



LPRO: Legislative Policy and Research Office

EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

BACKGROUND BRIEF

HISTORY OF EDUCATION STANDARDS IN OREGON

With publication of the *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Elementary Schools* (1920), Oregon began to develop standards for public education. The manual identified “responsible American citizenship” as the primary goal of public schools, along with an understanding of Oregon’s pioneer history. Subjects included reading, spelling, language, storytelling, penmanship, arithmetic, geography, health and hygiene, music, picture study/art, agriculture and moral truths and maxims. In the 1960s, school districts participated in the development of a statewide curriculum improvement plan and Common Curriculum Goals followed in the 1980s. As part of Oregon’s 1991 Educational Act for the 21st Century (ORS 329), content standards were first introduced at grades 3, 5, 8 and 10.

The federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) was part of President Lyndon

Johnson’s War on Poverty. When the law was reauthorized in 2001 under President George W. Bush as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, states

were required to adopt standards and assessments. The belief was setting high standards and measurable goals would improve learning outcomes, as students were to be assessed in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. Although this law was recently reauthorized and significantly amended as the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, standards and annual testing continue to be required.

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

In 2009, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers enlisted the aid of education leaders from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia in an effort to develop common standards to ensure that all

children graduate high school with the ability to succeed in college and workforce training programs. The work involved reviewing the best existing state standards with input from

CONTENTS

HISTORY OF EDUCATION
STANDARDS IN OREGON

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON
CORE STATE STANDARDS

WHAT ARE EDUCATION
STANDARDS AND
ASSESSMENTS?

IMPLEMENTATION OF
COMMON CORE STATE
STANDARDS

ASSESSMENTS IN OREGON

2015 LEGISLATION RELATED
TO STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS
ACT (ESSA)

STAFF CONTACT



EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

teachers, higher education providers, content experts, states and the public.

Oregon was well-positioned to participate in the development of common state standards, as the state had started to design a core standards structure in 2006 in order to create fewer standards that were more focused and cohesive. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) staff, along with stakeholder groups, reviewed each draft of the standards and provided feedback. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics were adopted by the State Board of Education in October of 2010 at the urging of Oregon district superintendents.

WHAT ARE EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS?

Education standards describe the knowledge and skills students should possess at different benchmark grades. The purpose of standards is to ensure that students graduate high school ready for college or entry into the workforce, and are able to compete with students in other districts, states and countries.

Standards are not curriculum. Curriculum is chosen by local school boards and schools. For example, a Grade 1 math standard reads “represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction.” The standard does not say how to impart this ability—that is left up to the classroom teacher, school and school district. Assessments test how well students have learned, based on the standards.

The state uses standards to instill equitable learning expectations among its 197 school districts, so the opportunities and expectations for students in Pendleton are roughly equivalent to those of their counterparts in Portland. Teachers use

standards to guide their lessons in order to ensure students learn and develop critical skills needed to move on to the next level. Parents use standards to understand what is expected of their children and whether their children are performing at grade level. The state assessments, which measure student learning compared to the standards, enable parents, the community and policy makers to evaluate how well schools are educating students.

As an example, here are the foundational skills for reading that should be acquired in kindergarten according to the CCSS:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.
 - a. Follow words from left to right, top to bottom and page by page.
 - b. Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.
 - c. Understand that words are separated by spaces in print.
 - d. Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
2. Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds.
 - a. Recognize and produce rhyming words.
 - b. Count, pronounce, blend and segment syllables in spoken words.
 - c. Blend and segment onsets and rhymes of single-syllable words.
 - d. Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme words.



EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

- e. Add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one-syllable words to make new words.

The methods and materials used to help students meet the standards listed above are determined by teachers and their districts. Textbooks and materials aligned to the CCSS are becoming more widely available and teachers have opportunities to collaborate online with their peers both here in Oregon and around the country to develop lesson plans.

