



	Morning		Afternoon
Labor Force Status	N	%	N
Employed	38,823	30.1	10,529
Unemployed	59,567	55.2	15,749
Not Employed or Seeking Work	27,495	60.2	8,116

## Common Core State Standards and Adult Education Teacher Effectiveness

*Standards-based education reform is one of many education models that call for the establishment of standards to promote positive student outcomes, which are often determined psychometrically through standards-based assessments. From this perspective, the establishment of clear, measurable standards for teaching and learning is considered to be fundamental to all teaching-learning endeavors, because the standards are considered to be at the helm of policies that specify what students need to know and do to succeed; what teachers need to know and do to support student success; what schools and programs need to provide to support teachers and students; what curricula supporting student success should include; and what assessments will be used to measure student and teacher success. Overall, the question of how success for all students can be achieved in a multicultural society like the United States is an essential one, and standards-based education seems to provide some answers.*

Over the last few decades, and especially in the 1980s, the standards-based education reform movement sought to steer education away from more “traditional” approaches to teaching and learning, and toward more student-centered approaches that reflect particular values about what students need to know and do. The 1994 *Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* under President Clinton (GPO, 1994), and its amendment to the 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* under President Bush’s administration (S. 110, 2001), were important policy frameworks that (1) invigorated debates regarding the importance of education standards, and (2) illuminated inquiries regarding the function and characteristics of education standards that are suitable for all learners, and regarding who would determine what the standards ought to be.

Today, each state has its own standards, many of which include content standards that are tied to professional education organizations such as the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). In response to the need for standards-based adult education, for example, the U.S. Department of Education funded the *Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse*<sup>1</sup>, which aims to “support states in developing and using content standards to improve the quality of adult education programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, ¶, 1).

More recently, in collaboration with teachers, school leaders, and other experts, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have coordinated the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which aims to provide “a clear and consistent framework to prepare children for college and the workforce” (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010, ¶. 1).

### Overview of Common Core State Standards Initiative

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) describe the Common Core State Standards Initiative as “a state-led effort to establish a shared set of clear educational **standards for English language arts and mathematics** that states can voluntarily adopt” (2010, ¶.6). Because each state has its own standards, this initiative offers states an opportunity to be consistent in the standards used for K–12 reading and mathematics, and it provides “more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country” (2010, ¶.28).

<sup>1</sup>See <http://www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov/Source/GetStandard.cfm>

The issue of who (or which entity) determines or ought to determine education standards has been a long-standing question regarding standards-based education and the design of standards for broad scale national use. The determination of standards is a debatable issue, because each education context is considered to be unique and with its own particularities; standards designed for one context may not be applicable to another.

Yet, the Common Core State Standards is a state-led effort that involves a specific process for determining these standards, as well as specific criteria for selecting them. In addition to this, the Standards are anchored with the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards and are benchmarked to international standards— both important ties that make the Standards relevant to wider teaching-learning contexts.

### Criteria for Determining Common Core State Standards

The CCSSO and the NGA Center—in consultation with parents, experts, administrators, and teachers—led what they considered to be an “open, inclusive, and rigorous” process for developing the Standards.

This process involved three core workgroups, each with a specific responsibility: (1) a standards development workgroup, which determined and wrote the Standards; (2) a feedback group, which supported the standards-development process by providing information and research; and (3) a validation committee, composed of states, national organizations, national experts, and leaders in the CCSSO and NGA, which reviewed and validated the Standards based on specified criteria (presented on the Core Standard’s website at <http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions>).

Exhibit 1 presents an excerpt from the Frequently Asked Questions<sup>2</sup> on the Core Standards website that lists the criteria.

<sup>2</sup>See Answers to Frequently Asked Questions:  
<http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions>

### Exhibit 1 - Criteria for Determining Common Core State Standards

**Q: By what criteria are the standards being developed?**

**A: The standards are being developed by the following criteria:**

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success;
- Clear, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn;
- Consistent across all states, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live;
- Include both content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations;
- Realistic, for effective use in the classroom;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society;
- Evidence and research-based criteria have been set by states, through their national organizations CCSSO and the NGA Center.

## Adopting the Common Core State Standards

As of January, 2013, 46 states (including California), the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA), have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Although the Standards offer opportunities for consistency in what students learn, states have discretion in determining the information offered to students, because each state has its own unique goals and expectations for students that are often driven by state education policy objectives. The adoption of the Standards by different states sets a precedent and potentially models processes for considering adoption of the Common Core State Standards in the adult education context.

## Relevance of the Common Core State Standards to Adult Education

The development and establishment of standards, whether they are adult education standards or K–12 standards, have implications for teacher preparation, practice, and effectiveness.

Though not created for the adult education arena, the Common Core State Standards Initiative brings some interesting perspectives to bear on the field of adult education, especially with regard to the particular need for

the field to address some of its historical and professional development, including its challenges in teacher training need for relevant principles for “teacher effectiveness” that can drive student achievement.

