

Common Core State Standards

As part of a national education reform effort, new content standards in mathematics and English/language arts were adopted by New Jersey and forty-five other states in 2010. The *Common Core State Standards* were developed through a joint initiative by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State Officers. The standards reflect the collaborative effort of educators, researchers, and experts in the fields of mathematics and English/language arts. The *Common Core State Standards* provide a research-based set of core conceptual understandings that provide high quality academic benchmarks for all students in grades K-12, regardless of where they live.

The Ramsey Public Schools have aligned the *Common Core State Standards* to our K-12 curriculum. Mr. Santulli, the district's mathematics supervisor, and Dr. Moore, the English supervisor, have been working with our teaching staff to analyze and align the standards with our curriculum. While the standards are designed to foster a rigorous academic program, we have found that our curriculum, through ongoing improvement and development, has kept pace over the years with efforts to increase academic expectations on a national level. As a result, the changes required by the *Common Core Standards* are not so far-reaching, as they may be for other public schools throughout the nation.

Ramsey's English/language arts curriculum fosters a strong set of reading, writing, and communication skills, and provides students with challenging assignments and advanced courses at the high school level. One of the changes in emphasis that has come with the new language arts standards is a greater emphasis on informational text, text complexity, and using evidence from text to support an argument or claim. Our K-12 Language Arts Committee has been designing language arts tasks and assignments that incorporate and foster these competencies.

In mathematics, while the *Common Core* requires some shift in the scope and sequence of the curriculum, and a greater emphasis on problem-solving applications, Ramsey has had a successful mathematics program for many years, which already incorporates many of the new math standards and practices. The emphasis on conceptual understanding and problem-solving, rather than rote memorization is an important part of the new mathematics standards. We have recently adopted new mathematics resources in grades 3, 4, and 5 to better address the mathematics standards at those grade levels. The *21st Century Skills Initiative* that our school district has undertaken during the past three years, has also emphasized the kind of critical thinking, deep comprehension, and real-world problem-solving that is characteristic of the *Common Core Standards* in both language arts and mathematics.

The new PARCC assessment will replace the NJ ASK and will be administered in grades 3 through 11, beginning in the spring of 2015. The PARCC exam will measure student progress in

language arts and mathematics as outlined in the new Common Core State Standards. This assessment will be computer-based, with students using laptops and iPads. The Ramsey School District has been selected to participate in a field test of the PARCC assessment this spring. About 50 students in grades 4, 7, and 10 will participate in the field test. As a result of our participation in the field test, we will have made the transition to a computer-based assessment system and will have gained insight into the kinds of assessment tasks that our students will face in the new testing format.

To learn more about the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC Assessments, visit the following websites: www.corestandards.org. www.parcconline.org.