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Fact Sheet

Common core standards

On August 2, 2010 the State Board of Education adopted California's version of the Common Core (or national) Standards.¹ The SBE's adoption of the Common Core standards was the culmination of intensive work on the part of the state's Academic Content Standards Commission which was established through SBX5-1 (Steinberg) to develop these standards for California.

In the coming months, timelines for implementation of the new standards will be dependent on actions by the legislature to authorize and fund implementation-related activities. These timelines will address the development of curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, professional development and assessments aligned to the Common Core. Additionally, issues such as the relationship between the new Common Core and California's English Language Development standards will also be addressed.

Adoption process

California was required to adopt the proposed Common Core standards by August 2, 2010 in order to obtain the maximum number of points for the federal Race to the Top application. The state was allowed to add up to 15 percent of its own standards to the Common Core. Earlier this year, California enacted SBX5-1 (Steinberg), authorizing the adoption process of the Common Core standards with a goal of adoption by the federal deadline. This legislation established a new Academic Content Standards Commission charged with reviewing the proposed Common Core English language arts and mathematics standards to ensure they build toward college and career readiness and are internationally benchmarked. A list of the 21 commission members, appointed by the governor and Legislature, is available here: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/pn/caacscannnc17jun2010.asp>.

Implementation timelines

Timelines are dependent on actions by the Legislature to authorize and fund implementation-related activities.

Current law restricts the State Board of Education from taking actions on the curriculum frameworks and instructional materials until July 2013.

At the August 2 meeting of the SBE, the commission presented its recommendations and the board unanimously adopted the new standards. President Mitchell charged the Superintendent of Public Instruction and CDE staff to present the State Board with a schedule and plan for implementing the new standards into the state's education system.

In September 2010, the state lost its bid to obtain Race to the Top funding. Without Race to the Top, funding implementation-related activities will need to be supported by the Legislature. Once authorized by the Legislature, the Curriculum Commission will begin the process to create the curriculum frameworks through focus groups, field input and a formal 60-day comment period. The adoption of the new K-8 instructional materials will be based on the State's revised curricular frameworks. For grades 9-12, California does not have a statewide adoption process for instructional materials. However, the state may create a consortium of participating LEAs to conduct a review of the grades 9-12 Mathematics and ELA instructional materials and create a process to help guide districts' purchasing decisions.

Content

Even before the release of the of the Common Core standards, the governor's office and the SPI indicated they would only consider adopting the new standards if they met or exceeded California's current system of rigorous standards. In June and July 2010, the Academic Content Standards Commission examined the proposed Common Core and determined they meet and exceed California's Academic Content Standards, are internationally benchmarked, and prepare students for college and career readiness. According to the RTTT final guidance, states are allowed to add up to fifteen percent of their own standards to their Common Core adoption. Throughout their summer meetings, the Standards Commission determined the allowable 15 percent as part of their recommendation to the State Board. Those recommendations were adopted in August 2010 by the SBE.

The Common Core in its unedited form was built upon other strong states' existing standards and California English language arts standards in particular. The newly adopted standards are fewer in number, greater in depth and better aligned across grade levels than previous California standards.

English language arts

The Common Core is organized in nearly the same way as California's existing standards. Grade level standards are written for each grade K-8, and grade spans for 9-10, 11-12.

Common Core	California standards
Reading	Reading
Writing	Writing
Speaking and Listening	Listening and Speaking
Language	Written and Oral Language Conventions

The Common Core standards place a greater emphasis on increased text complexity, which help students with reading comprehension, and a greater reliance on informational texts such as newspapers, magazines, maps, manuals, etc. Between kindergarten and grade five, it is recommended that 50 percent of text come from traditional sources and 50 percent informational sources. By high school, 30 percent of text should be traditional literature, with 70 percent informational text. In all grades, students must demonstrate the ability to pull evidence from text when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

The final California version of the Common Core standards shifts the focus of writing instruction from narrative to persuasive forms. Previous California standards have primarily focused on narrative styles of writing. The standards now require 40 percent of writing instruction to include arguing with evidence, 40 percent informing and explaining and 20 percent narrative.

In addition, the Common Core includes an emphasis on technical vocabulary, unlike the California standards. Decoding² is extended from third grade to fifth grade. Also included in the Common Core is a mandate to teach certain types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature and the writings of Shakespeare. As part of their 15 percent recommended additions toward the final California adoption, the Standards Commission included penmanship, review of written work, thesis statements, analysis of fallacies in media sources, public speaking and presentations.

Mathematics

The Common Core includes grade level standards for K-8, and the high school standards are organized by strand and not by discipline or course. Within grade levels, the organization is very different from existing California standards. Some examples of those organizational differences are shown in the table, above.

The most significant difference between the California Academic Content Standards and the Common Core standards is the positive advance in the vertical alignment of mathematic concepts across grade levels. This is accomplished by introducing concepts in the early grades, and building upon students' knowledge year by year. The primary example of this scaffolding is the introduction of algebraic concepts in grades K-7, such as fractions and abstract thinking, as prerequisites for Algebra I in eighth grade. While the proposed Common Core standards accommodate and prepare students for Algebra I in eighth grade, the commission chose to give LEAs the option to offer two mathematics courses for eighth graders – algebra I and an eighth grade mathematics course building upon standards and concepts introduced in the sixth and seventh grades to further prepare students for Algebra I.

