

Common Core State Standards Content Brief

English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science

On March 10, 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices released a draft of the English Language Arts and Mathematics K-12 Common Core State Standards. Education standards – the outline of the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and in their careers – are an important, yet often mystifying, component of our systems of education across the country.

The following document attempts to shed light on the recently released draft and provide: an overview of the evidence base from which they were drawn, key areas of focus, and an outline of the supports built into the standards to enrich teacher understanding.

Overview

The draft *ELA Common Core State Standards* advance the best elements of standards-related work to date. The *Standards* articulate a clear progression of learning from kindergarten to 12th grade. The standards illustrate a vision for student literacy – across subject areas – that applies to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This breakthrough resource is designed to help teachers better understand how instructional efforts at each grade level contribute to college readiness.

Evidence Base

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. The *Standards* also build on the firm foundation of the NAEP frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

Responding to the Evidence Base

- *Clear focus on college and career readiness.* A particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for students to be college and career ready in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. As new and better evidence emerges, the Standards will be revised accordingly. By focusing on the most essential elements of college and career success, teachers and students gain time to practice and achieve excellent performance.
- *Greater focus on text complexity.* There is clear evidence that the texts students are reading today are not of sufficient complexity and rigor to prepare them for the reading demands of college and careers. The *Standards* devote as much attention to the complexity of what students are reading as to how students read. As students advance through the grades, they must both develop their comprehension skills and apply them to increasingly complex texts.
- *Shared responsibility for students' literacy development.* Most college and career reading consists of sophisticated informational text in a variety of content areas. The *Standards* include a

significant focus on informational text in grades 6-12, and a special section designed for history/social studies and science teachers to supplement the content standards in their respective disciplines. This focus is in addition to, not in place of, literary texts.

- *A focus on writing to argue or explain in the later grades.* The *Standards* include student capacity in three areas of writing: argument, information/ explanation, and narrative. As students progress toward grades 9-12, the emphasis on writing shifts to focus overwhelmingly on writing to argue, inform, and explain. This emphasis is in accordance with NAEP's shifting emphasis.
- *Research and media skills integrated into the Standards as a whole.* In college and the workforce, students will need to research information and must consume and produce media. As media is embedded into every element of today's curriculum, it is also embedded throughout the *Standards* rather than treated as a separate section.
- *Recognition that both content and skills are important.* 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. 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.

Support for Teacher Understanding and Innovation

The *Standards* use individual grade levels in grades K-8, then two-year grade bands in grades 9-12 (9-10 and 11-12) to allow schools, districts, and states greater flexibility in high school course design.

The *Standards* are designed to show teachers how each element connects with the grades preceding and following, and ultimately the connection to college and career readiness.

The *Standards* include three appendices to help educators and others better understand the content and use the resource for classroom instruction. The appendices provide: extensive information on the research supporting key elements of the *Standards*, examples of texts to illustrate appropriate range of reading for various grade levels, and annotated writing samples to demonstrate adequate performance at various grades levels.

About the Common Core State Standards

The *Standards*, the development of which was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), build on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards, including their work on the American Diploma Project with Achieve. The *Standards* also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, and educators from kindergarten through college.