

Appendix B:

Criteria, Rationales, and State Results

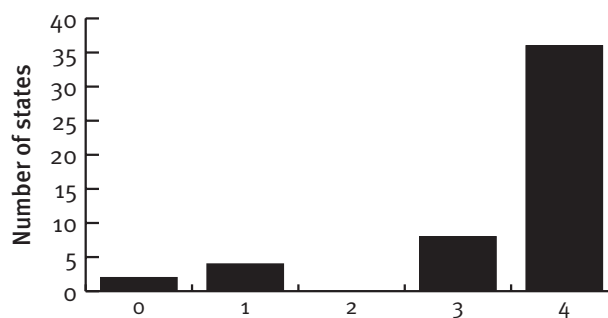
This appendix provides the rationale and a summary of the ratings for each criterion in Sections A to E across all 50 states including the District of Columbia. I generally use the word “standard” to designate an academic objective, regardless of the particular term used in a state document. Many states use such terms as “performance indicators,” “benchmarks,” “objectives,” or “grade-level expectations” as well as “content standards” or “performance standards” to indicate their academic standards. For the specific terminology used by a state, the reader should consult its documents.

A. Purposes and expectations for the standards

Criterion A-1. The document is written in prose that the general public can understand.

Rationale: A document purporting to spell out what students should know and be able to do in the English language arts from kindergarten to grade 12 should be written in a prose style that can be read without difficulty by the general public. A document studded with academic or educational jargon will not be intelligible to the general public, nor does it show respect for them.

Criterion A-1: The document is written in prose that the general public can understand.

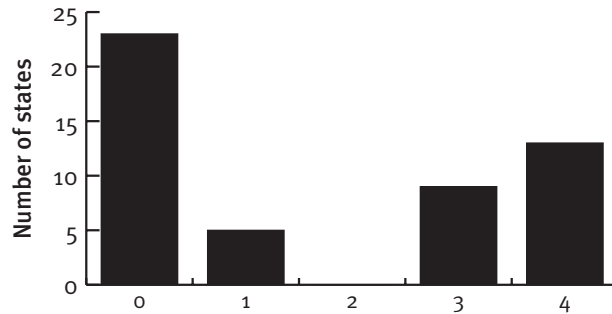


Results: Fortunately, the vast majority of states have documents that are relatively free from excessive educational jargon and therefore can be read relatively easily by the general public. All but 14 states earned a 4 on this criterion. Eight others earned a 3; of these, several are organized in such a confusing way (e.g., Mississippi), or are so cumbersome in length (e.g., Kansas), or are in so many separate pieces on the web (e.g., Kentucky), that it is difficult to deduce without a great deal of study what the state’s standards actually are. Of the six earning lower than a 3 or 4, several are so heavily laden with educational jargon or uninterpretable prose (e.g., Connecticut, Michigan, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Washington) that they are apt to be impenetrable by the average citizen. One (Wyoming) is so poorly written that, in our view, it should not have been approved as a public document.

Criterion A-2. The document expects students to become literate American citizens.

Rationale: A traditional goal of the English language arts curriculum has been to develop in future voters the speaking, reading, and writing skills they will need for active participation in this country’s civic culture. This goal includes development of the ability to read seminal political documents as well as other historical and contemporary materials that inform participation in our particular democracy. This goal also includes cultivating their civic identity—a sense of membership in their civic communities—as well as exposing them to the literary and non-literary texts that reflect the evolution of America’s basic political principles and the imagination and passion of its most historically and culturally significant writers.

Criterion A-2: It expects students to become literate American citizens.

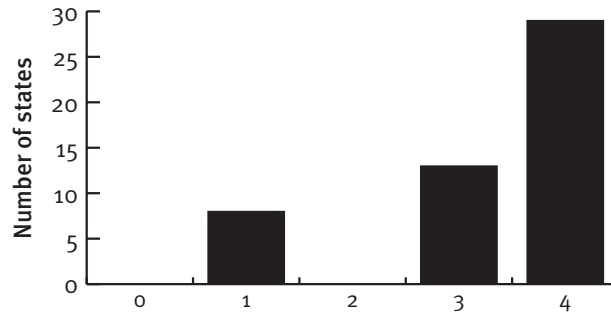


Results: Sadly, only 13 states earned a 4 on this criterion; they made national identity clear. Another nine earned a 3; they see active citizenship as a goal of the English language arts, but it is not clear in what land today’s students are to be tomorrow’s active citizens. More than half (28) of the states do not indicate that a major purpose of the E/LA/R curriculum is to ensure that students acquire the reading, writing, and speaking skills needed for active participation in our civic life. In five of these 28, citizenship is “global”; in the other 23, it is not mentioned at all. The failure of most states to specify the development of a literate citizenry for informed and responsible participation in this country’s civic life parallels the failure of half of the states to acknowledge the existence of American literature for criterion 5.

Criterion A-3. It expects explicit and systematic instruction in decoding skills in the primary grades as well as the use of various comprehension strategies and meaningful reading materials.

Rationale: The research evidence has been consistent for decades on the benefits of instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics; most students need to acquire decoding skills to become fluent readers and need explicit and systematic instruction in order to do so. A standards document should make clear that students will receive systematic instruction in decoding skills, followed by opportunities to apply those skills to whole words, alone and in texts with mostly decodable words. It is not enough to give students instruction in the letter-sound relationships that happen to be in the books they choose to read; this means that phonics instruction will be haphazard, not systematic. Nor is it enough to provide practice only in the context of a story they are reading; students need to practice applying decoding skills to isolated decodable words (words with consistent sound to symbol relationships) and then to decodable texts so they learn how to identify words in context quickly without depending on the context. A major purpose of phonics instruction is to reduce students’ dependence on context for identifying unfamiliar words in print so they can read faster and more fluently.

Criterion A-3: It expects explicit and systematic instruction in decoding skills in the primary grades as well as the use of various comprehension strategies and meaningful reading materials.

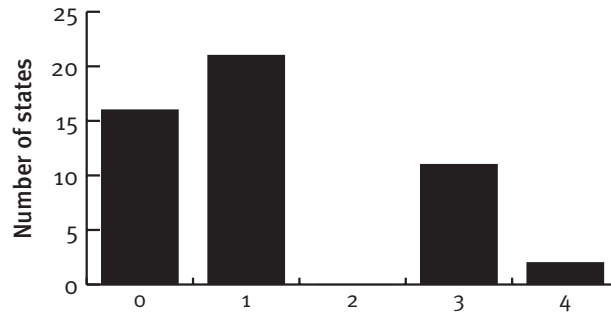


Results: There has been a dramatic improvement on this criterion, probably owing to the review by the National Reading Panel of high-quality research on reading and Reading First’s requirements for K-3. Many states have added unambiguous and thorough grade level expectations in beginning reading to their original standards or have revised them altogether. Twenty-nine states now earn a rating of 4 because it is clear that their students are to receive systematic instruction in decoding skills. Another 13 received a 3, chiefly because it was not clear that instruction in decoding skills would be systematic. Eight states earned a 1, in some cases because their reading standards begin in grade 3 or 4 and it was not clear what was taking place in K-2. Three or four of these states seem to be ignoring what sound research studies have consistently found to be important in beginning reading pedagogy.

