Idaho • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Idaho Language Arts Standards. 2006.
Accessed from: http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content_standards/language_standards.htm

Overview

The Idaho standards exhibit strengths in reading, vocabulary, listening and speaking, and media, but they also suffer from superficial treatment of text quality and complexity, student writing criteria, oral and written language conventions, and research. In a number of places, the standards are either unclear or repetitive in ways that make the progression of rigor hard to detect.

GRADE **C**

Clarity and Specificity:	1/3
Content and Rigor:	4/7
Total State Score:	**5/10**

(*Common Core Grade: B+*)

General Organization

The Idaho standards are grouped into six strands:

» Reading Process
» Comprehension/Interpretation
» Writing Process
» Writing Applications
» Writing Components
» Communication

For each strand, the state presents "goals," which are common across grade levels, and finally grade-specific objectives—except in the case of "Speech," where standards are provided only for the high school grade span, 9-12.

In addition, for many objectives, the state includes the oddly phrased "content limit" that explains how, if at all, the objective will be assessed by the state.

Clarity and Specificity

Idaho's standards are clearly organized and well presented, and some are clear and specific, such as:

> Write left to right, top to bottom, with appropriate spaces between words (Kindergarten)
> Use capital letter in first name (Kindergarten)

Unfortunately, a greater number of standards are vaguely written and repetitive. For example, the following generic standard appears under a literary text heading at both seventh and eighth grades:

> Analyze the themes of various genres (grades 7-8)

Such a standard is exceptionally vague and its verbatim repetition fails to delineate progression across grades.

Other standards, while not repeated verbatim, make few (or no) meaningful distinctions from grade to grade. For example:

> Identify defining characteristics of literature genres, including poetry (grade 4)
>
> Identify various genres of fiction and kinds of poetry based on their characteristics (grade 5)
>
> Describe different genres of fiction and kinds of poetry, and the major characteristics of each form (grade 6)

The "content limits" occasionally provide additional detail to clarify expectations. For example:

> Identify plots in literary text
>
> Content Limit: Item may require identification of elements of plot (e.g., main problem, conflict, key details, sequencing, and resolution) (grade 3)

Unfortunately, for standards not assessed on the state test, no additional guidance is provided. The content limit simply reads, "Assessed in the classroom, not on the ISAT" (Idaho's state test).

Finally, at the high school level, the Speech standards are presented only for the grade band 9-12, rather than grade by grade.

Taken together, these shortcomings leave teachers without the clear guidance they need to drive rigorous curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment. The standards therefore earn one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

Idaho generally covers early reading well and appropriately emphasizes standards addressing essential word-analysis skills and comprehension strategies. Specific targets for reading fluency are provided.

Vocabulary standards are generally rigorous, as in:

> Clarify pronunciations, meanings, alternate word choices, parts of speech, and etymology of words using the dictionary, thesaurus, glossary and technology sources (grade 7)

Literary and non-literary texts are treated separately, giving each category its proper attention. Additionally, an attempt is made to address American literature specifically, though only in eleventh grade:

> Analyze recognized works of literature representing a variety of genres and traditions that:
>
> - Trace the development of the major periods of American literature
> - Contrast the major themes, styles, and trends in different periods
> - Evaluate the influences (i.e., philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social) of the historical period that shaped the characters, plot, and setting (grade 11)

The eleventh-grade standards also include a vague vocabulary standard that mentions American literature, though its purpose is difficult to discern:

> Use context analysis to determine the meanings of unfamiliar and multiple-meaning words from American literature (grade 11)

Standards for writing delineate expectations for specific genres and products. Listening and speaking standards are generally rigorous. And in high school, although the standards are written for the entire grade span, they contain some good content:

> Analyze the types of arguments used by a speaker (e.g., argument by causation, analogy, authority, emotion, and logic) (grades 9-12)

This listening skill requires an understanding of types of arguments, a rigorous and welcome high school expectation, but it would be much better if these were scaffolded across four years. It is also commendable that standards ask students to "analyze historically significant speeches to find the rhetorical devices and features that make them memorable."

