



## ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND THE COMMON CORE

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Academic standards provide a broad outline for what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of each grade level, and for what students should know in order to be prepared to enter college or the workforce by the time they graduate from high school. In Colorado, academic standards are also the basis of the annual statewide assessment.

A recent multi-state effort to provide a clear and consistent set of expectations for the knowledge and skills that all students need has resulted in the development of the Common Core State Standards (common core). This *issue brief* provides information on Colorado's Academic Standards and the common core.

### Colorado's Academic Standards

Under the provisions of state law, Colorado has been using academic standards for over 20 years to define the broad themes, ideas, skills, and concepts that the state expects students to learn and be able to demonstrate for postsecondary success. With the passage of House Bill 93-1313, Colorado began adopting and implementing statewide model academic standards. Fifteen years later, state legislation called for the development of rigorous statewide academic standards and for the alignment of the K-12 and postsecondary public education systems.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, the Colorado State Board of Education (SBE) adopted new model academic standards, which exist today as the Colorado

Academic Standards. The state has developed academic standards for English language competency, and 13 other content areas, including: reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, geography, visual arts, performing arts, physical education, world languages, economics, civics, and financial literacy.<sup>2</sup>

### Development of the Common Core Standards

Common core standards represent a state-led effort to establish a set of nationally shared expectations for the knowledge and skills that all students need in order to graduate from high school prepared for a career or to enter college. The common core standards establish what students need to learn, but do not prescribe how the standards are to be met.

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers have led the development of the common core standards with input from teachers, parents, school administrators, and experts. States may voluntarily adopt and implement the common core standards; to date, 45 states, including Colorado, and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards in English language arts and mathematics. The states that have not adopted the common core standards are: Alaska, Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia.

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<sup>1</sup>Senate Bill 08-212.

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<sup>2</sup>Section 22-7-1005 (2)(a), C.R.S.

## Colorado and the Common Core

While the state was in the process of developing the Colorado Academic Standards, work on the common core standards in mathematics and English language arts had begun. Colorado was one of six states asked to provide feedback on the standards during the development process.

When the common core standards in English language arts and mathematics were released in June 2010, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) authorized a study comparing the state's current standards in the two subject areas with the common core standards. The report indicated that the state's standards were closely aligned with the common core. In August 2010, the SBE adopted the common core standards in mathematics and English language arts and incorporated these new standards into the Colorado Academic Standards.

## Academic Standards and Local Control

Under current state law, local education providers (LEPs) are required to adopt academic standards that meet or exceed the state's preschool through elementary and secondary education standards, and must adopt standards in at least the subject matter areas that are included in the state standards.<sup>3</sup>

LEPs are also charged with developing and implementing curricula and assessments that are aligned with the standards adopted by the LEP.<sup>4</sup> In addition to assessments developed and administered by the LEP to track student progress, every student enrolled in a public school is required to take the annual state assessment in the grade level in which the student is enrolled, beginning in third grade.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Section 22-7-1013, C.R.S.

<sup>4</sup>Section 22-7-1013 (2) and (3), C.R.S.

<sup>5</sup>Section 22-7-409 (1.2)(d)(I)(A), C.R.S.

## Student Assessments

Each spring, the state evaluates all public school students in grades 3 through 10 using grade-specific assessments to determine the level at which the state's students meet the academic standards in the content areas assessed. The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) has served as the principal evaluative component of the state's educational accountability system since 1997, when it was implemented through state law.

The adoption of new academic standards in December 2009 required the development of new assessments capable of measuring the new standards. In response, the CDE designed transitional assessments, known as the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP), to replace the CSAP assessments during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. During the spring of 2014, TCAP assessments will be administered in reading, writing, and mathematics, along with the newly developed Colorado Summative Assessments for science and social studies. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, new assessments measuring only the new content standards will be used.

Data from the assessment program is used to track individual student, school, and district progress toward increasing student academic achievement. Starting in the 2014-15 school year, teachers and principals will also be evaluated, in part, on student performance and growth as part of the teacher and principal evaluation system.

States that have adopted the common core are collaborating to develop assessments that will be aligned to the standards in mathematics and English language arts. States may participate in the assessment development process through one of two consortia: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Colorado joined PARCC in 2010 and became a Governing Board member in 2012. The PARCC assessments in mathematics and English language arts will be ready for state use during the 2014-15 school year.