Criterion A-4. It expects students to read independently on a daily basis through the grades, suggesting how much reading students should do per year as a minimum, with some guidance about its quality.

Rationale: The few academic hours students spend in school each day for 180 days per year are hardly sufficient for developing advanced reading and writing skills. All students should be expected to read daily on their own, in and out of school. They should also be given guidance on what constitutes quality in reading materials and how much they should try to read on a daily basis.

Criterion A-4: It expects students to read independently on a daily basis through the grades, suggesting how much reading students should do per year as a minimum, with some guidance about its quality.



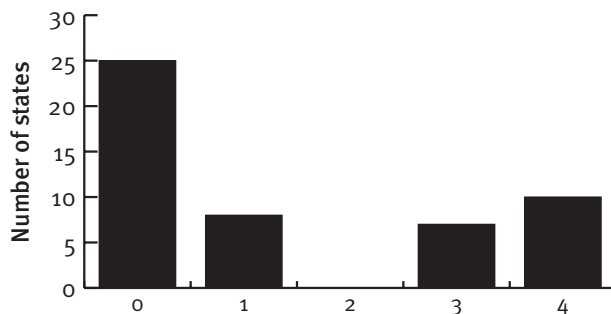
Results: Only two states—California and Georgia—earned a 4 because their documents indicate both the quantity and quality of independent reading that students are required to do. Another 11 states earned a 3 for indicating

either quality or quantity but not both. Twenty-one other states say they want independent reading, thus earning a 1, but are apparently reluctant to define or illustrate the quality expected in any way or to recommend how much independent reading (in numbers of words or books read) could be expected from grade to grade. Astonishingly, 16 states never even mention the expectation.

Criterion A-5. It acknowledges the existence of a corpus of literary works called American literature, however diverse its origins and the social groups it portrays.

Rationale: Almost every nation can point to distinctive works, authors, literary periods, and literary traditions of its own, in addition to key works or authors from other cultures that have influenced its own writers. Because the United States has political institutions, traditions, beliefs, and values that differ in many ways from those of other English-speaking countries, it is reasonable to expect an English language arts standards document in this country to acknowledge and pay special attention to the literary works specific to this country’s intellectual and cultural history, i.e., American literature, a term that properly includes all the literature written in English by those born or living within the borders of the United States, regardless of their religious, ethnic, or racial background.

Criterion A-5: The standards acknowledge the existence of a corpus of literary works called American literature, however diverse its origins and the social groups it portrays.



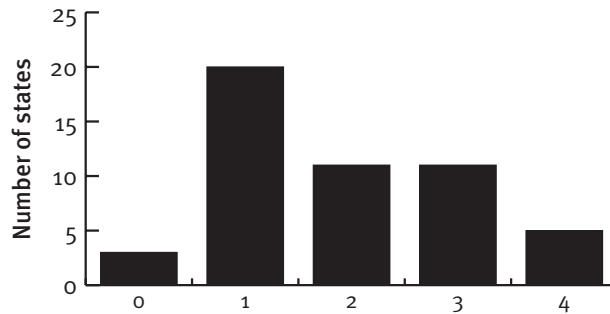
Results: Only 10 states describe American literature in an inclusive way with illustrative works and authors, thus earning a 4 on this criterion. Another seven states describe it in an inclusive way but do not provide illustrative works and authors. Yet another eight acknowledge the existence of American literature once, but no more. Why are the other 25 states unable or unwilling to specify in their standards, even in the introduction to those standards, the one particular body of literature most citizens expect students in their public schools to study? (States were not required to include reading lists to meet this criterion.)

Criterion A-6. State tests are based, at least partly, on the standards, with blueprints distinguishing literary from non-literary reading and weights showing the increasing importance of literary study through the grades.

Rationale: In the 2000 review, this criterion was intended to determine whether a state’s standards were used for state assessments. Since all states are now required by NCLB to assess their students using state standards, the criterion was altered to address two issues that a state’s reading assessment must now resolve: whether to distinguish literary from non-literary reading, and how to weight these two broad types of reading. The weights usually reflect the number of passages of each type that appears on a test. Blueprints or test specifications should distinguish literary from non-literary reading because each serves different purposes, entails different reading processes, and evokes different respons-

es. More important, literary study should receive increasing weight through the grades relative to non-literary reading because it is (or should be) the major content of the English class, the only class in which literature is taught as such. The reading of informational or functional texts is appropriately emphasized in other school subjects.

Criterion A-6: State tests are based, at least partly, on the standards.

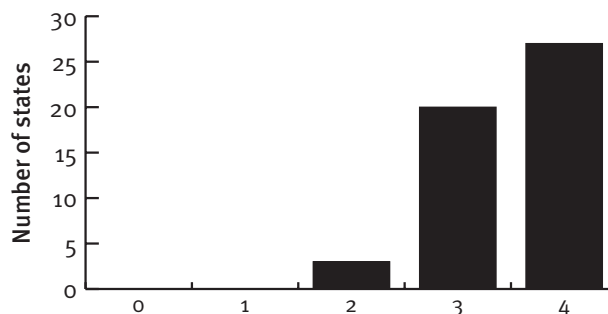


Results: Only five states get gold stars; according to state officials or the state’s assessment blueprints, their high school assessments weight literary reading more than informational reading broadly conceived. Another 11 get a silver star: They seem to weight the two broad types equally at the high school level. Yet another 11 states were rated 2 for one of several reasons: (1) They do not make their test blueprints available to the public, (2) the information in their blueprints or given to us by an informant was unclear, (3) the weights change from year to year, or (4) they have not yet determined the weights. Unfortunately, 20 states earned a 1. It is not clear to what extent high school English teachers in these states have participated in discussions about the weights accorded the two types of passages on state reading tests for which they are held accountable, but it is difficult to believe that in these 20 states such teachers would prefer a lower weight for literary reading than for informational reading. Three other states earned a 0 (Kansas and the District of Columbia gave us no information, and Michigan does not distinguish literary from non-literary reading in its state assessments).

Section B: Organization of the standards

Criterion B-1. Standards are presented grade by grade or in spans of no more than two grade levels.

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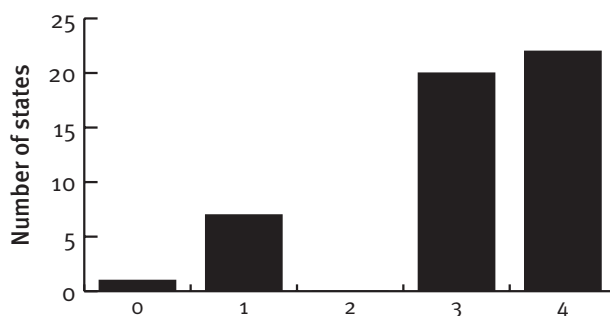
Rationale: This criterion differs from 2000, when a state could earn a 4 if its standards were presented at three levels (elementary, middle, and high school). For this review, my expectations have risen, primarily because standards covering such a broad span of grades are now understood to be inadequate as a guide to teachers of particular grades. Wise states have by now developed grade-by-grade expectations, at least from grades 3 to 8. Some have developed grade-specific expectations for K to 8, K to 10, or K to 12. The rubrics now indicate that a state must have at least two sets of standards at the high school level (as well as grade-by-grade standards or standards spanning no more than two grade levels at a time at lower grade levels) to earn a rating of 4.

