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## 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.

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### Background

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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;

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- 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.

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### **Highlights of Public Feedback**

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The feedback represents the opinions of more than 1,000 people. There were 988 online surveys completed via [www.corestandards.org](http://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.)*

### 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.

# Reactions to the March 2010 Draft Common Core State Standards: Highlights and Themes from the Public Feedback

## Common Core State Standards Initiative Background

In June 2009, 48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia, coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), committed to developing a common core of state standards in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for grades K-12. The purpose of this state-led initiative, Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), is to create a rigorous set of shared standards that states can voluntarily adopt. The standards are crafted to “define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so they graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and workforce training programs.” The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are designed to:

- align with college and work expectations;
- be clear, understandable and consistent;
- include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- be informed by other top performing countries; and
- be grounded in research and evidence.

As with any such undertaking, the work is iterative. Early drafts of the standards were shared with the states, professional organizations, content experts, teachers, civil rights groups, and representatives from institutions of higher education as a way to solicit input from a wide range of stakeholders. Each round of feedback served to inform and strengthen subsequent internal drafts.

On March 10, 2010, a draft of the K-12 standards was posted online for public feedback. This offered the public an opportunity to provide input on the draft standards to the writing teams. By design, this was not a scientific, representative survey, and the results are not necessarily predictive of general public opinion.

*Nearly 10,000 people provided feedback on the March 10 draft standards.*

Nearly 10,000 individual online surveys were completed and submitted. Ninety-two percent of the respondents identified themselves as representing the opinions of an individual rather than a group or organization. Every state and territory is represented in the feedback. Participants identified themselves as:

- K-12 teachers (48 percent);
- parents (20 percent);
- school administrators (6 percent);
- post secondary faculty members or researchers (5 percent);

- students (2 percent); and
- other (2 percent).

Those who checked “other” went on to specify roles such as “librarian,” “early education teacher,” “grandparent,” “retired,” and “reading or math coach.”

Respondents were provided with the option to provide feedback on one content area—ELA or mathematics—or both content areas. They further chose whether to respond generally on a content area; at the more detailed, standard level; or both general and detailed feedback. The survey items were set up using a 4-point scale ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (4). Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents focused on either English language arts or on mathematics and about half responded to both content areas. Most respondents provided general feedback only.

Members of the Standards Work Teams received, read, and considered, all of the feedback data as they worked on the final Common Core State Standards. The following report summarizes the themes and highlights from this feedback.

**Cross Cutting Themes from Written Feedback**

Several themes rose to the top across content areas, grade levels, regions, and types of respondents, suggesting they are widely held opinions. In general, respondents like the CCSS. While many think the standards would be even better with some small changes, three-fourths of respondents give the CCSS high marks.

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Additionally, a majority of respondents see value in having common education standards across the states. For example, one respondent wrote, “clear, aligned national standards are long overdue and should be critical to unifying the patchwork of state and local standards that currently exist. I’m excited about how these standards can support raising the bar for achievement for poor and minority students.”

The draft standards received high marks for clarity. At the same time, the detailed comments included many suggestions to improve the usefulness and clarity of the standards documents. The comments tended to fall into three categories. 1) Many found the documents’ language difficult to follow. Feedback suggests that a glossary is needed for both ELA and mathematics. 2) Respondents also indicated an interest in seeing examples for each standard to ensure they understand the expectations. 3) Respondents also called for more details. While a few see the standards documents as already too long or too wordy, most respondents commented on the need for more clarity, more components, or further development of some aspect of the standards document.

*Many respondents note there are too many standards, particularly in high school mathematics, but also in ELA.*

The call for additional details in the standards does not equate to a call for adding more standards. Many respondents note there are too many standards, particularly in high school mathematics, but also in ELA. Some teachers took the time to count the

number of standards for which they would be responsible and found it to be unreasonable. As one teacher says, "On my school's schedule, I see my students between eighty and ninety days in a school year. That means I have less than two days per standard. Obviously, some of the standards can be overlapped and simultaneously taught, but if I need to reteach any material or slow down for my ELL students or IEP students, there simply is not enough time to cover fifty standards. Also, in the introduction to the standards, it discusses how these standards are only the essentials and should be supplemented. Again, where is that going to fit?"

Some respondents took this opportunity to call for standards to be developed in additional areas. As the following samples indicate, the message is, "include standards for my content area."

- "Add pre-k standards."
- "I am concerned that science and history-social studies exist only as part of English Language Arts. Giving these disciplines cursory attention and incorporating their content into the ELA standards solely to support ELA learning is a grievous error in terms of preparing students for college/careers."
- "In the Social Studies area of reading, geography appears to be un-addressed at this time. In order to have students well prepared for real world situations, an understanding of local, national, and world geography is a must."
- "There should be connections to the arts. Visual and kinesthetic learners can demonstrate reading mastery through art projects and musical performances. Social studies students should make artifacts, wear costumes to depict historical figures, and make art-filled portfolios to use more ways of demonstrating student performance of these standards."
- "Where is world history?"
- "Emphasize spelling, punctuation, grammar."
- "Strengthen digital/information literacy."
- "...I think more needs to be emphasized in the 5 areas of phonemic awareness."
- "Add handwriting."
- "Where is visual literacy?"
- "Not enough emphasis is given to the spoken word and the correction of speech mannerisms that take away from the students ability to speak in a clear, coherent, listenable manner."
- "Where is multicultural education?"

Many respondents' concerns are focused on the implementation of these new education standards. The majority of respondents are comfortable with the quality of the standards, but they want to be sure that enough is done to ensure successful implementation. They want standards that exist as part of a well-supported, cohesive, seamless education system.

*Respondents want standards that exist as part of a well-supported, cohesive, seamless education system.*

Respondents expressed concerns about the availability and cost of aligned curricula. They are concerned about timelines for implementation. There are questions and suggestions related to particular teaching materials and instructional strategies, which some believe should be

embedded into the standards document. There is even mention that the initiative should feed into a common teacher licensure effort. They want to be sure that these standards exist as the engine to a standards-driven system.

Related to this, few respondents believe the current education system is well prepared to meaningfully implement the Common Core State Standards. Local resources and capacity were frequently cited as potential problems. Some suggest the solution lies in the need for phasing in the standards, perhaps one grade level at a time, along with outside resources and outside guidance. Some respondents want guidance on implementation embedded into the CCSS document. This reaction is balanced by respondents who do not want methodology embedded into the standards and are pleased the CCSS leaves implementation to local jurisdictions.

*Few respondents believe the current education system is well prepared to meaningfully implement the Common Core State Standards*

Similarly, many respondents are concerned with assessments and expressed the opinion that common assessments are at least as important as common standards. They are interested in assessments that are less invasive and more useful, although exactly what that means differs among the respondents. Nonetheless, there are strong feelings about the types and frequency of assessments.

There is a theme around the impact of the CCSS on gifted students, special education students, English language learners, and/or economically disadvantaged students. There was a strong reaction to the idea that ALL students should meet the standards, with numerous comments similar to "Special Education modifications are needed." A second group of comments is from respondents who suggest that the standards do not go far enough to specifically address the needs of the gifted, English learners or special education students.

In addition to the widely held themes, there were three messages that were clearly linked to specific groups of respondents. These three themes - no federal standards, opposition to the K-3 standards, and a call to establish health standards - are outlined below.

A significant number of respondents oppose all federal standards, which they perceive the CCSS to be, and, in some cases, all forms of standards. The community of parents who home school their children feel very strongly that any standard not perceived as local is problematic. Many of these respondents see this initiative as a first step toward a required national curriculum and loss of parental freedom. Many versions of, "This is simply not a government function," were posted.

A second group of respondents believe the standards are developmentally inappropriate. Parents from this group are concerned that "children are being pushed too hard to meet standards at too early an age.... It is too much to ask 5, 6 and even some 7 year olds to sit at a desk and learn all these things. We need to let our young children be young children."

A third group of respondents pressed hard to establish health standards. While many expressed an interest in expanding the CCSSI to additional areas such as pre-kindergarten, media literacy, or the arts, the hundreds of responses that included very similar language calling for health standards are notable and indicative of an organized effort.

### **Educators' General Reactions to English Language Arts**

Most respondents chose to answer only the general questions and to add explanations to some of their questions rather than respond to the specific sections for the ELA standards.

The headline for English language arts is that, at both the general and detailed level of feedback, the majority of the educators<sup>1</sup> reacted positively or very positively to every standard and every question. While there were numerous suggestions for small word changes or grade level adjustments for identified topics, the number of the criticisms paled in comparison to the overall positive reaction.

Educators reacted positively to all of the following general questions:

- Students meeting these standards will be well prepared for success in college or the workplace after high school.
- Overall, the standards represent a clear and coherent vision of English language arts.
- The architecture and design of the standards is easy to use and follow.
- The language is clear and easily understandable for educators.
- The College and Career Readiness Standards for Reading (page 7) are clear, focused, and appropriate.
- The College and Career Readiness Standards for Writing (page 15) are clear, focused, and appropriate.
- The College and Career Readiness Standards for Speaking and Listening (page 19) are clear, focused, and appropriate.
- Overall, the Introduction is clear and provides a good overview of the intent of the standards.
- The section on the college- and career-ready student accurately portrays the characteristics exhibited by a student ready for success after high school.
- The key design considerations are an appropriate description of what the standards do, and should do.

### **Educators' Specific Feedback on English Language Arts**

Educators also reacted favorably to the detailed questions related to the ELA standards, with at least two-thirds of them registering strong or very strong approval.

Many of the respondents who chose to respond to the detailed questions took the opportunity to add additional comments for each section of the document. Most comments were detailed suggestions about grade placement of particular standards or suggestions for ways to rewrite

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<sup>1</sup> Includes teachers, professors, principals, mathematics coaches, etc. In short, everyone except those who self-identified as parents or grandparents.

or expand certain standards. The following section highlights the major themes that could be pulled from the specific comments.

*Respondents want a broader range of examples that cover different genres, contexts, and stages of development.*

The Range and Level of Text Complexity sections in Appendix A confused many respondents. There were questions about how to use it and the research behind it. This quote captures a frequently expressed sentiment: “The range and level of text complexity is unclear. How are we instructing students that do not yet meet standard? Why instruct most students above their reading level in content areas?”

Respondents are pleased that writing samples are included in Appendix C, but are not completely comfortable with the current exemplars. They want a broader range of examples that cover different genres, contexts, and stages of development. They want the context explained so that the conditions under which the writing was produced are clear.

Not everyone appreciates the grade band organization. Many respondents think that every grade level needs to be separate. As one unhappy respondent explained, “Treating grades 9 and 10 as a unit (and doing the same with 11 and 12) makes vertical alignment a nightmare.”

