



A Students Speak Research Memo
on

Education Standards Revision

April 2026

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The content students learn is set by state level education standards, which are almost always created by adults. Many studies provide support for the claim that student choice promotes motivation and learning.¹ By providing students with a voice in setting education standards students could be provided opportunities for choice in two ways. First, some small groups of students would have a voice in actually setting education standards and working with the district to

choose curriculum. Second, students could advocate for more flexibility in the education standards which would in turn allow teachers to have more opportunity to allow for student choice in their learning.

What if students had a say in what they learned?

Only two states currently involve students in revising education standards and this policy is relatively new for both of those states. The newness of these policies along with staggered review periods has made it difficult

to gather feedback on how this process has worked so far. It is hard to document the benefits seen by including student voice and to locate input from students on this approach to revising standards. In the future, once more standards review cycles have been completed, it will be possible to obtain feedback from students who have served on standards review committees to learn about their experiences.

¹ Yuval Eshel & Revital Kohavi, Perceived Classroom Control, Self-Regulated Learning Strategies, and Academic Achievement, 23 Educ. Psychol. 249 (2003); Patricia L. Hardré & John Marshall Reeve, A Motivational Model of Rural Students' Intentions to Persist in, Versus Drop Out of, High School, 95 J. Educ. Psychol. 347 (2003).

Massachusetts Law

Massachusetts law states that “[t]he board [of education] shall establish a set of statewide educational goals for all public elementary and secondary schools in the commonwealth.”² To effectuate these goals, the “board shall direct the commissioner to institute a process to develop academic standards.” The law also requires that

The standards shall be formulated so as to set high expectations of student performance and to provide clear and specific examples that embody and reflect these high expectations, and shall be constructed with due regard to the work and recommendations of national organizations, to the best of similar efforts in other states, and to the level of skills, competencies and knowledge possessed by typical students in the most educationally advanced nations. The skills, competencies and knowledge set forth in the standards shall be expressed in terms which lend themselves to objective measurement, define the performance outcomes expected of both students directly entering the workforce and of students pursuing higher education, and facilitate comparisons with students of other states and other nations.³

Although the above text would not restrict student membership, the requirements to regard recommendations of national organizations and to express standards in terms which lend themselves to objective measurement may restrict the extent to which student input could change education standards in a meaningful way.

Unlike curriculum framework development, which requires a process that is “open and consultative” and “may include but need not be limited to classroom teachers, parents, faculty of schools of education, and leading college and university figures in both subject matter disciplines and pedagogy” the development of standards includes no such requirement.⁴

The state of Massachusetts does not have a regularly set review period for education standards. Instead, the standards are reviewed

² Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 69, § 1d (2025) (Statewide Educational Goals; Academic Standards; Vocational Training; Grant Program).

³ Id.

⁴ Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 69, § 1e (2025) (Curriculum Frameworks).

on an as-needed basis. Standards are reviewed in three phases. First, DESE uses surveys to engage stakeholders in gathering recommendations for revision.⁵ However, most of these stakeholders work in education.⁶ Of the surveys completed, less than 15% were from parents, people from businesses or non-profits, or “other” groups.⁷ The remaining surveys were from people who work in schools, people in higher ed, DESE staff, or school committee members.⁸

The second phase of standards revision involves having “content advisors” use the survey data to make revision recommendations.⁹ These advisors are K-12 educators, professors, and content support specialists. During the third and final phase, DESE uses the feedback from the content advisors to create draft standards to be proposed to the state board of education. These draft standards are then subject to public comment before revision and final adoption.¹⁰

CURATE is a board of teachers and experts that review education standards and make reports to the commonwealth to “consult and make informed, local decisions about curricula”.¹¹ CURATE looks for “high-quality curricular materials” which they have defined as being “rigorous,” “engaging,” and “inclusive.” Student involvement with CURATE may be an avenue for voice in curriculum decisions.

Model Laws

Only two states include student voice in setting education standards. Colorado passed a law in 2023 requiring students at the state level to review education standards and at the regional and local level to choose curriculum. Oregon also includes student voice in reviewing education standards, but only for social studies.

⁵ Jill Norton, Sarah Ballinger & Jennifer Ash, Abt Assocs., Massachusetts English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks Review (Oct. 13, 2016), at 5.

⁶ Id. at 14.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id. at 2.

¹⁰ Id. at i.

¹¹ Mass. Dep’t of Elementary & Secondary Educ., CURriculum RATings by TEachers (CURATE), <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html> (last updated Dec. 26, 2025).

Colorado

Colorado law requires the state board of education to create K-12 education standards, which are then revised every six years.¹² Stakeholders must be engaged in the process of adopting and revising education standards.¹³ Students must also be involved in the standards review process starting in the 2024 revision cycle.¹⁴

The 2024 requirement to include students was created by SB23-008.¹⁵ This bill requires student involvement at the local, regional and state levels. The education commissioner “shall appoint youth representatives” to each content standards revision committee.¹⁶ The law is silent on a set number of students that may be appointed. Currently, math is the only content undergoing revision and one student is on the review committee.¹⁷ The youth are able to receive a stipend for their service to offset costs.¹⁸

Colorado law also requires a minimum of two youth representatives at regional educator meetings.¹⁹ Students are nominated to attend these meetings by school and appointed to attend by the education commissioner.²⁰ These regional educator meetings include teachers, school board members, administrators, and postsecondary faculty and administrators. The purpose of the meetings is to “collaborat[e] in the planning, design, and implementation of the alignment of the preschool through postsecondary public education systems.”²¹ This planning includes postsecondary and workforce readiness, programs of instruction, assessment, and school support services.²²

¹² Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-7-1005 (2024) (Preschool Through Elementary and Secondary Education—Aligned Standards—Adoption—Revisions).

¹³ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-7-1010 (2024) (State Board—Commission—Public Input—Staff Assistance).

¹⁴ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-1-104.1 (2024).

¹⁵ S.B. 23-008, 74th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2023).

¹⁶ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-1-104.1 (2024).

¹⁷ Colo. Dep’t of Educ., Standards Review and Revision—Mathematics, <https://ed.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/casreviewandrevision/group3-mathematicscommittee> (last visited May 4, 2026).

¹⁸ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-1-104.1 (2024).

¹⁹ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-7-1011 (2024) (Regional Educator Meetings—Purpose—Recommendations).

²⁰ Id.

²¹ Id.

²² Id.

Colorado law also requires local education providers (school districts) to appoint two youth to review local standards and curriculum.²³ These youth are appointed from nominations by their schools.²⁴ The law also allows for youth to be reimbursed for any expenses they incur in service to their school district.²⁵

Oregon

Oregon law requires a “public school student from grade nine through twelve” on the social studies review committee.²⁶ The law regarding the revision of social studies standards also requires representation from a recent graduate, a “parent of a public school student,” an education advocate, and a voting rights advocate. Although student representation is cabined to social studies, this could be a starting point if the legislature is hesitant to allow youth to review all standards.

Conclusion

Both Colorado and Oregon have novel approaches to student voice in revising education standards. Oregon has a much more narrow approach, which could appeal to a legislature as a starting point. Colorado went all in on student voice in what students learn—placing students at the state, regional, and local levels of standards and curriculum decision making. No matter which approach is chosen, it will be important to ensure structures are in place for the chosen students to speak with and receive feedback from other students so that they can help to create standards to ensure relevant learning for all students.

²³ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-7-1013 (2024) (Local Education Provider—Preschool Through Elementary and Secondary Education Standards—Adoption—Academic Acceleration).

²⁴ Id.

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 30, Ch. 329, Refs & Annos (West)