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

South Carolina • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

South Carolina Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts. 2008.
Accessed from: http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/index.html

Overview

The South Carolina standards are woefully vague and repetitive, despite some good content, such as the treatment of early reading, and some aspects of literary and informational texts.

GRADE **D**

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

(*Common Core Grade: B+*)

General Organization

The South Carolina standards are divided into three strands: Reading, Writing, and Researching.

Each grade level contains six "standards" (three for Reading, two for Writing, and one for Researching), and a number of "indicators" are listed for each standard. Introductory material states that "all of the six standards and their indicators carry equal weight and should be taught in an integrated manner." Standards for high school are divided into courses, English 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Clarity and Specificity

South Carolina's essential problem is that far too many of its indicators are repeated across grades, even though some of them are rigorous. Overall, the indicators are far too repetitive to be helpful for grade-level curriculum planning, instruction, or assessment.

Consider the following indicator for literary text response, repeated in grades 6-12:

> Create responses to literary texts through a variety of methods (for example, written works, oral and auditory presentations, discussions, media productions, and the visual and performing arts) (grades 6-12)

In some cases, the indicators are both unmeasurable and repetitive, as in this example, repeated in grades 1-12:

> Read independently for extended periods of time for pleasure (grades 1-12)

Excessive repetition of vague indicators casts a pall over the document and earns South Carolina one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

South Carolina's indicators for early reading are systematic and thorough, as in the following first-grade phonics set:

> Use onsets and rimes to decode and generate words
>
> Use knowledge of letter names and their corresponding sounds to spell words independently
>
> Organize a series of words by alphabetizing to the first letter

> Identify beginning, middle, and ending sounds in single-syllable words
>
> Classify words by categories (for example, beginning and ending sounds)
>
> Use blending to read
>
> Spell three- and four-letter short-vowel words and high-frequency words correctly (See Instructional Appendix: High-Frequency Words.)
>
> Use known words to spell new words (grade 1)

All of the early reading criteria are addressed (see *ELA Content Specific Criteria*, Appendix A) and often with examples. Appendices list the high-frequency words that students are to learn, as well as the roots, prefixes, and suffixes that they should know at each grade level. Vocabulary is addressed at every grade level, with a focus on word analysis. Spelling is also addressed within vocabulary.

From Kindergarten onward, literary and informational text are treated separately, with specific indicators outlined in each area, progressing in rigor across the grades, despite repetition in a number of places. Consider the following progression—on "point of view"—in grades 2-7:

> - Analyze the text to determine the narrator (grade 2)
> - Analyze the text to determine first-person point of view (grade 3)
> - Distinguish between first-person and third-person points of view (grade 4)
> - Differentiate among the first-person, limited-omniscient (third person), and omniscient (third person) points of view (grade 5)
> - Differentiate among the first-person, limited-omniscient (third person), and omniscient (third person) points of view (grade 6)
> - Explain the effect of point of view on a given narrative text (grade 7)

With respect to informational text, some repetition also exists, but rigorous progression is evident in a number of places, as in this grade 5-8 sequence dealing with bias and propaganda:

> - Analyze a given text to detect author bias (for example, unsupported opinions) (grade 5)
> - Summarize author bias based on the omission of relevant facts and statements of unsupported opinions (grade 6)
> - Identify propaganda techniques (including testimonials and bandwagon) in informational texts (grade 6)
> - Identify author bias (for example, word choice and the exclusion and inclusion of particular information) (grade 7)
> - Identify the use of propaganda techniques (including glittering generalities and name calling) in informational texts (grade 7)
> - Analyze informational texts for author bias (for example, word choice and the exclusion and inclusion of particular information) (grade 8)
> - Identify the use of propaganda techniques (including card stacking, plain folks, and transfer) in informational texts (grade 8)

To illustrate the quality and complexity of reading that students should master, South Carolina appends a suggested reading list organized by grade spans and genres. The titles represent a thoughtful selection of literary and informational texts. Although American literature is not required for study, a number of important works from American literature are included on the list.

The indicators for oral and written conventions are fairly well delineated across grades 1-6. They are somewhat repetitive in grades 7-12, but generally go farther than many state standards in defining specific objectives for grammar and usage.

Content Weaknesses

The South Carolina indicators for writing are woefully repetitive, with many repeated verbatim across multiple grades in multiple instances. They focus mostly on process and do not describe specific expectations for products by genre in a way

that is helpful to teachers. For example, in "informational writing," some version of the following indicator is repeated across grades 4-10:

> Create informational pieces (for example, reports and letters of request, inquiry, or complaint) that use language appropriate for the specific audience (grades 4-10)

Even indicators for persuasive writing in high school mention only that essays should have a thesis statement and "use support." It would be more helpful to describe key aspects of persuasive writing such as anticipating and addressing potential counterclaims and the use of rhetorical strategies.

South Carolina's indicators include none that address listening and speaking. Some "Oral Communication and Vocabulary" indicators are included, such as this high school indicator, but it is repeated verbatim in all four years:

> Create written works, oral and auditory presentations, and visual presentations that are designed for a specific audience and purpose (grades 9-12)

Although it includes a Research strand, South Carolina's indicators in this domain are thin. For example, "clarify and refine a research topic" is an indicator in all grades 4-12. The equally thin "use a variety of print and electronic reference materials" appears in grades 6-12. Paraphrasing and summarizing information is addressed, as is documenting sources, but these indicators are perfunctory and repetitive, as in this grade 6-12 indicator:

> Use a standardized system of documentation (for example, a list of sources with full publication information and the use of in-text citations) to properly credit the work of others (grades 6-12)

Nowhere are specific characteristics for research products fully defined, such as essays that reflect the evaluation of primary and secondary sources or the synthesis of information.

