Evidence of WASCD feedback to CCSSO on public draft April 2010

WISCONSIN ASCD RESPONSE TO Common Core State Standards Draft

April 1, 2010

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/

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

CCSSO

National Governors Association

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.)

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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.

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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.

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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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