



ALABAMA COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS

TOOLKIT

Dear Alabama Community Member:

Alabama has taken many steps to raise the bar to help all students receive a world-class education and the [Alabama College and Career Ready Standards](#) (ACCRS) are an integral part of that advancement. Across the state since 2012, schools have been implementing Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards, which are new academic standards in English Language Arts and Math in Grades K-12.

These standards, which help to guide what students should learn and know, will offer the academic knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college, career, and life. The educators who teach the standards offer critical-thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills to Alabama's students. The implementation of the ACCRS, along with high quality, well-trained and supported educators, has the potential to transform the future for Alabama students and for our state.

Support for ACCRS is composed of educators, administrators, nonprofit organizations, policy leaders, business leaders, and [other key organizations](#) that promote education statewide. The Alabama State Department of Education has created this toolkit of resources designed to inform, help raise public awareness and garner support for the standards within your community. Whether you are an educator, business, military or community leader, we hope this toolkit will be useful to you.

ACCRS Partners

[Alabama State Department of Education](#)

[Alabama State Board of Education](#)

[A+ Education Partnership](#)

[Alabama GRIT \(Graduate Ready, Impact Tomorrow\)](#)

[Business Council of Alabama](#)

[Business and Education Alliance](#)

[Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools](#)

[School Superintendents Association](#)

ALABAMA COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS

The Alabama State Board of Education approved the adoption of the Common Core State Standards along with specific Alabama standards in November 2010. The standards are part of an initiative, led by states to ensure students graduate from high school ready to pursue advanced education or training. Alabama was an integral part in the development of the standards.

By combining both Common Core and Alabama's standards, our state has adopted one of the most comprehensive sets of standards in the nation, called the Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards (ACCRS), ensuring students are prepared for a successful future.

ACCRS are now fully implemented in every school districts in the state. With more than 25,000 teachers trained and approximately 120,000 hours of professional development in reading and math curricula; the Alabama State Department of Education has, and will continue to, work decisively to ensure a better understanding of how to implement the standards is achieved by all. The implementation of the ACCRS is critical to supporting education in Alabama.

Together with highly trained, well-supported teachers, ACCRS will better prepare our students to achieve goals for college and career. Parents, students and teachers will understand the high expectations set for student learning. Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards include a significant focus on developing deep knowledge, conceptual understanding, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

We are now implementing the next phase with new assessments, geared towards measuring the college and career readiness of our students. The ACT suite of tests are aligned with our standards and show parents, students and educators a continuum of growth in learning. The assessments include: Aspire, ACT test and WorkKeys.



“When we look at ACCRS in mathematics; we look at how to better utilize standards that are going to make students successful anywhere they go, so they can be competitive on a global level. By making math real to students, they see how it applicable in their own lives.”

– Allison Grizzle, the 2013-2014
Alabama State Teacher of the Year



KEY MESSAGES

OFFICIAL NAME: Alabama College and Career Ready Standards. A state-approved course of study committee, which included educators and professionals in math and English from across Alabama, reviewed the national Common Core State Standards. This committee then combined the best of the Common Core State Standards with specific Alabama standards to create *the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts*.

TAG LINE: *Every Child a Graduate. Every Graduate Prepared.*

ELEVATOR SPEECH:

- With ACCRS, Alabama is strengthening its academic standards in Math and English to ensure all students receive a quality education, comparable to any other state in America or country around the world.
- Alabama did not receive any federal funding for the adoption of the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards. Alabama was not a recipient of any Race to the Top (RTTT) money. Alabama maintains complete control of its academic standards and are **not** obligated to **any** federal mandates because of the adoption of the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards.
- Forty-five other states, and several U.S. territories, have adopted Common Core as the standards were designed to be rigorous and relevant to today's world. The standards reflect the knowledge and skills Alabama's young people need for success in college and careers.
- ACCRS finally puts Alabama's academic standards in par with any other state in the nation. Alabama graduates should be as well prepared for the today's changing work force as any other students.



“ *These Alabama College and Career Standards, including Common Core, provide what we need as teachers in Alabama to guide valuable learning experiences in our classrooms. My students are thriving!* ”

– *Suzanne Culbreth, 2012-2013
Alabama Teacher of the Year*



TALKING POINTS

State-Led Effort - The standards, which have now been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia, were developed through a state-led initiative spearheaded by governors and school chiefs.

College and Career Readiness - Our state's new standards are designed to make sure that all students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college and career.

Clear and Consistent Expectations - The standards provide students, parents, and teachers with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at every grade level, and as such, serve as a roadmap to quality education. Outcomes improve when students, parents, and teachers are on the same page working together toward shared goals.