### **Educators’ General Feedback on Mathematics**

Similar to English language arts, the reactions to the mathematics standards were very positive. At least three-fourths of educators, from pre-kindergarten through higher education, reacted positively or very positively to each of the general topics.

A majority of educators agree or strongly agree that the College- and Career-Readiness Standards accurately portray the characteristics exhibited by a student ready for success after high school. Twenty-five percent of respondents who disagree that the standards are set at the appropriate level of rigor, do so for a variety of reasons but are split between whether they are too high or too low. Some think that the standards are fine for those headed for university, but irrelevant for the student who is interested in a career technical education field. Others expressed concern that the expectations are set too high for most college-bound students and only appropriate for those headed into science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) careers. A third group believes that particular chunks of content, currently identified as STEM, should be required for all students. And finally, a fourth group believes there is essential content, currently omitted, that needs to be included for both groups of college-bound students.

**Educators like the architecture and design of the mathematics standards. They describe the document as easy to use and follow.**

Educators like the architecture and design of the mathematics standards. They describe the document as easy to use and follow. That said, there were also requests for language that is easier to understand and translate into practice. More specifically, some educators would like to see a document that is

easier to understand with simple language, more detail, more information, and more examples.

Educators think the *Introduction* is clear and provides a good overview of the intent of the standards. The mathematical practices were particularly appreciated. Most educators see the process standards as incorporated into the content standards, although some want this aspect to be more explicit and more like those in the National Council of the Teachers of Mathematics' *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*.

Educators agree that the *Key Design* considerations are an appropriate description of what the standards do, and should do. There is strong agreement that the standards define "what" and "when" content is taught, and avoid describing "how" it should be taught.

The mathematical *Practices* sections of the standards document were well received with about two-thirds of the educators strongly supporting or supporting every section. They are viewed as clearly written, focused on key content, and appropriately rigorous. Some respondents suggested the practices be part of every grade level and integrated into the content. Those who criticized usually suggested bringing the practices into closer alignment with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) by adding a section or two (e.g., problem solving, reasoning). Some awarded low marks because they do not see the mathematical practices as well enough embedded throughout the content strands.

Educators embrace the idea of fewer topics. Many are relieved that they will be responsible for fewer standards and be able to spend the time necessary to teach a topic well. Some worry that there are still too many standards and that the CCSS does not fix the "mile wide" issue.

**Without explicitly saying so, educators gravitate toward a curriculum that revisits concepts and topics across grades.**

And yet, many educators suggest ways to add to the number of standards.

Without explicitly saying so, educators gravitate toward a curriculum that revisits concepts and topics across grades. Although none of the feedback questions addressed this topic, many educators offered suggestions that moved the standards in that direction. They suggest adding foundational skills in earlier grade levels and continuing practice to maintain skills in subsequent grade levels.

Respondents also suggest that new topics such as economic literacy be built into the CCSS. They identify "critical" areas that should be expanded or developed. Rarely does someone suggest a topic be removed.

**Educators' Specific Feedback on Mathematics**

Specific feedback on the mathematics standards can be broken up into three sections: the elementary grades (K-5), the middle school grades (6-8), and the high school grades (9-12).

*Elementary teachers are most alarmed that "patterning" is missing.*

Elementary teachers are most alarmed that “patterning” is missing. Many of the respondents asked that it be added back in the standards at every grade level, even as they suggest removing the Properties of Arithmetic. (Rather than “Algebra as patterns,” the CCSS emphasizes “Algebra as generalized arithmetic,” and so the Properties of Arithmetic are the appropriate precursor to Algebra.) The following comments show the range of topics educators would reintroduce to the standards.

- “Where is patterning? This is the basis of the Algebra strand and it seems to be non-existent.”
- “Repeating and growing pattern recognition and generalization are not explicitly stated in the K-3 mathematics standards. Need for students to recognize, generalize, and extend.”
- “Why is there no skip counting in 1st grade, but in 2nd grade?”

The reaction to the term “standard algorithm” was strong and split. Some educators embraced the idea as “a return to sensibility.” Others are troubled by the idea that standard algorithms are required, with a few respondents even taking exception to the notion that “standard algorithms” actually exist. At the extremes, educators worry that teaching the standard algorithm means students forego the opportunity to understand the mathematics and mathematicians worry that foregoing the standard algorithm locks students out of higher mathematics.

Related to this topic, some respondents felt the CCSS generally tilted toward procedural expertise at the expense of conceptual understanding. Some suggest that consolidating a topic within one or two grade levels necessitates reducing the topic to learning the procedures rather than developing conceptual understanding.

Although generally positive, middle school comments revealed some of the tension within the mathematics education community around the amount and type of statistics and probability that should be included and disagreements about when it should be taught. Educators disagree about whether this content is more important and should replace the other content. Even among those who want it included, there is little agreement about what content should be removed from the school curriculum to make space.

## **Educators offered wide-ranging and contradictory observations, criticisms, and suggestions.**

Educators reacted positively to the high school standards. They also offered wide-ranging and contradictory observations, criticisms, and suggestions. Educators accept the notion that students want and deserve access to different mathematical content. It seems reasonable that the standards would make clear what is required for all students and also specify the additional topics students interested in continuing on in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) need. Only three respondents expressed concerns related to early tracking of students into specific pathways. Several respondents suggested another pathway be carved out for the “unprepared, uninterested” student.

While respondents agree that STEM/non-STEM pathways make sense, there is less agreement about what content should be in each of the pathways. For example, there is little agreement about who should be required to generate the quadratic formula, which is

currently identified as STEM. Some teachers think the topic should be completely eliminated for everyone. As one teacher states, "I think the quadratic formula needs to go the way of the paper-and-pencil algorithm for roots." Some teachers agree with the CCSS placement because, "Not all students are going to be able to complete the square of a quadratic equation but they can all learn to use the quadratic formula to solve a quadratic equation." Finally, some teachers think the topic should be required for non-STEM. As one teacher said, "Strongly disagree with the following: ... solving quadratics with complex roots is labeled STEM. Let us go deeper for non-STEMs!"

The headline for non-STEM would have to be that CCSS is expecting more than is reasonable or necessary and needs to add more. Many respondents state that the CCSS are too rigorous for the non-STEM student and explain that students do not need all of these skills to enter the workplace or go to college. In some cases the same respondent goes on to suggest ways the content load could and should be increased. There seemed to be a thread of agreement that non-STEM content should include more geometric proofs; matrices because of the business and spreadsheet application; complex numbers because they are assessed on the ACT exam; simple trigonometric functions; the Binomial Theorem, which can be accessed through Pascal's Triangle; and some arithmetic with polynomials.

The one exception to the tendency to add content is the general agreement that "the level of probability understanding expected for all high school students is too high. Some of the standards need to be a STEM standard or take them out entirely. These are really at the Advanced Placement Statistics level of understanding."

The agreement about the STEM pathway is clearer. Amid the hundreds of unrelated comments on isolated topics are many about arithmetic with polynomials. Most respondents think this area, especially the Remainder Theorem and long division with polynomials, are STEM. There is an effort to protect the STEM students' time to build a solid preparation for college. To that end respondents identify topics (e.g., 3-dimensional vectors, statistics) that should wait until college.

## **Conclusion**

The feedback is, overall, very good news for the standards developers. Respondents like the draft standards. The calls for the standards to be a bit more clear and easier to use were accompanied by hundreds of conflicting suggestions on ways to improve the standards. There are concerns about assessment and about how the standards will be implemented. There are requests for additional guidance and support in this area. However, all in all, the Common Core State Standards are seen as an important step in the right direction.

**Draft K-12 Common Core State Standards**

**Wisconsin Response to Questions for State Feedback**

**December 4, 2009**

1. **Is the architecture of the draft standards clear and easy to follow? How can we ensure the documents are designed to be accessible for all audiences?**

- **The documents need a gestalt—a cohesive vision for each discipline in a broad sense.**
  - The document promotes a checklist of isolated skills rather than the depth of understanding that comes with an integrated view of a discipline.
  - Attached are examples from Wisconsin's draft revisions to model academic standards in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics illustrating a vision for each discipline.
- **The documents need a shared vocabulary and architecture.**
  - Each discipline is organized differently, making cross-disciplinary conversations and vertical team discussions very difficult .
  - To help teachers work in vertical teams across grades PK-12 within a discipline and in cross-disciplinary teams, the standards documents need common structure and terms, both across grade levels and across disciplines. Elementary teachers will have to deal with both disciplines and therefore need standards documents with consistent terminology and architecture.
  - Both documents need a clear identification of the overarching standards and a consistent organization used by each discipline.
    - The mathematics document is organized around core concepts and core skills, placed next to each other under the "progression heading," but never identifying what are the "standards."
    - The ELA document is organized around key achievements, core skills, and core skills applied to core text or communication types. For K-3 the document provides alphabetic and print, language, and writing foundations. Again, the "standards" are not identified.
- **The documents need an overview of the progression of a skill.**
  - In mathematics, the current architecture makes each grade level appear to stand alone, lacking connections across the grades.
  - In ELA, the foundations document has the same grade-by-grade stand alone structure.

## Sample Illustrating a Vision for English Language Arts

<p><b>PK-12 Standards: RECEPTIVE</b></p> <p>Students listen to, read, and view multiple types of texts using various evolving technologies and strategies. With these texts, students will engage in critical, creative, and reflective thinking to achieve diverse purposes within local, national, and world communities.</p>	<p><b>Learning Priority</b></p> <p>Engage with, respond to, analyze, interpret, and evaluate local, national, and world literature from various periods</p>	<p><b>Focus Areas</b></p>	<p><b>Grades PK-2 Learning Continuum</b></p>
<p>Recognize relationships between and among texts</p>	<p>Attend to modeling of making text to self, text to text, and text to world connections</p>	<p>Make text to self, text to text, and text to world connections</p>	<p>Identify and examine literary elements (e.g. setting, plot, characters, etc.)</p>
<p>Analyze genre conventions and literary devices</p>	<p>Engage in reading through structured activities (e.g. read alouds, shared reading, listening centers, etc.)</p>	<p>Engage in independent reading and discussion outside of structured activities and assigned reading.</p>	<p>Seek texts for listening, viewing, and reading based on the student's own criteria</p>
<p>Interpret text through the lens of history, society, ethics, and culture</p>	<p>Choose texts for listening, viewing, and reading from recommendations provided (e.g. teacher sharing and modeling)</p>	<p>Engage in independent reading and discussion outside of structured activities and assigned reading.</p>	<p>Seek texts for listening, viewing, and reading based on the student's own criteria</p>
<p>Develop a habit of reading a variety of texts</p>	<p>Choose texts for listening, viewing, and reading from recommendations provided (e.g. teacher sharing and modeling)</p>	<p>Engage in independent reading and discussion outside of structured activities and assigned reading.</p>	<p>Seek texts for listening, viewing, and reading based on the student's own criteria</p>
<p>Select a variety of texts for enjoyment and enrichment</p>	<p>Choose texts for listening, viewing, and reading from recommendations provided (e.g. teacher sharing and modeling)</p>	<p>Engage in independent reading and discussion outside of structured activities and assigned reading.</p>	<p>Seek texts for listening, viewing, and reading based on the student's own criteria</p>

