

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

What Should the Occupational Therapy Practitioner Know About the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?



1. What are the Common Core State Standards, and why were they developed?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a national set of high-quality academic learning standards. Development of the CCSS began in 2009, and the initiative was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. The standards were designed in collaboration with teachers, school chiefs, administrators, and other experts. The federal government supported the development of the CCSS, although it did not lead the initiative or participate in the development process. The primary goal of the CCSS is to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare children for college and the workforce. CCSS have been developed for English language arts and mathematics, are aligned with college and work expectations, and are based on evidence and research.

Prior to the development of the CCSS, each state had its own, unique set of learning standards for each grade. This meant that public education students in one state might be learning different topics and concepts than their peers in the same grade living in a different state. The CCSS have been adopted by the majority of states and provide consistent expectations for students across the nation. The CCSS build upon the strengths and lessons of the previous state learning standards. The CCSS are also internationally benchmarked so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, while the CCSS provide a consistent set of English



language arts and mathematics learning standards for most of the nation, they were intentionally designed *not* to include the following:

- Instructions for teaching methods and strategies
- All that can or should be taught
- Advanced coursework beyond the CCSS
- Interventions needed for students well below grade level
- Supports needed for English language learners and students with disabilities
- Everything needed to be college and career ready

States and school districts have the freedom to select their own curricula, teachers have the autonomy to develop their own lesson plans and implement a variety of teaching methods in the classroom, and teachers and school support staff have the opportunity to teach knowledge and skills that are not included in the CCSS.

2. Do the Common Core State Standards apply to all students, including students receiving special education services?

One of the principles of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is that students with disabilities have a fundamental right to access the same high quality education as their peers without disabilities. The CCSS furthers this goal. All students, including students with disabilities receiving special education services, are expected to work toward meeting the CCSS for their current grade level. This ensures that they

will be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers. The CCSS provide an opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

The experts that developed the CCSS acknowledge that students with disabilities may require significant accommodations and supports in order to access the general curriculum and achieve the CCSS for their grade level. Students receiving special education services will continue to have an individualized education plan (IEP). Students with disabilities should receive support from teachers and specialized instructional support personnel, including occupational therapy practitioners, who are prepared and qualified to deliver high quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.), students with disabilities may receive accommodations and supports to help them participate in the general curriculum, including:

- Instructional supports for learning based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning
- Instructional accommodations that do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the Common Core
- Assistive technology to ensure access to CCSS-based instruction

These accommodations and supports should be included in a student's IEP (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]; Courtade & Browder, 2011).

Some states have developed or adopted Extended Common Core State Standards or Common Core Essential Elements for the small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These extended standards do not change the original CCSS, but rather emphasize the basic core essence of each standard. Students working toward extended standards are striving to achieve the same CCSS as their peers without disabilities, but they may be working on a building block of the skill that is required to meet the general education standard. For example, a seventh grade student in general education may be working on *writing informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content* while a student with a significant cognitive disability works toward achieving the following extended standard: *Write to share information supported by details*. Mastery of the extended standard is clearly related to and required for full mastery of the CCSS.

3. How will school districts assess student's mastery of the Common Core State Standards?

Along with the new learning standards, new assessments have been developed aligned with the CCSS. States adopting the CCSS will choose to belong to one of two assessment consortia: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Each of these consortia has developed a CCSS-based assessment that will be used with the majority of students within the state. These computer-based assessments include a variety of accommodations that can be used by students when necessary and may be compatible with assistive technology supports.

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may have the opportunity to participate in an alternate assessment. The two alternate assessment consortia are Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium (DLM) and National Center and State Collaborative Partnership (NCSC). Both of the consortia plan to implement comprehensive systems of formative and summative assessments, as well as instructional and professional development resources. These alternate assessments are also primarily computer based and include options for accommodations. Unique assessments for English language learners have also been developed.

4. How are the Common Core State Standards addressed in an individualized education plan for a student receiving special education services?

Students receiving special education services under IDEA will continue to have a written IEP as part of their special education services. All requirements of IDEA continue to apply to districts, teachers, and related service professionals. Prior to the implementation of CCSS, many states required IEPs to be "standards based," or linked to the state's academic learning standards. A CCSS-based IEP will include goals aligned to grade-level CCSS and a listing of the specific accommodations and supports needed for the student to work toward achieving CCSS. CCSS-based IEPs should be linked to the learning standards for the student's current grade level, regardless of his or her current abilities. For example, the IEP of a fifth grade student reading at a second grade level should be linked to fifth grade CCSS. Educational teams in states that use Extended Common Core State Standards may link IEP goals to extended standards.

