



---

# SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

---

**Randy I. Dorn** Old Capitol Building · PO BOX 47200 · Olympia, WA 98504-7200 · <http://www.k12.wa.us>

---

December 4, 2009

To: Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, CCSSO  
Dane Linn, Education Division, NGA Center

From: Alan Burke, Deputy Superintendent of K-12 Education  
Jessica Vavrus, Director of Teaching and Learning  
Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Re: Washington State Feedback on Early Draft of K-12 Common Core Standards

We greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded to our state to review and provide input in the early drafts of the English Language Arts and Mathematics K-12 common core standards. On November 30<sup>th</sup> we brought together a group of approximately 60 K-12 educators (including teachers, curriculum directors/administrators, and assessment specialists). The group had representation from special education, English language learners, highly capable/gifted education, tribal representation, and members of our state achievement gap workgroup. All of the individuals that participated on the 30<sup>th</sup> have expertise in these subjects and were eager to review and provide input on the drafts. Attached are specific responses to each of the six guiding questions that you and your team requested input on, as well as suggestions related to the structure for high school mathematics.

As you are likely aware, Washington State recently underwent a significant revision to our K-12 mathematics learning standards. While we have not recently revised our reading, writing, and communication standards, we believe our current standards (adopted in 2004 and 2005) strongly reflect international research and represent clearly what students should know and be able to do in each of these areas through their progression of grades. While we are strongly supportive of the common core standards initiative, we are also cautious about the impact of differences between the common core and our current state standards. Depending on how the full draft and subsequent final K-12 common core standards documents turn out, you can imagine that there may be significant implications in both the policy and implementation arenas for our state.

As you will see reflected in much of our input, one area in which specific clarity could be given is who the intended audience is for these standards. Much of the language in both sets of standards is not easily understood by even the seasoned educators that participated in this preliminary review. If the intended audience is teachers and administrators, we strongly suggest using language that is more commonly understood by a broad spectrum of stakeholders. We also hope through the additional narrative

anticipated in the full K-12 standards draft, that the connection between the K-12 common core standards and the common core career and college readiness standards will be more clearly articulated.

Finally, one area in which we believe Washington may serve as a model is in the area of cultural competency of our academic learning standards. With 29 different tribes represented in our state, as well as a strong migrant population, and large immigrant populations representing hundreds of languages other than English, we have spent years building standards that are inclusive of diverse cultures and honor students who are not from the United State and whose home languages are not English. The common core standards initiative provides a great opportunity to bring equity in education to students across all states. Common standards can be a liberating component of K-12 education for our student population that is increasingly mobile. However, without acute attention to cultural competency of our student population, we run the risk of homogenizing and assimilating these groups that make up such a large part of our student population nationally.

We are bringing our K-12 workgroups back together to review the full public draft of the K-12 common core standards on January 8<sup>th</sup> and wonder about the possibility of having one or two representatives from the ELA and Mathematics common core drafting groups join us for part of the day. As stated earlier, should our state make the decision to formally adopt the common core standards, we have significant work to do to establish understanding of and buy-in to the standards. By having time with national-level experts on this topic, we will be better equipped to begin building more widespread support and buy-in. We will contact Chris Minnich sometime next week to discuss the possibility of having someone join us on January 8<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you again for this important opportunity. We hope that the input provided will be timely enough to have an impact on the upcoming public draft of the full common core standards. Please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Vavrus at 360-725-6417 or [Jessica.vavrus@k12.wa.us](mailto:Jessica.vavrus@k12.wa.us) if you have any questions or need clarification regarding any of the input provided.



---

# SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

---

**Randy I. Dorn** Old Capitol Building · PO BOX 47200 · Olympia, WA 98504-7200 · <http://www.k12.wa.us>

---

February, 2010

To: Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, CCSSO  
Dane Linn, Education Division, NGA Center

From: Jessica Vavrus, Director of Teaching and Learning  
Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Re: Washington State Feedback on **February 8, 2010** draft of K-12 Common Core Standards

Once again we were extremely impressed at the improvement of this early February draft of the standards over the documents that we shared and provided input on in January. Kudos to all of the developers for taking and pulling together such wide and certainly varied input, and thank you once more for including our state in the process. Washington participated in one of the three conference calls last week with Chris Minnich and members of the English Language Arts and Mathematics development teams. In the following pages, we have provided some high level thoughts/suggestions for each of the specific subject areas. However first, I'd like to share with you just a couple of pieces of input that were expressed by our state Curriculum Advisory and Review Committee:

1. Numbering and navigation systems – it would be exceedingly helpful for the numbering systems in both the ELA and Mathematics documents to be more closely aligned. Our teachers, especially at elementary, are already navigating at least three different sets of standards vocabulary, structure, and number. As much consistency between the documents as possible would be appreciated.
2. In the English Language Arts document, page 6 refers to “ELLs” and the development of “...native-like” proficiency in English. This page in particular for those that had a chance to review it raised a few eyebrows and red flags. It would be helpful to soften this language in an effort to be more culturally sensitive as it may be possible for misinterpretation of this page to distract further review of the standards with an open mind. Depending on how the subject of student's whose first language is not English is broached in the mathematics document, this suggestion would also apply to those standards as well.

