

Review of Oklahoma Language Arts Standards Draft

August 5, 2015

The purpose of this review is to provide feedback to Oklahoma DOE officials on the draft standards for English Language Arts (ELA). Pertinent background includes recent history of state standards, review of previous standards, and current climate of standards development to support rigorous educational standards for Oklahoma students with expectations for strong college and career outcomes. Assumptions by the reviewer include the following;

- Standards are designed to ensure equity in expectations across all LEAs in state of Oklahoma,
- Standards are designed to provide clarity and specificity to ensure fidelity of interpretation,
- Standards are designed to ensure vertical articulation,
- Standards are to support teachers in delivering a rigorous college and career ready curriculum PreK-12
- Standards are the goals that will be supported by additional curriculum and pedagogy

In addition, clarity around the state's expectation for the use of these standards must be determined philosophically. In many states the standards serve as conversation points for teacher teams in ensuring that the curriculum taught meets/covers the expected standards. Finally, standards represent the intended outcomes for students, Curriculum guides with associated pedagogical practices are developed by curriculum teams to ensure that the practices and resources are aligned to support teachers in achieving the defined standards.

In preparation for this review, the following documents were reviewed;

Fordham Foundation "The State of Standards and Common Core – in 2010"
(http://www.math.jhu.edu/~wsw/FORD/SOSSandCC2010_FullReportFINAL.pdf),

Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills for English Language Arts
(<http://elaokteachers.com/standards/>),

Virginia Standards of Learning
(http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/index.shtml),

Massachusetts Curriculum Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy
(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/>).

The purpose of the review of these documents was to assist in the support of developing new standards in Oklahoma. At some point a cross walk of the new standards with OKPASS or Common Core may be necessary to provide support for the new standards and for ensuring ease of transition for teachers.

During this process I have also had communication, both through email and by phone, with co-chair of the ELA standards writing committee, Dr. Matthew Hollrah. The conversations with Dr. Hollrah helped me understand the process, timeline, climate and current needs of the committee more fully. Based on this communication, I also obtained additional support for the review of the grade level bands from other literacy experts (specifics provided at end of the report). Timeline for the review and feedback was very tight therefore the report contains broad themes and recommendations with attachments that will give more explicit feedback for the individual bands PreK-K, 1-4, and 5-8. These reviewers are practitioners who have experience writing and unpacking standards and curriculum in Virginia. I was unable to find a reviewer for the 9-12 band in the timeline required. A reviewer for more specifics for the 9-12 band could be provided after August 7th.

In reviewing any standards, the review must take into account the various stakeholders who will read, review, and most importantly utilize the standards. State and federal decisions will rely upon the clarity and rigor of these standards. Local educational entities will interpret and implement these standards, teachers will develop curriculum, and parents and students will depend upon the standards to produce an education that prepares students for college and careers readiness.

The current educational climate around standards complicates the writing of new standards. In fact, with many educational concepts there is really only one clear way to state something. Trying to recreate that with different language is often confusing to the teacher who understands the content and skill. These draft standards have language from previous Oklahoma PASS standards and some Common Core Language. Focusing on what teachers need is a better practice than excluding previously used documents because of the educational climate. Standards writing is an evolving practice and many standards will be revised over time based on the interpretation and expectations of others. Oklahoma is in an excellent position to build on previous work, incorporating college and career readiness skills that will clarify expectations and set a high bar for rigorous college and career outcomes

Overarching themes

1. The writing team chose to indicate the importance of the interconnection of reading and writing by having both reading and writing appear under each of the five standards. This is a critical decision. The relationship is undeniable. In the current draft there is not enough clarity in either the reading or writing standards in each of the five standards to justify the inclusion in each standard. Choosing this format will require teachers and curriculum writers to look in 10 places for writing standards and 10 places for reading standards. Making the standards fit into this format creates forced language in attempt to make things fit the format rather than define the standard.
 - a. Considerations (separate options are listed)
 - i. Edit the document to show the interconnections without including the specificity required in standards and use this as a supplement or appendix. A draft of what this could look like is provided here.

Standard 1: Speaking and Listening		
Students will develop and apply effective communication skills through speaking and active listening.		
Reading	Writing	Listening/speaking
Students will ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.	Students will generate questions about a text.	Students will participate in collaborative conversations about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- ii. Use a narrative that speaks to this important connection and consider separating reading and writing (consider how the PASS categories were organized)
- iii. Align the attributes under the categories so that each sub category in writing is related to the same subcategory in reading. Create stronger language and examples so that the document can be used easily for reading and writing standards by all teachers. This will require that many skills be listed in multiple places. For example, given the current layout items such as producing complete sentences would need to be included in both Speaking and Listening and Writing