*Save file  
W1 draft  
Standards  
for ELA*

Sample w/ Draft standards for ELA

## Sample Illustrating a Vision for Mathematics

PK-12 Standard: Concepts and Connections in Number and Algebra Grades 9-12: Algebraic Reasoning (Algebra, Number and Operations, Data Analysis)		Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
<b>Learning Priority</b>  <b>Learning Priority NA1:</b> Represent and communicate with real numbers when solving mathematical, real world, and non-routine problems	<b>Focus Area</b> <b>Order</b>	Compare and order positive rational numbers with symbols ( $>$ , $<$ , $\leq$ , $\geq$ , $\neq$ , $\approx$ ); represent their location on a number line  Understand and apply the conventions for algebraic order of operations  Describe what it means for a number to be between two numbers	Use understanding of integers and negative rational numbers to locate and order these numbers on a number line	Compare and order irrational numbers and represent their approximate location on a number line
	<b>Properties</b>	Recognize and use the properties of operations, including associative, commutative, distributive, and identity, and identify which properties are true for which operations  Describe the effect of multiplying or dividing a number by one, by a number between zero and one, and by a number greater than one  Understand that division by zero is undefined		Understand absolute value  Apply distributive and other properties to integer and rational expressions in problem solving situations
	<b>Order of Operations</b>	Understand and apply the conventions for algebraic order of operations to equations and expressions without and with variables		Extend and apply the conventions for algebraic order of operations to algebraic expressions
	<b>The Concept of Inverse Relationships</b>	Recognize and apply the inverse relationships of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division  Understand and use the opposite and reciprocal of a rational number	Extend understanding of inverse relationships, opposites, and reciprocals to integer and rational number operations	Explore, explain and apply the inverse relationship between squares and square roots  Recognize common right triangle triples (e.g., 3, 4, 5) in the context of the Pythagorean Theorem and its converse

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**Specific to English language arts:**

- Need a glossary and a hierarchy of the terminology used in the document (skills, standards, achievements, foundations, etc.) and clear idea of what *are* the “standards” and what are the supporting materials.
- One individual from our Wisconsin writing team noted, “It is difficult to see a cohesive, progressive vision that pushes thinking about ELA forward when I am forced into the old paradigm of pulling apart the skills of reading, writing speaking, etc. that we *know* are truly interconnected processes.”

**Specific to Mathematics:**

- **The mathematics document is missing some of the important “Big Ideas” of mathematics.**
  - The current articulation of the Core Concepts is inconsistent and often represents a list of skills to be mastered even though there is also a list of Core Skills. The architecture of the mathematics standards is promising, but lacks consistency and a cohesive perspective. Teachers need to know how discrete skills fit together as a cohesive whole.
  - The opening section, ‘Developing Coherent Understanding,’ presents an important overview of the grade level and is a strength of the K-5 document; however, there needs to be a strong connection between the overview and the Concepts and Skills for each grade level. Unfortunately, these narrative sections are often not consistent with nor supported by the lists of concepts and skills. While it is fine that they do not address all of the concepts and skills, it would seem reasonable that they at least address each of the core areas at each grade level.
  - The big ideas of mathematics seem to get lost in the midst of a list of skills to be mastered. Too many of the concepts appear to be miniscule pieces of knowledge or specific skills that students should acquire. The concepts need to be worded to bring out the big mathematical ideas.
- **The relationship between the Core Concepts and the Core Skills is unclear.**
  - Attention to clearly identifying the important core concepts and then aligning the skills to each core concept would provide much needed clarification. The concern is that teachers will ignore the concepts and only directly teach skills to students.
- **There needs to be a view of the standards across grade bands, not just at individual grade levels.**
  - The current architecture makes each grade level appear to stand alone, lacking connections across the grades.
  - The concern is that when the standards (concepts and skills) are not seen as part of a learning continuum or learning progression, they end up as a checklist of skills that students cover, rather than a coherent whole, connecting across grade levels and across mathematical topics.
  - It appears that the skills are to lead to the development of the concepts, but the connection between the concepts and skills is not clear, nor is it clear how one will lead to another. A grid format showing progressions across the grades will

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certainly be helpful to begin to see the development of mathematical ideas across the grades.

- There is an intention of taking a mathematical idea and showing how it develops within and across grades and builds sound understanding of this idea in elementary school. However the intention does not succeed in accomplishing its goal. For example, sound knowledge of place value is not apparent. Rather, the focus appears to be on individual digits rather than on the big ideas of place value. By pulling the topic apart to list certain skills at each grade level, the important ideas and richness of place value is lost. Problem solving and contextual situations are often lost and not connected to the learning of computation.
- **This document needs to include pre-kindergarten/early childhood.**
  - The recent release of the National Research Council Report, *Mathematics Learning in Early Childhood (2009)*, must be considered as part of the elementary learning continuum.
  - The section on “Precursors for Kindergarten Mathematics” is appreciated due to the growing importance and need for sound mathematics goals in prekindergarten programs.

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**2. In what ways does this early draft convey a coherent vision of the discipline? What else is needed to enhance a coherent vision?**

- **These documents outline discrete, compartmentalized instruction rather than the big ideas.**
  - The documents read more like a curriculum-level list of skills rather than a vision of the discipline focused by fewer and clearer standards.

**Specific to English language arts:**

- **No mention is made of viewing and representing.**
  - Students must be knowledgeable about the use of media and technology as tools to further learning. Also, texts such as web texts, multiplatform books, graphic novels, visual displays, and models are not included.
- **Only small attention is paid to speaking and listening.**
  - There is no mention of the connectivity among the processes of speaking and listening.
- **Differing approaches to the discipline are evident**
  - Some grade bands emphasize the recursive nature of ELA, while other grade bands emphasize incremental changes.
    - Specifically, the Core Skills in Reading at K-3 and 4-5 appear to be recursive in nature. They are nearly identical at the two levels, honoring the recursive nature of a skill like reading, indicating that students continue to learn and relearn skills with increasingly difficult text. However, the set of Core Skills change quite a bit in 6-8 showing that the authors truly believe that the reading skills a child is developing really are the same across K-5 and make a significant shift in grade 6.

**Specific to Mathematics:**

- **The document needs an explicit infusion of the strands of mathematical proficiency across the concepts and skills.**
  - We understand that there is an intention to include mathematical practices/processes; however, it is critical that they be infused within each of the concepts and skills, not an add-on.
  - The omission of the mathematical processes and mathematical practices is glaring. Processes and practices must be an integral part of each of the standards at both the core concept and core skill levels.
- **The core concepts and core skills do not seem to be fully aligned with research as noted in the National Research Council's report, *Adding It Up*. The current document lies predominantly in the domain of procedural fluency with little attention and emphasis on the other domains of mathematical proficiency.**
  - Neither skills nor understanding should be done in isolation from the other. There needs to be an explicit infusion of the stand of mathematical proficiency across the concepts and skills:
    - *conceptual understanding* – comprehension of mathematical concepts, operations, and relations

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- *procedural fluency* – skill in carrying out procedures flexibly, accurately, efficiently, and appropriately
  - *strategic competence* – ability to formulate, represent, and solve mathematical problems
  - *adaptive reasoning* – capacity for logical thought, reflection, explanation, and justification
  - *productive disposition* – habitual inclination to see mathematics as sensible, useful, and worthwhile, coupled with a belief in diligence and one’s own efficacy.
- **There is clearly a lack of a comprehensive vision for preparing students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.**
    - The current version of the K-8 common core state standards for mathematics lacks a coherent and comprehensive vision of student’s mathematics learning and the development of their mathematical proficiency in preparing students with 21st century skills. The current document focuses on procedural fluency with little attention and emphasis on the other domains of mathematical proficiency. The National Research Council’s argument is strong in that it is essential to develop all strands in concert.



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**3. To the extent that the early drafts provide progressions for grade level/grade span expectations, does the document present a rigorous, yet reasonable continuum of expectations?**

- **Rigor seems to be defined by level of skill, rather than level of understanding**
  - The focus on a set of discrete skills seems to miss the goal of defining a clear continuum of expectations. Mastery of a discrete list of skills does not equal conceptual understanding of a discipline.
- **Grain size is at times incredibly small and feels more like a scope and sequence than a set of standards.**

**Specific to English language arts:**

- **The progression of these skills across grade bands is inconsistent and confusing.**
  - Sometimes, there is no progression, and in other places, there is a huge jump between grade band levels. For example, see Reading Core Skills at K-3, 4-5 (no progression) and 6-8(huge jump).
  - The inconsistent grain size of the skills and the artificial decisions about what skill is appropriate in which grade band is problematic. For example, on page 45 of the ELA standards, often skills build across two grade bands by adding a new or unique expectation within the same skill, but this creates a narrowing of the curriculum where it is seen that one can *only* do certain tasks at certain grade levels (grade 6-8), like “drawing on a range of evidence to understand tone, motivation and theme.”
- **Grain size is, at times, incredibly small.**
  - There is a very narrow “foundations document” at grades K-3 in reading, but it does not exist in other places (yet). This grain size is incredibly small and feels more like a scope and sequence than a set of standards.
- **The standards are not “fewer.”**
  - Given all the text, nomenclature, sections, and differing epistemology, the ELA document feels unwieldy and disconnected, with divergent approaches.

**Specific to Mathematics:**

- **The clear view of a continuum or learning progression is missing.**
  - The mathematics document does not show a clear progression across grade bands. We recommend that the writing committee clearly articulate how concepts progress across grades and across grade bands. While the document attempts to present a progression of learning across grades, the progression is more evident in skills and not in concepts. It is essential that, as the National Math Panel Report clearly stated, conceptual understanding and procedural skills are most effectively developed in concert with each continuously supporting the other at all stages and levels of mathematical learning.
  - The usefulness of the mathematics document would be enhanced with an overview/chart showing the learning progression across grade levels for various grade bands. We would recommend considering four grade bands: PK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. As teachers review the mathematics for their particular grade level, it is important to also know what mathematics students have learned at previous levels, as well as

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what mathematics concepts and skills will follow (such as how the prior and later grade bands were summarized in the ELA document).

