



This document will help teachers and parents understand why the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are inappropriate for Kindergarten - 3rd Grade, and will also help teachers and parents advocate against the CCSS—and for policies and classroom practices that will best meet the needs of young children.

SIX REASONS TO REJECT CCSS FOR GRADES K-3

1. Many of the Kindergarten - 3rd Grade CCSS are developmentally inappropriate, and are not based on well-researched child development knowledge about how young children learn. ^{1, 2}

The CCSS for young children were developed by mapping backwards from what is required at high school graduation to the early years. This has led to standards that:

- list discrete skills, facts and knowledge that do not match how young children develop, think or learn;
- require young children to learn facts and skills for which they are not ready;
- are often taught by teacher-led, didactic instruction instead of the experiential, play-based activities and learning young children need; ^{1, 2, 12}
- devalue the whole child and the importance of social-emotional development, play, art, music, science and physical development.

An example of a developmentally inappropriate Common Core standard for kindergarten is one that requires children to “read emergent reader texts with purpose and understanding.” Many young children are not developmentally ready to read in kindergarten and there is no research to support teaching reading in kindergarten. There is no research showing long-term advantages to reading at age five compared to reading at age six or seven.⁶

2. Many of the skills mandated by the CCSS erroneously assume that all children develop and learn skills at the same rate and in the same way.

Decades of child development research and theory from many disciplines (cognitive and developmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine and education) show how children progress at different rates and in different ways. For example, the average age that children start walking is 12 months. Some children begin walking as early as nine months and others not until 15 months - and all of this falls within a normal range. Early walkers are not better walkers than later walkers. A second example is that the average age at which children learn to read independently is 6.5 years. Some begin as early as four years and some not until age seven or later - and all of this falls within the normal range.⁵ Research has shown that children who score well on early intelligence tests have only a 40% correlation with later achievement tests results³ and that one-third of the brightest incoming third graders score below average prior to kindergarten.⁴

The CCSS are measured using frequent and inappropriate assessments – this includes high-stakes tests, standardized tests, and computer-administered assessments. States are required to use computer-based tests (such as PARCC) to assess CCSS. This is leading to mandated computer use at an early age and the misallocation of funds to purchase computers and networking systems in school districts that are already underfunded.

3. Early childhood educators did not participate in the development of the standards.

The CCSS do not comply with the internationally and nationally recognized protocol for writing professional standards. They were written without due process, transparency, or participation by knowledgeable parties. Two committees made up of 135 people wrote the standards - and not one of them was a K-3 classroom teacher or early childhood education professional. When the CCSS were first released, more than 500 early childhood professionals signed a Joint Statement opposing the standards on the grounds that they would lead to long hours of direct instruction; more standardized testing; and would crowd out highly important active, play-based learning. All of this has come to pass. Notably, this important Joint Statement was not even reported in the “summary of public feedback” posted on the Core Standards website.¹¹

4. There is a lack of research to support the current early childhood CCSS. The standards were not pilot tested and there is no provision for ongoing research or review of their impact on children and on early childhood education.

The CCSS do not build on what is known from earlier long-term studies such as the Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Project, the Abbott Schools of NJ, or Chicago Parent Child Centers which demonstrate what works for young children.^{7, 10} There is no convincing research showing that certain skills or bits of knowledge such as counting to 100 in kindergarten or being able to “tell and write time in hours and half-hours using analog and digital clocks in first grade” will lead to later success in school. There was no research on how to effectively train teachers on implementing the CCSS.

5. The standards do not take into account what young children today need when they get to school. Children need play in school now more than ever. They need teachers who are skilled facilitators of play so the solid foundations can be laid in the early school years for optimal learning in the later years.

Many of today’s children are over-exposed to electronics and screens.¹⁴ Many of them are overly scheduled and lack opportunities for sustained, unstructured, free play and especially outdoor/nature play.^{8, 9, 14}

These conditions have led to reduced play opportunities for many children, which has, in turn, led to deficiencies in many of the essential foundational skills that develop through play: executive functioning, self-control, persistence, creativity, problem-solving, flexibility, attention span, and ability to call on stored knowledge when needed.^{15, 16, 17}

6. The adoption of CCSS falsely implies that making children learn these standards will combat the impact of poverty on development and learning, and create equal educational opportunity for all children.