Results: Altogether, 27 states qualify for a 4. Another 20 received a 3, usually because they still have a single set of standards at the high school level. The remaining three received a rating of 2 for the particular mixture they present (e.g., Montana has grade-specific standards in reading from grades 3 to 8 and one set for high school, with standards for spans of more than two grades in other areas from K-12).

Criterion B-2. They are grouped in categories reflecting coherent bodies of scholarship or research in reading and English language arts.

Rationale: The organizing strands of an English language arts standards document should correspond to relevant areas of research and scholarship, some of which have histories going back centuries (e.g., the study of rhetoric, literary study, and study of the history and structure of various languages). More recent areas of research include reading and writing. Such groupings facilitate local curriculum development and help to show whether the standards cover all the needed areas. Gaps in coverage may arise when the title and content of a category bear little relationship to a recognized body of research or scholarship. Gaps also occur when a coherent body of research on which teachers traditionally draw is not reflected in the content of a category or is split into two or more categories, or when the standards in a category indiscriminately reflect two distinct bodies of research or scholarship (as sometimes happens when standards for literary and non-literary study are mixed in a broad category called “reading”). Needless to say, the standards within a strand should reflect the title of that strand and show coherence. States are not expected to organize their standards in any one way, but what they group together in substantive categories (often called strands) must be coherent and reflect recognized bodies of scholarship.

Criterion B-2: They are grouped in categories reflecting coherent bodies of scholarship or research in reading and the English language arts.



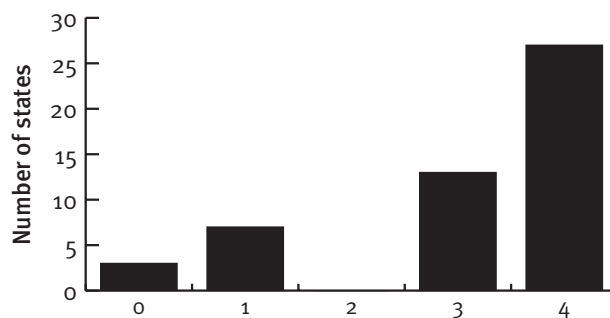
Results: Twenty-two states earned a 4 on this criterion because their conceptual framework for all standards from K to 12 reflects coherent bodies of research in the English language arts, including clear categories or subcategories for literary and non-literary reading. Another 20 states received a 3, often because their high school standards reflect a less coherent organizational scheme than their K-8 standards. Eight states received 1s or 0s. Most of those earn-

ing a 1 had several categories (or strands) that were incoherent and/or did not reflect recognized bodies of research or scholarship. New Mexico uniquely earned a 0 because all of its categories were incoherent.

Criterion B-3. They distinguish higher-level concepts and skills from lower-level skills, if lower-level skills are mentioned.

Rationale: Not only should standards be grouped in categories that reflect coherent bodies of scholarship, they should also be grouped within a category in ways that distinguish higher- from lower-level concepts and skills. When objectives under a broad category are haphazardly organized so that lower- and higher-level items are mixed, it conveys the wrong message to teachers and test makers. By using subcategories to distinguish important concepts such as a controlling idea, a focus, a hypothesis, or a thesis from such lower-order skills as language conventions, a standards document helps teachers and others aim for the higher-level concepts.

Criterion B-3: They distinguish higher level concepts and skills from lower level skills, if lower level skills are mentioned.



Results: Twenty-seven states earned a 4, indicating that they coherently organize objectives in each strand of their E/LA/R standards. Another 13 earned a 3, chiefly because some of their objectives are and some are not organized coherently. Seven states received a 1; their major categories and subcategories contain few coherent groups of objectives. And three states (Colorado, Maine, and West Virginia) received a 0, chiefly because they provide little more than an uneven list of objectives in each strand.

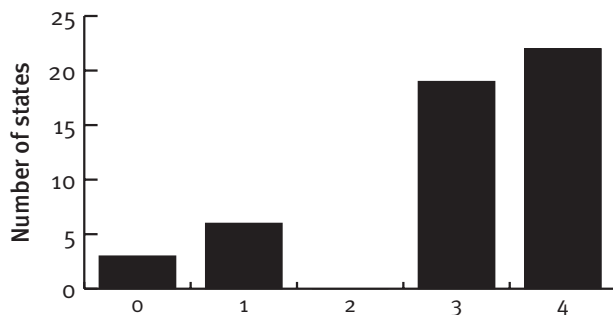
Section C: Disciplinary coverage of the standards

Criterion C-1. The standards clearly address listening and speaking. They include how to participate in group discussion for various purposes and in different roles, desirable qualities in formal speaking, and use of established as well as peer-generated or personal criteria for evaluating formal and informal speech.

Rationale: Students need skills for formal as well as informal listening and speaking. Standards should expect them to learn how to participate in group discussions that have diverse purposes (e.g., discussing a literary work or brainstorming solutions to a school problem) and rules, which are often determined by the age of the students and the purpose of the group. Participation includes learning how to take different roles (such as moderator, recorder, or timekeeper, or speaker and listener) and how to evaluate why some discussions are focused and productive while others are not. In addition, students should learn the features of formal presentations and learn how to use at least one set of estab-

lished criteria for evaluating formal speech (such as those from National Issues Forum or Toastmasters). It is also useful for students to develop and use peer-generated or personal criteria to evaluate individual or group talk.

Criterion C-1: The standards clearly address listening and speaking.

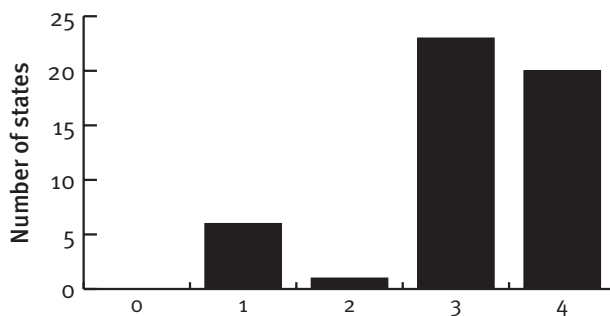


Results: Almost all states include standards for listening and speaking and address most of these areas adequately. Altogether, 22 states received a rating of 4. Another 19 received a 3, most often because they failed to require students to learn about and use established criteria for evaluating formal speaking. Only nine states do not address this area of the English language arts adequately or at all (Alaska, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Montana, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Vermont).

Criterion C-2. The standards clearly address reading to understand and use information through the grades. They include progressive development of reading skills and vocabularies, and knowledge and use of a variety of textual features, genres, and reading strategies for academic, occupational, and civic purposes.

Rationale: Reading standards should address the development of all the major reading skills, including development of a reading vocabulary, the major component in reading comprehension, through systematic word study as well as through broad reading, listening, and dictionary use. Attention should be given to the beginning reading skills of phonemic awareness; phonics instruction; fluency, comprehension, and study strategies (such as skimming, questioning, summarizing, note-taking, and paraphrasing); customary features of an informational text (such as its central purpose, mode of organization, table of contents, or index); and different types of informational reading materials (such as newspapers or instructions for assembling an object).

Criterion C-2: The standards clearly address reading to understand and use information through the grades.

