



Massachusetts Common Core of Learning

Dear Friends,

The landmark [Massachusetts Education Reform Act](#) enacted in June of 1993 put many reforms in motion for Massachusetts' 900,000 public school students in 1800 schools. One important effort was the development of a statewide set of broad educational goals for all students. This set of goals, called the Massachusetts Common Core of Learning, is presented in these pages. We are pleased to share it with you, tell you how it came to be written and how it fits into the Education Reform process.

The [Massachusetts Board of Education](#) organized a [Commission on the Common Core of Learning](#), and over nine months of work from September 1993 to June 1994 the forty-member Commission listened to the people of Massachusetts. Almost 2,000 written communications were received, 16 hearings were held around the state, and in total we estimate that over 50,000 people participated either directly or indirectly in the development of the Common Core. This process resulted in major changes and improvements to early drafts, and there is no doubt that the Commission received significant benefit from such unprecedented participation by the public in the educational policy making process.

The Commission's final draft was presented to the State Board of Education in June 1994, and the Board received public comment and made further changes before unanimously adopting the Massachusetts Common Core of Learning in July 1994.

The Common Core of Learning establishes broad goals and emphasizes that teaching and learning must be interdisciplinary. It can be used as a guide by educators, families, students, community members, school committees and school councils to examine and refine current educational expectations, goals, policies and practices at the local school level.

When you read the Common Core of Learning, please consider the following questions:

- What can teachers and school leaders do to implement the Common Core goals for all students?
- How can classroom and school teaching practices best support interdisciplinary teaching?
- How can parents and families assist in making the Common Core succeed? How can the business community and the public at large help to ensure that students are prepared for the 21st century?

The Common Core of Learning is the first of three steps in a closely-connected process. The second step will be specific and rigorous curriculum guides in seven academic areas to assist teachers, and the third step will be a comprehensive system to assess the performance of each

individual student and schools, too. Through this process, the Board and Department of Education look forward to working in partnership with the Commonwealth's educators, families and all others as we strive to provide all our students with the knowledge and skills that are essential to their success.

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Commissioner of Education

Martin S. Kaplan
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Table of Contents

- [What Is the Purpose of the Common Core of Learning?](#)
 - [What Beliefs Form the Common Core of Learning?](#)
 - [Thinking and Communicating](#)
 - [Gaining and Applying Knowledge](#)
 - [Working and Contributing](#)
 - [What are our Responsibilities to Support the Common Core of Learning?](#)
 - [How Can We Make the Common Core of Learning Succeed?](#)
 - [The Massachusetts Commission on the Common Core of Learning](#)
 - [Speaking Out on Education](#)
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What is the Purpose of the Common Core of Learning?

The **Common Core of Learning** sets forth the broad goals for education identifying what students should know and be able to do. The goals reflect what citizens highly value and see as essential for success in our democratic society. The purpose of the **Common Core of Learning** is to provide a focus for improving education in the Commonwealth. Parents of students ask:

- **What is my child's school trying to teach?**
- **What is my child learning in school?**
- **How is my child doing?**

Educators ask the same questions in a different way:

- **What are the broad goals of public education?**
- **What are the specific curriculum areas to be learned?**
- **How can we accurately measure student progress toward achieving these goals and mastering this curriculum?**

The answers to these questions represent the three steps in a comprehensive process which will result in improved education opportunities for every student in the Commonwealth. **The Massachusetts Common Core of Learning** sets broad goals for education and is the first step in the process of education reform. The second step is the development of state curriculum frameworks for the areas of the arts, English, foreign languages, health, history and social studies, mathematics, and science and technology. These frameworks will contain academic content standards which establish a basis for objective measurement. The third step is the development of an assessment system to evaluate student performance and measure the success of schools.

Every sector of the Massachusetts community has contributed to the drafting of the **Common Core of Learning**. A [40-member Commission](#) representing the diversity of the Commonwealth worked from September 1993 through June 1994 to gather and analyze ideas, with the aim of setting high goals for all Massachusetts students. Over 15,000 people communicated with the Commission, which was guided by what it heard. The Commission members agreed that high expectations for all students are based on the belief that all children can become lifelong learners and meet high standards.

Improving education in Massachusetts is a long-term process and requires an ongoing commitment by our society. The goals stated in the **Common Core** should be achieved during the elementary and secondary school years by all students. Further, these goals must be sustained throughout one's lifetime. Individuals must [think and communicate](#), [gain and apply knowledge](#), and [work and contribute](#) to society, not only during the school years, but also in the workplace or at home after formal schooling is completed.

What Beliefs Form the Basis of the Common Core of Learning?

