

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

Wisconsin • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED¹

Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts. January 13, 1998.
Accessed from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/standards/elaintro.html>

Sample Proficiency Standards. January 13, 1998.
Accessed from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/standards/pdf/teched-prof.pdf>

Overview

Wisconsin's ELA standards are generally clearly written and presented, and include some rigorous content. Unfortunately, their failure to provide grade-specific expectations creates critical gaps in content that leave teachers without the guidance they need to drive rigorous curriculum, assessment, and instruction.



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

General Organization

Wisconsin divides its ELA expectations into five “standards” (i.e., strands) that are common across all grade levels: Reading/Literature; Writing; Oral Language; Language, Media and Technology; and Research and Inquiry. These standards are divided into “content standards” that are also common to all grades and include a broad statement about what students should know and be able to do. For example, the Reading/Literature strand is introduced with the following:

Content Standard: Students in Wisconsin will read and respond to a wide range of writing to build an understanding of written materials, of themselves, and of others.

Each content standard is followed by a two-paragraph explanation of its rationale and purpose.

Finally, the content standards are broken into “performance standards” for three benchmark grades: 4, 8, and 12. No other grade-specific standards or indicators are provided.

Clarity and Specificity

On the positive side, Wisconsin's ELA standards are well organized and presented, and many are reasonably clear and jargon-free. For example:

- Orally communicate information, opinions, and ideas effectively to different audiences for a variety of purposes
- Identify and discuss criteria for effective oral presentations, including such factors as eye contact, projection, tone, volume, rate, and articulation
 - Read aloud effectively from previously read material
 - Speaking from notes or a brief outline, communicate precise information and accurate instructions in clearly organized and sequenced detail
 - Present autobiographical or fictional stories that recount events effectively to large and small audiences
 - Participate in group readings, such as choral, echo, and shadow reading

- Perform dramatic readings and presentations
- Distinguish between fact and opinion and provide evidence to support opinions (grade 4)

Others are too vaguely worded to provide adequate guidance, such as:

- Write creative pieces (poetry, fiction, and plays) employing basic aesthetic principles appropriate to each genre (grade 4)

By failing to indicate what the “basic aesthetic principles” are, this standard is not instructionally useful.

What’s more, because standards are only provided for three grade levels, they do not provide the specificity needed to drive instruction from grade to grade, thus earning them one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

While grade-specific standards are not provided, some essential content is incorporated, such as the comprehension and analysis of literary and non-literary texts:

- Recognize and recall elements and details of story structure, such as sequence of events, character, plot, and setting, in order to reflect on meaning (grade 4)
- Identify and use organizational features of texts, such as headings, paragraphs, and format, to improve understanding (grade 8)

In addition, the standards delineate some important genre-specific content, including:

- Apply knowledge of expository structures, such as the deductive or inductive development of an argument, to the comprehension and evaluation of texts (grade 12)

Standards addressing the specific genres that students should learn at each grade level are included, and do show a logical progression of content across grade levels, as demonstrated with the grades 8 and 12 expectations below:

- Write a coherent and complete expository piece, with sufficient detail to fulfill its purpose, sufficient evidence to support its assertions, language appropriate for its intended audience, and organization achieved through clear coordination and subordination of ideas (grade 8)
- Write a persuasive piece (such as a letter to a specific person or a script promoting a particular product) that includes a clear position, a discernible tone, and a coherent argument with reliable evidence (grade 8)
- Write a coherent argument that takes a position, accurately summarizes an opposing position, refutes that position, and cites persuasive evidence (grade 12)
- Compose and publish analytic and reflective writing that conveys knowledge, experience, insights, and opinions to an intended audience (grade 12)

As these standards demonstrate, important and more advanced genre-specific expectations are introduced in the later grades, and there is a clear progression and scaffolding of content and rigor.

Standards addressing the research process are also included and these, too, demonstrate a clear progression of both content and rigor.

The state delineates expectations for listening and speaking, and its standards for media are noteworthy because they distinguish—clearly and rigorously—between the evaluation, creation, understanding, and analysis of media.

