

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Scope of Work

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) contracted WestEd to conduct a review of Colorado's K–12 Model Content Standards (MCS). The findings and recommendations from this review are intended to inform decision-making by the CDE during its standards revision process. Periodic standards review is critical to help ensure that the content (skills, knowledge) students are expected to learn reflects the changing priorities, needs, and values of the state and society more broadly, and continues to prepare students for the challenges they will face in successive grades or postsecondary endeavors.

This standards review consists of three phases, each focusing on a different set of content areas:

- Phase I: Review of the MCS in reading and writing, mathematics, science, and music were examined (completed in Winter 2009).
- Phase II: Review of MCS in civics, economics, geography, history, and financial literacy (completed in Spring 2009).
- Phase III: Review of MCS in world languages (foreign language), physical education, visual arts, dance, and theatre (completed in Summer 2009 and described in this report).

### Organization of the Report

This report presents the methodology, findings, and recommendations for Phase III of the standards review. As with the Phase I and Phase II reports, the complete report for Phase III is organized as follows:

- **Section I: Introduction.** The background and purpose for the study.
- **Section II: Methodology.** The processes used and criteria applied during each step in Phase III are described.
- **Section III: Content Area Findings and Recommendations.** Study findings analysis, and specific recommendations for improvement are presented by content area.
- **Section IV: References.** References and documents reviewed in the analysis.
- **Section V: Appendices.** Ratings and comments from analysts are provided for each standard in all grades for each content area.

### Overview of the Methodology

The standards review involves the following three components:

- Review of the **internal quality** to determine the degree to which the standards demonstrate depth, coherence, rigor, and breadth.
- Review and comparison of respected **external referent** standards to better understand overall strengths and limitations of the MCS, with particular attention paid to the organization/structure and content of the standards.

- Analysis of the degree to which the MCS contain the skills described in Colorado’s draft **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and Abilities** (21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills) and definition of **Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness** (PWR Skills), and are amenable to their inclusion. This analysis is intended to help integrate the state’s two initiatives of the revision of the MCS and the development of definitions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and readiness for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Key to the review, across all components listed, are the objective, third-party analysis and subsequent recommendations related to improving the quality of the MCS. Outcomes of the review are intended to inform and guide the work of those revising Colorado’s standards.

The WestEd analysts who conducted the Phase III MCS review possess extensive knowledge and skills in standards review and development, in their respective content areas (i.e., world languages [foreign language], physical education, visual arts, dance, and theatre), K–12 curriculum, instruction, assessment, and alignment, as well as experience in the classroom. These analysts were trained in specific protocols designed to (1) articulate and operationalize the criteria and processes used to judge internal quality, and (2) ensure the accuracy and consistency of the application of the criteria across content areas. The protocols and related criteria were applied systematically to each MCS standard, at both the grade span and cross-grade span levels.

For the review of **internal quality**, the specific criteria applied to the analysis of each standard were as follows:

- *Depth*: Do the benchmarks describe content of sufficient and appropriate depth in the standard *within each grade span*? Do the benchmarks describe content of sufficient and appropriate depth in the standard *across the grade spans*?
- *Coherence*: Are the benchmarks for each standard sequenced appropriately across the grade spans? Do the benchmarks begin and end at appropriate points in the content?
- *Rigor*: Do the benchmarks describe content and skill expectations of a reasonable and appropriate level for this grade span? Do the standards and benchmarks communicate an appropriate level of rigor?
- *Breadth*: Do the benchmarks describe sufficient and appropriate breadth of content across standards *within each grade span*? Do the benchmarks contain the essential content for this subject *within and across grade spans*? If not, what content is missing? Are the benchmarks free from extraneous content *within and across grade spans*? If not, what content is extraneous?

The standards were rated as meeting each criterion (Depth, Coherence, Rigor, Breadth) according to the following designations: Fully, Partially, No, Insufficient Information.

Additionally, analysts provided comments that explained their rationale for ratings, as appropriate.

For the analysis of the **external referent** standards, the following criteria were used:

- *Organization/Structure* — Similarities and differences in (1) *grade articulation*; (2) *hierarchy of standards*; (3) *number of standards*; and (4) *design/format*.
- *Content* — Similarities and differences in (1) *standards scope and sequence*; (2) *grade spans*; and (3) *wording*.

For each criterion (Organization/Structure, Content), analysts recorded a holistic rating reflecting the similarity of the external referent standards to the MCS (i.e., as Similar or Different). Analysts also provided descriptive comments, rationale, and evidence related to the specific similarities and differences observed between the standards compared.

For the examination of Colorado’s draft **21st Century Skills** and definition of **PWR Skills**,<sup>1</sup> analysts used the following ratings to reflect the degree to which evidence of one or more 21<sup>st</sup> Century or PWR Skills was present in each MCS: Fully Present, Partially Present, Not Present. No rating was recorded if a 21<sup>st</sup> Century or PWR Skill was not reflected in a standard and that standard was not judged to be an appropriate fit for a skill.

The outcomes of this review have both standard-specific and cross-standard implications for the CDE’s consideration during its MCS revision process. It is intended to provide the CDE with an objective analysis and recommendations that can inform and guide the work of those revising Colorado’s standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Because PWR Skills represent skills required after high school, the review was limited to the 9–12 grade span and did not include the elementary or middle grades.