Again we appreciate all of your openness and support for our state as we navigate this process. We also appreciate the connection you have facilitated with us and the Hunt Institute. We look forward to connecting with them soon to see how they can support us in continuing to build buy-in and understanding of this important initiative.

Content-specific input follows:

### **K-12 Mathematics Input:**

We saw continued improvement with this next draft of **K-12 Mathematics Common Core Standards**. We especially appreciate the way data analysis, statistics, and modeling were embedded in the other content areas. As requested we have included below a few suggestions/issues for consideration with the next iteration of the document:

- **Content of the K-8 “Content Outlines”:** When data analysis and statistics is embedded in one of the content areas, it would be helpful to see it indicated in this content outline. (Possibly with a footnote – similar to the way these standards are noted throughout.)
- **Denoting Pre-calculus/4<sup>th</sup> year standards:** In high school we appreciate the organization of standards under conceptual categories and are aware of the work of Achieve on suggested courses. However, we believe it is important *in this document* to note which standards are meant for a pre-calculus/4<sup>th</sup> year level. Therefore, it would also become clear for states what is expected by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of mathematics.
- **Additional examples:** While examples embedded after many standards, we would like to see additional examples somewhere in the document, perhaps as an appendix? Previously, examples were provided to the College and Career Readiness standards, but did not make it into this document.
- **Placement of the standard algorithm:** It would be extremely helpful for some sort of explanation around the placement of the standard algorithm within the common core standards. An explanation in the introduction/front matter would be helpful to provide justification for how the standards developers see the standard algorithm fitting into the standards.

## **K-12 English Language Arts Input:**

### **Reading**

- The words used for specific skills defined in standards 1-10 are used in other standards or the wording is meant to be inferred rather than specifically stated. Read for clarity and alignment between/through grades, and ensure that skills are standard-specific.

Examples:

- Grade 7 Literary/info 2 “Infer themes not explicitly stated in the text and provide the evidence which those inferences are based.” Inferring is a skill defined in Standard 1 and main idea/theme is in Standard 2. Do not combine standards. When it comes to assessing, each skill must be discreet.
- Grades 9-10 Info Standard 3 uses the word *summarizing* which is Standard 2.
- Grades 9-10 Literature Standard 4 references *tone of text* which is Standard 6; Standard 7 uses *compare and contrast* which is Standard 9 (this is in 11-CCR also).
- Grade 8 and 9-10 info Standard 6 uses *compare/contrast* which is Standard 9.
- Move Reading Foundations to the beginning of the Reading Standards since these skills/standards are the foundation for future reading success.
- Missing metacognition, strategy application, and student goal setting

### **Writing**

We appreciate the work of the committee. Each draft has gotten better. We particularly like the new format, the use of the word “conventions” as an umbrella term, increased clarity of the language, grade-level descriptors K-8, and the inclusion of the CCR descriptors. In fact, there is much we like about the document. There are still a few major concerns.

1. One of their main concerns is the writing strand feels fragmented. Research is the subject of 4 out of 10 core standards, and conventions and style are part of the language strand. One third-grade teacher said, “How can someone write without style?” Another teacher said, “A new or first-year teacher may assume that conducting research is of a higher priority than the other standards.”
  - a. Please consider adding word choice and sentence variety/style in some form to the text types beginning at grade 3.
  - b. Would it be possible to limit the research to one or two standards? Right now, research is almost 50% of writing. Perhaps add a conventions and a style standard? Or expand the idea of prewriting/planning so it includes more than research.
2. By removing conventions from writing, the perception will be that conventions are not only separate from writing, but that instruction should be separate from the teaching of writing. Research has shown that effective instruction is more effective when discussed in the context of writing, rather than through isolated skills instruction.” (DiStefano and Killion, 1984, et al.). Perhaps in addition to the more specific references in the Language Strand, you might add conventions as a core writing standard?

3. Please add the terms *elaboration* and *sentence-to-sentence progression/cohesion* grades 4 and above to the text types where appropriate. It has been our experience in this state that “develop through relevant and specific facts, concrete details... often leads to listing of details, examples instead of cohesive writing. (By the way, we have worked so hard to move beyond lists. Is it possible to find another way to describe grade 2 and 3 organizational structure of argumentative texts besides “list-like”?)
  
