Common Core State Standards Implementation in Dubai’s American Curriculum Schools

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Executive Summary
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are currently being implemented across the United States (US) and in American curriculum schools abroad. How are the CCSS being implemented in American curriculum schools in Dubai? This white paper spotlights CCSS implementation in the US and Dubai and cites resources and case studies that Dubai policymakers, school administrators, and teachers can use to create awareness around CCSS and help successfully deploy the new standards.

Introduction
In June 2009, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative was announced, which is a United States (US) educational initiative that outlines what K-12 students should know in English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical subjects, and Mathematics at the end of each grade. The goal of the initiative is to establish consistent education standards across all US states, as well as ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit-bearing courses at two- or four-year college programs or to enter the workforce.

CCSS strive to ensure that students are prepared to compete not only with their American peers in the next state, but also with students around the world.

As of December 2014, forty-three US states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense education system have adopted the CCSS.

Source: www.corestandards.org

American curriculum schools worldwide are beginning to implement the CCSS as well, including the 30 American curriculum schools in Dubai.

In this white paper, we will explore the following questions:
How are Common Core State Standards being implemented:
- in the US?
- in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE)?
CCSS Implementation in the US

Forty-six states initially adopted the CCSS, though implementation has not been uniform. Three states repealed CCSS and others plan to repeal. In several states, public disputes are underway about whether or not to use the standards. Controversy over standards-based education is not new, as there has existed for quite some time a push-and-pull regarding federal involvement in US public education standards, which is why CCSS was specifically created as a state-led initiative.¹

A great deal of debate has developed across the US around the role and impact of CCSS. Critics and supporters alike need to be armed with the facts about what the standards aim to achieve and how they are implemented. CCSS is the product of a multi-year, collaborative effort aimed at raising achievement levels of US students. The initiative was led by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), with contributions by major US educational and other relevant national organizations. The final draft was posted online for public comment. More than 10,000 responses were received.²

In order to positively impact student achievement, CCSS, like all other standards, must not only be adopted, but also implemented. Adopting the standards merely represents the beginning of the process, as the goal is to integrate content standards that impact teaching and learning in classrooms. Often, states possess well-articulated content standards that barely correlate to what transpires in classrooms. Properly implementing standards requires states, districts, and key educational stakeholders to strategically consider how CCSS can be efficiently and effectively implemented in every classroom from kindergarten through high school. Achieving positive outcomes with CCSS means considering numerous elements in a school: budget, curriculum, assessments, graduation requirements, accountability systems, and instructional resources. As states and districts adopt and begin to implement, refining implementation becomes a continuous work in progress towards effective teaching and learning. Each state has unique challenges and needs to address, with teachers and policymakers constantly learning and adjusting to the standards.³

The key decision points are held at the following levels:

Because education in the US consists of loosely coupled organizational units – states, districts, schools, and classes – failure at one level may not be fatal to another. States or districts might mismanage CCSS, but astute districts and schools could implement the standards effectively.⁴ This same independently organized system of CCSS implementation applies to Dubai American curriculum schools. Some schools are more effective at the curriculum level, while others are more effective in the classroom through teacher preparedness and understanding of CCSS. Just as there is a wide variety of implementation across US states, there is also variety in Dubai’s American curriculum school system.

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¹ “The Common Core mathematics standards succeed in being both mathematically coherent and grade-level appropriate. Overall, they are the best standards that I have seen in the past twenty years. If we can design a professional development program of the same caliber to go with these standards, then our nation will be making a substantial first step towards educational excellence in mathematics.”

- Dr. Hung-Hsi Wu, Professor of Mathematics, University of California at Berkeley

² “With the states’ release today of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to supporting effective teaching in every classroom, charting a path to college and careers for all students, and developing the tools to help all children stay motivated and engaged in their own education. The more states that adopt these college and career-based standards, the closer we will be to sharing innovation across state borders and becoming more competitive as a country.”

- Bill Gates, Co-Chair, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Snapshots of Success from the States: What Can We Learn?
At this point, the forty-three participating states are at varying stages of implementation. The CCSSO has compiled a list of successful state strategies and policies, which align with the Common Core State Standards Implementation Progress and Capacity Rubric it created for the State Education Agencies. CCSSO’s compendium highlights success stories across the CCSS spectrum, including implementation, professional development, communication/awareness, and reviewing instructional materials for CCSS alignment.