Content Weaknesses

While Wisconsin’s standards include some clear and rigorous content, their failure to delineate grade-specific expectations leads to the omission of much critical K-12 content, beginning with early reading.

Only three standards touch on any content related to phonics, phonemic, or phonological awareness:

Use a variety of strategies and word recognition skills, including rereading, finding context clues, applying their knowledge of letter-sound relationships, and analyzing word structures (grade 4)

Demonstrate phonemic awareness by using letter/sound relationships as aids to pronouncing and understanding unfamiliar words and text (grade 4)

Read aloud with age-appropriate fluency, accuracy, and expression (grade 4)

Vocabulary standards are inadequate and omit such important content as synonyms, antonyms, compound and multiple meaning words, and denotation.

With the exception of the brief and overly broad fourth-grade standard below, the state fails to include any standards that reflect the importance of reading American literature.

Draw upon a reservoir of reading materials, including fairy tales, fables, and narratives from the United States and cultures worldwide, to understand plots, make predictions, and relate reading to prior knowledge and experience (grade 4)

Nor does Wisconsin provide explicit guidance regarding the amount, quality, or complexity of texts that students should be reading each year, much less any actual titles.

The state fails to include expectations that clarify the characteristics and quality of writing that students should produce in each grade. In addition, standards addressing English language conventions are vaguely worded and omit some essential grade-appropriate content.

Some standards set forth unnecessary or irrelevant expectations, such as:

Demonstrate the ability to integrate general knowledge about the world and familiarity with literary and nonliterary texts when reflecting upon life's experiences (grade 4)

Asking students to “integrate general knowledge about the world” when “reflecting upon life’s experiences” is both vague and unnecessarily distracts from standards outlining critical ELA-specific content.

Finally, too many reading standards focus on habits of mind and reading comprehension strategies, rather than on critical content. For example,

Establish purposeful reading and writing habits by using texts to find information, gain understanding of diverse viewpoints, make decisions, and enjoy the experience of reading (grade 4)

Comprehend reading by using strategies such as activating prior knowledge, establishing purpose, self-correcting and self-monitoring, rereading, making predictions, finding context clues, developing visual images, applying knowledge of text structures, and adjusting reading rate according to purpose and difficulty (grade 4)

Given that very few standards are presented at all, the inclusion of these expectations unnecessarily distracts from the essential content that is outlined in the standards.

While much important content is included in the Wisconsin ELA standards, the failure to delineate grade-specific expectations leaves critical content gaps that are exacerbated by the inclusion of unnecessary and distracting content. As such, the standards can earn no higher than three points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, Wisconsin'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 Badger State has in place today.

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- 1 Wisconsin's academic standards have not changed since Fordham's last evaluation, the *State of State English Standards 2005*. However, in 2005 we also reviewed supplementary material for Wisconsin's benchmark indicators. Moreover, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge the 2010 standards have been substantially revised and improved since 2005. (See Appendix C for a complete explanation of changes in criteria.) Through this new lens, Wisconsin's ELA grade dropped from a C to a D. The complete 2005 review can be found here: http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=337&pubsubid=1076#1076.

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

Wisconsin • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED¹

Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Mathematics. January 13, 1998.
Accessed from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/standards/matintro.html>

Overview

Wisconsin's standards are scant. They are provided only for the end of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, and very few standards are provided for each grade band. In some ways, they cover a lot of mathematical content concisely and efficiently. However, much of the essential content is missing and the level of detail for what is covered is insufficient.



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

General Organization

The standards cover three grade bands: end of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. They are organized into six content strands, including a mathematical process strand.

Clarity and Specificity

The standards are well presented and generally easy to read. They are quite brief, though, with fewer than 100 standards in total for all grade levels.

