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WYOMING LANGUAGE ARTS ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS
for
Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

RATIONALE

Wyoming has high academic expectations of all students as evidenced in the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards. The Wyoming Academic Content Standards Committee, which developed the Language Arts Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, recognizes the mission of language arts instruction as providing the essential skills that allow students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to achieve high academic expectations and to access the general academic curriculum. Instructional opportunities addressing the rigorous Academic Content Standards combined with instructionally supportive assessment with clear targets enable all students to achieve high standards of academic performance.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) require students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to be assessed in the same grades as regular education students and to have access to challenging instructional opportunities linked to State Standards. These instructional opportunities are targeted in the Academic Content Standards.

The basis of the Academic Content Standards is to provide a K - 12 framework for instruction of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and to assist school districts, schools, and communities in developing and strengthening curriculum rather than prescribing courses, material, or instructional methodology. The Academic Content Standards specify the essential learning all students must master. Teachers ensure that students achieve mastery by using a range of instructional strategies they select based on students’ needs, the Academic Content Standards, and grade specific Academic Benchmarks. The specifics of how the students acquire the knowledge and skills are determined at the district level.

The Academic Content Standards focus on a broad range of outcomes. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities vary widely in their forms of communication and access skills. Consequently, reading is broadly defined. Reading is defined as making meaning of words, pictures, symbols and/or icons as they are presented to a student or independently encountered by the student. Writing is defined as the expression of thought through words (verbal or written), pictures, symbols and/or icons. A teacher’s instructional use of these terms may be further differentiated by the individual skills and communication levels of students. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities access challenging standards at varying levels of complexity and often through the use of a wide range of accommodations and assistive technology.

ORGANIZATION OF ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

The Academic Content Standards specify the essential learning that must be mastered. Kindergarten through eighth grade teachers, students, and parents work toward the achievement of grade-level linked Academic Benchmarks. Ninth grade through eleventh grade teachers, students,
and parents work toward the achievement of the eleventh grade grade-level linked Academic Benchmarks. Success at each academic benchmark level requires the effort and commitment of teachers to create a learning environment that allows the student to reach that level.

The Language Arts Academic Content Standards are presented in a three column format. The first column is a statement of each Wyoming State Benchmark in reading or writing. The second column is a statement of the essence of the Wyoming State Benchmarks written as an Academic Benchmark. The increasing Levels of Complexity of the Academic Benchmarks are described with examples, in some cases, in the last column. The Levels of Complexity define the consistency of performance, level of independence, and instructional setting associated with the Alternate Benchmark as the complexity of performance of the skill increases from a Level 1 (most basic) to a Level 4 (most complex).

The Academic Content Standard in reading is delineated as three categories of Academic Benchmarks: 1. Students understand that text has meaning; 2. Students understand literary texts; and 3. Students understand informational texts. The Academic Content Standard in writing is delineated as two categories of Alternate Benchmarks: 1. Students apply writing skills; and 2. Students write expressive and expository pieces. These categories in reading and writing have corresponding Academic Benchmarks. In some instances, the general education benchmarks have been combined and are represented by one Academic Benchmark. Teachers should be aware of the requirements at the next level of Academic Benchmark, even as they prepare for the current level, so prerequisite skills are introduced and experienced over time. They must also be aware of the requirements at the previous level so they reinforce necessary prerequisite skills and continue to practice and apply the skills that have already been mastered.

**IMPORTANT GENERAL TERMS**

There are several important terms that need to be defined for educators, parents, and interested Wyoming citizens.

**Academic Content Standards**

State what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are expected to know and be able to do. The specifics of how the students learn the knowledge and skills are determined at the district level. Academic Content Standards provide a common set of goals and expectations for all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in Wyoming. They provide a consistent framework for challenging instruction to promote access to the general education curriculum.

