



Overview of the Core Curriculum Content Standards Richard C. Ten Eyck, Assistant Commissioner for the Senate Education Committee

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Introduction

I am pleased to discuss with you our progress in revising the 1996 Core Curriculum Content Standards. Standard-based reform continues to guide educational change in New Jersey, and this second generation of standards will move us forward in improving instruction and student achievement.

It is important to note that standards-based education is not about incremental improvement of classrooms, schools and school systems, it is really about transforming the whole ecology of schooling to obtain the desired result – improved achievement for all.

The standards impact a number of critical current reforms and priorities. They guide curriculum and instruction for all students in all schools. They will form the basis of our new assessment system in language arts literacy, math and science. They will be linked to new professional standards for teachers and administrators that will be required in college preparation programs. They will be the foundation of a statewide accountability system that will track the progress of all schools and districts.

Review Process

In May of 2001, we began the formal review process, which has been an inclusive one. Over 250 educators and representatives from business and industry have served on our standards revision committees in all content areas.

We have also received guidance and direction from a statewide advisory committee composed of representatives from all of the major educational organizations, as well as colleges and universities and business and industry. The entire revision effort has been coordinated by the Office of Academic and Professional Standards in my division.

When New Jersey began the development of standards in 1994, we were one of only thirteen states engaged in establishing content standards. The goal was to develop general curricular direction to districts about what students are expected to know and be able to do.

Since 1994, nearly every state has created standards. As part of our review, we researched a wide variety of sources to establish a state-of-the-art perspective about what standards should look like and what content should be added.

At the outset of our review process, we sought recommendations about improving our standards from Achieve, Inc., the Council of Chief School Officers and the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence. In addition, national experts in each content area provided specific input about how to improve our standards. The committees have also reviewed other exemplary state standards and the national standards in their area.

In December 2001, we disseminated widely the first draft of the standards. Since then, we have actively solicited feedback from professional organizations, teachers, parents, students, representatives of business and industry, the higher education community, and interested New Jersey citizens.

The department joined with New Jersey United to conduct six feedback sessions at various locations around the state. The department's content specialists held numerous feedback sessions as part of state conferences and workshops. Finally, we received feedback from individuals in response to a request for comments posted on the NJDOE Web site. During this process, we obtained input from hundreds of individuals from across the state. This feedback assisted the content committees in providing final drafts of the standards.

External reviews of our 1996 standards indicated a need for increased specificity. Thus, this second generation of standards includes more content direction. There is more subject matter and, where the committees thought it would be helpful, smaller grade-level bands or delineations. Many of the standards contain interdisciplinary connections.

Content Areas

Let me briefly review the main features of each of the content areas.

Knowing that early elementary school experiences are critical to school success, the revised language arts literacy standards provide clearer expectations, especially for students in grades k through 4.

They specifically address Governor McGreevey's request to identify standards for the early grade levels. They are also aligned to the requirements of Reading First under No Child Left Behind. New Jersey was the fourteenth state to receive a grant award of \$120 million over six years for this comprehensive reading program. The standards will greatly assist our efforts to improve the early literacy performance of all students.

The standards reflect a balanced approach to reading instruction and are based on the recommendations of the National Reading Panel, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the International Reading Association.

The mathematics standards are aligned with the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

The new standards are more specific, are organized into a smaller number of standards that correspond to the content clusters of statewide assessments, and are organized by strands which guide teachers to specific areas of mathematics.

The need for scientific literacy in today's increasingly technological world is well known. New Jersey is host to an impressive array of scientific and technological industries that inform and support science instruction. Over the years, an enormous amount of scientific content has accumulated at an accelerating rate. Our science standards are not intended to include all of science. Rather, they are an attempt to define what all students should know and be able to do as they grow towards scientific literacy.

A major difference between the 1996 science standards and the revised standards is that two life science areas have been combined. Additionally, technology has been integrated into each of the science standards.

The science standards are more teacher-friendly — that is, the language is clearer and more consistent. The concepts and skills are developmentally appropriate, and it is easier to track concepts across grade spans.

The State Board of Education adopted these three standards areas on July 2, 2002. They have been widely disseminated and are now being implemented in our classrooms. They will form the basis of alignment with the new statewide assessment system. They are available in print and also featured on the department's Web site.

The remaining standards are now before the state board. The visual and performing arts standards strengthen the focus of the arts content by specifying what is to be learned in the arts disciplines of dance, music, theater, and the visual arts.

The health and physical education standards will help students develop the knowledge and behaviors to adopt, maintain, and enjoy healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle. These standards are reflective of three important national reports that called upon schools to take a more active role in health promotion and disease prevention.

The revised social studies standards will provide students with the knowledge they need to be active, informed, responsible citizens and contributing members of their communities. The standards define, in much more detail, social studies as comprising the four disciplines of history, geography, civics and economics. They also include more content in the teaching of world history, United States history and New Jersey history. The Legislature's current interest in ensuring that diverse issues are included in the curriculum are covered in these standards.

The world languages standards continue the vision of second language learning to be available to all students with the emphasis on communication and culture. These standards also take into account New Jersey's highly mobile population and the interest of students to study specific languages by describing multiple entry points for language study.

We have introduced a new standards area, that of technological literacy. Technology is evolving at an amazing rate, with both frequent advancements to existing technology and the creation of new technologies. All students must understand and be comfortable with the concepts and application of technology. Two standards in this area, computer applications and technology education, will provide this for our students. The Legislature was also interested in our establishing a separate technology standard.

The Workplace Readiness Standards have been renamed and are now Career Education and Life Skills. This important area provides a focus on career awareness, planning and employability skills. These are essential elements in preparing our students for the careers of the future.

We have also included the practical arts, now called Career/Technical Arts, in this section of the standards.

I want to note that the state board is also reviewing the Early Childhood Education Program Expectations at this time. The fact that we have coordinated the review of all of the standards, illustrates the integrated pre-K-12 educational system we believe needs to be in place. The revision of the early childhood standards provides more guidance in differentiating expectations for teaching practices from the expectations for learner outcomes. It also provides additional examples for both teaching practices and learning outcomes.

The Commissioner has recommended that we spend time over the next several months reviewing these standards to ensure that they define the content we want our students to learn. They are now being disseminated to all stakeholders and are available on our Web site.

Hundreds of pieces of testimony are being reviewed about these areas and further revisions will be made. We anticipate that the board will adopt these standards early in 2003. At the same time, we will also be defining the high school graduation requirements. They must be linked to the standards, but at the same time allow students options to pursue selected courses of study.

National Perspective

While we review our proposed standards, we must also view New Jersey's standards in relation to the national standards movement and other states' standards. The current draft is a reflection of where the majority of states are heading in defining more clearly the content to be studied.

In examining the standards review and revision process, we have learned a great deal in the last six years. We have learned of the need to clearly define the concept of "core" in order to clearly understand the distinction between what all students must learn and what it is that those students who elect certain areas of study should be expected to learn. Further, we have learned of the close connection between our state's standards and processes we develop to assess whether or not students are achieving competency in these areas. Lastly, we have recognized the critical connection between our state's standards and the graduation requirements for our students.

I believe that New Jersey continues to be a leader in articulating rigorous standards that will prepare students for postsecondary education and a career. This second generation of standards focuses on high expectations. The standards provide specific direction for teachers, students and parents about what we want all students to know and be able to accomplish as a result of a New Jersey public education. They offer a powerful challenge to all educators to enable all students to develop the skills, understandings, and attitudes to be successful in their daily lives.