

Common Core Standards

Southern Early Childhood Association



SECA Policy Brief

March 2010

A Little History

Over the past several decades, a debate has flourished nationally and in the states about what children should learn in school and what types of knowledge/skills they should exhibit when they complete our formal education system. The debate has ranged from the development of national mandated standards to the implementation of state specific standards.

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, a focus was placed on 1) accountability for states and individual school districts and 2) educational progress and proficiency for children. In order to comply with the requirements of the federal program (which were tied to federal funding for a state), most states began or completed the development of “state learning standards”. These standards identified what children should be taught and should know at each step of the educational process and drove the development of assessments and curriculum content.

With that process as a backdrop, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) undertook the development of a set of national voluntary standards that were developed on behalf of 48 states. (*Texas and Alaska have not participated in the development of these common standards.*) “This process was an extension of a prior initiative led by CCSSO and NGA to develop College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language as well as in mathematics. “ These standards were released in September 2009 and are the backbone of the current document. *Source: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science, March 2010, p.1.*

“The Council of Chief State School Officers is a non-partisan, nationwide, nonprofit association of public officials that head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress and the public.” www.ccsso.org

“Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the collective voice of the nation’s governors and one of Washington, D.C.’s most respected public policy organizations. Its members are the governors of the 50 states, three territories and two commonwealths. NGA provides governors and their senior staff members with services that range from representing states on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on key federal issues to

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developing and implementing innovative solutions to public policy challenges through the NGA Center for Best Practices.” www.nga.org

On March 10, 2010, the first drafts of the common core standards for K-12 were released in [English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science](#) and [Mathematics](#).

The standards are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;
- Clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current standards;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Evidence-and-research based.

Source: Press Release, March 10, 2010, Council of Chief State School Officers

The proposed standards were developed with working groups that included representatives from participating states, a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups. (See Appendix A for a list of working group members from the SECA States.)

“As a natural outgrowth of meeting the charge to define college and career readiness, the *Standards* also lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the skills and understandings students are expected to demonstrate have wide applicability outside the classroom or workplace.” *Source: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science, March 2010, p.1.*

The [State of Kentucky](#) has adopted the Common Core Standards (prior to finalization) and will be moving forward to integrate them into their state systems. They were the first state in the nation to make this adoption. (For more information, see the March 2010 edition of *Public Policy Notes* at www.southernearlychildhood.org.)

The draft is currently out for public review and it is anticipated that the final standards document will be adopted in early spring. The groups are inviting public comment and feedback through an on-line survey. *This policy brief will provide information on the K-5 standards.* For copies of the K-12 standards and **access to the on-line feedback survey, go to www.corestandards.org. A response from the Alliance for Childhood is included in Appendix B.**

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

The standards are grouped into 3 areas:

- K-5 Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science
- 6-12 Standards for English Language Arts
- 6-12 Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science

Content:

- ❖ *College and Career Readiness Standards for Reading....p. 7*
- ❖ *Reading Standards for Literature K-5... p.8*
- ❖ *Reading Standards for Informational Text K-5p.10*
- ❖ *Standards for Reading: Foundational Skills K-3p.12*
- ❖ *Text Complexity..... p.14*
- ❖ *College and Career Readiness Standards for Writing.....p.15*
- ❖ *Writing Standards K-5..... p. 16*
- ❖ *College and Career Readiness Standards for Speaking and Listening.....p.19*
- ❖ *Speaking and Listening Standards.....p. 20*
- ❖ *College and Career Readiness Standards for Language.....p. 22*
- ❖ *Language Standards K-5.....p.23*
- ❖ *English Language Arts Conventions Progressive Skills Chart....p. 27*
- ❖ *Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality and Range of Student Reading K-5....p. 28*
- ❖ *Staying on Topic Within a Grade and Across Grades.....p. 29*

Key Design Considerations

1. **“A focus on results rather than means**—The Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or specify the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to use to monitor and direct their thinking and learning. Teachers

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are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful.”

2. **An integrated model of literacy**—Although the *Standards* are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected.
3. **Research and media skills integrated into the Standards as a whole**—The need to research and to consume and produce media is embedded into every element of today’s curriculum: in like fashion, the associated skills and understandings are embedded throughout the *Standards* rather than treated in a separate section.
4. **Shared responsibility for students’ literacy development**—The *Standards* present reading instruction in K-5 as fully integrative, including a rich blend of stories, drama, and poetry as well as informational texts from a range of content areas.”

