

Latino/Hispanic Focus Groups Regarding
Colorado Academic Standards
And Essential Skills

Conducted by
Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition
November 14, 2017

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Introduction

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) contracted the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition (CSPC) to conduct a series of parent focus groups regarding the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) and proposed revisions to the CAS. The CSPC conducted six focus groups with 4-12 participants in different parts of the state. The following report is a summary of the findings of the focus groups.

Methodology

Focus Groups

Date/time	Location	Number of Participants	Facilitators
September 25, 2017 6-7:30pm	Eva R. Baca Elementary School, Pueblo, CO	8 (1 English-speaker, 7 Spanish-speakers)	Richard Garcia (CSPC) Germán Zárate (CSPC) Carol Gates (CDE)
October 10, 2017 6-8:00pm	Centennial HS, San Luis Valley, CO	12 (All participants bilingual)	Germán Zárate (CSPC) Dr. Jim Pollicita (volunteer)
October 17, 2017 6-7:30pm	Scott Elementary School, Greeley, CO	4 (All Spanish-speakers)	Germán Zárate (CSPC) Dr. Jim Pollicita (volunteer) Dr. Floyd Cobb(CDE)
October 19, 2017 6-7:70pm	Riverside School, Grand Junction, CO	8 (1 Spanish-speaker, 7 English-speakers)	Germán Zárate (CSPC) Larry Medina (CSPC board member) Melissa Colzman (CDE)
October 24, 2017	CSPC office, Westminster, CO	12 (All Spanish-speakers)	Germán Zárate (CSPC) Mirla Low (CSPC) Dr. Floyd Cobb (CDE)

November 1, 2017	Main District Building, Rocky Ford, CO	10 (9 Spanish- speakers, 1 bilingual)	Germán Zárate (CSPC) Dr. Jim Pollicita (volunteer) Carol Gates (CDE)
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Format

For each focus group, each location had a community member in charge of recruiting Latino and Hispanic parents for the focus groups. Some Anglo community members also participated. Child care was available and snacks were provided at each focus group. Each participant received a \$10 gift card from Safeway upon conclusion of the focus group. The child care providers were paid for their time.

Each meeting was conducted in Spanish or in English as necessary. Each meeting followed the same agenda. The meeting began with introductions, then three questions were asked to solicit previous understanding of State Standards.

Questions:

1. What are the standards?
2. What have you heard about standards?
3. Where have you learned about them?

After these questions, the CDE PowerPoint about CAS was presented by the CDE representative (if present) or by the CSPC facilitators. Then four additional questions were asked.

Additional questions:

4. What skills are important?
5. What skills are important for students to have when they graduate?
6. Now that you have heard a basic overview of the standards and essential skills do you have any additional questions or thoughts to help with your understanding?

7. Do you feel the academic standards and essential skills are reflective of what you would hope to see from your children as parents?

Any additional questions from the participants were answered at the end of the meeting. Germán facilitated the discussion and another CSPC representative recorded the responses using chart paper, or a notebook.

Responses

Previous knowledge of State Standards

A full report of the responses to each question from each focus group is available in Appendix A. The responses that were in Spanish have been translated to English.

