

## Comparison of the Common Core and 2008 Georgia English Language Arts Standards

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### Executive Summary

This report responds to the request by State Senator William Ligon of Georgia for a comparison of the 2008 Georgia Performance Standards in English language arts with the Common Core State Standards in English language arts.<sup>1</sup> This comparison helps legislators, education policy makers, and other Georgia citizens to understand whether Georgia strengthened or weakened its system of public education by adopting Common Core’s K-12 standards in 2010. As the results of this comparison indicate, the implementation of Common Core’s standards and the use of any state tests based on them represent two steps backwards for Georgia in many respects.

The analysis drew on the criteria used in the 1997, 2000, and 2005 reviews of state English language arts standards for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Most of the 20 criteria used for the comparison are similar in wording to their counterparts in the 2005 review form, as are most of the rubrics for the 0 to 4 rating scale.

Table 1 shows the results of the comparison of the two sets of standards. The 2008 Georgia Performance Standards in English Language Arts are clearly superior to the Common Core State English Language Arts Standards in all four categories of criteria. The 2008 GPS are much stronger in their organization and disciplinary coverage, in the overall quality of the standards, and in the value they place on literary study—the kind of reading that develops critical thinking.

**Table 1: Average Points per Section and Total Average for Both Sets of ELA Standards**

	CC	GA
Reading Pedagogy and Independent Reading	3.3	3.6
Value of Literary Study	1	3.6
Organization and Disciplinary Coverage of the Standards	1.7	3.6
Quality of the Standards	1.4	2.4
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>3.3</b>

Two independent sets of evaluative comments support the results of this analysis. They come from the 2010 review of Georgia’s 2008 ELA standards and Common Core’s ELA standards by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

An examination of the “crosswalk” by the staff at the Georgia Department of Education, which concluded that the qualitative differences between the two sets of standards are minimal, indicates that the staff’s conclusion resulted from looking in only one direction—at the extent to which the content of the minimal competencies in Common Core’s ELA standards was addressed in the 2008 Georgia standards. The staff did not look at whether the rich content of the 2008 Georgia ELA standards was addressed in Common Core’s ELA standards.

The results of the comparison in this report serve as the basis for the following recommendations:

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<sup>1</sup> The author was a member of the Common Core Validation Committee from 2009-2010.

1. Georgia should re-adopt its previous standards (with some revisions spelled out below) because they are far superior to Common Core's. They emphasize reading far more than does Common Core, they stress the kind of reading (literary study) that fosters critical thinking, and they serve as far better guides to the kind of reading that secondary students in Georgia should be assigned in the school curriculum in order to be prepared for a meaningful high school diploma, whether they choose to go to an institution of higher education, go into an occupational trade, or go into the military.
2. Georgia should base its state assessments in reading and literature on its previous standards, not on Common Core's inferior English language arts standards. It would be a waste of the taxpayers' money to base state assessments on a set of standards that needs to be completely revised, if not abandoned.
3. Georgia's legislators should ask literary and humanities scholars at their own fine universities to work with a group of experienced and well-trained high school English teachers to design a readiness test in reading and literature for admission to Georgia's own colleges and universities. They should also ask engineering, science, and mathematics faculty at the University of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology to design a readiness test in mathematics and science for admission to Georgia's own higher education institutions, as well as the syllabi for the advanced mathematics and science coursework this faculty wants to see Georgia high school students take. Georgia can do much better than Common Core's standards or tests for these purposes. Georgia does not need federal education policy-makers (or test developers) to decide what admission requirements to Georgia's colleges and universities should be in reading, literature, mathematics, or science.
4. Before Georgia uses its previous ELA standards to guide classroom curriculum and state testing, the legislature should require them to be reviewed and vetted by experienced Georgia high school English teachers and literary scholars at its own colleges and universities.
  - a. Some standards belong at the graduate level.
  - b. Some standards are repetitious, superfluous, or non-assessable.
  - c. The Reading across the Curriculum (RC) standards should be removed. They are inappropriate for English teachers and English classes.
  - d. All of the standards for "multicultural" literature should be folded as appropriate into grade 8 or the high school courses for American, British, and world literature. High quality literary works by "multicultural" authors are part of one of these bodies of literature and should not be isolated.

## Comparison of the Common Core and 2008 Georgia English Language Arts Standards

This report responds to the request by State Senator William Ligon of Georgia for a comparison of the 2008 Georgia Performance Standards in English language arts with the Common Core State Standards in English language arts. The purpose of this comparison was to help legislators, education policy makers, and other Georgia citizens to understand whether Georgia strengthened or weakened its system of public education by adopting Common Core’s K-12 standards in 2010.

For the analysis, I shortened and slightly revised the criteria I used in the 1997, 2000, and 2005 reviews of state English language arts standards for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Eliminated items (e.g., the set of questions on teacher education) were not relevant for a comparison of standards.

Most of the 20 criteria used for this report are similar in wording to their counterparts in the 2005 review form, as are most of the rubrics for the 0 to 4 rating scale. See Appendix A for the review form used in this report. I retained the rating scale used in the 2005 review, with the rating of 2 used only when what was in a document was unclear. In the chart, CC = Common Core and GA = the 2008 Georgia Performance Standards.

