

How to Develop Effective Core Course Objectives to Support Selection of District-Determined Measures

As a first step in the process of identifying [Example District-Determined Measures](#) (DDMs), ESE partnered with WestEd to convene expert educators from across the Commonwealth to develop Core Course Objectives (CCOs) for over 100 grades/subjects and courses. CCOs guided WestEd's assessments experts as they considered the content alignment of various assessments for inclusion in ESE's collection of Example DDMs. This document was developed as a resource for use by district administrators and other stakeholders who might be interested in employing the CCO development process to as they continue the work of identifying DDMs that are aligned with the Curriculum Frameworks.

The following questions are addressed in the sections that follow:

- What are Core Course Objectives?
- What steps might a district follow to develop Core Course Objectives in particular grades/subjects and courses?

The sets of CCOs that emerge from this district-led process will help administrators focus on the content to which a promising assessment should align in order to serve as a meaningful measure of teacher impact on student learning.

What are Core Course Objectives?

CCOs are statements that describe elements of core, essential, or high priority content (knowledge, skills, or abilities) that have been drawn or synthesized from a larger set of curriculum standards and/or other types of resources documents. CCOs can help guide the selection of high quality DDMs by clarifying the key knowledge, skills, and abilities that are the most appropriate to measure.

High-quality CCOs meet the following criteria:

- **Centrality:** *A high quality CCO describes a critically important concept, skill, or ability that is central to the domain for the course or school year.*
- **Assess-ability:** *A high-quality CCO describes knowledge, skills, or abilities that can be assessed.*
- **Scope:** *A high quality CCO may describe an overarching learning goal.*
- **Relevance:** *A high quality CCO represents knowledge, skills, and abilities that are consistent with Massachusetts' values and goals.*

Overall, a high quality set of CCOs embodies the knowledge, skills, and abilities that teachers agree should be included as part of instruction in that subject, grade, or course.

What steps might a district follow to develop Core Course Objectives in particular grades/subjects or courses?

Massachusetts districts seeking to develop CCOs may find it helpful to follow the series of steps described below. These recommendations are based on lessons learned during the development of model CCOs in summer 2013 by more than 230 Commonwealth educators.

1. **Identify the DDM Team.** Each district will want to identify a team of five to eight individuals who will be responsible for coordinating the work of developing new CCOs. A diverse group of educators, curriculum and assessment leaders, instructional leaders, and administrators can be engaged in this work. Each nominee should bring unique expertise in the grade, content area, and/or course for which the DDMs will be developed, and ideally will represent different schools, geographic areas, and student populations.
2. **Gather Resources.** The DDM team will gather certain types of information to help guide their decision-making. These resources will include the most relevant Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, as well as other content-focused documents such as standards from other states or jurisdictions, district-level curriculum guides or maps, course descriptions, syllabi, or scope and sequence documents.
3. **Synthesize Information.** CCO developers will use information from these sources to develop 10-15 statements, each with the “just right” level of detail so it is focused enough to be useful in identifying a promising DDM. For grades, subjects, and courses for which highly detailed curriculum frameworks are in place, CCO statements may subsume a number of more detailed statements in the larger standards documents.
4. **Review and Refine.** Team members will want to consider the following criteria as they review the sets of CCOs that are emerging from their work:
 - **Format:** Are all CCOs in this set presented in a *consistent format*? Each CCO should consist of one or two complete sentences, starting with “Students” followed by an action verb (e.g., identify, create, or connect). Teams in particular grades/subjects or courses may find that an equally effective strategy is to present a general statement (complete sentence) with several examples bulleted below.
 - **Granularity:** Do the CCOs in this set reflect a *similar level of granularity*? Granularity refers to the level of specificity. Each CCO should be high-level and broad enough in scope to be taught using a wide variety of instructional tools or methods, but also focused enough so that students’ growth in learning that knowledge or skill can be measured by an assessment.
 - **Progression:** Is there a cross-grade or course *developmental progression and/or sequence* across CCOs? In some grades/subjects and courses, content is intentionally ordered to ensure systematic coverage of fundamental knowledge and skills prior to introduction of more complex tasks. Are the CCOs in this set ordered in a logical manner for this content area?

- **Importance:** Does each CCO cover essential or core skills and knowledge for this content area—something all students can be expected to learn and in which they can be expected to show growth? Does each CCO describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities that need and deserve a significant proportion of instructional time? Is each a priority for instruction?
- **Depth:** As a set, do these CCOs show range of *depth or complexity*? An effective set of CCOs should reflect the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that will be taught in this grade/subject or course, from the most basic (i.e., foundational) knowledge and skills to the most advanced.
- **Measurability:** Is each CCO measurable with some type of assessment?
- **Distinct:** Is each CCO *distinct*? Do any CCOs overlap significantly with another, suggesting redundancy?

