

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgments

The Illinois State Board of Education gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many educators, parents, employers, working professionals and citizens who contributed their time, expertise and effort to the Standards Project as members of the learning area writing teams and the Coordination Team. Their work in writing and critiquing the initial drafts released in July of 1996 represents a monumental effort in collaboration and thoughtful cooperation unprecedented in Illinois education.

In addition, the State Board appreciates the involvement of the thousands of Illinois citizens who responded to the initial drafts through surveys, public hearings and focus groups. This broad response provided extremely valuable information that allowed the revision teams and External Review Team to shape this first edition of the Illinois Learning Standards.

A HISTORICAL AND RESEARCH BASE

Illinois provided a model for the nation a dozen years ago when it adopted 34 State Goals for Learning in 1985. These were “broadly stated, relatively timeless expressions of what the State of Illinois wants and expects its students to know and be able to do as a consequence of their elementary and secondary schooling.” They were the forerunners of the Illinois Learning Standards as we know them today.

In the intervening years, education research and state-by-state experience have brought a modern, systematic approach to setting standards. It is widely understood today that broad goals, while useful, are not sufficient to define student learning. Clear and specific standards communicate to students, teachers and parents exactly what is expected for students to learn. Specific standards make clear the types of tests and measures that accurately gauge student progress. Data from these tests inform educators and the public about student progress and where improvements are needed.

This document builds upon the State Goals for Learning established as a result of education reforms in 1985 and presents a more specific set of expectations for student learning. These expectations are stated as Goals for Learning, Standards and Benchmarks.

THE CASE FOR STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

A Changing World

Technological breakthroughs, an explosion of information and global economies are just a few of the conditions that have changed dramatically in the past decade. To be successful in a world characterized by change, students will need to learn the basics, but the basics of the 1990s and the new century to come go far beyond the basics of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. In addition to basic knowledge and skills, students will need to acquire new ways to learn that will serve them throughout their lives.

Scarce Resources

A clear set of standards that outlines expectations for student learning provides a focal point for deciding how to use the always-scarce resources that support education. Once standards are front and center and reliable information on student progress is made available, the efforts of educators and the funds available for teaching and learning can be targeted more efficiently and effectively to enhance learning.

Clear expectations help take the guesswork out of decisions about programs, materials, equipment and staff assignments. A standards-based education system benefits students, teachers, administrators, parents and taxpayers alike.

Sharing What Works

Shared standards have the potential to draw teachers, parents, schools and communities together across the state to share their best ideas and practices and help each other adapt them for the conditions affecting their students. From lesson plans to test items, from scheduling methods to technology plans, the standards can provide an organizer for shared efforts to improve education. To paraphrase a famous saying, all teaching and learning is local, but the capacity for innovative ideas is infinite within those localities. The standards can be the vehicle for sharing and supporting many ways to help students learn.

High Expectations as a Component of Fairness

Research shows that students learn best when they are clear about what they are expected to know and do. Part of being fair to students is letting them know the standards for achievement.

Another part of being fair is to maintain the same high standards for all students, wherever they may live. Unfairness occurs when students may meet or even excel at local standards, but then move to a new community or leave home to attend college, only to find that other students have been held to higher expectations. Setting state standards is part of meeting Illinois' obligation to provide fair and equitable educational opportunities for all students.

STANDARDS AS A BASIS FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Standards for All

Maintaining high expectations for all students is a component of fairness in education. "All students" include those who choose college and those who choose more technical career preparation directly from high school; those for whom English is a second language; those with learning disabilities and those who are gifted and talented; those who are returning to education for completion of a diploma, even as adults; and those from advantaged and disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

For most special needs students, their Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) will be linked to the standards, with accommodations and individualized approaches to the depth and timetables for achievement. For individuals with severe disabilities, few of these standards may apply in terms of achievement.

While the task of helping virtually all students achieve the standards may seem daunting, the alternative is not acceptable. Different expectations for different groups of students lead students to demand less of themselves—and unfortunately allow them to deliver on these lower expectations.

Measuring Progress

To know if students are meeting the standards, their progress must be measured over time. Most of this measuring will occur in the classroom where teachers see students on a daily basis. There, teachers can check progress in many ways—by observing, questioning, reviewing work assignments, testing or judging projects and performances.

Some of this measuring will occur on a larger scale through state assessments designed specifically to check students' performance against the standards across the state. And some measuring will occur through a variety of national and international tests taken by students' individual choice such as Advanced Placement (AP) exams or by voluntary participation of their schools in tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Each level of measurement in and of itself cannot provide a complete picture of student achievement. Taken together, however, a learning profile can emerge, allowing students, parents and educators to know how well students are doing and where improvements are needed. By extension, progress data can inform school boards, communities and education agencies about where to make changes and improvements in programs, resources and support.

The standards and learning benchmarks in this document provide a “road map” for local and state measures of progress.

Being Accountable

Being accountable for results requires that everyone involved understand what results are desired. The goals, standards and benchmarks form the basis for this shared understanding.

