

# **FACTS ABOUT ABOUT ALABAMA COLLEGE AND CAREER STANDARDS**



**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
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## **THE FACTS ABOUT ALABAMA COLLEGE AND CAREER STANDARDS**

### *The Standards*

Our new standards will provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so that teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.

Consistent standards will provide appropriate academic benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live, and allow states to more effectively help all students succeed.

With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together toward shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves, our communities, and the country.

These new standards are designed to be relevant in the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in both college and career.

When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today's job market, our communities will be strong and competitive in the global economy.

The standards incorporate the best and highest of previous state standards in the U.S. and are internationally benchmarked to the top performing nations around the world.

The best understanding of what works in education comes from experience. That's why the standards were developed by teachers, principals, parents, and education experts, not politicians in Washington.

The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them, which is why the standards allow each teacher in each classroom to figure out what works best for his or her students.

### *The Development Process*

The Alabama College and Career Ready Initiative was a state-led effort to establish consistent and clear education standards for English-language arts and mathematics so students will be prepared for success in today's world.

The initiative was launched by state leaders through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center).

The process used to write the standards was designed to ensure that the standards were informed by the best standards among states and around the globe; the experience of teachers, content experts, states, and feedback from the general public.

The development process began by working with higher education, employers, and the best research available to determine what students need to be college and career ready. Standards were then developed for each grade level to prepare students to meet those expectations by graduation.

CCSSO and the NGA Center received nearly 10,000 comments from the public on the standards, and experts worked to incorporate that feedback for the final release.

Next, CCSSO and the NGA Center worked with experts to ensure that the K-12 standards are aligned with the college and career ready standards.

Finally, a validation committee of experts reviewed the standards and determined that they will prepare students for college and career.

Each state that chose to adopt the standards did so through its own unique process of determining educational standards.

### ***The Mathematics Standards***

The standards stress not only procedural skills, but also conceptual understanding to make sure students are learning and absorbing the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels – rather than the current practices by which many students learn enough to get by on the next test, but forget it shortly thereafter, only to review it again the following year.

The K-5 standards provide students with a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals, which help young students build the foundation to successfully apply more demanding math concepts and procedures, and move into practical applications of those core math principles.

In kindergarten, the standards follow successful international models and recommendations from the National Research Council's Early Math Panel report by focusing kindergarten work on the number core: learning how numbers correspond to quantities, and learning how to put numbers together and take them apart (the building blocks of addition and subtraction).

The K-5 standards build on the best state standards to provide detailed guidance to teachers on how to navigate their way through complex topics such as fractions, negative numbers, and geometry, and to do so by maintaining a continuous progression from grade to grade.

Having built a strong K-5 foundation, students can do hands-on learning in geometry, algebra, and probability and statistics once they reach the middle school level. Students who have completed grade 7 and mastered its content and skills will be well-prepared for algebra in grade 8.

The middle school standards are robust and provide a coherent and rich preparation for high school mathematics.

The high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically.

The high school standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness by helping students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

The high school standards emphasize mathematical modeling – the use of mathematics and statistics to analyze empirical situations – to help students better understand the concept and improve decision-making skills.

### ***The English-Language Arts Standards***

#### ***Reading***

The standards establish a staircase of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college-and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read.

Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspectives. Because the standards are building blocks for successful classrooms – but recognize that teachers, school districts, and states need to decide on appropriate curriculum – they intentionally do not offer a required reading list. Instead, they offer numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect at the beginning of the year.

The standards mandate certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, and seminal works of literature. The standards appropriately defer the many remaining decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, and schools.

#### ***Writing***

The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing – a basic form of argument – extending down into the earliest grades.

Student research – both short focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and longer term in-depth research – is emphasized throughout the standards, but most prominently in the writing strand, since a written analysis and presentation of findings is a critical skill for students to master.

Annotated samples of student writing accompany the standards and help establish adequate performance levels in writing arguments, informational/explanatory texts, and narratives in the various grades.

#### ***Speaking and Listening***

The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through various media platforms.

An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way these standards are put into practice, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

#### ***Language***

The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.

The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking, but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.

Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation, but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

#### *Media and Technology*

Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the 21st century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media), are integrated throughout the standards.

#### *Implementation*

The standards do not tell teachers how to run their classrooms or principals how to run schools. They clearly lay out what students should learn, but allow schools and teachers to decide how to best help students reach their academic goals.

***The Common Core State Standards have always been, and continue to be, a state-led effort.***

The standards are being implemented by each state individually.

The federal government did not play a role in the development of the standards, and it is not playing a role in implementation.

#### *Professional Development*

In most schools, fully implementing the Common Core State Standards will require shifts in instructional strategies and practices.

Educators, school leaders, and teacher preparation programs will benefit from thoughtful and embedded professional development opportunities to prepare for and navigate the transition to the standards.

There are many groups actively engaged in this issue and professional development has been an important part of the implementation.