

Objections to Common Core

Idaho is hearing public comment on the Idaho Content Standards, more commonly known as Common Core.

This document outlines specific reasons many Idahoans object to Common Core Standards in Idaho. There is one section of general objections, followed by specific objections to Common Core English Language Arts, Math, and Science.

Does Idaho have Common Core Standards or Idaho Content Standards?

As both terms are used frequently in the following document, here is a brief overview: [Idaho adopted Common Core Standards in 2011](#), which outlined English Language Arts (ELA) and Math standards. In subsequent years (2016-2017), Idaho Department of Education rebranded and readopted the Common Core Standards as the “Idaho Content Standards.” In 2017, Idaho also adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)—science standards aligned with Common Core—deliberately dubbed the “Idaho Science Standards.”

As will be demonstrated below, the differences are not substantive, and for all intents and purposes Idaho students are still subject to Common Core Standards.

Thus, references to Common Core below refer to the Idaho Content Standards.

Though initially adopted in 2016-17, Idaho has gone through several iterations of Idaho Content Standards. This document uses the most recent Idaho Content Standards [taken directly from the Idaho State Department of Education website](#).

Note for clarity: Though “content” can sometimes mean “curriculum,” in this case the two are separate. Curriculum, often set at the district level, refers to the textbooks and resources used to help students acquire skills. For the purposes of this hearing, “standards” and “content standards” mean approximately the same thing: The performance standards (knowledge, concepts, and skills) Idaho students are supposed to master in each content area.

The process for public testimony:

[Here are the areas open to public comment](#). See Docket 08-0000-1900, specifically the Idaho Content Standards under Rules Governing Thoroughness (08.02.03.004) (scroll down to see).

1. Individuals sign up to speak at the beginning of the public hearing. There may be limits on how long each person can talk, depending on the number of people at the hearing
2. Speakers must keep their testimony specific and be ready to cite which rule they have comments on. For the purposes of this document, that would be: IDAPA Chapter 08,

Title 02, Chapter 03: Rules Governing Thoroughness, 004 Idaho Content Standards, list specific subject if applicable.

3. The hearing is meant to gather comments that can be used for considering amendments to the actual language in the rule. With regards to the Idaho Content Standards, it is likely that entire standards (not specific elements) will need to be repealed rather than revised, as Common Core is not adaptable (see objection 3 below).
4. Hearing administrators may ask clarifying questions during testimony, to make sure everyone understands which rule the speaker wishes to be amended.
5. You can leave written comment with staff at the hearings, which will be incorporated into the rule-making process.

General objections to Common Core:

Common Core was federally pushed as part of an education standardization agenda.

While some [Common Core advocates claim](#) the standards were state-led and not part of a federal initiative, the Obama Administration widely pushed and promoted adoption of these standards. The Obama Administration's Secretary of Education, [Arne Duncan, used federal Race to the Top](#) grants to incentivize states to adopt Common Core. As described by Duncan, it was part of [a deliberate effort by the Obama Administration](#) to standardize and benchmark standards nationwide.

Click here for the [Pioneer Institute's overview of Common Core's implementation](#) ("Background" starts on page 3.)

The Idaho Department of Education said it already repealed Common Core, but the replacement standards are nearly identical.

The Idaho Department of Education committed to changing Common Core, but has not substantially done so. [Idaho is still listed as a Common Core adoption state](#) from the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Common Core got such a bad reputation that to avoid protests, many states changed or rolled back the standards. In 2016-17, Idaho adopted the supposedly-new Idaho Content Standards.

Education officials clearly told Idahoans that the standards have been changed. Sherry Ybarra, Public Superintendent of Public Education, said when asked about getting rid of Common Core standards: "We did get rid of it. We didn't rename it." [She told reporters](#) how the State Board of Education went out for six months of public comments, culminating in the new "Idaho Content Standards."

Yet a side-by-side comparison of Idaho's old Common Core state standards (adopted in 2011)

and the current Idaho Content Standards (adopted in 2016-17) reveals that the vast majority of content was copy-pasted word for word.

