

Become an Informed Parent: Standards-Based Education

Content standards. What are they? Why are they important? How do they affect a student's education? What should parents know about content standards — and *do* within a standards-based education system — to promote their student's academic success?

Standards-based reform has been the driving force behind much of the education policy in the last two decades in California (and in the entire country). As a result, California now has a standards-based education system, with the goals of providing a challenging curriculum to all students and raising their performance to a proficient level.

California's standards-based education system has four main parts:

- **Standards** that spell out what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level or high school course
- **Tests** to measure students' progress toward mastering those standards
- **Strategies** to build teachers' capacity to help students meet the standards
- **Accountability** by the schools and districts for students' progress in meeting the standards

(Posted April 2006)

{mospagebreak title=What Are Content Standards?}

WHAT ARE CONTENT STANDARDS?

At the heart of a standards-based education system are academic content standards (also known as content standards or standards). Content standards are *what a student should know and be able to do in each grade* from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Why were California's standards developed?

Under the provisions of state law, the State Board of Education's Standards Commission began developing the state's official content standards in the mid-1990s.

The Standards Commission's goal was to create highly specific, measurable, rigorous, "world class" standards that were "based on the knowledge and skills that pupils will need to succeed in the information-based, global economy of the 21st century." To make California students globally competitive, the commission drew from standards of academically demanding states, such as Virginia and Delaware, and countries, such as Japan and Singapore.

In 1997 and 1998, the Board of Education adopted content standards for four core academic subjects:

- English-Language Arts
- History-Social Science
- Mathematics
- Science

{mospagebreak title=What Are the Standards for English and History?}

WHAT ARE THE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH AND HISTORY?

Here is a brief explanation of the content standards for English-Language Arts and History-Social Science in the 9th through 12th grades.

English-Language Arts

From kindergarten through 12th grade, the content standards are divided into four areas:

- Reading
- Writing
- Written and Oral English-Language Conventions
- Listening and Speaking

The standards for 9th-12th grade include:

- Using technology as a tool to conduct research and create multimedia presentations
- Analytically critiquing the media
- Using the language arts for the purpose of work and careers (e.g., mastering interview techniques, filling out job applications, writing business letters)

Because independent reading significantly improves a student's reading comprehension and vocabulary, 9th and 10th graders are expected to read one and one-half million words annually on their own. By 12th grade, students are expected to read two million words, including a wide variety of classic and contemporary literature, magazines, newspapers, and online information. Two million words translate to about 11 pages per day or one 335-page book each month.

History-Social Science

From kindergarten through 12th grade, the standards specify that students study the broad aspects of history–social science including history, geography, civics, economics, ethics, sociology, and political science. The curriculum is divided into three broad, inter-related categories:

- Knowledge of History and Cultural Understanding
- Democratic Understanding and Civic Values
- Skills Attainment and Social Participation Skills essential for effective citizenship

There are no 9th grade content standards. The 10th through 12th grade standards are as follows:

- 10th grade: “World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World”
- 11th grade: “United States History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century”
- 12th grade: “Principles of American Democracy” and “Principles of Economics”

In addition, there are 9th-12th grade Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills standards to learn critical thinking skills that include historical research and interpretation, spatial thinking, and reasoning.

{mospagebreak title=What Are the Standards for Math and Science?}

WHAT ARE THE STANDARDS FOR MATH AND SCIENCE?

Here is a brief explanation of the content standards for Mathematics and Science in the 9th through 12th grades.

Mathematics

The mathematics standards for 9th through 12th grades are not organized by grade level, as they are for kindergarten through 7th grade. They are organized by subject (or discipline):

- Algebra I
- Geometry
- Algebra II
- Trigonometry
- Mathematical Analysis
- Linear Algebra
- Probability and Statistics
- Advanced Placement Probability and Statistics
- Calculus

High schools may teach mathematics in traditional courses or in an integrated fashion. However the individual subjects are sequenced or combined, students are expected to achieve the content standards.

