



Academic Standards

What the Law Says...

ESEA '94 mandated the development of “academic standards” by the States. These standards are to be applied to all students and all schools in the state. The NCLB language is as follows:

(b) ACADEMIC STANDARDS, ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

[Reformatted for clarity]

(1) CHALLENGING ACADEMIC STANDARDS.

- A. **IN GENERAL.** Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State has adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards that will be used by the State, its local educational agencies, and its schools to carry out this part, except that a State shall not be required to submit such standards to the Secretary.
- B. **SAME STANDARDS.** The academic standards required by subparagraph (A) shall be the same academic standards that the State applies to all schools and children in the state.
- C. **SUBJECTS.** The State shall have such academic standards for all public elementary school and secondary school children, including children served under this part, in subjects determined by the State, but including at least mathematics, reading or language arts, and (beginning in the 2005–2006 school year) science, which shall include the same knowledge, skills, and levels of achievement expected of all children.
- D. **CHALLENGING ACADEMIC STANDARDS.** Standards under this paragraph shall include:
- I. challenging academic content standards in academic subjects that:
 - specify what children are expected to know and be able to do;
 - contain coherent and rigorous content; and
 - encourage the teaching of advanced skills; and
 - II. challenging student academic achievement standards that:
 - are aligned with the State’s academic content standards;
 - describe two levels of high achievement (proficient and advanced) that determine how well children are mastering the material in the State academic content standards; and
 - describe a third level of achievement (basic) to provide complete information about the progress of the lower-achieving children toward mastering the proficient and advanced levels of achievement.

Regulations

The US Department of Education has promulgated regulations on Standards and Assessments. These regulations contain the following provisions:

- States are to develop content and achievement standards for all schools and all children (not just Title I schools or children).
- States have the flexibility to develop standards for each grades or more than one grade.
- If standards are developed for more than one grade, content expectations indicating what is to be taught at each grade level must be developed.
- High school standards must reflect what a State expects all high school students to know by the time they graduate, regardless of course titles or years completed.
- Achievement standards must:
 - Be aligned with state standards,
 - Include achievement levels that describe:
 - Two levels – proficient and advanced
 - A third level, basic, with complete information about the progress of lower achieving students
 - Include a description of the competencies associated with each achievement level,
 - Identify assessment or “cut” scores,
- States must have achievement standards for each subject assessed.

A note about regulations and guidance...

The Secretary of Education (US DOE) promulgates both regulations, which are binding, and non-regulatory guidance on specific issues in ESEA. This guidance is usually adhered to by states and districts as if it were regulatory.

Standards and Pennsylvania

The adoption of Chapter 4 regulations by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education laid the groundwork for Pennsylvania’s compliance with ESEA ‘01. Chapter 4 included content standards for mathematics, reading, and writing. The state board has also adopted content standards in most of the content areas. In May 2001, the State Board adopted four levels and descriptors of achievement standards: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced.

Beginning in the fall of 2004, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has posted what it calls “anchor standard” to help teachers identify the standards addressed on the PSSA.