

IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE LITERACY STANDARDS IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

*The Standards set requirements for English language arts (ELA) but also for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. **Literacy standards for grade 6 and above are predicated on teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields.** It is important to note that the 6–12 literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects are not meant to replace content standards in those areas but rather to supplement them. States may incorporate the standards into their standards for these subjects or adopt them as content area literacy standards. (Emphasis added)*

--- From the Introduction to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) acknowledge the importance of reading, writing, speaking, listening and language in all subjects, not just English Language Arts. The CCSS, therefore, include literacy standards specific to content areas essential for a well-rounded education including history/social studies, science and technical subjects. Skilled teachers trained in a specific discipline are best positioned to teach students how to read, understand, listen, speak and write about their fields: for instance, history teachers are best suited to teach students how to read and write about history, just as English teachers are best suited to teach students how to read literature and write literary analyses.

Literacy standards rarely extend into non-English subjects in current state standards. The CCSS offer guidance on disciplinary reading and writing beyond what occurs in an English class. The college and career readiness expectations in the Common Core State Standards reinforce the importance of these efforts as reading and writing are critical to building content knowledge in a range of disciplines and contexts. In both college and the workplace, for example, individuals must frequently read, comprehend and communicate about complex informational text.

Since state standards in history/social studies, science and technical subjects may not currently include literacy standards, explicit expectations related to disciplinary literacy could represent a significant change for teachers in those fields. What will not be new to teachers in these fields is the need for students to develop disciplinary literacy. In order to move from implicit or informal expectations to establishing connections between standards in history/social studies, science and technical subjects and the CCSS, states will need a strong implementation strategy to ensure their impact in grades 6-12.

TAKING STOCK OF CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES AROUND DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

The first step states should take is to review current expectations regarding disciplinary literacy by identifying existing practices and policies in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. A series of questions to ask include:

- What are the current expectations regarding literacy in current state history/social studies, science and technical subjects standards?

- What are the current teacher practices in history/social studies, science and technical subjects related to disciplinary literacy (including, but not limited to, reading primary source documents, writing laboratory reports and presenting information orally)?
- To what extent do states' assessments (in ELA, history/social studies and/or science) require students to exhibit the skills and knowledge described in these standards?
- How do these formal and informal expectations in history/social studies, science and technical subjects align with the corresponding literacy standards in the CCSS?
- What related professional development materials and opportunities exist for history/social studies, science and technical subject teachers, either individually or with ELA teachers? How will the state explain the necessity of this to history/social studies, science and technical subject teachers?

BRINGING TOGETHER STATE CONTENT EXPERTS TO REVIEW CURRENT AND CCSS EXPECTATIONS

Once a state has identified existing policies and practices, a good next step is to assemble relevant teams of history/social studies, science and technical subject teachers and content experts to consider implications for implementation. These teams should:

- Include representatives from relevant state organizations (National Science Teacher Association and National Council for Social Studies state affiliates, for example), department of education content staff, middle and high school teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty;
- Determine how the expectations in the Common Core State Standards already in practice, but perhaps not explicit in the state standards, can be formalized in the state's standards, assessments, teacher preparation and professional development, and instructional materials;
- Discuss and make recommendations to state policymakers concerning how to assign responsibility for teaching and assessing the disciplinary literacy skills in the CCSS; and
- Develop communications and outreach strategies on suggested professional development for history/social studies, science and technical subject teachers.

Assembling teams of relevant stakeholders will also build goodwill among those who are ultimately expected to carry out the literacy standards. Care should be taken to explain to these teams the value of these disciplinary literacy standards, including the importance of subject matter expertise in teaching students how to read and write about their discipline.

ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT

States should consider formal adoption of these literacy standards as part of their history/social studies, science and technical subject standards, at least during the next revision cycle of those standards. It is also possible that states could include in their current content standards an acknowledgement of these literacy standards and the responsibility of history/social studies, science and other technical subject matter teachers to teach these skills. Having a crosswalk that shows how these literacy standards impact and reinforce history/social studies, science and technical subject standards would be useful for all teachers – and could lead to opportunities for cross fertilization, shared lessons and professional development across the disciplines.