4. Please consider adding “planning” and “formatting” to Standard 5 and “development” and “style or rhetorical choices” to Standard 4.



---

# SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

---

**Randy I. Dorn** Old Capitol Building · PO BOX 47200 · Olympia, WA 98504-7200 · <http://www.k12.wa.us>

---

April 2, 2010

To: Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, CCSSO  
Dane Linn, Education Division, NGA Center

From: Jessica Vavrus, Director of Teaching and Learning  
Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Re: Washington State Feedback on Public Draft (March 10, 2010) of K-12 Common Core Standards

We would like to once again applaud the work of the development groups on integrating input into the recent Public Draft of the K-12 English Language Arts and Mathematics Common Core Standards. Overall both documents are extremely well written and there has been marked improvements made over time. The interactive process that your organizations have facilitated has been beneficial in building buy-in and understanding throughout Washington State. During March we encouraged educators and stakeholders to provide input via the survey available at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org). We look forward to receiving a summary of what you may have received in terms of public input through that process from our state. The following input is from our state-level content and assessment specialist teams.

If you have any questions or need clarification on any of the enclosed comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at 360-725-6417 or [Jessica.vavrus@k12.wa.us](mailto:Jessica.vavrus@k12.wa.us). Thank you once again for your consideration of our feedback. We will be looking forward to the final standards in the coming month!

## **General Input on both Mathematics and English Language Arts**

- Create systematic format and organization for both E/LA and Math – documents should mirror each other and have aligned numbering system. It is important to think of the common core as one document (ELA/Math) that a 3rd grade teacher will need to implement. It should be easy for the teacher to understand both documents and understand the concepts and skills necessary for students at that grade level. It is also important teachers have access to the entire learning progression so they know where their piece fits into the big pictures. If the two documents do not align (ELA and Math) we are making a difficult implementation more difficult.
- It is important to state the assumptions made regarding full day or half-day kindergarten. It would be helpful to note the skills that may be expected to be mastered before children enter kindergarten if only a half day kindergarten is offered. This could be done in the same way that STEM is noted for the HS mathematics standards. If learning progressions are available this could be omitted because guidance would be given within the learning progressions.

- Once the standards are finalized, a document (and communication package) should come out explaining the importance of education (especially mathematics) for parents. These standards will require the buy in of all stakeholders. Communication from state and national leaders to the public around honoring education is necessary to successfully implement change.

## **Mathematics**

- There needs to be more intentional infusion of the mathematical practices at each grade level.
- Learning progression of key concepts should be explicitly addressed (perhaps in an appendix). This needs to be more detailed than a chart or table. The learning progressions would inform formative assessment, instructional material development and for PD around implementation.
- Examples are vital for the successful implementation of the common core. If examples are not available for the final document this spring, there should be a plan stated for the development of examples for the standards.
- Mental strategies and estimation should be more explicitly addressed in the core standards.
- While it is important to have congruence with the ELA standards, merging the concepts and skills into one section makes the document more unclear to the reader. It is important to make the distinction between the two areas in some matter.
- The course progression graphic in the appendix needs to be clearer.

## English/Language Arts

### ELA General Comments:

- The format has a nice progression of skills; however, organization of document by grade and/or content (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language) would provide easier access for the grade level teacher. Larger font and color coding would be helpful.
- Culturally responsive components need to be deeply embedded throughout the standards and appendices. K-College and Career Readiness standards should provide an opportunity for students to understand and analyze areas of reading, writing, and speaking and listening that represent gender, various cultures, and traditions.
- The standards seem to be focused on the academic classroom and need to also include preparing students for life and work.
- Student (directed) goal setting needs to be incorporated.

### ELA Reading:

- Do not assume that a statement in the introduction of the document regarding the need to appreciate diverse cultures is enough. The way in which cultural competency is currently addressed borders on patronizing. Embed global and cultural literature within the standards. One suggestion is to eliminate the literature list – by creating a list, you are narrowing the focus of literature. You may want to refer the audience to resources such as Newberry and Caldecott. If specific literature is included, then broaden the selection [e.g., Ache, Anaya, Oratory in Native North America, Tan (keep Zora Neale Hurston)].
- Move Reading Foundations to the beginning of the document.
- The format is a little choppy. Although there is a need to understand the scope and sequence of content by grade bands, it's difficult to navigate the document in this format. Perhaps color coding, enlarging font, creating a numbering system would help increase reader friendliness. Further, think of the audience who will be using the standards documents the most – the grade level teacher. A document that categorizes the standards by grade only and/or by specific content area only (i.e., Reading, Speaking and Listening, Writing, and Language) from beginning to end would help the classroom teacher.
- Metacognition and study skills/strategies need to be incorporated into all standards.

