WestEd's Standards-to-Standards Alignment and Evaluation Studies

Rigorous academic content standards can serve as critical levers for improving student achievement by signaling goals, focusing instruction, and establishing common learning expectations. WestEd helps state departments of education and other educational entities gather this evidence of rigorous academic content standards through independent, objective alignment and evaluation analyses carried out by seasoned experts. Our alignment and evaluation studies are designed with two key aims in mind: (1) satisfying rigorous evidence requirements, such as federal peer review; and (2) providing meaningful and practicable feedback that contributes to the quality of content standards.

WestEd's Experience and Expertise

WestEd has conducted standards-to-standards alignment and evaluation studies for reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as other academic content areas, such as the arts and humanities. In addition, WestEd has completed several standards-to-standards alignments for career-technical education (CTE) programs.

WestEd's Approach

WestEd's approach to analyzing alignment between content standards has been refined over time. Our approach is grounded in the methodology that Achieve previously developed to determine the college and career readiness of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics academic content standards. WestEd evaluates content standards based on the following set of criteria: *rigor*, *coherence*, *focus*, *specificity*, *clarity & accessibility*, and *measurability*.[1] Trained content experts provide independent judgments about the college and career readiness of individual content standards.

The types of research questions our alignment and evaluation studies typically answer are:

- To what degree do the academic content standards prepare students for college and career readiness?

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[1] Achieve, Inc. (2008). *Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous Common Core Standards from the Ground Up*. Retrieved from: https://www.achieve.org/publications/out-many-one-toward-rigorous-common-core-standards-ground; Achieve, Inc. (2016). *A Review of the Oklahoma January 2016 English Language Arts and Mathematics Academic Standards*. Retrieved from: https://www.achieve.org/publications/review-oklahoma-january-2016-english-language-arts-and-mathematics-academic-standards.

- To what degree do the academic content standards align to another set of academic content standards?
- Where are there gaps of important content and skills in the content standards?

Our alignment and evaluation studies typically proceed in the steps described below.

Evaluation Criteria to Determine College and Career Readiness

The first step in evaluating the state standards is to align them for categorical concurrence to a referent set of content standards such as a nationally recognized set of standards for a content area or a specific set of state content standards. Evaluating for categorical concurrence establishes a relationship between standards in each set of standards that have similar content and skills.

After the initial alignment between the two sets of content standards, individual standards are then evaluated for correspondence to the identified individual referent standards using the following criteria: *rigor*, *coherence*, *focus*, *specificity*, *clarity & accessibility*, and *measurability*. Ratings are provided to determine if the content standards approach, meet, or exceed the expectations of the corresponding referent content standards. The results of these ratings provide a clear picture of the degree to which the content standards prepare the students for college and career readiness.

Gap Analysis of Standards

WestEd's analysts then review the content standards to determine whether there are any substantive gaps of content and skills in the standards when compared to a referent set of content standards. WestEd checks both sets of standards to see if there are gaps in content and skills. We recognize that there may be content or skills covered in the referent standards that are not addressed in the content standards, but we also realize that content standards may have skills or content not covered by the referent standards.

Alignment Study Team Training

The alignment and evaluation study team includes staff with expertise and experience in alignment methodology, college- and career-readiness standards and assessments, and K–12 curriculum and instruction.

Prior to evaluating the alignment between two or more sets of standards, WestEd analysts familiarize themselves with the standards, and the alignment specialists are trained in the use of the alignment protocol based on the evaluation criteria to ensure consistency of

expectations. Prior to making any judgments, the analysts review a small subset of standards, and then, as a group, discuss their findings. This is to ensure that they can apply the alignment protocol independently and accurately, as well as use the criteria consistently to assign ratings to standards. The analysts also develop decision rules to ensure the rating process is standardized and applied consistently across grades and content areas. After training, the project lead monitors the ratings and associated justifications to make certain the specialists continue to use the alignment protocols properly.

Final Report

Each alignment and evaluation study report is tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the client. A report will typically provide summary findings for the criteria described above. It will also document gaps in content/skills in grades/courses. We also include a description of the methodology, training procedures, and all criteria and decision rules used by the specialists. Finally, WestEd creates detailed spreadsheets listing the ratings and comments for individual content standards.