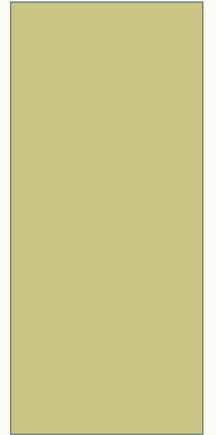


ELA REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

PRELIMINARY REPORT



SENATE BILL 812 CHARGE TO ASRC

Undertake a Comprehensive Review to ensure standards are:

- Age level and developmentally appropriate
- Understandable to Parents and Teachers
- Increase Student Achievement
- Among the Highest in the Nation

COMPARISON OF STATE STANDARDS

ELA Sub-committee developed a matrix to perform a holistic analysis of state standards commonly acknowledged to be rigorous

- Massachusetts (Pre-CCSS, 2001; used to calibrate)
- California (Pre-CCSS, 2008)
- Texas (Independent Standards, 2008)
- Virginia (Independent Standards, 2010)
- North Carolina (present --CCSS)

HOLISTIC MATRIX FOCAL POINTS

- Implications for Instruction
- Clarity and Focus
- Implementation and Sustainability
- **For K-3:** attentive to early foundational skills in reading
- **For 6-12:** attentive to capacity for post-secondary readiness (college and career-ready)

MASSACHUSETTS

- Framework utilized “Guiding Principles” for ELA instruction and a rationale for each standard
- Learning Scenarios presented periodically throughout the document as a model for instruction
- Reading resources embedded in standards for easy reference
- Written concisely
- “The succinct nature of the standards allowed for the main focus to be easy to identify and would likely help teachers in their translation to teaching and learning.”

CALIFORNIA

- “Content Standards and Instructional Practices” narrative portion of curriculum framework especially strong
- Ties pedagogical approach to solid and updated research on teaching methods and child development, which are cited within document
- High level of detail and clarity
- Attentive to developmental appropriateness

CALIFORNIA, CONT.

California

- “The vocabulary and concept development standards for the **sixth grade** shift from a focus on word origins... In addition, students are required to understand and explain **shades of meaning** in related words: e.g., softly, quietly” (155).

CCSS

- “Distinguish **shades of meaning** among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (e.g., knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).”
ELA.Literacy.L.3.5c

CALIFORNIA, CONT.

Examples of Clarity/Detail:

- **Writing:** By seventh grade, write essays of “500-700 words, two or three typed, double-spaced pages in these categories: interpretations of literature, research reports, persuasive compositions, and summaries.”
- **Reading:** By 12th grade, “students are expected each year to read independently two million words of running text” which “translate[s] to about 11 pages a day, or one 335-page book each month” (215)

CALIFORNIA, CONT.

- **Literature:** “Novels are the core text for literary analysis in high school and are supplemented with short stories, essays and poetry” (214).
- **Informational Reading:** for Grade 12 students focus on “public documents [e.g. policy statements, speeches, debates, platforms]” (232).

CALIFORNIA SUMMARY

- Transparent about what research informs pedagogy
- Attentive to current, accepted theories of child-development
- Offer high level of detail and direction
- Set clear standards for reading and writing
- Offer multiple levels of support for differentiation, assessment, ELL, Universal Design

TEXAS

- Standards lack framework for conveying a philosophy/orientation towards the teaching of English
- No lesson exemplars
- No performance indicators included in standards
- Overall, less guidance for teachers as compared to Massachusetts, California, or Virginia
- Increasing complexity of skills that prepares college-ready students
- Clear, concise, vertical progression of skills across grade levels
- Very helpful ancillary document that details how students have met, failed to meet or exceeded standard at each grade level: *see Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Performance Level Descriptors*

TEXAS, CONT.

Example: Specificity of Detail & Rigor

- **6th grade:** *Complete* analogies that explain part to whole (e.g., ink: pen)
- **7th grade:** *Complete* analogies that explain a function (e.g., pen: paper)
- **9th grade:** *Produce* analogies that describe a function of an object or its description

Example: Mixture of Vague and Clear Directives for Teachers

- **8th grade:** Analyze how the genre of texts with similar themes shapes meaning
- **11th grade:** Analyze a theme that comments on the human condition

TEXAS, SUMMARY

- Rigorous, designed to produce college and career-ready students
- Vertically-Aligned
- Concise and Detailed in Many, but not All, Respects
- Some supports for Parents
- Other Reviews of Standards suggest great deal of overlap with CCSS
- Arguably too many standards to teach within a year's time

VIRGINIA

- Standards of Learning (SOL's) externally validated by Achieve's American Diploma Project and College Board; prepare students for demands of SAT and ACT
- At each grade level, offer a brief narrative of essential goals before listing standards and indicators for each standards
- For assessments, provide performance descriptors:
- http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/scoring/performance_level_descriptors/index.shtml
- For writing, extensive information to guide conversion to instruction for teachers:
http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2010/online_writing/index.shtml

VIRGINIA, CONT.

