

Background

In 2010, the State Board approved the Common Core State Standards. Based upon feedback from various arenas after the State Board approval, Pennsylvania educators convened to create Pennsylvania Core Standards, essentially a hybrid between the national CCSS (Common Core State Standards) and the state's own academic standards. Thus, after the Pennsylvania educator review, the State Board approved the final Chapter 4 regulations on September 12, 2013. The Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) approved the final regulation on November 21, 2013. With publication of Chapter 4 in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*, the new regulations took effect on March 1, 2014.

While the educator review of standards created the PA Core Standards, concerns continue to focus on the similarity of language of the PA Core Standards to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

It is noteworthy that in states that have not adopted the CCSS, expectations for student learning are very similar to the expectations for Pennsylvania students. An example from Grade 3 Mathematics may serve to illustrate.

In the area of Operations and Algebraic Thinking for Grade 3, three expectations generally exist:

1. Represent and solve problems with multiplication and division
2. Demonstrate fluency
3. Represent multiplication and division in various forms

These expectations actually mirror the expectations of Virginia and Nebraska – two states who did not subscribe to the CCSS. Although the concepts grade by grade are similar across CCSS and non-CCSS states, an alternative perspective on post secondary and career ready expectations exists in Pennsylvania: Eligible Content

Another Perspective: Eligible Content

Concerns around misinformation directed at the new academic standards have drawn much public notoriety. Our Chapter 4 regulations were designed proactively to address many of the concerns that continue to surface:

- The Department may not expand the collection of student data and, in accordance with section 444 of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, regarding family educational and privacy rights, may not collect personal family data due to the implementation of the Pennsylvania Core Standards. (Appendix A-2)
- The Board will not include National assessments as part of the State Assessment system unless, upon consultation with teachers, counselors, and parents representing students who have been identified under Chapter 14 (relating to

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special education services and programs), the Board determines the assessment is an appropriate means of assessing academic progress of students identified under Chapter 14 or unless the General Assembly authorizes the use of a National assessment.

The commitment to clearly defining a strong set of post secondary and career ready standards is perhaps the common goal to which we can all agree. Focusing on what should actually be taught in our classrooms may present another avenue to describe the minimum of what Pennsylvania students need to achieve to meet the post secondary and career ready mark. Pennsylvania's Eligible Content statements are a straightforward set of what we want students to know and do.

Engaging the public in a meaningful manner to review Eligible Content (the test outline for the PSSAs and Keystone Exams) will serve to underscore the purpose and intent of Chapter 4.

Pennsylvania currently employs a blueprint to identify the skills and concepts assessed on the PSSA and Keystone Exams. Known as Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content, these grade level documents provide a framework to guide instruction. The Eligible Content statements clearly define what students will need to master grade by grade as they progress toward the mastery of more sophisticated skills and are the most specific description of the skills and concepts assessed on the PSSA

An example of a Grade 3 Mathematics Eligible Content statement illustrates the specificity of Eligible Content and its value to the classroom teacher. Representing and solving problems with multiplication and division is clearly defined as a *know and do*:

Use multiplication (up to and including 10×10) and/or division (limit dividends through 50 and limit divisors and quotients through 10) to solve word problems in situations involving equal groups, arrays, and/or measurement quantities.

Clarity of Purpose

Inherent in the discussion of Eligible Content and the guidance Eligible Content provides to classroom teachers, several caveats need to be emphasized:

1. Eligible Content represents the minimum expectations for our students and provides direction for expanded learning opportunities.
2. How the Eligible Content is taught or delivered in classrooms across the commonwealth is a local decision. Implementation has been and remains a local control issue.
3. Materials and resources – from textbooks to online and other resources – are also a local control issue. As LEAs evaluate existing resources, it is a local decision as to what is necessary for instruction

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The focus should be on what our children should know and be able to do so they can graduate from high school ready for postsecondary pursuits; thus, we want to hear from the public via a review of the Eligible Content: asking our constituents to provide substantive feedback on the quality, appropriateness, and clarity of the Eligible Content. This proposal is designed to urge teachers, parents, community, business leaders and experts to weigh in on whether we have set the course for students to graduate high school ready for next steps: post secondary and career.

Next Steps: Engaging the Public

In the spirit of openness and transparency, it is proposed that we begin a process to publicly promote awareness and understanding of our Eligible Content. Our goal will be to inform and seek feedback from our educators, parents, and other community members on the Eligible Content statements, their purpose, and value. If after we gather feedback and conclude that significant changes need to be made, we will we engage in a revision process via public hearings.

Getting Started

Gathering feedback from the public may best be served by gathering feedback via an interactive website whereby stakeholders can provide specific input grade-by-grade and statement-by-statement. Feedback will be aggregated and posted online for public viewing.

We will continue the review process by engaging national experts, members of our universities, teachers, and parents who will make recommendations to the State Board. Thus, I am recommending that the State Board convenes hearings to bring back the findings, feedback and recommendations for its consideration and appropriate action.