

League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces Education Study Committee

Report on the New Mexico and Las Cruces Public Schools Core Curriculum Standards

Meeting with Associate Superintendent for Learning, Teaching and Research,
Dr. Steven Sanchez, Las Cruces Public Schools
March 24, 2011, 10:30 a.m. LCPS Administration Building

Report by Sue Cain and Jane Asche

This meeting with Dr. Sanchez and two members of the League Education Study Committee was guided by a set of seven questions designed by the committee to better understand the issues related to the state's adoption of the national Common Core State Standards Initiative for grades K-12. The following report is organized by the answers given by Dr. Sanchez to these questions.

1. How much do the new Common Core State Standards for grades K-12 differ from the previous core curriculum standards of New Mexico and the LCPS?

Actually, the NM state standards already being used by the LCPS were very similar to the new Common Core State Standards which have now been adopted by New Mexico for English/Language Arts and Mathematics. LCPS 8th grade standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics were revised several years ago. Our LCPS standards were not as extensive, but similar to the newly adopted state standards. LCPS started last year to incorporate any of the new standards that were missing into our previously established standards for grades K-12 in reading, language arts, and math curriculum areas. In the next two to three years LCPS will integrate the new standards into our current LCPS standards in Social Studies, Science, and Technology. Each school district may add up to 15% of their own curriculum standards to the new state standards.

The new state standards are not a curriculum in the sense that they do not prescribe specific curriculum materials. Instead they are a clear set of goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help students succeed. Local teachers, principals and superintendents will decide how the standards will be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in the classroom. Heavy emphasis is placed on reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in all curriculum areas as well as analytical thinking and organizational skills. The Standards do recognize that both content and skills are important.¹

For Example: In English-language arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare (a rare instance of a specific author, but does not dictate which specific works of Shakespeare). The standards also contain lists of age appropriate literature to make sure that students are mastering the reading material that will be required for entry into college or a variety of technical career paths. However, the crucial decisions about what specific materials should be used or specific content should be taught are left up to state and local determination. (See Appendix 1 for a more detailed explanation of the

¹ This information is taken from the Myths vs. Facts information section that Dr. Sanchez shared with us from the Common Core standards Website (see endnote 2 below for website address). Once on the website go to the tab titled about "About the Standards" and then once on this page, click on the "Myths vs. Facts" tab in the left hand menu on the page.

Common Core State Standards from the Common Core State Standards Initiative website.)²

Dr. Sanchez provided us with copies of the New Mexico Public Education Department's News Release, June 18, 2010, "Public Hearing Scheduled for K-12 Mathematics and English/Language Arts Common Core Standards that Will Be Implemented in 2011." This document clarifies and answers many of the questions we had about the new state standards in relationship to the LCPS core curriculum content and standards.³

The news release explains that adoption of the Common Core Standards by New Mexico would be a two part process. Governor Bill Richardson and [then] Secretary of Education Garcia signed a memorandum of agreement in May of 2009 with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers that called for the states to work together to develop common standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics for Grades K-12. These are commonly referred to as Standards for Excellence.

To be eligible for the "Race to the Top" competition, the Public Education Department (PED) was required to adopt the Common Core Standards for Language Arts and Mathematics by August 2, 2010 for use in the public schools. The first part of the process was to hold a public rules hearing where adoption of these standards was discussed. Once the rules were adopted allowing for the amendment of the NM Administrative Code for education standards, a delayed implementation date was set of August 31, 2011 to allow all school districts to prepare their teachers to implement the new standards.

The second part of the process was to work with the educators and community members throughout the state to add the common core Benchmarks and Performance Standards and review current New Mexico Language Arts and Mathematics K-12 Benchmarks and Performance Standards. Two statewide committees, composed of teachers, school administrators, other education professionals, parents and other community members were established to determine which, if any, current performance standards were to be retained. The PED then conducted another public hearing in late fall of 2010 for the adoption of the "new" Benchmarks and Performance Standards for Language Arts and Mathematics. Implementation of these revised K-12 standards will be required by all school districts beginning with the 2011-2012 school year.