- **In looking at the topics across grade levels, a major developmental strand that is missing is a progression of key ideas for laying the foundation for algebraic reasoning.**



**4. Is the language in this early draft clear, concise, and precise? Please identify any areas where more concision and precision is needed.**

**Specific to English language arts:**

- **Clearly defined terminology that is used with consistency in all disciplines (skills, standards, achievements, foundations, etc.) would help educators understand the Common Core Standards.**

**Specific to Mathematics:**

- **The language in the mathematics draft is very inconsistent from one grade level to the next, as well as within grade levels.**
  - For example, Grade 2 and 3 uses the phrase “story problems” but in Grades K and 1 the terms are “situation problems” and “problem situations.”
- **While there is an attempt to connect topics grade to grade, the corresponding growth of concepts across levels is not made clear.**
  - It appears that attempts to be precise may have had the opposite effect intended and have made the ideas less accessible and more unclear, especially at the middle level. For example, the concepts listed in Grade 6 and Grade 7, “Ratios, Rates, & Proportional Relationships” are not clear and not concise. More importantly, these proposed “concepts” do not convey the conceptual knowledge and big ideas that students need to be developed. These are not much more than a mathematical definition found in a mathematics textbook and do not contribute to establishing a sense of the conceptual understanding students need to develop.

5. If you could add and/or remove ONE concept or skill, what would it be? Please provide an explanation/justification.

**Add**

**English language arts and mathematics:**

- **Add 21st century skills, e.g., problem solving, collaboration, creating your own information.**
  - To be college and career ready students must demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The message from Wisconsin’s leaders in business and industry, city and county government, and community organizations was to embed the skills that lead to instructional strategies that engage students in learning the discipline, prepare students with the skills needed to be successful in any future education beyond high school, and serve students well in the work force. These skills include critical thinking and problem solving, collaborative communication skills, contextual learning skills (learning how to learn, unlearn, and relearn), personal responsibility, ethics, and adaptability or nimbleness.

**Mathematics:**

- **Technology as a tool of mathematics must be included in this document.**
  - Omission of appropriate use of technology and other tools of mathematics (including manipulatives and measuring tools) has serious implications for both the learning and application of mathematics, PK-12, as well as in post-secondary and career applications. Technology, when used appropriately, contributes to student understanding of rigorous mathematics, provides access to mathematics for more students, and prepares students for the future.

**Remove**

**English language arts:**



- **Remove the illustrative texts; keep only the description of texts, not the actual examples.**
  - Illustrative texts may, for some, become a required reading list. There’s an over abundance of historic and classic texts and a lack of contemporary works. Including student voice and choice in text selection is essential. Concern about the phrase, “texts can only partially represent the cultural diversity of the United States.”

**Mathematics:**

- **Remove core concepts that are stated as mathematical definitions**
  - Concepts must be stated as big mathematical ideas, fundamental understandings, rather than discrete skills.

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**6. Do you have any other general feedback about the draft standards?**

- **Link of the K-12 Common Core Standards with the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) is not clear.**
  - Make clear the target that is represented by the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). It is unclear if the CCRS are meant to represent high school exit expectations, grade nine expectations, or expectations for entering college-level coursework.
  - If, the CCRS are to represent high school exit expectations, the CCRS should match the end of grade 12 standards and the grade level standards in grades K-11 should lead to that set of final expectations.
  - Categories of organization within the CCRS do not match the K-12 Common Core Standards (the only exception is Student Practices in the ELA standards, which do match the comparable section in the CCRS); in Mathematics, the stated intent is to infuse mathematical practices (described in the CCRS); however, they are not evident in the Common Core Standards' concepts and skills.

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**Specific Questions from Mathematics Common Core Writing Team:**

**How should high school material be presented?**

- Use learning progressions to indicate the core concepts and core skills.
- Allow for a variety of course structures and “routes” (traditional sequences, integrated courses, STEM courses).
- To be internationally competitive, do not provide a prescriptive progression that ties standards to courses that are labeled Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II; no other country organizes mathematics this way.
- There needs to be a clear link to the College and Career Readiness Standards, including an integration of the mathematical practices.

**How would you use an arrangement into blocks (with connections between blocks indicated) in designing curriculum in your state?**

- The state would provide model curriculum around the blocks, to illustrate a variety of course structures and “routes.”
- Samples would provide clear direction as to how to incorporate the core skills and core concepts into a variety of high school course options.
- Identify clear learning priorities rather than an outline of topics.
- The current example of the progression seems to be more of a list from a textbook, rather than a standards document to guide teaching and learning.

**Do you want us to indicate different pathways through the high school standards, and, if so, how?**

- No. The standards should be presented as the core concepts and skills that all students need to acquire, regardless of the chosen pathway. In addition, there can be additional mathematics standards for students pursuing STEM, technical, and mathematics-focused post-secondary options.
- States should provide this support for local districts’ implementation, showing how the common core standards can be achieved in a variety of formats or pathways. The task is best left to the states, as each state has different high school graduation requirements and a variety of diploma options.

**General feedback on the sample middle and high school level progression**

- There is an omission of mathematical practices and the mathematical processes
- As with the K-8 document, the concepts at this level seem to be more skill-driven, than concept driven. There needs to be both.
- There is a need for more relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking, including communication, application, and technology as a tool of mathematics.
- Wisconsin’s recent work revising state standards identifies key concepts (learning priorities) and how they are demonstrated by students across a learning continuum. In the example provided here, the labels are Stages 1 through 4 rather than grade levels. The purpose is to indicate benchmarks of progress through a concept rather than assignment to a specific course or grade level. Curriculum will determine the course or grade level where the concept is to be taught and mastered. In addition, under the stages the

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unshaded cells indicate the mathematics that all students need to acquire. The shaded areas indicate the mathematics for students who are pursuing more math-intensive career paths, including STEM, technology, and mathematics. We present the following as an example of how part of one of the learning priorities related to functions could show this learning progression:

## Sample Learning Progression for High School

Learning Priority	Focus Areas	Stage 1:	Stage 2:	Stage 3:	Stage 4:
<p><b>Learning Priority NA2:</b> Understand functions and their representations, properties and applications</p>	Representation of Functions	<p>Explain whether a relation given in symbolic, graphical or tabular form is a function</p>	<p>Identify and summarize properties of different types of functions from their graphs including linear, quadratic, exponential, absolute value, sine and cosine trigonometric functions</p>	<p>Create and interpret different representations including numerical, graphical, and functional notation of the functions in Stage 2</p> <p>Analyze and communicate, with and without the use of technology, the effect of transformations on the graphical representations of different types of functions</p>	<p>Identify, summarize and interpret properties and create different representations of polynomial, step, and other trigonometric functions, including an analysis of even and odd functions</p>
	Basics of Functions	<p>Evaluate a function at a specified point in the domain</p> <p>Understand the concepts of domain and range of functions and determine the domain</p>	<p>Apply arithmetic operations to functions and determine the domain of the resulting function</p>	<p>Determine the range of the function</p> <p>Determine and understand the composition of functions</p> <p>Understand the meaning of the inverse of a function and determine whether a given function has an inverse</p>	<p>Determine the inverse of a function</p> <p>Prove basic properties of logarithms using properties of exponential functions</p>

**Common Core State Standards  
Wisconsin Feedback (April 2, 2010)**

1. The documents still contain too many standards. This becomes especially problematic when considering the impact on assessment.
2. The documents **must** have a common architecture, creating parallel language, structure, and organization for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Both ELA and mathematics will be used by K-5 teachers. In other words, at least half of the teachers using the standards will be using both ELA and mathematics. Consequently, the standards must have the same architecture. As this architecture is designed, the emerging Common Core efforts in science and social studies must be considered. Again, if this common architecture is not addressed, it will result in elementary teachers and perhaps others wading through different content area structures (e.g., ELA, math, science, social studies). When an individual state develops standards, care is to taken to create the same structure because it is the foundation for discussion across the content areas. Part of the “Common Core” should be common language, common structure, common organization.

To achieve this, consider the following:

- a. Use the same definitions of the various “layers” of each discipline’s standards (mathematics uses domain and clusters; ELA uses strands).
- b. The grade level narratives that are given in mathematics are useful to provide an overview to the grade level, but for English language arts, the grade-to-grade differences are minimal, so a narrative overview should be given to each grade

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band (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12). The grade level narratives for mathematics at the high school are currently more like a list of topics than a description of learning about the topic.

3. Including literacy only in history/social studies & science suggests that ELA teachers need to include this content in their classes. We encourage instead a broader emphasis on literacy across all subject areas (arts, world languages, career and technical education, health/physical education, mathematics). We recommend placing these standards either as an appendix to the ELA document or saving them for future development of common core standards for social studies and science. If these standards are still to be included in the ELA Common Core, we recommend:
  - a. Identify who is responsible for these standards
  - b. Show how these standards are connected to ELA instruction as well as instruction in social studies and science classes
  - c. Regardless of whether or not these standards are included in this document, include more elaboration to explain their connection with ELA and answer the question about how these standards would be assessed in ELA and the other subjects.
4. The Common Core Standards need an overarching vision up front that points to applications of knowledge and understanding in order to avoid reading the standards as a skills checklist (necessary to move from current standards to new standards; from current curriculum to new curriculum at LEA-level)
5. A clearer integration of technology applications needs to be embedded in the ELA and mathematics standards. If not explicitly included, this is easily ignored.

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**6. English Language Arts specific:**

- a. The content of the discipline is more than the communication skills learned.

Therefore, the elements detailed in the standards are necessary, but not sufficient in defining the discipline. Communication processes are an important inclusion, but learning about the human experience across time through ELA is left out.

- b. The writing exemplars showcase informational and explanatory writing, but should also include persuasive and creative writing exemplars.

- c. The “Exemplars of Reading Text Complexity and Quality” (Appendix B) becomes a recommended (if not required) list with the addition in the description of “and quality.” In “Appendix B: Illustrative Texts,” we recommend fewer exemplars (perhaps 2-3 per grade, in a variety of genres) and the inclusion of an explanation as to why each was chosen, highlighting the text complexity demonstrated in each. These changes would provide the technical assistance that would help teachers in choosing materials of comparable complexity. Such an approach would mirror what was done in “Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing,” as well as the approach in “Appendix A: The Model in Action: Sample Annotated Reading Texts” (pp. 15-25). It has been noted that there are passages drawn from materials that are listed in the “Appendix B: Illustrative Texts” that have been used or are being considered for future use on NAEP assessments. The use of these passages on NAEP sets the stage for the unintended interpretation of this list as a focus for instruction, leading to limitations on teachers’ instructional decisions.

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- d. The Reading Foundations, unlike other strands, is singled out. This section is described both as standards and as foundational skills. These two terms are not the same and the role of this section must be determined: If the section is standards, the content belongs integrated into the ELA document; if the section is foundational skills, the section belongs in an appendix.

