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What is the Meaning of a Core Curriculum vs. Common Core?

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What is a core curriculum?



In a public school setting, a core curriculum is a set of educational goals, explicitly taught (and not taught), focused on making sure that all students involved learn certain material tied to a specific age or grade level. The design of a core curriculum includes things that do not have much relevance to a homeschooler: grade levels, learning divided into discrete subjects (math, science, history, etc.), testing goals, and classroom management needs. We think of curriculum as *formal* instruction using materials (textbooks) that support the instructional agenda of a school. This instructional agenda includes directions designed and reviewed by administrators, curriculum directors, and teachers.

There are many definitions of curriculum, depending upon whom you ask to define it. In the research conducted for this handout, I found my favorite definition. Stated anonymously it read, *"The curriculum is the entire life of a school child."* Enough said.

In detail, a core curriculum encompasses:



- The content and sequence of subjects taught and assessed (according to performance objectives) using a variety of materials.



- Anything and everything students participate in that includes or teaches a lesson (Housewise-Streetwise, Just Say No, Red Ribbon Week, Jump Rope for Heart, etc.)



- Everything that goes on within a school including extra-curricular activities, guidance, and interpersonal relationships.



- Everything implied by a school's organization: room/seating arrangements, time management, raising your hand to speak, behavioral expectations for students, student competition for academic/social awards (Honor Roll, Student of the Month, etc.), adhering to a routine or schedule, etc.



- Everything and anything planned by school personnel – festivals, prom, homecoming, etc.

- Everything experienced by the learners in the school.

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A core curriculum has layers and is very eclectic. Just like students, no two curricula are the same. Each school has regional, societal, and financial differences, even within their own district. Students in affluent areas, as well as financially challenged ones, learn content from their teachers as well as conduct and attitude. They learn important social and emotional lessons from everyone involved in their school from the principal and school nurse, to the cafeteria and custodial staff, to parent volunteers, down to their own peers. Many educators and associated personnel are sometimes unaware of the strong lessons they impart on their students through everyday contact.

What is the difference between a core curriculum and a Common Core Curriculum?



A school's core curriculum, for all intent and purposes, includes everything taught in the classroom (explicitly, and indirectly) using textbooks and other materials for support. Public schools have state standards that teachers must address within their instruction and assess after students have opportunities to learn. Within these learning opportunities, students demonstrate what they know.

The nation's governors and education commissioners through their representative organizations, the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country, together with state leaders, provided input into developing these standards.



"The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy."

– Taken from <http://www.corestandards.org/>



Released in 2010, the Common Core State Standards presents rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of math and English language arts and identify the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and in future careers. These standards will help ensure that students across the U.S. have similar academic skills and create a level playing field for future job prospects. As mentioned before, schools can be very different in their curriculum focus; their differences have allowed some students

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to be more prepared in some skills because a certain skill may have been a focus within that particular school – without the school even realizing it.



A “Common Core” curriculum – a curriculum shared by all schools having adopted it – will bind school professionals across the nation together in working toward the same goals. Everyone will work in concert. Teachers will no longer have to guess what will be on student assessments; if they teach the Common Core Standards, the students will be prepared.

Students changing schools will not lose valuable time “catching up” and others will not have to wait for new students to catch up to their class. Different teachers may have different styles or lesson plans throughout the US, but the core content and skills in the Common Core are the same.

As of 2022, Forty-one states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the Common Core State Standards.



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Resources:

Field Guide to Learning. February 28, 2011). *What is a core curriculum? Should we be following one?* Retrieved May, 2013, from <http://fieldguidetolearning.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/what-is-a-core-curriculum-should-we-be-following-one/>

Wilson, Leslie O. 2005. Curriculum Index. *Curriculum – Different Types*. Retrieved May 3, 2013, at <http://www4.uwsp.edu/education/wilson/curric/curtyp.htm>

Teacher’s Mind Resources. 2011. *What is a Curriculum?* Retrieved May, 2013, at <http://w2www.teachersmind.com/Curriculum.html>

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