California standards K-7	Common Core 3rd grade	Common Core 7th grade
Number Sense	Operations & Algebraic Thinking	Ratios & Proportional Relationships
Algebra & Functions	Numbers & Operations in Base 10	The Number System
Measurement & Geometry	Numbers & Operations-Fractions	Expressions & Equations
Stats, Data Analysis & Probability	Measurement & Data	Geometry
Mathematical Reasoning	Geometry	Statistics & Probability

In their current format, the Common Core standards for high school are not organized by course, rather by grade-level span or concept. A third-party organization, Achieve, is working on a plan to align standards with high school courses. The Standards Commission requested that the forthcoming Curriculum Commission ultimately determine the course standards for high school mathematics in California. Advanced placement calculus, advanced placement statistics and probability were added verbatim from current California standards due to the fact that the proposed Common Core did not include these two courses. Additionally, the Common Core standards are anchored in career technical education in an effort to ensure the standards will enable students to be college and career ready upon graduation.

Assessment implications

In September 2010, the federal government granted awards to the Race to the Top Competitive Assessment System Grants. The request for applicants required a consortium to develop assessments aligned to the common standards designed to prepare students for college and careers by the time they graduate from high school. Further, the groups were charged to develop common policies, procedures and definitions (e.g., administration, item release, test security, accommodations, and definition of English learners). Two grant requests were awarded to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) in the amounts of approximately \$170 and \$160 million respectively. California did not sign an MOU with SBAC, a consortium of 31 states and partnered with WestEd.

Instead, California chose to sign an MOU with PARCC, a consortium of 26 states and partnered with Achieve, Inc. PARCC's purposes include:

- To measure and document students' college and career readiness at the end of high school and progress toward this target
- Provide assessments and results that:
 - » Are comparable across states at the student level
 - » Meet internationally rigorous benchmarks
 - » Allow valid measures of student longitudinal growth
 - » Serve as a signal for good instructional practices
- To support multiple levels and forms of accountability including:
 - » Decisions about promotion and graduation for individual students
 - » Teacher and leader evaluations
 - » School accountability determinations
 - » Determinations of principal and teacher professional development and support needs
 - » Teaching, learning and program improvement
- To address all students, including English learners and students with disabilities

California's public institutions of higher education have worked closely with staff at CDE throughout their involvement with PARCC. The consortium plans to implement their assessment program by the 2014-15 school year. As a participating state, California will continue to provide input into the development process, however it is uncertain at this time if the state will be prepared to fully implement a statewide assessment, aligned to the California-specific version of the Common Core, at the local level by that deadline.

Implications for governance teams

Local governance teams should monitor the activity of the SBE regarding the implementation of the Common Core standards and related assessments. Meeting agendas, minutes and materials are available on the California Department of Education's website, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/>. Live streaming of meetings is now also available. Local governance teams may wish to participate in the various stages of the curriculum framework and instructional materials adoption process. Governance teams also need to begin the planning process for phasing in implementation of new curriculum in their schools as the content of the Common Core does differ from California's previous standards. This may include developing a strategy and resources for implementing effective professional development. CSBA will continue to provide updates as new information becomes available.

Conclusion

To date, 41 states have adopted a version of the Common Core standards based on The Common Core State Standards Initiative. The universal adoption of common (or national) standards may raise the level of quality for all students in the United States and will certainly lead to greater professional development opportunities across states, and lower the cost of curriculum and instructional materials.

However, despite these potential positive advances, several cautions remain. Now that standards have been adopted, a new governance structure will be needed going forward to guide such activities as a regular revision process and to define the fifteen percent of each state's personalization of the standards. Perhaps the most serious caution regarding the implementation of the Common Core standards is that California does not have a teaching force ready to teach the new standards. High quality, intensive professional development for teachers, administrators and staff will be critical to the success of students learning the new standards. This type of professional development is costly and will take significant time to develop – both issues the state lacks the capacity and ability to address. Over the next several years, teacher preparation programs will also need to adjust their course offerings and incorporate the new standards for credential candidates.

In 1997, as the previous Standards Commission was finalizing the current California Academic Content Standards, CSBA testified that "In order to do more than just pay lip service to the rigor of the standards, it is essential that we begin the discussion now about how the state and school districts will build the infrastructure to ensure that all students, not just some students, will meet those standards." That statement is as true today regarding the Common Core as it was in 1997 when California first adopted academic content standards.

Resources

California Academic Content Standards and Curriculum Frameworks: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/>

California Academic Content Standards Commission: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/pn/caacsc.asp>

California State Board of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/>

Common Core State Standards Initiative: <http://www.corestandards.org>

Race to the Top – California: <http://www.caracetothetop.org>

Race to the Top – USDOE: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>

Endnotes

- 1 In June 2010 the collaborative known as The Common Core State Standards Initiative released their K-12 mathematics and English language arts standards aimed at college and career readiness. California representatives participated in the Initiative, a state-led effort launched more than a year ago by state leaders, including governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia, through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers.
- 2 decoding: A series of strategies used selectively by readers to recognize and read written words. The reader locates cues (e.g., letter-sound correspondences) in a word that reveal enough about it to help in pronouncing it and attaching meaning to it.