



COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Academic standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do at the end of a grade level or grade span. Standards are not the same as the curriculum, which is the plan or sequence of instructional units employed to teach students. Colorado uses “performance levels” to refer to how well students are doing on the academic standards.

The development of academic content standards in Colorado began in 1993 when the state legislature adopted the Colorado Education Reform Act (the Act). The legislature declared that a system of standards-based education would serve as an anchor for education reform, promote authentic assessment of student learning, reinforce accountability and encourage equity. C.R.S. 22-7-401. The Act required the Colorado State Board of Education to define content standards in reading, writing, math, science, history and geography. Local school boards then had until 1997 to adopt content standards that met or exceeded the state content standards.

In 2008, the state legislature passed the Preschool to Postsecondary Alignment Act, also known as Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids, or CAP4K. C.R.S. 22-7-1001 *et seq.* CAP4K took standards-based education to the next level by requiring the state board and the Colorado Commission of Higher Education to create a seamless system of public education standards, expectations and assessments. This alignment was intended to ensure that a student who achieves the required level of proficiency on state academic standards as the student progresses through the K-12 education system will achieve postsecondary and workforce readiness when the student graduates from high school, if not earlier.

Pursuant to CAP4K, in 2009 the state board adopted state academic standards (CAS) in ten content areas: reading, writing and communicating (i.e. language arts); math; science; social studies; world languages; music; visual arts; dance; drama and theatre arts; and health and physical education. The state board also adopted English language proficiency standards and standards that will result in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

At about the same time that Colorado was developing the CAS, the development of Common Core State Standards began as an initiative of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. These two organizations brought together national experts and educators to create a “common core” of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for grades K-12.

Colorado reviewed the Common Core standards against the CAS and found them to be substantially similar to the state’s standards. In 2010, the state board incorporated the Common Core standards into the CAS for English language arts and math.

Local school boards were required to review their own academic standards to ensure they met or exceeded the CAS by December 15, 2011. C.R.S. 22-7-1013. The 2012-13 school year was a “transitional year” to allow districts to transition their instruction from the old standards to the new standards. The 2013-14 school year was the first year of full implementation of the CAS.

The CAP4K legislation requires the state board to review and adopt any appropriate revisions to the CAS by July 2018 and every six years thereafter. The Colorado Department of Education will launch the review process in early 2017.