

# Standards? What Standards?

By Emily Hoyler

Standards-based education aims to identify clear, measurable criteria that describe what students should know and be able to do by the time they finish high school. There has been a lot of buzz lately about the new Common Core State Standards, as well as "standards-based curriculum design". We have provided this brief summary to give you SSP's perspective on what the buzz is all about.

## Common Core

The Common Core State Standards are a set of English/language arts and math standards that have been created in a collaborative state-led effort, in partnership with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The Common Core are *not* national standards, as the federal government was not involved in their creation, though federal government does support this project. The motivation behind this initiative was to create a common set of goals and expectations for student achievement and readiness for college and careers. At this time, all but five states (Texas, Alaska, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia) have signed on to the standards.

The Common Core English/Language Arts standards are based on a set of anchor standards for college and career readiness, which are developed into a scope and sequence for grades K-12. The anchor standards are divided into five areas: reading, writing, speaking & listening, language, and media &

technology. Each of these areas then describes several key skills students need for careers and life-long learning, with an emphasis on complex texts, and vocabulary instruction. For grades 6-12, there are also standards that pertain to the development of communication skills within the content areas of history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. The focus on informational text, the inclusion of media & technology standards, and the inclusion of literacy and communication skills across the content areas are notable additions to these standards.

The Common Core Math standards provide students

in grades K-5 with a foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals, and geometry. The standards from grades 6-8 focus on preparing students for high school math, which aims to provide students with the skills to think and reason mathematically so they can solve real-world problems.

In New England, a new standardized achievement test is being developed to align with the new CCSS. This assessment will replace the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) tests that are currently used.

The Common Core State Standards can be viewed and downloaded from <http://www.corestandards.org/>

## Next Generation Science Standards

Similar to the Common Core, the Next Generation Science Standards are a new set of science standards being developed by a state-led initiative, though these standards are being developed by a partnership between the National Research Council, National Science Teachers Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 26 "lead state partners," and facilitated by Achieve, non-profit education reform organization based in Washington, D.C. Vermont is one of several states engaged in the process, with a State Standards Advisory Board (consisting of representatives from education, business, and science) working on recommendations for these standards (Shelburne Farms' SSP's Jen Cirillo is participating in the Vermont process). At present the standards are still under development, with an anticipated release date of

fall 2012, however the conceptual framework, called "A Framework for K-12 Science Education: Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Core Ideas", has been released, and can be viewed here: [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=13165](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13165) You can find more information here <http://www.achieve.org/next-generation-science-standards>

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## US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development Sustainability Standards

In September 2009, the US Partnership for Education for Sustainability released Version 3 of National Education for Sustainability K-12 Student Learning Standards. These standards were developed to identify what K-12 students need to know and be able to do to be sustainably literate. The standards are organized around the concepts of intergenerational responsibility, interconnectedness, economic systems, social & cultural systems, personal action and collective action, and are differentiated for grade bands for K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Currently, the US Partnership is conducting a “crosswalk” (a comparison and alignment) to the Common Core State Standards, and plans to do the same with the Next Generation Science Standards once they are released.

The US Partnership Sustainability Standards can be viewed at:

[http://s3.amazonaws.com/usp\\_site\\_uploads/resources/152/USP\\_EFS\\_standards\\_V3\\_11\\_10.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/usp_site_uploads/resources/152/USP_EFS_standards_V3_11_10.pdf)

## What about Social Studies/History and the Arts

Arguably, some of the most important things students should learn about can be found in social studies, history, and the arts, as these areas reflect the *core* of society and culture. At this time there are no plans to create national standards in these areas. Earlier attempts at creating national history standards are chronicled in *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, 2000), which discusses the controversies and challenges that were encountered in this effort, such as: what is goal of history education— is it to instill patriotism? Or is it to explore the past with the lens of our current values? Which perspectives are considered and explored? Furthermore, since these content areas do not appear on the current standardized tests that are driving education in the NCLB era, they are often pushed aside, or at worst, left out of curriculum altogether.

## How it all fits with EFS

Standards themselves won't fix education. Students need to grasp the big ideas, and be able to transfer their understanding to new situations. When teachers drill down into the sub-standards and the grade-level-expectations, and develop curriculum based on these

limited examples, often times the big idea is missed. When this happens, students aren't prepared to transfer their learning to new situations.

If instead, curriculum design is focused on big ideas, and provides students with place-based examples that students explore through projects and service, students will be able to transfer their knowing to new situation, and solve complex, real-world problems. This defines education for sustainability.

If we work to ensure rigorous local assessments, based on big, transferable understandings, and engage project- and place-based learning opportunities for our students, then our students will succeed on these tests, and more importantly, in life. To use a metaphor shared by Grant Wiggins, standards are like building code, while curriculum is the blueprint/architectural design. We don't design buildings to merely meet code, we design them to be beautiful, functional spaces. Likewise, we shouldn't design curriculum to meet merely standards; standards are just baseline requirements that we should meet along the way as we design rigorous, project- and place-based curriculum that engages students in making a difference in the real world.