SOL's

- One goal to promote “lifelong love of reading”
- Instruction of reading at the learner’s instructional /comprehension level
- For writing, list specific guidelines at each grade level, including ones for editing
- Address grammar, usage and mechanics through writing

CCSS

- May promote placing students in reading texts beyond their instructional level: “read and comprehend literature...in the text complexity band proficiently”
- Many of writing standards are almost identical from grade to grade
- Use grade level bands for 9-10, 11-12

NORTH CAROLINA

- K-3 CCSS call for students to perform tasks “with prompting and support” and “with guidance and support from adults”
- NC Teacher Comment: “Every standard that begins with the phrase ‘with prompting and support should be dropped or modified. I have no idea what is meant by that? How much prompting and support am I supposed to give?’”

NORTH CAROLINA, CONT.

- W.CCR.7: CCSS call for “short” and “sustained” research projects
- R.CCR.6-R.CCR.9-10 tasks students with knowing how to “identify false statements and fallacious reasoning”
- California calls for 500-700 word essays with clear parameters
- Texas standards identify which logical/rhetorical fallacies students should know and understand at each grade level

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY

- Link emailed to superintendents, who were asked to pass on to ELA teachers
- Link sent in May and again in July
- Total of responses from both surveys 1,736
- Combination of Likert-designed questions and open-ended response
- Answers to open-ended responses have been transferred to spreadsheets that will be available on the ASRC website

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY

Leading Teacher Concerns:

- Developmental appropriateness
- Number of standards to cover by end of year
- Multiple tasks embedded within single standard

Aspects of CCSS that Teachers Value:

- Emphasis on Text-based evidence
- Focus on Academic Vocabulary
- Focus on Non-Fiction

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY

Impediments to Implementation

- Lack of textbooks and Instructional Materials aligned with standards
- Students arriving with learning gaps since standards not “phased in”
- Need for Professional Development

Other Concerns

- Loss of focus on reading for enjoyment
- Loss of focus on reading literature in lieu of informational texts
- Teaching of writing diminished since it is no longer assessed

NC ELA SURVEY: DEVELOPMENTAL APPROPRIATENESS

- RL 3.2: “Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in text.”
- “Recounting a fable or folktale poses no problem for my students, but determining a lesson or moral is always something we struggle with. It’s an abstract process that many of my students are unprepared for.”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: COVERING ALL THE STANDARDS

- RL 9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare
- “There is not enough time to read the source material and read the specific work and then discuss it. Our students have such a limited knowledge of literature and history that they cannot and do not recognize allusions without serious scaffolding. Furthermore, as there are no instructional materials in which a source and subsequent exemplar text have been identified as a ‘matched pair’ for study, it becomes time consuming for the teacher to first seek out and then prepare a lesson to teach it.”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: CLARITY

- RL 4.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters in mythology (e.g., Herculean).
- “[It is] not easy to find supporting materials or references. The only example that is referred to is ‘Herculean’...I’m unclear about how mythology and determining the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, with only one word for an example, is to be taught or studied. Is the intent mythology, Greek word parts, Greek mythological characters, or vocabulary?”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: READING

- “I would like to see ELA have its own content again. It’s said that we’ve let go of so much of the literature and literary non-fiction in place of random articles for the sake of assessments. It’s like they’ve simply become reading classes at some schools. We seem to have lost the true ELA experience in deference to test-taking.”
- “Kids are beginning to see reading as something they have to do and not learning to read for the joy of reading. They used to enjoy reading books on their levels and sharing their thoughts. That has become a thing of the past. Teacher read-aloud was once a favorite part of their day, even the older ones. Now it is being controlled by expectations and not enjoyment.”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: INFORMATIONAL TEXT

- “The reading of non-fiction should be emphasized in course-specific classes. It seems that now ELA classrooms have become more and more responsible for reading and writing, when in fact students are not engaging in enough imaginative reading and writing.”
- “A bus schedule is not Byron. If we want robots, keep it up. If you want thinkers, stress great literature and poetry, and make students explain their analysis in written format.”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: WRITING

- “I agree with the standards; however, again, teachers tend to focus on standards that are tested. When the writing test disappeared, so did intensive writing instruction. The current 10th grade EOC has short-answer responses, but they are testing reading standards. Writing is a crucial synthesis of all the standards. Students must read, analyze, evaluate, organize, prepare and present. If the state is serious about these standards, and it should be, it needs to be tested along with the reading standards.”
- “Writing needs more clarity and examples of what is structurally acceptable for each– narrative, informative, etc.”

