

**School Board Meeting:**

March 10, 2014

**Subject:**

English Language Arts  
ADJUST Report

**Presenter:**

Pam Miller, Jenina Rothstein,  
and Laura Hauer

**SUGGESTED SCHOOL BOARD ACTION:**

Report only.

**DESCRIPTION:**

The district's continuous improvement process includes seven different phases designed to assist all programs in developing and refining excellence for the students of BHM Schools. Those phases are REFLECT, RESEARCH, PILOT, IMPLEMENT, ADJUST, MONITOR, and EVALUATE.

Each phase of the process identifies specific desired outcomes and related tasks to achieve those outcomes for the program to be prepared to continue to the next phase of improvement. There are two opportunities within the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) for the programs to prepare and present information to the school board either as reports or as recommendations for curriculum adoption proposals.

The ELA program is currently engaged in the phase of ADJUST. During this time, teachers examine solutions to findings they discovered throughout implementation. They determine what adjustments are required to the content's programming, the instruction, the resources, and the assessments in order to meet the requirements of the standards, as well as the desired district program outcomes, vision, and goals.

The ELA ADJUST phase is particularly interesting due to the adoption of the Common Core standards as a part of Minnesota's Academic Standards. This set of standards brings many excellent goals for students to achieve, along with challenges for the district to reach full implementation.

At Monday's board workshop, we will share the successes and challenges presented to us by the implementation of these standards.

Assisting with the presentation by representing the BHM ELA programming will be Jenina Rothstein, Instructional Support Specialist, and Laura Hauer, Secondary ELA Continuous Improvement Process Coordinator.



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ADJUST REPORT  
2013-14

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### HISTORY

#### **Development of the Common Core**

Common Core started at the state level, was driven by state's needs, and became a national movement as states collaborated and watched how essential learnings overlapped. CCSSO (Council of Chief State School Officers) & the National Governor's Association (NGA) were two of the driving forces in the creation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Their conversation started with the question of what skills and knowledge students need in order to be college and career ready. Once those pieces were identified, there was backwards planning in terms of placing and aligning standards. The current Administration and their Race to the Top Initiative is endorsing Common Core Standards but not driving it. Each state still has the ability to opt in, or opt out of standards. And that's a choice that they get to make in each disciplinary area. Currently 46 states, including Minnesota, have adopted the English Language Arts Common Core Standards.

#### **History of Minnesota Standards**

The first Minnesota state standards appeared in 2003 with the repeal of the Profile of Learning. MN was one of the states consulted in the Common Core process. (There is some carry-over from previous standards into the Common Core). Common Core standards include the following categories: reading strategies for both fiction and non-fiction; forms of writing and writing processes; speaking, viewing, listening skills; media literacy, and language (grammar, usage, and the like). There's also a focus on literacy across the curriculum. Minnesota has adopted Common Core in English Language Arts, but not in Math. (One of the reasons that Minnesota has not adopted Math is that it has not been up in the standards review cycle.)

In 2009-2010 the Minnesota Standards committee revised the 2003 standards, and adopted the Common Core, with implementation required by 2012-13. Given the idea that the standards are

“intended to be a living work” future review is expected. The next revision is scheduled for 2018-19 as required by MN Statute. In English Language Arts (ELA) its best to think of the standards as a list of skills and processes (or shared goals and expectations) and not a set of content of canned curriculum. Although the standards lay out a scope and sequence (and include an Appendix listing examples or titles of texts at each grade level), the issues of what materials, and what texts are taught, still remains a local decision.

In Minnesota, State Standards really means the Common Core plus: the Common Core standards with additional standards as required by MN statutes regarding Native American Standards, and Media Literacy Standards, along with a focus on reading for enjoyment.

### **History and Evolution of Standards in District 877**

District leadership started work in the fall of 2010, and Literacy Teams started looking at standards in 2010-2011 and collaborating with staff. At the elementary level, the district Elementary Literacy Team adopted a new program, Literacy by Design (fall of 2007) and has been working to align the curriculum with state standards. Placement of standards within units is complete. BCMS adopted new instructional resources (Prentice Hall Literature) prior to the implementation of MN State Standards (Common Core plus) in the fall of 2011. The goal there was to bring common texts, common goals, and common language into the equation. And now, with the adoption of the MN State Standards (Common Core plus), teachers are checking the alignment of those standards with current curriculum, identifying the texts and activities within that curriculum that best function as formative or summative assessments. At the high school there has been a series of discussions about how to adequately address standards without sacrificing a tradition of rich electives. Teachers are working to adapt course units and materials to address standards, and working toward common assessments. Teachers and counselors are also working to define a series of “pathways” that allow for course choices, but ensure that all standards are delivered to all students. Next, the high school will need to communicate requirements to students and parents, and find a way to track progress through the system.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

