

Standards: A short history

The push for higher academic standards in American education began in earnest with the publication in 1983 of "A Nation at Risk," a federal report criticizing U.S. public school curriculum as weak and warning that U.S. students were falling behind their counterparts in other nations. In Oregon, traces of the standards movement go back even further. Here are some key dates:

The past

1960s-1970s:

Oregon begins a gradual shift from evaluating schools on how they teach and how they are equipped to measuring what students have learned. The state requires districts to establish minimum competencies in core subjects for students, but there is no consistency, standards are low, and there are no consequences for failing to meet them.

April 1983:

The report "A Nation at Risk" points out U.S. academic standards are

falling, high school curriculum has been watered down, and students in other nations are outstripping American youngsters in academic performance. The report triggers efforts to improve schools across the country.

June 1984:

The Oregon Board of Education approves the Oregon Action Plan for Excellence. It requires schools to define what students should know and be able to do, measure their progress and take corrective action if they need help. The plan calls for statewide student testing.

1989:

President Bush convenes an education summit with the nation's governors. The meeting results in a drive to establish voluntary national academic standards for history, science and other subjects. It also spurs states to establish their own standards.

1991:

Statewide academic testing begins in Oregon. Also, Oregon's Legislature approves the Oregon Educational Act

for the 21st Century, a significant school reform law that calls for standards-based education. The law creates the certificates of initial and advanced mastery for students who achieve high academic standards, but it leaves open what subjects students must master. The law mandates a 20-year implementation timeline.

1995:

The Legislature refines the school reform act, requiring students to demonstrate proficiency in English, math, science, history, geography, civics, economics, the arts and foreign language to earn a certificate of initial mastery.

1996:

The state Board of Education establishes benchmark scores on statewide tests that students must achieve to earn a certificate of initial mastery. The board also defines the scope and quality of classroom work students must submit to earn the certificate.

The present

This fall's high school freshmen will be the first class eligible to earn the

certificate of initial mastery. Forty-eight states have established or are establishing new standards.

The future

1999:

Oregon high schools award the first certificates of initial mastery to 10th-graders who have passed the state academic tests and submitted requisite class work. Subjects covered: math, English, writing.

1999-2003:

New subject areas are added yearly to the certificate of initial mastery. By 2003, it includes math, English, science, social sciences, the arts and foreign language.

2002:

The certificate of advanced mastery is awarded to seniors in some schools. It consists of advanced English and math skills and a career-related learning program.

2005:

The certificate of advanced mastery is awarded in all high schools.

GLOSSARY

■ STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION:

Schooling based on defined knowledge and skills that students must attain in different subjects, coupled with an assessment system that measures their progress.

■ CERTIFICATE OF INITIAL MASTERY

(CIM): A 10th-grade certificate of achievement indicating a student's knowledge in math and English, as demonstrated by scoring on statewide assessment and evaluation of a portfolio of his or her work. More subjects will be added to the certificate each year, until in 2003 it will require high academic performance in science, geography, history, economics and civics. Second-language and arts skill and knowledge will be assessed according to local school district standards. The other subjects will be assessed by state standards.

■ BENCHMARK: A progress check at grades three, five and eight to measure a student's current achievement and his or her progress toward the certificate of initial mastery.

■ STATE ASSESSMENT TEST: An annual test given to third-, fifth-, eighth- and 10th-graders to test their knowledge and skills in English and math. The assessment will be expanded to cover additional subjects as the CIM expands.

■ CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED MASTERY (CAM):

A 12th-grade certificate requiring further achievement and higher test scores in topics covered by the certificate of initial mastery. The certificate also includes training and experience in one of six broad career areas and an assessment of students' career-related skills, such as problem solving, communication, teamwork ability and personal time management. The certificate is to be available in all schools by the 2004-2005 school year.

DEAR ABBY: The letter you printed from Mary Pryor, describing her stolen purse experience in France, reminded me of the experience an acquaintance of mine had during his visit to Bogota, Colombia.

He chased a thief who had stolen his billfold, yelling — in his best tour-book Spanish — what he thought was, "Stop him! I've been robbed!" A policeman finally stopped the culprit, retrieved the billfold and told my American friend that what he actually had been shouting was, "Stop him! I'm a robber! I'm a robber!"

— Don Stone, Sioux City, Iowa

DEAR DON: I suppose your letter illustrates that it's better to speak fractured Spanish than no Spanish at all.