**7. Mathematics specific:**

- a. With the “Standards for Mathematical Practices” (pp. 4-5) relegated to front matter (and not embedded in the actual K-12 standards), the K-12 standards become too much a skills checklist. We recommend clustering the standards into deeper understandings, to connect topics within a grade level and also to show the connections of concepts K-12, such as making more explicit how the K-5 concepts lead to algebraic thinking. Leaving the grade level standards as they are now, the long list could be interpreted as a checklist of isolated skills rather than as concepts to teach for understanding. Clustering will also diminish redundancies such as found in grade 2, Number – Base 10 (#7 & #9 both refer to mental computation and could be combined.)
- b. The language of the standards must strike a balance between a *mathematician's* language and a *mathematics educator's* language in both the Standards for Mathematical Practice and the Grade Level Standards. It is important that the final version uses terms that are mathematically accurate, but not unnecessarily technical, especially critical for teachers of grades K-8.

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- c. As noted earlier, the narrative at the beginning of each grade level is a benefit and needs to reflect the skills, understandings, and mathematical proficiencies to truly ‘tell the story’ of mathematical learning at that level. There needs to be a coherent message that builds across levels. In the public draft version, the high school narratives seem to be more of a list of skills. It would be helpful if the writers would review the narratives side-by-side to ensure the coherence.
- d. The elementary and middle school overview on pages 7 and 8 is very helpful to see how the standards build across grade levels K-5 and 6-8; however, a clear connection is missing to help bridge elementary to middle school. The link of the six domains in grades K-5 to the six domains in grades 6-8 must be explicit (currently only “Geometry” appears in both domain groupings). The recommendation is to identify the specific connections linking elementary grades to middle school and middle school to senior high school. Broad categories that provide K-12 coherence would be helpful, for example
- Number and Algebra
  - Geometry
  - Measurement, Data/Statistics, and Probability
- e. The current learning progression, especially at the elementary level, designates mastery of some skills prior to developmental readiness. This has the potential consequence of focusing instruction on memorizing procedures and skills rather than building an important foundation of understanding. This is especially apparent in the areas of base-ten number, development of relational thinking about all numbers, including fractions, and decimal concepts.



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- f. The focus on ‘the standard algorithm’ continues to be problematic. This narrow definition will likely be interpreted in a very limited way by educators and will not provide access to all students. It is debated what ‘the standard algorithm’ actually means in the international world of mathematics. We suggest that the language be broadened to include multiple algorithms and efficient computational strategies.
- g. Application of mathematical knowledge is very important and seems to be missing from the current draft. Application of mathematics needs to be readily apparent through rich examples in all areas. Most of the standards seem to point to modeling; however, more applications through modeling need to be included. Modeling as a separate standard with no applications is insufficient for this important component of mathematics.
- h. The course pathways section (Appendix A) does not belong in a standards document. These are curriculum and program decisions, not elements of standards. The course pathways are too skills-based and are not neutral, especially when it comes to assessment. The course pathways support end-of-course assessment or the general ACT-type of assessment, whereas the international benchmark (comparison with nations ranking high on international assessment measures) is for integrated maths (in the plural).

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WISCONSIN ASCD  
RESPONSE TO

# Common Core State Standards Draft

April 1, 2010

*Assoc. for Supervision +  
Curriculum Development*



**Wisconsin ASCD is a non-profit,  
non-partisan membership organization  
that represents 750 educators in  
Wisconsin focused on improving  
teaching and learning. Our members span  
the entire profession of educators—  
curriculum leaders, superintendents,  
principals, teachers, professors and  
state education agency personnel.**

Wisconsin ASCD and its parent organization, ASCD, have access to the education experts who will assist school districts in implementing the standards through professional development, leadership, resources and capacity building. We offer the following comments summarized from input by our Board Members— many who consulted their school staffs— representing 21 school districts, 2 colleges and 3 state education agencies in Wisconsin. These comments were also informed by the discussions of 200 education leaders gathered at a symposium on the Common Core State Standards Initiative sponsored by Wisconsin ASCD which included representatives from 98 school districts, 9 colleges and universities, and 12 state education agencies in Wisconsin. ▶▶

*A national test/ assessment system is desperately needed with national cut scores defined by the US Dept. of Ed. instead of each state. Move to a growth model of accountability as part of ESEA reauthorization and make sure growth for all is the goal of entire system. We need to embrace the EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT assessment system because College and Career Readiness Standards are backed by a large body of evidence. They are a credible measure of student achievement, a gatekeeper of higher education regionally and are skills-based not content-based. MAP testing needs to be considered in the assessment conversation.*

*We have kept the 19th century model; time is finite and learning is not.*

*This era is about instruction, assessment and standards. Why did Wisconsin join the Common Core Initiative? To compete globally and ensure economic success. This will help us with the "how" of teaching, not the "what." – Tony Evers, Wisconsin State Superintendent*

*Every student must be a critical thinker, problem solver, innovator, effective communicator, collaborator, self-directed learner. Each student must also be information and media literate, globally aware, civically engaged and financially and economically literate. – Paul Sandrock, WI Dept of Public Instruction*

*Funding is all about competitive grant programs now versus providing equity. This is a change the Obama administration is bringing to education. – David Griffith, ASCD Director of Public Policy*

*What we don't have time to do is replication of thought and design. DPI should be the "hub" of information and quality control. We don't have time for everyone to do their own thing. We need to pool resources regionally. Districts should work collaboratively to accomplish the tasks. – Nick Dussault, WASCD Board Member, Green Bay Area Public Schools*

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## WISCONSIN ASCD'S RESPONSE

View the draft standards at: [www.corestandards.org/standards/k12/](http://www.corestandards.org/standards/k12/)

### What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

- A joint effort between the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices in partnership with ACT, the College Board, and Achieve.
- They believe it provides a significant and historic opportunity for states to collectively develop and adopt a core set of K-12 standards in mathematics and English language arts.
- 48 states and 3 territories have signed on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative process.

### What will the common core standards look like?

- Fewer, clearer, and higher
- Inclusive of content and skills
- Internationally benchmarked
- Research and evidence based
- Accessible to students, parents, and the public

### What is the timeline?

- September 2009: Release public draft of college and career ready standards for public input
- March 2010: Release draft standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts for grades K-12
- May, 2010: ASCD endorses the Common Core State Standards Initiative
- June, 2010: K-12 standards finalized

More information at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)



### General Comments

High standards alone will not increase student achievement. Wisconsin ASCD is interested in how the Common Core Standards will improve teaching and learning and how they will be aligned with instructionally relevant assessments, curricula, instruction, materials and new technologies. What are the changes? How are these standards different? Do they reflect the future? Do they make clear what is valued? And how is the development of global competencies connected to economic growth?

- The grade level format contributes to logistical utility and understanding of the standards.
- We find it very positive that the documents represent consideration of ELL's and students with disabilities.
- Attempts are made to strategically integrate technology skills.
- We like the examples that were used to clarify a standard. It would be helpful if the final document had more examples.

### General Concerns

1. There is a noticeable influence from ACT in creating these standards which may result in a constrained curriculum driven by large-scale testing.
2. In the classroom, will these standards foster the development of deeper understanding rather than a skills checklist approach?
  - When should concepts get introduced to students? The current draft is a mastery list. A "learning continuum" model would be more helpful for teachers.
  - How do these standards support "depth" of understanding a concept? Unfortunately, it appears they are the old "mile wide and inch deep."
  - What about the application of knowledge? How is this represented in the standards? How do these standards support students demonstrating higher levels of knowledge?
3. Are these standards clear?
  - There is specific technical vocabulary within standards that does not always have an explicit common understanding. (for example, "domain-specific" p. 13, 19, 21, 24, 28, 31, 40, 43 etc. The term "content area" is more easily recognized by teachers and students.)
  - Are these standards easily understood by students and parents? (for example, "scaffolding" p. 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 34, 36, 37, etc.)

## English Language Arts and Literature in History, Science, and Social Studies

### ELA Comments:

- All important ideas are represented in a contemporary balanced literacy model. The K-3 Foundational Skills (pp. 12-13) is balanced and non-political with an equal treatment of phonics and comprehension. We especially like the emphasis on sustained reading and increased independent reading.
- The specification of range and level of text complexity, language (grammar & convention), grade expectations, and range of writing tasks are clear, user-friendly and consistent with current knowledge about literacy development.
- Exemplars and appendices provide useful examples; however specific lists of books have a delimiting effect.
- It is encouraging to have research, technology and cooperative learning integrated in a meaningful manner.

### ELA Concerns:

1. Metacognitive strategies are not emphasized enough and need to be more explicit. (for example, K p. 8 # 9 – kindergartners are able to compare more than characters in a story, just ask them about plant-eating and meat eating dinosaurs. The metacognitive strategy is identifying similarities and differences starting in kindergarten. At higher levels this becomes compare/contrast and also categorizing and classifying.)
2. Omit the book lists. Provide a lexile chart to indicate general levels of complexity. Leave book decisions to local control.
3. Resources: We are not in favor of the booklists. They are dated and very traditional. There is not much literature from the 21st century and they reflect little diversity. However if they must be included, the current lists do not represent the description of desired literature that accompanies the lists. (p. 7 & 31)
4. The standards seem to be developmentally aggressive. For example: Are most second graders competent in revising and editing? (Gr2 p. 16 #5) Only in certain areas, such as adding to text or using capital letters and end punctuation. We could have the same wording (“competent in revising and editing”) for grades 5, 9 and 12. Some specificity would help teachers.

### ELA Specific Concerns:

1. The use of the phrase “decoding words” (K-3 p. 13 #3) could be misinterpreted as “phonics only” instruction. Simply eliminate that phrase to keep a balanced focus on “phonics and word analysis.”
2. Do the writing standards represent the skills and processes that students need to be competent?  
For example, creative writing standards appear to be missing. Creative writing often leads to career writing – journalism, screenwriting, advertising, songwriting, etc. This may represent an imbalance. The types of writing need to be clearly defined and equally represented.

**Myth:** English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.

**Fact:** With the Common Core ELA *Standards*, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelming focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

*continued on page 8*

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# WISCONSIN ASCD'S RESPONSE

**Myth:** Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.

**Fact:** The mathematical progressions presented in the Common Core are coherent and based on evidence.

Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that today, different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

## Mathematics

### Math Comments:

- The ultimate purpose of mathematics is problem-solving. We appreciate the specificity but it seems like a laundry list of discrete skills that will be easily translated into workbooks. Our concern is that this will put us back into individual skill development and move away from inquiry and the interconnectedness of mathematics. Include examples of broader problems and the application of mathematics to solve them consistent with the Standards of Mathematical Practice as described on pages 4-5.
- Hong Kong and Singapore math instruction appear to be the basis of the Common Core Math Standards. Therefore it is critical to make explicit the key understandings behind the Hong Kong and Singapore math approaches.
- Base Ten is the core of our number system and is not sufficiently understood by our children— hence the difficulty with decimals, place value, etc. The increased emphasis on these topics is appreciated.