² The Common Core State Standards website is <http://www.corestandards.org> and is the definitive site to view the recommended common standards developed by a national study group of teachers, administrators, parents and community groups that included the business community. It is important to note that when a state becomes an adopter of the Common Core Standards Initiative, they develop their own variation of the standards so all states do not have identical standards.

³ NM Public Education Department News Release: June 18, 2010. Public Hearing Scheduled for K-12 Mathematics and English/Language Arts Common Core Standards That Will Be Implemented in 2011, 300 Don Gaspar, Santa Fe, NM, 87501-2786, ped.state.nm.us, Beverly Friedman and Danielle Montoya, Public Information Officers, 505-827-6661 or 505-476-0393. This news release is available in the League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces (LVWGLC) files.

2. What is the plan and time schedule for LCPS's full implementation of the new common core standards?

This year, 2010-2011 school year, LCPS has been implementing the new Standards for Excellence in the English/Language Arts and Mathematics curriculum area. Teachers and administrators started working on amending the district's past standards in these areas last year. The same process will be followed when the other areas of the new state standards are formally adopted by the NM Public Education Department. It will be two to three years before we are completely finished with this process for the history/social studies, science, and the technical curriculum areas.

3. What types of professional development experiences will be offered to assist teachers and staff to use the new state standards in their curriculum planning?

LCPS offered two types of professional development and planning for teachers and administrators for amending and implementing new state standards in language arts and mathematics last summer. Eight hundred teachers participated during the summer, about one half of all staff. On-going professional development opportunities are offered in the following ways:

- Summer Institutes for teachers and staff (3-5 days). Participation is voluntary and teachers are paid a stipend.
- Several in-service/professional development days during the school year where administrators, teachers and staff work in each building on understanding and implementing the new standards and amended standards.
- Online Professional Development courses (known as PD360) covering many areas that demonstrate and teach "best practices" for classroom instruction, management, parent communication, etc. Teachers may do this on their own time. Some of the necessary strategies for teaching some of the state standard's skill areas are included.
- Use of Professional Development Plans for individual teachers incorporating the new standards.

All LCPS professional development activities in the district are guided by six principles for instructional continuous improvement in professional learning communities within the district and schools. (See Appendix 2.)⁴ The current cuts to education budgets by the state legislature may place some constraints on teacher professional development time and teachers will be getting 2.7% less take home pay. Teachers will be using their planning time in some instances to teach an extra class, so we can keep class sizes down with fewer teachers. All of these things take a toll on time that can be spent in the professional learning communities in the schools.

4. There is concern that in "teaching to the test" the daily teaching schedule leaves little time for science, social studies, and writing. Because social sciences and science are all part of the new core curriculum standards, what are some of the additional difficulties for teachers and staff related to implementation and inclusion of the new standards while still meeting the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements?

⁴ The LCPS Professional Development Plan developed in 2008-2009 from which the information was taken for Appendix 2 is available both from the LCPS Superintendents Office and also is available in the files of the LWVGLC. It was supplied to us by Dr. Steven Sanchez and the document was produced by Betsy A. Geery.

The difficulties include all of the following:

- Continuing growth of new student population (600+ this year)
- Tremendous pressure on teachers to meet the NCLB testing requirements and at the same time implement new teaching strategies and materials to include the amended LCPS standards and new state standards. Doing so often requires additional teacher time in after school hours.
- Including special needs students in the state standards requirements. Finding multiple strategies for helping all students acquire and measure success for each skill becomes more complex if a teacher has more special education students in her/his class.
- Needing better measures of parental involvement. Even though we have several special initiatives to work on this issue, we need more resources and time for this because it has such a large impact on student success.

5. Given recent legislative proposals in Congress to make federal requirements more flexible are the NCLB requirements still relevant to local districts?

Senator Bingaman and Senator Udall have indicated they and other senators are looking for some positive changes in the NCLB requirements in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, which specifies what districts must do to receive federal monies. The emphasis may be changing from the current static achievement model for assessing student progress to an emphasis of looking at the overall performance growth of each student. A changing society and the need for finding ways to involve parents in their child's educational planning are a continuing concern for improving student academic progress.