[See the ELA standards side by side here.](#)

The English Language Arts changes are:

- The new Idaho Content Standards removed several paragraphs of exposition present in Common Core standards (for example, compare page 22 of the old and standards). No actual standards were removed.
- The new standards updated the dates of the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress to the 2015 National Assessment of Education Progress.
- The new standards added less than half a page on handwriting standards. This is by far the most substantive change, and it consists of requiring students to learn cursive.
- The new standards added one bullet point to high school Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, saying that students should additionally be able to "use precise, domain-specific language" and "respond to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of readers."

[See the math standards side-by-side here.](#) There are virtually no differences.

In 2017, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)—[science standards aligned with Common Core](#)—were similarly renamed and implemented. The State Department of Education repackaged the NGSS as the "Idaho Science Standards."

Yet there is substantial overlap: [Click here for a line-by-line comparison](#) of the current Idaho Science Standards with the controversial NGSS.

[Click here to listen to the Idaho Science Standards Committee](#) members confirm Idaho Science Standards were deliberately renamed to avoid association with the Next Generation Science Standards.

Idahoans have already requested new standards. Idaho should take this opportunity to keep its commitment, respect public wishes, and give Idaho schools new standards.

The standards are copyrighted and inflexible: Idaho can't adapt them.

[Common Core Standards are copyrighted](#), and must be used "for purposes that support the Common Core State Standards Initiative" (CCSSI). In practice, the [CCSSI defined adoption](#) to mean the authorizing authority (the state or school board) must adopt Common Core "word for word, with the option of adding up to an additional 15% of standards on top of the core." Idaho should have the flexibility to respond to the needs of teachers, schools, and public, and the ability to evaluate and discard what doesn't work.

Common Core Standards have not helped Idaho students.

Since adopting Common Core state standards, Idaho students have not performed better on tests in English Language Arts or math.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) [shows that Idaho students haven't made progress](#). Over the years, NAEP 8th grade reading scores nudged slightly upwards, while 4th grade reading scores have wavered, but are lower than they were pre-Common Core. Likewise, math scores for Idaho fourth and eighth graders remain at or below where they were before Common Core was implemented.

Falling test scores nationwide—particularly for vulnerable students—are due to Common Core.

Federally-funded researchers recently released preliminary findings in their [evaluation of Common Core](#) results. They reported, “Contrary to our expectation, we found that [Common Core] had significant negative effects on 4th graders’ reading achievement during the 7 years after the adoption of the new standards... based on analyses of NAEP composite scores.” Negative achievement effects were larger and more wide-ranging for disadvantaged groups: students with disabilities, English language learners, and Hispanics in particular.

These researchers were part of the initial federal Common Core push, yet they theorized that had Common Core never been implemented, test scores for today’s students [would be higher than they actually are](#) (see article in the Federalist). Furthermore, the researchers found Common Core’s negative effects actually [worsen over time](#), meaning a rough implementation period likely isn’t to blame for falling test scores.

According to the Brookings Institute, Common Core hasn’t given states statistically significant improvements. [Their 2015 report](#) concludes, “Kentucky was one of the earliest states to adopt and implement CCSS. That state’s NAEP fourth grade reading score declined in both 2009-2011 and 2011-2013.”

Specific objections to Common Core English Language Arts:

Common Core’s increased focus on technical texts harms student learning

Common Core standards recommend increased focus on informational and technical texts, suggesting students read a 50/50 blend of informational texts and literature. Sandra Stotsky, Professor Emerita of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas and developer of the lauded Massachusetts ELA standards, explained that Common Core was designed to introduce more technical, info-based learning at a younger age.

But it is by reading interesting literature and classics, Stotsky explains, “and slowly building up a vocabulary of comprehension that higher levels of comprehension and complexity become accessible.” Unfortunately, the type of literature required to build fundamental academic vocabulary are the very books de-emphasized by Common Core, leaving students with underdeveloped reading skills.

See here for [Professor Stotsky’s full report](#).