It is clear that the Common Core State Standards provide “important goals for teachers to ensure they are preparing students for success in college and the workforce” (2010, ¶. 41), and these college preparation and workforce goals are relevant to the context of adult education. Preparing students for college and the workforce is not a goal that is unique to the K–12 system; it is also a key goal for learners in the adult education system. A description of the Common Core State Standards Initiative elucidates this observation.

## Common Core State Standards Design Features Related to Adult Education

Three of the design features of the Common Core State Standards include the following:

1. They are designed to help ensure that student who graduate from high school are prepared to enter either college or the workforce.
2. They are benchmarked to international standards to ensure global market competitiveness.
3. They are tied to the college and career readiness (CCR) anchor standards.

### Excerpted from the 04/25/2012 Online Fact Sheet of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education

The Promoting College and Career-Ready Standards project, which runs from August 2011 to July 2014, will assist ABE programs in preparing students for success in higher education and training programs. It will also assist efforts to raise awareness and understanding for the critical skills and knowledge that colleges, universities, and employers expect from incoming students and employees. To reach these goals, this project will:

- Validate a set of college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards in English Language Arts/Literacy and mathematics—useful to states and adult education programs as a model for developing or updating their state standards.
- Align the selected CCR standards with the National Reporting System’s Educational Functioning Levels (NRS EFLs) and outcome measures, to determine the extent to which the CCSS work with the ABE accountability system.
- Assess and update the Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse (AECSW) Website.

#### Outcomes and Products

- Report describing key content decisions made by expert panels to select CCR standards for ABE, and an outline of implications for ABE in the future.
- Report describing the results of the panelists and the implications of the findings for the NRS EFLs and outcome measures.
- Step-by-step guide to the sustainability of educational reforms.

One of the core responsibilities of teachers in the adult education system is to support adult learners in their achievement of college entrance credentials, and to prepare them either to enter the workforce or to advance in their current jobs. The goal of the Common Core State Standards—to help *ensure that students who graduate from high school are prepared to enter either college or the workforce*—is therefore a goal that not only is relevant to adult education, but also currently drives practice in adult education.

That the Common Core State Standards *are benchmarked to international standards* to ensure global market competitiveness only adds to their relevance to the field of adult education, which aims to support adult learners in an increasingly competitive, global job market.

In addition, the Standards are organized in a way that links each of them to the college and career readiness (CCR) anchor standards. This link is important in supporting teacher effort to ensure that what adults learn has meaning for their access to post-secondary education.

Exhibit 2 (below), taken from the Common Core State Standards website<sup>3</sup>, provides a description of what students who are college and career ready know and can do.

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/students-who-are-college-and-career-ready-in-reading-writing-speaking-listening-language>

### **Exhibit 2 - Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language**

**They demonstrate independence.**

**They build strong content knowledge.**

**They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.**

**They comprehend as well as critique.**

**They value evidence.**

**They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.**

**They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.**

## Subject Areas and Skills Related to Adult Education

The Common Core State Standards focus on both content and skills, and the Standards are in the subject areas that are of primary focus in the field of adult education: mathematics, language arts, and literacy. Given that many subject areas in the adult education system (even mathematics) are often subsumed under the general topic of “adult literacy,” this focus on language arts and mathematics increases the accessibility of—and the opportunities to transfer—the Standards to the adult education system. Additionally, in terms of skills, key areas of focus reflect those of adult education—the integration of higher-order thinking skills to achieve college and career readiness; and supporting student success through reasoning, critical thinking, media/information/technology, and mathematics.

In the area of language arts, a key focus is on text complexity and the ability of students to advance as the scope or the complexity of the text advances. The ability to read complex text is often a goal for many adult learners. The English Language Arts Standards include approaches to addressing text complexity that adult education teachers may consider.

*The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* developed “A Guide to Aligning the Common Core State Standards with the Framework for 21st Century Skills<sup>4</sup>,” and this provides examples for making alignments related to mathematics and language arts. This could be an important resource for adult education administrators to consider modeling from.

## Sample Standards and Transferability to Adult Education

Given the focus of adult education on mathematics and language arts, the CCS Mathematics and Language Arts Standards can be valuable tools for helping to shape both teacher practice and student achievement. In addition to the standards for content, which aim to support student knowledge development, the CCS presents standards for practice, which teachers can use to support their practice. The Mathematics Standards are organized by two large grouping categories—clusters and domains—each of which reflects a hierarchy order for grouping the standards, as is shown in Exhibit 3 below.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/P21CommonCoreToolkit.pdf>