Oral presentations are also required, as in this objective from high school:

> Deliver oral responses to literature that advance a judgment and/or demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the significant ideas of a work or passage. Support important ideas and viewpoints through accurate and detailed references to the text and to other works (grades 9-12)

More detail could certainly be provided about the type of work or passage, especially at various grades in high school, but at least formal oral presentations are required.

Although only covered in high school, some good media analysis is also included, as in:

> Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines and documentaries, and online information) cover the same event (grades 9-12)

Students in high school are also required to produce multimedia presentations.

Content Weaknesses

The Idaho standards provide no guidance about the quality and complexity of text that students should read across grade levels. Nor do they provide detailed expectations regarding the characteristics and quality of writing products expected in each genre. The following persuasive writing standard, for example, leaves too much to the imagination:

> Write persuasive compositions that take into consideration the validity and reliability of sources (grades 9-12)

Also missing are student writing samples and sample rubrics to help clarify expectations across grades.

Similarly, listening and speaking standards lack evaluation criteria, and the standards fail to include explicit standards for group discussions.

The expectations for English language conventions, housed in the writing strand, could also be more carefully crafted. Much content is left unaddressed by these general standards that gloss over specific grammar and usage, as in these idiosyncratic standards that are repeated from grades 4-8:

> Use correctly:
> - future verb tenses
> - adjectives
> - personal pronouns
> - conjunctions
> - adverbs (grades 4-8)

What happened to grammatical elements such as verb tenses other than the future tense, phrases, clauses, and pronouns other than personal pronouns? The research standards, embedded in expository writing, suffer from a similarly superficial treatment.

Taken together, these shortcomings leave as much as 35 percent of the essential K-12 content missing, thus earning the standards four points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of C, Idaho's ELA standards are mediocre, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn a solid B-plus. The CCSS ELA standards are superior to what the Gem State has in place today.

Idaho • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Idaho Content Standards: Mathematics: K-2. Revised 2006.
Accessed from: http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content_standards/math_standards.htm

Idaho Content Standards: Mathematics: Grades 3-8. Revised 2007.
Accessed from: http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content_standards/math_standards.htm

Idaho Content Standards: Mathematics: Grades 9-12.Revised 2008.
Accessed from: http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content_standards/math_standards.htm

Overview

Idaho's standards are well organized, but they are sometimes difficult to read. In K-8, arithmetic is reasonably prioritized and though its development is straightforward, it is not quite rigorous enough. The high school standards include advanced courses and cover much of the essential content, though the development is not always coherent.

GRADE **B**

Clarity and Specificity:	2/3
Content and Rigor:	5/7
Total State Score:	**7/10**

(*Common Core Grade: A-*)

General Organization

The K-8 standards are organized into five content strands such as Number and Operation, and Concepts and Language of Algebra and Functions. The strands are divided into topics, which vary from grade to grade, and finally into grade-specific standards.

For grades 3-12, the state provides three additional clarifications for many standards. First, they indicate whether students are allowed to use calculators. Second, they specifically indicate the "cognitive level"—for example, memorize, perform procedures, solve non-routine problems or make connections—at which students should perform. Finally, they often provide a "content limit," which is essentially a description of how the standard will be assessed on the state test.

High school standards are presented in two ways. First, grade-specific standards are presented for grades 9-10. These standards follow the organizational structure described above. Second, the state provides course-specific standards for courses such as Geometry, Pre-Calculus, and Advanced Placement Statistics. The course-specific standards are similarly organized with one important difference: Instead of specifying content limits and cognitive levels, skill statements, which are designed to clarify the intent of the standards, are provided.

