

Introduction to the Draft Common Core Standards

March 9, 2010

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) are pleased to present the draft Kindergarten-12 grade level Common Core State Standards documents that our organizations have produced on behalf of 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia. These English language arts and mathematics standards represent a set of expectations for student knowledge and skills that will result in high school graduates who are prepared for success in college and careers.

To develop these standards, CCSSO and the NGA Center worked with representatives from participating states, a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups. These drafts reflect their input, and we are grateful for the time and insight hundreds of individuals have contributed to the development of these important documents.

Now, we seek public comment on these draft documents and encourage input via our online survey available at www.corestandards.org. The public comment period will end on April 2, 2010.

After our work groups have had an opportunity to review all of the feedback from the general public and state-led reviews, they will produce final documents. It is expected that the final set of standards documents will be available in late spring 2010.

You will notice that the college- and career-readiness standards have been incorporated into this draft. The final English language arts and mathematics standards documents will include college- and career-readiness standards along with the K-12 grade level standards.

The criteria that we used to develop the college- and career-readiness standards, as well as these K-12 grade level standards are:

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

The following links provide more information about the [criteria](#) and [considerations](#) for standards development.

The standards development process has maximized the best practices and research from across the nation and the world. While we have used all available research to shape these documents, we recognize that there is more to be learned about the most essential knowledge for student success. As new research is conducted and we evaluate the

implementation of the common core standards, we plan to revise the standards accordingly on a set review cycle.

Our organizations would also like to thank our advisory group, which provides advice and guidance on this initiative. Members of this group include experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners

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. Effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction accordingly, and closely monitoring student progress. For example, ELLs who are literate in a first language that shares cognates with English can apply first-language vocabulary knowledge when reading in English; likewise ELLs with high levels of schooling can bring to bear conceptual knowledge developed in their first language when reading in a second language. However, ELLs with limited or interrupted schooling will need to acquire background knowledge prerequisite to educational tasks at hand. Those ELLs who are newcomers to U.S. schools will need sufficiently scaffolded instruction and assessments to make sense of content delivered in a second language and to display this content knowledge.

English Language Arts

The common core standards for English language arts (ELA) articulate rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing to prepare all students to be college and career ready, including English language learners. Second-language learners also will benefit from instruction about how to negotiate situations outside of those settings so they are able to participate on equal footing with native speakers in all aspects of social, economic, and civic endeavors.

ELLs bring with them many resources that enhance their education and can serve as resources for schools and society. Many ELLs have first language and literacy knowledge and skills that boost their acquisition of language and literacy in a second language; additionally, they bring an array of talents and cultural practices and perspectives that enrich our schools and our society. Teachers must build on this enormous reservoir of talent and provide those students who need it with additional time and appropriate instructional support. This includes language proficiency standards that teachers can use in conjunction with the ELA standards to assist ELLs in becoming proficient and literate in English.

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 in grade-level coursework;
- 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.

Mathematics

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.

Language is a resource for learning mathematics; it is not only a tool for communicating, but also a tool for thinking and reasoning mathematically. All languages and language varieties (e.g., different dialects, home or everyday ways of talking, vernacular, slang) provide resources for mathematical thinking, reasoning, and communicating.

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

Overall, research suggests that:

- Language switching can be swift, highly automatic, and facilitate rather than inhibit solving word problems in the second language, as long as the student’s language proficiency is sufficient for understanding the text of the word problem.
- Instruction should ensure that students understand the text of word problems before they attempt to solve them.
- Instruction should include a focus on “mathematical discourse” and “academic language” because these are important for ELLs. Although it is critical that

students who are learning English have opportunities to communicate mathematically, this is not primarily a matter of learning vocabulary. Students learn to participate in mathematical reasoning, not by learning vocabulary, but by making conjectures, presenting explanations, and/or constructing arguments.

- While vocabulary instruction is important, it is not sufficient for supporting mathematical communication. Furthermore, vocabulary drill and practice are not the most effective instructional practices for learning vocabulary. Research has demonstrated that vocabulary learning occurs most successfully through instructional environments that are language-rich, actively involve students in using language, require that students both understand spoken or written words and also express that understanding orally and in writing, and require students to use words in multiple ways over extended periods of time. To develop written and oral communication skills, students need to participate in negotiating meaning for mathematical situations and in mathematical practices that require output from students.

Application of Common Core State Standards for Students with Disabilities

The Common Core Standards articulate rigorous, grade-level expectations in the areas of English language arts and mathematics to prepare students to be college and career ready.

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.

For special education students to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in mathematics and English language arts, their instruction must incorporate supports and often times, accommodations, including:

- Special education supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum (IDEA 34 CFR §300.34, 2004).
- An Individualized Education Program, which includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards.
- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.

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.