In November of 1992, the Board of Education stated that the mission of public education in Massachusetts is to "provide each and every child with the values, knowledge and skills needed to achieve full potential in his or her personal and work life and to contribute actively to the civic and economic life of our diverse and changing democratic society."

The [Massachusetts Board of Education](#) believes that all children can become lifelong learners and meet high standards. This guiding belief is the basis for establishing high expectations for teaching and learning in the Commonwealth. The goal is for all to lead productive, fulfilling, and successful lives in our complex, diverse and changing world.

If students are to succeed in the 21st century and meet the future's challenge:

- **They must recognize the importance of education as a lifelong effort.**
- **They will need to communicate effectively with others through reading, writing, speaking, computing, the arts and technology.**
- **They will need to respect and understand people of different backgrounds in our diverse society.**
- **They will need to understand environmental and other issues with**

worldwide implications.

- **They will need to make informed decisions for themselves, their families, their communities and our country.**
- **They will need to contribute to our society.**
- **They will need to take responsibility for their own behavior.**

In the 1950's, high school graduates could feel reasonably certain that school had prepared them adequately for lifetime jobs in American industry, jobs that would provide them with economic security. Today, due to global competition, new technologies and work methods, jobs are changing at such an accelerating pace that high school can no longer provide all the education one needs for life. Everyone needs to become a lifelong learner who can adapt to change and challenge and be prepared for the jobs and opportunities of the future.

While manual typewriters constituted high technology in offices and schools only a short time ago, now computers, electronic networks, expanded telephone services and other technological tools are essential in the workplace. These tools must become standard within every classroom to ensure that all students and teachers have the opportunity to apply and extend their skills and knowledge.

The television age began only forty years ago. Today, students are inundated with complex, often contradictory, messages from diverse media. Students must become skilled at organizing, analyzing, and making sense of the vast information they receive. They must learn to evaluate arguments, spot hidden messages, analyze evidence, differentiate between fact and opinion, and make comparative judgments.

We believe it is essential that all students be held to high standards of achievement in reading, writing, speaking standard English, mathematics and science, history and the arts. Failure to do so denies students the opportunity to participate fully in our society and economy.

We believe that all students should learn or maintain a second language, beginning in elementary school, and should be expected to master that language. This expands opportunities to communicate with others, to work in an increasingly competitive worldwide economy, and to understand the diversity of cultures.

Not so long ago, most Americans did not worry about their environment. Now, with the global population explosion, worldwide industrialization, increased use of natural resources and the degradation of rain forests and agricultural land, students need to develop skills to analyze the environmental issues that face them today and that will challenge them tomorrow.

We believe that the quality of each student's future will depend on his or her ability to gain and apply knowledge. An expanding base of knowledge in essential subject areas enables students to be effective and productive individuals, workers and citizens throughout life. Linking skills and knowledge acquired across the disciplines is crucial to student success in school and in the workplace of tomorrow. Strong study and work habits prepare students to be productive learners and workers.

In recent years our family and neighborhood structures have broken down, the sense of community has diminished, and the social fabric of our civilized society has been torn by violence, disrupted by substance abuse and undermined by neglect. Our society must restore essential values of compassion, courage, honesty, justice, perseverance, respect, and self-discipline at home, in school and in the workplace. We all must learn to get along with others,

work cooperatively, participate in our communities and avoid and prevent violence.

Thinking and Communicating

All students should:

Read, Write and Communicate Effectively

- Read and listen critically for information, understanding and enjoyment.
- Write and speak clearly, factually, persuasively and creatively in standard English.
- Distinguish fact from opinion, identify stereotyping and recognize bias.
- Read, write and converse in at least one language in addition to English.

Use Mathematics, the Arts, Computers and Other Technologies Effectively

- Apply mathematical skills to interpret information and solve problems.
- Use the arts to explore and express ideas, feelings and beliefs.
- Use computers and other technologies to obtain, organize and communicate information and to solve problems.

Define, Analyze and Solve Complex Problems

- Make careful observations and ask pertinent questions.
- Seek, select, organize and present information from a variety of sources.
- Analyze, interpret and evaluate information.
- Make reasoned inferences and construct logical arguments.
- Develop, test and evaluate possible solutions.
- Develop and present conclusions through speaking, writing, artistic and other means of expression.

Gaining and Applying Knowledge

All students should:

Acquire, Integrate and Apply Essential Knowledge

Literature and Language

- Read a rich variety of literary works including fiction, poetry, drama and nonfiction from different time periods and cultures, relating them to human aspirations and life experiences.

- Analyze implications of literary works, and communicate them through speaking, writing, artistic and other means of expression.
- Know and understand the development and structure of English and other languages and how learning another language fosters appreciation of peoples and cultures.