### ELA Writing:

1. Most importantly, there has been a **marked improvement** in the substance and format of the Writing CCS in this last public draft, particularly
  - The inclusion of narrative texts at the secondary level,
  - More references to process writing and technology,
  - Expanded definitions of writing text types.
2. There are, however, some challenges that still exist including:
  - The inclusion of a fourth strand: Language. That strand is given the same weight on paper as is reading, writing, and listening/speaking, although it is composed of sub-parts of reading, writing, and speaking.
  - Research standards taking the place of other important writing standards, such as style;

- Fragmentation of writing in the formatting of the document. To quote one teacher, this fragmentation, “implies writing instruction would be an ‘aside’;
- The separate grammar/conventions section implies disembodied worksheet instruction would meet these standards;
- The pervasive academic language;
- The emphasis on qualities of “produced text” to the exclusion, or limiting, of process writing, writing to learn, metacognitive writing, or other types reflective writing. To quote a former Director of the Puget Sound Writing Project, University of Washington, “The document focuses so heavily on the qualities of produced text that it threatens to send us back to the time before the Dartmouth Conference in the early 60’s, before we began to think about how writers produce texts and why they make the rhetorical choices they do”;
- More emphasis on analysis than synthesis;
- Embedding the definitions of the writing text types in Appendix A. These definitions help to balance the somewhat narrow view of these genres in the standards. Please place them either at the beginning of the writing strand or in the introduction;
- The very weak explication of writing research—limited to only one type of writing. This section needs to be expanded if the field is to believe that the writing standards were well researched.

### **ELA Speaking and Listening:**

General comments:

- Unique identifying numbering system is needed. (e.g., Consider, including grade and college and career standard in the numbering system. For example, if numbered 4.1.1 in Speaking and Listening, the first number would indicate grade 4, the second number would indicate the College and Career Readiness Standard #1, and the third number would indicate the Speaking and Listening standard #1. )
- The term ‘formal English’ is used only in Speaking and Listening, and ‘Standard English’ is used only in the Language section. It would be helpful if only one term was used, or if both are used, that they are used interchangeably.
- Multiple formats would be helpful – all of Speaking and Listening (K-12) together so the progression of skill development is clear and easy to follow.
- The Language section would be stronger if embedded into reading, writing and speaking and listening rather than a stand-alone.
- Missing pieces:
  - Although the cultural competency piece is addressed in the introduction, if a reference is not embedded into the standards themselves, it is easily lost.
  - Showing an understanding of how differing cultural and individual assumptions may affect intercultural communications.
  - Demonstrating respect, analyzing influence of cultural principles, beliefs, and world views on intercultural communication.
  - Exchanging information and speaking effectively in a multicultural, global context present ideas and one’s self in a variety of situations.

- Analyze and evaluate effectiveness of one’s own communication.
- Non-verbal communication.
- Identification of different types of listening for different purposes (e.g., active, enjoyment, and critical)

Specific details for review:

- Page 22, the ‘Note on range and content...’ part ends mid-sentence.
- Page 45, standards #3 and #4 for grades 6 and 7 would be better if switched. The current grade 6 for these seems to be a higher cognitive level than the grade 7.

**ELA Language:**

- The **Language Standards** section should be integrated into the other three areas; conventions need to be a part of writing and vocabulary and should be integrated into reading, writing, and speaking and listening.
  - The research (Braddock (1963), DiStefano and Killion (1984), et.al.) suggests that conventions should not be taught in isolation from writing. They need to be integrated into effective writing instruction.
  - Spelling should incorporate word study/morphology.
  - Spelling is more complex than indicated by the umbrella term ‘convention’.
  - Word study should be included and extended past third grade foundational skills in reading and should include phonology, morphology, and orthography. Just including spelling in the Convention Section is not complete or deep enough.
  - The word choice and style section, as currently written, is related to writing and should be included in the writing section.
- Oral language development needs to be incorporated into the standards and should appear at the beginning of the document since oral language develops before reading and writing.

**ELA Science and Social Studies Integration:**

- Clear; coherent progression evident; well connected to Washington’s revised science standards
- Clarify and expand upon “shared responsibility” – provide examples of how or under what circumstances science and social studies/history teachers could incorporate literacy standards into the curriculum. Further note that students (typically grades 4-12) and post secondary citizens, regardless of college bound, need to acquire the literacy skills needed to read and comprehend disciplinary literacy text.