
History of Content and Learning Standards in Massachusetts

On June 18, 1993, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act was signed into law. This historic legislation created the framework for unprecedented improvements in student learning, teacher professionalism, school management, and equity of funding. Chapter 69, Section 1D specifically states:

The board (of elementary and secondary education) shall establish a set of statewide educational goals for all public elementary and secondary schools in the commonwealth. The board shall direct the commissioner to institute a process to develop academic standards for the core subjects of mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages and the arts. The standards shall cover grades kindergarten through twelve and shall clearly set forth the skills, competencies and knowledge expected to be possessed by all students at the conclusion of individual grades or clusters of grades. The standards shall be formulated so as to set high expectations of student performance and to provide clear and specific examples that embody and reflect these high expectations, and shall be constructed with due regard to the work and recommendations of national organizations, to the best of similar efforts in other states, and to the level of skills, competencies and knowledge possessed by typical students in the most educationally advanced nations. The skills, competencies and knowledge set forth in the standards shall be expressed in terms which lend themselves to objective measurement, define the performance outcomes expected of both students directly entering the workforce and of students pursuing higher education, and facilitate comparisons with students of other states and other nations.

The first editions of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks were adopted by the Board in:

- 1996 for Mathematics (Math), Science & Technology Engineering, Arts, Comprehensive Health, and World Language
- 1997 for English Language Arts (ELA) and History/Social Science
- 1999 for Foreign Languages
- 2003 for English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes
- 2006 for Vocational Technical
- 2008 for Kindergarten Learning Experiences

The standards for mathematics were significantly updated in 2000 and 2004 and ELA in 2001 and 2004 based upon lessons learned since implementation of the original frameworks and updated research. While a combination of federal grants and state appropriation provided some support, upgrades to local curricula and associated professional development were led and supported by local school districts.

- In 2008, the National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve, Inc, published "[Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education](#)." The first recommendation of this bipartisan call to action was: "Upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for

grades K-12 to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive.”

- In 2008, after having gathered more information from research and educators around the state (particularly emerging data and research related to shortcomings in the transition from high school to college and work), Commissioner Chester convened teams of Massachusetts teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff members to begin drafting revisions to the ELA and Math Frameworks.
- In 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) started their bi-partisan effort to write a set of Common Core State Standards. The work of our state review panels was deliberately coordinated with the NGA's and CCSSO's effort. The coordinated timeline was as follows:
 - In spring 2009, [Massachusetts joined](#) the CCSSO, the NGA, and 45 other states to support the development of K-12 internationally benchmarked, rigorous Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics aligned to college and career expectations.
 - The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education discussed the Common Core State Standards Initiative and outlined a review process in [January 2010](#). The Board continued the discussion of the draft standards and held a public discussion with K-12 educators and college faculty to share their impressions of the draft standards in relation to our existing standards in [March 2010](#).
 - In March 2010, CCSSO and NGA [released public drafts](#) of the K-12 Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics and solicited public comment. Department staff and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Review Panels for Math and ELA compared the Common Core State Standards with our 2000/2001 frameworks, and determined that they were not only consistent with our own emerging revisions, but were stronger in several respects.
 - Massachusetts played a key role in the development of these standards. Six of our staff members were invited by CCSSO and NGA to serve on the [Common Core State Standards Development Teams](#); and 14 Massachusetts [scholars and educators](#) contributed their expertise to reviewing successive drafts in order to shape Massachusetts’ written comments to CCSSO and NGA. The deep involvement of Massachusetts in this effort is important for two reasons. First, our existing standards were considered the best in the nation and we wanted the Common Core State Standards to be every bit as challenging. Second, adoption and statewide dissemination of standards for college and career readiness was a key component of our \$250 million Race to the Top grant.
 - The Board established a timeline for an expert panel review and public comment in [May 2010](#). Commissioner Chester appointed [independent ELA and math expert panels](#) composed of PreK-12 educators and representatives from higher education and the business community to review the Common Core State Standards and report back to the Board whether they found that they were: (a) equivalent to, (b) more rigorous than, or (c) less rigorous than our draft revised Massachusetts

standards for ELA and mathematics. In addition to the panels, the Commissioner secured experts from outside of Massachusetts to compare the Common Core State Standards to the Massachusetts draft revised standards and report their findings to him and the Board.