It is important to reiterate that the CCSS are not designed to include everything that students need to know in order to be college and career ready. There are many other skills that students may need to master in order to be successful in college and career. IDEA also states that a child's IEP

may address the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities, and other non-academic activities. For transition age students, IDEA emphasizes that transition services should focus on improving academic *and* functional achievement, which may include employment, independent living, and community participation. Therefore, IEPs should include both CCSS-based goals as well as goals for non-academic skills that may be necessary to help the child participate in all aspects of school and prepare for college, career, and independent living. A CCSS-based IEP can have both goals that link to state standards and goals that incorporate individual life skill needs (Courtade, Spooner, Browder, & Jimenez et al., 2011). Goals and interventions to develop daily living skills, self-management skills, self-determination skills, social skills, assistive technology use, and vocational skills may significantly enhance a student's college and career readiness when delivered in conjunction with CCSS academic instruction. School-based occupational therapy practitioners can contribute to the education team both by writing CCSS-based goals appropriately and by helping identify areas for intervention beyond CCSS-based goals.

5. Why should school-based occupational therapy practitioners be knowledgeable about the Common Core State Standards?

School-based occupational therapy practitioners primary goal is to enable students to participate in educational activities (AOTA, 2010). The CCSS are an important part of the educational context in which students are learning within their classroom. By understanding CCSS and the teacher's accompanying lessons and instruction, occupational therapy practitioners can improve their ability to support student participation in educational activities, ability to effectively collaborate with teachers and other educational team members, enhance the quality of their occupational therapy services, and advocate for system level programs to support learning.

A major goal of the CCSS is to prepare students to be college and career ready. This goal aligns well with the domain of occupational therapy, and occupational therapy practitioners can contribute to the development of college and career ready students. Knowledge of the CCSS expectations for students enables school-based occupational therapy practitioners to better support students during the transition process. CCSS knowledgeable occupational therapy practitioners understand the academic skills necessary for college and career success and can help students identify additional skills needed in order to pursue desired college and career outcomes.

6. What are some examples of how school-based occupational therapy practitioners can integrate CCSS into their practice?

Hanft and Shepherd (2008) describe the role of the school-based OT practitioner as including hands-on services, team supports, and system supports. Below are some examples of ways school-based occupational therapy practitioners can support CCSS in each type of service delivery model:

Hands-On Services

- Review the CCSS that each student is working toward
- Create and implement CCSS-based IEPs and IEP goals for students on your workload
- Support classroom activities and goals that address CCSS
- Discuss students' progress toward college and career readiness
- Trial/implement assistive technology to enable students to participate in CCSS-based academic work and CCSS-based assessments
- Identify accommodations needed on CCSS-based assessments and document these accommodations

Team Supports

- Co-teach classroom activities/lessons based on the CCSS in collaboration with teachers and other education team members
- Deliver a workshop on the role of occupational therapy in supporting the CCSS
- Consult with the education team regarding implementation of CCSS
- Participate in creating CCSS-based IEPs
- Communicate with students and family members regarding the CCSS
- Participate in Response to Intervention or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support initiatives to support student achievement of CCSS

System Supports

- Participate in the school district CCSS implementation task force
- Participate in the school or district CCSS evaluation team
- Participate in CCSS curriculum committees
- Share information on CCSS with new graduates, mentees, and OT fieldwork students.

7. What steps should I take as a school-based occupational therapy practitioner to increase my knowledge of Common Core State Standards and effectively support implementation of CCSS within my school or district?

School-based occupational therapy practitioners should first determine whether their state has adopted CCSS or is using another set of academic learning standards. Regardless of the type of standards used in your state, it is good practice to be familiar with the learning standards and expectations in place for the students in your school(s). Review the standards for the grade level(s) where you provide intervention and become familiar with the curricula being used to support implementation of the CCSS. Many states have resources for CCSS implementation on the State Board of Education website. If you work with students with significant cognitive disabilities, investigate whether your state has adopted Extended Common Core State Standards or a similar method of extending the standards for these students.

After developing familiarity with the CCSS or learning standards adopted in your state, begin to have formal or informal discussions with other educational team members. Actively participate in discussions on CCSS or other academic learning standards during staff meetings, IEP meetings, or less formal meetings with the teachers you work with each day. Effective collaboration with the education team is best practice for school-based occupational therapy practitioners (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008) and is necessary to effectively support the implementation of CCSS. Review the CCSS when writing IEP goals to determine whether occupational therapy intervention priorities align with the student's grade level CCSS. Consider collaborating with a classroom teacher to deliver a CCSS-based lesson or classroom activity. Finally, remain actively involved in your school's or district's CCSS initiatives. Visit the State Board of Education website frequently to remain up to date on current events related to CCSS.

8. Where can I find additional information on the Common Core State Standards?

Resources

Common Core State Standards Initiative

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

IDEA Partnership—Common Core State Standards and Assessments Collection

<http://www.ideapartnership.org/>

Assessment Consortia

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

<http://www.parcconline.org/>

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>

Dynamic Learning Maps

<http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/>

National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC)

<http://www.ncscpartners.org/>

AOTA Resources

Common Core State Standards Pediatric Virtual Chat

http://otconnections.aota.org/galleries/aota_podcasts/m/pediatric_virtual_chats/120761.aspx

Fact Sheet: Occupational Therapy and Universal Design for Learning

<http://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Practice/Children/Resources/Fact%20Sheet%20Universal%20Design%20For%20Learning.pdf>

FAQ: Response to Intervention for School Based OTs and OTAs

<http://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Secure/Practice/Children/RtIFinalRevise12-21-08.pdf>

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