



Essential Standards Tool Kit

Establishing Essential Standards

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the exciting journey of establishing essential standards! This document is intended for district-level staff and teacher teams to prioritize Idaho content standards. We understand that not all standards are taught due to a multitude of factors, and we also recognize that some standards are more important than others.

QUICK RESOURCES

Idaho Content Standards Essential Standards – Extended Guides
Reading: Are We Making a List of Delivering on a Promise? The Unintended Consequences of Believing All Standards Are Equal by Thomas W. Many
Reading: Prioritizing the Standards Using the R.E.A.L. Criteria by Thomas W. Many and Ted Horrell
*Template: R.E.A.L. Templates
*Template: Content Standard Cards
*Prepopulated templates can be found on the Idaho Educator Mentoring and PD Platform

WHY ESTABLISH ESSENTIAL STANDARDS?

By identifying the most critical skills and knowledge that students need to master, essential standards provide clarity for teachers, students, and parents. This allows educators to focus their instruction on the most important content, ensuring that students are well-prepared for future learning.

Establishing essential standards in schools is vital for ensuring consistency and clarity in education. These standards help create a clear, focused curriculum that allows teachers to concentrate on the most critical skills and knowledge that students need to know and be able to do. By providing a consistent framework, essential standards ensure all students receive a high-quality education with clarity for teachers, students and parents.



Essential standards improve instructional planning and assessment alignment, allowing teachers to design lessons and evaluations that directly support key learning goals. They also enhance accountability by providing measurable benchmarks for student achievement. With a clear focus on essential content, schools can better support struggling students and prepare all learners for future academic and life challenges.

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL STANDARDS?

The Idaho Department of Education defines essential standards as:

Essential Standards Definition: Teachers will *explicitly teach* the standard, *assess* students' skills or knowledge in the standard *more than once*, and *intervene* to provide support for students who are not meeting proficiency. Teaching, assessing, and intervening on these essential standards will require considerable time and effort, which is why they are prioritized. While all state standards will still be addressed, they will not be taught with the same intensity. Instead, other standards will be used as supporting or additional standards to reinforce or extend the essentials.

Supporting Standards Definition: These standards are taught to support the learning of essential standards and may or may not be formally assessed.

Additional Standards Definition: These standards deepen understanding and may be included as time allows throughout units of study and may or may not be assessed.

See Idaho Content Standards Essential Standards – [Extended Guides](#)

HOW TO ESTABLISH ESSENTIAL STANDARDS

Learning Together

It is important to begin this process by learning together and establishing a common understanding and language of essential standards.

- Step 1: Create a team of people to lead this work and begin your research on the “what” and the “why” of essential standards. You must be able to explain this to staff and parents throughout the process.



- Step 2: As a team, choose “how” you will go about this process with a clear protocol. Our team decided to use the R.E.A.L. protocol to establish essential standards. While there are other protocols available, we believe this one best meets our needs.
 - **Readiness**
 - The **R** stands for readiness. This standard provides students with essential knowledge and skills necessary for success in the next class, course, or grade level.
 - **Endurance**
 - The **E** represents endurance. This standard provides students with knowledge and skills useful beyond a single test or unit of study.
 - **Assessed**
 - The **A** stands for assessed. Upcoming state and national exams will assess this standard. This standard can be assessed with a high DOK in the classroom (e.g. more than a multiple-choice question).
 - **Leverage**
 - The **L** refers to leverage. This standard provides students with the knowledge and skills that will be of value in multiple disciplines. (modified from: *Prioritize the Standards Using REAL Criteria*, 2022). Look for readings or videos that clarify your vision and the final product for the district or school.

Create Training

- Step 3: Once the team has a solid grasp of the “what” and “why” of creating essential standards, develop the training you would like to deliver to your staff. This should include the “what”, “why”, and most importantly, the “how”. Provide clarity on what the end goal and products are. The Idaho Department of Education has created a slide deck for this purpose. We encourage you to tailor this to your own needs so that it accurately reflects your school’s goals, expectations, and culture.

WORKING ESSENTIAL STANDARD DOCUMENTS

Teacher Created Essential Standards

- Step 4: Once teacher teams have identified their essential standards using a protocol, they should consolidate them into a single document. We recommend placing this document in a shared folder accessible to all staff. This centralized location will allow different grade levels and content areas to view one another's standards, fostering vertical alignment and promoting collaborative discussions across the school.



Additionally, it will improve communication with administrators by providing clear insight into classroom activities and helping to monitor student success more effectively.

Next Steps

- Step 5: Establishing essential standards is just the first step. Teacher teams will continue to collaborate to provide clarity in learning by creating:
 - Alignment with supporting and additional standards – all standards have a home
 - Pacing guides and instructional calendars
 - Formative Assessments
 - Common Formative Assessments for grades or contents that have multiple teachers instructing the same course
 - Collaborative Formative Assessments for singleton teachers who need an educational partner to discuss and review work together.
 - Summative assessments
 - Protocols for discussing data
 - Clarity on learning targets and success criteria
 - Intervention and extension strategies

RESOURCES

The Idaho Department of Education has curated or created the following resources. These resources were used with educator committees in the Summer of 2024 to develop our essential standard guidance. See the [Essential Standards Guidance](#) documents on our website. All supporting documents can be found on the Idaho Educator Mentoring and PD Platform. To gain access to the platform, email Summer Cook at bells@sde.idaho.gov.

1. *Are We Making a List of Delivering on a Promise? The Unintended Consequences of Believing All Standards Are Equal* by Thomas W. Many. This was used as a tool to understand why essential standards are important for both students and teachers.
2. *Prioritizing the Standards Using the R.E.A.L. Criteria* by Thomas W. Many and Ted Horrell. This resource explains the protocol to decide if a standard is essential or fits into another category.
3. Idaho Department of Education, Content and Curriculum, Essential Standards slide deck. The slide deck was created to train the teacher committees that supported this work. It provided the team with common language and guidance in protocol and product.



4. R.E.A.L. Templates. These templates have all K-12 ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies state standards in a grid for teachers to “grade” if the standards meet the criteria. This could be assigned as a pre-activity for individuals to assess the standards on their own before bringing them to a team discussion.

5. Content Standards Cards with all the Idaho content standards for ELA, Science, Math and Social Studies K-12. The Content Standard Cards are a great manipulative for teachers to visualize their work. Cards can be sorted and laid out into the different standards category types: of essential, supporting and additional.

6. Blank documents of both the REAL Templates and the Content Standard cards can be used for all electives, CTE, or other programs to follow the same process.

The Content and Curriculum team is here to support you in this work. Please use our website to [Request Professional Development](#) or reach out to Emalee Merrell emerrell@sde.idaho.gov for additional support.

For Questions Contact

Content & Curriculum

Idaho Department of Education

650 W State Street, Boise, ID 83702

208 332 6800 | www.sde.idaho.gov

○