



Adopting Common Core Standards

Background

National standards have been a recurring issue of interest in education for roughly 25 years. Various experts, government panels and politicians have suggested movement toward uniform standards among the states, but none gained traction¹. In 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) launched the Common Core State Standards Initiative, benefitting from momentum built earlier in the year. Washington, along with 47 other states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, signed on to the initiative². The initiative earned another boost with the launch of the federal Race to the Top competitive grant program, which gave preference to states that signed on to a common standards consortium.

The standards are meant to provide a consistent framework across states lines, be aligned with college and career expectations, include rigorous content and application of knowledge, and build on leading state and international standards. Initial efforts focused on English/language arts and mathematics, and included input from work groups comprised of teachers, administrators, and subject-area experts.

The English/language arts standards are broken out by grade, while the mathematics standards are organized by grade for K-8 and course for high school. The inclusion of standards for both eighth grade math and high school algebra in the Common Core was not meant as a deterrent to teaching eighth graders Algebra I. The K-7 standards cover the necessary prerequisites for Algebra I; the eighth grade standards provide another alternative for states should they so choose.

Standards in Washington State

Washington State's English/language arts³ standards were last revised in 2004-06, and the mathematics standards in 2008-09. For English/language arts standards, Washington's current standards are broken into 12 Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) for grades K-10, spread across reading, writing, and communication. For each EALR, grade level expectations are provided. For example, to demonstrate mastery of EALR 2 — the student understands the meaning of what is read — a first grader would identify the main idea of a text while a ninth grader would state both literal and inferred main ideas and provide supporting text-based details⁴.

For mathematics, Washington's standards are organized by grade in K-8, and then by course for secondary grades⁵. The standards are organized in a way that is meant to sequence skills and

¹ McNeil, Michelle. "NGA, CCSSO Launch Common Standards Drive." *Education Week*. April 17, 2009.

² Alabama; Arizona; Arkansas; California; Colorado; Connecticut; Delaware; District of Columbia; Florida; Georgia; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Kentucky; Louisiana; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Mississippi; Missouri; Montana; Nebraska; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; North Carolina; North Dakota; Ohio; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Puerto Rico; Rhode Island; South Carolina; South Dakota; Tennessee; Utah; Vermont; Virgin Islands; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia; Wisconsin; Wyoming

³ Revised readings standards were adopted in 2004, writing standards in 2006, and communication standards in 2006.

⁴ Washington State Reading K-10 Grade Level Expectations, <<http://www.k12.wa.us/Reading/pubdocs/ReadingEALR-GLE.pdf>>

⁵ Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II; or Mathematics I, Mathematics 2, and Mathematics 3.



knowledge, building upon foundations created in previous grades. For example, students are expected to master addition, subtraction, and place value in third grade before moving on to multi-digit multiplication in fourth grade. While grade-specific standards are provided for seventh and eighth grade, schools and districts may offer high school level courses to middle/junior high school students who have mastered the K-8 standards.

Comparing Common Core to Washington State Standards

Analysis conducted in summer 2010 graded the Common Core standards in both English/language arts and mathematics, as well as the standards in all 50 states⁶. This analysis gave the Common Core a grade of B+ for English/language arts and an A- for mathematics. Washington, in comparison, earned a grade of C for English/language arts and an A for mathematics. In English/language arts, Washington's standards were found to be vague at times, as well as incomplete given they only go through grade 10, resulting in a lower grade than the Common Core standards. For mathematics, Washington's standards were found to be equal to the Common Core standards — slightly superior in some areas and slightly inferior in others, while covering the same topics and concepts.

Common Core in Washington

Washington, along with 35 states and the District of Columbia, applied for Phase 2 of the Race to the Top program. To earn more points for its application, the state needed to demonstrate a commitment to adopting common standards. In addition to signing on the Common Core Initiative in 2009, the Legislature passed a bill authorizing the Superintendent of Public Instruction to formally adopt the Common Core standards after review by the education committees of the House and Senate⁷.

⁶ Carmichael, S., Martino, G., Porter-Magee, K., & Wilson, W.S. *The State of State Standards — and the Common Core — in 2010*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute, July 2010.

⁷ E2SSB 6696