Here are a few on-the-ground highlights of successful CCSS implementation in the US:

- Kentucky (KY) reported substantial gains in student attainment during the third year of its CCSS implementation. Students across all grade levels improved in most subjects, and graduation and college-readiness rates also improved. Even traditionally underperforming groups of students, such as those living in poverty or with disabilities, showed advancements. During the first year of testing in 2011-12, KY reported plummeting student proficiency rates. During the second year, it showed modest progress. The third year of testing exhibits positive data, illustrating a dynamic that as students and teachers become familiar with the standards, progress is evident. KY demonstrates a college-readiness rate of 63% in 2014, up from 54% in 2013, and 47% in 2012. The four-year graduation rate is up slightly to 87%. Elementary and middle school students are making larger gains than high-school students because older students who did not previously have CCSS tend to struggle more in the transition. KY state education leaders have analyzed positive and negative facets of their implementation and concluded that their biggest mistake was not supporting school districts and teachers with adequate financial resources during the transition. However, in one area KY shined – public outreach. The state began a social marketing campaign a year before beginning CCSS testing, warning parents that test scores would initially decline. Read KY’s results in more detail.

- Christine Poser, a middle school librarian from Staten Island, NY, assumed a leadership role in her school’s CCSS implementation. Her expertise in supporting project-based learning and using formative assessments to evaluate student learning positioned her well to introduce CCSS to staff, parents, and students. Ms. Poser was passionate about the CCSS goal of connecting the classroom to the real world. She leveraged her skills in library science to support teachers and students in the new curriculum’s requirement for nonfiction texts and taught workshops for parents on how to search the library’s databases. Read about her experience in a January 2013 School Library Journal profile.

- Since 2012, Wyoming school districts have diligently worked to align their curriculum to CCSS by the 2014-15 academic year. Thus far, district leaders note positive results, including improved ACT scores for college-bound students. Learn about how district and school officials aligned standards; created awareness around CCSS for teachers, parents, and students; and systematically launched implementation in this article.

- In Dover, Delaware, the “Common Ground for Common Core” initiative hosted teachers from approximately 100 schools to share their brightest moments of working with CCSS. Teachers shared best practices to support the CCSS shift from instruction to inquiry, creating a community of practice that inspired other teachers to join. Read more about Delaware’s implementation here.

- Achieve magazine collates success stories from across the US. One of these stories is from Lee Ann Wall, an instructional assistant at Iota Middle School in Acadia Parish, Louisiana. Ms. Wall reported that she has, “...seen huge positive gains in critical thinking, problem solving, and perseverance…” in her students.

“I am most excited about the way they [CCSS] are designed to promote higher-level thinking, as well as the fact that there will be common expectations from coast to coast. Individual, state-determined standards were fine for a time when most families had roots in a particular part of the country and families stayed in one place.”
- Bailey Gregorich, Fifth Grade Teacher, Wyoming

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Teachers who feel positive about Implementation (end of year 1)

In July 2014, YouGov conducted a survey sponsored by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that polled 1,676 pre-K through 12th grade public school teachers from 43 states and the District of Columbia. Some of the results of this second annual survey are summarized in the graph on the left. Growing enthusiasm for CCSS supports an observed trend that the better teachers understand CCSS and see the impact it has on teaching and learning, the more supportive they are. The 81% of teachers who noted that implementation is challenging called for materials, professional development, planning time, and other means of support to ensure successful implementation.

An October 2014 Gallup poll cited that educators had mixed feelings about CCSS, with 41% perceiving them positively and 44% perceiving them negatively. The majority (61%) of teachers in schools where CCSS was fully implemented in the 2013-14 school year felt good about them. This survey indicates growing uncertainty towards CCSS that has been tabulated previously, but notes a trend that teachers feel more positively about CCSS once they are fully engaged with them. Parents also feel divided about the standards, with 33% feeling positively, 35% feeling negatively, and 32% with no opinion or were uninformed of the standards.