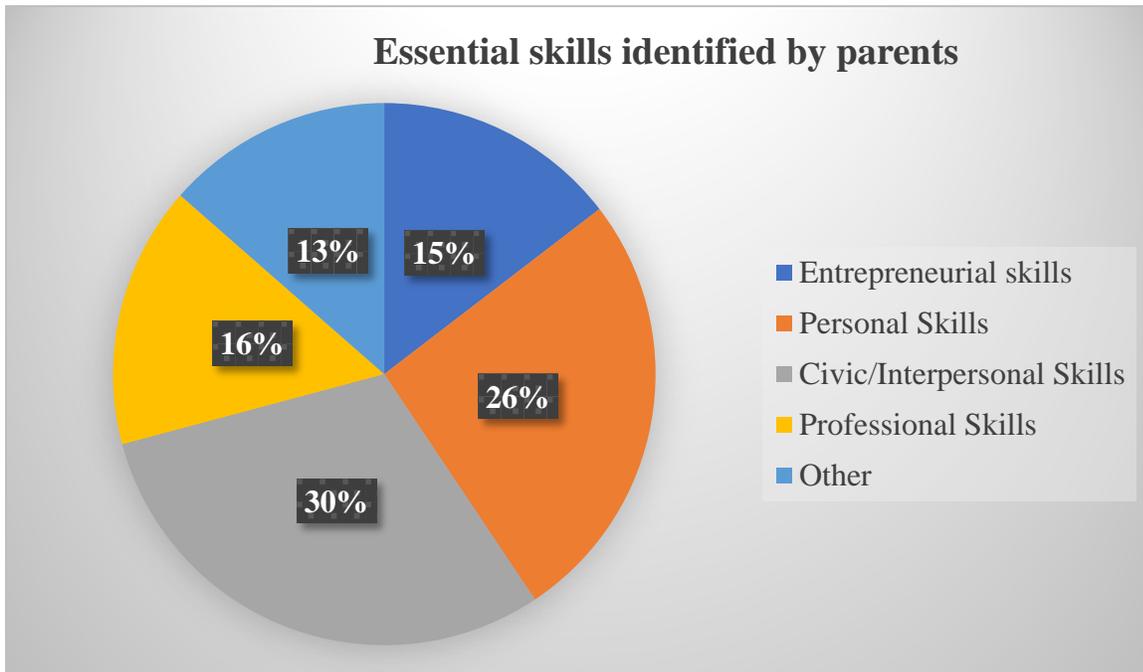
When asked at the beginning of the focus group if they had heard of standards, and what they knew about the standards, most parents indicated that they had not really heard of them or knew very little about them. At three out of six focus groups some participants knew that standards were what the state wants students to learn and what the schools are supposed to implement.

Of the parents who had heard of standards, most mentioned that they had heard about standards at their schools, such as at curriculum nights, parent nights, or from their children's teachers. One participant mentioned they had heard of standards on the internet, another learned about them from the school board or state board.

Essential Skills Identified by Parents

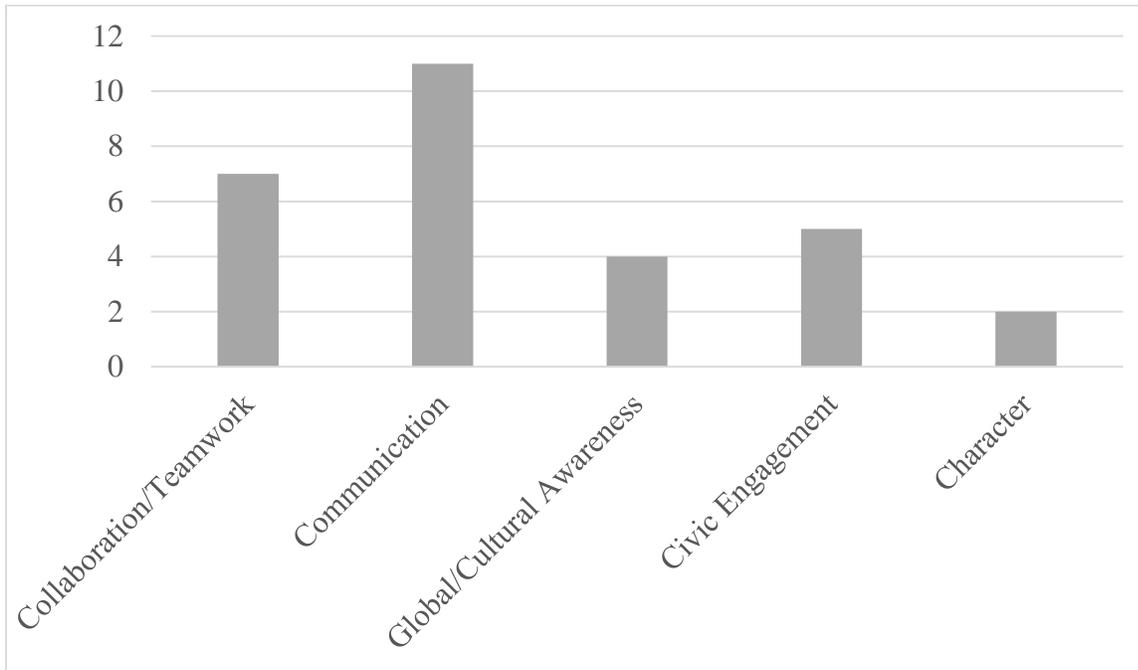
The two questions about what skills are important in general and what skills are important for students to have when they graduate generated a wide variety of responses. The 83 responses have been classified into the four key categories as identified by CDE. See graph 1.

