

AS OF JUNE 20, 2010,
THIS STATE HAD ADOPTED
THE COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS.

Illinois • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED¹

Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts. 1997.
Accessed from: <http://www.isbe.net/ils/ela/standards.htm>

Overview

Illinois has not updated its ELA standards since their initial adoption in 1997. While other state standards have undergone rigorous revision processes—including the articulation in most states of grade-specific expectations across core content areas—Illinois has lagged behind and, as a result, fails to provide clear and rigorous K-12 ELA expectations.



Clarity and Specificity: 1/3
Content and Rigor: 3/7
Total State Score: 4/10
(Common Core Grade: B+)

General Organization

The *Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts* are organized around five goals:

- » State Goal 1–Reading (“Read with understanding and fluency.”)
- » State Goal 2–Literature (“Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.”)
- » State Goal 3–Writing (“Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.”)
- » State Goal 4–Listening and Speaking (“Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.”)
- » State Goal 5–Research (“Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.”)

Each goal is divided into strands that are common across all grades. For example, the Reading goal is broken into the following three strands:

- a. Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.
- b. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.
- c. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

Each strand is then divided into five grade-band standards: early elementary, late elementary, middle/junior high, early high school, and late high school. (Note that the state does not specify to which grades these levels correspond.)

Clarity and Specificity

The *Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts* generally employ clear language and are jargon-free. Unfortunately, they lack the specificity to be actionable in curricula and classrooms. Their organization—by broad levels, rather than by grades—cannot provide the clarity and specificity to guide consistent grade-level instruction in Illinois classrooms, schools, and districts.

Just as troubling, the standards are so vague as to be almost entirely useless. For example, the only standard that addresses phonics and phonemic awareness in the early elementary grades states:

- | Apply word analysis skills (e.g., phonics, word patterns) to recognize new words (early elementary)

The vast majority of standards are similarly vague, failing to clarify what, precisely, students should know and be able to do. Because the standards sorely lack detail and provide very little guidance to teachers, they earn one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

One of the framework’s five goals articulates that students will “read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.” The standards across this goal are relatively strong. They specify much of the essential content that students must master across grade levels, and provide clear progression from one grade band to the next. For example,

- Identify and analyze a variety of literary techniques (e.g., figurative language, allusion, dialogue, description, word choice, dialect) within classical and contemporary works representing a variety of genres (middle/junior high school)
- Analyze and evaluate the effective use of literary techniques (e.g., figurative language, allusion, dialogue, description, symbolism, word choice, dialect) in classic and contemporary literature representing a variety of forms and media (early high school)
- Compare and evaluate oral, written or viewed works from various eras and traditions and analyze complex literary devices (e.g., structures, images, forms, foreshadowing, flashbacks, stream of consciousness) (late high school)

The standards presented under goal 5—“Use language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information”—are appropriate and rigorous; they convey the entire scope of the research process, from formulating a research question, and identifying and evaluating sources, to synthesizing and integrating information, and reporting findings and citing sources.

Finally, the state provides detailed listening standards, particularly for middle/junior high school.

Content Weaknesses

Along with these few strengths, the Illinois ELA standards present significant shortcomings and content gaps.

While the literary standards mentioned above are adequate, the standards focus almost exclusively on literary texts, with few standards focused on reading and analyzing non-literary texts.

As noted above, only one vaguely worded standard addresses phonics and phonemic awareness.

The standards do not provide any guidance regarding the quantity, complexity, or types of texts that students should read, nor do they mention or provide examples of foundational works of American literature.

Standards across each of the five goals place far too great an emphasis on *strategies* for learning rather than on learning *outcomes*. For example:

- Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., reread, read ahead, use visual and context clues, ask questions, retell, use meaningful substitutions) (early elementary)
- Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., in addition to previous skills, clarify terminology, seek additional information) (late elementary)
- Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., in addition to previous skills, draw comparisons to other readings) (middle/junior high school)

Such standards equate to mere process guidance, which fails to provide teachers with concrete student-performance expectations. Moreover, the validity of these strategies as effective learning tools is much debated.

The writing standards also focus primarily on strategies. They provide no genre-specific expectations, rubrics, or criteria to define how writing skills should progress across grade levels and genres. The standards seem to place greater emphasis on managing anxiety in public speaking (see below) than on specifying criteria for effective writing by genre and grade level.

Identify methods to manage or overcome communication anxiety and apprehension (e.g., topic outlines, repetitive practice) (late elementary)

Develop strategies to manage or overcome communication anxiety and apprehension (e.g., sentence outlining, note cards) (middle/junior high school)

Use strategies to manage or overcome communication anxiety and apprehension (e.g., developed outlines, note cards, practice) (early high school)

Implement learned strategies to self-monitor communication anxiety and apprehension (e.g., relaxation and transference techniques, scripting, extemporaneous out-lining, repetitive practice) (late high school)

Finally, the state fails to delineate essential grammar and conventions content.

Because the state fails to detail grade-specific expectations, and because a majority of standards are either vague or focus on strategies more than on content, between 50 and 65 percent of critical content is absent from the Illinois standards. The state earns three points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, Illinois's ELA standards are among the worst in the country, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn a solid B-plus. The CCSS ELA standards are significantly superior to what the Prairie State has in place today.

¹ Illinois has not updated their ELA standards since 1997; thus, they have not changed since our last evaluation, the *State of State English Standards 2005*. In 2005, however, we reviewed all available assessment frameworks for the standards, something we did not do for this review. (See Appendix C for document selection methods.) In addition, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge standards in 2010 have been substantially revised and improved since 2005. (See Appendix C for a complete explanation of changes in criteria.) These changes contributed to a change in Illinois's final ELA grade: from a B to a D. The complete 2005 review can be found here: http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=337&pubsubid=1041#1041.

