

Common Core State Standards

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For English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities Special Considerations in Relation to Common Core Standards

Built from the highest state standards in the country, the Common Core standards are evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are informed by other top performing countries. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom. These standards are designed to ensure that all students are learning what they need to know to graduate from high school ready for college or a career.

Common standards provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices within and across states that can lead to an improved ability to best serve English language learners and young people with disabilities. Additionally, the K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for these special groups.

These students may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge. English Language Learners (ELLs) differ in ethnic background, first language, socioeconomic status, quality of prior schooling, and levels of English language proficiency. Effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction accordingly, and closely monitoring student progress. The development of native like proficiency in English takes many years and will not be achieved by all ELLs especially if they start schooling in the US in the later

grades. Teachers should recognize that it is possible to achieve the standards for reading and literature, writing and research, language development, and speaking and listening without native-like control of conventions and vocabulary.

The Common Core State Standards for English language arts feature rigorous grade-level expectations to prepare all students to be college and career ready, including English language learners. Second-language learners benefit from instruction so they are able to participate on equal footing with native speakers in all aspects of social, economic, and civic endeavors.

Many ELLs have first language and literacy knowledge as well as skills that boost their acquisition of English language and literacy. Additionally, they bring an array of cultural practices and perspectives that enrich our schools and society. Teachers must build on this enormous reservoir of talent with additional time and appropriate instructional support. To help ELLs meet high academic standards in language arts it is essential that they have access to:

- Teachers and personnel who are qualified to support ELLs while taking advantage of the many strengths and skills they bring to the classroom
- Literacy-rich school environments where students are immersed in a variety of language experiences
- Instruction that develops foundational skills in English and enables ELLs to participate fully in grade-level coursework

- Coursework that prepares ELLs for postsecondary education or the workplace, yet is made comprehensible for students learning content in a second language (through specific pedagogical techniques and additional resources)
- Opportunities for classroom discourse and interaction that are well designed to enable ELLs to develop communicative strengths in language arts
- Ongoing assessment and feedback to guide learning
- Speakers of English who know the language well enough to provide ELLs with models and support.

ELLs are more than capable of participating in mathematical discussions as they learn English. Mathematics instruction for ELL students should draw on multiple resources and modes available in classrooms— such as objects, drawings, inscriptions, and gestures—as well as home languages and mathematical experiences outside of school. Language is not only a tool for communicating, but also a tool for thinking and reasoning mathematically. All languages provide resources for mathematical thinking, reasoning, and communicating. Regular and active participation in the classroom—not only reading and listening but also discussing, explaining, writing, representing, and presenting—is critical to the success of ELLs in mathematics. Research has shown that ELLs can produce explanations, presentations, and participate in classroom discussions as they are learning English. ELLs, like English-speaking students, require regular access to teaching practices that are most effective for improving student achievement. Overall, research suggests that:

- Language switching can facilitate rather than inhibit solving word problems in the second language, as long as the student’s language proficiency is sufficient for understanding the text of the word problem
- Instruction should ensure that students understand the text of word problems before they attempt to solve them
- Instruction should include a focus on “mathematical discourse” and “academic language” because these are important for ELLs

- Students learn to participate in mathematical reasoning, not by learning vocabulary, but by making conjectures, presenting explanations, and/or constructing arguments
- While vocabulary instruction is important, it is not sufficient for supporting mathematical communication.

Overall, research has demonstrated that vocabulary learning occurs most successfully through instructional environments that are language-rich and actively involve students in using language. These environments also require that students understand both spoken or written words and express that understanding orally and in writing, while requiring students to use words in multiple ways over extended periods of time.

Students with Disabilities

The Common Core Standards provide a historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities. The continued development of research-based instructional practices and a focus on their effective implementation will help improve access to mathematics and English language arts (ELA) standards for these students.

Students with disabilities share one common characteristic: the presence of disabling conditions that significantly hinder their abilities to benefit from general education. Therefore, how these high standards are taught and assessed is crucial in reaching this diverse group of students.

In order for these students to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural skills in mathematics and English language arts, their instruction must incorporate:

- Supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum
- An Individualized Education Program that includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards
- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards. In order to succeed in the general curriculum, students with disabilities may be provided additional supports and services, such as instructional supports for learning based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)² which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression.

Some students with significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to certain standards in both instruction and assessment, based on their communication and academic needs. These supports and accommodations should ensure that students receive access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

References

Thompson, Sandra J., Amanda B. Morse, Michael Sharpe, and Sharon Hall. "Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer and Evaluate Use of Accommodations and Assessment for Students with Disabilities," 2nd Edition. Council for Chief State School Officers, 2005 http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2005/Accommodations_Manual_How_2005.pdf

2 UDL is defined as "a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient." by Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-135)