

ADDING TO THE COMMON CORE: ADDRESSING THE “15%” GUIDELINE

When 48 states and three territories signed on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), it was their goal to create a shared set of expectations in English Language Arts and mathematics. Therefore, states who adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are expected to adopt them in their entirety. While states will not be considered to have adopted the common core if any individual standard is left out, states are allowed to augment the standards with an additional 15% of content that a state feels is imperative. For example, some states may include literature from authors born in the state or about groups or events important to the state. In some cases, these requirements are even written into law. States may also need to add content to courses so that they align with other existing policies. It is important to note, however, that adding to the CCSS is purely optional.

In fact, the 15% guideline should be considered primarily as a *common-sense guideline* to meet specific state needs. States should be judicious about adding content and keep in mind the possible implications of doing so. Remember, a central driver in the creation of the CCSS was to develop standards that were common across states lines – and clear and focused – the opposite of the “mile wide, inch deep” standards so prevalent in many current state standards. A literal interpretation by states of the 15% guideline (that is 15% added at every grade level and in each subject) would undermine the very reason the states developed the Common Core State Standards in the first place. The following chart illustrates the process that states should use to decide whether or not to augment the standards:

Identify content in existing standards not in the Common Core State Standards.

- Achieve's Common Core Comparison Tool (CCCTool) can help with this.

Decide if the CCSS are missing content that the state must include.

- Are there any existing state laws and/or regulations that must be met?
- Are there strategic priorities or other compelling reasons to add content?

Consider implications of adding this content.

- How will this affect assessment?
- How much will this affect commonality with other states?
- Does it dilute the standards?
- What is the impact in the classroom?

Decide to add or not to add additional content to the adopted common standards.

- What preparations need to be made for assessment, instructional materials and professional development?

IMPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER

Any augmentation to the CCSS should be carefully considered. The CCSS are designed to be focused and rigorous, and were informed by the best state and international standards and the expertise of many individuals and organizations, among other sources. If a state were to add several major topics throughout K-12 in English language arts and mathematics, it would dilute the overall focus of the standards and risk making their standards out of sync with those of other states adopting the CCSS. This would have many implications, particularly around the use of common assessments and instructional materials.

For states considering common assessments aligned to the common core standards, possible scenarios to consider when adding content to state standards include:

- ✓ *The standards added are not content that would typically be assessed on a large-scale assessment, and might therefore have minimal implications on a common assessment effort.* An example of this might include a requirement that students read literature from their state.
- ✓ *The standards added represent a topic or set of topics for which a state might create a module to augment a common assessment.* An example might include a state adding a poetry section to one grade-level assessment or including “+” mathematics content (content beyond what is required for college and career readiness) in their high school geometry course.
- ✓ *The standards added are few enough in number that they will be assessed in other ways.* For example, a state might add a research standard to one grade, but instead of assessing that on a large-scale assessment, indicate that it will be graded by teachers using a rubric.

As states consider their strategies for adopting and implementing the CCSS, they need to carefully and deliberately consider the benefits and trade-offs of augmenting the common standards, rely on their common sense and stay within the spirit of the 15% guideline.