New Standards Change Classrom Curriculum

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Common Core has become a household phrase for those involved with the school district. Across the nation schools are adopting more rigorous curriculum, and changing the way information is presented in the classroom. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is the name for the national education movement, but Kodiak Superintendent Stewart McDonald said not all states were required to adopt those specific standards.

“They had to have standards as rigorous as the common core state standards or their equivalent. And some standards opted to go with their equivalent. The new Alaska standards are essentially the common core standards with some significant differences. In language arts they made some adjustments in the earlier grades to make sure that developmentally those standards were appropriate. But in mathematics, the new Alaska standards that are common core based are actually arranged differently and broken into a better sequence through kindergarten through fifth grade. But after that they are essentially t he same thing as the common core state standards.”

Jenny Schauf is the curriculum coordinator for the district and said the idea is that each grade level builds upon the one before, and students will be required to demonstrate knowledge learned in all previous grades, in addition to whatever they are learning for a particular academic year.

“So if you look at the kindergarten standards in reading, for example, standard one in reading is looking at text based evidence. At the twelfth grade level it is also looking at text based evidence, but it’s scaffolded. So at an early level the foundational skills are put into place so kids are specifically taught or expected to learn certain things so that when they get into the upper grade levels they are allowed to focus more on the content and not the foundational skills that are needed.”

While the federal or state government isn’t mandating how things are taught in a classroom, the new standards are definitely shaking up the way information needs to be presented in order for students to meet the new requirements. McDonald said teachers are having to rethink how they help students understand subject matter because they will have to demonstrate the knowledge in different ways.

“So if a standard only asks for you to use rote memorization: know something or actually write a sentence that contains a noun and a verb, that sort of thing, than all you’re doing is, the level of instruction is – well, like the level of instruction we all received growing up. But when the standard itself is asking for higher level application to demonstrate meeting the standard, it’s the game changer. This is what is significantly different about these new standards. They ask for things to be measured in their application. Not just do you know, but can you actually apply it, and then to what degree are you applying it.”

He said the shift toward this type of learning and testing has been coming to the whole state for some time, and Kodiak has been slowly implementing it in various grade levels.

“The communication between the state and school districts over the last couple years has been tough. It’s not been real clear. There hasn’t been a single piece of paper, outlining and bulleting the requirements in a very plain, user-friendly way to read it and communicate with the public. So most people and most school districts in the state think that this is stuff each district is dreaming up, or they’ll find a district that hasn’t decided to move on these things yet and they’ll say well that district isn’t doing it so why do we have to. Well I mentioned procrastination, I believe if people don’t like what’s happening here today, what’s happening in those districts that are waiting will even be worse.”

McDonald said Kodiak has had to fast track these teaching and learning methods into the classroom because now the federal government is looking to measure how students are doing with common core. He said students will be taking pilot tests this spring that will do just that.

While the new state and national standards have certainly changed curriculum for students, they’ve also changed how that curriculum is graded. Tune in to KMXT’s newscasts tomorrow to hear more from Superintendent Stewart McDonald about grading policies have changed, and how teachers are adapting.