

Colorado Academic Standards: Drama and Theatre Arts Benchmarking Report



COLORADO
Department of Education

Introduction

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) remains committed to providing rigorous academic standards to the highest quality. The Colorado Academic Standards in Drama and Theatre Arts were approved by the Colorado State Board in 2009. CDE has requested third-party experts conduct a formal study to identify the quality of the Drama and Theatre Arts standards being implemented since the 2009 school year, and to determine how and to what degree Colorado's current Drama and Theatre Arts standards compare with the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS), as well as the Drama and Theatre Arts standards of higher-performing states and countries.

The Colorado Department of Education engaged the services of the State Education Agency Director of Arts Education (SEADAE) to conduct an external review; benchmarking the Colorado Academic Standards in Drama and Theatre Arts against the National Core Arts Standards, Arizona Academic Standards in the Arts, Delaware Content Standards for Visual and Performing Arts, and the K-12 Create Arts Continuum, a syllabi developed by the Board of Studies, State of New South Wales (Australia).

The Colorado Department of Education approached SEADAE for the review of the Colorado Academic Standards in Drama and Theatre Arts because of its history of high-quality work involving arts education standards, assessment, and instruction, as well as the deep content expertise of its members. SEADAE members are those persons at state arts education agencies who are charged with oversight of educational policy and practice in the arts (Dance, Media Arts, Music, Drama and Theatre Arts, and Visual Arts).

Methodology (p. 6-11)*

The Arts were organized in to grade-band clusters of PK-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8 and Drama and Theatre Arts High School Generalist and Performance Pathways for the review. The elements of the standards identified for review include: Academic Standards for Drama and Theatre Arts, Prepared Graduate Competencies; High School Expectations; Grade Level Expectations; and Evidence Outcomes. While important to understanding the current CAS standards, the following elements in the standards were not included in the review: 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies; Inquiry Questions, and the Nature of the Discipline.

Colorado Academic Standards Criteria for Review: A review of the internal quality of the Colorado Academic Standards in Drama and Theatre Arts with respect to the degree of rigor, depth, breadth, and coherence of the Standards. A four-point rating scale was used (3-Strong, 2-Moderate, 1-Weak, 0-Not Found). Rating were found for each of the following:

- Rigor – “...instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational expectations that are *academically, intellectually, and personally challenging...*”
 - Active language for learners to demonstrate declarative and procedural knowledge and skills
 - Developmentally appropriate
 - Enable and encourage students to build upon prior knowledge and transfer or adapt appropriate grade-level constructs to new situations, thereby fostering creativity and adaptive innovation
 - Promulgate age appropriate arts literacy and fluency
- Depth – “...robust, well-integrated understandings of fundamental concepts essential to the attainment of literacy and fluency music...”
 - Deep investigation and multiple perspectives
 - Deep investigation of developmentally appropriate literacy and fluency
 - Reinforce and revisit core concepts and transfer of prior knowledge



- Promote inquiry-based learning
- Specific learning objectives with levels of student mastery
- Breadth – “...a logically scaffolded and sequenced set of standards in which essential content is explored through a wide array of interrelated ideas, facts, and perspectives.”
 - Build learner knowledge and skills through a variety of related experiences over time
 - Provide interrelated ideas, facts, and perspectives
 - Continuum of knowledge and skills necessary for progressively sophisticated levels of literacy and fluency.
- Coherence – “...a progression of instruction in which each lesson builds on previous lessons, moving students from simpler concepts to more complex and challenging concepts from lower-level thinking to higher-level thinking as they progress through their education.”
 - Systematic, intentional progression of learning that builds on previous Standards, with a logical pathway for learning and mastery
 - Construction parallel to that of other standards and concurrent knowledge and skills required for mastery
 - Cognitive ability increases for content mastery

Arizona, Delaware, National Core Arts Standards, and State of New South Wales (Australia): CDE selected external referents to which the CAS-Drama and Theatre Arts would be compared. Included in the selection criteria was (1) the time of the adoption/adaption of these standards, as CDE was looking for recently adopted/updated standards, (2) relevance and coherence of the content-area learning objectives, (3) suggestions from the CDE staff, and (4) consist use by other experts in the field. Analyst’s used a four-point rating scale (Very Similar, Similar, Dissimilar, or Very Dissimilar) when comparing CAS-Drama and Theatre Arts to the referent exemplars, along with the lenses of rigor, depth, breadth, and coherence.

Findings & Recommendations

OBSERVATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- The CAS for Drama and Theatre Arts do not offer active language for demonstrating knowledge and skills. In many instances Grade Level Expectancies (GLE’s) are not challenging enough for grade levels. The standards are statements of fact rather than learning objectives.
- There is little evidence of an inherent progression of learning across the grade band cluster to ensure student understanding.
- CAS for Drama and Theatre Arts lack specificity, offering few qualitative criteria and no quantifiable scale as to whether students are approaching the standard.
- There is a lack of a continuum of knowledge and skills embedded in the standards, which leaves no way to gauge students’ level of understanding.
- There is a lack of specificity of GLE’s. GLE’s are not scaffolded for moving student from simple concepts to more complex and challenging levels of thinking.
- Criteria for sufficient rigor, depth and breadth, and coherence of the GLE’s are not being met by CAS. This is largely due to standards not being couched in active language.

* Page numbers refer to the page(s) in the full benchmarking report.



- There is very little focus on theatre history and culture.
- There also needs to be greater distinction between ELO's for the High School Extended and Fundamental pathways.

(pg. 14)*

It is worth noting that the process for reviewing the Colorado Academic Standards for Dance, Drama and Theatre Arts, Music, and Visual Arts was limited, by design, to analyzing two main components of the CAS model; the content-specific standards; and their associated grade-level expectations. Accordingly, this Review and the ratings within were based on the merits of the explicit GLE language alone. The Reviewers acknowledge that additional clarity or understanding could be attained by connecting the Prepared Graduate Competencies [PGCs] aligned to the content standards embedded in the GLE, Evidence Outcomes, and 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies. Furthermore, inclusion of these elements may certainly have resulted in different ratings. For this Report to guide future iterations of the CAS toward greater coherence, the CAS might benefit from close examinations of the full set of aforementioned resources (i.e., PGC, GLE, EOs, and 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies) to ensure the GLEs, themselves, are written in such a way that there can be no mistaking what students are expected to know and be able to do. As arts educators are the primary users/implementers of the Standards and would most assuredly rely on the GLE statements as the primary component or expression of the Standards, it is important to draft GLE statements that include clear, accountable language. This would go a long way toward making explicit the currently implicit expectations for teaching and learning.

Moreover, a substantial number of the existing GLEs are broad, sweeping statements of intent that do not necessitate action and are not written in measurable language; they fail to identify where students' knowledge and skills should fall along a continuum. Additionally, there is an apparent lack of consistency and "voice" (i.e., parallel language, coherence) with respect to the flow of the Standards from grade to grade and across grade-band clusters. This applies to the majority of GLEs across all four arts disciplines under review. As indicated, there is a strong likelihood that essential knowledge and skills are present in components parts of the CAS that were not part of this analysis (e.g., EOs, 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies). However, the GLEs, in and of themselves, do not explicitly spell out expectations for student learning. Perhaps making the GLEs more verb-driven would help to ameliorate the issue.

* Page numbers refer to the page(s) in the full benchmarking report.