CCSS Implementation Toolkits and Resources

Because CCSS represents a new framework for teaching and learning in the US, many organizations that provide leadership for the public education system are creating free toolkits and resources to guide the various stakeholders involved with implementation. Achieve is an independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit education reform organization created in 1996 that is dedicated to raising US academic standards and graduation requirements, improving assessments, and strengthening accountability. Achieve is the leading voice for the college- and career-ready agenda in the US. They have positioned CCSS on the national agenda and taken a leadership role in publishing CCSS-related resources.
American Curriculum Schools in Dubai: Standards and Accreditation

In order to be categorized as an American curriculum school in Dubai, a school must meet a list of mandatory requirements established by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), which is the private school regulation and inspection authority in Dubai. The requirement areas include curriculum, assessment and graduation requirements, staffing and personnel, and accreditation, which are monitored by KHDA’s Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB). KHDA clearly states, “Curriculum expectations must meet or exceed the US Common Core Standards.” In effect, all schools must employ the CCSS in order to be classified as an American curriculum school in Dubai.

Per these requirements, Dubai American curriculum schools must now be accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which is the oldest educational accrediting body in the US. NEASC serves more than 2,000 public and independent schools, colleges, and universities in the northeastern region of the US, as well as 220 American/international schools in 68 countries through the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA). CAISA promotes high quality education by developing and applying standards that assess the effectiveness of nearly every aspect of American schools operating abroad.

To receive a NEASC accreditation in Dubai, American curriculum schools must deliver content that closely reflects subjects taught in American schools with the mission of delivering high quality teaching and learning. In 2014, NEASC and KHDA launched a partnership to facilitate the accreditation of Dubai’s American curriculum schools. By academic year 2017-18, schools meeting KHDA requirements and gaining NEASC accreditation will be categorized as “Authorized American Schools.” Schools not successfully meeting these requirements will be categorized as offering a “school-based curriculum.” This partnership exhibits dedication on behalf of KHDA in encouraging Dubai-based American curriculum schools to commit to continuous improvement and the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning in order to be on par with schools in the US. Furthermore, this partnership, with its set of requirements and accreditation demands, will provide parents in Dubai with confidence that the education provided by their student’s school is comparable to that which is found in US schools.

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The NEASC standards for accreditation are as follows:

1. **School Guiding Statements (Mission, Vision, Objectives)**
2. **Teaching & Learning (Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment, Internationalism)**
3. **Governance & Leadership (Operational & Strategic Oversight, Long-term Planning, Policy)**
4. **Faculty & Support Staff (Qualifications, Conditions of Employment, Professional Development)**
5. **Access to Teaching & Learning (Counseling, Special Needs, Guidance)**
7. **Operational Systems (Facilities, Finance, Health & Safety)**

**CCSS Implementation in Dubai**

According to DSIB monitoring data for American curriculum schools in the 2013-14 academic year, as of November 2014, 23 of the 30 American curriculum schools in Dubai are on the spectrum of having already implemented CCSS, in the process of implementing, or in the planning stages. DSIB monitors were paying particularly close attention to curriculum design, including cross-curricular links between subjects; activities that encouraged independent learning, research, and critical thinking; and enrichment activities that connected school learning with real world activities outside of the classroom.

In one American curriculum school where CCSS was adopted only last year, although the new curriculum was not fully in place, staff had already benefited from professional development activities aligned to the new standards. Staff reported that they recognized the importance of cross-curricular links and meaningful opportunities for independent learning, research, and critical thinking, even though these were not yet available in all subject areas.

Another American curriculum school that was rated “Good” by DSIB on a scale of unsatisfactory, acceptable, good, and outstanding, was fully aligned with CCSS from Kindergarten through high school. The school was applauded for holding weekly meetings between the principal and department heads, as well as between department heads and teachers, to ensure consistency in CCSS implementation. Curriculum was reviewed regularly and modified when necessary, in consideration of student achievement data.

Schools that aligned with CCSS and made an effort to extend the reach of technology into the learning process also received positive feedback from DSIB. Likewise, schools that provided a wide range of extra-curriculars, which included diverse activities such as Model UN, sports, music, cultural engagement, LEGO Club, drama, student council, band, public speaking, arts and crafts, and martial arts, were also highly ranked. This extra-curricular aspect of CCSS supports the 21st century learning tenet that significant learning occurs outside of the school day in interest-driven pursuits.

In some schools, CCSS had been implemented, but the impact on teaching and learning was not yet evident in the classroom. The important point noted by DSIB is that the scope and sequencing was embedded in the system and school leadership and teachers were convening to create cross-curricular links and ensure consistency.

