

# The TRUTH about Common Core Standards

## Supporting the Common Core in Montana

MEA-MFT has joined with other public education groups in support of Common Core. These groups recently formed the Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) to provide accurate information about Montana's great public schools. MT-PEC is spreading the word: Common Core is good for Montana kids so long as the state provides enough resources to allow schools to comply with the standards.

MT-PEC includes MEA-MFT, Montana Assoc. of School Business Officials, Montana Rural Education Assoc., Montana Quality Education Coalition, Montana School Boards Assoc., and School Administrators of Montana.

**MEAMFT**  
Public Schools Public Service

Change of any kind can make folks nervous. And too often, people with an agenda try to exploit that nervousness.

Take the hullabaloo over the new Common Core State Standards, for example. No doubt you've read some of the wild accusations about the standards. But when you look at who opposes the standards in Montana and nationally, it reads like a who's who of the individuals and groups that constantly try to discredit public schools in their attempt to get tax dollars for private schools.

So, what are the Common Core Standards? Who is behind them? Here's the scoop:

The Common Core State Standards set grade-by-grade benchmarks for what k-12 students should learn in math and English. They were designed to create a clear, consistent level of knowledge for students no matter where they live.

**State-led initiative:** The Common Core State Standards Initiative came from the states—from governors and chief state school officials. They were developed with input from teachers, school administrators, and other education experts.

Common Core is not part of any federal program. Individual states decided on their own whether to adopt the standards. Only four states decided not to adopt them.

Montana was the last of the 46 states to adopt the standards, because Montana's education leaders wanted to make sure they were right for Montana students. Educators, business leaders, and others across the state helped review the standards. Twelve public meetings were held over two years before the Montana Board of Public Education voted to adopt the standards in 2011, on the recommendation of Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau.

**Top teachers support Common Core:** This fall, Mary Moe, Montana's 1987 Teacher of the Year, authored a letter in support of Montana's Common Core Standards. Twenty-two Montana Teachers of the Year (see p. 13) signed on to the letter, which has been printed in many Montana newspapers. Here's what the letter says:

## Montana Teachers of the Year for Common Core

As Montana Teachers of the Year, our life-work has been dedicated to engaging Montana students in learning experiences that prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the future.... We proudly reflect the good work that some 10,000 Montana teachers do every day  
(Continued)



Montana Teachers of the Year stand solid for Common Core. Here, 13 of them, plus friends, stand together at the Teacher of the Year Celebration Oct. 17. From left, back row: Tom Pedersen, Jon Runnalls, Terry Beaver, Paul Andersen, Gary Carmichael, finalist Paul Swenson. Front: Eileen Sheehy, Anne Keith, Superintendent Denise Juneau, Jack Johnson, Nancy Stucky, Debi Biegel, Mary Wren, Anna Baldwin, Patty Myers.

## The TRUTH about Common Core Standards (Continued)

and every year.

Collectively, the 22 of us have over 500 years of teaching experience. We've taught at the elementary, middle, high school, college, and graduate school levels in Montana. We teach English, math, language arts, social studies, science, and other subjects, but mainly we teach kids.

Our experience has taught us that Montana's students are best served when:

- The expectations of the state are expressed in relevant and rigorous standards.
- Local communities, relying on local teachers' professional expertise, map out a sequence of courses and curricula that meet those standards within the context of community values.
- Classroom teachers have the latitude to design learning experiences that challenge, excite, and intrigue students as teachers deliver the community-approved curriculum aligned with state-approved standards.

• In our classrooms, schools, and communities, all students feel respected for who they are and are encouraged to explore what they could be.

Standards in all professions change over time. As individual professionals, we have watched Montana's Board of Public Education adopt new accreditation standards throughout our careers.

We have watched the development of Montana's Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics. We have never connected with one another to weigh in on them collectively. We do so now to say this: **We support Montana's Common Core Standards. Here's why:**

- Montana's Common Core Standards are more rigorous, more specific, and more comprehensive than the standards they replace.
- Montana's Common Core Standards prepare students to make smooth transitions into colleges, careers, and citizenship.
- Montana's Common Core Standards help kids who move out of Montana or kids who move into Montana enter their new school with the skills and knowledge they'll need to stay at grade level.

• Montana's Common Core Standards honor Montana's long-held tradition of local control of our public schools, as well as our constitutional and statutory obligations to understand, recognize, and preserve the cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.

• Montana's Common Core Standards infuse English and math competencies into other subject areas, just as processing information, solving problems, and communication are infused in all aspects of adult life in the 21st century.

• Most importantly, Montana's Common Core Standards establish goals that guide teachers in their design of instruction without limiting their professional judgment in how to deliver it.

**Implementing Montana's Common Core Standards** will require much of Montana teachers. We'll need to develop new skills, design new learning experiences, and ensure that assessments play a relevant but appropriate role in students' learning experiences.

We know that Montana teachers are up to the task and that our students and our state will be better for our efforts. ■

*Read the Common Core Standards here:* [www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards)

**Information gap:** Two-thirds (62%) of Americans have never heard of the Common Core Standards, including most parents, says the latest PDK/Gallup Poll. Of those who *had* heard of the standards, many wrongly thought the federal government was forcing states to adopt them. (It's not.)

### What's so great about Common Core Standards?

1. They preserve local control. Local Montana educators and school boards will decide how to meet the standards and set curriculum locally.
2. They deepen problem-solving skills and critical thinking.
3. They promote greater opportunity for all kids, no matter where they live.
4. They bring back flexibility and creativity in teaching. No more "drill & kill" test prep.

### The following Montana Teachers of the Year concur in the statement in support of Common Core:

Anna Baldwin	2014	Arlee	HS English & Digital Academy Native Amer. Studies
Eileen Sheehy	2013	Billings	HS US Government & AP US Government & Politics
Tom Pedersen	2012	Helena	HS Honors Biology II & Senior Science Seminar
Paul Andersen	2011	Bozeman	HS AP Biology & GATE Physical Science
Anne Keith	2010	Bozeman	8th Grade Math & Communication Arts
Sally Broughton	2009	Monforton	6-8 Social Studies & Language Arts
Steve Gardiner	2008	Billings	HS English & Journalism
Gary Carmichael	2007	Whitefish	HS US & Modern World History
Debi Biegel	2006	Bozeman	K-5 Instrumental & Choral Music
Mary Wren	2005	Great Falls	HS Math
Alyson Mike	2004	E. Helena	8th Grade Physical Science
Jon Runnalls	2003	Helena	Middle School Science
Judie Woodhouse	2002	Polson	HS English & Journalism
Terry Beaver	1999	Helena	HS Biology
Patty Myers	1998	Gt. Falls	2d Grade
Kim Girard	1997	Glasgow	HS Math
Nancy Stucky	1992	Billings	Elementary Special Education
Kay Brost	1994	Broadus	K-6 Librarian and Gifted & Talented
Mary Moe	1987	Col. Falls	HS English
Hal Stearns	1986	Missoula	HS History & Sociology
Ken Price	1984	Helena	HS Chemistry & Physics
Jack Johnson	1972	Billings	8th Grade US History, Current Events, & Math