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August 26, 2008

Dr. Veronica Garcia  
Secretary of Education  
New Mexico Public Education Department  
Jerry Apodaca Education Building  
300 Don Gaspar  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Dr. Garcia:

Achieve has completed its final Quality Review of the alignment of the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments with the American Diploma Project (ADP) Benchmarks. The primary purpose of this final review is to ensure that the state's academic standards for exiting high school align with the expectations for success in college and career. The ADP Benchmarks to which these New Mexico standards were compared represent the knowledge and skills required for successful entry into credit-bearing college courses and quality jobs. A secondary purpose of this review is to ensure that the New Mexico standards meet the criteria of high quality standards that include rigor, coherence, focus, specificity, clarity/accessibility, and measurability.

**The New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts with proposed amendments present student-learning expectations that are intellectually demanding and are well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks.** If New Mexico students master the state standards, they will likely be well prepared for both workplace and college success.

### Summary of Findings

- The *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts with proposed amendments are well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks*. The revisions enhance the rigor of the standards and their alignment with the ADP Benchmarks in all areas including Language, Communication, Writing, Research, Logic, Informational Text, Media, and Literature. Prior gaps in expectations for student learning from grades 9 – 12 have been addressed, thus ensuring that teachers have a coherent view of the development of student performance across four years.

- *The New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts with proposed amendments are organized in a manner that highlights the essential elements of the standards.* The state adopted the ADP organizing strands of Language, Communication, Writing, Research, Logic, Informational Text, Media, and Literature--and added a strand entitled Reading. This new organization of the standards conveys a streamlined and unified vision of the discipline and focuses attention on the most important elements of the expectations.
- *The New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts with proposed amendments exhibit the criteria of high quality standards.* The New Mexico standards fare well against Achieve's other criteria in addition to rigor: Coherence, focus, specificity, clarity/accessibility, and measurability. Reviewers particularly cited the specificity and clarity of the Performance Indicators as contributing to the overall accessibility and measurability of the standards over time.

In conclusion, by successfully completing these standards, New Mexico has taken an important step to better prepare young people for success in postsecondary education and in their careers. My Achieve colleagues and I look forward to continuing to support your efforts to ensure that New Mexico's students are prepared for the real world demands they will face upon graduation.

Regards,



Laura Slover  
Vice President for Content & Policy Research,  
Achieve

LMS:jg  
Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Bill Richardson  
Governor

Dr. Reed Dasenbrock  
Secretary of Higher Education

Mr. Larry Langley  
President and CEO, New Mexico Business Roundtable for Educational Excellence

Dr. Pauline Ridone  
Director, Legislative Education Study Committee

## **New Mexico Achieve Quality Review II Detailed Comments from English Language Arts Review Panel Enclosure**

### Documents Reviewed

To evaluate the rigor, coherence, focus, specificity, clarity/accessibility, and measurability of the standards, Achieve reviewers considered the April 2008 *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* and Performance Indicators, a description of the state's revision process, and a Crosswalk of the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with the New Mexico Career Technical Work Ready Standards dated April 21, 2008. Achieve's Quality Review I of the New Mexico standards and side-by-side of the state's standards to the ADP English Benchmarks was also included in the reviewers' materials.

In this final Quality Review (Phase II), Achieve focused primarily on how the proposed amendments to the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* and Performance Indicators align with the Achieve ADP Benchmarks for English. Achieve also considered how the revised standards meet the criteria for quality standards including rigor, focus, coherence, specificity, clarity/accessibility, and measurability.

In Quality Review I of November 2007, the Achieve reviewers regarded the *New Mexico Language Arts Content Standards, Benchmarks and Performance Standards* as generally well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks with only minor exceptions, if the amendments to the standards proposed at that time were adopted. In addition, the organization of the New Mexico Standards presented some issues of focus because crucial elements of informational text, logic, and research were not highlighted, as they should be. The changes suggested at that time to the organizational structure would also serve to make the expectations more specific and measurable, thus establishing more clearly the concepts and skills that should be acquired by graduation from high school. It was also recommended that the state review its proposed amendments to guarantee that progression from grade to grade was clear.

New Mexico explained in its summary of their revision process that:

The work completed for Achieve's Quality Review II was done with two key overarching considerations:

- measurability, clarity, and understandability in the way content standards and performance indicators were stated for facility of implementation by teachers
- rigor within the contexts of necessity and relevance for New Mexico as a majority-minority state with its unique demographics

These considerations are completely in line with the prior Achieve recommendations, and are amply accomplished in the April 2008 *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments.

Review Panel Comments

- **The revised *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments are well aligned to the ADP Benchmarks.**

The ADP Benchmarks and the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments are now well aligned. The minor differences noted in the November 2007 Quality Review I have been resolved in this latest revision. The new Performance Indicators provide effective specifications of the standards. For example, in the 2007 review, the state was encouraged to amplify its criteria for effective work-related texts. The new Performance Indicators not only address this issue very well but also include elements that provide strong criteria in addition to those included in the ADP Benchmark, such as the ability to access and send information electronically.

