

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

Washington • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Reading: K-10 Grade Level Expectations: A New Level of Specificity. 2004.

Accessed from: <http://www.k12.wa.us/Reading/pubdocs/ReadingEALR-GLE.pdf>

Writing: K-10 Grade Level Expectations: A New Level of Specificity. 2005.

Accessed from: <http://www.k12.wa.us/Writing/pubdocs/EALRwritingfinal.pdf>

Communication: K-10 Grade Level Expectations: A New Level of Specificity. 2005.

Accessed from: <http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/Communications/pubdocs/EALRcommunication.pdf>

Overview

Washington's standards for grades K-10 are generally well organized but contain a mixture of precise and vague language that compromises their clarity and their rigor. In addition, the inclusion of nonacademic expectations, including several that incorporate explicit test-prep and career-planning expectations, unnecessarily distracts from mastery of essential academic content.



Clarity and Specificity: 2/3

Content and Rigor: 4/7

Total State Score: 6/10

(Common Core Grade: B+)

General Organization

The Washington standards for ELA are grouped into four “Essential Academic Learning Requirements” (EALR) in each of three strands: Reading, Writing, and Communication. These EALRs are common to all grades and give broad descriptions of what students should know and be able to do. For example:

- Reading EALR 1: The student understands and uses different skills and strategies to read.
- Writing EALR 1: The student understands and uses a writing process.
- Communication EALR 1: The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.

Each EALR is divided first into “components,” such as “use word recognition skills and strategies to read and comprehend text,” and finally into grade-level expectations (GLEs) for grades K-10.

Clarity and Specificity

The ELA standards are generally clear and well organized, with a comprehensible grade-by-grade progression of content and skills. Many of the GLEs are specific and include illustrative examples to clarify expectations, such as:

Avoids dangling modifiers (e.g., “After I stood in line for hours, I discovered the tickets were sold out.” Incorrect: “After standing in line for hours, the tickets were sold out.” The second sentence makes it appear that the tickets were in line.) (grades 9-10)

At times, however, the language is vague or obscured with jargon, such as:

Define words and concepts necessary for understanding math, science, social studies, literature, and other content area text (grade 3)

Use text features to verify, support, or clarify meaning (grade 8)

Use literary themes within and across texts to interpret current issues, events, and/or how they relate to self (grades 9-10)

In places, the state makes somewhat arbitrary distinctions, resulting in inordinately complicated standards laced with unnecessary detail. For example, it's not clear what's intended by distinguishing between “writes for different purposes” and “writes in a variety of forms/genres.” While purpose and form are not the same, the GLEs don't make this distinction meaningful despite including roughly fifty specific GLEs per component.

Such general language does little to ensure that districts, schools, and teachers will have comparable levels of understanding and rigor. These shortcomings detract from the overall presentation, earning the standards two points out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

The GLEs include a clear early-reading focus on phonics and phonemic awareness, including many standards that are detailed and specific, such as:

- Segment and blend multi-syllabic words, including compound words (grade 1)
- Add, delete, and/or substitute one phoneme for another in initial, medial, and final positions to make a new word (grade 1)
- Segment and blend words orally containing three to five phonemes (grade 1)
- Generate words that begin or end with the same sound or different sounds (grade 1)
- Blend and segment onset and rime (grade 1)

The state emphasizes learning essential grammar content by including clear, rigorous, and detailed expectations for language conventions, including:

- Uses who vs. whom correctly (grades 9-10)
- Uses that vs. which and that vs. who correctly (grades 9-10)
- Uses either... or and neither... nor correctly (grades 9-10)
- Uses active voice except when passive voice is appropriate (e.g., active voice: “They saw it.” vs. passive voice: “It was seen by them.”) (grades 9-10)
- Uses parallel construction in clauses.
 - parallel: The coach told the players they should get plenty of sleep, they should eat well, and they should do some warm-up exercises.
 - not parallel: The coach told the players they should get plenty of sleep, that they should eat well, and to do some warm up exercises (grades 9-10)

The vocabulary expectations are reasonably clear and emphasize the importance of content knowledge for vocabulary building, particularly in grades 9-10. For example:

- Integrate new vocabulary from informational/expository text and literary/narrative text, including text from a variety of cultures and communities (e.g., salon as a historical reference to political gatherings as opposed to a beauty salon), into written and oral communication (grades 9-10)
- Explain the meaning of content-specific vocabulary words (e.g., regeneration, isolationism, emancipation, polarized) (grades 9-10)
- Transfer knowledge of vocabulary learned in content areas to comprehend other grade-level informational/expository text and literary/narrative text (e.g., the concept of parallel in mathematics to understand parallelism) (grades 9-10)

The expectations for writing are precise and thorough; they include illustrative examples to clarify intent, and they often helpfully mention mentor texts—grade-appropriate texts that demonstrate specific aspects of writing that students are learning—that can be used across grades. For example:

Writes a story in pictures and in words following a pattern from literature (e.g., *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say or *The Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle) (Kindergarten)

Uses a variety of transitional words and phrases to make connections between and within paragraphs.

- chronological (e.g., next, after)
- spatial (e.g., over, under, next to)
- ordinal (e.g., first, second, third) (grade 4)

Composes an effective ending/conclusion that is more than a repetition of the introduction (e.g., response to a “so what” question, connection to bigger picture) (grade 8)

The standards include a document devoted to “communication” skills, which include general listening and speaking skills, oral presentations, group interactions, analysis of information in multimedia formats, and self-assessment. Many of these are addressed in detail, with helpful illustrative examples. For example:

Reaches a group decision through compromise, with teacher guidance for large group solutions (e.g., blending differing points of view to reach a compromise or choosing the quickest or best solution) (grade 4)

Uses techniques to enhance the message (e.g., irony and dialogue to achieve clarity, force, and aesthetic effect; technical language) (grades 9-10)

Content Weaknesses

The GLEs focused on reading are a mixed bag. While they outline some clear expectations for reading literary and non-literary texts, many of the standards are vague and much of the critical content that students must learn to become proficient readers is simply absent. For example, many of the standards for recognizing and interpreting different genres are too vague to guide curriculum, assessment development, or instruction. Here’s an example:

Compare/contrast how recurring themes are treated by diverse authors or in different genres (grades 9-10)

Such standards—found often—lack essential content- and genre-specific detail.

The standards do not refer to any specific works of literature, American or otherwise. For grades 9 and 10, they refer implicitly to American literature only by referring to events in U.S. history:

Examine the ways in which works of literature are related to the issues and themes of their historical periods (e.g., the Gold Rush, civil rights movement, post-World War II Europe) (grades 9-10)

Until grade 8, the GLEs do not address the quality and complexity of texts, and even then they vaguely reference reading “great literary works,” with no criteria or book lists that would help teachers select sufficiently rigorous texts.

The GLEs for research are limited to gathering information; there are no clear expectations regarding the research process.

In addition, the GLEs include unnecessary standards that are focused on test prep rather than mastery of essential content. For example:

Select, from multiple choices, a prediction, inference, or assumption that could be made from the text (grade 8)

This elevates a test-taking skill and needlessly deflects attention from mastering critical content.

The standards also include an entire component devoted to “reading to perform a task” and another to “writes for career applications.” While including a handful of standards focused on such nonacademic reading and writing can add value, the number of standards devoted to such nonacademic reading and writing disproportionately emphasizes less important content and skills.

Similarly, important communications and oral presentation content is buried deep among voluminous standards focused on less critical content, such as assessing your own and your peer’s effectiveness in communication and “social interaction skills” (including cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, etc.).

Finally, because the Washington standards include GLEs only through grade 10, much important end-of-high-school content is entirely missing from the standards.

Taken together, these shortcomings lead to the loss of as much as 35 percent of the critical content, thus earning Washington's standards four points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

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

Washington • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Washington State K-12 Mathematics Learning Standards. July 2008.

Accessed from: <http://www.k12.wa.us/mathematics/Standards/K-12MathematicsStandards-July2008.pdf>

Overview

Washington's standards are easy to read and well organized. They come with extensive explanatory notes and examples. They cover nearly all the essential content with rigor and do an excellent job of limiting and prioritizing the content to be covered. In elementary school, arithmetic is both given priority and developed well. The high school content is generally strong, but a few STEM-ready topics are not included.



Clarity and Specificity: 3/3

Content and Rigor: 7/7

Total State Score: 10/10

(Common Core Grade: A-)

General Organization

Washington presents grade-specific standards—called “performance expectations”—for all grades, K-8. These standards are subdivided by three headings: Core Content, Additional Key Content, and Core Processes. The standards that are meant to be the top priority for a grade level are explicitly labeled with the Core Content heading. Finally, the state provides “Explanatory Comments and Examples” for most standards to help clarify intent.