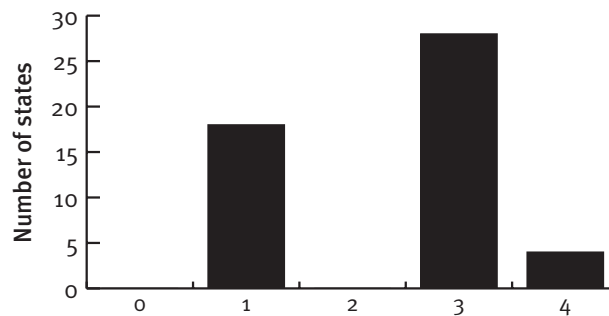


Results: Twenty states earned a 4 on this criterion. They have strong beginning reading standards, an explicit and strong vocabulary strand through the grades, and satisfactory coverage of secondary reading skills for different types of informational reading materials. Another 23 states received a 3, sometimes because the vocabulary strand they introduced in the elementary grades does not extend to high school. Seven states (Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Tennessee, and Utah) received less than a 3, usually because of weak reading standards in the secondary grades.

Criterion C-3. The standards clearly address the reading, interpretation, and critical evaluation of literature. They include knowledge of diverse literary elements and genres, use of different kinds of literary responses, and use of a variety of interpretive and critical lenses. They also specify those key authors, works, and literary traditions in American literature and in the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people that all students should study because of their literary quality and cultural significance.

Rationale: Standards in English language arts should outline the common core of literary knowledge that a state believes all students should gain from studying literature. Indeed, expectations for the content of American students' literary and non-literary knowledge should be as fleshed out as are expectations for the content of their history knowledge. American literature should be conceptualized in broad terms. Yet educators also have an obligation to offer the public an outline of the historically, intellectually, culturally, and aesthetically significant authors, works, literary periods, and literary traditions in the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people with which these educators believe all students in their state should become familiar. By graduation, all students should have read, for example, selections by major writers of the American Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance, selections from the Bible (as background to Western literature, literature in its own right, and a major source of literary allusion in Western literature), and selections by major writers in British literary history. They should also have read literary works in translation from many cultures around the world, especially from the ancient Greeks and Romans, which greatly influenced literature written in English. Names of key authors, works, and literary traditions or periods are just as necessary in an English language arts standards document as are names of significant people and periods in history standards.

Criterion C-3: The standards clearly address the reading, interpretation, and critical evaluation of literature.



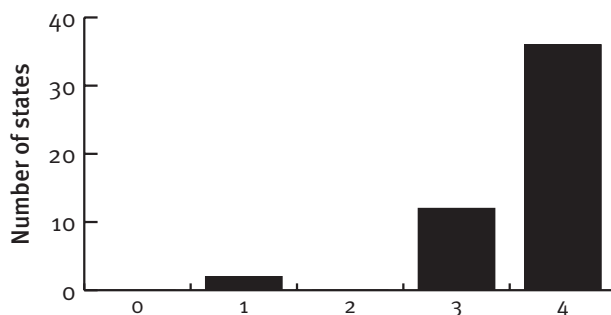
Results: Only four states earned a 4 (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Massachusetts). Not only do they satisfactorily address the formal content of the high school literature curriculum, they also provide some literary specifics (key authors and/or works) in addition to specific periods and traditions, and/or provide a selective reading list to outline the substantive content of the high school literature curriculum. Another 28 states earned a 3. Although they

generally do well in outlining the formal content of the high school literature curriculum, they tend to provide few specifics. A large number of states (18) earned a rating of 1; they do not provide any content-rich or content-specific literature standards, nor do they adequately address the formal content of the literature curriculum. The major weakness here is a failure to address the elements and devices characteristic of the three major types of imaginative literature (fiction, poetry, and drama) clearly, equally, and systematically over the grades. Many states concentrate chiefly on fiction (or on narrative literature, as a few call it, thus overlooking other forms of fiction), with some attention to the elements of poetry but very little to dramatic literature. Some low-rated states also fail to separate literary from non-literary reading in areas where clear distinctions in strategies or skills can be made.

Criterion C-4. The standards clearly address writing for communication and expression. They include use of writing processes, established as well as peer-generated or personal evaluation criteria, and various rhetorical elements, strategies, genres, and modes of organization.

Rationale: All of these components are essential elements in composition instruction, and each includes key concepts, such as a focus or controlling idea, coherence, or a logical relationship among ideas. It is appropriate to expect students to demonstrate the use of various writing processes, but standards must also address the qualities of a completed piece of writing as evaluated by prescribed criteria. It is useful for students to develop and use peer-generated or personal criteria to evaluate their own and others' writing, but they must also become familiar with, use, and understand the rationale for prescribed criteria—either the teacher's or those of external evaluators.

Criterion C-4: The standards clearly address writing for communication and expression.

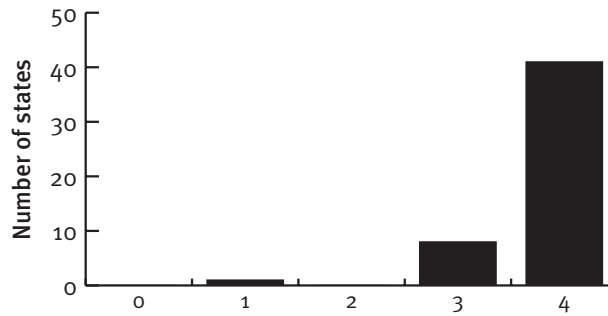


Results: A large majority of the states now provide standards addressing all the important elements in a writing curriculum. A total of 36 states earned a 4. Another 12 received a 3, chiefly because they fail to indicate some of the significant aspects of expository writing at the high school level. Two states (Montana and Nebraska) earned a 1.

Criterion C-5. The standards clearly address oral and written language conventions. They include standard English conventions for sentence structure, spelling, usage, penmanship, capitalization, and punctuation.

Rationale: Not every detail of usage or grammar needs mention in a standards document. But language conventions can be spelled out at different levels to show what growth in using them means. It is possible to show increases in expectations in broad categories such as parts of speech, types of clauses, or uses of the comma. With respect to penmanship, conventions do not refer to specific ways of forming letters, but to accepted ways to distinguish upper- from lower-case letters and to achieve overall legibility.

Criterion C-5: The standards clearly address oral and written language conventions.

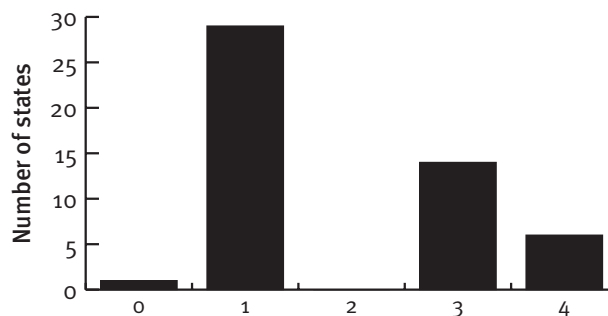


Results: This turned out to be the best-covered area in most state standards, in part because states generally outline more standards in this area and because this area is frequently addressed with the most measurable objectives in the standards or assessment document. Forty-one states earned a 4. Another eight earned a 3, usually because they provided few different details over the grades. Montana earned a 1.

Criterion C-6. The standards clearly address the nature, dynamics, and history of the English language. They include the nature of its vocabulary and its structure (grammar); the evolution of its oral and written forms; and the distinction between the variability of its oral forms and the relative permanence of its written form today.