### A. Reading Pedagogy and Independent Reading

1. *The document expects explicit and systematic instruction in decoding skills in the primary grades as well as use of meaningful reading materials and an emphasis on comprehension.*

<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 3</b>                  Research in reading is clearly used to inform the acquisition of decoding skills. There is good coverage of key comprehension skills across subject areas, as well as use of meaningful reading materials. However, not one of the objectives on phonics and word analysis skills in grades K-3 expects students to apply these skills <i>both in context and independent of context</i> to ensure mastery of decoding skills. Only in grades 4 and 5 are students expected to read accurately unfamiliar words “in context and out of context.” The placement of this standard at only grades 4 and 5 badly misinforms teachers in the primary grades.</p>
<b>GA</b>	<p><b>Rating: 4</b>                  Research in reading is clearly used to inform the acquisition of decoding skills. In the primary grades we find: “Applies letter-sound knowledge to decode quickly and accurately.” In addition, in grade 2 we find: “Automatically recognizes additional high frequency and familiar words within texts.” There is no suggestion that teachers are to teach students to use contextual approaches at the same time as they decode or learn to recognize high frequency words automatically. There is good coverage of key comprehension skills across subject areas, as well as use of meaningful reading materials.</p>

2. *The document makes clear that interpretations of written texts should be supported by logical reasoning, accurate facts, and adequate evidence.*

<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 4</b>                  The standards indicate that interpretations of any text must accord with what the author wrote. Evidence is required for interpretations or claims for all texts.</p>
<b>GA</b>	<p><b>Rating: 4</b>                  The standards indicate that interpretations of any text must accord with what the author wrote. Evidence is required for interpretations or claims for all texts.</p>

3. *The document expects students to read independently through the grades and provides guidance on quality and difficulty.*

<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 3</b>                  Students are expected to read independently, and Appendix B provides a limited list of exemplars of quality and difficulty through the grades. However, we do not know if the titles in grades K-8</p>
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	were independently vetted by literary experts or who they may have been. Moreover, Common Core suggests that teachers use a cumbersome set of factors to determine “complexity.”
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Independent reading is encouraged, quantity is spelled out per grade, but there is no list of recommended titles or authors in an accompanying document to guide quality. E.g., in grade 4: “The student consistently reads at least twenty-five books or book equivalents (approximately 1,000,000 words) each year. The materials should include traditional and contemporary literature (both fiction and non-fiction) as well as magazines, newspapers, textbooks, and electronic material. Such reading should represent a diverse collection of material from at least three different literary forms and from at least five different writers.” In grade 8: “The student reads a minimum of 25 grade-level appropriate books or book equivalents (approximately 1,000,000 words) per year from a variety of subject disciplines. The student reads both informational and fictional texts in a variety of genres and modes of discourse, including technical texts related to various subject areas.”

## B. Value of Literary Study

### 1. The document expects and enables teachers to stress literary study in the ELA class.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> Nonfiction or informational reading has been weighted more than imaginative literature in ELA at all grade levels—with ten standards for the former and nine for the latter at each grade level. This proportion augurs a drastic decline in literary study in grades 6-12.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> There are more standards for literary study than for non-literary study throughout the grades. This stress helps to balance the fact that elementary teachers in self-contained classes usually teach reading in all content areas as well as in the ELA class so that informational reading is already apt to be taught more than literary reading in K-6. Grade 8 has state-specific literary standards that should be emulated across the country (“ <b>ELA8R4.a.</b> Identifies a variety of Georgia authors both male and female. <b>ELA8R4.b.</b> Identifies authors' connections to Georgia through a variety of materials including electronic media. <b>ELA8R4.c.</b> Identifies award winning Georgia authors. <b>ELA8R4.d.</b> Examines texts from different genres (e.g. picture books, poetry, short stories, novels, essays, informational writing, and dramatic literature) created by Georgia authors. <b>ELA8R4.e.</b> Relates literary works created by Georgia authors to historical settings and or events. <b>ELA8R4.f.</b> Explains how Georgia is reflected in a literary work through setting, characterization, historical context, or current events. <b>ELA8R4.g.</b> Evaluates recurring or similar themes across a variety of selections written by Georgia authors, distinguishing theme from topic”). High school standards provide for full courses in American, British, world, and multicultural literature.

### 2. The document and the standards indicate that assigned texts should be chosen on the basis of literary quality, cultural and historical significance.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> Excellent advice is given in a sidebar on p. 35 and in Appendix B for selection on the basis of quality and significance. But most standards contain nothing to ensure that teachers or test-makers follow this advice. There are also no criteria for selecting informational or literary texts. Nor are there recommended lists of author or titles (just exemplars of “complexity” at each grade level).
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> While there is no one overarching statement requiring selection of literature based on its quality or significance, it is stated or implied in different ways in the standards. E.g., in grade 8, students are to study “award winning Georgia authors” and “significant text.” High school literature standards require study of “canonical” poets or literature. E.g., in grade 11, students are to “analyze the influence of mythic, traditional, or classical literature on American literature” and trace “the history of the development of American fiction.” Such standards clearly imply that most assigned texts will reflect historical and cultural significance.

### 3. The standards promote study of American literature.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b>
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	They do so only in two standards in grades 11/12. It is not mentioned in earlier grades where it would be appropriate (e.g., for American folktales or tall tales), and there is no mention of authors who were born in or wrote about the state or region.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> American literature is addressed fully in grades 10 to 12, and at the state level in grade 8 (“ <b>ELA8R4</b> . The student acquires knowledge of Georgia authors and significant text created by them.”). American multicultural literature is covered in high school standards.

### C. Organization and disciplinary coverage of the standards

1. *They are grouped in categories and subcategories reflecting coherent bodies of scholarship or research in reading and the English language arts.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> The organization of the ten anchor standards for Reading does not reflect scholarship or research. The grade-level standards are mostly organized according to language processes, but major subcategories do not reflect coherent bodies of scholarship or research in the secondary grades. The writing standards are misleadingly organized (argument, narrative, and informational). Academic arguments are not identical to persuasive writings. Practical or personal writing is not necessarily informational or narrative in nature.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> Major categories and subcategories mostly reflect coherent bodies of scholarship or research: literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama), writing (expository, narrative/personal, technical, response to literature, argument/persuasive), conventions, listening/speaking/viewing, research and technology, and vocabulary.

