



MOUNTAIN HOME SCHOOL DISTRICT 193

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Dear Parent,

This fall, your child's teacher will begin teaching to higher academic standards in mathematics and English language arts. These standards are not only higher but also comparable with any other country in the world. This will bring changes, but we are ready for them. We also are excited for the opportunities these new standards bring for both our students and our community.

The new Idaho Core Standards were adopted after a state-led effort referred to as the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Through this initiative, state governors and education chiefs came together to find a solution to a common problem all states are facing today: while students are performing well academically in grades K-12, too many students are graduating from high school unprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education or the workforce. This challenge is all too real in Idaho, where just 46 percent of Idaho's high school graduates go on to postsecondary education and, of those, nearly half must take remedial courses. At a district level, we have worked to address this challenge in several ways, and we are pleased to see it being addressed on a state level through raising academic standards in all grades.

These standards, just like standards in every other content area, are the goals the state has set for what every child should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. Our local school district will still determine the curriculum that will be best to help teach these standards in the classroom. As a parent, we hope you will stay involved and help us as we begin reviewing and selecting the curriculum that is best for our students and community.

Here is a look at how the standards will change in English Language Arts and Literacy:

First, you will see a better balance between fiction and non-fiction in your child's assignments. Classic literature, stories, and poems will continue to be taught in English classes. However, these standards now include an emphasis on literacy in other subject areas, such as science and social studies, as well. Therefore, students will not only learn how to read, write and analyze fictional texts in English class but also will learn these critical skills when working with non-fiction and informational texts in other subject areas. As a result, students will graduate from high school prepared to read, write and analyze all types of texts, whether they are fiction, non-fiction, or informational texts.

Second, your child will be asked to use evidence from the text when writing papers or making oral presentations. In all classes, the standards will require students to not only read the text but also dig into it to support their arguments or research. As a result, students will be better prepared to support their arguments and decisions with evidence, not just opinion, whether they are in college or the workforce.

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Third, you will see an increased focus on vocabulary across all grade levels. As a result, students will continue to learn new vocabulary words as they progress through school as well as the correct context in which to use them. This is more important than ever in the 21st Century as students live and work in the digital age and encounter new words and terms constantly.

Here is a look at how the standards will change in Mathematics:

First, students will work more deeply in fewer topics. In each grade level, your child's teacher will cover fewer concepts than in the past but go into much more depth on each concept. This makes sure every student gains a full understanding before moving on to the next concept. As a result, your child will gain a full and foundational understanding of mathematics before moving on to the next grade level.

Second, your child will understand why math works, and be asked to talk about and prove their understanding. Students will no longer just memorize formulas but will learn why a particular formula exists. As a result, students will learn critical foundational concepts and problem-solving skills in the early grades so they are prepared for higher levels of math, such as algebra, once they reach the middle grades.

Third, your child will be asked to use math in real-world situations. Students will not just memorize formulas or methods but will learn strategies for solving problems they could encounter in life. As a result, students will gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills while in school that they can apply in postsecondary education and the workforce.

These are just some of the changes you will see as a result of the implementation of these new standards. We know that the transition will not happen overnight, and we hope you will help us in our efforts.

We also need your help in making sure every child is prepared for these higher academic standards. Idaho will transition to a new statewide assessment to measure students against the new Idaho Core Standards in Spring 2015. Because the standards are higher, we know it will take students a few years to master these new standards and reach grade-level proficiency. Therefore, in Spring 2015, we will see a drop in the number of students reaching grade level. It is not because our students woke up one day and were not as smart as the day before. It is because we are holding them to a higher standard, which is a good thing for every child and their future.

Here are a few ways we encourage every parent to get involved.

- Talk to your child's teacher about what changes you can expect to see in the classroom and ask for their advice on how you can help at home.
- Call us to see how you can help the district as it begins reviewing and selecting curriculum to meet these new academic standards.
- Support your child as they face this more rigorous content in the next school year and beyond. It will be new and different, and we encourage every parent to stay involved and active in their child's education!

Sincerely,



Tim W. McMurtrey
Superintendent

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