Mathematics, Science and Technology

- Know and understand major mathematical concepts such as measurement, estimation, quantity, probability and statistics; and explore the relationship of mathematics to other areas of knowledge.
- Recognize and use patterns, construct mathematical models, represent and reason about quantities and shapes, draw accurate conclusions from data, and solve, justify and communicate solutions to problems.
- Apply the fundamental principles of the life sciences, physical sciences, earth/space sciences and the science of technology to analyze problems and relate them to human concerns and life experiences.
- Investigate and demonstrate methods of scientific inquiry and experimentation.

Social Studies, History and Geography

- Know and make connections among important historical events, themes, and issues; recognize the role the past has played in shaping the present; and understand the process by which individuals and groups develop and work within political, social, economic, cultural and geographic contexts.
- Synthesize and communicate information about important events and fundamental concepts in Massachusetts, United States and world history, including historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, Federalist Papers, and the Gettysburg Address.
- Know important information regarding the physical environment and understand concepts such as location and place, critical features of a region, demographic trends and patterns, and the relationship between people and the environment.

Visual and Performing Arts

- Know and understand the nature of the creative process, the characteristics of visual art, music, dance and theatre, and their importance in shaping and reflecting historical and cultural heritage.
- Analyze and make informed judgments regarding the arts. =
- Develop skills and participate in the arts for personal growth and enjoyment.

Health

- Know basic concepts of human development, mental health, sexuality, parenting, physical education and fitness, nutrition and disease prevention, and understand the implications of health habits for self and society.
- Make informed and responsible judgments regarding personal health, including avoidance of violence, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Develop skills and participate in physical activities for personal growth, fitness, and enjoyment.

Working and Contributing

All students should:

Study and Work Effectively

- Set goals and achieve them by organizing time, work space, and resources effectively.
- Monitor progress and learn from both successes and mistakes.
- Manage money, balance competing priorities and interests, and allocate time among study, work and recreation.
- Work both independently and in groups.
- Work hard, persevere and act with integrity.

Demonstrate Personal, Social and Civic Responsibility

- Accept responsibility for one's own behavior and actions.
- Know career options and the academic and occupational requirements needed for employment and economic independence.
- Treat others with respect and understand similarities and differences among people.
- Learn to resolve disagreements, reduce conflict and prevent violence.
- Participate in meaningful community and/or school activities.
- Understand the individual's rights, responsibilities, and role in the community, state and nation.
- Understand how the principles of democracy, equality, freedom, law and justice evolve and work in society.
- Analyze, develop and act on informed opinions about current economic, environmental, political and social issues affecting Massachusetts, the United States and the world.

What are our Responsibilities to Support the Common Core of Learning?

This **Common Core of Learning** is key to realizing a new state of excellence in education in Massachusetts. To achieve this excellence, we share a responsibility to take these actions:

1. Our Commonwealth and society must foster a climate that honors education, encourages academic achievement, and rewards hard and thoughtful work.
2. Our Commonwealth, municipalities and citizens must fulfill their joint obligation to support the public schools financially at the level necessary to ensure equal education opportunities so that all students can achieve at high levels.
3. School systems must provide opportunity and support for quality professional development for all educators so that they can reach their full potential in a vital, changing and challenging profession.
4. Our public schools and neighborhoods must become environments in which all children can study, learn and play in safety.

5. Families and other community members must be active participants in the education process by volunteering in school, mentoring students, encouraging studies, and strengthening informal learning through reading and outside learning activities.
6. Schools must have access to the newest technology and sufficient number of computers and other tools so that teachers and students can prepare for the technological society in which they will work and live.
7. The Massachusetts business community must play an active role with the schools in encouraging student mentoring, school-to-work programs, and other innovative ways to make education relevant for students.
8. Our higher education system and public schools must build alliances to enhance their overall quality and foster innovation in teaching.
9. Public policymakers for programs serving families and children must coordinate their resources so that children come to school ready to learn. Children must have the nutrition and health care needed for healthy minds and bodies, and they must have access to high quality preschool programs. Their families must have access to the training and support they need to help their children learn.
10. Our society must expect significant commitment and effort by our children and their families to make the process of learning succeed. Students must recognize that the quality of their lives as adults is dependent on their education. They must give priority to academic studies over television viewing, employment during the school year, and after-school activities.

How Can We Make the Common Core of Learning Succeed?

We all have to work together to make the **Common Core** a success. With this **Common Core of Learning**, Massachusetts has established broad goals for all students. The Board of Education believes that all students can reach these goals. Students, parents, educators and our entire society all share responsibility to ensure that:

STUDENTS are in school ready to study and learn.

STUDENTS recognize the importance of education throughout their lives.

FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS encourage curiosity, love of learning and pride in a job well done so that children can be active seekers of knowledge and dedicated learners throughout their careers and lives.

FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS nurture confident children, so they are able to face the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS cultivate integrity and respect so that children can contribute to their families and society.

EDUCATORS provide opportunities for students to learn and apply knowledge in everyday situations and assist students in developing good work and study habits to prepare them for the transition to the world of work.

EDUCATORS strengthen the ability of students to understand and communicate effectively with others, by providing daily opportunities to develop communication skills and apply them to real-world problems and issues.

EDUCATORS encourage the involvement of families, business and community members by fostering active education partnerships, including mentoring.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY LEADERS develop climates of safety in schools and environments that encourage high achievement and reward hard work.

SCHOOLS are models for democracy and order, exemplifying the principles of equality and justice, and the fair application of rules.

COMMUNITIES AND THE COMMONWEALTH fulfill their joint obligation to support the public schools, libraries, other education resources and services for children at a level and with a commitment to ensure equal education opportunities.

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Linda Wing, *Lecturer, Program Coordinator, Harvard School of Education*

Frank Yetter, *Publisher, North Shore Weeklies, Melrose*

Speaking Out on Education

The following are comments from some of the distinguished community leaders who presented their views on the Common Core of Learning at a major two day forum in Boston in January, 1994:

"There are at least two subjects, related to law, that any high school graduate should know fairly well. . . . It is obviously, and critically important that citizens . . . understand how the city council, the state legislature, Congress and the courts at different levels work. For without such an understanding, democracy itself cannot work. Second, graduates must know American history . . . so that they understand something about the nature of freedom, how it relates to law and government, and what may be necessary to maintain it"

Stephen Breyer, Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals, First Circuit

"Knowing how to learn-that is, how to analyze and synthesize information, how to evaluate claims of truth-is as least as important as possessing any specific body of knowledge at a given moment in a student's progression through school."

Jean Dowdall, President, Simmons College

"Personal qualities must be reinforced, such as: responsibility for work to be done, discipline of being at school on time, integrity and honesty in the way in which the work will be done, and finally sociability and teamwork in getting the job done."

John Hamill, President, Fleet Bank

"The education of our young people must begin where they are, using their knowledge, experiences, cultures and languages as the basis for their learning. . . ."

Sonia Nieto, UMass/Amherst, School of Education

"If schools fail to teach them to read and write, they cannot teach them anything else, and worst of all, they rob them of the ability to learn on their own. A student who is fully literate,

by contrast, is capable not merely of participating in the structured education provided by a curriculum and a classroom, but also of further independent self-education."

John Silber, President, Boston University

"Through literature and art, students can build the foundation for living well. Literature and art carry some fairly consistent messages: about compassion, self-discipline, courage, honesty, perseverance and justice."

William F. Weld, Governor of Massachusetts

"In an increasingly interdependent economy and complex marketplace, every high school graduate needs to be able to define a topic, conceptualize it, research and analyze it, and be able to present it in a clear and concise manner."

Benaree Wiley, President, The Partnership, Inc.

"Teach students non-violent ways to solve their differences, programs that utilize mediation techniques such as conflict resolution."

Beth Winship, "Ask Beth" Syndicated Columnist

The following are actual quotations from the thousands of people in Massachusetts who gave comments as the Common Core of Learning was being written in 1993 and 1994:

"Learning is a lifetime activity. The world before (our children) is unpredictable and the hope is that our schools will provide them with the tools to continue to learn, grow and adapt."

Parent, Suburban Boston

"One subject I feel I'm lacking in is my knowledge of the American Government. I think each student should know the basics before graduating."

Student, Central Massachusetts

"Children should develop the ability to reason and solve problems based on solid information and facts. They should be able to differentiate between opinions, theories and facts."

Teacher, Western Massachusetts

"We, as a community, need to teach our students to respect others. . . ."

Community Member, Southeast Massachusetts

"When understood fully and employed meaningfully the arts are crucial in helping schools and students make connections between imagination and learning, between thinking and feeling, and between the self and the environment, and most importantly, between the individual and society."

Superintendent, Northeast Massachusetts

"Critical thinking should be one of the goals of all education. It is just as important for critical thinking to be taught in English and history courses as in science and math courses. The arts are an avenue for developing creative thought and critical thinking skills."

Parent, Central Massachusetts

"In the ideal world the study of a foreign language would begin in kindergarten and continue for 13 years. The ability of American students to master a foreign language will be even more important in the future than it is today. If America is to compete in the world economy, we must have many people who can communicate in languages other than English."

Superintendent, Southeast Massachusetts

"Students should be able to adapt to change, accept responsibility and have the skills necessary for life and work."

Parent, Central Massachusetts