2. *The standards clearly address listening and speaking. They include use of various discussion purposes and roles, how to participate in discussion, desirable qualities in formal speaking, and use of established as well as peer-generated criteria for evaluating formal and informal speech.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> They address most of these elements but do not address the use of established criteria for evaluating formal and informal talks, presentations, or speeches.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Most of the above areas are adequately covered. But standards do not address the use of established criteria for evaluating formal and informal talks, presentations, or speeches. “Uses rubrics as assessment tools” is inadequate; whose rubrics—peers, teachers, or others and at what grade levels?

3. *The standards clearly address reading to understand and use information through the grades. They include progressive development of reading skills, knowledge and use of a variety of textual features, genres, and reading strategies for academic, occupational, and civic purposes.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 2</b> The standards clearly ask for reading to understand and use information through the grades. However, they do not clearly distinguish modes of organization (e.g., chronology) from structural (or textual) elements of an expository text (e.g., introduction, conclusion), do not progressively develop informational reading skills from grade to grade, and omit such important concepts as topic sentences for paragraph development.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> All of the above areas are covered in some way, but there is no progressive development of informational reading skills in K-8. By grade 6, most skills are mentioned accurately (e.g., “ <b>ELA6R1.2.a</b> . Applies knowledge of common textual features (e.g., paragraphs, topic sentences, concluding sentences, glossary, index). <b>ELA6R1.2.b</b> . Applies knowledge of common graphic features (e.g., graphic organizers, diagrams, captions, illustrations, charts, tables, graphs). <b>ELA6R1.2.c</b> . Applies knowledge of common organizational structures and patterns (e.g., transitions, logical order, cause and effect, classification schemes)”.

4. *The standards clearly seek to develop strong vocabulary knowledge and dictionary skills.*

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<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 1</b></p> <p>Although the vocabulary standards highlight specific figures of speech and rhetorical devices, they do not teach use of glossaries for discipline-specific terms, or words that must be taught (e.g., foreign words used in written English that do not appear in an English language dictionary). Common Core leans heavily and incorrectly in many cases on use of context to determine the meaning of unknown words. For example, it is difficult for students to interpret correctly a literary, biblical, or mythological allusion “in context,” as in “<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.5a</a> Interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context,” if they have no knowledge of the texts that have served as the basis for these allusions and if the reading standards do not point to some of these significant texts, authors, or events.</p>
<b>GA</b>	<p><b>Rating: 4</b></p> <p>Vocabulary standards are part of the reading/literature strand and through grade 8 spell out dictionary skills (e.g., “<a href="#">ELA6R2.d</a>. Uses reference skills to determine pronunciations, meanings, alternate word choices, and parts of speech of words.”). They identify the groupings students should be taught (e.g., “<a href="#">ELA7R2.c</a>. Identifies and explains idioms and analogies in prose and poetry,” “<a href="#">ELAWLRL5.c</a>. Identifies and understands foreign terms that appear in works originally written in a language other than English.”). And they point to the sources of word meaning in grade 10 (“<a href="#">ELAWLRL5.b</a>. Uses knowledge of world mythologies to understand the meanings of new words,” and “<a href="#">ELA10RL5.b</a>. Uses knowledge of mythology, the Bible, and other works often alluded to in literature to understand the meanings of new words.”).</p>

*5. The standards clearly address the reading, interpretation, and critical evaluation of literature. They include knowledge of diverse literary elements and genres, use of different kinds of literary responses, and use of a variety of interpretive and critical lenses. They also specify those key authors, works, and literary traditions in American literature and in the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people that should be studied because of their literary quality and cultural significance.*

<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 1</b></p> <p>Most of the above areas are covered but very unsystematically. Most literature standards lack examples of authors, works, literary traditions, and literary periods and only sporadically address the major genres and their characteristics. Only a few high school level standards indicate specific cultural content. Even a reference to mythology in the elementary grades asks for identification only of mythological characters (<a href="#">ELACC4RL4</a>).</p>
<b>GA</b>	<p><b>Rating: 4</b></p> <p>Although there are no lists of key authors or works at each grade, the standards in grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are content-rich and require study of literary traditions in Georgia, in American literature, in British and other world literature, as well as of “multicultural” literature (which is never defined). The standards systematically address the major genres of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction, and their literary elements, techniques, and vocabulary. The types of writing are reasonable (narrative, informational, persuasive, technical, research), Earlier standards on mythology and other cultures ask for cultural specifics and comparisons (<a href="#">ELA6R1</a>. “Compares traditional literature and mythology from different cultures,” and “Identifies and analyzes similarities and differences in mythologies from different cultures.”)</p>

*6. The standards clearly address writing for communication and expression. They include use of writing processes, established as well as peer-generated criteria, and various rhetorical elements, strategies, genres, and modes of organization.*

<b>CC</b>	<p><b>Rating: 1</b></p> <p>While there are a great many standards on writing, the sub-strand on “argument” confuses argument with expression of opinion in the elementary grades and with persuasive writing throughout. There is no scholarship to support the three “types” of writing proposed by Common Core and thus this strand badly misinforms English and reading teachers throughout the grades. There is also nothing on the use of established or peer-generated criteria for evaluating writing or written presentations.</p>
<b>GA</b>	<p><b>Rating: 3</b></p> <p>Most aspects of writing are addressed well, and academic arguments are not confused with</p>