As this quotation from the *Mathematics Content Standards Introduction* explains, students require consistent support from their parents to become proficient in most of mathematics:

“Mathematics is critical for all students, not only those who will have careers that demand advanced mathematical preparation but all citizens who will be living in the twenty-first century. These standards are based on the premises that all students are capable of learning rigorous mathematics and learning it well, and all are capable of learning far more than is currently expected. Proficiency in most of mathematics is not an innate characteristic; it is achieved through persistence, effort, and practice on the part of students and rigorous and effective instruction on the part of teachers. Parents and teachers must provide support and encouragement.” (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/mthintro.asp>)

Science

As in mathematics, the science standards for 9th through 12th grades are organized by subject (or discipline):

- Physics
- Chemistry
- Biology/Life Science
- Earth Science

High schools may teach science in traditional courses or in an integrated fashion.

The content standards reflect the view of science as a balance between a “body of knowledge” and “a method of scientific inquiry.” There are Investigation and Experimentation standards for 9th through 12th grades.

{mospagebreak title=The Sequoia District’s Content Standards}

THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT'S CONTENT STANDARDS

Aligning itself with the California State Board of Education, the Sequoia district has adopted standards for the following subjects:

- Visual & Performing Arts
- World Languages
- Spanish
- Science
- Physical Education
- Math
- Foods
- Child Development

You can view the standards on this website. On the homepage, click on "Curriculum & Standards," click on "Standards," and then click on the individual subject.

{mospagebreak title=Testing Students on the Content Standards}

TESTING STUDENTS ON THE CONTENT STANDARDS

California developed the STAR Program to test 2nd through 11th grade students each year on how well they are learning the knowledge and skills defined in the content standards for the four academic subjects: English-Language Arts, History-Social Science, Mathematics, and Science.

STAR stands for Standardized Testing And Reporting. As the name indicates, the STAR Program has a testing component and a reporting component.

In addition to taking STAR tests, high school students are tested on English and math standards in the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).

{mospagebreak title=The STAR Program}

THE STAR PROGRAM

What are the STAR tests?

The STAR Program has three categories of tests:

- CST - California Standards Tests. Most students take the CSTs.
- CAPA - California Alternate Performance Assessment. Most students with disabilities take the CSTs with some accommodations or modifications. Students with severe disabilities who cannot take the CSTs take the CAPA.
- Apprenda 3 - This is for Spanish-speaking English learners who either have been enrolled in California schools less than twelve months or are being taught in Spanish. These students also take the CSTs.

What subjects do the CSTs cover?

12th graders do not take STAR tests. Sequoia District 9th-11th graders take two, three, or four CSTs in April and May:

- 9th Graders:
 - English-language arts
 - General Mathematics (for students who are not taking a standards-based math course)
- 10th Graders:
 - English-language arts
 - History-social science
 - Life Science (This tests on middle school Life Science and high school Biology standards.)
- 11th Graders:
 - English-language arts
 - History-social science
- 9th-11th Graders who complete any of the following math or science courses by the end of 2005-06:
 - Algebra I, Geography or Algebra II
 - Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, or Physics

What subjects do the CAPA and Aprenda 3 tests cover?

CAPA is an individually administered, performance-task test. It covers the content standards in three subjects: English-language arts, mathematics, and science (grade ten).

Aprenda 3 is a multiple-choice achievement test of general academic knowledge of reading, language and mathematics. It is given in Spanish.

How are students scored on the STAR tests?

Students' number scores on the CSTs and CAPA are converted to five performance levels: Far Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The state goal is for all students to perform at the Proficient or Advanced level.

How do parents find out their student's STAR scores?

The state generates STAR Student Reports, STAR Student Reports for CAPA, and Aprenda 3 Student Reports. In September/October, the Sequoia district mails the reports to parents and guardians.

What information does the STAR Student Report contain?

The report indicates the subjects for which your student took CSTs, the number score and performance level for each test, and the percentage of correct answers for each area of each test. It shows whether your student achieved the state target of Proficient plus your student's specific strengths and needs in each subject area. In addition, the report has a California Reading List Number that links your student's English CST score with a list of books at the appropriate reading level for your student. You can access the CRL at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/readinglist.asp>.

{mospagebreak title=What is the Early Assessment Program (EAP)?}

WHAT IS THE EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (EAP)?