### Math General Concerns:

1. The math standards are no longer organized by the NCTM strands. Consistency and alignment with NCTM would be more acceptable to teachers.
2. The layout of the math standards is very difficult to read—way too text heavy. It also is impossible to see a progression from one grade level to the next in the current format (unlike the ELA layout).
3. Standards for communication in mathematics are missing or not explicit enough in this document.
4. Standards for math processes are not clearly evident.
5. The lack of algebra in primary grades (patterning, and graphing) is of concern. There is a need to make the concept of equality and use of letters in place of numbers as variables explicit for earlier grades (K- 6).

### Math Specific Concerns:

1. There is very little 3D geometry before grade 4; also, very little “movement” in geometry before grade 4 (for example, transformations p. 41 grade 8).
2. What is the “standard algorithm?” (pp. 15-17, 21, 23-24, 28, 32) Does every student need to use the same algorithm? Does this push a more traditional, direct instructional model?
3. Are the “proofs” described in the high school standards formal or informal proofs?
4. Are students expected to have access to the dynamic geometry software and algebra systems?

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## Implementation Concerns

*These are issues that if considered up front will ease the implementation of the Common Core Standards.*

### General Concerns

1. The document is overwhelming, especially for elementary teachers. What happened to "fewer, clearer, higher?" With the length of this document, teachers will only concentrate on their particular grade level. Consistency in skill development and deeper understanding which can only occur over time will suffer. Consider developing simple charts of sequential development of skills and concepts to highlight grade to grade progression, especially in mathematics.
2. In the classroom will these standards result in a skill and drill approach focused on success that is measured by large-scale testing (provided by ACT)? Other than one set of standards rather than 50, this is not much different from what we have now.
3. What is the expectation for implementation? Be sure to consider that we will have to wait for materials that support the Common Core Standards. It would be valuable to develop a list of current high school and middle school textbooks and materials that support these standards. It would also be valuable to support the use of e-books and technology in order to make the implementation of these standards more current and in order to help public school districts to move the publishing industry forward. An e-book does not and should not cost the same as a hard cover book.
4. When will an assessment framework be developed?

### ELA

5. With sustained reading and writing time increasing, will science and social studies become primarily time for literary instruction? For example, The Human Body sustained reading example over K-5 grades (p. 29) accomplishes deep knowledge on an important topic but seldom does an elementary teacher spend such significant time on a science topic each year. The unintended consequence may be less topic "coverage" in science and social studies since our current K-5 science curricula is more eclectic.
6. If science and social studies teachers (6-12) are expected to fulfill their instructional role with regard to literacy as outlined with explicit tasks for reading and writing, the need for professional development as well as revamping of teacher preparation programs in those areas is necessary.
7. The current middle school system of teaching literature and writing together may need restructuring. Separate classes are not the answer because an integrated cognitive emphasis is underlying the Common Core Standards.

### Math

8. Teachers, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, are not trained sufficiently to offer deep instruction in math reasoning and variety in problem-solving and mathematical models. In the classroom, the danger is that assigning more problems will be the result (quantity over quality), not deeper understanding or a variety of ways to solve problems.
9. It is more and more difficult to find "math minded" elementary and middle school teachers. These Standards will require more than a surface level of understanding to make an impact. Again this will involve professional development and revamping of teacher training and certification programs, especially in order for students to be ready for algebra in 8th grade as indicated. ■■■■

**Myth:** The Standards tell teachers what to teach.

**Fact:** The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That's why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

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The Wisconsin Mathematics Council (WMC), an Affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, applauds the efforts of the standards writing teams as they attempt to articulate the important mathematics that students must learn. The Mathematical Practices have the potential to be an organizing structure around K-12 learning. We agree with the introductory statements about stressing conceptual understanding and revisiting organizing principles. However, the current document does not fully reach those goals and there are some components of the standards that are either designated too early or are missing from the March 2010 Draft of the Common Core Standards.

The ensuing comments reflect the perspectives and reactions of the WMC Board of Directors to the March 2010 Draft of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematics.

- **Standards must identify the important big ideas of mathematics.** Teachers welcome standards that clearly delineate the important 'big ideas' of mathematics. However, as teachers reviewed the draft CCSS the first thing they noticed was a long list of paper and pencil skills that will easily become a checklist of things to do. This results in students memorizing procedures rather than being able to learn and apply mathematics. The big ideas of geometry, especially at the elementary level, are not well connected. As you look across the geometry standards, they appear to be a series of discrete, unrelated activities.
- **There must be coherence between grades and across grade bands (grades K-5 to grades 6-8 to high school).** The current document shows how a topic builds across a given grade band (e.g. grades K-5); however, there is little continuity across the K-12 spectrum. We suggest that a K-12 coherence could be more readily achieved if the standards were aligned in three K-12 areas:
  - Number and Algebra
  - Measurement, Data, Statistics, and Probability
  - Geometry

By describing a K-12 picture of mathematics, teachers and students are able to clearly see how learning at their particular grade level either builds a foundation for subsequent mathematics or builds upon the learning that has been previously acquired. This is a critical component of a coherent curriculum.

- **The standards must be developmentally appropriate in order to ensure that students are ready to learn with understanding** otherwise they become a checklist of procedures that are memorized with little or no understanding. We are concerned that the consequence of designating standards before students are developmentally ready will impede student learning and will result misconceptions that could have been avoided. This is particularly concerning at the primary grades (K-2) in place value, base 10, and computation. This is also concern at the middle school level where algebra appears to be the primary focus of eighth grade.
- **There must be clear connection between the Standards for Mathematical Practice and the Grade Level Standards.** The practice or "doing" of mathematics needs to be integrated with the mathematics topics that our students should be learning. In order to ensure that this occurs, the Mathematical Practices need to be explained in grade level narratives and combined, where appropriate, with the skills and understandings in the grade level standards. We also suggest that

specific examples applicable to each level (K-5, 6-8, and high school) be included in each of the Standards for Mathematical Practice at the beginning of the document.

- **The focus on paper/pencil computation and using the standard algorithm has the potential of short circuiting student understanding.** Using multiple strategies and reasoning is an important component of the end goal that students know how to select and use efficient strategies to compute. They need to be able to choose from among strategies given the context of the problem. The standard subtraction algorithm (with regrouping) is certainly not efficient for some problems (e.g. 3000-2997). Students need to understand the importance of looking at the relationships between numbers. They need to understand what they are computing, not just memorizing a procedure. 'The' standard algorithm can cause a lack of understanding in the traditional manner in which many students have learned how to divide with fractions by invert and multiply (e.g.  $\frac{7}{8} \div \frac{1}{4} = \frac{7}{8} \times \frac{4}{1}$ ), while having no understanding of why the answer must be between 3 and 4. Many adults are still confused why dividing by a fraction yields a larger number than the dividend.
- **Mathematical modeling, problem solving and applications need to be explicit and infused across all grade levels.** These areas are the essence of doing mathematics and, in the current version of the CCSS, are missing. The description of the Modeling category for high school is very strong; however the current format, in which there are no explicit modeling standards, but only connections to modeling across other categories, has the potential for modeling to be reduced in practice to two or three "applications" problems at the end of a unit or chapter. (In general we ask the writing group to consider the effect of the final document on commercial textbook publishers: will it push them to produce materials which present mathematics as a coherent subject, with a significant proportion of high-cognitive-demand tasks, or will they simply be able to cut-and-paste from current editions and claim they are aligned to the Common Core?)
- **Other areas of concern:**
  - No clear connection between mathematical topics or between mathematics and other disciplines
  - Very little attention to communication – writing, speaking, reflecting.
  - Little or no reference to the use of the "tools of mathematics" (except in the mathematical practices)– this includes manipulatives, measuring tools, technology, as well as paper/pencil.
  - Weak references to number sense, estimation and determining the reasonableness of solutions.
  - The extensive list of topics, especially at grades 9-12 will lead to breadth, not depth – continuing the dilemma of the "mile wide and inch deep" teaching of mathematics.
  - Insufficient attention to the infusion of mathematical processes, K-12 (problem solving, reasoning and proof, connections, representation, communication)
  - Appendix A reads like a table of contents for a textbook, and should not be a component of the Common Core Standards for Mathematics. There is a concern that it will result in publication of mathematics textbooks that reflect isolated topics.

The Wisconsin Mathematics Council agrees that focus and consistency nationwide could benefit mathematics education and that it is important for students to leave our K-12 schools with a firm grasp of key mathematical skills; however, WMC has concerns that much of the March 2010 draft of the Common Core State Standards seems to be a movement away from understanding and applying mathematics and toward more of an arithmetic-focused curriculum.

As a leader in mathematics education, the Wisconsin Mathematics Council welcomes the opportunity to partner on a national level with CCSSO and other organizations in the further development and review of the Common Core State Standards, as well as planning for and carrying out implementation strategies, assessment tools, and professional development.

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**From:** Donna L. Pasternak [dlp2@uwm.edu]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2010 2:15 PM  
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**Subject:** Common Core Standards Response

Dear Colleagues:

What follows is the WCTE response to the CCS, crafted from notes taken at the DPI preview last Tuesday. The board members who participated in the conversation included Barbara, Erin, Scott, Tom, Emilie and me. I want to thank those of you who provided feedback on the first draft and/or accepted the invitation to place your name on the document. If you haven't already done so, I encourage everyone to read the CCS at <http://www.corestandards.org/>

I know you are all extremely busy, dedicated to the advancement of our profession, and some of you felt you did not have enough time to study the CCS in the time I allotted for helping me craft a response to it. I concede that I expedited its writing, because I felt the CCS warranted an immediate response after the DPI preview. When initiatives such as the CCS are shaped by organizations that appear to sidestep the members of the professional organizations that will have to enact them, I fear that our silence will be misunderstood as acceptance of the situation. Will our response change having to follow the CCS? I think not, but it may cause some revision to occur. At the very least, we will be on record that WCTE is not happy with the narrow vision of English studies found in the CCS. I encourage you all to respond to the CCS individually.

All best,  
 Donna

Donna L. Pasternak, President, WCTE

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The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE) is firm in its insistence that the Common Core Standards (CCS) fit the needs of English Language Arts teachers and their students in the State of Wisconsin. Therefore, WCTE asks that the following concerns be taken into consideration when revising and implementing this document:

1. The English Language Arts Common Core Standards fail to acknowledge the heart of our discipline: Humanities.

Focusing the CCS on the skills needed to read, write, listen, and speak is only a partial vision of what is necessary for students to be college and career ready in English Studies. What is missing from the CCS is an articulation of the humanities portion of the discipline. The CCS document does not

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acknowledge the reasons for reading, discussing and writing about literature, which is to explore the readers' own experiences and the social and political worlds they inhabit. The skills identified in the CCS are the means to learning the content of English Studies. Without this content articulated in the CCS, the reading of texts becomes nothing more than sophisticated (or unsophisticated) decoding.