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	persuasive writings or expressions of opinion. But there is nothing on the use of established or peer-generated criteria for evaluating writing or written presentations.
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7. *The standards clearly address oral and written language conventions. They include Standard English conventions for sentence structure, spelling, usage, penmanship, capitalization, and punctuation.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> Oral and written language conventions are addressed, but the vertical progressions don’t always make sense, many standards are placed at inappropriate grade levels, and much of the linguistic terminology is inappropriate at the grade level it appears: e.g., grade 2: “Use adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.” Or in grade 4: “Use modal auxiliaries to convey various conditions.” And what is a grade 8 teacher to make of: “Use verbs in the active and passive voice and in the conditional and subjunctive moods to achieve particular effects”?
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> All of the above areas are adequately covered and in student- and teacher-friendly language.

8. *The standards clearly address the nature, dynamics, and history of the English language. They include the nature of its vocabulary, its structure (grammar), the evolution of its oral and written forms, and the distinction between the variability of its oral forms and the relative permanence of its written form today.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Standards on word origins and etymologies are useful. But there is nothing on the distinctions among oral dialects or between oral and written forms of English, or on the history of the English language at the secondary level. In grade 5, we find a highly inappropriate standard: “Compare and contrast the varieties of English (e.g., dialects, registers) used in stories, dramas, or poems.” This is graduate-level work.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> In grade 8, a vocabulary standard (ELA8R2.c.) expects students to “demonstrate an initial understanding of the history of the English Language.” As part of dictionary skills, students are to understand the etymologies of words. And we find in grade 11: “ELA11LSV2.1.e. Analyzes the effect of dialect and language on positive or negative stereotypes among social groups.”

9. *The standards clearly address research processes, including developing questions and locating, understanding, evaluating, synthesizing, and using various sources of information for reading, writing, and speaking assignments. These sources include dictionaries, thesauruses, other reference materials, observations of empirical phenomena, interviews with informants, and computer data bases.*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> All of the above areas seem to be adequately covered including the research processes. But students are to apply the same reading standards (“Apply grades 9–10 Reading standards”) to literature or informational texts at each grade level “to support analysis, reflection, and research.”
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 4</b> All of the above areas are adequately covered, and the research processes are developed well over the grades.

**D. Quality of the standards**

1. *They are clear, specific, and measurable (i.e., they can lead to observable, comparable results across students and schools).*

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> There are many vague standards with unclear meanings and inconsistently interpretable meanings. E.g., “Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.” What kind of texts does the writer have in mind? What will be learned if the texts address different topics? E.g., “Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.” How much and what kind of reading of world literature must precede the reading of a specific work that is to be analyzed for the author’s point of view? Thus, only some standards are measurable as is. There are also many standards with
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	inappropriate or misleading examples, e.g., informational reading standard 9, grade 6: "Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person)." This standard needs a sensible example. Moreover, in the primary grades, many standards require teachers to prompt or give guidance and support without specifying what would constitute meeting the standard independently.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Almost all of the basic standards for each grade level are interpretable, teachable, and measurable. There are simply too many of them in grades 10-12 because they include what should be separate sets of standards for American, British, world, and multicultural literature. Grades 5-12 also include a grab-bag of poorly written standards for Reading across the Curriculum. They are also unsuitable for an English class (e.g., ELA9RC2.a-f, ELA9RC3.a-c, and ELA9RC4.a-c). No English teacher should be expected to teach the vocabulary of other disciplines, nor be asked to attempt something like: "ELAALRC2.d. Evaluates the merits of texts in every subject discipline."

2. They are of increasing intellectual difficulty at each higher educational level and cover all important aspects of learning in the area they address.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> Most standards do not show meaningful increases in intellectual difficulty over the grades because they are generic skills. In addition, many grade-level standards are simply paraphrases or repetitions of the governing CCRS, especially in grades 6-8. Primary grade standards are weak because of overuse of prompting; prompted learning leaves unclear the level of independence required for student performance. In the secondary grades, they show no meaningful increases in difficulty and/or complexity through the grades related to skill development.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Most of the grade-focused standards show meaningful increases in difficulty over the grades and address the important aspects of learning in the area. The standards for American, British, World, and multicultural literature should each be used for separate end-of-course tests. The Reading across the Curriculum "standards" should be removed because they are not for an English teacher.

3. They index or illustrate growth through the grades for reading by referring to specific reading levels, to titles of specific literary or academic works as examples of a reading level, or to advanced content..

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> While the reading and literature standards only occasionally provide examples of specific texts or authors, Appendix B contains a long list of illustrative titles for each grade for the main genres. However, each grade contains too wide a range of reading levels to establish a meaningful reading level for assessment purposes, especially in grades 9, 10, and 11.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> The kinds of literary techniques and elements taught often suggest the complexity of the texts to be taught, but no lists of authors or works to suggest reading levels are given.

4. They illustrate growth expected through the grades for writing with reference to examples and rating criteria, in the standards document or in other documents.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b> Appendix C is a collection of annotated student writing samples at all grade levels. However, no rating criteria, say, on a 1 to 6 scale, are offered by grade level—a serious and puzzling omission. Based on the annotations and the compositions themselves, it is clear what the best and least developed compositions are. But it is not at all clear how teachers are to develop common expectations for where most students will be: somewhat above grade-level, about grade-level, and somewhat below grade-level performance at a particular grade level.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 0</b> No specific criteria or examples of student essays are provided.

5. Their overall contents are sufficiently specific, comprehensive, and demanding to lead to a common core of high academic expectations for all students in the state.

