



Common Core State Standards Initiative

Summary of Public Feedback on the Draft College- and Career- Readiness Standards for English-Language Arts and Mathematics

The point of the state-led effort to create common academic standards is simple: improving teaching and learning to ensure that high school graduates in *every* part of the nation have the knowledge and skills they need for college or a career. The process is designed to produce standards that are research and evidence-based as well as internationally benchmarked. If students meet these new rigorous and clear standards, they will have better choices in their lives and the nation will be more competitive in today's global economy.

State leaders clearly understand that these common academic expectations are the essential building block to significantly improve education for all students. They are also listening carefully to a variety of audiences to make sure the new Common Core State Standards provide the excellence and clarity that educators and students require. To this end, a draft of the common core standards was available for public comment between September 21 and October 21, 2009.

Below, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provide highlights from the public feedback on the draft college- and career-readiness Common Core State Standards for English-language arts and mathematics.

Background

This summer, two [work teams](#)—one for English-language arts (ELA) and one for mathematics—created the first drafts of the college- and career-readiness Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Team members were selected for their content knowledge and extensive experience with standards. Many of the work team members began their careers as classroom teachers and have extensive experience setting standards and aligned assessments.

Using an iterative process, the organizations have shared ever-stronger drafts with larger and larger audiences. Please [click here](#) to view a graphic display of the standards development process. The major steps include:

- Work teams create first draft standards in early summer;
- [Content experts](#) (for example, mathematicians and mathematics educators reviewed the mathematics standards) examine first draft standards;
- Working teams use comments to revise standards during July 2009;
- States and national organizations review and comment on second draft of the standards during August 2009;

- Work teams use feedback to revise standards;
- Drafts made available for public comment during September and October 2009 (a summary of the feedback begins on page 2 of this report);
- The process continues, with [K-12 Work and Feedback Teams](#) soliciting and considering state, national organization, and public feedback as they finalize the college- and career-readiness standards and develop the K-12 standards; and
- A [Validation Committee](#) provides advice to the entire process and products of the initiative.

Highlights of Public Feedback

The feedback represents the opinions of more than 1,000 people. There were 988 online surveys completed via www.corestandards.org, and in many cases, a single response represents the input of multiple individuals. In some cases, people worked together to submit feedback, and multiple names are listed on a single survey response. Other times, an authorized person submitted a response representative of the opinions of hundreds of members of an organization. In addition, some organizations convened focus groups for the purpose of soliciting opinions, which were submitted by the organization as a single, synthesized response. And finally, beyond the online submissions and not reflected in those numbers, about three dozen groups or individuals submitted feedback directly to NGA or CCSSO.

Who Responded?

The respondents self-identified and were able to select multiple categories. Keeping in mind that a single one of the 988 respondents might actually represent many people, it is not always possible to know whether a respondent considers herself both a teacher and a professor or whether two people worked jointly to complete the survey. With these caveats, the respondents identified themselves in the following categories:

- 53 percent as educators and another category;
- 29 percent as content experts;
- 28 percent as teachers;
- 22 percent as parents and another category;
- 3 percent as parents only;
- 14 percent as professors;
- 10 percent as school district staff;
- 8 percent as students and another category;
- 1 percent as students; and
- 5 percent as state education agency staff.

(The percentages exceed 100 percent because people identified themselves in multiple categories.)

What Types of Comments Were Submitted?

Survey respondents were given the option to submit comments specific to particular ELA standards, mathematics standards or general comments on either set of standards. Most comments submitted were overall or general comments. To summarize, there were:

- 255 general comments about the ELA standards;
- 87 comments on one or more specific ELA standards;
- 169 general comments about the mathematics standards;
- 96 comments on one or more specific mathematics standards; and
- 359 respondents commented on some element of both the ELA and mathematics standards.

Themes Across Content Areas

Most of the comments were specific to either mathematics or ELA, but a few topics surfaced in the comments in both content areas.

The Importance of a Standards-Based System

Many respondents said that while it is important to get the standards right, standards are only one part of a complex system. Respondents said it is important to build an assessment system that measures fairly what is important and gives teachers timely information. They spoke to the necessity of having a robust curriculum that is aligned to the standards and also allows individuals to maximize their potential beyond meeting the standards. Respondents stressed the need for professional development designed to better equip the existing teaching force and for teacher preparation programs that seek out the best and brightest candidates, prepare them well, and support them as they start teaching.

Some respondents took the opportunity to share grievances and concerns not specific to either content area and beyond the scope of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Most of these are isolated comments on a unique topic.

Anti-Standard or Anti-Testing Sentiments

There was no statement directly against the Common Core State Standards, but a few respondents expressed the idea that a focus on standards comes at the expense of developing individual students. It was also stated that standards do little to improve education but rather drain money away from the classroom and feed bureaucracy.

Standards Writing Process

Some respondents questioned the process used to draft the standards. There were comments about whether the process could have been more transparent and complaints that too few classroom teachers were involved in the writing process. There were also concerns about possible conflicts of interest because some team members are associated with the testing industry.

Reactions to the College- and Career-Readiness English-Language Arts Standards

A number of respondents, most often classroom teachers, found the standards to be exemplary. As one teacher states, “These standards are excellent! They are relevant, realistic, and rigorous. The format of the document itself is user-friendly; this is great work! Thank you!”