The CCS should identify standards that address the knowledge foundational to literary (textual) study and meaning-making. This content should facilitate the students' personal growth in a developmentally appropriate way, increasing their awareness of the world around them, fostering their growth as independent learners, and supporting their own decision-making. In the same vein, the study of writing in English Studies should address creative exploration. If these aspects of English Studies are not included in the CCS, we fear that the disciplinary knowledge of English Studies will be subordinated to learning to write, read, speak, and listen in "history, social studies, and science." In other words, we fear that teachers in English studies will become the handmaidens (gendered language intended) to the other disciplines as English teachers teach students skills and teachers in other disciplines teach content. We recommend that the State of Wisconsin contextualize the CCS with what we know and value about English Studies that helps all of us better understand the human condition.

2. Grade-specific standards and grade appropriate texts ignore what we know about child development.

Providing grade-specific standards, while helpful for teachers who wish guidance, ignores what we know about child development. Students come into our age-specified grades (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> grade) with different abilities and widely varying backgrounds in language experience and exposure. To expect that all students would achieve the standards specified in a narrow grade level identified in the CCS is tantamount to saying that scientific studies of child development are irrelevant. Providing bands spanning grade equivalencies (e.g., K-2) of expected development would be much more in line with scientific knowledge and commonplace experience.

Despite the disclaimer that the texts listed in the narrow grade levels in the CCS are merely "illustrative," we fear that school districts will purchase these texts out of expediency to implement an unfunded mandate. The exemplar texts listed do not address the complexity and diversity of the State of Wisconsin. We propose that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provide English teachers in the State of Wisconsin with peer-reviewed models that reflect the values of its population. This type of document could become a "living" compendium where additional peer-reviewed exemplars could be uploaded and commented upon by practitioners.

3. The use of the term "Standard" English throughout the CCS is offensive and does not underscore what we know about audience and register in the study of language in the State of Wisconsin.

WCTE recognizes that differences in language have always existed and respects that people in Wisconsin have home languages that are central to their identities. We will not subordinate the home language by assuming that there is one "standard" language in the United States, and we repudiate the use of the term "standard." The CCS should reflect the understanding that there are varieties of language in the United States and students have a right to their own languages and patterns of language appropriate to their home situations. The CCS should indicate such and discuss the teaching of language in a more equitable manner.

WCTE acknowledges the impending reality of the CCS in the State of Wisconsin. We ask the writers of the CCS to implement changes to the document as it now stands to make it relevant to teachers of English in our state.

Respectfully submitted,

The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE)

Donna L. Pasternak, President, WCTE

2023

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What would we like to communicate with the editorial team regarding directions for the WEJ? Must dos? Don't dos?

Barbara made the motion and Penny seconded to formally accept the editorial board presented by Emily. Motion carried. Emily went on to read the bios of those involved on the board. Scott asked about funding. Paula discussed the possibility of a print version. We discussed the format of the publishing at length. Both print and online versions were discussed. Paula suggested the first year would have one online/paper and one online only edition. Catherine suggested that the last issue they receive would be the last paper issue and then we would be online only after that. Much happy discussion about it being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition and the convention theme is "English...For a Change," so this would be the change. JoAnne suggested that Mary Louise write an article about the changes in the Journal which would be included in this last print issue. Paula asked about regular articles that we would like to make sure were in the journal. The DPI report by Emilie was definitely recommended. JoAnne pointed out that we need to make sure we have a Wisconsin focus in the Journal. Paula and Catherine suggested consolidating the Update and the Journal, sending out the Update as a link rather than an attachment. Pat suggested that if we are online we then have a member forum to discuss what is going on in the classroom, etc. We had a blog, a listserve, and a bulletin board over the years for discussion, but none of them went very far. Lisa suggested having an online discussion with a featured author as a member benefit. John brought up that we do ask our award winners to submit their papers for publication, which we need to keep in mind.

3) Treasurer's Report from Tom (see attached) Lisa moved to accept the treasurer's report, Penny seconded. Motion carried.

4) DPI report – Emilie shared information about the new Common Core National Standard Initiative. Much discussion followed about their recommendations and what we perceive as the abandonment of literature and concentration on skills in the ELA Common Core standards. Emilie reported that the state committee will continue to work on the new state standards document, but they cannot be approved based on what we know about the national initiative. ACHIEVE is a big part of this committee, and NCTE is at odds with ACHIEVE. There was a LOT of concern about the motivations behind these standards (i.e. global markets, capitalism), and also the moral and ethical considerations inherent in the Humanities which are not addressed in these Common Core National Standards at all.

5) Committee Reports

a) District Director Liason – Jacki (see attached report) shared yesterday's discussion by the district director group. We received a handout with regard to district directors' annual timeline of duties and event ideas. The district directors came up with some great ideas for getting new and current members more involved and networking. This was followed by a discussion of funding, program ideas, past programs, other groups to network with, etc.

We ended the morning with JoAnne discussing the voting process and figuring out how we can do both print and electronic voting efficiently and who is in charge of each. Still confusion about this, but it will be taken care of this year.

## Views from the Field: The Common Core State Standards and Student Diversity: Closing the Gap

*Wisconsin English Journal's Associate Editor examines issues related to new standards, reading, and the achievement gap.*

While the Common Core State Standards ostensibly are designed to help all children achieve at high levels, I wonder whether these standards will reduce the achievement gap for students who bring diverse backgrounds to school. For example, in her new co-authored book, *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement*, Lucy Calkins and her colleagues (2012) question the decision to implement new standards at this historical moment. Specifically, she asks, "Why is *now* a good time to raise the stakes for our children, when a huge percentage are living in poverty and when the safety nets have been torn apart and there is no funding to improve education?" (p. 3). Calkins then adopts a more optimistic stance, highlighting the potential of the common core to accelerate literacy achievement. However, I also wonder about another set of gaps – those issues that the standards do not address and the instructional modifications that teachers might need to make in their classrooms in order to serve all students

As Calkins and her colleagues (2012) noted, there are several things that the Common Core does not do. In particular, the Common Core does not ask students to "make text-to-self connections, access prior knowledge, explore personal response, and relate to your own life" (p. 25). In fact, the Common Core "de-emphasizes reading as a personal act and emphasizes textual analysis" (p. 35). Calkins believes that this approach echoes the "New

Criticism" - an approach to reading and textual analysis that was originated during the 1930's and 40's and has dominated instruction in

college and high school English classrooms for decades (Willinsky, 1990). The New Critics promoted the close reading of the text maintaining that text structures contributed to textual meaning while suggesting that the personal perspectives of readers distracted them from ascertaining the true meanings of texts. I worry that limiting the connections that students can make between texts and their own experiences may create particular hardships for students who bring different experiences and cultural lenses to the texts they read.

In this column, I offer a brief but close analysis of the Common Core State Standards. In particular, I argue that like the "New Critics" of the past, that the authors of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) maintain that meaning resides within texts and that students' experiences, including diverse ways of making sense of the world are undervalued, considered to lead to inaccurate reading (Calkins, 2012).

### **A Brief Analysis of the Common Core State Standards**

I offer this analysis as an opportunity to invite readers of the Wisconsin English Journal to consider what this common set of standards might mean for children who bring diverse experiences and perspectives to literacy classrooms and what gaps may need to be filled. In my own work, I identify three discernable, and potentially problematic patterns with the standards - 1.) a focus on recounting, retelling, and summarizing, 2.) a focus on text structure and organization, and 3.) reading as a process of discerning correct meanings directly from texts (Compton-Lilly, in press). In this column, I limit

my analyses to the Common Core's presentation of reading in kindergarten through grade 5 as a process of discerning correct meanings from texts.

### Reading as a Process of Discerning Identifiable and Correct Meanings from Texts

While the title of the section of the standards that I focus on - the "integration of knowledge and ideas" - suggests that children are expected to connect texts to their own lives, the content of these standards present a different picture. These standards invite the integration of knowledge and ideas within particular texts or in the cases of grades 3, 4, and 5, across a select set of texts.

In the standards for literature, kindergarten students reading literature texts "with prompting" are expected to "describe the *relationship between illustrations and the story* in which they appear" (p. 37) while fifth grade students, also reading literature, must "analyze how visual and multimedia events *contribute to the meaning* tone, or beauty of a text" (p. 38). While the fifth grade standard involves multimodality via graphic novels and multimedia presentations, the focus remains on the internal consistency of these texts. Standards for informational texts are similar with first grade students using "illustrations and details in a text to *describe its key elements*" (p. 39) and fourth grade students interpreting "information presented visually or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages)" and explaining "how the information *contributes to an understanding* of the text in which it appears" (p. 40).

While some of the standards presented under the heading of "integration of knowledge and ideas" invite students to "compare and contrast stories" (grade 5, p. 38) "draw on multiple print or digital sources" (grade 5, p. 40), and "integrate information from several texts" (grade 5, p. 40), these standards situate meaning construction as occurring across multiple teacher-provided texts rather than involving students' own experiences and cultural knowledge. Meaning is located within texts, rather than within students and communities. I wonder what this means to a Puerto Rican child who reads an account of Columbus that does not

acknowledge the devastation his journey had on the Taíno people or an African American student who reads about Malcolm X in a textbook that does not recognize his role as a human rights activist. It is very possible that children who live in particular communities, may bring particular knowledge to texts that affect their reading and analysis of those texts. Textual meaning does not reside in texts alone; meaning is a construction that always involves multiple ways of being, knowing, and thinking and human experiences.

I argue that the standards privilege literal meaning, focus on text structures, and view reading as a process of ascertaining the author's intended meaning. The diverse backgrounds of students is neither acknowledged nor accessed. While on the surface this may appear to treat making sense of texts as a neutral process that is unaffected by students' experiences, cultures, and ways of being, in actuality this perpetuates the status quo, the privileging of particular ways of understanding texts and assessing comprehension.

### Gaps, the Common Core and Meaning Construction

While the type of textual analysis promoted by the New Critics and the Common Core State Standards might be one way of analyzing texts, it is a particularly dangerous approach when working with students who may find the literal meanings of texts limited, incomplete, and often dismissive of their own knowledge and experiences. In a summary of her decades of research on reading, Rosenblatt (2004) again challenged the work of the New Critics by redefining reading as a transactional process involving both the text and the reader. As she wrote:

Every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context. Instead of two fixed entities acting on one another, the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The "meaning" does not reside ready-made "in" the text or "in" the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text. (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1369)

We all transact with text. We ask questions, challenge claims, quote salient passages, and talk about what we gain from texts.

Beach, Thein and Webb (2012) raise a set of related questions. They believe that much of the resistance to the bureaucratic imposition of the Common Core State Standards comes from “teachers who value a bottom-up focus on their own unique, local school cultural contexts and particular students’ needs, interests, and knowledge” (p. 10). These teachers worry that the Common Core State Standards do not acknowledge cultural diversity and worry that assessments that accompany the Common Core, like literacy assessments of the past (Willis, 2008), will privilege students who bring particular types of knowledge and cultural capital while failing to “recognize the cultural diversity of America’s student population” (Beach et al., 2012, p. 13).