Read [Professor Stotsky’s letter explaining](#) why she refused to validate Common Core

Common Core ELA de-emphasizes student character development and opinions

As [English Teacher D’Lee Pollock-Moore points out](#), Common Core ELA standards “fail to understand that one of the fundamentals of teaching literature involves character education.” Reading builds wisdom and plunges students into lives and experiences they could otherwise not acquire. Pollock-Moore continues, “When we read a work such as “Walden” by Henry David Thoreau or “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King Jr., we internalize those works. They change our hearts. They help us become better people.” Though Common Core talks about identifying themes and “analyzing their development” in a text, Pollock-Moore argues, the standards have nothing to say about how the themes and morals apply to students’ lives. For example, see the list of [Sample Performance Tasks for Informational Texts](#) in 11-12 grade Common Core ELA, page 171.

According to creators, emphasis on text-only analysis [is a deliberate feature of Common Core ELA](#). But when a teacher insists students develop their own thoughts and opinions about a work, it encourages students to think deeply about a text. It helps them build character, hone their judgement, and thrive as rational individuals with their own discrete opinions.

Click here to review [Idaho English Language Arts Standards](#)

Specific objections to Common Core Math:

The common core math standards have decreased student achievement in California, which had high-rated state standards before Common Core

See what happened in California after they went from highly rated math standards to Common Core math standards: <https://www.hoover.org/research/californias-common-core-mistake>

As the Hoover institute summarizes: “The deficiencies of Common Core as compared to the 1997 California standards were well documented by [mathematicians and other experts](#). Common Core [was not benchmarked to international high-achieving countries](#) despite claiming that this

was so; Common Core standards were [less clear than the California 1997 standards](#); Common Core [had significant gaps in its content coverage](#); and, perhaps most obviously, [despite its explicit promise to expect algebra and geometry in grade 8](#) as other countries do, it pushed the Algebra I course firmly into high school.”

Click here to review the [Idaho Math Standards](#).

Specific objections to Next Generation Science Standards:

Next Generation Science Standards (now called Idaho Science Standards) are mediocre.

The Fordham Institute, a research firm and Common Core supporter, [rated the Next Generation Science Standards as a “C”](#): Firmly mediocre. Idaho shouldn’t settle for mediocre standards. Our students deserve the best we can possibly give them.

The Idaho Science Standards teach human-driven global warming.

Though there is much diversity of thought surrounding climate change, its potential causes, and human stewardship of the environment, the Idaho Science Standards emphasize climate change, and that human interaction with the environment is routinely harmful.

ESS2-K-3. (A kindergarten standard): “Communicate solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air, and/or other living things in the local environment.”

LS2.C: “...anthropogenic changes (induced by human activity) in the environment—including habitat destruction, pollution, introduction of invasive species, overexploitation, and climate change—can disrupt an ecosystem and threaten the survival of some species.”

ESS3-HS-5: “Analyze geoscience data and the results from global climate models... Examples of evidence, for both data and climate model outputs, are for climate changes (such as precipitation and temperature) and their associated impacts (such as on sea level, glacial ice volumes, or atmosphere and ocean composition).”

ESS3-HS-6: Use a computational representation to illustrate the relationships among Earth systems and how those relationships are being modified due to human activity...”

ESS2.D: “Weather and Climate • Current models project that, without human intervention, average global temperatures will continue to rise.” (ESS3-HS-6)

Click [here to review the Idaho Science standards](#).

Common Core alternatives do exist

[Here is a discussion on alternatives to Common Core Math](#). There are more rigorous, flexible standards Idaho can adopt.

[Here is an alternative set of ELA standards](#), offered by Professor Sandra Stotsky, who helped write the acclaimed Massachusetts ELA Standards.

Note on scholarship: This document was prepared by the Idaho Freedom Foundation as a casual overview of some common objections to the Idaho Content Standards and potential reasons why Idahoans may support repeal. It is not intended as a comprehensive study or formal policy position.

Though the Idaho Freedom Foundation stands by the quality of our scholarship, this document does reference research by third-party entities unaffiliated with the Idaho Freedom Foundation. While IFF believes the reports we cite are useful for readers seeking a background on Common Core, test scores, and the Idaho Content Standards, IFF cannot guarantee the accuracy of such reports with the same stringency as we do our own work. This document always lists where third-party research and summaries are cited. Original sources are attached for public inspection wherever possible.

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