- iv. Keeping the format as is will require a great deal of professional development to ensure teacher understanding of the standards. It will be easy to miss a standard that does exist in another place.
2. The formatting of the draft document is confusing. The green and blue headings are not always at the same level of detail and specificity, making the separation into the categories and sub categories hard to understand. There is no numbering system that makes it easy to track and to coordinate categories across grade levels. The current format would be especially difficult for new and developing teachers to follow.
 - a. Considerations
 - i. Create a key that defines the categories and subcategories creating clear understanding for the details that need to be communicated at different levels.
 - ii. Read and edit across grade levels and grade bands to ensure that all bands are adhering to the same depth/details at the category and subcategory level. Edit for the verbs use in the standards so that there is both progression through the grade levels and clarity and consistency from the category to the subcategory
 - iii. Create a numbering system for the knowledge under the standard that will allow teachers to use common language when referencing the standard.
 - iv. A one page progression chart later at a grade level will allow the removal of “this does not start at this grade”
 - v. There are places in the Pre K and K “where this does not start at this level” should be replaced with the appropriate precursor skill.
3. There is a great deal of repetition across grade levels.
 - a. Considerations
 - i. Include specifics that will create differentiation and specificity as to what students will know and be able to do that is different at each grade level
 - ii. Include more specificity by defining what phrases like “variety of genres,” means. Poetry is taught at many grade levels. Specific sets of skills can be broken out at different grade levels related to poetry.
 - iii. Scaffold the different specific genres or literary text types by introducing at defined grade levels.

- iv. 9-12 standards use wording such as grade level focus. The repetition of the language across reading and writing indicates the through line. It leads to confusion if all 9-12 teachers are not sure what needs to be differentiated from year to year.
 - v. Backwards mapping from the 9-12 standards will also help build out the 5-8 writing standards.
4. There are references to processes that are only measurable in performance types of assessments.
- a. Considerations
 - i. There should be a blue print developed as to what will be tested. Measuring a recursive process is a performance based assessment while other skills can be measured in different testing formats.
 - ii. Clearly processes are critical. Reviews of standards often note that while the metacognitive processes are part of the curriculum and pedagogy the standards also need the defined knowledge and skills that students will accomplish if engaged in the processes.
5. Standards need strong verbs
- a. Considerations
 - i. Some verbs that contain more challenge are contained in the lower grade while upper grades have lower level expectations. Band standards should be continued through all bands and rigor should begin early. Verbs indicate to the teachers the thinking skills that students need to know and be able to demonstrate.
 - ii. Higher level thinking needs to begin in Pre-K as opposed to adding skills as one perceives the students to develop. There will be higher level thinking that deepens as to what is demonstrated over time. Can include “begins to” as opposed to “will” to help that
6. Standards need specificity in sub categories.
- a. Considerations
 - i. The biggest concern of all readers of the draft ELA standards was the content and skill specificity. Finding the right combination specificity for

things such as genre or specific standards for fiction and informational text is critical.

- ii. Consider companion document with sample reading lists, writing exemplars, etc.
- iii. Ensure developmental progression of skills, ensuring clear focus at different grade levels that builds PreK-12.
- iv. The writing process is referenced, focus on the three critical components and develop specificity for usage, mechanics, and composition categories.
- v. When there is more specificity it will be possible to be more accurate in assigning a skill to a particular grade level. Currently there is need to look at moving many skills down a grade level in the K-4 standards. At 5-8 developing more details will allow the grades to become differentiated.
- vi. Specificity of the project or presentation in Speaking and Listening in 9-12 will also strengthen the standards and the type of writing skills that are desired.

7. Standards need vertical alignment.

a. Considerations

- i. A look at 9-12 standards by all will support :
 - 1. Backwards mapping of the curriculum, to help develop a natural building of rigor that has specified components at each grade level.
 - 2. Better understanding of where a grade level focus must be determined to separate the skills, content and knowledge demonstration at varying grade levels.
 - 3. How the writing process needs to build from Pre-K to 9 (and through 12) to get specific writing outcomes.
 - 4. An opportunity to examine and unpack terminology such as “sound devices, modes, genres, types of response, rhetorical style, domain specific” and other broad terms that need to be detailed by skill and content specific to individual grades. Do a vertical check to see if all teachers at each grade level have the same understanding of some of these terms.
- ii. Ability to understand when (which grade level) particular skills are introduced, and where they are mastered so that standards have strands of connections rather than repetition.

- iii. Reading and Writing Independently in all bands is underdeveloped. This is a critical and visual presentation of this makes it appear as not important and the lack of specificity will make it (See Jennifer Serravallo)

8. Standard 5: Language has particular concerns

a. Considerations

- i. While it has specific attributes, the standard is complex and some of the content seems unimportant related to reading. This is more related to writing process. This will be difficult strand to teach. (Correcting modifiers in reading is not a skill that would be demonstrated in most classrooms.)

In the short timelines that the draft writing committee had, the natural tendency was to concentrate on the grade level work in the assigned bands. A good next step is to understand that all bands need more specificity that will; 1. Create understanding of concrete outcomes, 2. Allow grade level focus to be determined to remove repetition, 3. Create a comprehensive vertical document that builds in content and skill levels. Working for specificity in band level teams should be supplemented with vertical meetings that support two ongoing processes, specificity and connections to the continuum of standards.

Attached to this overarching document are reviews of specific grade level standards by Virginia literacy practitioners:

Pre-K and K	Susan Anselene, MA Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education Specialist
1-4 Principal ES	Michelle Pohzehl, MS Elementary Education, NBCT, Literacy Coach, Assistant
5-8	Barbara Rohr, MA English, NBCT, Reading Specialist, ESOL Specialist

The current timeline for submitting this did not provide enough time to complete that more in-depth feedback for the 9-12 draft. The feedback in the preK-8 feedback documents is consistent with the needs in the 9-12 draft. It is possible to set up a phone conference to speak to any of the information included in this report. We all have appreciated the opportunity to review the hard work of this standards working committee.

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