The Facts about Kentucky's Core Academic Standards

In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly mandated new academic standards focused on the "critical knowledge, skills and capacities needed for success in the global economy."
With the directive to "consider international benchmarks," Senate Bill 1 (2009) charged the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) in collaboration with the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to "plan and implement a comprehensive process for revising the academic content standards in reading, language arts including writing, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and humanities, and practical living skills/career studies." Academic standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear, consistent expectations and goals for student learning.

Senate Bill 1 (2009) provided for the "consideration of standards adopted by national content advisory groups and professional education consortia."
The Senate Bill 1 Steering Committee, comprised of legislative leadership, key legislative members, representatives from higher education, P-12 education and the Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) was formed to guide implementation of Senate Bill 1. In an effort to fulfill the legislative mandate, in June 2009, Gov. Steve Beshear and the Kentucky Department of Education entered into an agreement to participate in an initiative that would lead to common core standards in the areas of mathematics and English/language arts for K-12 education. The Senate Bill 1 steering committee supported collaboration with the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), then led by former Kentucky Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit, in the Common Core Standards project.

> "These standards are so important and they're absolutely essential for businesses in Kentucky to move forward and be competitive."
>
> *Dave Adkisson, CEO/President*
> *Kentucky Chamber of Commerce*

The new standards resulted from a state-led initiative with broad input.
The state governors' and education commissioners' membership organizations brought together experts and state partners to determine the basic core components. The standards were developed using what the top countries in the world – ranked highest in education – expected of students in order to ensure college/career readiness and international competitiveness of their high school graduates.

> "As with anything meaningful, significant progress won't happen overnight. But we are confident that it will happen if Kentucky holds firm to its commitment, as reflected in the challenging academic standards, to prepare all of our students for success in college, career and life."
>
> *James R. Allen, Louisville, CEO of Hilliard Lyons*
> *Chair, Champions for Education*

The drafting process for the standards included broad input from Kentucky teachers, administrators, higher education officials, education partners, the public, staffs of the three participating agencies (CPE, EPSB and KDE), a national validation committee and national education organizations. **The federal government did not direct or even suggest what should be included. In fact, federal law prohibits dictating a national curriculum.**

Several versions of the standards were publicized for teacher and public feedback. Kentucky teachers were very positive about the standards and expressed that their collective voices had been heard. The result of the review process was the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The Common Core State Standards are a vast improvement from Kentucky's prior standards.
The Common Core State Standards incorporate the best of previous state standards in the United States, are internationally benchmarked to the top performing nations around the world and are aligned with college and career expectations.

Standards Report Card	
CCSS	KY CC 4.1
Language Arts	
B+	D
Mathematics	
A-	D

Source: The State of State Standards—and the Common Core – July 2010

A study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, analyzed the new standards for content, rigor, clarity and specificity as compared to Kentucky's prior standards which the study called "among the worst in the nation." The analysis concluded that the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics are "significantly superior" to what Kentucky had in place before.

> "Consistent academic standards, aligned to college and work expectations, will help our students reach higher levels of success."
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> *Gov. Paul Patton, President Pikeville University*
> *Chair, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (2009-11)*
> *Chair, National Governors Association (2002-03)*

The new standards meet the mandates established by lawmakers in Senate Bill 1.
The standards are:

- focused on critical knowledge, skills, and capacities needed for success in the global economy;
- fewer but more in-depth to facilitate mastery learning;
- based on evidence-based research;
- internationally benchmarked; and
- aligned from elementary to high school to postsecondary education so that students can be successful at each education level.

The Council on Postsecondary Education, Education Professional Standards Board, and Kentucky Board of Education unanimously agreed to adopt the new standards as the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS). The standards are designed to be relevant in the real world and to make sure all students graduate high school with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college and careers.

The KCAS define "what" students should learn, not "how" they should be taught.
The standards are expectations of what students should learn and be able to do – they do NOT tell teachers how to teach. In Kentucky, curriculum is a local district/school decision and is not dictated by the standards. In other words, the standards define the "what" but a curriculum defines the "how" – the resources selected, the teaching methods, etc. The Kentucky Core Academic Standards do not dictate what texts teachers use for curriculum. Teachers know best what works in their classrooms which is why the standards allow each teacher to create lesson plans, select the resources and teaching methods, and tailor instruction to meet the unique needs of their students.

> "The Common Core Standards are what our state and our students need. They will not solve every problem, but they will help."
>
> *Robert King, President*
> *Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education*

The state has taken a strategic, integrated approach to standards implementation.
Kentucky has used a model for implementation that involves leadership teams comprised of content teachers from each grade level and special education, instructional leaders and administrators from all 174 school districts. Mathematics and English/language arts teacher networks broke down the standards into student learning targets used to drive instruction. Impressed with the excellence of this work, many other states and districts have asked Kentucky to share its resources. Through the leadership networks, teams receive extensive training on the standards which they then share in their districts with classroom teachers.

The Kentucky Department of Education provided a new online system of instructional resources and formative assessments aligned with the KCAS that teachers could use to support effective instruction in their classrooms. For the past two years, Kentucky teachers have successfully implemented the Kentucky Core Academic Standards in English/language arts and mathematics by designing their own lesson plans and following local curriculum.

> "Since the implementation of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards in our state, we have moved from 34 percent of our graduates who are college/career-ready to 47 percent of our graduates reaching college- and career-readiness."
>
> *Terry Holliday, Ph.D.*
> *Kentucky Education Commissioner*

As directed by Senate Bill 1 (2009), Kentucky has put in place assessments based on the KCAS.
Kentucky has contracted with private vendors for state assessments based on the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. It collects and reports results publically through the online School Report Card which is designed to promote transparency of the data without compromising student privacy (identifiable data is suppressed).

Kentucky's new academic standards are having an impact.
While early results have shown lower test scores in the elementary grades as the material being taught and tested has become more rigorous, the college readiness of high school graduates entering postsecondary education in Kentucky has increased dramatically. The first year the KCAS were taught in Kentucky schools, the percentage of students prepared to take credit-bearing college courses increased more than six percent, as measured on the ACT college entrance exam.

In *Education Week's* 2012 "Quality Counts" report on key education indicators, policy efforts and outcomes, Kentucky ranked 10th in the nation—moving up from 34th place in 2010.