

Standards Overview

What are educational standards?

Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be on course toward college or career readiness by providing clear goals for student learning at each grade level. Standards establish *what* students need to learn, but they do not dictate *how* teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers decide how best to help students reach the standards. Put another way, standards are not a curriculum; it's up to school districts to design curricula that aligns to the standards.

What are the Colorado Academic Standards?

Senate Bill 08-212, Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids, called for the development of rigorous standards delineating what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade to be college and career ready. In 2009, the Colorado Department of Education engaged Colorado educators in a year-long process to update its academic standards in English language proficiency and 10 content areas: dance, drama and theater arts; mathematics; music; reading, writing and communicating; science; social studies; visual arts; and world languages. The Colorado State Board of Education adopted the Colorado Academic Standards in 2009. Then, in 2010, after closely comparing the Colorado Academic Standards with the Common Core State Standards, the state board adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. The comparison showed that the Common Core State Standards reflected Colorado's focus on college and career readiness, the values of the Colorado educators who developed the original Colorado Academic Standards and they also reflected more rigorous and clear expectations than the Colorado Academic Standards. With the Common Core State Standards incorporated, the Colorado Academic Standards stand as the values and content organizers of what Colorado sees as the future skills and essential knowledge for our next generation to be more successful. All Colorado districts must implement the Colorado Academic Standards, or standards that meet/exceed the Colorado Academic Standards, by the 2013-14 school year.

Common Core State Standards Overview

What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily choose to adopt. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening and mathematics.

How did the Common Core State Standards initiative come about?

For decades, students in different states have been taught different material at different rates and held to radically different standards. Several years ago, a small group of governors joined together in an effort to align their states' standards and assessments. This group expanded through the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. In 2007, content experts began to develop the new Common Core State Standards. Drafts were circulated among the states, comments were received and the standards were adjusted. In fact, Colorado was one of only six states asked to provide feedback on the Common Core State Standards in the development process. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input into the development of the standards. So far, 45 states and the District of Columbia have signed up to implement these new expectations.

Who leads the Common Core State Standards initiative?

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers 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 the development of the standards.

How do the Common Core State Standards benefit students?

The world has changed. The careers of today and tomorrow value postsecondary education and training more than ever. U.S. students are competing for jobs not just across county lines, but across state lines and our borders. The Colorado Academic Standards, with the Common Core State Standards included, are critical to the business community because they were designed to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow.

High standards that are consistent across states promote common learning experiences in a mobile society and provide teachers, parents and students with a set of clear, common expectations that are aligned to the expectations for college and career success. The standards provide common expectations within and across states ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the U.S. and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to every state in the country, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies, including:

- Development of textbooks, digital media and other teaching materials aligned to the standards
- Development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually that will replace existing state testing systems
- Changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards

Were teachers involved in developing the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

Are the Common Core State Standards research or evidence based?

The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations. In English language arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence. In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries. The studies indicate that the traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is "a mile wide and an inch deep."

Do the Common Core State Standards abandon classic literature and focus too heavily on non-fiction?

The Common Core State Standards includes classic literature and works of fiction while encouraging increased exposure to informational texts and literary nonfiction. The goal is to have children read challenging texts that will build their vocabulary and background knowledge, a strategy grounded in what education scholar E. D. Hirsch has shown: A broad, content-rich curriculum reduces the achievement gap between the middle class and the poor. Common Core suggests that, as a student progresses through the grades, the nonfiction proportion of materials should increase until, by the end of high school, it represents 70 percent of total reading in all classes. The increasing focus on informational texts explicitly prepares students to be college and career ready giving them the skills to read and understand textbooks and texts encountered in the working world. The standards explicitly warn that English teachers "are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts." These informational texts include foundational documents of American history — the Gettysburg Address, Common Sense and works of thought leaders like Emerson and Thoreau.

Are the Common Core math standards rigorous?

Mathematical content dominates the K–12 expectations. Unlike many of the older state standards, Common Core demands “automaticity” (memorization-based familiarity) with basic math facts, mastery of standard algorithms and understanding of critical arithmetic. These essential math skills are not only required but given high priority, particularly in the early grades. The math standards focus in depth on fewer topics, and ones that coherently build on one another over time. The Common Core math standards articulate 10 math “practices” that promote students’ ability to apply their learning to real world contexts, skills necessary for success in college and career.

Are the Common Core State Standards internationally benchmarked?

Yes, international benchmarking played a significant role in development of the standards.

Do the Common Core State Standards address the importance of content knowledge or only address skills?

The Common Core State Standards recognize that both content and skills are important.

- In English language arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America’s Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. In the early grades, foundational research based reading skills are also emphasized. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- In mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student’s ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

Do the Common Core State Standards have enough emphasis on fiction/literature?

The standards require specific critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America’s Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Are the Common Core State Standards part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory or required by the federal government. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the Recovery Act or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint was released because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are offering support by developing a State Policymaker Guide to Implementation, facilitating opportunities for collaboration among organizations working on implementation, planning the future governance structure of the standards and convening the publishing community to ensure that high quality materials aligned with the standards are created.

Will the federal government take over ownership of the Common Core State Standards?

The federal government will not govern the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The Initiative was and will remain a state-led effort. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are committed to developing a long-term governance structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers and other state policymakers.