Graph 1



29 out of 83 responses to the essential skills questions were in the Civic/Interpersonal Skills category. Graph 2 shows the distribution of responses within this category.

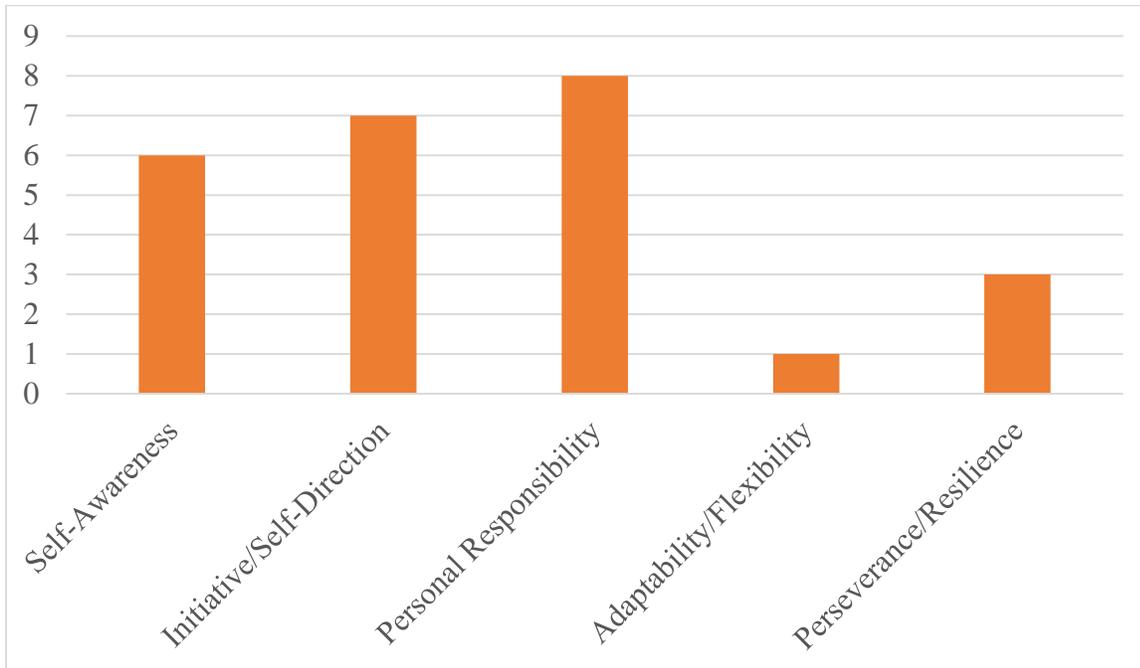
Graph 2- Responses in the Civic/Interpersonal Skills category



The types of comments that were mentioned from the Civic and Interpersonal Skills category were basically about being able to communicate with and understand a wide variety of people. In the communication category (11 responses), people mentioned understanding what students read and write, listening skills, public speaking skills and being able to communicate in more than one language. In San Luis, several people felt it was important for students to learn their local history and the Spanish language. There were also many comments on collaboration/teamwork (7 responses). People felt it is important for students to be able to “work in teams” and “collaborate”. Comments from the civic engagement category (5 responses) were about.