<b>CC</b>	<b>Rating: 1</b>
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	Common Core’s relatively content-empty reading standards cannot by themselves lead to a common core of high academic expectations because they cannot frame an academic curriculum. The basic work will have to be done at the local level unless the testing consortia pre-empt curriculum decision-making at the local level in order to develop test items with a knowledge base to which skills can be applied.
<b>GA</b>	<b>Rating: 3</b> Georgia’s standards require study of significant authors and texts in literary traditions in Georgia and in American and British literature as well as in other traditions. However, because they do not specify key groups of works and authors that outline essential substantive content for the high school English curriculum, they can be interpreted in different ways by teachers and test developers and thus fail to lead to a common core of high academic expectations for all students.

### Summary

**Table 1: Average Points per Section and Total Average for Both ELA Documents**

	<b>CC</b>	<b>GA</b>
Reading Pedagogy and Independent Reading	3.3	3.6
Value of Literary Study	1	3.6
Organization and Disciplinary Coverage of the Standards	1.7	3.6
Quality of the Standards	1.4	2.4
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>3.3</b>

As Table 1 shows, the 2008 Georgia Performance Standards in English Language Arts are superior to the Common Core State English Language Arts Standards in all four categories of criteria. The 2008 GPS are especially stronger in their organization and disciplinary coverage, in the overall quality of the standards, and in the value they place on literary study—the kind of reading that develops critical thinking.

### Two Sources of Independent Confirmation

The question that may be raised at this point is whether my ratings are valid. Are there independent points of reference that support my analysis? Fortunately, independent support comes from two sets of comments by Fordham Institute reviewers in a 2010 review.<sup>2</sup> According to the reviewers for the 2010 review of state standards by the Fordham Institute, Georgia’s former English language arts standards are clearly superior to Common Core’s standards. Below are their final comments:

“The Georgia K-12 ELA standards are better organized and easier to read than the Common Core. Essential content is grouped more logically, so that standards addressing inextricably linked characteristics, such as themes in literary texts, can be found together rather than spread across strands. The high school standards include a course devoted to “Reading and American Literature,” which provides a greater number of more detailed and rigorous expectations that address the importance of reading American literature. Georgia also more clearly specifies genre-specific writing expectations, and better prioritizes writing genres at each grade level.”

The Fordham reviewers’ comments on Common Core’s ELA standards clearly suggest they are inferior to Georgia’s ELA standards:

<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Fordham Institute, “The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010.” <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/the-state-of-state-of-standards-and-the-common-core-in-2010.html>

**“Overview:** ...They would be more helpful to teachers if they attended as systematically to content as they do to skills, especially in the area of reading...

**Clarity and Specificity:** ... The organization of the reading standards is hard to follow...They are organized into four categories... Since many kinds of texts, genres, sub-genres, and their characteristics are discussed in each category, it is also difficult to determine whether a logical sequence covering all of this important content has been achieved. ... the organization of the reading strand, as well as the instances of vague and unmeasurable language, mean that the standards do not ultimately provide sufficient clarity and detail to guide teachers and curriculum and assessment developers effectively.

**Content and Rigor:** ...The reading standards for both literature and informational text fail to address the specific text types, genres, and sub-genres in a systematic intersection with the skills they target. As written, the standards often address skills as they might apply to a number of genres and sub-genres. As a result, some essential content goes missing.

The...standards for grades 6-12 exhibit only minor distinctions across the grades, such as citing evidence “to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences from the text.” Several problems surface here. First, these standards don't properly scaffold skills from grade to grade. For example, quoting from text is arguably easier than paraphrasing, but the standards require mastery of paraphrasing first. Second, these standards are also repeated verbatim in the informational text strand, thus making no distinction between applying this skill to literary and informational text.

What's more, while some genres are mentioned occasionally in the standards, others, such as speeches, essays, and many forms of poetry, are rarely if ever mentioned by name. Similarly, many sub-genres, such as satires or epic poems, are never addressed.

Many defining characteristics of the various genres are also rarely, if ever, mentioned...Where literary elements *are* mentioned, their treatment is spotty. ...

The Writing standards include too many expectations that begin with the phrase, “With guidance and support from adults...” Such standards are problematic because they fail to adequately scaffold or clearly delineate what *students* should be able to do.

One troublesome aspect of the writing standards is the persistently blurry line between an “argument” and an “informative/explanatory essay.” ...

**Bottom Line:** ...overwhelming focus on skills over content in reading combined with confusion about the writing standards, lack of detail about oral presentations, and the sporadic rigor of the media standards.”

In addition, I would like to belie the claim that Common Core's ELA standards resemble the 2001/2004 Massachusetts ELA standards, considered one of the best sets of ELA standards in the country. One of the major justifications for Massachusetts adopting Common Core's standards in 2010, according to Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville and Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester, is the claim that specialists from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education contributed heavily to the content and shape of Common Core's ELA standards.<sup>3</sup> This claim implied that there were few differences between Common Core's ELA standards and the Bay State's ELA standards. However, the many grave flaws in Common Core's final ELA standards raise questions about the competence of Common Core's

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial\\_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/07/20/with\\_help\\_from\\_mass\\_feds\\_devise\\_sound\\_school\\_standards/?comments=all#readerComm](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/07/20/with_help_from_mass_feds_devise_sound_school_standards/?comments=all#readerComm).

