

# Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. **What is the purpose of the state's curriculum?**

As required by the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985, Georgia must maintain a curriculum that specifies what students are expected to know in each subject and grade. Additionally, the state's standardized tests, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) for grades 1-8 and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) for Grade 11, must be aligned with that curriculum.

The state's curriculum is a guideline for instruction that helps teachers, students, and parents know what topics must be covered and mastered for a particular course. The curriculum establishes the minimum standards, and does not prohibit systems, schools, or teachers from adding material to it. Some systems may have curricula of their own, but they must include everything that the state requires.

## 2. **Why did the curriculum need to be revised?** In January 2002, a Phi Delta Kappa audit concluded that the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) not only lacked depth and could not be covered in a reasonable amount of time; it did not even meet national standards. The finding of the audit was that it would take twenty-three years—not twelve—to cover the topics included at anywhere near the level of depth necessary for real learning to take place. Shallow standards forced our teachers to guess what they should teach and hope that what they were teaching is what would be tested. Inevitably, teachers used the curriculum not as a guide for quality instruction, but as a reference to mention in lesson plans and then place back on the shelf.

Because the state had not provided a usable and effective curriculum to guide instruction in the past, many systems had to pay high-priced consultants to pare down the topics to a manageable level that may or may not align with tests. It is no surprise, then, that our students haven't performed well either on statewide or national test, such as the SAT, for years.

The revised and strengthened curriculum will drive both instruction and assessment in Georgia's schools, providing guidelines for teachers, students, and test makers. We will now teach to a curriculum, not to a test or a textbook. Our statewide assessments will be aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards, taking the guesswork out of teaching and providing guidelines for our schools, students, and test makers—and those standards will be based on best practices that have proven to be effective in high-performing states and nations.

## 3. **Who developed the GPS standards?**

The Georgia Performance Standards are the result of months of work by teacher teams, state and national experts, and consultants. We looked at national standards from high-performing states such as Michigan, Texas, and North Carolina, and nations such as Japan, and consulted the guidelines of national groups such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

## 4. **What IS a performance standard, and why does it represent an improvement upon the old content standards used in the previous curriculum?**

Performance standards go into much greater depth than the content standards used in the previous curriculum. The performance standard incorporates the content standard, which simply tells the teacher what a student is expected to know (i.e., what concepts he or she is expected to master), and expands upon it by providing three additional items: suggested tasks, sample student work, and teacher commentary on that work.

Performance standards provide clear expectations for assessment, instruction, and student work. They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to know "how good is good enough." The performance standards isolate and identify the skills needed to use the knowledge and skills to problem-solve, reason, communicate, and make connections with other information. Performance standards also tell the teacher how to assess the extent to which the student knows the material or can manipulate and apply the information.

5. **What subjects are being covered in this process? Are they subjects required of all students to graduate from a Georgia public high school? And what happens to the other courses?**

The GPS includes standards for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. At this time, courses in Foreign Language and Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education are being converted to performance standards. Courses in health, physical education, and fine art will be converted to performance standards at a future date.

6. **Is a school system required to follow the state curriculum? What if they decide to do something else?**

Yes. Systems are required to cover, at a minimum, the material in the state curriculum, but they are free to supplement it with additional topics they expect teachers to cover. Students will be tested on their mastery of this material through the state's standardized tests, the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT).

The state curriculum is the minimum of what teachers should teach and what students should know. The Georgia Department of Education encourages teachers, however, to incorporate extra activities and projects that will stimulate critical thinking and in-depth learning on the part of their students.

7. **When was the last K-12 revision of the Georgia curriculum?**

The original Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) was brought into being by the Quality Basic Education Act in 1985. The law required that the state maintain a Quality Core Curriculum, and that the QCC be reviewed and revised every four years. Despite this fact, the first revision did not occur until 1996-1997 because the Department was never given the funding to do revisions until that point. The 1996-97 revision included all content areas, but was more of a minor tweaking than a full-scale revision.

8. **What does this mean for textbooks purchased by school districts?**

There's a 7-year adoption cycle for textbooks, and it remains unchanged. Schools and systems will continue to change textbooks on the [recommended state schedule](#).

9. **What does this mean for student testing? When will the tests be revised to match the new curriculum?**

The Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) administered in the second year of the phase-in for a particular course will be developed and aligned to the new curriculum.

We are already looking at existing test items and aligning them to the curriculum, rewriting certain questions to reflect the new curriculum, specifying which items need to be moved to another grade level because the skills have been moved to another items, and identifying which questions need to be developed.

10. **How will teachers be trained on the new standards?**

Training for GPS implementation occurs on a two-cycle consistent with the implementation plan. The first year of training occurs the year before a subject is implemented at a specific grad-level. The second year of training occurs during the first year of implementation of that subject in the classroom.

Training follows a train-the-trainer model, and local school systems choose the recipients of that training and design a plan for redelivery.