**New Mexico.C9.** Produce effective work-related texts such as business letters, resumes, biographies, job applications, work procedures, work orders, and briefs.

**Performance Indicators: Grades 9 – 12**

- Address audience needs and state purpose and context in an efficient manner.
- Demonstrate proficiency in accessing and sending information electronically.
- Follow conventions of work-place writing with business letter and memo formats.
- Make use of appropriate writing strategies, such as creating a visual hierarchy, using white space and graphics as appropriate, and providing smooth transitions between sections or steps of the text.
- Include relevant information and exclude extraneous information.
- Anticipate problems, mistakes, and misunderstandings that might arise for the reader.
- Include necessary dates and other essential identifying information.

In a similar manner, may other ADP Benchmarks have been extended and sequenced by the state's Performance Indicators in order to support the progression of the standards, as in the following example:

**ADP.E3.** Describe the structure of a given argument; identify its claims and evidence; and evaluate connections among evidence, inferences and claims.

**New Mexico.E3.** Describe the structure of a given argument; identify its claims and evidence; and evaluate connections among evidence, inferences, and claims.

Gr	Performance Indicators
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify the structure of a multi-faceted argument.</li><li>• Examine texts for multi-faceted arguments, citing a stated main claim or conclusion and explicit or inferred evidence.</li><li>• In a multifaceted argument, cite a main claim and explicit or inferred evidence that</li></ul>

	supports it.
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze elements of deductive and inductive arguments.</li> <li>Explain the different ways premises support conclusions in deductive and inductive arguments.</li> <li>Create responses to arguments that evaluate problems and offer solutions or alternative recommendations.</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and analyze personal, social, historical, or cultural influences, contexts, or biases.</li> <li>Identify and analyze rhetorical strategies that support proposals.</li> <li>Evaluate connections between claims, supporting evidence, and the development of an argument.</li> <li>Evaluate evidence for timeliness, relevance, and believability.</li> </ul>
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine the significance and predict the possible consequences of a speaker's arguments, conclusions, and proposals</li> </ul>

New Mexico has done an outstanding job of building on the ADP Benchmarks and amplifying them in a manner that assures that state's new standards are specific, measurable, and rigorous and show a clear progression in demand through the grade levels.

- The *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments are organized in a manner that highlights the essential elements of the standards.**

The prior standards document was organized into three strands:

- Reading and Listening for Comprehension (RL)
- Writing and Speaking for Expression (WS) and
- Literature and Media (LM)

Not only were many standards included in each strand inconsistent with that strand's focus, but the organization also resulted in considerable redundancy. It also obscured important elements of the proposed revised standards such as logic, research, and informational texts—new expectations that were not well accommodated under the old organization structure. The state adopted the ADP organizing strands of Language, Communication, Writing, Research, Logic, Informational Text, Media, and Literature. To these ADP strands, an additional strand entitled Reading was added. In the introduction to this strand, the following rationalization for its inclusion is explained:

As a majority-minority state, New Mexico has an ethnically and multi-culturally diverse student population for whom reading proficiency at grade level cannot be assumed. This reality lies at the core of the rationale to add the new strand of READING to the state English standards. Making the instruction of reading explicit through its incorporation into state standards may be one important means of ensuring such instruction for students in all grade levels.

This strand includes four standards:

- A1** Know how to use comprehension strategies for unfamiliar vocabulary.
- A2** Know how to comprehend the message or meaning of a text.
- A3** Know how to infer, analyze, and synthesize.
- A4** Know how to use meta-cognitive strategies.

As the New Mexico standards are intended to support instruction as well as to describe the outcomes for its students, it is quite appropriate and wise for the state to include such elements in its materials.

Without question, the new organization of the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments conveys a unified vision of the discipline and serves to focus attention on major aspects of the expectations.

- **The *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments exhibit the criteria of high quality standards.**

In addition to rigor, Achieve has several other criteria for high quality standards, which include coherence, focus, specificity, clarity/accessibility, and measurability. Reviewers particularly cited the specificity and clarity of the Performance Indicators as contributing to the overall accessibility and measurability of the standards over time.

### Conclusion

The *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments present student learning expectations that are intellectually demanding and well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks. The revisions to the prior draft respond clearly to all of the major issues raised in Achieve's Quality Review I, and the document is now a strong, rigorous, specific, and clear communication of the state's high expectations for its students. When the state places the *New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts* with proposed amendments into rule within the *New Mexico Standards for Excellence*, it will have a set of standards that will ensure that New Mexico's students are prepared for the real world demands they will face upon graduation.