Clearly, changes are needed in programming, curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to meet the intent of the revised standards. At all 3 levels, ELA teachers continue to work on interpreting the language of the standards & translating them into “kid friendly language”. They are also sifting through the standards, looking for common themes, and figuring out ways

to efficiently package and teach essential skills and concepts, and communicate those standards to parents. As that happens, teachers are in the process of eliminating redundancies and filling in gaps in terms of curricular materials, and working to create and implement common assessments that are aligned to the standards. And as those pieces fall into place, they are working to record all of these revisions on newly developed district curriculum maps.

## **IMPACT OF THE ELA STANDARDS FOR BHM SCHOOLS**

At the elementary level, Literacy By Design provides a foundation for teachers to begin meeting the standards-- particularly in it's focus on non-fiction reading strategies. At the middle school level, the adoption of a common text carries the potential to foster alignment from grade to grade. At the high school, there's a renewed and positive energy about aligning the curriculum that has been developed around common standards, and a creative focus in thinking about assessments.

### Ongoing Challenges:

- For all levels there are the challenges of meeting **standards that aren't in the current curriculum**. For example at the elementary level there are various grammar skills and specific reading skills that are in MN State Standards that are not addressed in Literacy by Design.
- Common Core places much more **emphasis on non-fiction reading** within English courses than traditional curriculum has. That carries with it some real challenges: it requires that teachers shift out of old paradigms, and forces them to ask what traditional texts they may be willing to "let go of" in order to make room in the course for non-fiction pieces and strategies.
- **6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects Standards** will need to be placed across disciplines. Secondary curriculum leads are working with their colleagues to determine strategies to ensure we are instructing and assessing these additional literacy standards for all students in required Social Studies, Science, Tech Ed and Technology courses.
- Common Core involves more **rigor**, in terms of the emphasis placed on critical thinking skills and processes. Students are no longer responsible just for the content of a text--they are now regularly asked to examine the author's intention, the social or historical context, the writing techniques etc., and they're being asked to evaluate its overall effectiveness.

These standards require “deep” teaching. **But the number of days in a term is static. The challenge is to figure out how to re-package what we do.** That takes time.

- The new environment dictates **multiple assessments at multiple levels**: we measure data within the classroom, at the district level, and at the state/national level. Common assessment isn't new, but given the rigor of the standards, the way we "do" common assessment is evolving. Emphasis on formative assessment (or grading practices surrounding that) and a need for summative tests that measure critical thinking skills accurately, requires development and revision of tests.
- **Media literacy** is not a new focus in English curriculum, but given the rapidly evolving media landscape--the challenge is fitting in lessons about new research techniques, fair use/ responsible use, copyright issues, and the like.
- Given the rigor of the standards, and the dictum that they apply to all students, there's a need to work hard to find new and **efficient supports for all at-risk students, and all English Language Learners and all Special Education populations.**

As implementation happens, and as Common Core adoption continues to be “headline news,” questions and concerns are arising. The Common Core is not free from politics and not without controversy. Rumors swirl about extreme political agendas or a “required national curriculum.” There are misconceptions about the creation of the standards-- the groups who conceived it and the accuracy of the research that fed into it. One of the most pressing concerns involves the increased rigor of the standards themselves, and the necessity of time and funding to make the implementation meaningful and successful. Teachers, administrators, board members and community representatives will need to be prepared to answer those questions and concerns.

#### **Appendix:**

“English Language Arts.” *Minnesota Department of Education*. MDE. 2013. Web. 3 Feb. 2014.

- Description of MN State Standards and Timelines:  
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards/LangArts/>
- MN FAQs sheet - addresses common questions re: committees, timelines, processes  
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StandImplToolkit/Exploration/ArchStand/MDESupports/052565>

“English Language Arts Standards” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*. CCSS. 2012.

Web. 3 Feb. 2014

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

“Myths vs. Facts” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*. CCSS. 2012. Web. 3 Feb. 2014

<http://www.corestandards.org/resources/myths-vs-facts>