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

While districts were expected to begin preparations to implement the CCSS in 2010, formal support for statewide implementation began in 2013 with regional meetings of Professional Learning Teams charged with training teachers in their home districts. ODE distributed funds to support district implementation in January 2014. The grants to school districts ranged from \$1,000 to \$7,000 for small districts, \$150,000 for mid-size districts and up to \$495,000 for the largest districts. Additional grants of \$2,700 to \$10,800 were distributed to small, rural and remote school districts. In 2013, the legislature allocated an additional \$21 million in federal funds for the CCSS implementation and \$6 million in state funds for grants to districts to support educator effectiveness. Professional development programs were scheduled for the spring and summer of 2014. The Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey released in May of 2014 indicated that 80 percent of responding teachers reported that curriculum currently taught in their schools covered the skills identified in the CCSS.

ASSESSMENTS IN OREGON

With the assistance of local teachers, ODE developed the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) in 1991 to determine student progress toward meeting state standards. These assessments covered the subjects of reading and mathematics for grades 3-8, and high school, and science and social sciences for grades 5, 8 and high school. Additional assessments included the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) for English Learners (EL) and the Extended Assessment in the subjects of reading, writing, math and science for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Each school's assessment results are included in the school's report card which is posted on the [ODE website](#).

With the adoption of the CCSS, new assessments were needed to align to the new standards. Oregon joined 16 other states in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to develop new tests. In the 2014-15 school year, Oregon implemented the Smarter Balanced assessments for English language arts and mathematics. The OAKS assessments continue to be used for science and social sciences.

For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, Oregon participated in the National Center and State Collaborative Assessment Consortium, an entity charged with developing assessments based on alternate achievement standards aligned to the Common Core. Following stakeholder review, the decision was made to continue using alternative assessments provided by Behavioral Research and Teaching at the University of Oregon.



EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

2015 LEGISLATION RELATED TO STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

While there was general support for the CCSS among educators, the Smarter Balanced assessments were criticized for being long, difficult and time consuming, as well as for the use of results in evaluating teacher performance. The Oregon Education Association passed a resolution in May 2014 calling for the state to cancel the tests scheduled for the spring of 2015. Schools saw an increase in the number of parents who opted their children out of testing. The 2015 Legislative Assembly responded to these criticisms with a number of bills.

- House Bill 2655 (2015) created the “Student Assessment Bill of Rights” which allows parents to excuse their children from taking the statewide summative tests for any reason. Schools are required to notify parents of this option twice a year. (At the time of this publication, data on the number of opt outs following passage of HB 2655 was not yet available.)
- House Bill 2680 (2015) prohibits the use of results from the statewide Smarter Balanced assessments given during the 2014-15 school year to make summative evaluations of teachers, administrators or schools. The measure directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene a work group to review the results; evaluate whether the assessments accurately measure student learning; analyze student learning gaps; and identify adjustments in instruction necessary to address student learning gaps.

- House Bill 2713 (2015) directs the Secretary of State to conduct an audit of the use of Smarter Balanced assessments. The audit is to address the fiscal, administrative and educational impacts of the assessments, including instructional time, curricula, educators’ exercise of professional judgment, budgets and administrative time and focus.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

With passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (effective the 2017-18 school year), states are given greater flexibility in a number of areas, including standards and assessments. States must adopt challenging academic standards in reading, math and science and achievement levels must be aligned with higher education and Career and Technical Education institutions.

State testing is still required in math and English language arts in grades 3-8 and once in high school. Science is to be tested once at elementary, middle and high school levels. For high school, states are allowed to offer districts flexibility to administer another state-approved, nationally recognized assessment in place of the statewide summative test. The law continues to require 95 percent of all students and all student subgroups to participate in the statewide assessments, but explicitly allows states to create “opt out” policies and to determine how to include participation rates in accountability systems.

ODE has convened stakeholder work groups to guide implementation of ESSA. Discussions to date have focused on how to better support school districts in implementing the CCSS and on developing a



EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

long-term vision for Oregon's statewide assessment system that meets both the needs of system accountability and of educators and students throughout the year.

Additional information regarding Oregon's educational standards and assessments is available at:

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2860>

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