



Colorado Department of Education – Communications Office
201 East Colfax Ave.
Room 207
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-866-3898
Fax: 303-866-6938

July 21, 2010

News Release

State Board of Education Compares Colorado Academic Standards With Common Core Standards

In preparation for its upcoming decision on Aug. 2, the Colorado State Board of Education received a presentation and engaged in a Web-based discussion regarding the comparison of Colorado Academic Standards and the Common Core Standards. The Common Core Standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association in conjunction with national experts and state education agencies.

Based upon further review of the comparative analyses, Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones will make a recommendation to the board for or against adoption at the Aug. 2 meeting.

The commissioner initiated today's board discussion with a presentation of reports released last week by the Colorado Department of Education's Office of Student Assessment that compared the Colorado Academic Standards and the national Common Core State Standards (CCS).

The reports were developed by the Assessment and Standards Development Services program at WestEd, an educational research, development and service organization. WestEd provided CDE with a line-by-line analysis of differences between Colorado's model content standards and the CCS for two standards subject areas - Mathematics and Reading, Writing and Communicating. (The complete analyses and summaries can be found at www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/CAS_CCSSI_Gap_Analysis.html.)

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones, Stanley Rabinowitz, the director of WestEd's Assessment and Standards Development Services and

Jo O'Brien, assistant commissioner of standards and assessment, led the state board through the analyses.

In addition to a variety of other comments, board members primarily asked staff to compare the levels of rigor between the two sets of standards. They also sought confirmation that adoption of the CCS would not result in curriculum requirements of any kind in Colorado.

Commissioner Jones emphasized that the decision about adopting national common core standards is not about eliminating Colorado's new standards, but rather about using the common core standards as voluntary enhancements to the state's version.

Jo O'Brien cautioned that many analyses will find varying strengths and weaknesses but underscored that WestEd's work was specific, straightforward and not conducted with a political lens.

Stanley Rabinowitz said WestEd performed a crosswalk of national and state standards, looking for specific overlaps and gaps between the two sets of grade-level expectations.

"There is significant alignment between the two documents," said Rabinowitz. He noted that a difference in "grain size" (level of detail) and structure complicated the analyses. As a result, he said, some differences appeared greater than they are in substance. When non-alignment was discovered, he said, the content typically was found no more than one grade level higher or lower and no pattern was found that would indicate either set of standards spells out a more rigorous set of expectations.

"This truly comes down to a judgment of how much of the national work will enhance your work," said Rabinowitz, "I am confident . . . that you will be able to arrive at a decision that retains the integrity of the work you have done but that is enhanced by the common core standards."

Members of the Colorado Academic Standards subcommittees provided feedback on the gap analysis and recommended amendments to the previously adopted state standards. Angela Norlander, principal consultant in the office of standards and assessment for CDE, told the board that the committees found the national standards included a degree of specificity that constituted curriculum-level content, while Colorado's standards afforded greater latitude to local districts to develop that level of specificity. Nonetheless, Norlander said the committees recommended a series of proposed amendments that kept Colorado's work intact.

“There has been some misinformation about the adoption process,” said Commissioner Jones. “What I really wanted to demonstrate to you is that the approach we took in the department was open and transparent and we did not have our minds made up. Colorado certainly does not intend to discard the Colorado standards. We intend to enhance or enrich, but not replace.”

Board member Angelika Schroeder, among others, asked if one set of standards is higher than the other. O’Brien said the two sets of standards reflect 90 percent alignment.

There are a few instances, she said, “where one of the documents has an edge over the other... it tips back and forth enough to say we can’t indicate which one is better. We (Colorado) are very pithy, very curt. It truly is what a student should know. The value out of the (national) common core is it gets much more into the detail in terms of how a student might get there (to standards).”

Board member Peggy Littleton pressed for an exact definition of what it means to adopt the national common core. Rabinowitz responded that the board could define “adoption” in its own resolution to be clear about its intentions going forward. To date, 27 states have adopted the national standards, which is a key component of the federal Race to the Top competition. States submitting applications in the second round of the Race to the Top win points in the review if they adopt the national standards by Aug. 2.

Coloradans are encouraged to provide feedback on this report through Wednesday, July 28. The public can e-mail comments to Standards_Review_Com@cde.state.co.us.

About Colorado’s Standards

The Colorado State Board of Education unanimously adopted new standards in 11 content areas last December, following a two-year statewide conversation. These standards detail the broad themes, ideas and concepts that the state expects students to learn, experience and demonstrate for postsecondary success. The new standards replace those adopted in 1994 when the state first shifted to a common statewide understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do.

The 11 content areas include dance; comprehensive health and physical education; math; music; reading, writing and communicating; science; social studies; drama and theatre arts; visual arts; world languages; and English language proficiency.

For more information, contact Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

Follow us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/codepted>

#