Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematics:
Frequently Asked Questions

What are the Common Core State Standards?
The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the
National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers
(CCSSO), with the goal of providing a clear and consistent description of what K-12
students should know in order to be ready for college and the workplace in the 21st
century. At the present time (Summer of 2010), standards have been produced for English
Language Arts and for Mathematics; Science standards are in the initial stages of
preparation, and are expected to be ready within 2 years. The Wisconsin State
Superintendent, Tony Evers, adopted the CCSS Standards in ELA and Mathematics on June
2, 2010, and so they are now the official Wisconsin state standards. Wisconsin has also
joined a consortium of 37 states that hopes to produce the next generation of state
assessments, aligned to the Common Core. The current time line has these assessments
being implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. This document attempts to answer some
of the more urgent questions that teachers and administrators may have concerning the
transition to the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics. More information on the
CCSS initiative (in all subjects) can be found at the Core Standards website,
corestandards.org.

Why do we need a new set of standards? Is what we are doing now wrong?
Wisconsin’s first set of Model Academic Standards for Mathematics was released in 1998.
Although 12 years is a long time for a standards document to last without modification, there is
nothing wrong with that set of standards. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are an
attempt to introduce consistency across states in what is expected in teaching and learning of
mathematics, especially in the grade-level placement of individual topics; the topics themselves
are very similar to those in the 1998 Wisconsin standards (and the Wisconsin Assessment
Framework).

How are the CCSS organized?
There are two distinct components to these standards: Standards for Mathematical Practice, and
Standards for Mathematical Content. The Standards for Mathematical Practices are important
processes and proficiencies that describe ways students engage in mathematics. The Standards
for Mathematical Content in grades K-8 identify several mathematical content domains, each of
which crosses several grades, and contains one or more clusters of standards at each grade level.
Since it is not practical to list high school content by grade level, the Standards for Mathematical
Content in high school are organized into conceptual categories, which play a similar role to the
K-8 content domains. The two pieces of the CCSS document are very similar to the Wisconsin
Assessment Framework components of Mathematical Processes and Mathematical Content.
MPS teachers are very familiar with the importance of both of these components.

What are these “Standards for Mathematical Practice”? They seem new.
The Standards for Mathematical Practice are the CCSS version of the NCTM process standards,
or of Wisconsin’s Mathematical Processes (the former Wisconsin Standard A). These practices
are the heart and soul of the CCSS. It is important to note that they are not just listed as
“Practices” but as “The Standards for Mathematical Practice” when the State Superintendent adopted the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics as the Wisconsin Standards on June 2, 2010, the Standards for Mathematical Practice were also adopted. The Standards for Mathematical Practice must become a reality in Wisconsin mathematics classrooms. They are descriptors of what a mathematically proficient student does, and curriculum, instruction and assessment should be intentionally focused on developing these practices along with the Standards for Mathematical Content.

**What is the best way to use the CCSS most effectively?**

Embed the Standards for Mathematical Practice into instruction so that students are receiving a high quality, mathematically rich curriculum, connected to past and future learning. It is in the Standards for Mathematical Practice that the higher level thinking (i.e., Bloom’s, cognitive demand) skills will be addressed. Simply checking off skills in the CCSS misses the bigger picture of the vision of mathematics that is proposed in these standards.

**Are there fewer content standards than before?**

The CCSS address the often-recognized problem with many current curricula in the United States that “are a mile wide and an inch deep”. The CCSS are more focused, rigorous standards, and in grades K-8, the opening paragraphs for each grade point out several critical areas that should receive greater focus at that grade. When reading and interpreting the standards, it is important to realize that any particular standard only appears in one grade where that standard will be the focus of instruction. It is then expected that the standard will be revisited in later grades as the basis for further, deeper work on the topic; curriculum spiraling is expected to deepen student knowledge.

**When will the Wisconsin State assessments change to match CCSS?**

The short answer is 2014. The most current information is that Wisconsin has joined a consortium of 37 states that hopes to produce a “smarter, balanced” assessment. The consortium still has to receive funding for the project, so no date or time line can be considered final at this point, but 2014 is the current target date. In the meantime, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is exploring other options to move toward assessment of 21st Century Skills.

**Does this mean the WKCE-CRT will be around until 2014? How can we implement the CCSS if we are to be held responsible for student performance on the current WKCE-CRT assessments?**

If you teach good mathematics well, incorporating the CCSS Standards for Mathematical Practice, rich learning experiences, classroom discussions, and formative assessment practices, your students will be proficient on any grade-appropriate assessment they are given. The mathematics content in the CCSS is not drastically different from that in the 1998 Wisconsin standards (or the Wisconsin Assessment Framework). Where there are changes, the CCSS is usually more rigorous than the Wisconsin documents, so as you make a thoughtful transition to the Common Core, your students’ performance on the WKCE-CRT should actually improve.
What should our school do with the Learning Targets, CABS, and other documents that are aligned to the former standards? What about textbooks?
There is no need to make any changes in your use of these documents for at least this first year. As curriculum and instruction are modified in the transition to the Common Core, district documents will be re-aligned as necessary so that we are prepared for the new state assessment in 2014. Similarly with textbooks; all of the board-adopted curricula can be successfully used in the initial years of the transition and there are no current plans to purchase new textbooks. Within a few years, curricula fully aligned to the CCSS (including the Standards for Mathematical Practice) will be developed and the district may consider purchasing one or more of those curricula at that time. In the meantime, beware of publishers offering a “quick fix” by re-ordering their existing material and claiming it is aligned to the Common Core.

What is the Math Department’s plan to help the district learn about the CCSS?
The Math Department will identify specific learning progressions that schools can study during this school year. The Math Department will provide your school’s Math Teacher Leader (MTL) with information about the CCSS at the monthly MTL meetings, and the MTL will be able to share this growing knowledge of the CCSS with their building’s staff throughout the year. As always, we encourage schools to be purposeful in how they use the MTL position to ensure sufficient and meaningful opportunities for the MTL to support teachers and students. Finally, we will set up a district-wide CCSS Study Committee, or even university credit-bearing courses on the CCSS. Stay tuned!

What should our school do now to implement the CCSS?
Consider 2014 as a target date for full implementation of the CCSS in your school, and plan deliberately and thoughtfully. Use information contained in this document and work with district mathematics staff to implement a plan suited for your particular situation. We have the time to do this right! We recommend that the 2010-2011 school year be a year of study of the CCSS document; the following year (2011-2012), you might consider aligning at least part of your curriculum with the CCSS. In 2012-2013 you can then complete the implementation, in good time for the new state assessment.

So this is a study year? This is a big document! What exactly should we study?
Start by discussing, learning and internalizing the Standards for Mathematical Practice, and working to infuse them into your current curriculum. During the 2010-2011 year, district mathematics staff will identify Learning Progressions within the CCSS document. You can then choose one or more of these Learning Progressions for your school staff to study as the second phase of your implementation. As you study these learning progressions, make connections to what is currently happening in classrooms and then consciously focus on embedding the Standards for Mathematical Practice into the lessons and tasks you choose to use. The long-term goal is for high quality mathematical instruction in which the mathematical practices are evident in tasks with a high level of cognitive demand.

How can I learn more about the CCSS?
Your Mathematics Teaching Specialist will always have the most current information on district policies and programs regarding the CCSS.