NC ELA TEACHER SURVEY: WRITING

- “While Common Core does contain strong writing standards, the number of standards and the emphasis on tested standards allows limited time to truly create successful writers. I believe students need a more rigorous writing curriculum, and that it would be a good idea to drop some of the reading standards so that an intensive focus on writing is possible. We want to send our students off to college and technical schools and the work force prepared to successfully craft email, reports, papers, etc., and I don’t believe the current curriculum places enough emphasis on those skills or allows much time for their mastery.”

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS: DEVELOPMENTAL APPROPRIATENESS

- Dr. Megan Koschnick, child-development expert:
- Standards writers took a “top-down” approach, pushing down higher-level, abstract thinking into the lower grades
- Some standards require students who are at a pre-operational or concrete operational stage to think and reason abstractly before they are ready
- Many developmentally inappropriate social and emotional goals cloaked in the language of the speaking and listening goals
- Expectations can cause stress/frustration for children

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS: NUMBER OF STANDARDS

- Mike Schmoker, “[The standards] are written to appear as though there are only 10 for each category, but there are actually dozens more embedded within the 10. For instance, for grade 11 and 12 standards, I count more than 70.”
- Larry Ainsworth, supporter of the CCSS, nevertheless acknowledges there is an excessive number of standards in ELA

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS: AINSWORTH'S ELA STANDARDS CHART

Grade Levels	Literature	Informational Text	Foundational Skills	Writing	Speaking & Listening	Language	Total
Kindergarten	10	10	17	7	8	21	73
Grade 1	10	10	19	7	9	27	82
Grade 2	10	10	11	7	9	25	72
Grade 3	10	10	9	21	10	31	91
Grade 4	9	10	6	25	10	26	86
Grade 5	9	10	6	25	10	24	84
Grade 6	9	10		28	10	22	79
Grade 7	9	10		28	10	19	76
Grade 8	9	10		28	10	21	78
Grades 9-10	9	10		28	10	18	75
Grades 11-12	9	10		28	10	17	74

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS: READING

- Mike Schmoker: “Language arts standards documents tend to be trivial and do very little to clarify the *amount of reading and writing* students must do to become truly literate— which may be the most important standard of all.”
- Kelly Gallagher: It is “disconcerting” that the CCSS do not provide specific grade-level standards, especially as “goals are important in developing young readers.”
- Sandra Stotsky: NC CCSS are “content-free skills, not content standards. They do not address specific literary knowledge, specific literary history, or specific reading levels.”

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS: READING

- Kelly Gallagher: Misunderstanding about amount of non-fiction reading is “driving an overemphasis on the teaching of excerpts... and away from sustained rigor of longer literary works. If the reading of excerpts replaces the reading of novels, students will be denied the opportunity to stretch their capacities at exactly the same time when they are in the key stages of brain development.”
- Hope Williams: 3 skills college students need to be successful are to read deeply, think critically, and be creative enough to propose multiple scenarios; obviously the latter 2 skills are also connected to reading widely

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS: WRITING

If we could institute only one change to make students more college ready, it should be to increase the amount and quality of writing students are expected to produce. Develop student writing skills systematically in all classes and across a range of writing genres, especially expository, descriptive, and persuasive writing. To increase the amount of writing that high school students do, assign many short, three to five-page papers that require careful reasoning supporting by research and citations. Expect students to edit and revise these papers rather than submit them only once.

--Dr. David Conley, "The Challenge of College Readiness"

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revise the standards or write new standards that prioritize a number of Essential Goals that can be taught for mastery during a 180 day school year.
- Revise the standards or write new standards with the guidance of child-development experts, utilizing a “bottom-up” approach that is centered on optimizing the growth of the learner at each stage and sequencing them appropriately.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revise the standards or write new standards with an eye to clarity and detail. Offer comprehensive itemized lists which constitute a minimum standard where necessary (e.g., Greek and Latin affixes and roots, logical fallacies, etc.). Include exemplar lessons, student work and assessments.
- Revise the standards or write new standards with student-focused reading goals that are based on students' instructional reading levels.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish concrete minimum goals for each grade level, including the amount of reading.
- Establish clear writing goals, including exemplars of student work and scoring rubrics.
- Establish grade-level standards instead of grade-level “bands” at the high school level.
- Align high school English content with the social studies curriculum in order to facilitate the teaching of core documents by content experts, establish context, and deepen student understanding.