The second most common category of skills mentioned was from the Personal Skills section. 25 out of 83 responses fell under this category. Graph 3 shows how the responses were distributed.

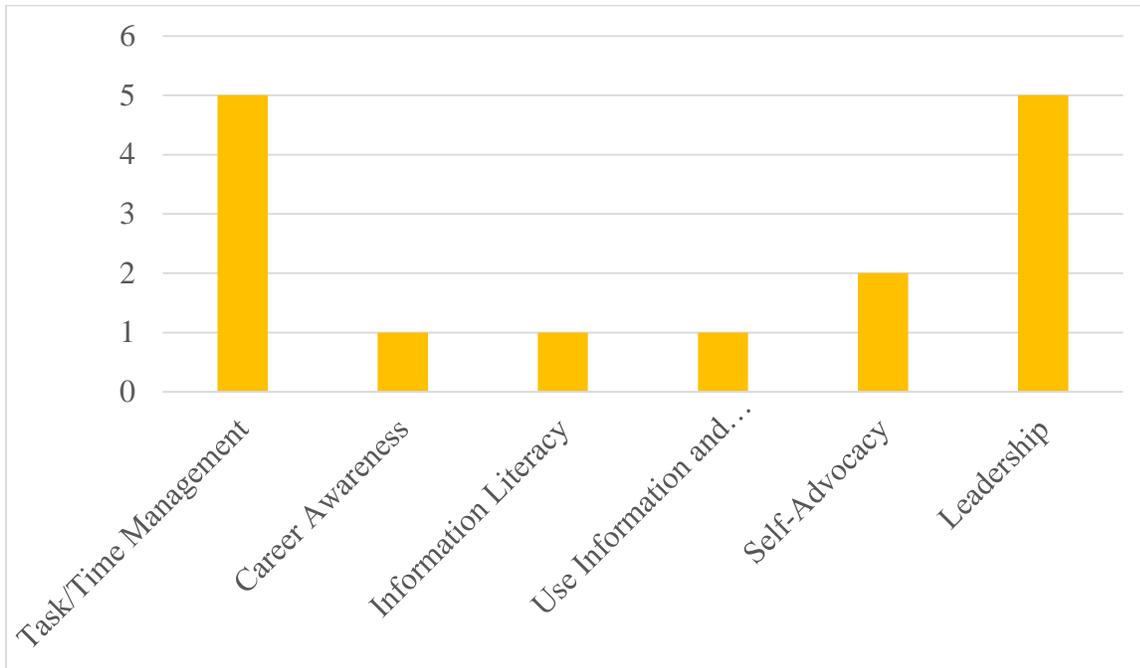
Graph 3- Responses in the Personal Skills Category



Comments from the personal responsibility category (8 responses) were about being responsible, following rules, being mature and making good decisions. In the initiative category (7 responses) people mentioned being “self-motivated”, being “prepared to leave home”, and being able to advocate for themselves. Self-awareness responses (6) were mostly about being confident, having faith in yourself, and having a strong self-concept. Responses from the perseverance/resilience category (3) were about being hard-working and persisting. In the adaptability/flexibility category (1) someone mentioned the importance of being flexible.

