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Common Core State Standards Drive Curriculum and Instruction

For the past two years curriculum teams in the Plainville Community Schools have been examining the newly adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and revising curriculum documents to ensure that every student will have ample opportunities to practice the skills and apply the knowledge necessary to leave our schools prepared for the challenges of college and career.

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards were developed with the collaboration of teachers, school administrators, and experts in order to provide a clear, comprehensive, and consistent framework to prepare students across the country for college and the workforce. To date, 46 of the 50 states have adopted these standards, and the next generation of state testing will be based on the CCSS.

In reading, the standards establish a "staircase" of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read. As they read more complex text they are also developing their comprehension skills so that they gain more understanding from the material they read. The focus is on informational text (non-fiction) as well as literary text (primarily fiction) in order to promote the skills of reading beyond literature. Science and social studies teachers will also engage their students in reading complex, primary source texts in order to build students' skills in reading and comprehending more technical writings.

The ability to write logical arguments, supported by sound reasoning and relevant evidence, is a key component of the writing standards. Opinion writing begins as early as kindergarten and increases in complexity as students progress through the grades. Research – both short focused projects similar to those commonly required in the workplace, and more extended projects – is emphasized throughout the standards. Vocabulary development as well as the mechanics of writing and speaking are woven throughout the standards for English/language arts and will apply to teachers of science and social studies as well.

Speaking and listening is also a component of the CCSS as students are expected to gather, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media. These presentations may occur in academic discussions, in one-on-one conversations, as well as through formal presentations.

The mathematics standards begin with a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals in grades kindergarten through five. Students in kindergarten through grade two will focus their learning on understanding and making sense of the ways numbers work, learning how to put numbers together and take them apart. Addition and subtraction, along with a strong understanding of place value are the major foci for kindergarten through second grade. Third through fifth grade students navigate through multiplication and division, fractions, negative numbers, and geometry.

The standards stress procedural skills as well as a deep conceptual understanding in order to lay the foundation for higher learning in geometry, algebra, probability and statistics. A focus on practical application of mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges begins in the middle school and extends through high school, where students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations as college students and employees regularly do.

In Plainville, we are continuing our shift in curriculum and instruction necessary to meet the expectations of the Common Core State Standards. It is our hope and expectation that our students will leave us better prepared to meet the demands of college and career as a result of these efforts.