Multimedia indicators are addressed only occasionally. For example, consider this indicator, which appears under "Visual Aids in Presentations." It repeats almost unchanged in grades 4-12:

> Select appropriate graphics, in print or electronic form, to support written works and oral and visual presentations (grades 4-12)

Students should be expected not only to select graphics, but to analyze and produce multimedia products in order to be college- and career-ready.

Despite notable areas of rigorous content, such as early reading, South Carolina fails to define a systematically rigorous set of student expectations. Weaknesses in the areas of writing, listening and speaking, research, and media mean that South Carolina is missing close to 50 percent of necessary content and earns three points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, South Carolina'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 Palmetto State has in place today.

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

South Carolina • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

South Carolina Academic Standards for Mathematics. June 12, 2007.
Accessed from: http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/standards/math/documents/2007MathematicsStandards.doc

Overview

South Carolina's standards are often strong. Many are clear and easy to read, and the high school content contains some mathematically rich material. Unfortunately, the standards neither prioritize nor support the arithmetic skills that students need and therefore fail to provide the kind of guidance K-12 teachers need to truly prepare students for college mathematics.

GRADE **C**

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

(*Common Core Grade: A-*)

General Organization

South Carolina's K-8 standards are organized by strands including Measurement, Number and Operations, and Algebra. These are subdivided by topic and then into grade-specific "indicators." It is these indicators that are referred to as "standards" and examined below. The high school standards are organized by course rather than grade, but otherwise follow the same structure.

Clarity and Specificity

In general, South Carolina's standards are well organized and not difficult to read. There are a reasonable number of standards in each grade; they are easy to find and stated succinctly. Some are simple and easily understood, such as the following standards:

> Classify angles as right, acute, or obtuse (grade 3)
>
> Represent with ordered pairs of integers the location of points in a coordinate grid (grade 6)

Some standards, however, are subject to wide interpretation in terms of the mathematical skill that students are expected to master. For example:

> Represent numeric, algebraic, and geometric patterns in words, symbols, algebraic expressions, and algebraic equations (grade 5)

Without further clarification, it is not clear from this statement what students are expected to be able to do.

In the elementary grades, the standards contain many statements that include the phrase "generate strategies to..." such as:

> Generate strategies to add and subtract without regrouping through two-digit numbers (grade 1)

There is an attempt in the introduction to explain the phrase, but it is not specific enough to make these standards clear or measurable:

> An indicator beginning with the phrase "Generate strategies" addresses a concept that is being formally introduced for the first time, and students must therefore be given experiences that foster conceptual understanding.

Other standards begin with equally vague phrases, including "apply an algorithm" and "apply strategies and procedures." Unfortunately, the accompanying clarification statements provided in the introduction are similarly ambiguous.

Most of the standards are explicit and clear. But enough of them suffer from such vague language that, taken together, the standards do not quite provide a complete guide to users. This results in a Clarity and Specificity score of two points out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Aside from the number of standards devoted to each content area, South Carolina does not offer explicit guidance as to which content is most important. In the elementary grades, the arithmetic standards comprise only about one-third of the standards—an insufficient proportion that does not properly prioritize the role of arithmetic in the early grades.

Content Strengths

The high school standards are generally good and cover the advanced material needed for STEM-ready students.

Content Weaknesses

The primary weakness of South Carolina's standards is with the development of arithmetic. While fluency is stated as a goal, the development of the standards does not support true mastery of arithmetic skills that students need to continue to more advanced topics. For example, the arithmetic standards on whole-number addition and subtraction are the following:

> Recall basic addition facts through 9 + 9 and corresponding subtraction facts (grade 1)
>
> Generate strategies to add and subtract pairs of two-digit whole numbers with regrouping (grade 2)
>
> Apply an algorithm to add and subtract whole numbers fluently (grade 3)

Note that the last standard does not specify that the standard algorithms are the ones to be applied in solving addition and subtraction problems. The guidance in the introduction for the phrase "apply an algorithm" states that standards beginning with this phrase address "a concept that has been introduced in a previous grade." In the above, various strategies may have been generated to add and subtract, and the "algorithm" chosen to apply to achieve the desired fluency may be one that is inefficient or otherwise inadequate.

The development of whole-number multiplication and division and of fraction and decimal arithmetic follows a similar pattern. Students first "generate strategies" and then "apply an algorithm" to achieve arithmetic fluency. The failure to specify the use of standard algorithms and other standard arithmetic procedures has the potential to undermine students' mastery of arithmetic.

Further, the important topics of common denominators and negative numbers are not mentioned in the elementary standards. While negative numbers are never mentioned explicitly, in sixth grade, integers suddenly appear in a standard, which states simply:

> Understand Integers (grade 6)

While this is a laudable goal, it is unmeasurable and fails to provide sufficient guidance about what students are expected to know and be able to do.

As stated above, the high school standards are generally strong, but they, too, reveal a few weaknesses. Many begin with "apply a procedure to...," without specifying what procedure ought to be applied. Since graphing calculators are required for all courses, this could result in students relying on them to perform procedures that should be mastered without the use of a calculator.

A few details are also missing in the standards for lines and quadratics. The geometry course is not rigorous. The standards use all of the important theorems to solve problems, but there is no indication that the important theorems themselves should be proven.

In sum, much of the high school content is covered clearly and well in these standards. They fall short, though, on the topic of arithmetic. Arithmetic is the fundamental prerequisite for advanced mathematics, but its importance is insufficiently supported in South Carolina's standards. This is no less than a "crucial shortcoming" that leads to a Content and Rigor score of three points out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of C, South Carolina's mathematics standards are mediocre, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn an impressive A-minus. The CCSS math standards are significantly superior to what the Palmetto State has in place today.