The majority of respondents reacted favorably to the standards but want adjustments.

“Less is More” versus “More is Better”

Respondents conceptually embrace the idea of “fewer, clearer, higher” standards. However, most also suggest the standards be expanded in one or more areas. Respondents suggested dozens of topics that could also be added or expanded, but rarely is it suggested that a topic be eliminated or minimized. Among the topics suggested to be added to the standards are 1) civic readiness; 2) applied learning; 3) awareness of author strategies; 4) collaboration; 5) oral and written language development specific to disciplines; 6) the way that gender, race, class, and culture shape our textual interpretations; 7) ability to navigate in a digital world; 8) differences in formal and information rules among forms of genres; 9) topics and research questions; 10) flexible writing processes; 11) reading for pleasure; 12) viewing skills; and 13) vocabulary development.

There is a predictable relationship between a respondent’s expertise and his or her suggestions. Writing teachers want more specificity about the process, types, and purposes of writing woven into the Common Core State Standards; librarians tend to be more sensitive to the opportunities and demands created by the online environment; and reading teachers offer much more detailed and specific standards related to teaching reading.

Make the Study of Literature and a Defined Reading List Explicit

A number of respondents cited two connected additions to the standards: the importance of having a literature standard and the importance of including a defined reading list. Respondents believe that it is through literature that students come to understand the possibilities of language, gain access to the major genres, find models of style and syntax for their own writing, and develop historical and philosophical knowledge. Some respondents believe that defining great books that all students should read is a core piece of this teaching. They express a concern that the emphasis of the draft standards is reductive and too focused on the workplace.

Reactions to the Mathematics Standards

The reactions to the draft mathematics standards are generally positive. Although respondents identified many items to adjust, this seems to be a standards document most respondents find acceptable. For a few, either the idea of common state standards or the Common Core document itself unleashed uncontrolled enthusiasm. In the words of one teacher, “THANK YOU for creating standards! I’m a math teacher, and am thrilled to be held to the same standard as other math teachers in other states. Thank you, thank you, thank you...”

Differing Opinions about the Content to Include

The theme around which there seems to be the most tension is in trying to sort out how much math it really takes to be prepared for life beyond high school and the nature of that math. Defining exactly what content prepares students for entry-level, credit-bearing college courses and workforce training programs and does not unduly burden other students is complicated.

Opinions divide along the lines of those who are connected to higher education and those who are not. The respondents who teach at the college level indicated that the standards lack key content, including 1) solutions of systems of linear equations with two or more variables using determinants; 2) solutions of systems of quadratic equations; 3) exponential equations; 4) logarithms; 5) solution of polynomial equations; 6) binomial theorem; 7) permutations and combinations; 8) trigonometric functions and identities; 9) analytic geometry; 10) analytic geometry (distance formula, midpoint formula, translation of axes, distance from point to a line); 11) parametric and polar equations; 12) conic sections (equations for parabola, circle, ellipse, hyperbola); and 13) complex numbers.

Other respondents, including high school teachers and those who work in vocational fields, see the content in the standards and model problems to be well beyond what is needed by work-bound students or those going on to non-technical study at the college level. Specific examples of content suggested for removal from the standards includes 1) completing the square, 2) graphing linear inequalities with two variables, 3) solving sets of equations with three variables, 4) conditional probability, and 5) modeling using probability and statistics.

Standards Organization

There were also many comments on the organization of the standards. Many respondents are pleased with the current organization of the document, and those who are not disagree on how it should be improved.

Comments include concerns that the 10 content standards form artificial breaks in the subject of mathematics; that the topics of mathematics would be better served if some of the standards were collapsed; that some topics are actually subtopics given artificial status by the current organization; and that some strand names should be changed to better reflect the content.

There is also concern that the standards document does not indicate which topics deserve priority because of their importance. Some respondents worry that the document suggests a false priority because different topics are written at different levels of specificity. This means that for some topics there are numerous standards that over emphasize the amount of content connected to the standards. Intended or not, the absence or presence of detail establishes priorities.

Concerns with Problems

Respondents felt that the example problems are central to conveying the intentions of the standards. There were many comments on the example problems, including 1) comments related to the level of rigor the problems represent, 2) suggestions for improving the both the

existing problems, and 3) a call to increase the pool of problems available. There is confusion around the purpose the example problems should serve. Most people see them as illustrative, but more than a few respondents questioned a problem's suitability for a high-stakes assessment environment.

The overriding theme is that respondents want more and better example problems, available in multiple formats.

Consistency and Accuracy

Another theme is about consistency and accuracy. Respondents described what they perceived as mathematical flaws, imprecise language, and slips in the internal consistency of the document.

Respondents identify instances when mathematical aspects of the standards lack the appropriate degree of precision. Some comments referred to an erroneous or too-broad use of a mathematical term, some comments offered a more stringent definition of a mathematical phrase, and some comments identified inconsistent uses of the same term.

Respondents noted that the structure of the document is not completely parallel. For example, the names of the strands are different types of things. "Statistics" is an area of study; "Modeling" can be described as "how one does mathematics;" and "Functions" is a basic concept in the field of mathematics. In another example, the strands do not have the same supporting elements. For a case in point, the standards document states that it looks to future topics, but only in the area of "Probability" are those topics actually stated.