6. Will LCPS, K-12, still be able to include international languages and fine arts in the curriculum for our students?

Arts and Music are still included in every elementary and secondary school and we have not cut the budget for them. After passage of NCLB in 2002 many teachers felt forced to focus on reading and math which caused them to begin to leave out art, recess and other important interdisciplinary teaching activities. LCPS is now working to ensure that schools are providing a mid morning and mid afternoon recess for K-5 students.

Three International languages are offered at all LCPS high schools – German, Spanish, and French. LCPS seeks to expand the international language program offerings and hopes to provide more practice in speaking languages through the use of computerized speaking laboratories.

7. What else is important for us to know about the new state common core standards and the assessment process for achieving these standards?

One thing the League can do is to help people understand the progress that is being made in so many of the schools in spite of the fact that the school is not yet achieving the goals for Average Yearly Progress (AYP). Here are a few examples.

- In the San Andres Alternative High School the attendance rate is up from 40% to 85% since the school was redesigned in the 2005 to 2006 school year. The graduation rate is up from 16.4 to 26.4% for the 9th grade cohort groups that graduated in 2008 and 2009. This

graduation rate is high for an alternative school in which the students represent a cohort who were not doing well in a traditional classroom and would not typically graduate from high school.⁵

- In one elementary school, Booker T. Washington Elementary, where 97% of the children are on free or reduced lunch, indicating an extraordinary poverty rate, the teachers are working miracles in terms of growth of grade level proficiency even though many children are not yet up to grade level. The rates of individual student growth that are common in this school are rarely accomplished in classrooms packed with students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These teachers and the school administrators are obviously doing something right.

The interview with Dr. Sanchez left us with a strong impression that LCPS is working very hard to prepare teachers to implement the new state standards. The district is ahead of the state mandated date of August 2011 in terms of amending LCPS standards and beginning actual implementation in the classrooms. Understanding the new Common Core Standards is a complex process even for educators, let alone lay citizens. Appendix 3 of this report provides definitions of a few terms that are helpful and some examples of some of the NM core curriculum requirements.

⁵ These data were gathered from the LCPS district records with the assistance of Tracie O'Hara, the Director of Accountability, Assessment, and Research. It is important to note that certification of such records is a lengthy process. The San Andres 9th grade cohort of students that started to school in the school year 2006 to 2007 and graduated in the spring of 2010 will not be officially certified until the end of May of 2011. The San Andres Alternative High School, which has been operating for many years, was completely redesigned during the school year 2005 to 2006. The graduation rate for the 2010 graduate group, which started 9th grade in the fall of 2006 is expected to be 30% or greater. Again, this is a high rate for an alternative high school. The practice of following a 9th grade cohort for four years to give a graduation rate for all those students that started in one given group of 9th graders in a given freshman year, which is required in the state of NM, is a rigorous standard for graduation rates. Even if some of these students move and complete school somewhere else, they are not counted as having graduated because they did not finish in the same school they started in the 9th grade. This practice can make graduation rates appear lower than they are for a given cohort of students. A cohort group is a group of persons that have something in common, frequently age. In this case, the cohort group is made up of students who start a common grade in the same year in a given school.

Appendix 1

Understanding the Common Core Standards

In order to help the reader understand the Common Core Standards movement, information is provided below that comes directly from the **COMMON CORE State Standards Initiative** website at <http://www.corestandards.org>. Information on the standards can be located by clicking on the tab in the top banner of the homepage titled “About the Standards. The actual standards can be read by clicking on the tab in the top banner of the home page titled “The Standards.”

About the Common Core Standards

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.

The NGA Center and CCSSO received initial feedback on the draft standards from national organizations representing, but not limited to, teachers, postsecondary educators (including community colleges), civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Following the initial round of feedback, the draft standards were opened for public comment, receiving nearly 10,000 responses.

The standards are informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live.

These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

Key Points in English Language Arts Standards

Reading

- The standards establish a “staircase” of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read.
- Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective. Because the standards are building blocks for successful classrooms, but recognize that teachers, school districts and states need to decide on appropriate curriculum, they intentionally do not offer a reading list. Instead, they offer numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect at the beginning of the year.
- The standards mandate certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and the writings of Shakespeare. The standards appropriately defer the many remaining decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, and schools.

