

Kentucky: Reviewing and Revising Academic Standards

The ARCC partners with state departments of education to build their capacity to effectively plan for, implement, and support statewide initiatives, many of which are the result of legislation. In one such effort, ARCC staff are assisting Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) personnel with the revision of academic standards initiative, a direct result of the passage of Senate Bill 1 2017 (SB1). In essence, SB1 requires the KDE to implement a process for reviewing and revising Kentucky academic standards for reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The bill calls for selected content areas to be reviewed each year and every six years thereafter on a rotating basis. The process began in 2017 by soliciting feedback on English language arts and mathematics standards. In 2018, social studies standards were submitted to the process. In addition to the required content areas, KDE elected to review additional academic standards, not required by SB1—computer science, health/physical education, career studies (formerly vocational studies), financial literacy, and technology.

The review and revision process for each content area lasts approximately one year. To begin, KDE assembles two committees per content area—an Advisory Panel and a Standards Review and Development Committee. Committee members include both educators and community members. All Kentuckians then have an opportunity to participate in a public comment period to provide feedback on the current set of academic standards for the discipline under review. At the end of the public comment period, feedback data are compiled and sent to the committees to aid in the revision of the standards. After the committees have made revisions, the public comment period opens again to gather feedback on the revisions. This process continues in cycles until the standards are ready to go before the Kentucky Board of Education for approval and, ultimately, implementation.

Krista Hall, Director of the Division of Program Standards in the Office of Standards, Assessment and Accountability at KDE, is leading this initiative. She agreed to an interview about her perspective on the progress of academic standards reviews in Kentucky. When asked about the origin of the initiative, Hall indicated that the requirements of SB1 are indeed the driving force. She also elaborated upon what the revised standards should accomplish, explaining, “Per SB1 the content standards shall: (a) Focus on critical knowledge, skills, and capacities needed for success in the global economy; (b) Result in fewer, but more in-depth standards to facilitate mastery learning; and (c) Communicate expectations more clearly and concisely to teachers, parents, students, and citizens.” According to Hall, the biggest success so far has been, “drafting a complete set of revised standards for math and reading/writing [formerly English language arts] standards K-12.”

Of course, large-scale initiatives are not without challenges. During initial committee meetings, KDE staff members directed the committees not to venture into the realm of curriculum development, but instead to stick to standards. In Kentucky, curriculum is under local control—meaning that local education agencies have control over how they deliver standards. As Hall reflected, “The biggest challenge has been developing standards rather than drifting into the field of curriculum. This is a very fine line, and many items [the public and committee members] requested to be included in the [standards] document fell under the scope of curricular decisions.” Under the guidance of Hall, committees have been able to more clearly define the scope of their work and draft standards documents that do not include curricular directives.

The ARCC supports KDE in this initiative by serving as an objective, external partner. The ARCC functions as the statutorily-required third-party entity to solicit public comments on the standards. ARCC staff members then analyze and summarize the data for standards committees. Additionally, the ARCC assists with the facilitation of committee meetings, as appropriate, and through this partnership, helps enhance the state’s capacity to run an efficient review process. Hall had this to say about ARCC support: “ARCC developed the surveys for each set of standards and provided the survey reports for the writing teams to review. ARCC provided facilitators to launch the work and provide focus around the vision and purpose. Through this facilitation, ARCC provided structures we used throughout the process...ARCC was very flexible and responsive. ARCC’s facilitators were knowledgeable about content, as well as, facilitation strategies...This process is very comprehensive, and ARCC brought their experience from other states to assist with the process and support our staff in accomplishing the task.”

KDE staff have taken the lead on the standards revision work in Kentucky, and as a result, several sets of revised academic standards are scheduled for implementation in the 2019-2020 school year—mathematics, reading and writing (formerly English language arts), physical education, and health education.

For more information about Kentucky’s academic standards revision process, please visit: <https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/revision/Pages/default.aspx>

For an update on standards adoption for the 2019-2020 school year, please visit: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/KYDE/bulletins/238ac11>