From students to teachers to parents, from school administrators to school boards to legislators to taxpayers, from employers to college admissions officers to the state education agency—all have some level of accountability for the results of education. It is one of the few public endeavors for which so many have so much responsibility.

The adoption of the Illinois Learning Standards provides an opportunity for greater accountability. The standards define the desired results, with further definition supplied through classroom and state tests and shared examples of student work that meets high expectations. All responsible parties will have to define their own roles in producing the results and determine how they will convey that they have met their responsibilities.

As examples, standards will drive revisions in school report cards, the establishment of an academic early warning/watch list and support programs for low-performing schools, and a performance-based annual report to the General Assembly by the Illinois State Board of Education.

It is important to note that adoption of the Illinois Learning Standards does not abrogate responsibility to meet the requirements of the Illinois School Code. All existing laws and rules remain in effect.

Improving the Education System

Standards alone do not improve the education system. However, they provide the focus, the foundation, upon which other reforms must be anchored. For example, teacher preparation and professional development will be strengthened as college courses and continuing education

programs are organized toward providing teachers the knowledge and skills to enable their students to achieve the Illinois Learning Standards. In addition, technology planning, because technology is woven throughout the Illinois Learning Standards, can and must be built around creating new learning opportunities for students to meet and exceed the standards. The analysis of student achievement data in relation to the Illinois Learning Standards will drive the improvement of teaching and learning and the more productive use of education dollars.

Making Standards Work for Student Learning

Moving standards from the written pages of this document into action in schools will take time, hard work and a variety of resources.

Making the documents available in printed and electronic formats is only a first step. A variety of secondary information will be available over time from the State Board of Education, Regional Offices of Education, school districts, public media and other partners in this endeavor. These will include parent brochures, test data, a curriculum and instruction database and other materials. Look for additional information related to the Illinois Learning Standards on the ISBE Web page (<http://www.isbe.state.il.us>).

To make standards work, resources need to be more carefully targeted toward students' achievement of the standards. Recent trends in federal law have moved many requirements for education funds toward standards-driven reforms. Information on using these funds in local schools and programs is available on the ISBE Web page under Grants.

Similarly, state education funds are being targeted to the greatest extent possible toward the standards. To find which state funds apply to standards-driven education programs, again see the ISBE Web page under Grants.

HOW THE STANDARDS WERE DEVELOPED

The Development Process

The Illinois Standards Project began in 1995 with the establishment of seven writing teams, one for each learning area represented in the final framework. Team leaders were selected on the basis of state and national expertise and reputation. The writing teams used extensive resources including national and state standards from across the country as well as the 1985 State Goals for Learning, and examples of Illinois schools' own expectations for student learning. A Coordinating Team composed of a cross-section of Illinois constituencies guided the production of the drafts, which were released for public comment in July of 1996.

The public comment period extended to January of 1997. It yielded extensive suggestions for improving the draft standards. The University of Illinois at Springfield, under contract with the State Board of Education, created a database of survey information and produced a variety of data analyses. These provided the main source of data used by the seven refinement teams that began work in February of 1997. These teams included educators, business people, parents, workforce preparation specialists and technology specialists.

An External Advisory Team was convened in February of 1997 to analyze issues that were related to the establishment of state standards and had arisen from the public comment data. This team represented the broad constituencies of Illinois citizens and included both supporters and opponents of state standards. The team produced a report advising the State Board of various opinions on the issues for their consideration prior to adopting the standards. The report is available from the ISBE Information and Reception Center at 217/782-4321.

UNDERSTANDING THE STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

The Criteria for Standards

From the outset, the following set of criteria guided the writing of the goals, standards and benchmarks:

- The standards and benchmarks must be clear and meaningful to students, parents, educators, business representatives and the community at large.
- The standards and benchmarks should include an appropriate combination of knowledge and skills, not just facts alone or skills alone.
- The standards and benchmarks should build upon and go beyond the basics within each of the academic disciplines.
- The standards and benchmarks should be specific enough to convey what students should learn, but broad enough to allow for a variety of approaches to teaching, curriculum, course design and assessment.
- The standards and benchmarks should be specific enough to be used in assessing progress and improving students' learning.

Comments received from Illinois citizens during the public comment period helped revise the standards so that they could better meet all the criteria.