The U.S. is the wealthiest nation in the world and has the highest child poverty rate among industrialized nations.¹⁸ Corporate-style reformers would have us believe that we can solve the problem of poverty by mandating the teaching of basic skills in our nation’s schools. But schools cannot solve all of the problems created by societal factors that exist outside of school walls. While we do not have all the answers, years of research tell us that schools, while important, cannot solve all the disadvantages created by poverty.¹⁹ In fact, during the last decade of “education reform” - increased standards and testing, more accountability and data gathering - the inequalities in our education system have increased²⁴ and the child poverty rate has grown.²⁵

SIX PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE POLICY

1. Young children learn through active, direct experiences and play.²⁰

Young children learn best through active learning experiences within meaningful contexts. They need materials that can be used in multiple ways and allow for hands-on exploration and problem solving. They need dynamic, ongoing relationships with teachers who understand child development, can build onto and extend their hands-on activities, and provide well-thought out educational experiences that demonstrate knowledge of and respect for each child. The teachers must be able to create time in the schedule to promote these active experiences between children, as peer interactions play a crucial role in cognitive learning and social-emotional development.

2. Children learn skills and concepts at different times, rates, and paces.

Every child is unique.^{5, 26}

Every child possesses a unique personality, temperament, family relationship and cultural background. Each has different interests, experiences and approaches to learning. Each child perceives and approaches the world differently, often taking different routes to reach the same ends. Thus, all children need learning experiences that take into account, support and build onto who they are as individuals.

3. Young children learn best when their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical selves become highly engaged in the learning process.

Active learning experiences and play engage multiple aspects of the child's capacities simultaneously. A curriculum focused on academic standards and goals compartmentalizes learning in ways that are not natural for young children. Hands-on, play-based, experiential learning engages the whole child and strengthens and supports young children's intellectual dispositions and their innate thirst for better, fuller, and deeper understanding of their own experiences.²⁷

4. Assessments of young children should be observational in nature, ongoing, and connected to curriculum and teaching. They should take into account the broad-based nature of young children's learning, not isolated skills, and the natural developmental variation in all areas of young children's growth and development.

Assessment methods should be developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.²¹

Assessments in early childhood should be as infrequent as possible to maintain high program quality. Standardized tests are highly unreliable for children younger than 3rd grade and should not be used in early childhood settings.^{10, 13, 28} The linking of test scores to teacher evaluation or to program evaluation leads to an increase in standards and test-based instruction, and less developmentally appropriate play-based, experiential education.

Administrators need to emphasize quality educational experiences and teaching, not test scores in the early years.¹⁰

5. The problems of inequality and child poverty need to be addressed directly.

Almost one quarter of our nation's children live in poverty.¹⁸ We need to do what other developed nations do which is to ensure that all of their children have health care, housing, and basic needs met for economic security and well being. Then we must fund our schools equitably, by giving more money to the schools and students where needs are greatest, which are most commonly schools in low-income neighborhoods. Educational funds should not be distributed to states based on their acceptance of specific education reforms, such as we have seen in the last decade. If we begin to redress some of the profound inequalities that exist for children in the U.S. today, this will be the surest way to genuinely improve schools and overall well-being and success for all of the nation's children.

6. Quality early childhood education with well-prepared teachers is the best investment a society can make in its future.

Research shows that early childhood education enhances the life prospects of children and has a high benefit-cost ratio and rate of return for society's investment. The Perry Preschool Project, a major longitudinal study of a quality preschool education program, showed that investment in high-quality preschool education improved the lives of those who were in the program and paid handsome returns to society. Building a strong foundation for learning in the early years is especially crucial for disadvantaged children.²²

The United States ranks twenty-fourth among wealthy nations in providing availability and quality of early childhood education.²³ Committing to high quality early childhood education with well-prepared teachers is a crucial first step our nation can take in reducing the achievement gaps between rich and poor children and improving the lives of children.

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www.deyproject.org

Resources

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