**Academic Benchmarks**

Linked to grade-level Wyoming Content Standards and benchmarks, the Academic Benchmarks comprise the competencies, skills, and knowledge that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities need to know and be able to do at the grade level Alternate Benchmarks in order to reach the Academic Content Standards. In this document, grades kindergarten through eighth and grade eleven are specified in order to promote access to the general education standards and participation in rigorous levels of alternate benchmarks that support individual growth.
### ACADEMIC BENCHMARK TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity Level</th>
<th>Example Term</th>
<th>(complexity level may vary depending on the skill or construct being measured)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Determines:</strong></td>
<td>Actively applies, selects or decides without presented choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 3</td>
<td><strong>Recognizes and labels:</strong></td>
<td>Combines two steps into a process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 3</td>
<td><strong>Labels or Names:</strong></td>
<td>Actively applies or produces a name or label for a concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 2</td>
<td><strong>Chooses or Selects:</strong></td>
<td>Selects from a field of choices. Selects without presented choices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 - 2</td>
<td><strong>Identifies:</strong></td>
<td>Passively selects a name or label when given choices. No product. Examples: Selects from 2 – 3 choices, points to, gestures, uses PECS, verbally labels, uses sign to show answer. Selects without provided choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 2</td>
<td><strong>Recognizes:</strong></td>
<td>Indicates a selection when given choices. No product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 2</td>
<td><strong>Matches:</strong></td>
<td>For concrete objects, such as picture cards and word cards, pairs two like or related concepts. For actions, repeats the action. Examples: Selects like things, matches number to number or set to set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Indicates:</strong></td>
<td>Shows through some action or signal, selects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Interacts with:</strong></td>
<td>Shows active excitement or engagement with a task or activity, although may not correctly complete the task. Examples: Purposefully manipulates or touches, teacher stimulates a response or selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 1</td>
<td><strong>Responds to:</strong></td>
<td>Actively engages with a task or activity. Similar to <strong>Attends to</strong>, but at a slightly higher level. Examples: Recognizes and reacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Attends to:</strong></td>
<td>Actively shows that attention is being paid to a task or event. Examples: Watches teacher for an appropriate length of time; indicates interest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

As described in the rationale, the Academic Content Standards represent a consensus of a diverse group of stakeholders from around the state of Wyoming including special education teachers, regular education teachers, parents, curriculum specialists, diagnosticians, and university representatives. In the spring and summer of 2005, representatives from these groups from many districts drafted Academic Content Standards using the Wyoming Content Standards and the previously written Expanded Standards. The Wyoming Content Standards were written in 1997 – 1998, and were last adopted in July, 2003. The committee that wrote these standards referenced several national and state standards to establish that the rigor of Wyoming standards is consistent with these documents, and adjustments were made as deemed appropriate by the state committees. Consequently, this rigor is found in the Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, which are directly linked to the Wyoming Content Standards. These documents included the following publications:

- National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading, Standards for the English Language Arts.
- National Center on Education and the Economy, New Standards Performance Standards.
- Speech Communication Associate, Speaking Listening, and Media Literacy Standards for K through 12 – Education and Guidelines for Assessing Communication in Primary and Secondary Education.
- Colorado Model Content Standards for Reading and Writing.
- Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel).
- Wyoming Language Arts & Mathematics Expanded Content Standards, Spring, 2001
- Bloom’s Taxonomy
- The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) Universal Design Principles

STANDARDS STRANDS

This Language Arts Academic Standards are organized into two major standards: (1) Reading and (2) Writing. The committee recognizes that literacy skills are not discrete and cannot be isolated from one another. As the National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Associate Standards for the English Language Arts state, “The standards are not distinct and separable; they are interrelated and should be considered as a whole.”

Reading: Students demonstrate understanding of literary and informational texts:
1. Students understand that text has meaning.
2. Students understand literary texts.
3. Students understand informational texts.

Writing: Students apply writing skills to communicate.
1. Students apply writing skills.
2. Students write expressive and expository pieces