



# ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS WORTH IT?

---

An important question to ask in light of recent controversy surrounding state adoption of the Common Core State Standards is whether the Common Core State Standards are worth it. The answer is yes, according to a 2012 article published in *Educational Leadership*. Researchers at Michigan State University's Center for the Study of Curriculum argue that the Common Core State Standards are worth the effort for two major reasons: quality and equality.

## THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS BOOST QUALITY

In terms of quality, University Distinguished Professor William H. Schmidt and Research Associate Nathan A. Burroughs argue that the Common Core State Standards in mathematics will address the mediocre quality of math learning that has been a pressing concern in U.S. education. They present evidence that there is a 90 percent overlap between the Common Core standards in math and the standards of the world's top-achieving nations on the international TIMSS assessment, suggesting that the Common Core math standards are of high quality. Additionally, they discuss how states with standards more like the Common Core standards perform better on the national NAEP assessment, showing the positive relationship between the Common Core and academic achievement. However, the authors acknowledge that high standards do not ensure high achievement, and point to the critical role that implementation plays. Teacher preparation is a key area to focus on to ensure effective implementation, especially for elementary teachers who report feeling the least prepared to teach the Common Core compared to middle and high school teachers.

## THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS BOOST EQUALITY

As for equality, Schmidt and Burroughs argue that the new standards will address the current unequal opportunity to learn math content in American schools. The authors present evidence that the widest variation in the opportunity to learn math content is across classrooms, meaning that students within the same school but in different classrooms are less likely to learn the same content than students from other schools, districts, and states. Moreover, the problem of unequal opportunity to learn is not restricted to minority and low-income children. In fact, the authors present evidence that the greatest variation in opportunity to learn math content takes place in middle-income districts.

## WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU

All education leaders and practitioners would do well to pay attention to the compelling argument that Schmidt and Burroughs make for the potential of the Common Core to address problems of quality and equality in math education, because these are problems for all of us. The article demonstrates widespread inequality in math instructional content and shows that inequality is not restricted to low-income districts. Providing access to high quality math education and effectively implementing the Common Core are important steps to address hidden inequalities faced by all students, regardless of their income level. A related issue concerning inequality is tracking, which Schmidt and Burroughs point out is at odds with the Common Core State Standards, which promote common grade-level content for all students. It is important to consider how the Common Core might



alter the course and classroom structure at your school, and what implications this has for teachers, students, and parents. Finally, superintendents, curriculum developers, principals, and teachers should consider how the powerful argument that the authors present for mathematics might apply across the curriculum.

## READ THE ARTICLE

Schmidt, W.H., & Burroughs, N.A. (2012). How the common core boosts quality & equality. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4) 54-58.

Summary by Alisha M. B. Brown, doctoral student in educational policy

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Suggested citation: Education Policy Center at Michigan State University. (2014). Are the common core state standards worth it? – research by William Schmidt and Nathan Burroughs. Retrieved [date] from <http://edwp.educ.msu.edu/publications/2014/are-the-common-core-state-standards-worth-it-research-by-william-schmidt-nathan-burroughs/>