ELA standards writers to use the advice they were given. Common Core's ELA standards writers did not adhere to the original wording, grade-level placement, or, in many cases, meaning of the Massachusetts ELA standards. In fact, their meaning was so often distorted by poor paraphrasing or inappropriate examples that much of the borrowed material ended up in standards that are not consistently interpretable or teachable.<sup>4</sup>

### **Discrepancies between this Report and the Georgia Department of Education in Ratings**

Readers of this report may be astonished at the huge qualitative differences between Georgia's 2008 Performance Standards in English Language Arts and Common Core's English Language Arts Standards despite the fact that they were given the same grade by the Fordham Institute. Nevertheless, these differences are independently confirmed by the comments of the reviewers for the 2010 Fordham Institute review who rated both sets of standards according to the criteria created for their review.

Readers of this report may also be puzzled by the conclusions of the staff at the Georgia Department of Education in 2011. They did their own comparison to determine how well Georgia's 2008 standards addressed what was in Common Core's standards.<sup>5</sup> Here is part of the summary of their analysis:

“Overall, ELA GPS and CCGPS are comparable in all divisions. While there are minor differences in the names of the divisions as well as the grade level expectations, the efficacy of the two sets of standards is evident. The crosswalk of the CCGPS and GPS shows how these standards are vertically aligned in each of the divisions, and it supports the transition to the CCGPS with minimal modifications to the current standards and teacher expectations.”

However, the explanation for the discrepancies between my ratings and those by the Georgia Department of Education staff is relatively easy to discover. The staff's analysis went in only one direction. They sought to show to what extent the 2008 GPS addressed what was in the Common Core. The staff did not analyze to what extent the Common Core addressed what was in the 2008 GPS. That is the source of most of the discrepancies between the staff's evaluation and Fordham's and my evaluations. If the reverse analysis had been undertaken, the staff would have noticed that literary study was being downplayed at every grade level from K-12 in Common Core. It would have noted that the 2008 GPS had thorough and first-class standards in grade 8 on Georgia authors and texts. It would also have noted, among other details, that topic sentences were mentioned in the 2008 GPS but not in Common Core. The staff may not have noticed the problems in the way the writing standards were organized in Common Core if no one on the staff had received training in rhetoric and composition.

However, it is not clear why the staff didn't note how inappropriate the exemplars for informational text in English and in other subjects in Common Core's Appendix B are for grades 9-12. See my analysis of these texts for an explanation of why so many are inappropriate.<sup>6</sup> It is

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<sup>4</sup> For details on these problems, see the Appendix in “The Emperor's New Clothes: National Assessments Based on Weak “College and Career Readiness Standards,” by Sandra Stotsky and Ze'ev Wurman, Pioneer Institute White Paper #61, May 2010. <https://app.box.com/s/q5olsax0amg0n9jygmhq>.

<sup>5</sup> “Comparison: Common Core and Georgia Performance Standards (English Language Arts and Mathematics),” Georgia Department of Education, September 1, 2011. The comparison (crosswalk) is dated June 2011 and updated in August 2011.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2000/01/Stotsky-Literature-or-Technical-Manuals.pdf>

also not clear why the staff did not flag (and comment on) the many technically-worded language standards in Common Core (such as “verb aspect”) that might be difficult for an elementary teacher to explain to children. For example,

In grade 4: “Form and use the progressive (e.g., *I was walking; I am walking; I will be walking*) verb aspects.” And: “Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.”

In grade 5: “Use verb tense and aspect to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions.” And: “Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense and aspect.”

It is also surprising that the staff did not comment on such grade-inappropriate Common Core standards as:

In grade 5: “ELACC5RI6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.”

In grade 6: “Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.” And: “Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.”

In grade 7: “ELACC7RL7: Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).”

It is also not clear how reliable the staff's own rating system necessarily is. For their comparison, the staff looked at the alignment between Common Core's reading expectations for grades 11/12 and the GPS for American literature in grade 11 and for British literature in grade 12. They rated the match as “weak,” meaning that “only minor aspects of Common Core were noted in GPS.” Yet, the reading done in survey courses on American and British literature may be very challenging. In fact, many of the exemplars of literary “complexity” for grades 11/12 in Common Core's Appendix B are the same literary works or authors studied in survey courses in grades 11/12 American and British literature courses. How could the match be rated as weak?

The omission of a comparison highlighting the many demanding literary standards in the 2008 GPS has consequences. It seems Georgia high schools have been requiring students in grades 11 and 12 to read works that are at least as difficult as those works Common Core is suggesting. But under Common Core, they may be reading easier works. We do not know yet how difficult the reading passages will be or where the cut score will be set.

**Comparison of Georgia's 2008 ELA Standards, Common Core's ELA Standards, and the Standards in the 2001 Massachusetts ELA Curriculum Framework, Grades 4, 8, and 11/12.** In Appendix B, readers will find the ELA standards from these three documents listed separately at each of these three grade levels (grades 4, 8, and 11/12). There were too many standards for a readable three-column spreadsheet. The purpose for this lengthy appendix is to show interested legislators how diverse three different sets of ELA standards at the same three grade levels can be and to help legislators gain some insight into the nature of the basic problem that Common Core's ELA standards create for the entire school curriculum. These appendices may also help legislators to understand how difficult it is to analyze and compare different sets of ELA standards. (It is

much easier to compare standards that address specific content, as for mathematics, science, or history.)