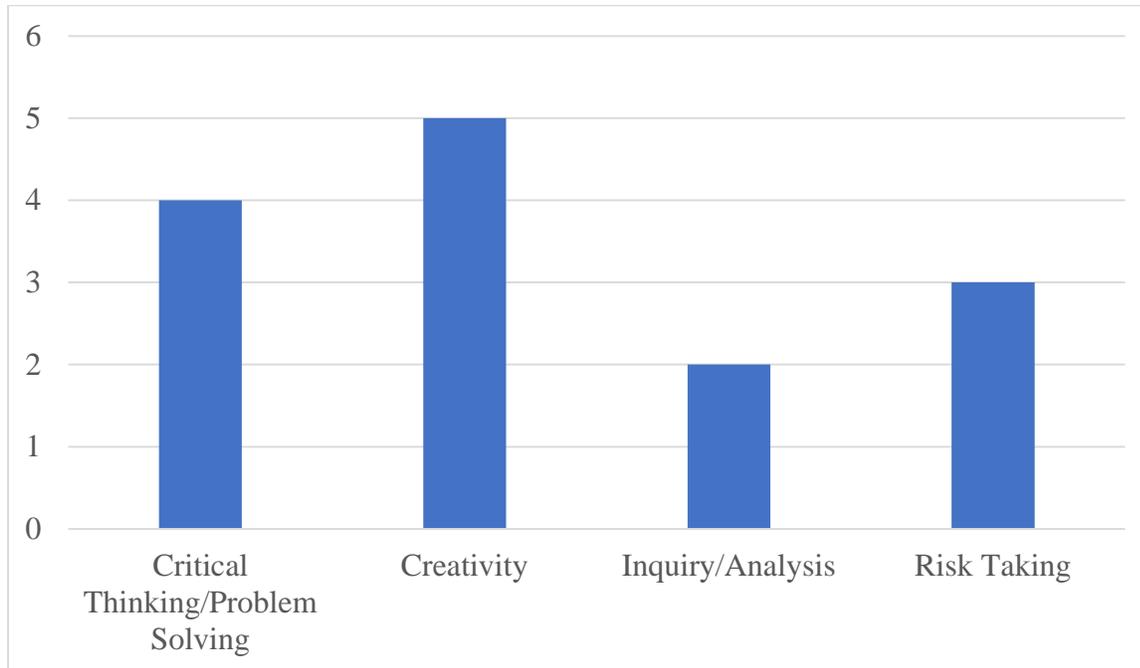
The two remaining categories were nearly equal in the number of responses given: Professional Skills (15 responses) and Entrepreneurial Skills (14 responses).

Graph 4- Responses in Professional Skills Category



Task and time management responses (5) focused on being organized, being accountable, and knowing to how to manage your time. There were 5 responses that directly stated it is important to have leaderships skills. In San Luis, a parent mentioned that “there are no workforce classes here, and that “students who are not going to college need preparation in other skills too”. It was also mentioned in other focus groups that students need to know how to search for information and advocate for themselves.

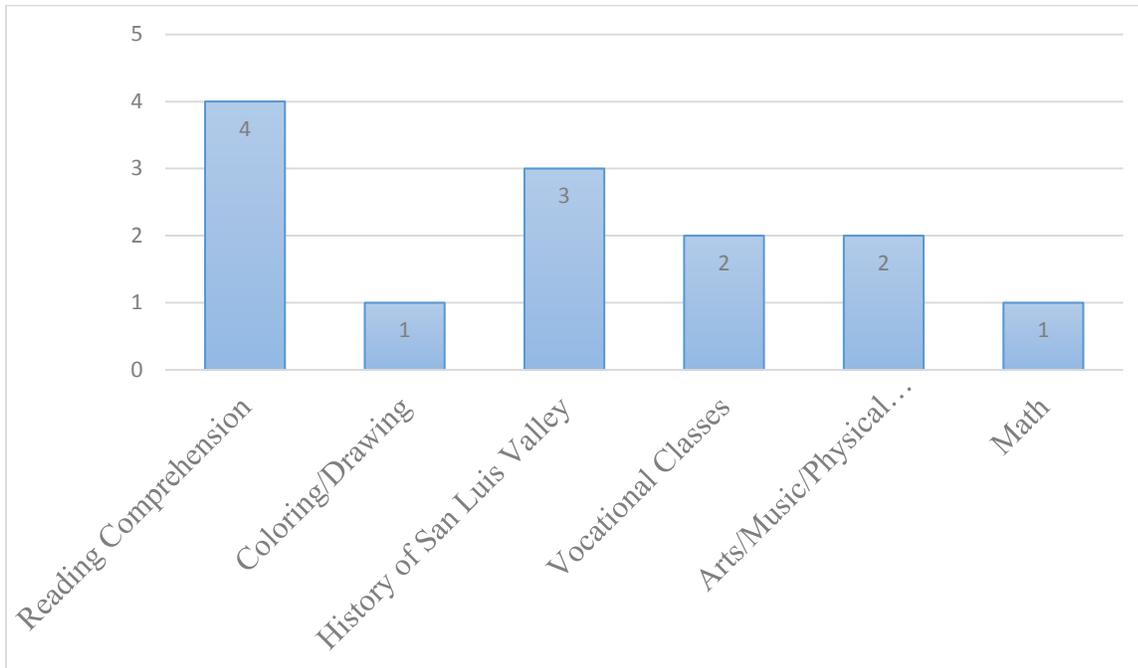
Graph 5- Responses in Entrepreneurial Skills Category



