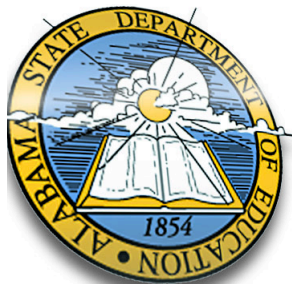


FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ALABAMA COLLEGE AND CAREER STANDARDS



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Thomas R. Bice, State Superintendent of Education

Frequently Asked Questions

The Standards

What are Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

The Common Core State Standards are a set of consistent, high quality academic benchmarks that clearly define the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each school year in order to be on track for success in college and career. The standards were created through a state-led initiative and have been adopted by more than 40 states.

Why are the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards important?

The standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children obtain the best possible education no matter where they live. With clear academic expectations for each grade level, teachers, parents, and students can work together toward shared goals. Furthermore, the standards draw from the best existing standards in the country and are benchmarked to top performing nations around the world, ensuring that our students are well prepared to compete not only with their peers here at home, but also with students around the world, maintaining America's competitive edge.

With consistent standards, states can also now opt to pool their collective expertise and resources in order to reduce costs for each individual state and bring the most well-informed, creative thinking to various efforts around the standards. For example, states can work together to:

- Make expectations for students as clear as possible to parents, teachers, and the general public;
- Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Develop and implement high quality curricula that best enable teachers to help all students reach the standards;
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the standards and replace the existing testing systems that often are inconsistent, burdensome, and confusing; and
- Evaluate and advocate for policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

Will local teachers be able to decide what and how to teach with the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

The standards simply establish a clear set of goals and expectations that will prepare students with the knowledge and skills to help them succeed. It is up to local teachers, principals, superintendents, and others to decide how the standards will be reached. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

What grade levels are included in the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

The English-language arts and mathematics standards are for grades K-12. Research from the early childhood and higher education communities also informed the development of the standards.

What do the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards mean for students with disabilities and English-language learners?

The standards create consistent, high expectations for all students and provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices that can lead to an improved ability to best serve young people with disabilities and English-language learners. The K-12 English-language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English-language learners and students with disabilities. Additionally, alternate assessments are being developed for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities, as are English-language proficiency assessments tied to the Common Core for English-language learners.

Why are the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards for just English-language arts and mathematics?

English-language arts and mathematics were the subjects chosen for the Common Core because they teach skills upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas. Furthermore, the English-language arts standards address literacy across disciplines, including science, social studies, and technical subjects.

Do these Alabama College and Career Ready Standards incorporate both content and skills?

Yes, both content and skills are important and have been incorporated in the Common Core State Standards. One of the criteria by which the standards have been evaluated is whether or not they

include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communications.

The Development Process

Who led the effort to establish the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

The standards were created through a state-led initiative with the goal of establishing a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics to be shared among states. The effort was spearheaded by governors and school chiefs through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), respectively.

Did the federal government play a role in developing these standards?

No, the federal government was not involved in the development of the standards. This has always been, and continues to be, a state-led and driven initiative. States voluntarily adopted and are currently implementing the standards on an individual basis. These standards are in no way federally-mandated – rather, they are the standards of more than 40 individual states.

How were the standards created?

Governors and schools chiefs convened a diverse team of teachers, parents, administrators, researchers, and experts in the education community to design the standards in order to ensure they reflect the best current thinking in education, the realities of the classroom, and aspirations for our children. CCSSO and the NGA Center also provided public comment periods for all stakeholders to submit feedback on the draft standards documents.

To ensure this process was open, inclusive, and rigorous, several working groups and committees were formed:

- The Standards Development Work Group was responsible for determining and writing the standards;
- The Feedback Group provided expert input on draft documents, drawing from a wealth of research-backed information; and
- The Validation Committee – comprised of independent, national education experts – reviewed the standards to ensure they met the development criteria. Its members were nominated by states and

national organizations, and selected by a group of 12 governors and chiefs who held leadership positions at the NGA Center and CCSSO.

By what criteria were the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards developed?

The standards were developed according to the following criteria, set by states through governors and school chiefs:

- Alignment with expectations for college and career success;
- Clarity, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn;
- Consistency, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live;
- Inclusivity of both content and the application of knowledge through higher-order skills;
- Grounded in strengths and lessons of existing state standards;
- Benchmarked to top performing nations across the world;
- Realistic for effective use in the classroom; and
- Evidence and research-based.

How are educational standards determined?

Each state has its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, past academic expectations of students have varied widely from state to state. The Common Core has now established the same rigorous expectations for a majority of students; however, each state remains fully in control of its own standards and all related decisions.

Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?

Yes, teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards to ensure that they are practical in the classroom. The National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations, have been instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards.

Adoption

Is the federal government playing a role in implementation?

No. The federal government is not implementing the standards. However, the federal government is supporting states that have adopted the standards by providing funding to the two state coalitions

working on the development of assessments and curriculum resources, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

How did states adopt the Common Core State Standards?

Each state adopted the standards through its own unique adoption process. Some states adopted the standards through their state boards of education, while others adopted them through their state legislatures. Since their release in June 2010, the standards have been adopted by more than 40 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Implementation

What does the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards mean for students?

This holds students to rigorous, yet attainable, academic benchmarks designed to ensure college and career readiness. The standards also provide important clarity for students— and their parents and teachers— about the knowledge and skills they should be learning at every step in their academic careers. Furthermore, consistent standards will allow kids to stay on track when their families move between states, rather than entering a new school behind or ahead of their peers, as was often the case when standards varied from state to state.

How will the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards impact teachers?

Great educators are at the core of a great education. Teachers helped design the standards to ensure that they reflect the realities of the classroom and provide the clarity and consistency teachers need to make sure their students stay on track and are equipped with the knowledge and skills for success. The standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but rather establish what students need to learn. It is up to schools and teachers to decide how to best help students reach them.

Additionally, the standards will:

- Help colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers;
- Provide the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of assessments linked to the standards;
- Allow states to develop and provide better assessments that accurately measure whether students have learned what was taught; and

- Guide educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subjects and skills they need to learn.

Who is in charge of implementing the standards?

The standards are being implemented by each state individually through the collaboration of various groups including SEAs, local education authorities, institutes of higher education, state educator associations, and individual school leaders. They do not tell principals how to run their schools, and they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they mandate or include any accompanying assessments, curricula, or instructional materials. While states are voluntarily coming together on certain implementation-related efforts, each state is independently and solely responsible for putting the standards into practice.

Will the standards be updated?

Yes, there will be an ongoing state-led development process to continuously improve the standards.