The high school material is organized similarly, but presented by course.

Clarity and Specificity

The standards are well presented and generally easy to read and understand. Most standards are straightforward and clear, for example:

Simplify fractions using common factor (grade 4)

Given two fractions with unlike denominators, rewrite the fractions with a common denominator (grade 5)

When standards are not clear, the explanatory comments and examples serve to clarify:

Identify rational and irrational numbers

Students should know that rational numbers are numbers that can be represented as the ratio of two integers; that the decimal expansions of rational numbers have repeating patterns, or terminate; and that there are numbers that are not rational (grade 8)

In some cases, the examples are used to be more specific about content, such as with this standard:

Know, explain, and apply basic postulates and theorems about triangles and the special lines, line segments, and rays associated with a triangle (Geometry)

One of the examples is an important theorem:

Prove that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees (Geometry)

Still, some standards are far too vague and general, such as:

| Select and justify functions and equations to model and solve problems (Algebra I)

The explanatory comments and examples do serve to clarify this standard, but the examples are numerous and somewhat disparate, so the actual intent of the standard remains subject to interpretation.

The following comment appears with numerous problem-solving standards and appears to be more of an English language requirement than one for mathematics:

| The intent of this expectation is for students to show their work, explain their thinking, and verify that the answer to the problem is reasonable in terms of the original context and the mathematics used to solve the problem. Verifications can include the use of numbers, words, pictures, physical objects, or equations.

Overall, Washington’s standards are well presented and usually clear and specific. The use of examples to clarify intent is exemplary, and they receive a Clarity and Specificity score of three points out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Washington does an exemplary job of prioritizing critical content at each grade level. This is done via the core content headings, which are explicitly stated to be the “major mathematical focuses” for each grade.

Arithmetic is unambiguously and effectively prioritized in elementary school. For example, in fourth grade, the core content topics are: “Multi-digit Multiplication,” “Fractions, Decimals, and Mixed Numbers,” and “Concept of Area.” Moreover, over half the standards are about arithmetic.

Content Strengths

The essential content is well covered. The development of arithmetic is strong. Instant recall of the number facts is specified:

| Quickly recall basic addition facts and related subtraction facts for sums through 20 (grade 2)
| Quickly recall multiplication facts through 10 X 10 and the related division facts (grade 4)

The capstone standards for whole-number arithmetic are equally clear:

| Fluently and accurately add and subtract whole numbers using the standard regrouping algorithms (grade 3)
| Fluently and accurately multiply up to a three-digit number by one- and two-digit numbers using the standard multiplication algorithm (grade 4)
| Fluently and accurately divide up to a four-digit number by one- or two-digit divisors using the standard long-division algorithm (grade 5)

The development of arithmetic continues nicely through fractions.

In high school, linear equations are covered thoroughly with standards such as:

| Write and graph an equation for a line given the slope and the y-intercept, the slope and a point on the line, or two points on the line, and translate between forms of linear equations (Algebra I)

Quadratics are also nicely developed with, for example, the following standard with its explanatory comment:

| Solve problems that can be represented by quadratic functions, equations, and inequalities. In addition to solving area and velocity problems by factoring and applying the quadratic formula to the quadratic equation, students use the vertex form of the equation to solve problems about maximums, minimums, and symmetry (Algebra II)

Similarly:

Translate between the standard form of a quadratic function, the vertex form, and the factored form; graph and interpret the meaning of each form (Algebra II)

Content Weaknesses

Some STEM-ready material is missing or covered inadequately. Trigonometry is mentioned, but material such as the graphs of the trigonometric functions, major trigonometry identities, and inverse trigonometric functions are missing entirely. Other missing material includes the arithmetic of complex numbers and polar coordinates.

In the elementary grades, the standards do an excellent job of covering arithmetic and setting it as a priority. The high school coverage is strong, except for some STEM-ready material. The Content and Rigor score is seven points out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With some minor differences, Common Core and Washington State both cover the essential content for a rigorous, K-12 mathematics program. That said, Washington's standards are exceptionally clear and well presented, and are generally more detailed and explicit than Common Core. In particular, they include "Explanatory Comments and Examples" that provide additional context so that the reader knows exactly what students are expected to know and be able to do. In addition, the high school content is organized so the standards dealing with various 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 development of fractions, and includes important material on trigonometry that is missing from Washington's standards.