

# The Washington Post

## Panel Proposes New English, Math Standards for Students

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An expert panel unveiled a proposal Monday that details the math and English skills every student ought to have by the end of high school, the first step toward what advocates hope will become common standards that help the U.S. regain world academic leadership.

In math, for example, students would be able to solve systems of equations; find and interpret rates of change; and adapt probability models to solve real-world problems.

In English language arts, they would be able to analyze how specific word choices shape the meaning and tone of a text; develop a style and tone of writing appropriate to a task, purpose and audience; and respond constructively to advance a discussion and build on the input of others.

The proposal, posted at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org), was drafted over the summer by a group that included experts affiliated with organizations that oversee the SAT and ACT college admissions tests, as well as Achieve Inc., a nonprofit standards advocacy group based in the District.

The panel was convened by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers, which this year enlisted 48 states and the District of Columbia in an effort dubbed the Common Core Standards Initiative. The two holdouts are Texas and Alaska.

The draft, according to Dane Linn, director of the education division of the NGA Center for Best Practices, was circulated to a wider group of experts and then vetted by representatives from six states before it was made public. Those states, Linn said, were California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts and Minnesota.

The group is seeking public comment on the proposal over the next month.

For many years, scholars and policy-makers have debated whether public schools should be held to national academic standards. The 2002 No Child Left Behind law left it to states to determine what students ought to learn in reading and math and how they ought to be tested. As a result, the benchmarks for proficiency in those subjects vary widely from coast to coast.

Proponents of national standards say it is folly to have such uneven expectations for students when the United States trails several countries in Asia and Europe on international exams. Opponents point to a long tradition of local control in American schools and say the federal government should not dictate what is taught.

The local-vs.-federal question has stymied previous efforts to develop national standards. Advocates of

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this year's effort say that what sets it apart is that the federal government is a bystander more than a player.

"This is more bottom-up than top-down," said Michael Cohen, president of Achieve, who was an education official in the Clinton administration. "It is very important that the federal government is not a key actor in this. It's actually not doing anything. This really is state-led."

However, the Obama administration has been cheering the effort and has set aside \$350 million to help develop tests after states adopt more detailed standards to be written in the coming year. It remains to be seen how many states will go that far. "This is not a slam dunk," Cohen said. "There is very challenging work ahead."

Critics of the initiative said that common standards will not necessarily help the United States catch up to countries such as Singapore, a recognized global leader in math.

"Advocates of true education reform--rather than repackaging the same failed policies--need to keep in mind a simple truth: previous efforts to create national standards failed utterly because Americans have extremely varied educational wants and needs," said Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute. "Efforts to address all of them with one-size-fits-all Beltway *diktats* will be fruitless at best, and quite harmful at worst."

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