As is well-known, to do well in school, other things being equal, students must develop strong reading skills. One of the first impressions an experienced eye notices, after eye-balling the three sets of ELA standards at each of these grade levels, is how many more writing than reading standards Common Core sets forth, especially in contrast to the Massachusetts standards. In the Bay State, there are many more reading standards than writing standards, and most of them are literary reading standards. This stress is, in my judgment, one reason why Massachusetts students have had the highest averages on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in reading in both grade 4 and grade 8 since 2005. Not only have its ELA standards stressed reading more than writing, they have stressed literary reading more than informational or nonfiction reading. The reverse stress is, again in my judgment, the basic problem with Common Core; it prioritizes writing over reading, despite the fact that everything we know from decades of educational research suggests that the basis for good writing is good reading. Good writers are good readers. Not all good readers become good writers, but all good writers have been good readers. Good reading is basic to all subjects, and when tested internationally, Massachusetts students have been among the highest-achieving countries in mathematics and science.

Where does Georgia fit into this pattern? It seems to have as many writing standards as reading/literature standards in grade 4 and possibly in grade 8. But by grade 12, its previous standards clearly stressed reading (mainly literary reading) more than writing. This is the right emphasis. In addition, readers who eye-ball these various sets of standards will quickly notice something else in the Massachusetts standards. Most of the literature/reading standards are accompanied by an example that usually makes it clear what the standard means and what level of reading difficulty teachers should aim for. These copious examples were very useful to Bay State teachers. The adoption and implementation of Common Core's ELA standards represents two steps backwards for Georgia in many respects.

### **Recommendations**

These results serve as the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Georgia should re-adopt its previous standards (with some revisions spelled out below) because they are far superior to Common Core's. They emphasize reading far more than does Common Core, they stress the kind of reading (literary study) that fosters critical thinking, and they serve as far better guides to the kind of reading that secondary students in Georgia should be assigned in the school curriculum in order to be prepared for a meaningful high school diploma, whether they choose to go to an institution of higher education, go into an occupational trade, or go into the military.
2. Georgia should base its state assessments in reading and literature on its previous standards, not on Common Core's inferior English language arts standards. It would be a waste of the taxpayers' money to base state assessments on a set of standards that needs to be completely revised, if not abandoned.
3. Georgia's legislators should ask literary and humanities scholars at their own fine universities to work with a group of experienced and well-trained high school English teachers to design a readiness test in reading and literature for admission to Georgia's own colleges and universities. They should also ask engineering, science, and mathematics faculty at the University of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology to design a readiness test in mathematics and science for admission to Georgia's own higher education institutions, as well as the syllabi for the advanced

mathematics and science coursework this faculty wants to see Georgia high school students taking. Georgia can do much better than Common Core's standards or tests for these purposes. Georgia does not need federal education policy-makers (or test developers) to decide what admission requirements to Georgia's colleges and universities should be in reading, literature, mathematics, or science.

4. Before Georgia uses its previous ELA standards to guide classroom curriculum and state testing, the legislature should require them to be reviewed and vetted by experienced Georgia high school English teachers.

- a. Some standards belong at the graduate level.
- b. Some standards are repetitious, superfluous, or non-assessable.
- c. The Reading across the Curriculum (RC) standards should be removed. They are inappropriate for English teachers and English classes.
- d. All the standards for "multicultural" literature should be folded as appropriate into grade 8 or the high school courses for American, British, and world literature. High quality literary works by "multicultural" authors are part of one of these bodies of literature and should not be isolated.

## **Appendix A: The Review Form for English Language Arts Standards**

### **A. Reading Pedagogy and Independent Reading**

1. *The document expects explicit and systematic instruction in decoding skills in the primary grades as well as use of meaningful reading materials and an emphasis on comprehension.*

0 Phonics or decoding skills are not mentioned at all.

1 Phonics or decoding skills are mentioned only in the context of other strategies so that it is unlikely they are addressed independently or systematically.

3 Phonics or decoding skills are given a separate bullet or statement but there is nothing to suggest explicit and systematic teaching and independence from contextual approaches.

4 Explicit and systematic instruction in decoding skills, both independent of context and in context, is clearly suggested or spelled out.

2. *The standards make clear that interpretations of written texts should be supported by logical reasoning, accurate facts, and adequate evidence.*

0 The standards imply that all points of view or interpretations are equally valid regardless of the logic, accuracy, and adequacy of supporting evidence.

1 The standards imply that all literary texts are susceptible of many equally valid interpretations.

3 The standards indicate that interpretations of texts must be in part on what is in the texts.

4 The standards indicate that interpretations of any text must accord with what the author wrote.

3. *The document expects students to read independently through the grades and provides guidance about quality and difficulty.*

0 Independent reading isn't mentioned at all.

1 Regular independent reading is recommended but not quality, quantity, or difficulty.

## Comparison of Georgia's 2008 ELA Standards and Common Core's ELA Standards

3 Quality, quantity, or difficulty of independent reading is indicated in some way (e.g., by a list of recommended books or by a recommended number of words or books per grade).

4 Quality, quantity, and difficulty are indicated in some way.

### **B. Value Accorded Literary Study**

1. *The document expects and enables teachers to stress literary study at the secondary level.*

0 Literary standards are not distinguishable from non-literary standards.

1. Literary reading is stressed about equally with non-literary reading throughout the grades.

3 Literary reading is stressed more than non-literary reading in the ELA class only at lower grade levels.

4 Literary reading is emphasized throughout the grades.

2. *The document and the standards indicate that assigned texts should be chosen on the basis of literary quality, cultural and historical significance.*

0 The document says little or nothing about literary quality and historical significance.

1 The document expects assigned texts to be chosen on the basis of literary quality and historical significance but offers no criteria for selection, no recommended lists of authors or works, and few or no standards to guide selection based on quality and significance.

3 The document expects assigned texts to be chosen on the basis of literary quality and historical significance and provides some standards and examples to guide selection.

4 The standards clearly require assigned texts to be selected on the basis of literary quality and/or historical significance.