Clarity and Specificity

The standards are generally well presented and easy to read. Many are clear and concise:

> Use ordered pairs to identify the position of a point in the first quadrant on a coordinate grid (grade 4)
>
> Solve quadratic equations by factoring (Algebra I)

However, a close reading reveals many problems with the clarity of the standards. There is a great deal of repetition, hurting the standards' specificity. A simple example: Out of forty-two third-grade standards, the following is used seven times for different goals:

> Use appropriate vocabulary (grade 3)

This statement, which clearly has different expectations for different topics, is too vaguely worded and appears too frequently throughout the standards to provide adequate guidance.

In addition, many standards are stated so broadly that they are subject to much interpretation on the part of the reader:

> Discuss sliding and flipping of two-dimensional shapes (grade 3)
>
> Use a variety of strategies to solve real-life problems (grade 5)
>
> Formulate conjectures and justify (short of formal proof) why they must be or seem to be true (grade 8)

The last standard is particularly poorly stated since it asks students to justify statements that may not be true.

The high school courses include some clear statements, but many are too broad, and their organization is generally poor. Standards on related topics, such as quadratic equations, are often scattered across various strands. This is exemplified by the following Algebra II standard, where the standard statement is about complex numbers, but which includes unrelated skill statements:

> Perform computations on expressions within the complex number system (Algebra II)

The corresponding skill statements, which are supposed to clarify the standard itself, actually include unrelated additional content that students are expected to master, as demonstrated below:

> a. Perform operations with matrices to include scalar multiplication, addition, subtraction, and matrix multiplication (2 by 2)
>
> b. Add, subtract, and multiply radical expressions and expressions containing rational exponents
>
> c. Use long division or synthetic division to divide a polynomial by a lower-degree polynomial
>
> d. Add, subtract, multiply, and divide rational expressions (Algebra II)

By scattering content haphazardly across standards and skill statements, coherence within topics is lost.

Idaho's standards are reasonable in number, and often easy to read and understand. However, they are frequently too broadly stated and repetitive. The high school courses incorporate some good standards but many are poorly presented and lack coherence. The standards "do not quite provide a complete guide to users" and receive a Clarity and Specificity score of two points out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Implicitly, arithmetic is given moderate priority: Arithmetic standards in the appropriate grades comprise about 40 percent of the standards.

Content Strengths

The standards cover the basic properties of arithmetic well, including commutativity, associativity, and distributivity. In addition, though some standards on arithmetic expectations are well stated, they are not appropriately supported, as discussed below.

Though the high school material lacks coherence, much essential content is covered. There are some rigorous standards, including:

> Write linear equations and inequalities in various forms given the graph of a line, a contextual situation, two or more collinear points, a point and the slope of a line, or a set of data (Algebra I)
>
> Use the quadratic formula, factoring, and completing the square to solve any quadratic equations (Algebra II)
>
> Identify a logarithmic function as the inverse of an exponential function (Algebra II)

The standards also include much of the essential content for geometry, including explicit mention of proof and postulates.

Content Weaknesses

The development of arithmetic is not adequately rigorous, in part because instant recall of basic facts is not explicitly required.

In the continued development of whole-number arithmetic, neither fluency nor standard methods are specified:

> Add and subtract whole numbers (grade 4)
> Multiply and divide whole numbers (grade 5)

Fraction arithmetic is expected in the standards, but there is little development of fractions, and standard procedures are not mentioned. Further, fractions are neither introduced early as parts of a whole, nor explicitly introduced as numbers. Common denominators are not mentioned.

Use of calculators pervades the standards, beginning with third grade:

> Select and use an appropriate method of computation from mental math, paper and pencil, calculator, or a combination of the three (grades 3-6)

In high school, some content is missing, such as vertex form and max/min problems for quadratics, and inverse trigonometric functions.

Idaho's standards, though sometimes difficult to interpret, cover much of the essential content. In K-8, arithmetic is moderately prioritized and developed in a straightforward way, but the coverage is not quite thorough enough. In addition, calculators are mentioned too frequently. In high school, most essential content is covered, but a few details are missing. These "shortcomings" result in a Content and Rigor score of five points out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*,Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of B, Idaho's mathematics standards are decent, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn an impressive A-minus. The CCSS math standards are superior to what the Gem State has in place today.