Writing

- The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing—a basic form of argument—extending down into the earliest grades.
- Research—both short, focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and longer term in depth research—is emphasized throughout the standards but most prominently in the writing strand since a written analysis and presentation of findings is so often critical.
- Annotated samples of student writing accompany the standards and help establish adequate performance levels in writing arguments, informational/explanatory texts, and narratives in the various grades.

Speaking and Listening

- The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media.
- An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

Language

- The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.
- The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.
- Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Media and Technology

- Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the twenty-first century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards.
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Key Points in Mathematics Standards

- The K-5 standards provide students with a *solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals*—which help young students build the foundation to successfully apply more demanding math concepts and procedures, and move into applications.
- In kindergarten, the standards follow successful international models and recommendations from the National Research Council’s Early Math Panel report, by focusing kindergarten work on the number core: learning how numbers correspond to quantities, and learning how to put numbers together and take them apart (the beginnings of addition and subtraction).
- The K-5 standards build on the best state standards to provide detailed guidance to teachers on how to navigate their way through knotty topics such as *fractions, negative numbers, and geometry*, and do so by maintaining a continuous progression from grade to grade.
- The standards stress not only procedural skill but also conceptual understanding, to make sure students are learning and absorbing the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels - rather than the current practices by which many students learn enough to get by on the next test, but forget it shortly thereafter, only to review again the following year.
- Having built a strong foundation K-5, students can do hands on learning in geometry, algebra and probability and statistics. Students who have completed 7th grade and mastered the content and skills through the 7th grade will be *well-prepared for algebra* in grade 8.

- The middle school standards are robust and provide a coherent and rich *preparation for high school mathematics*.
- The high school standards call on students to *practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges*; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically.
- The high school standards set a *rigorous definition of college and career readiness*, by helping students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.
- The high school standards *emphasize mathematical modeling*, the use of mathematics and statistics to analyze empirical situations, understand them better, and improve decisions. For example, the draft standards state: “Modeling links classroom mathematics and statistics to everyday life, work, and decision-making. It is the process of choosing and using appropriate mathematics and statistics to analyze empirical situations, to understand them better, and to improve decisions. Quantities and their relationships in physical, economic, public policy, social and everyday situations can be modeled using mathematical and statistical methods. When making mathematical models, technology is valuable for varying assumptions, exploring consequences, and comparing predictions with data.”

The Common Core State Standard Initiative is a work in progress. Specific standards have been developed for what is referred to as the English Languages Arts curriculum area and the Mathematics curriculum. As can be seen from the information above, the English Language Arts area of the standards addresses proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening, as well as language, media and technology. While the actual standards describe the conceptual knowledge and skills to be achieved by students, they do not include specific curriculum content which is chosen at the state level. The vetting process for standards at the national level for these two curriculum areas is completed. Standards for the History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Studies areas of curriculum have been developed only for reading and writing proficiency in these curriculum areas. Work on these standards is not complete, but is slated to be completed during 2011.

Adopting Common Core Standards at the State Level

When a state makes a commitment to adopt the Common Core Standards, the state Department of Education must then proceed to a second step which is to work with state educators and community members throughout the state to add the common core Benchmarks and Performance Standards for K-12 Language Arts and Mathematics for purposes of assessing student progress. They must examine which current benchmarks and performance standards will be retained if any. A very comprehensive news release from the NM Department of Education (NMPED) is available in the League files, as well as through the NMPED public information officers, Beverly Friedman and Danielle Montoya (505-827-6661 or 505-476-0393). The News Release is dated June 18, 2010 and is titled Public Hearing Scheduled for K-12 Mathematics and English/Language Arts Common Core Standards that will Be Implemented in 2011.

Appendix 2

Six Guiding Principles of the LCPS Professional Development Plan

The Las Cruces Public Schools has developed an extensive professional development plan that consists of two parts: Part One - An Instructional Continuous Improvement Framework and Part Two - Professional Development Standards. There are six guiding principles that create the structures of the professional development learning communities in which teachers engage in professional development. They are research based and derived from the book *Failure is NOT an Option: Six principles that guide student achievement in high-performing schools* by Alan M. Blankstein. The principles are as follows:

Principle #1: Common mission, vision, values and goals

Principle #2: Ensuring achievement for all students: Systems for prevention & intervention

Principle #3: Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning

Principle #4: Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement

Principle #5: Gaining active engagement from family and community

Principle #6: Building sustainable leadership capacity

For each of these principles there is a process, systems, strategies, and professional development system in place to help teachers apply these principles in the classroom.