The Early Assessment Program (EAP) is a voluntary, 11th grade assessment that combines California State University *placement* standards with California high school *content* standards. This early assessment identifies whether a student is prepared for college at a point when students have the time to gain the needed preparation during their senior year. Although EAP is not a part of the STAR Program, the assessment is given with the STAR tests.

You can learn more about the EAP at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/eapindex.asp>, www.csumathsuccess.org, and www.csuenglishsuccess.org.

{mospagebreak title=The California High School Exit Exam}

THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM

What is the California High School Exit Exam?

The California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) is a state exam all California public school students must pass in order to graduate from high school. The purpose of the CAHSEE is to improve student achievement in high school and ensure that students who graduate from high school can demonstrate competency in the state content standards for reading, writing, and mathematics.

Who takes the CAHSEE and when?

Students, including English learners and students with disabilities, take the exam at the end of 10th grade. English learners and students with disabilities may receive special assistance to take the CAHSEE. You can learn about test variations, accommodations and modifications at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/accomod.asp>. Students who do not pass the CAHSEE have opportunities in 11th and 12th grades to retake the part(s) not passed.

What subjects does the CAHSEE cover?

The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts and mathematics. The English-language arts part tests content standards through grade 10. The math part tests content standards in grades 6 and 7 and Algebra I.

How do parents find out their student's CAHSEE scores?

The Sequoia district mails the CAHSEE Student and Parent Report to parents about ten weeks after students take the exam. Also, your student's transcript shows whether he/she has taken the CAHSEE and whether he/she passed.

Are any students exempt from taking the CAHSEE?

For the 2005-2006 school year only, certain 12th graders, who have disabilities and who are scheduled to graduate this year, may be exempt from taking the CAHSEE as required by Senate Bill 517. Students must meet all the criteria of the bill, which was signed by Governor Schwarzenegger on 1-30-06. The State Superintendent's letter and Q&A are at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/sb517ltr.asp>

Students with disabilities who use a modification and have earned the equivalent of a passing score may be eligible for a diploma if a waiver of the requirement to pass one or both parts of the CAHSEE is granted by the Sequoia school board. Parents must ask the school to submit a waiver on behalf of their student.

{mospagebreak title=Helping Your Student Succeed on the Tests}

HELPING YOUR STUDENT SUCCEED ON THE TESTS

Know the content standards your child will be learning each year.

The state has produced a Parent Handbook for each of the four content standard subjects. Each Handbook gives an overview of the content standard, how it is integrated into the curriculum, ways parents can help their child succeed, resources that are available, and planning for your child's success. Go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/> and scroll to "Parent Handbooks."

You may read or download the content standards themselves at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/>. Scroll to “Academic Content Standards.”

To learn how the standards are being taught in your student’s classes or if you have questions about the standards, please contact your student’s teachers.

Know when the STAR and CAHSEE tests will be given each year.

These tests are given in the spring. The test dates are published in the monthly PTA newsletters. (The newsletter is mailed to families each month. If parents are divorced/separated, a newsletter can be mailed to each parent. If you are not receiving it, phone the Data Clerk at your student’s school.)

In addition, the Sequoia district sends a letter to 9th and 10th grade parents informing them about the CAHSEE test and the test dates.

If you have questions about the test dates, contact the Instructional Vice Principal at your school.

Encourage your student to do their best on the STAR and CAHSEE tests.

On the STAR tests:

- Download released questions from previous years’ California Standards Tests (CSTs) at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/resources.asp>. Scroll to the “Released Test Questions.”
- The CST blueprints, which list the specific content standards that are assessed on each test, are at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/blueprints.asp>.
- You can find information about CAPA at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/capa.asp>.

On the CAHSEE:

- Download “Study Guides” and “Released Test Questions” at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/resources.asp>.
- The CAHSEE blueprints, which list the specific content standards that are assessed on the exams, are at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/admin.asp>.

Read and use the information on the STAR Student Report.