The standards provide consistent learning goals for all students – regardless of where they live – so that when children move from one state to another, they will stay on track in school, making the transition of moving more seamless for both students and teachers.

Local Decision-Making on Implementation - The standards establish what students need to learn, but do not tell teachers how to teach. Teachers will continue to create lesson plans and tailor instruction to the unique needs of the students in their classroom. Implementation decisions will remain local. Teachers and school leaders will determine how the standards are to be taught and will establish the curriculum, just as they currently do, allowing for continued flexibility and creativity.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards are a state-led effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics. They were designed by a diverse group of Alabama teachers, experts, parents, and school administrators. They are designed to ensure that students graduating from Alabama high schools are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce. The ACCR standards are comparable to other state standards as well as international standards to guarantee Alabama students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

Why are the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards important?

The Alabama State Board of Education wants to make sure that Alabama students are given the tools they need to succeed. High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations so that everyone can work toward together. This will ensure that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here in Alabama, but also with students in other states and around the world, maintaining America's competitive edge. The ACCR standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.

“*The standards don't tell us what to teach – it's more how we teach. We're able to slow down and really use creative ways to get students thinking deeply and critically. When the kids can think through solutions themselves, they really understand it at a higher level.*”

– 5th Grade teacher,
Crestmont Elementary



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is leading the implementation of Alabama College and Career Ready Standards?

Parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across Alabama, together with educators and business professionals from other states, led the effort to develop the best possible educational standards.

Will the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?

No. The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

Does having Alabama College and Career Ready Standards lead to watering down standards in Alabama?

Not at all. The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards have been built from the best and highest state standards in the country. They are evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are informed by other top performing countries. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom. Far from looking for the lowest common denominator, these standards are designed to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, are learning what they need to know to graduate from high school ready for college or a career.



“*The Common Core assures the Department of Defense, which has endorsed the standards, which soldiers entering the military out of high school have the basic education they need to protect and defend our great nation.*”

– Lt. Gen. Jim Pillsbury (ret.) former Redstone Arsenal Commander



Parents and Families

Supporting learning at school — building stronger parent-teacher relationships

As parents, your partnership with your child's teacher is a critical element in your child's academic success. At school, you can use the implementation of the ACCRS as an opportunity to create a strong relationship with your child's teacher to have ongoing conversations about your child's progress. Important in these conversations is to talk about how your child is doing, not just at parent-teacher conferences or on curriculum nights, but year-round.



Alabama is implementing new standards in English Language Arts and in Mathematics. The Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (ACCRS) were developed to ensure that your child has the academic knowledge and skills to be successful in college, career and life. Academic standards set the expectation for what students need to know and be able to do in each grade and subject. They form the foundation of what teachers teach and students learn in the classroom.

The ACCRS are important because they will not only improve what your child learns, but how he or she learns by teaching critical-thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills. They will better prepare your child to compete for the jobs of the future.

The new standards will also be consistent across states, which means that as families move to a new state or to a new school district, their teachers will be able to better assess your child's abilities and know where he may need support in a way that is not possible now.

Greater opportunities for parent and family engagement

In addition, the ACCRS allow parents, students and teachers to be on the same page about student learning and to set high expectations together. When you know what your child will be learning in the classroom, you and your child's teacher can identify when your child needs extra help or if he or she needs to be challenged more. As parents, you can play an instrumental role in supporting your child's learning at home and at school.

Supporting learning at home

Parents can support your child's learning at home by:

- Setting and keeping high expectations and supporting your child in meeting them.
- Making education your top priority at home.
- Talking every day about what your child learned in class. Ask probing questions so your child can tell you why each topic is interesting or important.
- Providing a quiet environment at home so your child can complete homework.
- Making sure your child spends time reading every day.

You can use the following questions to help kick-start the conversation:

- What are the most important topics my child will be learning this year?
- Can I see a sample of my child's work? Is this piece of work satisfactory? How could it be better?
- Is my child on track to be successful in this class, prepared for next year and for college and career?
- What resources are available if my child needs help or wants to learn more about a subject?