Rationale: Whether or not they are native speakers of English, all students should be expected to know something about the evolution and essential characteristics of the language they read, speak, and write, especially its extraordinary lexicon. Standards should address the reasons for oral dialects of English, differences between formal and informal uses of the language, and the relative uniformity of its written form throughout the world. They also should address the reasons why most (perhaps all) societies teach a standard form of their own language for written and formal oral use.

Criterion C-6: The standards clearly address the nature, dynamics, and history of the English language.



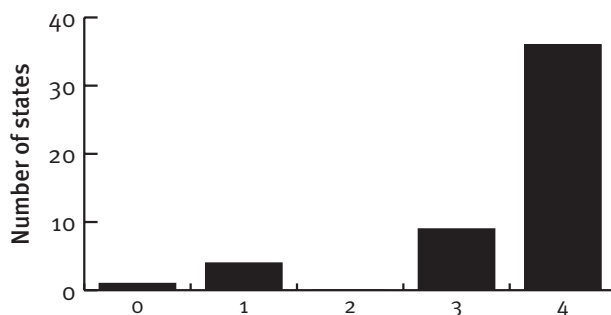
Results: On this criterion, a state earned a 1 if it expected grammar study in the strand on written language conventions and/or included study of word origins as part of the vocabulary section in the reading strand. It earned a 3 if, in addition, it expected attention to other things—influences on the English language such as Greek and Latin, differences between informal and formal language use, study of foreign words absorbed directly into literate English,

and the nature of and reasons for oral dialects. It earned a 4 if it expected study of the influence of historical events on the evolution of the English language, the influence of the English language on the rest of the world, and other broad topics. Unfortunately, just six states earned a 4, while 14 earned a 3. All but one (Kentucky) of the remaining 30 states earned a 1, which was not difficult to do. The failure of states to insist upon one clear standard on the history of the English language is probably related to their dual failure to specify American literature as a body of literature all students should study and to identify the ability to participate in American civic life as one of its major goals. The number of states receiving a rating of 0 or 1 on these criteria is similar.

Criterion C-7. The standards clearly address research processes, including developing questions and locating, understanding, evaluating, synthesizing, and using various sources of information for reading, writing, and speaking assignments. These sources include dictionaries, thesauruses, other reference materials, observations of empirical phenomena, interviews with informants, and computer databases.

Rationale: All students should be expected to be able to formulate suitable research questions for various areas of inquiry, acquire desired information independently, and evaluate its quality. Such abilities remain basic skills for informed citizenship. Students should also be expected to know how to use the facilities of a public library and the services of its librarians.

Criterion C-7: The standards clearly address research processes, including developing questions and locating, understanding, evaluating, synthesizing, and using various sources of information for reading, writing, and speaking assignments.



Results: The states showed considerable improvement since 1997. In 2005, a total of 36 earned a 4. Nine earned a 3, often because they did not address the development of research questions. Five states (Alaska, Hawaii, Kentucky, Michigan, and Montana) were rated 1 or 0, usually because research was not an identifiable substrand and was addressed skimpily—although it was addressed.

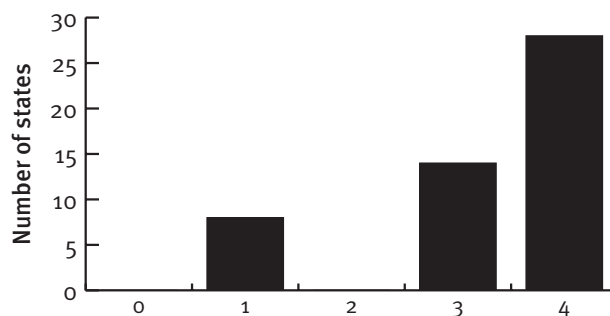
Section D: Quality of the standards

Criterion D-1. They are clear and specific.

Rationale: Standards must be clear and specific, enough so that teachers and parents as well as those developing assessment instruments know what is intended by them. Such objectives as “identify within nonfiction texts the dif-

ference between facts and opinions” or “effectively use the appropriate reference sources and materials necessary for gathering information” are clear, specific, and assessable. Specificity refers to the level of detail in a standard or objective. A standard can be so general or abstract as to permit an unlimited number of interpretations of what is intended. An example of such an objective is, “Select reading materials for a variety of purposes.” A specific standard indicates content of some kind and an intellectual activity that engages with or focuses on it to facilitate its learning, such as “identify and interpret figurative language and literary devices (e.g., simile, metaphor, allusion).”

Criterion D-1: They are clear and specific.

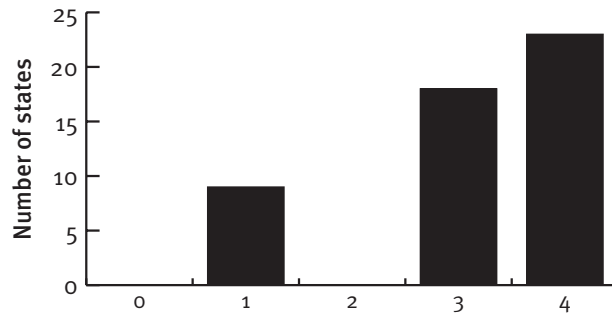


Results: More than half of the states (28) received a 4 on this criterion, indicating that the standards in a majority of states are, overall, clear and specific—a very positive sign. Improvement in the crafting of standards is especially visible in revised documents and in supplementary grade level expectations and/or benchmarks. A total of 14 states received a 3. Some of these states are still using their original documents, wholly or in part, and a rating of 3 may be accounted for in some of these states by the poor quality of many of the original standards, especially at the high school level. Eight states (Connecticut, Hawaii, Michigan, New Mexico, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) earned a 1, mainly because they tend to contain many unteachable or uninterpretable standards.

Criterion D-2. They are measurable (i.e., they can lead to observable, comparable results across students and schools).

Rationale: Standards may be clear and specific but not measurable. For example, the expectation that students create an artistic interpretation of a literary work is written in clear language, but it is not measurable. No guidelines exist that point unambiguously to a definition of artistic interpretation. If standards are not susceptible to measurement or judgment by experienced raters, then they are not true standards. To be measurable, English language-arts standards ought to contain such verbs as “identify,” “explain,” “describe,” “support,” “present,” “organize,” “analyze,” “evaluate,” “use,” “compare,” “distinguish,” “show,” “interpret,” or “apply.” Such verbs result in the manipulation of some body of ideas or results that can be observed and judged. Standards with verbs such as “recognize that,” “respect,” “value,” or even “understand” do not lead to the observable manipulation of ideas and are unlikely to be measurable. Standards that focus on the use of strategies or processes, rather than on their effects on intellectual content (or without any connection to what happens to the content), are also unlikely to be measurable. States should by now also be aware of the pitfalls in standards that expect students to draw on their personal experience. Can any teacher (never mind a test developer) assess the truthfulness of the introspection entailed by an objective expecting grade 12 students to “analyze the impact of the reader’s experiences on their interpretations”?

Criterion D-2: They are measurable (i.e., they can lead to observable, comparable results across students and schools).

