

General Introduction

Rationale

In 1989, the nation's governors and business leaders were invited by President Bush to a national summit on education. Those attending called for improving academic achievement for students and for establishing specific goals that would define what each student should know and be able to do by the time he or she graduates from high school. Since then, 48 states, including Nevada, have adopted or begun to adopt standards to serve as the foundation for their many initiatives to improve education.

Definition of Standards

Standards that define what students should know and be able to do in particular subject areas at particular times in their educational careers are an important first step in improving the education we provide our children. They provide a set of common expectations to guide curriculum development, student assessment programs, teacher education programs, and professional development programs for practicing educators. They allow parents and schools to hold students accountable for developing certain knowledge and skills. They similarly allow students and parents to hold school staffs accountable for the teaching and learning that goes on in schools. Finally, standards create a vision for what we want and expect from our educational systems. With an increasingly complex and technologically sophisticated world, it is crucial that we "raise the bar" by setting higher expectations for our children.

Background

The Nevada legislature passed a major education reform bill, Senate Bill 482 (SB482), during its 1997 session. A major intent of this legislation is to create standards to help improve the academic achievement of Nevada's students.

To accomplish this goal, SB482 created a panel known as the Nevada Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools. This Council is charged with establishing high, measurable standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science by September 1, 1998. They are similarly charged with establishing standards in social studies, computer education, health and physical education, and the arts no later than September 1, 1999.

The members of this Council have devoted countless hours in order to provide the best possible framework for Nevada's children. They are Council Chair Ms. Debbie Smith, Assemblywoman Vonne Chowning, Mr. Scott Craigie, Ms. Yvette Estrada, Senator Ann O'Connell, The Honorable Johnnie Rawlinson, Mr. David Sheffield, Mr. Brandon Swain, and Ms. Elaine Wynn.

It is the goal of the Council to establish strong content standards that will form the cornerstone for strengthening Nevada's education system, ensuring that the education students receive is consistently strong across all of Nevada. The Council has been clear that Nevada's standards must be of the highest quality. They need to be clear, specific, rigorous, and measurable. They need to reflect important subject matter, a balance between knowledge and skills, potential for instruction, and what research tells us about student learning and development. They need to be standards that the public—educators, parents, and the general public—can support. It is the Council's belief that such standards will help teachers plan meaningful lessons that cut across content strands. They will help teachers weave content together forming an interdisciplinary approach that gives context and depth to learning. They will provide a framework to help teachers determine the best ways of using technology to support instructional programs. Standards will establish common expectations among students, teachers, parents, and policy makers. They will help drive everything from the selection of teaching materials and textbooks to student assessment, teacher training, and professional development.

Creation of Nevada's Standards

Standards Writing Teams in English language arts, mathematics, and science were created by the Council to develop Nevada's standards. These teams consisted of Nevada citizens from many walks of life: teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, parents, community members, business/industry representatives, higher education

representatives, members of local boards of trustees, and members of the Council.

As they began their work, members of these teams reviewed exemplary standards from Nevada and other states to take advantage of good work that has already been done. They discussed and debated what is important for all students to know and be able to do in English language arts, mathematics, and science and crafted standards of which the people of Nevada can be proud.

The Writing Teams have approached their work in two phases. They initially developed exit content standards, statements of what students should know and be able to do upon graduation from Nevada public schools. The Writing Teams also wrote grade-level content standards for grades two, three, five, eight, and high school for each subject area. This work laid the framework for a second stage of work, the development of indicators of progress at the remaining grades (kindergarten and grades one, four, six, and seven). The indicators of progress state what students should know and be able to do in the off-grades so that they will be prepared to meet the grade-level and exit content standards. The resulting documents for grades K-8 and high school will serve as guides for schools and districts across the state as they develop curriculum and instructional programs.

Preview of Nevada's Standards

Nevada's standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science represent high expectations for all students and outline the essential knowledge and skills needed by citizens to participate productively in our increasingly complex society. To assist teachers, other educators, parents, and members of the community with understanding the standards documents, each of the three documents has a similar structure.

- Exit content standards that indicate what students should know and be able to do in a particular subject area by the end of their schooling are noted for each content area. These exit-level standards are broad statements listed at the top of a page and numerically sequenced.
- More specific expectations for students, organized by grade level, are found in the columns on each page. Grade-level content standards are specified for grades two, three, five, eight, and the end of high school and are in the shaded columns. Though students will not be required to demonstrate that they meet standards at the off-grades, indicators of progress are included for kindergarten and grades one, four, six, and seven to indicate what students should know and be able to do in order to meet grade-level and exit content standards. The intent is to clarify for teachers those things that should be taught ahead of time so students will be equipped to master subsequent standards. Blank boxes exist in those cases where no specific foundational skills are identified at particular grade levels. Off-grade indicators of progress appear in the unshaded columns.
- Glossaries containing technical terms associated with each of the content areas are included with the documents. The Writing Teams made every effort to write Nevada's standards to be understandable to a variety of audiences including teachers, parents, and members of the community. However, some terms (such as photosynthesis in science, thesis statement in English language arts, and Pythagorean Theorem in mathematics) are essential to learning the content. To aid readers who are not specialists in these disciplines, such content-specific terms have been identified in bold type the first time they appear in a document and defined both within the documents and in accompanying glossaries, organized alphabetically.

Nevada's Standards Writing Teams have developed standards for all students. As schools and districts take these standards and use them to form the basis for local curriculum and instruction, it will be important that educators consider ways that instruction and assessment can be modified to help all students meet these standards. For example, adaptations or modifications to instructional strategies and to assessment administration will likely be necessary for students with special needs and/or with limited English proficiency.