

Florida • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

The Sunshine State (Florida) Reading and Language Arts Standards. 2006.
Accessed from: <http://etc.usf.edu/flstandards/la/index.html>

Overview

Florida’s standards are generally comprehensive and clearly written, though on occasion, murky and repetitive. Save for the state’s major failure to address American literature, the standards exhibit attention to most of the areas prioritized in our *ELA Content-Specific Criteria* (see Appendix A).



Clarity and Specificity: 2/3
Content and Rigor: 5/7
Total State Score: 7/10
(Common Core Grade: B+)

General Organization

The document is organized into the following logical strands:

1. Reading Process
2. Literary Analysis
3. Writing Process
4. Writing Applications
5. Communications
6. Information and Media Literacy

The standards are then organized into easy to comprehend sub-categories and also by grade-level benchmarks. For example, under Reading Process, a sub-category is “Concepts About Print,” which includes expectations such as this grade 1 benchmark:

The student will locate the title, table of contents, names of author and illustrator, glossary, and index (grade 1)

In addition, the Florida standards contain “access points,” which are foundational skills related to the standards. Their purpose is to “...provide access to the general curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities.” This review, however, examines the standards and benchmarks only.

Clarity and Specificity

The Florida standards are generally clear and specific. They are easy to follow and are mostly free of the jargon, vacuous language, and senseless repetition that characterize many state standards.

Sometimes, however, the standards lapse into the wordy and unmeasurable, as in the following grade 5 standard for Literary Analysis:

The student will use interest and recommendations of others to select a balance of age- and ability-appropriate fiction materials to read (e.g., novels, historical fiction, mythology, poetry) to expand the core foundation of knowledge necessary to function as a fully literate member of a shared culture (grade 5)

In a few other places, the standards become unwieldy and difficult to comprehend, much less evaluate, as in this Literary Analysis standard, repeated across grades 9-12:

The student will create a complex, multi-genre response to the reading of two or more literary works, describing and analyzing an author’s use of literary elements (e.g., theme, point of view, characterization, setting, plot), figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, allusion, imagery), and analyzing an author’s development of time and sequence through the use of complex literary devices such as foreshadowing and flashback (grades 9-12)

Fortunately, such standards are the exception. Some repetition exists in other places, but for the most part Florida does a good job of modifying expectations across grade levels.

Since some standards are not measurable and others have jargon and some vague language, their Clarity and Specificity score is two points out of three (see *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A).

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

Florida’s early reading standards are clear and comprehensive. They address phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and fluency and do not emphasize unmeasurable reading strategies. The following phonemic awareness standard is typical:

The student will:

- identify individual phonemes (sounds) in words (e.g., CCVC, CVCC, CCCVC);
- blend three to five phonemes to form words;
- segment single-syllable words into individual phonemes; and
- manipulate individual phonemes to create new words through addition, deletion, and substitution (grade 1)

Vocabulary is addressed at every grade level, starting with Kindergarten. Unlike many state standards, Florida emphasizes word analysis, etymology, and even dictionary use, as in the following eighth-grade standard:

The student will determine meanings of words, pronunciation, parts of speech, etymologies, and alternate word choices by using a dictionary, thesaurus, and digital tools (grade 8)

Florida treats the analysis of literary and non-literary texts separately, which helps give each category proper attention. The standards for Literary Analysis include an expectation for written analyses, as in this fourth-grade standard:

The student will write a book report, review, or critique that identifies the main idea, character(s), setting, sequence of events, conflict, crisis, and resolution (grade 4)

Similarly detailed standards are included for informational texts.

Florida’s writing standards exhibit a number of virtues. This is one of very few states to include standards for penmanship, introducing printing in Kindergarten and cursive in grade 3. English language conventions are included within writing, and the standards for spelling, mechanics, and usage begin in Kindergarten and are fairly rigorous at all grade levels.

Standards for the Writing Process contain fairly specific directives, more so than in many other states, as in the following sixth-grade standard:

The student will revise by...
creating precision and interest by elaborating ideas through supporting details (e.g., facts, statistics, expert opinions, anecdotes), a variety of sentence structures, creative language devices, and modifying word choices using resources and reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus)...(grade 6)

Three writing genres—persuasive, narrative, and expository—are addressed at all grades, and although they may contain too many expectations for writing products at every grade level, the categories are clear and sensible.