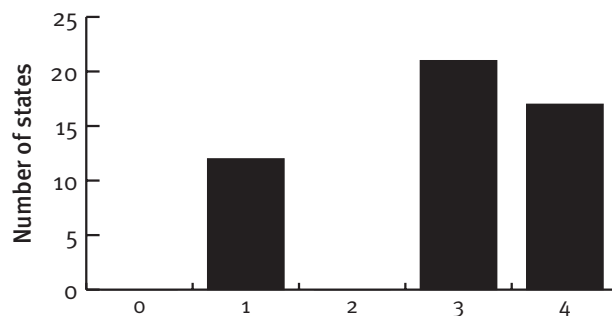


Results: Fewer states (23) earned a 4 on this criterion than on D-1. Overall, the expectations of these states are worded in ways that allow for measurement. Where they featured standards on strategies or processes, especially in reading and writing, they could still earn a top mark if they grouped them as such (usually to demonstrate that process as well as product is valued) and also provided many measurable academic expectations addressing all the important aspects of reading and writing growth. A total of 18 states earned a 3, usually because they featured unmeasurable standards in the key areas of reading and/or literature. Nine states earned a 1 (Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, Tennessee, Washington, and Wyoming); these states also typically had many unteachable standards.

Criterion D-3. *They are of increasing intellectual difficulty at each higher educational level and cover all important aspects of learning in the area they address.*

Rationale: Standards in English language arts should require the use of thinking processes that are appropriately challenging at each educational level, indicate important features to be demonstrated at each level, and show increasing intellectual or cognitive expectations. Sometimes an increase in difficulty can be achieved by a progression from such verbs as “describe,” “use,” or “identify” in the elementary grades to such verbs as “analyze,” “explain,” “interpret,” “synthesize,” “evaluate,” and “apply” in the upper grades. Sometimes it can be achieved by mention of some of the details that reflect increasing difficulty—e.g., from knowledge of such literary elements as plot, character, and setting in the elementary grades to such sophisticated elements as foreshadowing, symbolism, and literary allusions in higher grades. For reading and literature standards, some well-known titles, authors, or literary periods should be addressed directly in the standards so that the expected level of difficulty is clear.

Criterion D-3: They are of increasing intellectual difficulty at each higher educational level and cover all important aspects of learning in the area they address.

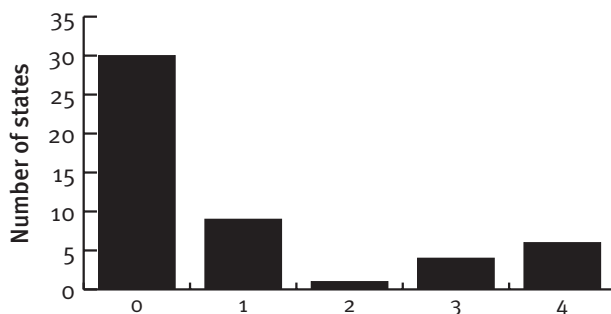


Results: A total of 17 states earned a 4 on this criterion, 21 earned a 3, and 12 earned a 1. States that have recently crafted grade-level expectations through grade 8 to supplement their state standards tend to show increasing expectations, such as those in the Tri-State Grade Level Expectations for Reading and for Writing for New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. States with only one set of standards for grades 9 to 12 were less likely to earn a 4 on this criterion, unless that one set of standards was extremely strong. Ultimately, the high school reading and literature standards are the most informative standards for indicating the level of intellectual difficulty a state aims for, and without some content-rich and content-specific standards at the high school level, that level is not readily discernable.

Criterion D-4. They index or illustrate growth through the grades for reading by referring to specific reading levels or to titles of specific literary or academic works as examples of a reading level.

Rationale: Standards in the English language arts must make clear what growth in reading means over the grades. For example, a document may indicate the reading level in its standards by providing examples of well-known works for each reading standard, selective grade-level reading lists, or authors’ names that are readily associated with specific texts whose approximate difficulty is known by most teachers. It may also offer sample passages showing the reading levels expected for specific educational levels.

Criterion D-4: They index or illustrate growth through the grades by referring to specific reading levels or to titles of specific literary or academic works as examples of a reading level.

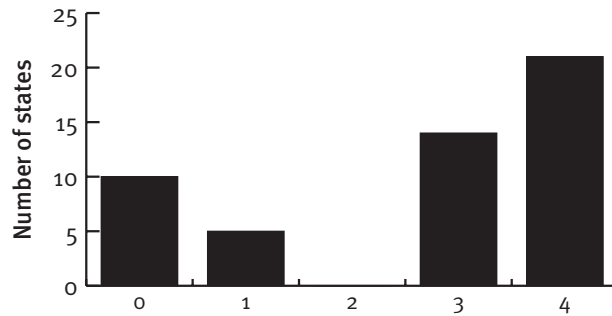


Results: Only six states earned a 4 on this criterion in 2005 (Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and South Dakota). They provide examples of titles or authors, or required authors or titles, or suggested reading lists divided by educational level, or all of the above. Another four earned a 3 (California, Idaho, Louisiana, and New York) because they provide fewer examples, unselective or no reading lists, and/or no examples at some grade levels. Nine states earned a 1, usually because they provide a few titles somewhere to suggest high school expectations. But 30 states earned a 0, meaning that they provide no indices to reading growth at all. A few of these states assert that students should be reading “grade-level” texts or texts of “increasing complexity.” Expectations need to be much more specific to guide teachers and promote equity.

Criterion D-5. They illustrate growth expected through the grades for writing with reference to examples and rating criteria, either in the standards document or in other documents.

Rationale: A state’s writing criteria as applied to samples of student writing at the grade levels assessed are one clear indication of the quality of the writing expected. Without them, the expectations for growth in writing remain completely unclear.

Criterion D-5: They illustrate growth expected through the grades for writing with reference to examples and rating criteria, in the standards document or in other documents.

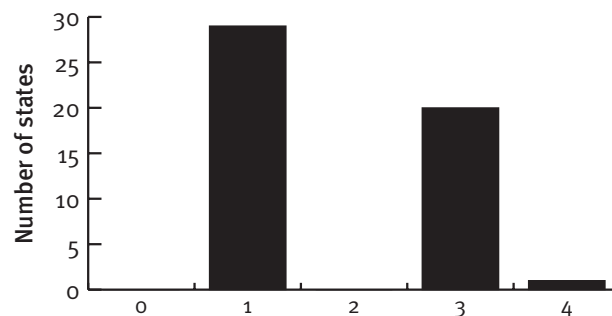


Results: A state earned a 4 either by providing in its standards document the criteria for its K-12 writing assessments and some exemplars showing the application of these criteria or by making these criteria and exemplars readily available elsewhere. That proved to be the case with only 21 states. In other words, fewer than half make this important information easily accessible to teachers, curriculum directors, test developers, and parents. Another 14 earned a 3 because their criteria or their exemplars do not go beyond grade 8. Fifteen states earned a 1 or a 0 because they do not seem to provide even that much information.

Criterion D-6. *Their overall contents are sufficiently specific, comprehensive, and demanding to lead to a common core of high academic expectations for all students in the state.*

Rationale: One purpose of state standards is to ensure that the academic demands of local school curricula are similar enough and demand enough at each grade level to assure all students in the state of equally high expectations. These demands must rest on some common subject matter if state assessments are to be meaningful. State standards must also be pegged to specific levels of reading difficulty and writing skill. They cannot ensure that all students bring comparable backgrounds in literary and academic knowledge to state assessments if they do not contain some specific expectations about the content students are to read (or otherwise be exposed to) over the grades. Local school districts may, of course, go far beyond statewide standards in fleshing out a complete curriculum for all their students.

