



"Bringing the Common Core to Life"
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Part 2
Introduction to the Common Core State Standards by
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That was perhaps the kindest introduction I've ever received. My mother lives only an hour from here and I'm hoping she could hear it directly. My name's David Coleman and together with the team that worked together with a much larger team of 48 states and teachers and experts from all fields developed the common core standards that now sit before you. But if you don't mind, I thought I might begin on a slightly more personal note. I grew up in New York City. I went to public school there. I went to PS 41, IS 70 and, yes, the old Stuyvesant building. You always know a New Yorker because they talk about their school names as numbers with affection like PS 41 or IS 70. My brother lived here in Albany for many years and my niece was born here. So you had a real partisan New Yorker in the work of the common standards.

But more important than my private background is the immensely important role that New York State played in building the common standards and I want to start there for a minute. Because one mistake you can make in thinking about common standards is that, boy, this was easy. All you do is take what's common amidst the 48 states that were involved and then you've got common standards, which would be a very bad and ugly thing. What we instead had to do was build on the work on the shoulders of the best work states had thus far done, already revising their standards, already moving towards an agenda of college and career readiness and New York State was a beacon state in terms of having done a great deal of work. There's a great deal of work in this state as you may know on revising the New York State standards towards the college and career readiness level and making a series of innovations which we stole shamelessly. The person in the group whom we stole the most from was Walter Sullivan and his working team led by Regent Cohen and others. But I mean to say to you today that the core standards stand on the shoulders of the work New York State has done. They are an advance, not a departure. And at the same time, they stand on the shoulders of many individual people in this state who contributed to them. That involves most of all the teachers of this state who are heavily involved but also John King and David Steiner himself, who played an immense and essential role in making these happen. And because I've now pointed out all these people who are involved, you can blame them for whatever parts of the standards that you don't find compelling or useful.



What I'm going to do with you today is I'm going to briefly give you an overview of the development of the common core standards, the principles on which they were based, and then go into a little more detail, an overview as it were, of mathematics and literacy. Then, we want to get closer to practice, closer to the lives you lead in making this happen. So what I will then do is give a picture of literacy instruction by looking together with you at King's wonderful letter from Birmingham Jail. And then we'll equally take a close look at mathematics to get a better sense of what does this really mean in practice. You will have several opportunities to undermine me with questions so I hope that you will prepare them now and after what I've been through, you cannot hurt me. So please ask the most ruthless things that come to mind.

Three critical principles underline the development of the common core. First, the standards must be college and career ready. They must from kindergarten through 12th grade create a staircase for college and career readiness. It is a bargain, almost I would say a wholly bargain, between the students and the schools that if you in fact can achieve these things you are indeed ready for what comes next. The terrifying truth, as you know, about remediation rates in this state is overwhelmingly kids need remediation when they go to college and remediation is a trap from which very few students escape and this happens most of all for the kids we are most concerned about. There are systematic reasons for this gap that we will discuss. But the crucial design principle that informed our work is that we had to build a staircase that kids could follow and if they did so they'd truly be ready in the areas of literacy and mathematics for the demands of college and career. That will underlie a lot of what I'll say next.

The second is that these core standards had to be based on ethics. It was not enough to piously say what we believe all students need to know and be able to do. It was time to support those declarations with evidence that demonstrated that these core knowledge and skills were in fact the critical capacities predicting kids' effectiveness in college and career settings.

And third was a level of honesty about time. Let me tell you the difference between teachers and standards developers. For standards developers time does not matter. Nothing is easier than with the stroke of a pen adding something that now all teachers and kids need to do. But that takes no account of what teachers are constantly conscious of, which is the actual amount of time it takes to master that and for students to practice it. And what's happened in almost every state is an accretion of standards to the point that they're utterly unrealistic in terms of time. All of you know what this means. This makes assessment a Russian roulette system. Since the assessment has to cover too wide a body of material into superficial matter no one can predict what will be assessed, what won't in an in-depth way and there's a situation of distrust.



There is no voice in these standards stronger than the voice of teachers who demanded that we focus on what matters most and provide the time for teachers to teach and for students to practice. That includes formal organizations like the UFT in New York City and the AFT statewide and NYSUT, who are deeply involved in this work, the professional organizations of teachers and the disciplines like NCTE and NCTM and several others that you know of. But it also involved quite wonderfully several other teachers of every stripe from every organizational background who are involved in developing these standards and also of course the NEA and other groups. But if there's one voice that is loud and clear here, it is the voice of teachers. And let me tell you what we learned as we listened to those voices.