3. *The standards promote study of American literature.*

0 American literature is not mentioned as such in any way.

1 American literature is mentioned, but no more than that.

3 American literature is mentioned in an inclusive way.

4 American literature is described in an inclusive way and is to be studied in depth from a historical perspective.

### **C. Organization and Disciplinary Coverage of the Standards**

1. *They are grouped in categories and subcategories reflecting coherent bodies of scholarship or research in reading and the English language arts.*

0 They are mostly grouped in unique or incoherent categories or subcategories (e.g., categories reflect pedagogical strategies).

1 Some categories or subcategories reflect coherent bodies of scholarship or research.

3 Most but not all categories and subcategories reflect coherent bodies of scholarship or research.

4 All categories and subcategories reflect coherent bodies of scholarship or research.

## Comparison of Georgia's 2008 ELA Standards and Common Core's ELA Standards

*2. The standards clearly address listening and speaking. They include use of various discussion purposes and roles, how to participate in discussion, desirable qualities in formal speaking, and use of established and peer-generated criteria for evaluating formal and informal speech.*

0 Standards for listening and speaking are not included.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most but not all of the above areas are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*3. The standards clearly address reading to understand and use information through the grades. They include progressive development of reading skills, knowledge and use of a variety of textual features, genres, and reading strategies for academic, occupational, and civic purposes.*

0 Standards for informational reading are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*4. The standards clearly seek to develop strong vocabulary knowledge and dictionary skills.*

0 Vocabulary standards are not in a distinct strand or category for instruction.

1 Vocabulary standards emphasize use of context throughout the grades.

3 Vocabulary standards highlight specific figures of speech and rhetorical devices but are limited in the categories of words they highlight and stress contextual approaches.

4 Vocabulary standards teach dictionary skills, use of glossaries for discipline-specific terms, ways to use context, and all useful categories of phrases, words, or word parts (e.g., foreign words, idioms, proverbs).

*5. The standards clearly address the reading, interpretation, and critical evaluation of literature. They include knowledge of diverse literary elements and genres, different kinds of literary responses, and use of a variety of interpretive lenses. They also specify the key authors, works, and literary traditions in American literature and in the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people that should be studied for their literary quality and cultural significance.*

0 Standards for literary study are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*6. The standards clearly address writing for communication and expression. They include use of writing processes, established as well as peer-generated or personal evaluation criteria, and various rhetorical elements, strategies, genres, and modes of organization.*

0 Standards for writing for communication and expression are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.



3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*7. The standards clearly address oral and written language conventions. They include standard English conventions for sentence structure, spelling, usage, penmanship, capitalization, and punctuation.*

0 Standards for oral and written language conventions are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*8. The standards clearly address the nature, dynamics, and history of the English language. They include the origin of its vocabulary, its structure (grammar), the evolution of its oral and written forms, and the distinction between its oral and written forms today.*

0 Standards for this area are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

*9. The standards clearly address research processes, including developing questions and locating, understanding, evaluating, synthesizing, and using various sources of information for reading, writing, and speaking assignments. These sources include dictionaries, thesauruses, other reference materials, observations of empirical phenomena, interviews with informants, and computer databases.*

0 Standards for the research processes are not distinguished as such.

1 Some of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

3 Most of the above areas for coverage are addressed adequately.

4 All of the above areas are adequately covered.

#### **D. Quality of the Standards**

*1. They are clear, specific, and measurable*

0 They are vague, filled with jargon, and/or expressed in ways that are not measurable (e.g., use unmeasurable verbs like “explore,” “investigate,” “inquire,” or ask for personal experience).

1 To some extent, clear, specific, teachable, measurable, and reliably rated.

3 For the most part, clear, jargon-free, teachable, and measurable, and reliably rated.

4 Overall, they are clear, jargon-free, teachable, measurable, and reliably rated.

*2. They are of increasing intellectual difficulty at each higher educational level and cover all important aspects of learning in the area they address.*

## Comparison of Georgia's 2008 ELA Standards and Common Core's ELA Standards

0 For the most part, they show little change in difficulty over the grades, or are frequently repeated for many grades at a time.

1 Increases in difficulty may sometimes be reflected in the wording of a standard.

3 Most of the standards show meaningful increases in difficulty over the grades and address the important aspects of learning in the area.

4 Overall, the standards show educationally appropriate and meaningful increases in difficulty over the grades and cover all important aspects of learning in the area.

*3. They index or illustrate growth through the grades for reading by referring to specific reading levels or titles/authors of specific literary or academic works as examples of a reading level, or by spelling out the nature of the intellectual task required by the standard.*

0 The reading standards contain no clue as to reading level other than something like “using texts at the appropriate grade level.”

1 The reading standards are sometimes accompanied by examples of specific texts or authors.

3 The reading standards are frequently accompanied by examples of specific texts or authors or spell out more advanced content.

4 The reading standards are almost always accompanied by examples of specific texts and/or authors, or spell out the advanced content required by the standard.

*4. They illustrate growth expected through the grades for writing with reference to examples and rating criteria, in the standards document or in other documents.*

0 The document provides no criteria or samples for the quality of writing at assessed grades.

1 The document provides criteria or examples for the quality of writing at some but not all assessed grades through high school.

3 The document provides criteria or examples for the quality of writing at all assessed grades through high school.

4 The document provides examples and criteria for the quality of writing at all assessed grades, including high school.

*5. Their overall contents are sufficiently specific, comprehensive, and demanding to lead to a common core of high academic expectations for all students.*

0 No. They cannot lead to a common core of high academic expectations.

1 To some extent only.

3 For the most part.

4 Yes.