Standards for listening and speaking are pithy and contain reasonable content at each grade level, including expectations for participating in discussions, reciting poetry and other text, giving speeches, and making oral presentations.

Florida combines its research and media standards into a strand called Information and Media Literacy. Starting in the primary grades, students are expected to learn the research process, evaluate sources, and present findings. The standards address the analysis of media techniques and require students to use technology when presenting information.

Content Weaknesses

One disappointing aspect of the Florida standards is that they do not require students to study American literature. This standard from grades 11-12 is about as close as they get to such a requirement:

The student will analyze and compare a variety of traditional, classical, and contemporary literary works, and identify the literary elements of each (e.g., setting, plot, characterization, conflict) (grades 11-12)

Such a broad and general statement is ultimately meaningless. American literature is never mentioned specifically. Further, the standards do not specify the quality and complexity of reading required at each grade level through the use of a reading list or sample passages—either of which would strengthen the document’s rigor.

Another important omission is the analysis of persuasive text. No standards exist for the study of types of arguments and rhetorical techniques, although the writing standards do address these characteristics.

In the Writing Applications strand, every type of writing receives equal emphasis. For instance, the following middle and high school expectations—the first a technical writing standard and the second, a persuasive writing standard—are given equal billing:

The student will write detailed travel directions and design an accompanying graphic using the cardinal and ordinal directions, landmarks, streets and highways, and distances (grades 9-10)

The student will write essays that state a position or claim, present detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning to support effective arguments and emotional appeals, and acknowledge and refute opposing arguments (grades 9-12)

Writing arguments and persuasive pieces is more important than writing directions, manuals, or procedures. It would be a shame if teachers—in an effort to cover what’s in the standards—spent too much time on the former and not enough on the latter. Setting clear priorities would help, as would including samples of model student writing, to illuminate expected levels of rigor.

Similarly, stronger guidelines for formal oral presentations, including evaluation criteria, would be helpful.

Florida’s ELA standards are missing some crucial content and “do not fully distinguish between more and less important content and skills” (see *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A). Therefore, they receive five points out of seven for Content and Rigor.

The Bottom Line

Florida’s standards are generally strong and, with one exception (noted below), address literary and non-literary texts more distinctly than the Common Core. In addition, Florida carefully distinguishes between persuasive writing and expository writing, a distinction that is blurry in the Common Core standards. Both sets of standards could do more to prioritize writing by genres at various grade levels.

On the other hand, Common Core standards addressing the analysis of persuasive text are more thorough and detailed than those found in the Florida standards. In addition, Common Core addresses the study of American literature in eleventh grade, whereas the Florida standards do not mention it at all. Common Core also includes a list specifying the quality and complexity of student reading as well as sample student writing. Such enhancements would significantly improve Florida’s standards.

Florida • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Sunshine State Standards: Mathematics, Standards Report Without Access Points (with Remarks). 2008.
Accessed from: <http://www.floridastandards.org/Downloads.aspx>

Overview

Florida’s standards are generally excellent. They are well organized and well written, and cover nearly all the essential content with both depth and rigor. The high school standards are particularly strong, extending coverage to include STEM-ready material.



Clarity and Specificity: 3/3
Content and Rigor: 7/7
Total State Score: 10/10
(Common Core Grade: A-)

General Organization

The standards are broadly organized into content strands called “Bodies of Knowledge.” The K-8 standards have four strands: “Algebra” (which includes arithmetic), “Geometry/Measurement,” “Number and Operations,” and “Data Analysis.” The bulk of the standards are derived from the first two strands.

The strands are broken into topics labeled as “Big Ideas” and additional topics are labeled as “Supporting Ideas.” These broad strands and topics further break down into “benchmark descriptions” which are the grade-level standards. There are about twenty standards per grade.

The high school standards are organized similarly except there are no “big” or “supporting” ideas—just content strands broken into topics and then grade-level standards. Algebra, for example, is comprised of ten topics (including polynomials and quadratic equations) and includes a total of eighty-four standards.

Each of the standards (K-12) is followed by a “remark/example” which typically elaborates on the standard and/or provides an example problem.