Criterion D-6: Their overall contents are sufficiently specific, comprehensive, and demanding to lead to a common core of high academic expectations for all students in the state.



This is perhaps the most important criterion in the review because it expresses the basic goal of state standards. If they are not sufficiently specific and appropriately demanding in their expectations, as well as being teachable, so that the difficulty level of the content of the English and reading curriculum can guide grade-by-grade construction of classroom curricula, then they cannot lead to uniformly high expectations for all students. Instead, inequities will persist, and high school diplomas will continue to mean little. Unteachable standards may express idealistic goals but they are, by definition, doomed to failure.

Results: Only one state (Louisiana) earned a 4 on this criterion because it addresses the substantive as well as the formal content of the English curriculum at particular high school grades with content-specific as well as content-rich standards. Another 20 states earned a 3; they tend to have many well-written literature and reading standards, but these are not sufficiently content-specific and content-rich to outline the literary and non-literary content of the secondary English curriculum at any grade. They provide too much latitude to ensure a particular level of difficulty in a “classic” or “traditional” work. Without specification in standards themselves of a group of historically or culturally significant works or authors in specific literary periods, from which teachers are to draw part of their classroom curriculum, the content of the classroom curriculum at any one grade level may have no commonalities in substance or range of difficulty from classroom to classroom or year to year, and test developers may be able to avoid demanding selections on state assessments altogether.

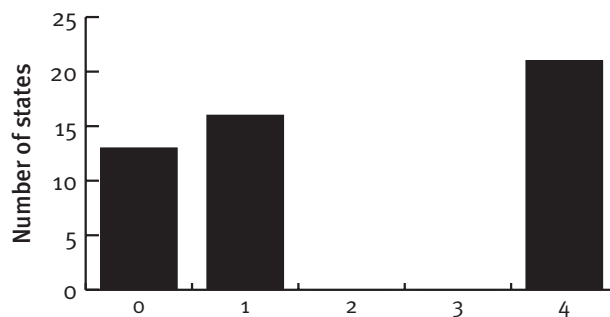
The remaining states (29) earned a 1 on this criterion. They lack content-rich and content-specific standards that outline the secondary English curriculum and do not satisfactorily address even the formal content of the English curriculum. (For examples of standards that do this well, see Appendix D.)

Section E: Requirements or Expectations That Impede Learning (Negative Criteria)

Note: The scores a state received on the criteria in this section were subtracted from its total score. These criteria point to pedagogical practices, beliefs, or injunctions that prevent sound learning from taking place or diminish the value of what has been learned.

Criterion E-1. The reading/literature standards expect students to relate what they read to their life experiences.

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Rationale: Literary study today suffers from the frequent injunction to students to ground their interpretation of what they read in their personal experience or connect what they read to their own lives. Although many educators

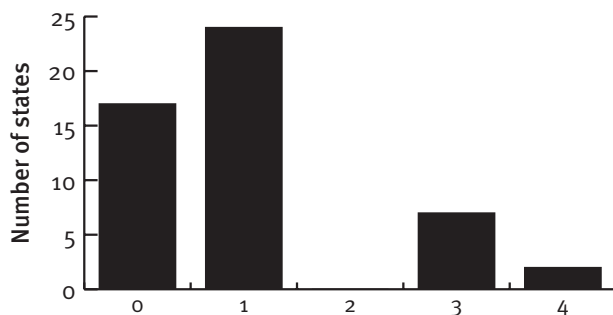
seemingly believe that students can understand a text better or be more motivated to read it if they relate it to their personal life, there is no research-based evidence to relate the putative benefits of this practice to academic achievement or increased leisure reading. In fact, the practice may narrow understanding of what is read by encouraging students to bring ready-made and often irrelevant associations to their reading, seriously interfering with an adequate interpretation of what they read. The practice also goes against the workings of the imagination and reduces the capacity of good literature to help students experience the writer’s created world. Finally, the teacher’s efforts to find works that can be easily related to students’ personal lives may restrict the literature taught in the elementary grades to contemporary realistic fiction, and in high school to “young adult” literature or works that deal with contemporary social problems.

Results: States could receive a 0, 1, or 4 on this criterion, with 0 being the top score. Only 13 states received a 0. Sixteen states were marked down a point because this expectation is expressed only mildly or occasionally beyond the primary grades (where it can make sense). Another 21 express this expectation prominently or frequently, some with an extremely heavy-hand, and consequently were marked down 4 points. Many states promote use of personal experience in interpreting texts and use of literary study for addressing contemporary social issues through a variation of “connect the text to another text, to a situation in life, and/or to an event or issue in the world.”

Criterion E-2. The reading/literature standards expect reading materials to address contemporary social issues.

Rationale: Although English teachers are often advised to select the works they ask their students to read for their relevance to social issues, it is inappropriate to make literary study a handmaiden to social studies. When the choice of literary work is guided by the hot-button issues of the day, the literary work selected may be studied more as a social documentary than as a literary work; by its very nature a literary work is not an accurate or reliable source of information about a social issue. The literary problem is that the aesthetic elements of the work may be given short shrift or ignored altogether. The curricular problem is that the effort to select literary works addressing social issues may eliminate from the curriculum literary works that do not address social issues. The use of such narrow selection criteria may also lower the level of what students are reading. Teachers who cannot find a suitably challenging literary work on the social issue they want to address may resort to works of lower quality (such as young-adult literature) in order to do so, especially if they want one with the “right” spin on it. Finally, there is no research-based evidence to relate this practice to higher levels of academic achievement or leisure reading.

Criterion E-2: The reading/literature standards expect reading materials to address contemporary social issues.



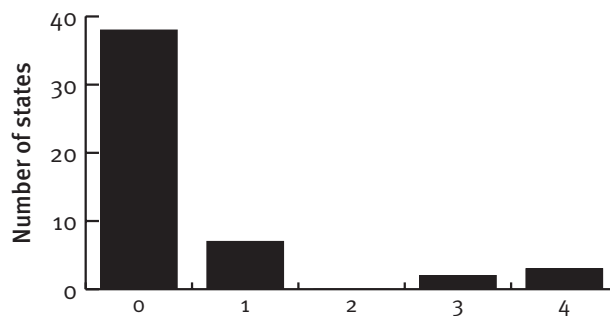
Results: A state could earn a 0 only if its standards indicate in some way that texts chosen for classroom study should be selected on the basis of their literary qualities or historical or cultural significance, whether or not these

texts can be related to a contemporary social issue. Seventeen states met this expectation. Twenty-four lost a point because they do not state any expectation that literary or non-literary readings should be selected on the basis of merit or cultural/historical significance even though these states do not suggest that they should be chosen to address current social issues. Nine states were marked down to a 1 or a 0 for expressing regular or strong expectations that students should relate what they read to current social issues, e.g., “connect the text to another text, to a situation in life, and/or to an event or issue in the world,” “compare and contrast a variety of perspectives of self, others, and world issues through a selection of literary works,” or “use literature to examine the social and political issues....”