Some of the standards are clearly stated and easily understood. However, even when stated clearly, the standards often lack specificity. In particular, the lack of grade-specific standards makes it difficult to know at which grade levels students should master specific content. Moreover, frequently, only capstone standards are included, which leaves teachers with inadequate guidance about how to scaffold essential knowledge and skills required to master those standards. For example, there are only two standards on fractions, starting with:

Add and subtract fractions with like denominators (grade 4)

The continued development of fractions, such as adding and subtracting fractions with unlike denominators, is never specified, but may be included in:

Perform and explain operations on rational numbers (add, subtract, multiply, divide, raise to a power, extract a root, take opposites and reciprocals, determine absolute value) (grade 8)

The failure to articulate the intermediate standards compromises the clarity and specificity. This lack of detail permeates the Wisconsin standards, and leaves them, on the whole, far too open to interpretation on the part of the reader.

Other examples of standards that are not specific and fail to adequately scaffold material are:

Use physical materials and motion geometry (such as slides, flips, and turns) to identify properties and relationships, including but not limited to

- symmetry
- congruence
- similarity (grade 4)

Recognize, describe, and analyze functional relationships by generalizing a rule that characterizes the pattern of change among variables. These functional relationships include exponential growth and decay (e.g., cell division, depreciation) (grade 8)

These standards are broadly stated and the reader is left with little idea as to what, exactly, students are required to know or what kinds of problems they should be able to solve.

Wisconsin's standards are sometimes admirably efficient, and they do contain some clear statements. However, the limited number and restricted grades of the standards, combined with the lack of clarity in many of the statements, render them "of limited guidance to users." They receive one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Priorities are not made explicit in the Wisconsin standards. Notably, there are only seven standards about arithmetic in the fourth-grade standards, and these seven standards must cover the entire development of numbers and arithmetic for grades K-4. Taken together, these arithmetic standards constitute only about one-fourth of the standards for the end of fourth grade, which does not appropriately prioritize arithmetic in elementary school.

Content Strengths

Despite the small number of standards, there is reasonable coverage of some essential content. The properties of numbers such as commutativity, primes, and the inverse nature of addition and subtraction are covered. Rates, ratios, proportions, and percentages are well represented.

Content Weaknesses

The standards are missing much essential content. Single-digit number facts are to be recalled, but not quickly or instantly. Whole-number arithmetic has basically no development and is missing both fluency and standard methods and procedures. It is covered in a single fourth-grade standard:

In problem-solving situations involving whole numbers, select and efficiently use appropriate computational procedures such as

- recalling the basic facts of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division
- using mental math (e.g., $37 + 25$, 40×7)
- estimation
- selecting and applying algorithms for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division
- using a calculator (grade 4)

This is inadequate. Worse, as a "computational procedure," this standard equates calculators with pencil and paper methods.

In the continued standards on arithmetic in eighth grade, common denominators are not mentioned, and the standard algorithms are undermined with "computational procedures for rational numbers" such as:

[C]reating, using, and explaining algorithms (grade 8)

This gives alternative algorithms the status that standard methods should have.

Linear equations are covered, but much of the mathematics of them is not made explicit. Basics are missing, such as point slope form and equations from two points.

High-school geometry is particularly sparse: There are only five standards, one of which is devoted to trigonometry and another to coordinates. Of the three remaining, one is not helpful:

Use geometric models to solve mathematical and real-world problems (grade 12)

The coverage of quadratic equations is even less robust. Polynomials, factoring, complex numbers, and completing the square are never mentioned. STEM-ready standards are almost completely missing.

Wisconsin's standards are inadequate to cover the necessary material. They do not set arithmetic as a priority in elementary school and miss much of the foundation of both whole-number arithmetic and the arithmetic of fractions. Much of high school mathematics is missing. These "numerous problems" result in a Content and Rigor score of one point out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of F, Wisconsin'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 Badger State has in place today.

¹ Wisconsin's model academic standards have not changed since Fordham's last evaluation, the *State of State Math Standards 2005*. However, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge the 2010 standards have been substantially revised and improved since 2005. (See Appendix C for a complete explanation of changes in criteria.) Through this new lens, Wisconsin's math grade dropped from a D to an F. The complete 2005 review can be found here: http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=338&pubsubid=1191#1191.