Clarity and Specificity

The standards are generally succinct and clear, for example:

- Extend number patterns to build a foundation for understanding multiples and factors—for example, skip counting by 2’s, 5’s, 10’s (grade 2)
- Justify the formula for the area of the rectangle “area = base x height” (grade 4)

The remarks/examples that are provided with the standards are an excellent feature that serves to ensure that the intent of each standard is clear, for example:

- Select and use appropriate units, both customary and metric, strategies, and measuring tools to estimate and solve real-world area problems
- Remarks/Examples:**
Students should recognize that the area of a piece of paper might be measured in square inches, the area of a room might be measured in square feet, and the area of a large piece of land might be measured in square miles. Alternately, these measurements might be in square centimeters, square meters, and square kilometers, respectively.
- Example: Students find the area of a composite shape. An L-shaped region may be decomposed into rectangular regions (grade 4)

The remarks/examples make it clear exactly what students are expected to be able to do.

Florida’s standards are well presented and very detailed, and the use of examples is exemplary. They receive a perfect three points out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Florida does an excellent job in offering explicit guidance as to what material is most important in each grade. Their content is prioritized through the use of the three Big Ideas for each grade. Through grade 6, two out of three of the Big Ideas in each grade appropriately emphasize the development of arithmetic. For example, the Big Ideas for the fourth grade are:

- Develop quick recall of multiplication facts and related division facts and fluency with whole-number multiplication (grade 4)
- Develop an understanding of decimals, including the connection between fractions and decimals (grade 4)
- Develop an understanding of area and determine the area of two-dimensional shapes (grade 4)

Content Strengths

Florida’s standards cover content with both depth and rigor. The number line is introduced early and appears frequently. Arithmetic properties such as associativity are well covered. The following thread develops the important topic of whole-number multiplication:

- Solve multiplication and division fact problems by using strategies that result from applying number properties (grade 3)
- Use and describe various models for multiplication in problem-solving situations, and demonstrate recall of basic multiplication and related division facts with ease (grade 4)
- Multiply multi-digit whole numbers through four digits fluently, demonstrating understanding of the standard algorithm, and checking for reasonableness of results, including solving real-world problems (grade 4)

High school content is well covered, including STEM-ready material such as polar coordinates, inverse trigonometry functions, series, and logarithms.

The high school organization is particularly strong. The sequence of ten standards under the topic quadratic equations in algebra contains the following:

- Graph quadratic equations with and without graphing technology (grades 9-12)
- Solve quadratic equations over the real numbers by factoring and by using the quadratic formula (grades 9-12)
- Solve quadratic equations over the real numbers by completing the square (grades 9-12)
- Use the discriminant to determine the nature of the roots of a quadratic equation (grades 9-12)
- Solve quadratic equations over the complex number system (grades 9-12)
- Identify the axis of symmetry, vertex, domain, range and intercept(s) for a given parabola (grades 9-12)
- Use quadratic equations to solve real-world problems (grades 9-12)

This approach is exemplary—it outlines rigorous coverage of a complete analysis of quadratic equations. Other high school coverage is also excellent.

Content Weaknesses

There are a few problems in the standards with the development of arithmetic. As seen above, the development of whole-number multiplication is excellent, but the development of whole-number addition and subtraction is not as strong. Big Idea 2 in grade 2 is about developing “quick recall of addition facts,” but the standards themselves do not highlight a need for automaticity. Students must have quick recall of the facts to move on.

The capstone standard for addition and subtraction reveals a much more substantive issue:

Add and subtract multi-digit whole numbers through three digits with fluency by using a variety of strategies, including invented and standard algorithms and explanations of those procedures (grade 2)

This standard leaves invented algorithms with the same status as the standard algorithms. This does not adequately ensure fluency with addition and subtraction.

In high school, axioms are mentioned in Geometry, but they are not integrated into the otherwise excellent geometry standards.

Florida's standards are outstanding. They cover nearly all the essential topics with both depth and rigor and easily merit a score of seven points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With some minor differences, Common Core and Florida both cover the essential content for a rigorous, K-12 mathematics program. Florida's standards are exceptionally clear and well presented and they are easier to read and follow than Common Core. Standards are briefly stated and further clarified with the use of additional remarks/examples that explicate the content expectations so the reader knows exactly what is expected. In addition, the high school content is organized so that the standards dealing with specific topics, such as quadratic functions, are grouped together in a mathematically coherent way. The organization of the Common Core is more difficult to navigate, in part because standards on related topics sometimes appear separately rather than together.

On the other hand, Common Core excels in the coverage of arithmetic, and includes some details—particularly those that address the development of fractions—that are missing in Florida.