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STATE STANDARDS.

Illinois • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Illinois Mathematics Assessment Framework, Grades 3-8, State Assessments. Spring 2006.
Accessed from: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/iaf_math.pdf

Illinois Mathematics Assessment Framework, PSAE Grade 11, State Assessments. Spring 2006.
Accessed from: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/iaf_math_PSAEFINAL.pdf

Overview

Illinois's standards are easy to read and sometimes clear, but they often lack specificity. There are significant weaknesses in both K-8 and in high school. The development of arithmetic is weak and students are apparently permitted to rely on calculators for performing arithmetic computation. The high school content is missing many of the essential topics.



Clarity and Specificity: 2/3
Content and Rigor: 1/7
Total State Score: 3/10
(Common Core Grade: A-)

General Organization

There are ten state goals. The first five are paragraphs about process or pedagogy with titles such as “Solving Problems” and “Working on Teams.” Goals 6-10 are content strands, each with an explanation of “Why this goal is important.” The goals are further broken down into eighteen topics and finally into individual grade-level expectations for grades 3-8.

High school follows the same structure, though expectations are only provided for grade 11.

Clarity and Specificity

The standards are sometimes easy to read and understand. The statements are generally short and some standards are clear such as:

Identify and locate whole numbers and halves on a number line (grade 3)

Others are not so clear. This is particularly true at the high school level. For example:

Determine the most cost-effective option using single- and multi-step calculations and then comparing results (grade 11)

Analyze functions by investigating domain, range, rates of change, intercepts, and zeros (grade 11)

These standards do not make clear what students are supposed to know or what types of problems they should be able to solve. The last standard includes topics that are generally covered in calculus, so its meaning is particularly confusing.

An additional problem with the standards is that many of them are repeated in consecutive grades. For example:

Identify and sketch acute, right, and obtuse angles (grades 5-7)

It is not clear why this standard appears identically in three successive grades, or what comprises the intended sequence for learning about such angles.

While the expectations highlighted in the above example are not subject to interpretation, other repeated standards should clearly have different interpretations in different grades. For example, the following standard appears in grades 3-8:

| Solve word problems involving unknown quantities (grades 3-8)

The complexity of the problems should increase as students master more advanced mathematics, yet this repetitive standard gives no such guidance.

Although the standards are easy to read, they often lack specificity, and the sequencing of the material is not clear. Thus, they receive a Clarity and Specificity score of two points out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

The importance given to the content areas is made explicit in the document by a chart which shows the percentage of the state assessment devoted to each state goal. For grades 3-5, about 33 percent of the assessments are devoted to the goal of Number Sense. This explicit setting of priorities is a good thing in and of itself, yet it does not prioritize arithmetic as it should in the early grades.

Content Strengths

The structure of the operations (commutativity, associativity, distributivity, and the inverse nature of addition and subtraction and of multiplication and division) of arithmetic are well covered. The number line is introduced in grade 3 and appears frequently thereafter.

Content Weaknesses

The development of whole-number arithmetic is weak. While the standards do specify that students be able to “solve problems” involving arithmetic, neither fluency nor standard procedures are developed. The explanation of why number sense is important includes the following, which does mention algorithms:

| All people must develop this sense of numbers and operations and be able to use it to solve problems using mental computation, paper-and-pencil algorithms, calculators and computers (state goal 6)

However, there is little support for the development of algorithms.

The following standards, for example, basically represent the complete development of whole-number multiplication and division:

| Model and apply basic multiplication and division facts (up to 12×12), and apply them to related multiples of 10 (e.g., $3 \times 9 = 27$, $30 \times 9 = 270$, $6 \div 3 = 2$, $600 \div 3 = 200$) (grade 4)

| Solve problems and number sentences involving addition and subtraction with regrouping and multiplication (up to three-digit by one-digit) (grade 4)

| Solve problems and number sentences involving addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division using whole numbers (grades 5-6)

Instant recall of number facts and fluency with standard procedures are not specified.

Compounding the problem, the standards explicitly allow the use of a calculator after grade 3. Presumably, this means that students can use calculators for whole-number computation rather than standard methods and procedures in the grade 5-6 capstone standard.

There are some good geometry standards in the K-8 standards, but there are also many that are vague and extraneous. One example:

| Identify congruent and similar figures by visual inspection (grades 3-6)

Visual inspection is not a mathematical method for determining congruence or similarity.

The high school standards have numerous issues with coverage. Neither linear nor quadratic functions appear as coherent topics, and there are very few standards about quadratics. Completing the square and the quadratic formula are not covered.

Polynomials are mentioned explicitly only once in the following overly broad standard:

Simplify or identify equivalent algebraic expressions (e.g., exponential, rational, logarithmic, factored, polynomial)
(grade 11)

The arithmetic of polynomials and rational expressions is not adequately covered by this standard.

Other essential content is also covered inadequately or completely missing, including constructions in geometry and inverse trigonometric functions.

Illinois's standards are weak in both elementary and high school. Arithmetic is neither prioritized nor developed properly, in part because calculators are explicitly used beginning in third grade. High school mathematics is incomplete and is missing much of the essential content. These “numerous problems, shortcomings, or errors” (see *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A) result in a Content and Rigor score of one point out of seven.

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, Illinois's mathematics standards are among the worst in the country, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn an impressive A-minus. The CCSS math standards are vastly superior to what the Prairie State has in place today.