The Philosophy behind the Standards

In addition to the criteria used to write and edit the standards, the following statements summarize other important concepts that guided their development and adoption:

- The standards should reflect what Illinois citizens generally agree upon as constituting a core of student learning. However, the Illinois Learning Standards cannot possibly incorporate all the learning students will accomplish. If schools and their communities believe that important content has been omitted, it will be their responsibility to develop local standards to fill the void. It is the hope of the State Board of Education that the state standards will provide a framework to build strong and rich classroom experiences that incorporate all the important learning a community expects of its students.
- Workplace preparation is an important purpose of schooling. The standards incorporate knowledge and skills that will help enable students to be successful in the workplace of their choice, as well as in their roles as citizens, family members and participants in our society. The standards also create opportunities to integrate the academic and workplace knowledge and skills and learning opportunities to enhance students' ability to see connections between what is learned and practical applications of that learning.
- The Illinois Learning Standards must reflect the impact of technology on our world. For example, in English Language Arts, it is important to recognize the increasing roles of visual and media literacy in communication. Thus, the standards include verbs such as "compose" and "produce" in addition to "write," empowering students to communicate through visual images, animation and video in addition to text.
- Conditions affecting student learning continue to change. Thus, refinement and updating of the standards must be a continuous process. The State Board of Education is committed to the development of an orderly process for improvement of the Illinois Learning Standards, to include but not be limited to, an annual report to the Board on issues identified through the implementation process and a formal review at three-year intervals. Updates will be made in the same spirit in which these standards were developed, that is, with broad participation of Illinois citizens.
- Illinois students cannot be held accountable for achieving the standards if they do not have adequate and sufficient opportunities to acquire the identified knowledge and skills. The State Board and Regional Offices of Education need to work with local schools and communities to identify the nature and extent of such problems and develop solutions which

will ensure that students have the necessary learning opportunities. That may require thinking about schooling in different ways and looking for new structures and approaches for educating students.

Navigating through the Framework

The standards framework is divided into seven learning areas:

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Science
- Physical Development and Health
- Fine Arts
- Foreign Languages (advisory standards)

Each learning area section contains the following information:

- An introduction to the learning area explaining the learning that is captured in the standards and background information.
- A section called “Applications of Learning,” in which five cross-disciplinary abilities are discussed as they apply to the learning area:
 - Solving Problems
 - Communicating
 - Using Technology
 - Working on Teams
 - Making Connections

- Charts of Goals, Standards and Learning Benchmarks that define the essential knowledge and skills for the learning area.

Goals are broad statements of knowledge and/or skills that organize the subject matter of the learning area. Each goal has an explanation of why it is important and how it relates to life beyond school.

Learning Standards are specific statements of knowledge and/or skills within a goal. Taken together, the standards clearly define the learning needed to reach that goal. They represent the results of schooling and thus may be considered exit standards.

Learning Benchmarks are progress indicators for gauging students’ achievement of each exit standard. They form the basis for measuring student achievement over time. In general, benchmarks for the early grades represent basic skills. Later benchmarks build in complexity and rigor from one level to the next, culminating in deep understandings demonstrated through complex performances.

The grade-level clusters for learning benchmarks are early elementary school, late elementary school, middle/junior high school, early high school and late high school. Specific grade levels are not used to allow schools flexibility in how they structure their education programs. The focus is on results, not on how the results are achieved or on a fixed amount of time.

The goals, standards and benchmarks are numbered for easy reference.

Appendices

The following appendices have been added to help the reader gain a better understanding of terminology used in the goals, learning standards and benchmarks; to illustrate how the 1997 Illinois Learning Standards compare with the 1985 State Goals for Learning; to cite resources

used to develop the 1997 Illinois Learning Standards; and to identify individuals who served on development and refinement teams to bring this work forward.

- Appendix A - Glossary of Terms
- Appendix B - Crosswalk - A comparison of the 1985 State Goals for Learning and the 1997 Illinois Learning Standards
- Appendix C - Bibliography
- Appendix D - Workplace Skills & Career Development Competencies
- Appendix E - List of Participants

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Using the Framework

The State Board of Education will use the Illinois Learning Standards for a variety of purposes including:

- as a guide to redesign the state assessment program;
- as a guide to assist schools and teachers with curriculum, instruction and assessments;
- as a foundation to establish professional teacher standards;
- as a guide to target the use of funds to better support teaching and learning;
- as a means to communicate the purpose and results of Illinois K-12 education to the public.

Local schools will use the standards framework for many similar purposes, such as

- a guide to organize and share curriculum, instructional methods and assessments across teachers, grade levels and schools;
- a means to gauge student progress through local assessments;
- a guide to focus school improvement plans;
- a means to communicate the purpose and results of schooling to the local community.

This list of uses will grow as standards-based reforms continue in Illinois.

Standards-Related Projects

Some specific projects are on the drawing board at the time of this printing. Stay tuned to the ISBE website (<http://www.isbe.state.il.us>) to see frequent updates on their progress or to get personally involved in their success.

- An on-line "marketplace" for educators and others to share their best ideas for helping students reach the standards. This will eventually include lesson plans, instructional techniques, assessment prototypes, samples of exemplary student work, recommendations on teaching materials and available funding support.
- A "coordinated system of support" for programs and initiatives that affect student learning. The system will include Regional Offices of Education, professional and community organizations and a variety of individuals working together to coordinate services and resources to meet the needs of schools.
- Improved public reporting to show student progress toward meeting standards. This will include redesigned school report cards and a new format for the State Board's annual report to the General Assembly.