Criterion E-3. *The document implies that all texts, literary and non-literary, are susceptible to an infinite number of interpretations and that all points of view or interpretations are equally valid regardless of the logic, accuracy, and adequacy of supporting evidence.*

Rationale: The idea that all knowledge is socially constructed and depends on one’s “perspective,” “point of view,” or “discourse community” is very trendy in the academic world today. In its extreme form, any personal response to a text can be considered valid simply because it was made (even if it was based on a complete misunderstanding of the text). Although this relativistic notion is sometimes applied across the board to all kinds of texts, implying that the label on a medicine bottle may be as open in meaning as a poem, it tends to show up chiefly in literary study. The notion is based on the sensible observation that literary works may be especially susceptible to more than one valid interpretation, frequently because of authorial ambiguity. If the idea that different interpretations of a text are possible is introduced in a standards document, there should also be caveats that the validity of any literary interpretation depends on the quality and weight of the evidence cited and that different interpretations cannot be equally valid if the quality and weight of the evidence brought to bear on them differ. If the idea is connected to non-literary writing, such as “multiple perspectives” on historical events or political issues, then students should be expected to consider accuracy, completeness of information, and logical reasoning as qualifying conditions.

Criterion E-3: The document implies that all texts, literary and non-literary, are susceptible of an infinite number of interpretations and that all points of view or interpretations are equally valid.



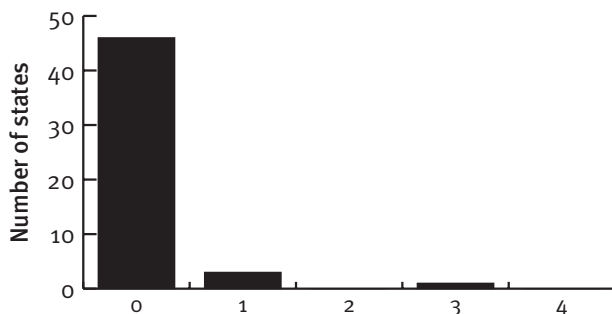
Results: Most states (38) earned a 4 on this criterion; they require, or seem to require, evidence to support an interpretation and do not seem to expect students to respect all interpretations of a text. Seven other states earned a 1; they seem to express this expectation but confine it to a narrow band of grades and/or did not make clear that they expect literary interpretations to be supported by evidence from the text. Five states (Connecticut, Delaware,

Michigan, Montana, and Utah) stress the validity of personal interpretations of a text without qualification (e.g., “accept, explore, challenge, and defend multiple interpretations of texts” and “respect the opinions of others about...written texts”) and earned only 1 or 0 points depending on whether this moralistic injunction affected only the elementary or secondary level or all grade levels.

Criterion E-4. The examples of classroom activities or student writing offered with the standards or in documents designed to accompany them are politically slanted or reflect an attempt to manipulate students' feelings, thinking, or behavior.

Rationale: Examples of classroom activities, topics for writing, or social issues to address show exactly what learning is intended by a particular standard or what kind of activity may lead to that learning. They clarify the educational philosophy guiding the document and often suggest to teachers the kind of pedagogy its writers wish to promote. If a document features an unsound classroom activity or a piece of student writing with blatantly politicized content, it inadvertently (or deliberately) promotes the activity, the writing assignment, or the politicized content.

Criterion E-4: The examples of classroom activities or student writing offered with the standards or in documents designed to accompany them are politically slanted or reflect an attempt to manipulate students' feelings, thinking, or behavior.

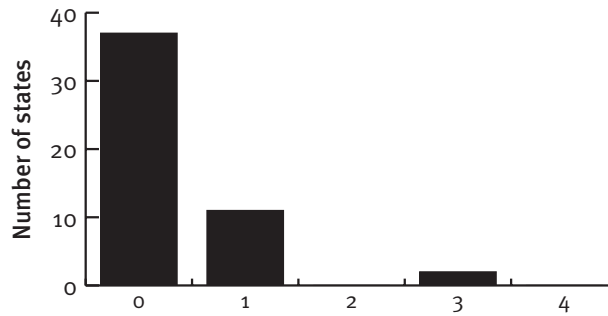


Results: Four states (Delaware, Georgia, New York, and Washington) were marked down on this criterion, with Washington marked down 3 points for politically loaded examples, e.g., in grades 9 and 10, “find text passages that support an inference that the author advocates economic change” and “examine how an action leads to long-lasting effects, e.g., environmental, economic, and/or political impact of off-shore drilling or strip mining.”

Criterion E-5. The standards teach moral or social dogma.

Rationale: Standards are not supposed to be sociological generalizations or conclusions for students to internalize and regurgitate. The inherent problem with standards that are little more than moral dogmas is that they are unassessable: How can we really know from an assessment what a student’s moral values are and how sincerely they are held? The intellectual problem with standards that express sociological generalizations is that most such generalizations are reductive assertions about complex phenomena and have many exceptions. In addition, they are the fruits of independent study and critical thinking and require evidence for support. To ask students to learn them as facts is to bypass the entire intellectual process on which they should be based.

Criterion E-5: The standards teach moral or social dogma.

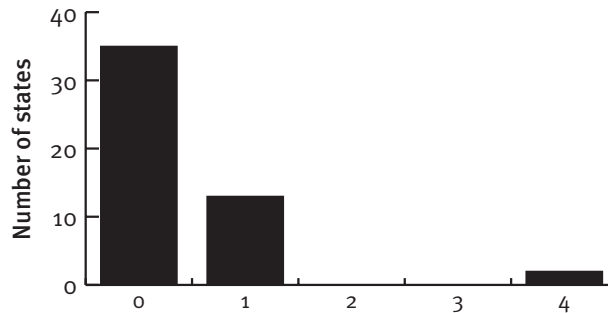


Results: Moral or social dogma seeps into the standards of 11 states—e.g., “people respond differently to texts based on their background knowledge, purpose, and point of view,” or “language and literature are primary means by which culture is transmitted,” or “demonstrate an understanding that a single text will elicit a wide variety of responses, each of which may be the point of view of the individual reader or listener.” These 11 states were marked down 1 point. Two others were marked down 3 points for promoting cultural stereotypes, e.g., “understand an author’s opinions and how they address culture, ethnicity, gender, and historical periods.” The diversity strand in Hawaii implies that issues of “race, class, and gender” in analyzing “underlying assumptions and values represented in text” may trump accuracy or adequacy of the evidence.

Criterion E-6. The document explicitly or implicitly recommends specific pedagogical strategies or one philosophy for all teachers to follow.

Rationale: No one instructional approach can work with all students all the time. A standards document should allow well-trained teachers to use their professional judgment and their understanding of educational research in addressing pedagogical issues. A document that attempts to mandate only one approach and exclude others has gone beyond its mandate and undermines good teaching. For example, not all students need systematic phonics instruction. But we do know from research that most students benefit from it, especially less able readers, and teachers should not be prevented from providing it for them.

Criterion E-6: The document explicitly or implicitly recommends specific pedagogical strategies or one philosophy for all teachers to follow.



Results: Although most states do not recommend specific pedagogical approaches in their standards document, 15 were marked down 1 or more points for doing so. Most of these 15 states received a 1 because they actively promote

a holistic or “integrated” approach to beginning reading, in effect discouraging teachers from having students practice skills. The others were marked down more because their literature standards are completely dominated by a “reader response” approach or because their advocacy of process and skills led them to deny the very existence of substantive content in the English curriculum.