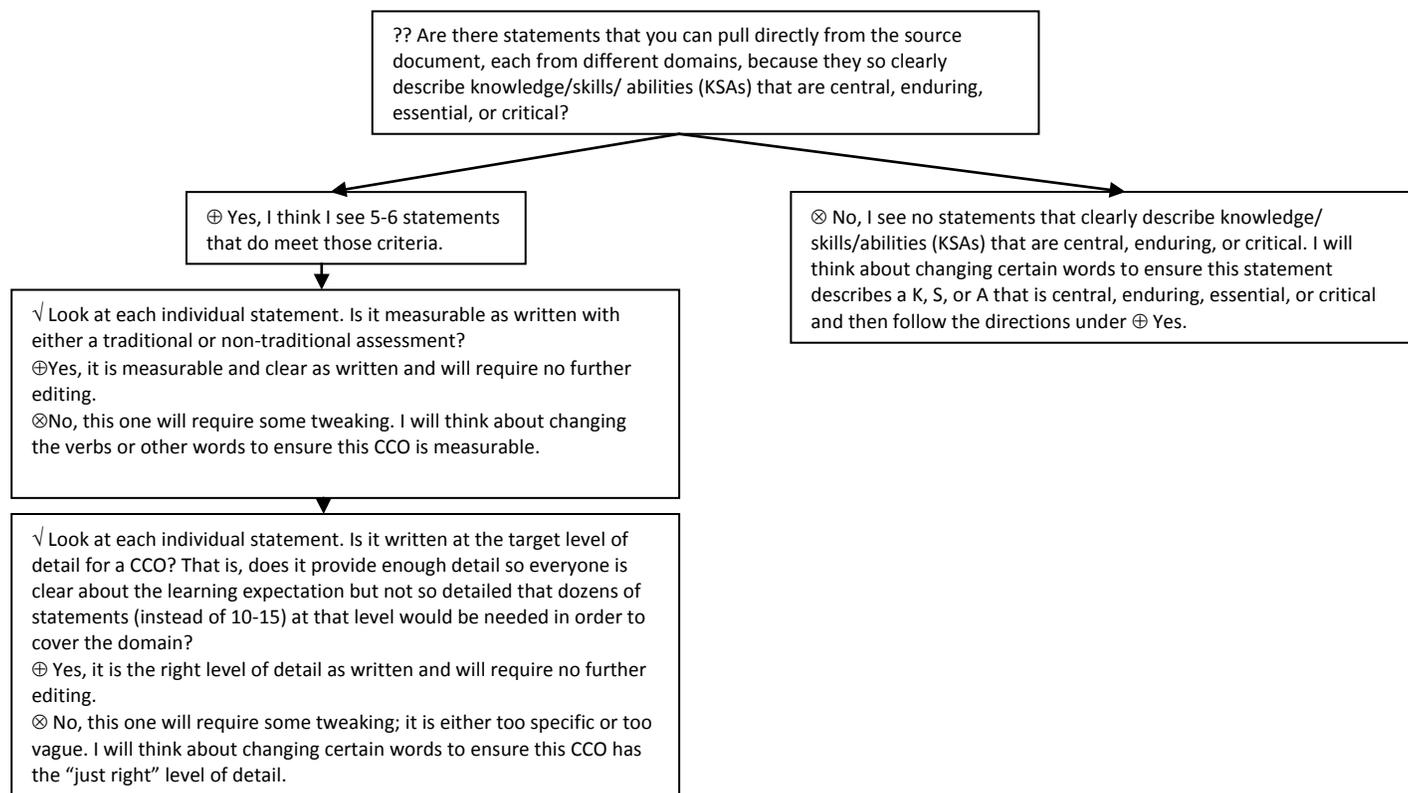
Team members may find it useful to use a decision-tree approach as they consider how best to write the individual statements that comprise a set of CCOs. Commonwealth educators found this approach useful during their CCO development work completed in summer 2013. Each approach example below suggests a different strategy for beginning the CCO development process; teams will want to decide which approach works best for them or will want to develop their own context-appropriate approach.

NOTE: These examples assume that panelists will have access to at least one set of relevant standards to use as a resource during the CCO development process.

Approach 1: One Core Course Objective Per Domain

Look at the set of standards. How are they structured? Are there domains or strands in this set of standards? Is a reasonable approach to develop one anchor for each domain?

