



# States unveil common education standards

## Gov. Markell plays key role in project

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SUWANEE, Ga. -- By third grade, students should know how to write a complex sentence and add fractions, no matter if they live in Georgia or Delaware.

Eighth-graders should understand the Pythagorean Theorem. And by high school graduation, all U.S. students should be ready for college or a career.

That's the goal of sweeping new education benchmarks released Wednesday called the Common Core State Standards, a National Governors Association project that aims to replace a hodgepodge of educational goals that vary wildly from state to state with a uniform set of expectations for students.

It's the first time states have joined to establish what students should know by the time they graduate from high school.

"The Common Core Standards is an initiative driven locally -- not by Washington -- where we've been able to talk with folks all over the country about what's working best and how we can be sure that our efforts are aligned to really deliver on what's most important -- a better future for our kids and greater hope for their parents," said Gov. Jack Markell, national co-chairman of the NGA Standards Committee, who joined via satellite with educators and other officials gathered at Peachtree Ridge High School outside Atlanta to release the final draft of the standards.

Markell said today's global economy makes the standards a necessity: "Whether the kids are graduating from Newark High here, or the Atlanta public school system, or from schools in India, Austria or Shanghai -- in many ways, because of technology -- these kids are now competing with each other for the same jobs and opportunities.

"That's why it is so critical that our nation makes clear its renewed focus on ensuring our students graduate not only ready to compete -- but ready to win," he said.

West Virginia schools Superintendent Steve Paine said, "Having consistent standards across the states means all of our children are going to be prepared for college and career, regardless of ZIP code."

States are expected to use the standards to revise their curricula and tests to make learning more uniform, eliminating inequities in education not only between states but also among districts. The standards also will ensure that students transferring to a different state won't be far behind their classmates or have to repeat classes because they are more advanced.

Under Common Core, third-graders should understand subject-verb agreement, fifth-graders need to know about metaphors and similes, and seventh-graders must understand how to calculate surface area. States that sign up are supposed to use the standards as a base on which to build their curricula and testing, but they can make their benchmarks tougher than Common Core.

All but two states -- Alaska and Texas -- signed on to the original concept of Common Core more than a year ago.

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Critics worry that the standards will basically nationalize public schools rather than letting states decide what is best for their students.

Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott has said that the state didn't sign on to Common Core because it wants to preserve its "sovereign authority to determine what is appropriate for Texas children to learn in its public schools."

So far, the standards have been adopted by Kentucky, Hawaii, Maryland, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Another 40 states and the District of Columbia have agreed to adopt the standards in coming months, said Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, which joined with the National Governors Association in leading the Common Core project.

The **federal government** was not involved but has encouraged the project, including adoption of the standards as part of the scoring in the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top grant competition. President Barack Obama has said he wants to make money from Title I -- the federal government's biggest school aid program -- contingent on adoption of college- and career-ready reading and math standards.

In March, Delaware and Tennessee won first-round Race to the Top **funding**.

"We got a good deal of attention here in Delaware when our state was one of two winners of the federal Race to the Top," Markell told the group Wednesday. "And while we were pretty excited about it, I did my best to make two things clear -- the first is that none of us is yet even close to the top -- perhaps not even close enough to see it. But we do know where we need to head and are pushing forward."

"The second is that we were never really racing against other states -- we are racing with them, as a team. I said then that to succeed, we needed to think of [Race to the Top] as a relay race, where we work together to pass on good ideas and move forward," Markell said. "When something works in one state, we need to share it with the nation."

Common Core was structured over a year of meetings with teachers, parents, school administrators, civil rights leaders, education policymakers, business leaders and others from

across the country. The group produced multiple drafts and collected comments from more than 10,000 people online.

"The world is small now, and we're not just competing with students in our county or across the state. We are competing with the world," said Robert Kosicki, who graduated from a Georgia high school this year after transferring from Connecticut and having to repeat classes because the curriculum was so different.

"This is a move away from the time when a student can be punished for the location of his **home** or the depth of his father's pockets."

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