- The Board heard an update on the Massachusetts review panels and external reviews of the standards, and opened a survey for public comment on the standards in [June 2010](#).
- At the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting in [July 2010](#), the findings of the expert panels were heard. The findings were as follows:
 - **Massachusetts Educator Panels:** The [English language arts panel](#) (with one member dissenting) concluded that the Common Core was a better choice of standards than the Massachusetts draft. The [mathematics panel](#) concluded that both sets of standards were excellent options for Massachusetts. Both panels cited the greater depth and increased specificity of the Common Core State Standards as beneficial. Both panels identified areas of the Common Core State Standards that, if adopted, could be strengthened by adding standards that were contained in the Massachusetts drafts, but not in the Common Core.
 - **[Report on the Public Survey on the Common Core State Standards:](#)** The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education posted a survey to solicit public comment in June 2010. 1329 teachers, principals, superintendents, higher education faculty, advisory councils and professional organizations visited the site, and 178 completed surveys. The majority of respondents rated both the Massachusetts and the Common Core State Standards as "good" to "excellent" in terms of their content, rigor, clarity, vertical alignment, relevance to college and career readiness, and measurability. 70 percent of respondents expressed a favorable opinion about common academic standards.
 - **WestEd was commissioned by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE)** to conduct an [independent analysis](#) of the revised Massachusetts state standards and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to address the following key question: *To what extent do the revised Commonwealth of Massachusetts state standards correspond with the CCSS in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics?*

From a qualitative examination of the standards, both sets were deemed to have merit. The CCSS were credited with tending to include a slightly higher percentage of standards that reflect higher levels of cognitive demand (i.e. Strategic Thinking in mathematics; Strategic Thinking and Extended Thinking in ELA).
 - **[Achieve's Report Comparing the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and Leading State Standards \(California and Massachusetts\):](#)** The major findings of this report were that the three sets of standards cover similar bodies of knowledge but the Common Core State Standards were more rigorous, coherent, and focused than the California and the Massachusetts standards. The report also found that the Common Core State Standards will set learning expectations for students that improve upon those currently set by California and Massachusetts, and that the college- and career-ready bar in the Common Core State Standards is

set at a level that currently surpasses the level of the mathematics required for graduation in both states.

- The Board heard [comments](#) from many prominent education, community, and business leaders.
- At the July 2010 meeting the Board [voted to adopt](#) the Common Core State Standards, contingent upon augmenting and customizing the standards to Massachusetts' needs.
- In [fall 2010](#), Department staff, in collaboration with members of the original Framework Review Panels, early childhood educators, and financial literacy specialists, made additions to the Common Core State Standards and released them for additional public comment. Massachusetts-specific additions include:
 - pre-kindergarten standards, strengthened knowledge of literary concepts and genres, language development in the early grades, print and cursive handwriting, and additional high school model course standards;
 - recommended authors, both of literature and literary nonfiction, which carries forward an element that was adopted with the first ELA framework in 1997, and then in the second (2001) revisions; and
 - models for enhanced pathways to calculus and increased rigor of grade 8 and Algebra I standards.
- The final version of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics was adopted by the Board in [December 2010](#).
- Since the adoption of these [Standards](#), they have been on our website and publicized statewide. Professional development sessions were conducted by the Department, in collaboration with higher education, throughout the Commonwealth. Massachusetts school districts have updated their ELA and math curricula, conducted professional development, and focused classroom instruction to include the upgraded standards.
- Currently, over [90 Model Curriculum Units](#), in ELA, mathematics, science, history, and arts are available on the Department's website for teachers to use in their classrooms. These instructional units show how the changes in the standards can be reflected in instruction. These units were developed by hundreds of teachers across the Commonwealth, in collaboration with the Department.

MA Educators Who Contributed to the New Standards

Massachusetts' experts were deeply involved in development of the Common Core State Standards. The Commissioner wanted to ensure that CCSS would be every bit as challenging as our best-in-nation standards.

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