

# Emphases in Common Core Standards for Mathematical Content Kindergarten – High School

March 12, 2012

## *Content Emphases by Cluster*

Describes content emphases in the standards at the cluster level for each grade. These are provided because curriculum, instruction and assessment at each grade must reflect the focus and emphasis of the standards.

Not all of the content in a given grade is emphasized equally in the standards. The list of content standards for each grade is not a flat, one-dimensional checklist; this is by design. There are sometimes strong differences of emphasis even within a single domain. Some clusters require greater emphasis than the others based on the depth of the ideas, the time that they take to master, and/or their importance to future mathematics or the demands of college and career readiness. In addition, an intense focus on the most critical material at each grade allows depth in learning, which is carried out through the Standards for Mathematical Practice. Without such focus, attention to the practices would be difficult and unrealistic, as would best practices like formative assessment.

Therefore, to make relative emphases in the standards more transparent and useful, the NY Math Emphases designate clusters as Major, Additional and Supporting for the grade in question.

To say that some things have greater emphasis is not to say that anything in the standards can safely be neglected in instruction. Neglecting material will leave gaps in student skill and understanding and may leave students unprepared for the challenges of a later grade. The assessments will mirror the message that is communicated here: Major Clusters will be a majority of the assessment, Supporting Clusters will be assessed through their success at supporting the Major Clusters and Additional Clusters will be assessed as well. The assessments will strongly focus where the standards strongly focus.

In addition to identifying the Major, Additional and Supporting Clusters for each grade, suggestions are given in each grade for ways to connect the Supporting Clusters to the Major Clusters of the grade. Thus, rather than suggesting even inadvertently that some material not be taught, there is direct advice for teaching it in ways that foster greater focus and coherence.

Finally, the following are some recommendations for using the cluster-level emphases:

### **Do ...**

- Use the guidance to inform instructional decisions regarding time and other resources spent on clusters of varying degrees of emphasis.
- Allow the focus on the major work of the grade to open up the time and space to bring the Standards for Mathematical Practice to life in mathematics instruction through sense-making, reasoning, arguing and critiquing, modeling, etc.

- Evaluate instructional materials taking the cluster-level emphases into account. The major work of the grade must be presented with the highest possible quality; the supporting work of the grade should indeed support the major focus, not detract from it.
- Set priorities for other implementation efforts taking the emphases into account, such as staff development; new curriculum development; or revision of existing formative or summative testing at the state, district or school level.

**Don't ...**

- Neglect any material in the standards. (Instead, use the information provided to connect Supporting Clusters to the other work of the grade.)
- Sort clusters from Major to Supporting, and then teach them in that order. To do so would strip the coherence of the mathematical ideas and miss the opportunity to enhance the major work of the grade with the supporting clusters.
- Use the cluster headings as a replacement for the standards. All features of the standards matter — from the practices to surrounding text to the particular wording of individual content standards. Guidance is given at the cluster level as a way to talk about the content with the necessary specificity yet without going so far into detail as to compromise the coherence of the standards.

**Explanations of terms used:**

**Major clusters** – areas of intensive focus, where students need fluent understanding and application of the core concepts (approximately 70%).

**Supporting clusters** – rethinking and linking; areas where some material is being covered, but in a way that applies core understandings (approximately 20%).

**Additional Clusters** – expose students to other subjects, though at a distinct, level of depth and intensity (approximately 10%).