The results of your student’s STAR tests, plus a Guide, are mailed to you in September. Monitor your student’s progress from year to year. If you have questions about how your child is doing in a subject, contact the teacher. (One communication tool that helps Sequoia district parents and teachers keep in touch through the Internet is *Communicado*. You can read about and register to use *Communicado* at the district website, <http://www.seq.org/>.)

The California Reading List (CRL) is a Web-based tool that allows parents to access lists of book titles organized by levels of reading difficulty. The CRL number on your student’s STAR Student Report identifies the list of books that is appropriate for his particular independent reading level. Access the CRL at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/readinglist.asp>.

Parents and teachers can use the STAR Student Report, together with teacher report cards and classroom work, to talk about ways to improve a student’s academic achievement.

If your child is performing below Proficient on the STAR or failed the CAHSEE, work closely with the school to improve his/her performance.

Talk with your student's teacher or Guidance counselor or with the Instructional Vice Principal to determine what supplemental instruction is best for your student. Options include after-school tutoring, CAHSEE prep classes given during school hours, and summer school. In addition, you may seek help from agencies offering after-school tutoring and other academic support, such as the Boys & Girls Club, which has locations in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Redwood City.

{mospagebreak title=Learn More – Information Sources for This Article}

LEARN MORE – INFORMATION SOURCES FOR THIS ARTICLE

You can find out much more about the many parts of standards-based education at the websites of the California Department of Education (CDE) and EdSource (“an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to clarify complex education issues”).

Content Standards

- **California standards for the four academic subjects**, plus Visual & Performing Arts and English Language Development
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/> or <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/>
- **Parent Handbooks for each of the core subjects' content standards**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/> Scroll to “Parent Handbooks”
- **The curriculum framework for each core subject** (The curriculum framework is a detailed blueprint that schools can use to implement the content standards into their curriculum.)
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/allfwks.asp>
- **Sequoia district standards**
<http://www.seq.org> Click on “Curriculum and Standards”
- **EdSource's “Standards and Curriculum Overview” articles**
http://edsource.org/edu_sta.cfm
- **EdSource's 2003 video, “California's Commitment: Raising Academic Standards for All Students”**
http://edsource.org/pub_abs_video03.cfm

The STAR Program

- **Edsource's “Assessment Overview” articles**
http://edsource.org/edu_ass.cfm#star
- **The STAR Program homepage**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/>
- **Questions from previous CSTs**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/resources.asp>
- **The CST blueprints**, which list the specific content standards that are assessed on each test
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/blueprints.asp>
- **The California Reading List (CRL)**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/readinglist.asp>
- **CAPA**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/capa.asp>

The California High School Exit Exam

- **The CAHSEE homepage**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/>
- **“Study Guides” and “Released Test Questions” for the CAHSEE**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/resources.asp>
- **CAHSEE test variations, accommodations and modifications**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/accomod.asp>
- **The CAHSEE blueprints**, which list the specific content standards that are assessed on the exam
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/admin.asp>
- **State Superintendent’s letter about an exemption for some 12th graders with disabilities**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/sb517ltr.asp>
- **EdSource article: “Exit Exam: Special Education Students Can Be Exempted in 2006”**
http://edsource.org/news_ass_020606.cfm
- **EdSource’s 2-06 articles: “CAHSEE at a Glance,” “Alternatives to the CAHSEE were considered,” “How Hard is the Exit Exam?”** at EdSource’s Free Online Publications page
http://edsource.org/pub_fre.cfm

Miscellaneous

- **EdSource’s Glossary of Terms and Education Acronyms**
<http://edsource.org/glo.cfm#commonacs>
- **The Early Assessment Program (EAP)**
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/eapindex.asp>
www.csumathsuccess.org
www.csuenglishsuccess.org
- **Communicado, Sequoia district’s website to facilitate communication between teachers and parents**
<http://www.seq.org>
Click on “Comunicado: Keeping you informed!” to read about about *Communicado*.
Click on “Communicado!” to register or enter the website.

Sequoia Union High School District

Department of Human Resources – Parent Involvement and Youth Development Program

For questions about parent involvement & parent resources please call Dorthy Burnside, Coordinator of Parent Involvement and Youth Development at 650-369-1411, ext. 2317 or email dburnsdie@seq.org.