Appendix 3

Some Helpful Definitions for Understanding the Common Core Standards

1. "Content standard" is a statement about performance that describes what students should know and be able to do in content areas at each grade level.
2. "Common core standards" are the new state core standards adopted for implementation in mathematics and English/Language Arts in 2011 in all New Mexico Public Schools. There are also plans to implement the common core state standards for science, social studies and technology in the next few years.
3. "Core academics" are the required subjects in middle and high schools.
4. "Core curriculum" means the body of knowledge that all students are expected to learn.

The term core standards really refers to "what students should know and be able to do" in the identified subject areas. These standards will guide the development of curriculum maps (what is to be taught at various grade levels and the sequence of content)." Dr. Steven Sanchez

The above definitions can be found on the following website:

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.029.0001.htm>

New Mexico State Core Curriculum Requirements in Grades K-12

(These also include some of the core academic requirements.)

(2) All kindergarten through third grade classes shall provide daily instruction in reading and language arts skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics and comprehension; and in mathematics. Students in kindergarten and first grades shall be screened and monitored for progress in reading and language arts skills, and students in second grade shall take diagnostic tests on reading and language arts skills.

(3) All first, second and third grade classes shall provide instruction in art, music and a language other than English, and instruction that meets content standards, benchmarks and performance standards shall be provided in science, social studies, physical education and health education.

(4) In fourth through eighth grades, instruction that meets academic content and performance standards shall be provided in the following subject areas:

- b. mathematics;
- c. a language other than English;
- d. communication skills;
- e. science;
- f. art;
- g. music;
- h. social studies;
- i. New Mexico history;
- j. States history;
- l. geography;
- m..physical education; and
- n. health education.

In eighth grade, algebra 1 shall be offered in regular classroom settings, through online courses or agreements with high schools.

(6) In fourth through eighth grades, school districts and charter schools shall offer electives that contribute to academic growth and skill development, and provide career and technical education.

(7) In ninth through twelfth grades, instruction that meets academic content and performance standards shall be provided in health education.

(8) In every grade, inquiry-based laboratory components are at the core of the science program, and shall be woven into every lesson and concept strand.

B. Most noteworthy as of the initial insertion of this section are the changes to graduation requirements that were included by the Laws of 2007, Chapter 308, Section 8, Senate Bill 211 of the 48th legislature, first session, amending Section 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978. Those changes include:

(1) a requirement that each school district shall align its curricula to meet the state standards for each grade level and subject area; each school district's aligned grade level and subject area curricula shall be in place for language arts and science by the 2009-2010 school year (Section 22-13-1.6 NMSA 1978);

(2) a requirement that, in order to graduate, students entering ninth grade beginning in the 2009-2010 school year shall earn at least one unit in either an advanced college placement or honors course, a dual credit course offered by a college, or a distance learning course;

(3) a requirement that, for students entering ninth grade beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, the number of science courses that must have a lab component is increased from one to two (Section 22-13-1.1 Section 1, Paragraph 3 NMSA);

(4) a requirement that, after July 1, 2010, the currently-issued high school diploma will be replaced by the New Mexico diploma of excellence;

(5) a requirement that, in order to receive the New Mexico diploma of excellence to graduate (unless a student has a parent-signed permission exempting the student from this requirement), students entering ninth grade beginning in the 2009-2010 school year shall successfully complete a minimum of twenty-four (24) credits aligned to the state academic content standards with benchmarks and performance standards;

(6) a requirement that, in order to graduate, beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, a student shall not receive a high school diploma if the student has not demonstrated competence in the subject areas of mathematics, reading and language arts, writing, science and social studies, including a section on the constitutions of the United States and New Mexico:

1. a provision that those students who exit a public school after the twelfth grade without having satisfied these requirements may receive an appropriate state certificate that indicates the number of credits the student earned and grade completed, with the added provision that a student who, within five (5) years after exiting school, satisfies these requirements may receive a high school diploma.

This information is from the following website:

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.029.0001.htm>