

October 2013

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We're off and running with the 2013-14 school year. Our students and staff are working hard and engaged in teaching and learning. I am proud and energized for a wonderful 2013-14.

This is the second year of the implementation of the New York State Common Core Learning Standards in English Language Arts and mathematics, and the second year of the Common Core-aligned state assessments.

We are required by state law to implement the state's Common Core Learning Standards. They represent the knowledge and skills our students are required to learn, and are meant to be consistent across every state in the country. The goal is to prepare students for the future, for success in the global economy. Forty-five states have adopted the Common Core.

Moving toward full implementation of the Common Core has been and will continue to be a significant change for students, parents, and staff. It will take time for all of us to adjust our practice, routines, and expectations the Common Core requires. I am confident our students and staff will do fine, but again it will take time.

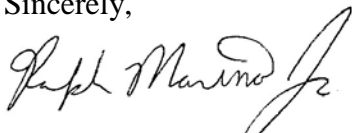
I understand that the Common Core concerns many parents. These resources will help us understand the various facets of the Common Core:

- EngageNY's parent's "backpack guide" to the new standards is included with this letter. You may also find it at the following link: [http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/parent\\_workshop\\_backpack\\_guide.pdf](http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/parent_workshop_backpack_guide.pdf)
- This is a brief video about what the Common Core includes: <http://vimeo.com/51933492>.
- This website is presented by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association: <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

If you have questions about the Common Core, please contact your child's principal, or feel free to email me at [rmarino@horseheadsdistrict.com](mailto:rmarino@horseheadsdistrict.com).

Thank you for your continued care and concern for your children. It is our mission, our responsibility, to provide our students with the best education possible in alignment with the state.

Sincerely,



Ralph Marino, Jr., Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

# Parent's Backpack Guide to Common Core State Standards

## FOR PREKINDERGARTEN–5TH GRADE: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS

In 2011 New York adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to make sure that all children succeed once they graduate from high school. This guide is designed to help you understand how the standards will affect your child, what changes you will see and what you can do at home to help your children in the classroom.

### Why Are the Common Core State Standards Important?

The Common Core State Standards are important because they will help all children – no matter who they are – learn the same skills. They create clear expectations for what your child should know and be able to do in key areas: **reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics**. If you know what these expectations are, then you can work with the teacher and help your child prepare.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)

The new Common Core State Standards make several important changes to current standards. These changes are called shifts. The chart below shows what these shifts change, what you might see in your child's backpack and what you can do to help your child. If your child's assignments do not reflect the shifts, then talk to your child's teacher.

What's Shifting?	What to Look for in the Backpack?	What Can You Do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will now <b>read more non-fiction</b> in each grade level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for your kids to have more reading assignments based on real-life events, such as biographies, articles and historical stories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read non-fiction books with your children. Find ways to make reading fun and exciting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading more non-fiction texts will help your child <b>learn about the world through reading</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for your kids to bring home more fact-based books about the world. For instance, your 1<sup>st</sup> Grader or Kindergartener might read Clyde Robert Bulla's <i>A Tree is a Plant</i>. This book lets students read and learn about science.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know what non-fiction books are grade-level appropriate and make sure your children have access to such books.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b>read challenging texts very closely</b>, so they can make sense of what they read and draw their own conclusions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your kids will have reading and writing assignments that might ask them to retell or write about key parts of a story or book. For example, your 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Grader might be asked to read aloud Faith D'Aluisio's non-fiction book titled <i>What the World Eats</i> and retell facts from the story.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide more challenging texts for your kids to read. Show them how to dig deeper into difficult pieces.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When it comes to writing or retelling a story, your child will <b>use "evidence" gathered from the text to support what they say</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for written assignments that ask your child to draw on concrete examples from the text that serve as evidence. Evidence means examples from the book that your child will use to support a response or conclusion. This is different from the opinion questions that have been used in the past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask your child to provide evidence in everyday discussions and disagreements.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b>learn how to write from what they read</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for writing assignments that ask your child to make arguments in writing using evidence. For 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, this might mean reading and writing about <i>The Kids Guide to Money</i>, a non-fictional book by Steve Otfinoski.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage writing at home. Write together using evidence and details.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b>have an increased academic vocabulary</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for assignments that stretch your child's vocabulary and teach them that "language is power."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read often to babies, toddlers, preschoolers and children.</li> </ul>

## MATHEMATICS

To improve student learning, the new Common Core State Standards are different from the old ones. These changes are called shifts. The chart below shows what is shifting, what you might see in your child's backpack and what you can do to help your child. Again, if your child's assignments do not reflect the shifts, then talk to your child's teacher.

What's Shifting?	What to Look for in the Backpack?	What Can You Do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b><u>work more deeply in fewer topics</u></b>, which will ensure full understanding. (less is more!)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for assignments that require students to show their work and explain how they arrived at an answer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know what concepts are important for your child based on their grade level and spend time working on those concepts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b><u>keep building on learning year after year</u></b>, starting with a strong foundation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for assignments that build on one another. For example, students will focus on adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. Once these areas are mastered, they will focus on fractions. Building on that, they will then focus on Algebra. You should be able to see the progression in the topics they learn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be aware of what concepts your child struggled with last year and support your child in those challenge areas moving forward.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b><u>spend time practicing and memorizing math facts</u></b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for assignments that ask your child to master math facts such as addition groupings up to 20 or multiplication tables.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help your child know and memorize basic math facts. Ask your child to "do the math" that pops up in daily life.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will <b><u>understand why the math works and be asked to talk about and prove their understanding</u></b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child might have assignments that ask her or him to show or explain their mathematical thinking - to SAY why they think their answer is the right one.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk to your child about their math homework and ask them to teach you new concepts. Help them figure out ways to explain their thinking.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your child will now be asked to <b><u>use math in real-world situations</u></b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for math assignments that are based on the real world. For instance, homework for 5<sup>th</sup> graders might include adding fractions as part of a dessert recipe or determining how much pizza friends ate based on fractions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide time every day for your child to work on math at home.</li> </ul>

## TALKING TO YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

When talking to your child's teacher, try to keep the conversation focused on the most important topics that relate to your child. This means asking the teacher how your child is performing based on grade-level standards and expectations.

Also, ask to see a sample of your child's work. Compare your child's samples to those found at <http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-common-core-sample-questions>. Also, feel free to bring those samples to your child's teacher and ask the teacher to explain how the samples are used in the classroom.

This information will enable you make important adjustments at home that can help your child achieve success in the classroom.

**For more information, please visit: [www.engageny.org](http://www.engageny.org) or contact your local principal or superintendent.**