The category of creativity had 5 responses, where parents said that creativity was important, or one who said “knowing how to improvise” is essential. The critical thinking/problem solving category (4 responses) included responses about problem solving in general, or specifically solving problems like dealing with bullying. For inquiry/analysis responses (2) people said, “the ability to re-group, analyze, plan, solve problems” and “how to analyze, think, reason”. Risk taking responses (3) mentioned things like being in confident and being independent.

There were also 13 other responses that did not fit under any of the designated categories from the Essential Skills Guidance Resource. These responses generally academic skills or abilities. Graph 6 shows the responses.

Graph 6- Responses in the Other Category for Essential Skills



Reading Comprehension (4) was the most common academic skill mentioned. In San Luis, people (3 responses) really wanted the student to learn the history of that area. A focus on the arts/music/physical education was mentioned twice. Math and coloring/drawing were also mentioned once each as being important.

When parents were asked, “Do you feel the academic standards and essential skills are reflective of what you would hope to see from your children?” one person responded that yes, these were good standards. At most of the sessions, the participants did not directly answer this question and instead focused on asking their own questions or voicing their concerns.

The participants raised a wide variety of questions and concerns. A few commonalities were that at several sessions people mentioned being concerned about a lack of resources and teacher preparation in rural areas. They felt they needed more textbooks, technology, and teacher training in order to be successful. Several participants asked about how to best support their children, especially as they progress through school, and mentioned that when the work is in English it is

hard to support at home. Others mentioned that the essential skills can be supported at home by teaching responsibility, creativity, and teamwork. Here is a list of some of the questions from parents at the focus groups.

Questions:

- Can the school board move independently of the standards?
- Are the standards measured on a bell curve?
- Are the standards compared with other states and countries?
- What happens when a student doesn't meet the standard? Why are students passed on to the next grade?
- What happens if a student is already above the standard?
- How are teachers evaluated?
- Are we asking too much of the schools?
- How is curriculum built?
- Are the agencies doing what they should?
- Why so much homework?

Concerns:

- Parents need more information on standards.
- Students need other options in school besides college preparation; for example, vocational classes.
- Health standard needs to be age appropriate
- Teachers need to be flexible in order to work with different types of students.
- Need mental health resources.

Overall impressions

At the beginning of each focus group, people were a little confused about the standard and essential skills. They seemed to be worried that they were going to be asked about their children's education. Once the CDE representatives explained through the PowerPoint presentation, people began to understand the purpose of the meeting was to help CDE find out what Latinos know and think about the standards. Then people became more engaged and they were happy to learn about the essential skills and academic standards. People were able to explain what skills

were important to them for their children. Many people were motivated to return to their schools and find out more about standards and essential skills. Overall, it was a positive experience and people appreciated that CDE wanted their input. People wanted to keep talking even when the ending time had long passed.

Conclusions

Participating parents universally showed great interest and commitment to the education of their children and the advancement of their communities. If schools provided workshops about essential skills and standards, people would like to know more about standards and how they can both support their children's education and positively influence their local schools. Continuing dialogue and engagement could be very beneficial for the families, students, and districts.