Based on the failure of the Common Core to recognize reading comprehension as a transactional process, Beach and his colleagues (2012) question the ability of these standards to address the achievement gap. They cite the need for increased resources to underfunded communities including support for equitable employment opportunities, housing, wages, healthcare, and schools. As teachers, we must also be alert to the gaps presented by the standards. We must include texts that present diverse perspectives, allow students spaces in which they can voice their own textual critiques, and help students to recognize that different types of reading are required in different situations. On formal assessments, discerning the intended meaning of authors might be best; in other reading contexts students must have opportunities to question, critique, and interpret in accordance with their own background and experiences.

If we accept that the real problems in American education lies with the achievement gap that separates White middle class students from students who bring diverse cultures and social class experiences to classrooms (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), then it is questionable whether a “common” and “core” curriculum will serve students who bring diverse cultural knowledge, socioeconomic experiences, language practices, gender positionings, religions, physical appearances, and sexual orientations to classrooms. In short, the knowledge and

experiences of too many students will be left behind highlighting the potential of the Common Core standards to exacerbate rather than address inequity.

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## WCTE Position Statement Regarding the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

In light of the recent questions raised by Governor Walker regarding the adoption and implementation of the CCSS for the state of Wisconsin educational systems, the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English resolves:

WCTE recognizes the importance and need for standards.

WCTE supports the rigor of the CCSS for ELA and its potential to impact student learning and develop Wisconsin students to be college and career ready.

WCTE encourages educational leaders in WI to have broad interpretation of the CCSS for ELA.

WCTE believes that the CCSS for ELA provide a basic framework, which can be a starting place in making curricular decisions.

WCTE believes that the spirit of the CCSS for ELA as a guide for college and career readiness is enhanced when seen in the larger context of the ELA as one of the humanities that explore the human experience.

WCTE endorses the efforts of Wisconsin DPI to place the CCSS for ELA in the larger context of the humanities.

WCTE cautions against the misuse of assessment of students and teachers that will be linked to the CCSS for ELA.

WCTE supports the five policy goals developed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) through their partnership with the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE) and their compelling report on the current status of support for professional learning in schools:

"Remodeling Literacy Learning: Making Room for What Works."

1. Support educators' knowledge of literacy pertinent to their content areas.
2. Promote active collaboration among educators to deepen student learning.
3. Invest in professional learning that is ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative, and linked to engaging literacy learners across grades and subjects.
4. Deploy educator time to maximize the development of collective capacity across a school or system.
5. Foster shared agreements about literacy among educators to deepen learning in every subject.

Passed by WCTE membership October 11, 2013.

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## Fight over Common Core K-12 state education standards comes to Eau Claire

By Jon Swedien Leader-Telegram staff | Posted: Thursday, October 24, 2013 12:19 am

Wisconsin's ongoing debate over the Common Core came Wednesday to Eau Claire, as a panel of state lawmakers heard testimony on the K-12 educational standards at Chippewa Valley Technical College.

The scheduled six-hour hearing of the Legislature's two select committees to review the Common Core State Standards included testimony from local and state education officials and academicians.

"Adopting these standards doesn't limit the curriculum" local schools can implement, said Eau Claire schools Superintendent Mary Ann Hardebeck during testimony in support of the Common Core.

The Common Core was crafted by state and local education leaders and state governors and then voluntarily adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. In Wisconsin, it drew little notice when accepted by state schools Superintendent Tony Evers in 2010.

The standards gradually have been implemented in state public schools, and a new state standardized test starting next year will be part of the program.

Conservative critics have characterized the Common Core as a national takeover of local education.

Liberal critics have asserted the standards will create too great of a focus on testing.

The select committees were created by Republican legislative leaders. The panels are holding a series of public hearings around the state in which they will hear testimony on the standards, their effectiveness and citizen complaints. From the input they gather, the Legislature potentially could modify the standards.

The Common Core's math standard's are less than what they should be, James Milgram, a professor of mathematics at Stanford University who was on the national validation committee for the Common Core, testified Wednesday at CVTC.

Milgram argued the "low" standards will result in a "regression toward the mean," meaning most students would not rise above the prescribed standards.

Sen. Tim Cullen, D-Janesville, who sits on the Senate's select committee, argued there is nothing stopping students from striving to surpass the standards, and teachers often encourage them.

Milgram said he didn't think it would be too hard to improve the math standards, and the Common Core is better than the educational standards previously in place in most states.

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State Department of Public Instruction officials said Wednesday they are trying to combat a wave of misinformation about the Common Core.

Assistant state superintendent Sheila Briggs said Wisconsin began reviewing its educational standards in 2006 and adopted the Common Core after gathering input from college officials, local education officials and business leaders.

Rep. Dean Knudson, R-Hudson, who sits on the Assembly select committee, said it was “indefensible” that the DPI didn’t gather more input from state residents, especially parents of schoolchildren.

Briggs said the DPI relies on local school districts to relay input from local families because there isn’t always this much interest in the review of educational standards. She said the Common Core has only recently become a hot-button issue.

Draped over a chair in the back of the conference room where the hearing was held were red T-shirts that read, “Stop Common Core.”

But Evers, who has been vocal in his support for the Common Core, has said that won’t be easy.

He believes the committees will see value in the Common Core, but, if they don’t, state lawmakers don’t have the authority to repeal the standards, Evers said in a phone interview Tuesday.

“I think the Legislature’s ability to derail this is somewhat limited. I believe the constitution of the state gives me that authority,” to set educational standards, Evers said.

Evers said if lawmakers challenge his authority, the matter could wind up before the state Supreme Court.

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October 16, 2013

Dear Chairman Paul Farrow, Chairman Jeremy Thiesfeldt, and members on the Select Committees on Common Core Standards:

We are attorneys at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL), a non-profit legal organization in Milwaukee that advocates for, among other things, reforming education in our state. We would like to comment on Superintendent Evers' testimony to you on October 3, 2013 during the joint hearing on the Common Core standards. It contains a major legal error – the Superintendent does not have the constitutional authority to implement Common Core in Wisconsin without approval from the legislature and governor.

In his [October 3 testimony](#), State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers repeatedly stated that, as Superintendent, he has the constitutional authority to adopt the Common Core standards in Wisconsin. He claimed, for example: “[w]hile I have the constitutional and statutory authority to adopt standards, in 2011 Wisconsin Act 32, the Legislature and governor explicitly required me to adopt the Common Core Standards (emphasis added).” Therefore, the argument goes, the Superintendent could implement Common Core regardless of what the legislature decides.

But his claim is baseless and without legal merit. The Superintendent is incorrect about his authority and incorrect about the power of the Wisconsin legislature. In Wisconsin, it is the elected policymakers in the legislature that have the ability to determine what standards should be set for our children.

Article X, section 1 of the Wisconsin Constitution states that: “[t]he *supervision of public instruction* shall be vested in a state superintendent and such other officers as the legislature shall direct; and their qualifications, powers, *duties* and compensation shall be *prescribed by law* (emphasis added).” Under this provision of the constitution, the Superintendent has the constitutional duty of “supervision” but all of his other powers and duties are limited to those prescribed by the legislature. Making public policy for the State of Wisconsin is well outside of the Superintendent’s constitutional duty to supervise the public schools and would usurp the power of

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the legislature. The issue of what falls under the Superintendent's constitutional supervision authority as opposed to what falls under the "duties" dictated by the state legislature is something that is currently being litigated in *Coyne v. Walker* (determining the constitutionality of whether the governor can veto proposed rules by the Superintendent).

However, the ability to develop and implement academic standards, such as Common Core, is a "duty" given to the Superintendent by the state legislature. *See, for example*, Section 115.28 (7), (10), and (36), Section 118.01 and Section 118.30 Wis. Stats. Even more specifically, 2011 Act 32 directed that the Department of Public Instruction shall replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination, and the new assessments shall measure mastery of the Common Core standards. Determining the type of standards, i.e. how high to set the bar, is a public policy decision, and, as such, it does not fall within the Superintendent's supervisory authority but rather falls within the legislature's power to make policy. If the Superintendent is correct that the power belongs to him and not to the legislature, then all of the legislation referenced above has been unnecessary and, as a matter of law, would be unconstitutional. No one, including the Superintendent, has taken that position.

As a matter of Wisconsin history, the Superintendent's "duties" as prescribed by the legislature have ebbed and flowed - without any constitutional violations. In 1848, for instance, the legislature gave the town superintendents, rather than the state Superintendent, the exclusive power to license teachers. It was not until 1939 that the state legislature decided to give the state Superintendent the sole authority to license teachers. In 1915, for example, the legislature created a State Board of Education, which managed and allocated the finances of the state's public educational activities. And today, the Superintendent has that duty. Common Core, like licensing teachers and financing education, falls within the Superintendent's "other duties" and like these other duties can be increased or reduced by the legislature. In other words, if the "legislature giveth, it can taketh."

In 1996, in *Thompson v. Craney*, the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that the Superintendent's constitutional power to supervise public education was violated when Governor Thompson created a Department of Education - led by the new Secretary of Education to be appointed by the governor - which would have powers previously reserved for the Superintendent. However, the holding was limited to prohibiting the legislature from reassigning the superintendent's *supervisory* authority to other statewide officers. It did not hold that the Superintendent has the constitutional authority to create public policy, or more specifically, to create statewide academic standards.

The decision of the Dane County Circuit Court in *Coyne v. Walker* does not suggest otherwise. Last year, that court held that 2011 Act 21, which allowed the governor to veto proposed rules, violated the Superintendent's constitutional authority to supervise public education. The court held that the Superintendent's ability to write rules is so interconnected to supervising public education that no other statewide official should share this authority (even though the state legislature can already veto proposed rules).

That decision, like any circuit court decision has no precedential value, and is now on appeal. We don't believe it was correctly decided and have filed a brief on behalf of former Reps. Scott Jensen and Jason Fields explaining why. But the issue in *Coyne* was whether whatever rulemaking authority the legislature chose to confer on the Superintendent could be subject to the involvement of the governor and Department of Administration in the way that Act 21 provides. Even the *Coyne* trial court acknowledged that the Superintendent has no inherent policy-making authority

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independent of the legislature. *Coyne v. Walker*, Dane County Circuit Court Decision, 11 (“the Superintendent has no inherent power to promulgate rules on his or her own.”).

The Superintendent has no constitutional authority to make policy. Educational reform and policy, including Common Core, are the business of the legislature.

Thank you for your time and do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Rick Esenberg  
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Associate Counsel and Education Policy Director

*The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (“WILL”) is a non-profit, public interest law firm dedicated to promoting the public interest in free markets, limited government, individual liberty, and a robust civil society.*