While critics rail against Common Core State Standards for national school learning guides, few know exactly what these Standards are, and fewer can assess if these Standards are a positive step for education.

Standards are simply the high-level literacy skills and understandings that have been traditionally taught, but only in some schools and for some students. Standards focus on careful close reading and critical analysis, help students develop ideas well in writing, boost research understandings, create skills to discern and write valid argument, spark creative writing, and release ability to learn on one's own, for continued success in life, and to help bring a brighter future to all students.

Do these Standards "dumb down" learning? Do they stifle teachers' creativity and independence? Are they a low-ceiling straitjacket for teachers? Are "bubble tests" poor tests? Are Standards unfair for urban and traditionally underperforming students?

In this brief volume, the author spells out each Reading and Writing Standard to show that the Common Core State Standards simply guide high-level achievement for all students, invite teacher innovation and creativity, and make school a more exciting place of learning. The national tests include extensive writing and evaluate the understanding of ideas. These Standards and tests ask students to investigate and learn to make their own decisions, as we all should, based on evidence. The evidence provided here sheds light on excellent guides to help each child succeed. Common Core State Standards are an opportunity to develop a common national base of high-quality learning. We must seize this chance to raise the bar in American education.

Dr. Katherine Scheidler earned degrees from the American University School of International Service in Washington, D.C., Brown University, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, and Boston University. She taught for several decades in an urban school in Providence, R.I., then served as Brown University clinical professor of Methods of Teaching English, supervising Brown seniors and MAT graduate students in their student teaching. As Massachusetts school system Curriculum Director and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Dr. Scheidler guided the first wave of new state standards and tests under No Child Left Behind, facilitated and observed increased student learning, and now supports teachers in the next step up with national Standards and tests.

STANDARDS MATTER

The Why and What of Common Core State Standards in Reading and Writing

Katherine Scheidler