Tips for communicating with parents and families:

- Be positive and encouraging.
 - Focus on the benefits to students.
 - Communicate your school and district's plans to implement the ACCRS, so parents can understand the bigger picture.
 - Empower parents to know what is happening in the classroom so they can help reinforce learning at home.
 - Avoid using jargon that only educators might understand.
 - Enable teachers and other parents to be the messengers of the ACCRS; they are the most trusted communicators to parents.
 - Make parents aware of the "Standards of the Week," posted Mondays and Fridays on the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) homepage as well as the ALSDE Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest pages. The Standards of the Week include examples of Mathematics and English Language Arts ACCRS that showcase what students are learning in the classroom.
- (Source: National PTA)



Business Leaders



The Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards are critical to Alabama's economic development because they were designed to give all students the knowledge and skills they will need to be prepared for the careers of tomorrow, including the ability to communicate effectively, work in groups, apply math in real-world situations, read and analyze both literature and informational text, construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others, and persevere in solving problems.



The Business Council of Alabama has praised the standards for:

- Raising the bar for Alabama students, which also raises their prospects for a brighter future.
- Giving Alabama cities and towns an advantage when recruiting out-of-state and international businesses.
- Giving military families consistency and quality; and giving Alabama an advantage in the next round of Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC).
- Giving Alabama a launching pad from which to aim for a brighter future for all our children by making our schools more competitive.

What you can do as a business leader

- Share information with your staff about the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards.
 - Include information in your employee newsletters, on your intranet, or at an upcoming staff meeting.
- Invite local education leaders in to share about the change and how they can get involved as a community partner to support students' learning (e.g. volunteering, tutoring, and supporting their own children's education).
 - Help champion the ACCRS and support education in your community by building relationships with your local schools, sharing information with your networks (Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, etc.), and including information in your speaking engagements about the importance of the standards.

Tips for communicating with business leaders

- Focus on the economic benefits:
 - By improving education, Alabama will have a stronger workforce.
 - A stronger talent pool will help attract and retain businesses to the state and to your community.
- Communicate how businesses and their staff can get involved to support education.

Students

You deserve a world-class education. Now, more than ever, your education is important in preparing you for life after high school so you can get the job of your dreams.



Most jobs in Alabama and throughout the nation will require some kind of education or training after high school. This means that in order to enter the workforce, you will need to go to college or graduate from high school with a set of marketable skills.

Together, your parents and teachers want to help you be ready for college, career and life so that you have all options and opportunities available to you when you graduate from high school. This is why the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards are the foundation for what you will learn in class every day.

The new English Language Arts and Math standards will make your education more relevant and are more focused on the skills and knowledge you truly need to be successful in the real-world. Feel free to ask your teachers what changes you may see in the classroom and how their expectations for you may change. If you need extra help or if you want to explore a topic further, don't be afraid to ask.

Tips for communicating with students

- Emphasize that the ACCRS will help make teaching more relevant to their lives, careers, and future.
- Make your conversations personal. Students prefer a personal, one on one approach for this type of information over social media.
- Be simple, upfront and straightforward about the changes they will experience in the classroom and how they will impact students.
- Acknowledge that students are apprehensive about assessments. They are concerned about their own performance, and their peers as well.
- Teachers, parents, and older peers (e.g. college-aged students) are the best communicators of this change to students. Students like hearing from peers who they can relate to.
- Be sure to mention ways that students can help contribute to their own success. Mention resources and supports that students have in order to help them be successful during this transition.



Educators



The Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards are designed to prepare students with the core academic knowledge and skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education and training.



The ACCRS will provide teachers with:

- Clear, focused standards that are comparable to any other state in the country and aligned with college and workforce expectations.
- Consistent explanations of what students are expected to learn from kindergarten through Grade 12.
- Rigorous strategic grade-level goals that provide coherent progressions from grade to grade, linking major topics of study.
- A focus on developing students' critical thinking, problem solving and real-world application of skills through effective instructional strategies.
- A foundation for working collaboratively across content disciplines, schools, districts, and states sharing resources and expertise, to create curricular tools and professional development.

Tips for communicating with educators:

- Offer opportunities for teachers to learn more about the standards. Most teachers are interested in learning more in depth information about them.
- Communicate how the ACCRS are a part of your school or district's larger plans to help your students be prepared for college and career.
- Focus on the benefit to teachers, including that they allow teachers time to go into more depth in their subjects, provide clear and concise learning targets, mitigate challenges with student mobility, and are common and consistent across states.
- Focus on the instructional shifts and the changes in practice that will be needed to implement the ACCRS successfully in the classroom.
- Empower educators to be the lead communicators about the standards to parents and families.
- Encourage teachers to repost the "Standards of the Week" in the classroom and their social media pages. The standards are posted Mondays and Fridays on the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) homepage as well as the ALSDE Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest pages. The Standards of the Week include examples of Mathematics and English Language Arts ACCRS that showcase what students are learning in the classroom.