Source: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science, March 2010, p.2

What You Won’t Find in the Standards

- ✓ The proposed standards **do not define how teachers should teach.**
- ✓ They **do not describe what can or should be taught:** they attempt to define what is most essential.
- ✓ The *Standards* set grade-level standards but **do not address how to support students who are below or above grade-level.**

Source: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science, March 2010, p.3

Key Features of the Strands

- **Reading:** Text Complexity and the growth of comprehension
- **Writing:** Text types, responding to sources, and research
- **Speaking & Listening:** Flexible communication and interpersonal skills
- **Language:** Conventions and vocabulary
- **Appendices:** Supplementary materials to support the other strands

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The *Standards* are grouped in these major areas and the skills and knowledge required in each area are progressively more difficult as the child moves from kindergarten to 5th Grade.

Reading Standards

- *Key Ideas and Details*
- *Craft and Structure*
- *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*
- *Range and Level of Text Complexity*

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- *Key Ideas and Details*
- *Craft and Structure*
- *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*
- *Range and Level of Text Complexity*

Reading Standards: Foundational Standards

- *Print Concepts*
- *Phonological Awareness*
- *Phonics and Word Recognition*
- *Fluency*

Writing

- *Text types and purposes*
- *Production and Distribution of Writing*
- *Research to Build Knowledge*
- *Range of Writing*

Speaking and Listening

- *Comprehension and Collaboration*
- *Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Language

- *Conventions in Writing and Speaking*
- *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

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Mathematics

Mathematics experiences in early childhood settings should concentrate on (1) number (which includes whole number, operations, and relations) and (2) geometry, spatial relations, and measurement, with more mathematics learning time devoted to number than to other topics. The mathematical process goals should be integrated in these content areas. Children should understand the concepts and learn the skills exemplified in the teaching-learning paths described in this report. National Research Council, 2009

The *Standards* “define what students should understand and be able to do. ...But what does mathematical understanding look like? One hallmark of mathematical understanding is the ability to justify, in a way appropriate to the student’s mathematical maturity, why a particular mathematical statement is true or where a mathematical rule comes from.Mathematical understanding and procedural skill are equally important, and both are assessable using mathematical tasks of sufficient richness.” *Source: Common Core Standards for Mathematics, March 2010, p. 3*

The Standards for Mathematics contain eight **Standards for Mathematical Practice.**

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

“In Kindergarten, instructional time should focus on two critical areas: (1) representing, comparing and ordering whole numbers and joining and separating sets; (2) describing shapes and space. More learning time in Kindergarten should be devoted to number than to other topics.

(1) Students use numbers, including written numerals, to represent quantities and to solve quantitative problems, such as counting objects in a set; creating a set with a given number of objects; comparing and ordering sets or numerals; and modeling simple joining and separating situations with objects. They choose, combine, and apply effective strategies for answering quantitative questions, including quickly recognizing the cardinalities of small sets of objects, counting and producing sets of

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given sizes, counting the number of objects in combined sets, or counting the number of objects that remain in a set after some are taken away.

(2) Students describe their physical world using geometric ideas (e.g., shape, orientation, spatial relations) and vocabulary. They identify, name, and describe basic shapes, such as squares, triangles, circles, rectangles, (regular) hexagons, and (isosceles) trapezoids, presented in a variety of ways (e.g., with different sizes or orientations), as well as three-dimensional shapes such as spheres, cubes, and cylinders. They use basic shapes and spatial reasoning to model objects in their environment and to construct more complex shapes.”

Source: Common Core Standards for Mathematics, March 2010, p. 9

The kindergarten standards include:

- Number names, counting, comparing and ordering numbers.
- Composing and decomposing numbers: addition & subtraction.
- Two digit numbers and composing and decomposing ten.
- Direct measures and representing and interpreting data.
- Shapes and spatial reasoning.

This includes being able to say the number name sequence to 100 and writing numbers from 1 to 20 in base-ten notation.

Contents:

- *Overview of the Mathematics Standards, Grades K-5....p.7*
- *Kindergarten....p. 9*
- *Grade 1....p. 12*
- *Grade 2....p. 15*
- *Grade 3....p.18*

How the Standards Apply to ELL and Students with Disabilities

“**English language learners (ELLs)** must be held to the same level of standards expected of students who are already proficient in English. However, these students are acquiring both English language proficiency and content area knowledge concurrently, so some students will require additional time, and all will require appropriate instructional support and aligned assessments.

ELLs are a heterogeneous group with differences in ethnic background, first language, socioeconomic status, quality of prior schooling, and levels of English language proficiency.

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Effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction accordingly, and closely monitoring student progress.

To help ELLs meet high academic standards in language arts it is essential that they have access to:

- Teachers and personnel at the school and district levels who are well prepared and qualified to support ELLs while taking advantage of the many strengths and skills they bring to the classroom;
- Literacy-rich school environments where students are immersed in a variety of language experiences;
- Instruction that develops foundational skills in English that enable ELLs to participate fully;
- Coursework that prepares ELLs for postsecondary education or the workplace yet is made comprehensible for students learning content in a second language (through specific pedagogical techniques and additional resources);
- Opportunities for classroom discourse and interaction that are well-designed to enable ELLs to develop communicative strengths in language arts;
- Ongoing assessment and feedback to guide learning; and
- Speakers of English who know the language well enough to provide ELLs with models and support.

