

The Facts about Alaska's New English Language Arts Standards



Toward preparing students to be college, career, and culturally ready graduates

In 2012, the State Board of Education & Early Development adopted new academic standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Academic standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear, consistent expectations and goals for student learning.

State and local control

Alaska did not adopt the Common Core State Standards. Adopting states had to agree to accept the standards in their entirety and not change them in the future. Alaska did not want to be bound by those restrictions.

Alaska's process to adopt our standards

We made our own determination on Alaska's standards in a lengthy and thoughtful process that included input from educators, parents, community leaders, and employers, followed by a public process before the State Board of Education & Early Development. For two years, Alaska worked on a new generation of English language arts and mathematics standards with rural and urban Alaskans, including representatives of universities, career and technical programs, industries, and teachers of diverse student populations and interests. Line by line, we examined our then-current standards, comparing them to standards across the country and in terms of clarity, content and rigor. In the end, we adopted standards that are similar to those adopted in other states, retaining the right to adjust them in the future. Alaska will be able to use assessments, teaching materials, and parent guides designed for many other states. Our standards will allow us to compare Alaska students with students from around the U.S. As Americans, including military families, move in and out of Alaska, they will be able to enter a school that has the same expectations as the school they left.

Why new standards

Alaskan stakeholders found our previous standards to be lower in rigor than other states' standards and to lack clarity in terms of what

students should know and be able to do. We wanted to increase our standards' rigor so that Alaska's high school graduates are better prepared for college education, technical training, and careers after high school. Only about a third of our students score proficient on national assessments in reading and math. As in other states, many of our high school graduates must take remedial courses in English and math when they enroll in the state university for four-year or two-year degrees. A lot of those students never make it through college. A fifth of our high school graduates who apply to the military can't pass its written entrance exam. We hear from Alaska employers that they are unable to find qualified local graduates to fill positions.

THE STANDARDS PROVIDE A ROADMAP FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Alaska's adopted standards in English language arts and mathematics:

- establish a base of **consistent** learning goals for all students.
- are a **clear roadmap** of academic expectations that allow students, parents, and teachers to work together toward shared goals.
- are **relevant to the real world** and focus on the knowledge and skills students will need to succeed in life after high school, in postsecondary education and a globally competitive workforce.

The standards do not tell teachers how to teach nor do the standards place limits on local curriculum. The standards do not preclude the use of culturally relevant lessons. In fact, teaching the standards in the context of local cultures is one of the best ways to present them.

Standards Format

The English Language Arts Standards include four content areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Within each content area

are grade-specific standards that designate what students should be able to do by the end of that grade. They leave room for local school districts to determine how the goal of each standard will be met as well as any additional topics that should be addressed.

Keys of the Standards

The English Language Arts Standards are designed to promote students' ability to demonstrate independence in the comprehension of all types of text; to speak, write and research well, supporting their arguments with evidence; and respond to varying demands of audience, purpose, and task in writing and speaking.

Reading

There remains an emphasis in the foundational skills of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) through fifth grade. The expectation is that by that point they would have mastery of those skills, which can be accessed throughout their academic career.

The standards require that students read increasingly complex texts so that by the end of high school they are ready for the demands of college-level and career-level reading. Students are expected to read challenging informational texts in subjects such as social studies and science, as well as literature.

Writing

The cornerstone of the writing standards is the ability to write logical argument based on sound reasoning and relevant evidence. Students are expected to conduct research in short, focused projects and longer in-depth projects.

Speaking and Listening

Oral uses of language are common in postsecondary education and the workplace. The standards for speaking and listening require students to gain, evaluate, and present complex information, ideas and evidence through speaking and listening.

Language

The language standards provide opportunities for students to develop their vocabulary through

conversation, direct instruction and reading. Students build an ability to communicate with greater precision and complexity.

Literacy Standards

For grades 6-12 there are standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. These standards recognize that teachers in subjects other than English must play a role in developing students' skills in reading and writing.

Instructional Shifts in English Language Arts

In the English Language Arts Standards, there are three shifts, which will encourage changes in instructional practices:

- Building knowledge through *content-rich nonfiction*.
- Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in *evidence from text* –both literary and informational.
- Regular practice with *complex text* and its *academic vocabulary*.

For more information, visit our website and click on the “standards star.”

