

What Are Standards and Where Do They Come From?

What are standards?

Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in core subjects at certain points during their education careers. Standards provide a baseline by which achievement can be measured.

Where did standards come from?

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published. This report called for reform of the U.S. education system. At that time, California was the only state to begin developing content standards and curriculum frameworks based on those standards. However, in 1989, President Bush and the nation's fifty governors adopted the National Education Goals for the year 2000. One of the National Education Goals for the year 2000 (Goals 2000) named five academic subjects for which national content standards should be established - English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. This was the beginning of the standards reform movement. Since this time, all states have written their own educational standards, and many states have even revised their standards.



More recent studies evaluating the performance of U.S. students with relation to other countries have echoed the same concerns that *A Nation at Risk* articulated. As a result, accountability systems have been instituted. Two years following the adoption of Goals 2000, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law. This Act heightened the accountability of states, school districts, and schools, strengthening the move to standards-based accountability systems. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, standards-based accountability systems articulate goals in the form of educational standards, delegate the roles and responsibilities for how these goals are met, and hold the systems responsible for the performance of the system and those involved in the system.

For more information about the standards reform movement and standards-based accountability systems, visit these websites:

National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org>)

Achieve (<http://www.achieve.org>)

Educational Resources Information Center (<http://www.ericae.net>)

McRel (<http://www.mcrel.org>)

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (<http://www.edexcellence.net>)

U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.ihtml>)

Who creates or writes standards?

There was a national standards movement in the early 1990's through which expert educators in the various subject areas responded to the Goals 2000 requirement by writing national standards documents listing essential knowledge in each subject area. Unfortunately, these documents presented some challenges to educators. They were written from varying perspectives within one subject area, and often contained too much content. Basically the national standards were not easily read, understood, or integrated into instruction.

As a result of this confusion, most significant standard writing is now being done at the state level. For most states, all five of the subject areas, as well as additional subjects like physical education, technology, and the arts, presently have state standards that are frequently referenced.

Didax Educational Resources (<http://www.didaxinc.com/standards.html>)

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (<http://www.nctm.org>)

National Council of Teachers of English (<http://ncte.org>)

National Academies of Science (<http://nas.edu>)

National Council for the Social Studies (<http://www.socialstudies.org>)

How do standards fit into my lesson plans?

Many teachers are asked to document the integration of standards into their lesson plans. This is a process that requires careful alignment of standards, instruction, assessment, and learning targets. This alignment is not difficult, but learning this process may take some coaching initially. **The Lesson Architect™**, a free online lesson planning tool, is a great tool for helping teachers learn how to effectively integrate standards into instruction and to align standards, instruction, assessment, and learning targets. Visit lessonarchitect.uwf.edu to begin using this tool!

Another resource that is helpful to teachers who are creating standards-aligned lesson plans is *Aligning Instruction to Standards: Just Ask Andie!* This reader-friendly book uses a coach, Andie, to walk teachers through the process of aligning standards, instruction, assessment, and learning targets using a step-by-step approach. To order a copy of this book, visit our eStore!

Reference

Marzano, R., Kendall, J. & Gaddy, B. (1999). Essential Knowledge. Colorado: McRel.