***Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Torrington—Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)***

*Why do we have to implement the Common Core State Standards?*

The Connecticut State Board of Education, the governing body for public education for all districts in the state, adopted the CCSS in July 2010. The State Department of Education has the jurisdiction to establish curriculum standards to promote a consistent program of studies for all students in the state so that everyone has access to quality education regardless of the town or city where they live.

In conjunction with the new standards, the state also joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to develop a new state assessment series that will replace CMT/CAPT. These tests will measure student mastery of the CCSS at grades 3-8 and Grade 11. The standards and associated assessments are geared to reflect the knowledge, content, and skills that students need to be successful as they move through the educational system. Scores on the assessments will be used to evaluate districts and schools through the new District and School Performance Index.

Student growth and achievement, as measured by these tests and other district assessments, will be part of the CT Educator Evaluation Plan as well.

*School districts have always had considerable autonomy in determining curriculum. Why are these standards being forced on us?*

Some people believe that the reason the state adopted the standards was to be more competitive for federal Race to the Top funding. This may have played a role in the state decision, but the widespread adoption of the standards by 45 states and three U.S. Territories and the positive response from teacher professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) suggest that these standards may be an improvement over the hodge-podge of standards that existed previously.

Each state education governing body had the chance to sign on or pass on adopting the CCSS. Most believe that the CCSS are clearer, more focused, and more coherent than existing standards.

*Do private schools need to adopt the standards?*

No. Public schools are held to a higher standard of accountability since they are funded with taxpayer money. This is evident in teacher certification, assessment systems, and other public school requirements. Many private schools have adopted the CCSS since they often articulate with public schools as students may move between the public and private sector.

 Many have also adopted the standards since they are closely aligned with national standards and endorsed by professional associations. This helps support the private school accreditation process.

*I’ve heard that the CCSS contain fewer topics to cover than previous standards. Are they “dumbing down” the curriculum?*

One hallmark of the Common Core Standards for Math (CCSM) is that some topics have been assigned to different grades, eliminated, reduced, or changed in focus. The reason for this is to allow greater depth of study (over breadth of study) that will allow students to build a strong conceptual understanding of the content so that they are able to apply and transfer knowledge and skills to solve real problems. Teachers implementing the standards agree that they are rigorous and require a high level of mastery in order to solve challenging problems, not just get the right answer. They also encourage the type of divergent thinking that is necessary in the real world to develop multiple answers and be able to explain thinking.

In English Language Arts (ELA), the standards shift more focus to informational literacy since this is the type of skill set that students use in work and post-secondary content study. ELA Standards raise the bar each year for students by requiring more independence and increasingly complex texts.

*Does this mean that ELA teachers will no longer teach classic literature?*

No. Classic core literature still will play an important role in the ELA curriculum, but it will be part of a balanced approach that also contains poetry, drama, contemporary literature, and informational text. As literature experts, ELA teachers will play an important role in teaching students strategies to analyze texts of all types, develop compelling arguments and opinions, and support positions using evidence from the texts.

*If teachers don’t like the standards, do they still need to teach them?*

Yes. In fairness to the students, all teachers need to deliver instruction that addresses the CCSS. This is a real challenge because teachers are currently teaching content to allow students to be successful on the current generation of state assessments (CMT/CAPT) and they also need to learn about the CCSS, how they are similar and different from past practice, develop new materials to address some content shifts, and even learn new instructional skills to help students be successful. This is hard work, but part of teachers’ professional responsibility.

Also in the future, student mastery of the CCSS will be incorporated into student growth and achievement component of the teacher evaluation plan.

*What help is available to help make the transition to the CCSS?*

The CSDE has been monitoring the work in states that are further along in the implementation process than we are and has been collecting a repository of resources, units, lessons, and other materials to share with districts. Some sample lessons and units developed in CT have been posted on the state website, but because the work on CCSS implementation is so widespread across the nation, the CSDE is trying not to duplicate or merely replicate efforts.

Both at the state and district level, websites have been established to post materials that are locally developed and collected from outside sources. Administrators and teacher leaders have gotten a regular stream of communication about the CCSS. Elementary literacy specialists and the elementary math specialist have been working with schools, grade levels, and individual teachers to build capacity, develop and share new materials, and piece together missing units and materials for new learning goals. Secondary teachers have used department time and professional development time to learn about the CCSS and plan to transition to the new expectations.

*What does the CCSS cost the district?*

The cost is variable and spread over time, but there is a cost. The district needs to pay for teacher training and capacity building through staff time, attending workshops and conferences, and job-embedded training. Much of this training is being done in-house by our teachers and staff working collaboratively and sharing expertise, but some outside information is necessary. Training has occurred on the CCSS themselves, on understanding shifts in content and practice, and on developing new materials.

The district also has to purchase some new instructional materials. Most current text series and instructional programs are not written to address the CCSS directly, although virtually all publishers have aligned or mapped their products to the CCSS. The district is purchasing some replacement units and new titles, especially informational texts to address CCSS shifts. Although most existing resources can still be used in some capacity, many are shifting between grades or only useful for specific topics or themes in combination with new resources.

As the district moves to the new state assessments, we also need to expand the network infrastructure and technology access (desktops, laptops, netbooks, tablets, or other devices) since all future testing will be on an online platform, not paper and pencil.

*More questions?*

See the TPS website: <http://www.torrington.org/page.cfm?p=1500>

CSDE website: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=322592>

 Or contact Susan Domanico, Assistant Superintendent: sdomanico@torrington.org