In one case, even though a Dubai school had implemented CCSS, its approach was still textbook-driven instead of following the signature approach of CCSS to design programs that meet students’ needs through interactive, problem-based teaching and learning. DSIB assessed that the entirety of classroom learning was informed in scope and sequence by the textbook publisher, which evidenced not only poor curriculum design, but ineffective leadership to modify curriculum to align with effective CCSS implementation.
Many schools are in an anticipated “work-in-progress” phase and should be commended for initiating implementation. However, the purpose of the DSIB monitoring is to provide valuable formative feedback to schools so teachers and administrators can lead the ongoing practice of refining and improving teaching and learning, which is a process that should be viewed as continuous and essential to a learning organization.

**What Dubai Educators Are Saying About CCSS**

In November 2014, KDSL conducted a survey to gauge impressions of CCSS from more than 65 teachers and administrators at American curriculum schools in Dubai. The following data sheds light on practitioners’ impressions at this point in the implementation process. The full survey is available on the [KDSL website](#).

### How much do you know about your school’s transition to CCSS?

- 50% Comprehensive knowledge
- 36% Some knowledge
- 12% Little knowledge
- 2% No knowledge

### How do your previous standards differ from CCSS?

- 45% CCSS are more demanding and raise expectations for student learning
- 28% CCSS are pretty much the same
- 27% CCSS are less demanding and lower expectations for student learning
- 8% I don’t know

### I believe CCSS will lead to improved student learning for the majority of students I serve.

- 96% Strongly agree
- 6% Agree
- 6% Disagree
- 3% Strongly disagree
- 1% I don’t know

### Do you feel prepared to teach the CCSS?

- 61% Yes, I feel completely prepared
- 31% I feel somewhat prepared
- 5% No, I don’t feel prepared at all
- 3% I do not know if I’m prepared

### Have you read the CCSS that relate to your grade and subject area?

- 4% Yes
- 96% No

### Have you participated in professional development/training in CCSS?

- 39% Yes
- 61% No
KDSL Supports CCSS in Dubai
KDSL conducts extensive professional development activities to provide leadership for educators globally. The following activities targeted UAE and greater MENA region educators at American curriculum schools.

MENA Common Core Conference
KDSL launched the annual MENA Common Core Conference in 2013, which hosts education professionals, government employees, and scholars from the MENA region to create awareness around CCSS, empower teachers to increase the academic success of their students, and connect educators across the region. The theme was “Align, Connect, Learn, and Implement.” The event was the first of its kind in the region, hosting over 250 participants, and featured highly lauded US education experts.

The 2014 event was held in October and hosted over 200 participants from the MENA region and featured 33 educational experts who conducted 25 workshops focused on best practices in implementing CCSS, leadership, science, and school climate and culture.

Both conferences featured a capstone event, a workshop where participants strategized with expert facilitators to create CCSS implementation action plans for their schools.

KDSL convened a two-hour forum for parents that featured ten education experts committed to ensuring high quality in Dubai’s American curriculum schools. The event was structured around key areas of importance to parents, including special education, university preparation, and the CCSS. The forum received coverage from The National, which recapped panelist insight, such as the fact that just because a student goes to an American curriculum school in Dubai does not mean they will be at an advantage in being accepted at a US university. Curriculum is not as important as academic rigor, advanced-level programming, and strong teaching. The next parent forum will be held in March 2015.

- Barb Golub, Literature teacher, literary specialist, and MENA Common Core Conference keynote

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Common Core Camps and School-based Support

KDSL Common Core Camps introduce American curriculum schools, leaders, and educators in the UAE to the CCSS. Facilitated by American curriculum educators with extensive teaching experience in the UAE, KDSL offers these three-hour training sessions focusing on either the English Language Arts or the mathematics standards. This started in Dubai during 2012. In 2014, camps were hosted at American curriculum schools in Dubai with teachers in attendance from Abu Dhabi and Fujairah. Kevin Simpson and Alison Burrows collaborate to introduce American curriculum school educators and administrators to the CCSS. They serve as coaches for schools and coordinate with teachers to plan, co-teach, and reflect on CCSS lessons.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges of implementing new standards, schools in the US and Dubai are witnessing positive results from CCSS. State and school level leaders, administrators, and teachers have lobbied together to create resources for implementation, for which the ultimate goal is improving teaching and learning and boosting student achievement. In the US, recent data from Kentucky highlighted a key lesson learned: the more familiar educators and students are with the standards and the longer they are in place, the more beneficial the results. Easing anxiety on all sides over the change through public awareness campaigns is critical, as well as the provision of financial, professional development, and other types of support for administrators and teachers engaged in implementation.