ELLs can participate in mathematical discussions as they learn English. Mathematics instruction for ELL students should draw on multiple resources and modes available in classrooms—such as objects, drawings, inscriptions, and gestures—as well as home languages and mathematical experiences outside of school. While mathematics instruction for ELLs should address mathematical discourse and academic language, this involves much more than vocabulary instruction.

Regular and active participation in the classroom—not only reading and listening but also discussing, explaining, writing, representing, and presenting—is critical to the success of ELLs in mathematics. Research has shown that ELLs can produce explanations, presentations, etc. and participate in classroom discussions *as they are learning English*.

ELLs, like English-speaking students, require regular access to teaching practices that are most effective for improving student achievement. Mathematical tasks should be kept at high

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cognitive demand; teachers and students should attend explicitly to concepts; and students should wrestle with important mathematics.”

*Source: Introduction to the Draft Common Core Standards, March 2010,
www.corestandards.org*

“All students, including **students with disabilities**— students eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/ or careers. The common core state standards provide a historic opportunity to improve access to academic content standards for students with disabilities. The continued development of understanding about research-based instructional practices and a focus on their effective implementation will also help improve access to the common core state standards.

Students with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with one common characteristic: the presence of disabling conditions that significantly hinder their abilities to benefit from general education (IDEA 34 CFR §300.39, 2004). Therefore, **how** these high standards are taught and assessed is of the utmost importance in reaching this diverse group of students.

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the common core state standards. To participate with success in the general curriculum, students with disabilities, as appropriate, may be provided additional supports and services, such as:

- Instructional supports for learning, based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression.
- Instructional accommodations —changes in materials or procedures— which do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the common core state standards.
- Assistive technology devices and services to ensure access to the general education curriculum and the common core state standards.

For some students with significant cognitive disabilities to access certain standards, those standards may need to be extended and/or adjusted. However, standards should be extended and/or adjusted only after students receive access to multiple means of learning and demonstrating knowledge. Any extensions and/or adjustments must align with and retain the rigor and high expectations of the common core state standards.”

*Source: Introduction to the Draft Common Core Standards, March 2010,
www.corestandards.org*

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Appendix A

Common Core State Standards Initiative K-12 Standards Development Teams/Members from the SECA States

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Appendix B

Joint Statement of Early Childhood Health and Education Professionals on the Common Core Standards Initiative

Issued by the Alliance for Childhood

March 16, 2010

www.allianceforchildhood.org

WE HAVE GRAVE CONCERNS about the core standards for young children now being written by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The proposed standards conflict with compelling new research in cognitive science, neuroscience, child development, and early childhood education about how young children learn, what they need to learn, and how best to teach them in kindergarten and the early grades. We have no doubt that promoting language and mathematics is crucial to closing the achievement gap. As written, however, the proposed standards raise the following concerns:

- *Such standards will lead to long hours of instruction in literacy and math.* Young children learn best in active, hands-on ways and in the context of meaningful real-life experiences. New research shows that didactic instruction of discrete reading and math skills has already pushed play-based learning out of many kindergartens. But the current proposal goes well beyond most existing state standards in requiring, for example, that every kindergartner be able to “read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.”
- *They will lead to inappropriate standardized testing.* Current state standards for young children have led to the heavy use of standardized tests in kindergarten and the lower grades, despite their unreliability for assessing children under age eight. The proposed core standards will intensify inappropriate testing in place of broader observational assessments that better serve young children’s needs.
- *Didactic instruction and testing will crowd out other important areas of learning.* Young children’s learning must go beyond literacy and math. They need to learn about families and communities, to take on challenges, and to develop social, emotional, problem-solving, self-regulation, and perspective-taking skills. Overuse of didactic instruction and testing cuts off children’s initiative, curiosity, and imagination, limiting their later engagement in school and the workplace, not to mention responsible citizenship. And it interferes with the growth of healthy bodies and essential sensory and motor skills—all best developed through playful and active hands-on learning.
- *There is little evidence that such standards for young children lead to later success.* While an introduction to books in early childhood is vital, research on the links between the intensive teaching of discrete reading skills in kindergarten and later success is inconclusive at best. Many of the countries with top-performing high-school students do not begin formal schooling until age six or seven. We must test these ideas more thoroughly before establishing nationwide policies and practices.

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We therefore call on the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to withdraw the proposed standards for children in kindergarten through grade three. We further call for the creation of a consortium of early childhood researchers, developmental psychologists, pediatricians, cognitive scientists, master teachers, and school leaders to develop comprehensive guidelines for effective early care and teaching that recognize the right of every child to a healthy start in life and a developmentally appropriate education.

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