### Exhibit 3 - Sample Math Standard

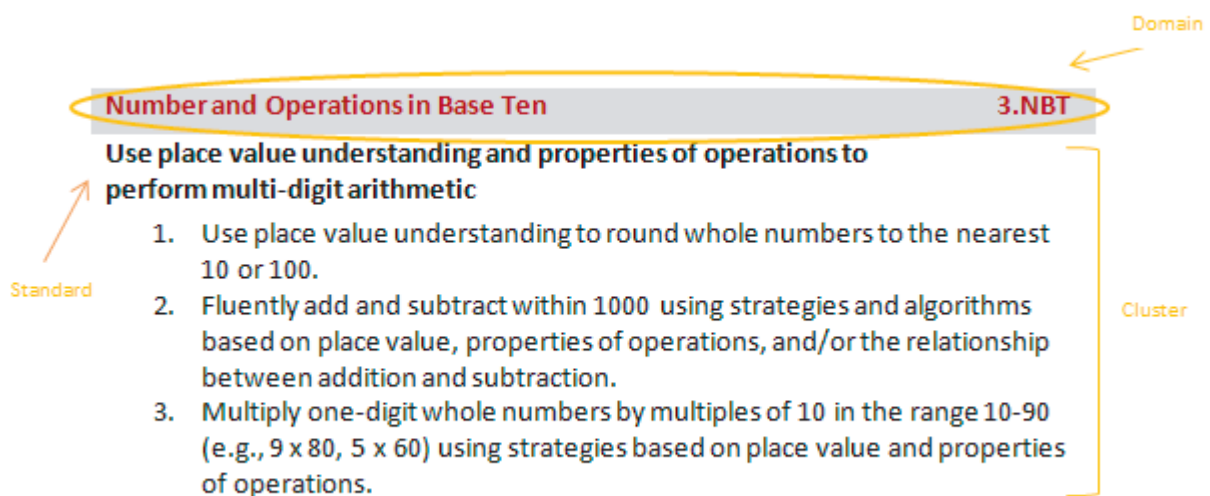


Exhibit 4 below provides sample English Language Arts (ELA) Standards that focus on one of three large domains—*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*. The other two domains under ELA are Knowledge of Language and Conventions of Standard English.

A sample of vocabulary acquisition and use is selected for illustration here because of the relevance of “vocabulary” to the adult education arena, where many adult education subject areas are often subsumed under the larger umbrella of “literacy” (where adults learn to read and write).

**Exhibit 4 - Sample ELA Standards  
Language Standards 6-12  
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**

Grade 6 students	Grade 7 students	Grade 8 students
<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grade 6 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>a. Use context (e.g. the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p>b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., <i>audience, auditory, audible</i>).</p>	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grade 7 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>a. Use context (e.g. the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p>b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., <i>belligerent, bellicose, rebel</i>).</p>	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grade 8 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>a. Use context (e.g. the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p>b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., <i>precede, recede, secede</i>).</p>

Although these Common Core State Standards are intended for the K–12 community of learners, they reflect content that is appropriate for adults too, especially adult learners who are at similar educational development levels (e.g., adults who read at a 6th, 7th, or 8th grade level). It is important for practitioners to review these Standards in relation to their goals and objectives for the adult learners in their program to determine the transferability of the Standards to their respective adult education contexts. In addition, although strategies are provided to help K–12 practitioners teach these Standards, adult education practitioners should remember that K–12 strategies may not be applicable to the adult education context. As such, teachers are encouraged to build lessons that will support student learning development using instructional strategies that reflect best practices in adult education.

Overall, there is correspondence between the content and skills provided in the Common Core State Standards and the content and skills that are the primary foci of practice in adult education. As a result, it is quite possible that adult education teachers may be able to apply some of the same Common Core State Standards lesson delivery principles to the adult education context, and that the Standards may help to provide better support to adult learners in their efforts to develop the skills needed to enter and succeed in post-secondary education or in the workforce.

In order to transfer skills from the Common Core State Standards Initiative, it is also worth considering the relationship of those Standards to those identified in the adult education content standards warehouse, and drawing on the areas that are most beneficial to students. Content standards are important, but it is worth considering how those standards reflect adult learner needs and goals. Consider the applicability of any proposed strategies for applying the Standards to your unique adult education contexts, and consider that developmental appropriateness is an important issue—

adult learners have different needs and goals than learners in the K–12 system, and topic areas that are important in the K–12 system may not be appropriate for adult learners.

## Conclusion

It is probable that utilizing best practices in adult teaching and learning to apply the Standards to the adult education context may prove beneficial to adult learners, including English language learners (ELLs). Additionally, the Common Core State Standards skills involve some foundational reading and writing skills—areas that are necessary for adult learner support and advancement. The Common Core State Standards present some important opportunities for adult education, but states have much to consider before adopting the Standards.

Further, the adoption of any standards also requires the adoption of assessments, not only for measuring student success but also to ensure the successful implementation of the standards. There will be a critical need for aligned and valid assessments in the field of adult education, especially in the area of adult mathematics/numeracy. As the field moves forward with developing standards and advancing teacher effectiveness, it is also important to consider the need to develop or adopt assessments that will help to highlight the strengths and needs of programs, teachers, and students—key information that will continue to support instructional change. In the K–12 arena, The Math Assessment Project ([map.mathshell.org/](http://map.mathshell.org/)) “is working to design and develop well-engineered assessment tools to support US schools in implementing the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSSM, 2012, ¶, 2).” This effort may illuminate some approaches for addressing the need for adequate mathematics assessments in adult education.

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