Dubai differs from the US because it is mandatory for Dubai schools to implement CCSS by 2017-18 if they wish to be authorized as an American curriculum school. To that end, lessons learned from the process in states such as Kentucky and Wyoming can provide valuable insight into successful implementation. Knowledge is power. The better equipped all stakeholders are with an understanding of CCSS, the greater the success will be in their schools. At the other side of the angst, hard work, and perseverance are Dubai’s young people, who deserve a quality education that prepares them for university and the world of work. KDSL is available to liaise with parents, schools, governments, and educational organizations to provide more specialized consultations on improving quality in Dubai’s American curriculum schools.
Common Core Resources

Common Core Overview
- Common Core State Standards
- Student Achievement Partners

English Language Arts
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
- International Reading Association (IRA)

Mathematics
- The Mathematics Common Core Toolbox
- Illustrative Mathematics
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)
- Oregon Council of Teachers & Mathematics CCSS Math Toolkit

Leadership
- ASCD Common Core Resources
- EduCore: Tools For Teaching the Common Core
- McREL
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
- Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)
- Learning Forward

Assessment
- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)
- Smarter Balanced
- NWEA

For School Administrators and Policymakers
- Resources for Policymakers – State of New Jersey Department of Education
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills - P21 Common Core Toolkit
- Collaborative For Student Success – Resources for Policymakers & Business Leaders

State Resources
- California
- New York
- North Dakota

Technology Tools
- LearnZillion: Lessons For Teaching The New Standards
- ASCD Common Core Resources Project for Educators on iTunes U

KDSL Website, Blog, and Twitter
ABOUT KDSL
KDSL is a Dubai based education company founded by Kevin Simpson and Alison Burrows, professional American educators and entrepreneurs. KDSL partners with organizations around the world to increase student achievement, teacher knowledge, and leadership in education.

Author
Kevin Simpson, Founder & Managing Director, KDSL
KDSL is an American-owned, global educational consulting company launched by Kevin Simpson in 2007 in the USA. In 2013 KDSL set up in Dubai with a new partner, Alison Burrows. KDSL partners with organizations worldwide to increase student achievement, teacher knowledge, and education leadership. KDSL’s primary services are as follows: Quality Assurance, School Accreditation, School Improvement, Curriculum Development, and Professional Learning (Development). Mr. Simpson has served 400+ schools and thousands of educators worldwide. The majority of his work in education has centered on American curriculum schools. Since 2008, he has been focused on education in the MENA region, assisting numerous schools with accreditation, training, and development. He has taught, consulted, and/or collaborated in parochial, public, charter, and international schools in 18 countries. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Teaching from Michigan State University (USA).

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Abigail Swetz serves as an independent consultant to KDSL. Her specialties include communications, project management, business development, and event planning. She currently engages in business development for a Dubai-based strategic communications firm. In the US, she was employed with a government agency that invests in museums and libraries to create informal learning opportunities for Americans. She supported a portfolio of educational and cultural public/private partnerships with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Salzburg Global Seminar, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Sundance Institute. Ms. Swetz possesses a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Maryland (USA) and a Master of Arts degree from George Washington University (USA).

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Kerrin is an educator with more than 20 years of experience and leadership in the education sector in the US and in developing nations worldwide. She is Managing Director of a UAE-based management and education company that provides a full range of innovative education sector technical assistance and cross-sectoral capacity building training to strengthen public and private sector organizations, programs and policies. Kerrin is currently UNICEF’s National Evaluator for Let Us Learn in Afghanistan, evaluating outcomes for an innovative girls education programme. She also served as a senior advisor in the Ministry of Education, Afghanistan, for three and a half years building much needed capacity in the education sector. Her projects included providing technical assistance to the Teacher Training Directorate, where she oversaw training of 100,000+ teachers and school principals. Kerrin holds a Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico in Organizational Learning and Instructional Technology with a specialization in Distance Education, and an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education with a focus in Technology in Education. She earned her B.A. in Economics from the University of California, San Diego.

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3 Center for American Progress, Common Core State Standards Fact Sheet, 4 December 2013.
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For more information about KDSL Global Educational Consultancy and how its services can help you learn more about American curriculum in the UAE and greater MENA region, or for permission to reproduce and distribute this white paper, please contact Kevin Simpson at kevin@kdsleducation.org or +971 50 289 8417.

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