⊕ Yes, that approach will work for me because teachers in my content area will understand that approach and it will ensure the breadth of domain coverage that I think is important.

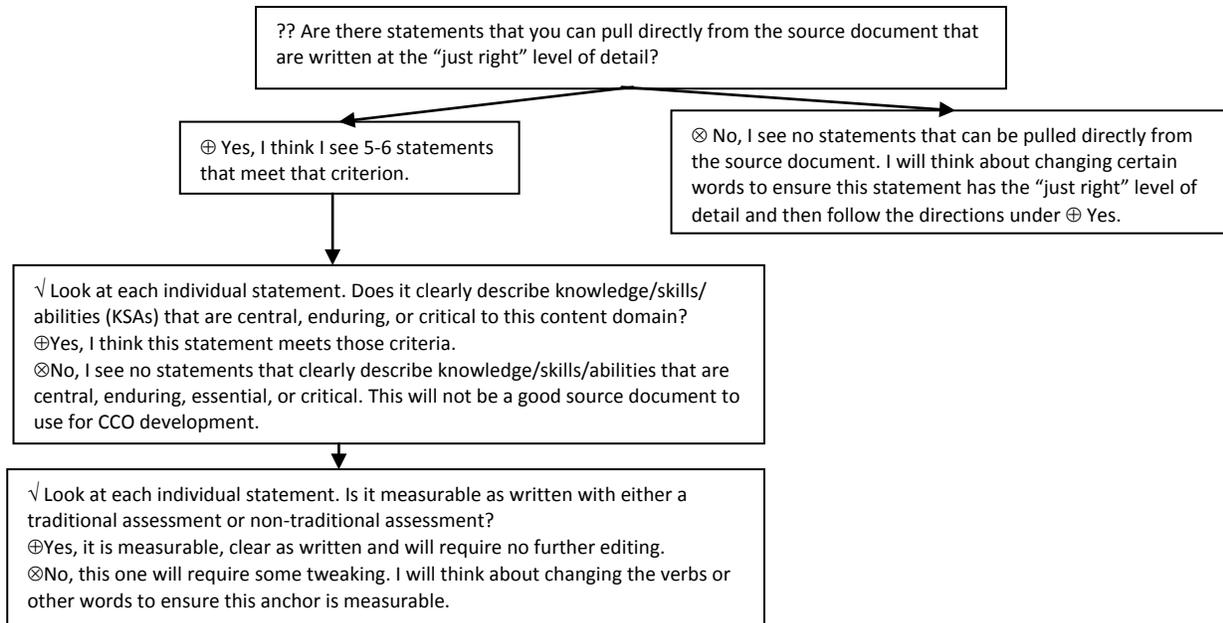


⊗ No, that approach really does not make sense for my grade/subject or course. I will use another approach.

Approach 2: Locating Statements with the Right Level of Detail for a CCO

Look at the set of standards. How are they structured? Is the set ordered hierarchically, with increasingly more detailed statements under broader ones? Do I see one level in this hierarchy that would have the “just right” level of detail for a CCO? Is it a reasonable approach to use a set of statements from that level as CCOs?

⊕ Yes, that approach will work for me because teachers in my content area will understand that approach and it will ensure that my statements are at the right grain size in terms of detail.



⊗ No, that approach does not make sense for my particular grade/subject or course. I will use another approach.

Approach 3: Using Overarching Statements as CCOs

1. Does this set of standards include many detailed statements? Would a reasonable approach be to identify a small set of standards that could be subsumed into an overarching statement and use those statements as CCOs?

⊕ Yes, that approach will work best for me because teachers in my content area will understand that approach and it will help me reduce a large set of standards to the “just right” number of CCOs.

Locate a small set of standards (6-12) that have something important in common. Do they all relate to a particular K, S, or A? Can you think of a statement that would encompass all?



√ Look at each individual statement after it is written. Does it clearly describe knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSAs) that are central, enduring, essential, or critical to this content domain?

⊕ Yes, I think this statement meets those criteria.

⊗ No this one will require some tweaking to ensure that it meets these criteria. I will think about changing the statement so it clearly communicates a K, S, or A that is central, enduring, essential, or critical to the domain.



√ Look at each individual statement after it is written. Is it measurable with either a traditional or non-traditional assessment?

⊕ Yes, it is measurable as written and will require no further editing.

⊗ No, this one will require some tweaking. I will think about changing the verbs (see Appendix B) or other words to ensure this CCO is measurable.

⊗ No, that approach does not make sense for this grade/subject or course. I will use another approach.

Team members may find that a different approach works better for them; the three approaches above are provided just as a starting place. Once work on a set of CCOs is underway, the team should document their approach.