



New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards



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October 2004

PTM# 1505.24

State Board of Education

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(Adopted April 2004)

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(Adopted April 2004)

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(Adopted July 2002; revised and readopted April 2004)

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(Adopted July 2002)

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(Adopted April 2004)

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(Adopted April 2004)

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New Jersey

Core Curriculum Content Standards

The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom.

—A Nation at Risk, 1983

More than two decades have passed since the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*. Many educators see the publication of that report as the initiating event of the modern standards-based reform movement. First developed by national subject-matter organizations, content standards varied widely in character, scope, and level of detail. However, the standards were intended to clarify and raise expectations by providing a common set of expectations for all students.

In 1996, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, an ambitious framework for educational reform in the State's public schools. New Jersey's standards were created to improve student achievement by clearly defining what all students should know and be able to do at the end of thirteen years of public education. Since the adoption of those standards, the New Jersey Department of Education has continuously engaged in discussion with educators, business representatives, and national experts about the impact of the standards on classroom practices. To assist teachers and curriculum specialists in aligning curriculum with the standards, the department provided local school districts with a curriculum framework for each content area. The frameworks provided classroom teachers and curriculum specialists with sample teaching strategies, adaptations, and background information relevant to each of the content areas. In addition, the statewide assessments were aligned to the Core Curriculum Content Standards. This alignment of standards, instruction, and assessment was unprecedented.

The State Board wisely required that the standards be reviewed and revised every five years. The review process, begun in May 2001, involved teachers, school administrators, students, parents, and representatives from business, higher education, and the community. In addition, several content areas were reviewed by Achieve, Inc. and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In response to this unprecedented review, the 2004 New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards provide the level of specificity and depth of content that will better prepare students for post secondary education and employment. The standards are based on the latest research in each of the content areas and identify the essential core of learning for all students. They are clear, concise, and appropriate for the benchmarked grade levels and enhance a student's capacity to access new information, problem solve, employ research methods, and ask questions across disciplines.

The language arts literacy, mathematics, and science standards were adopted by the State Board of Education in July 2002. In April 2004, the language arts literacy standards were revised to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and readopted by the Board. Five content areas,



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including the visual and performing arts, comprehensive health and physical education, world languages, career education and consumer, family, and life skills, and technological literacy were also adopted by the Board in April 2004. To complete the revision process, the social studies standards were adopted in October 2004. **The 2004 standards in all nine content areas replace the 1996 standards.** Local school districts must align their curriculum and instructional program with the 2004 New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. As required by regulation, the next five-year revision process will begin in the 2008-2009 school year for all nine content areas.

New Jersey continues to wrestle with a paradox regarding the governance of public education. It is a state with a 120-year-old constitutional guarantee that regardless of residency, its children will receive a “thorough and efficient” education. Throughout this same time period, the State has evolved into approximately 600 independent school districts and charter schools that exercise considerable local control to develop and implement curriculum. Thus, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards are an attempt to define the meaning of “thorough” in the context of the 1875 State constitutional guarantee that students would be educated within a thorough and efficient system of free public schools. The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards are not meant to serve as a statewide curriculum guide. Local school districts must use the standards to develop and/or align curriculum to ensure that students achieve the expectations.

Since the adoption of the original 1996 New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, the State Board approved administrative code that implements all aspects of standards-based reform. N.J.A.C. 6A:8 requires districts to: align all curriculum to the standards; ensure that teachers provide instruction according to the standards; ensure student performance is assessed in each content area; and, provide teachers with opportunities for professional development that focuses on the standards. The regulations also include the state’s accountability system for schools and districts, including new high school graduation requirements.

New Jersey’s standards-based reform agenda has also been impacted by the adoption of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB requires states to develop challenging content standards and academic assessments and it holds states and local districts accountable for results. Each state must create annual assessments, based on the state’s standards, which measure what children know and are able to do in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, and at grade 11. Science will also be assessed at grades 4, 8, and 11. NCLB further requires that students be taught by highly qualified teachers and that research-based methodologies be used in the classroom.

IMPLEMENTATION

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards are intended for all students. This includes students who are college-bound or career-bound, gifted and talented, those whose native language is not English, students with disabilities, and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Insistence on the core curriculum means that every student will be involved in experiences addressing all of the expectations set forth in all nine content areas. A core curriculum does not mean that all students will be enrolled in the same courses. Different groups of students should address the standards at different levels of depth and should complete the core curriculum according to different timetables. Depending on their interests, abilities, and career plans, many students will and should develop knowledge and skills that go beyond the specific indicators on the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Nevertheless, all students should complete all elements of the core curriculum.

While New Jersey’s Core Curriculum Content Standards and cumulative progress indicators have been developed in terms of separate academic disciplines, this familiar approach was chosen primarily for the sake of organizational convenience and simplicity of communication. The results expected of New Jersey’s students could have been



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described in more integrative terms which would have reflected more accurately how students would someday apply what they have learned in school. Because students obtain knowledge and skills in a multiplicity of ways, it is most productive to concentrate on how we can best use resources to achieve higher order results across an array of content areas. Each content area focuses on the development of higher order thinking skills and requires students to read, write, think, and create. Although the standards have been organized into separate academic disciplines, this is not meant to imply that each standard can only be met through content-specific courses. The very nature of learning lends itself to an integrated approach with reinforcement through experiences beyond the schools walls, such as community service, mentorships, and structured learning experiences.

All schools must have, as their common goal, student achievement of these standards. However, the standards themselves will not result in major improvements unless there is continued commitment to their implementation in each and every school. Changing a school's instructional program to implement the vision of these standards will be a continuous, ongoing process. Of key importance to the successful implementation of these standards is teacher preparation and on-going, high quality professional development. Teacher preparation programs must focus on both content and pedagogy. Programs must focus on the increasing complexity of content set forth in these standards. In addition, schools must demonstrate a high level commitment to well-planned, sustained professional development that increases a teacher's content knowledge and instructional competency. District and school administrators will need to create opportunities for teachers to explore, discuss, plan, and implement creative ways to engage students in higher order thinking skills across all disciplines. This can only happen when schools and teachers make high quality professional development a priority.

FORMAT AND ORGANIZATION

Since our schools need to produce both excellent thinkers and excellent doers, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards describe what students should know and be able to do in nine academic areas: visual and performing arts, comprehensive health and physical education, language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, technological literacy, and career education and consumer, family, and life skills. The last two standards areas replace the cross-content workplace readiness standards, adopted in 1996. Each of the nine content sections in this document begins with an introduction that articulates the vision for the content area and provides information on the revision process. Each content area has numbered **standards** (e.g., 3.1, 5.2) followed by a **descriptive statement**. The descriptive statement provides a brief overview of the content and skills enumerated in the standard.

The content standards themselves are concerned with the knowledge students should acquire and the skills they should develop in the course of their PK-12 experience. They are broad outcome statements that provide the framework for **strands** and **cumulative progress indicators (CPIs)**. Strands are organizational tools that help teachers locate specific content and skills. Under each strand is a number of CPIs at specific benchmark grades. The CPIs provide the specific content or skills to be taught and are cumulative; that is, the progress indicators begin at a foundational or basic level and increase in complexity as the student matures, requiring more complex interaction with the content. Refer to a specific standard and CPI using this notation: "**1.1.4A1**" which includes the standard (**1.1**), the grade (**4**), the strand (**A**) and the CPI (**1**).

In one sense, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards mark with precision the results expected of all students. In another sense, they serve as a banner behind which all segments of the education community and the state at large can mobilize to reshape our approach to education. Collectively, they embody a vision of the skills and understandings all of New Jersey's children need to be successful in their careers and daily lives.