

Change coming to South Dakota classrooms

As you talk with your children about their experiences in their English language arts and math classes this year, you may notice some differences. The changes are likely the result of South Dakota's new standards in English languages arts and math, called the South Dakota Common Core.

The standards are referred to as "common" because about 45 states came together to develop this shared set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

The South Dakota Board of Education approved the new content standards in English and math in November 2010. The adoption of standards for the various content areas is not a new process. It has been going on for years, and the South Dakota Board of Education is the governmental body tasked with evaluating and adopting content standards.

Content standards provide a framework for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Decisions about curriculum, including *how* the standards will be taught and selection of textbooks and other instructional materials, are made at the local level, just as they always have been.

One of the most exciting things about these new standards is that they are aligned to current expectations for college and career readiness. They challenge students to think more deeply and to be able to apply that knowledge to real-world situations. They emphasize skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and the ability to construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others. These are all skills identified by employers as necessary for success in today's globally competitive world.

Across the district, we have been immersed in the process of training teachers and staff, so that they are familiar with the standards and understand the shifts in instruction that go along with the standards. Any time we make the move to new standards, it is a challenge. However, high quality standards are a critical foundational piece in ensuring that our students are prepared for success in college, careers and life in the 21st century.

I will be providing more detail on the standards throughout the year. In the meantime, you can visit www.commoncore.sd.gov to find out more, and if you still have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me, your school principal, or your child's teacher.

Thank you, and let's have a great year!