

# finEDge Position Statement on Standards Alignment

## Overview

Standards alignment refers to the degree to which the emphasis on subject matter learning goals (be they content, processes, attitudes, or other cognitive or affective goals) in federal/state/local standards matches the emphasis on those goals in a program (school initiative or other educational product or service). *Emphasis* is defined broadly here to include both *how much* space or time is given to the development of student understanding for particular learning goals (i.e., quantity) and *how well* the learning activities within a program build toward student understanding of the particular learning goals (i.e., quality). One might think of standards alignment as a match between philosophies of what people should learn. A program that is aligned to a particular set of standards should share the broad philosophy of the standards document regarding what learners need to know, do, and understand to be competent in a certain subject matter at a certain age. It should also emphasize learning activities that develop student understanding of the specific standards.

Because there are numerous sets of standards for most subject matter, and because programs and standards are generally developed separately by different groups, it is impossible to have a 100% alignment between a program and standards. Standards alignment, by nature, is an interpretative process. Program designers do their best to understand the overall intent of standards, to interpret the meaning of specific standards, and to develop a program that they believe will best help students develop the competencies in the standards. Standards themselves generally do not offer guidance on how to reach those competencies, but instead simply outline what those competencies should be at specific points in a student's development. It is up to program designers to build pathways toward those competencies through a design process that includes extant research, iterative field-testing and revision, rigorous evaluation, and expert intuition.

Ideally, programs are developed after standards are released. This allows program designers to study the standards carefully; weigh the differences, similarities, and challenges of different sets of standards; and interweave the philosophies of various sets of standards into the core program philosophy. This ideal situation is rare in practice, as new sets of standards emerge all the time, and programs must often simply react to them. In these more pragmatic situations, program designers make good-faith efforts to compare the philosophies behind new standards to the program's approach and to include new learning activities and other content that improve the fit between the standard and program philosophies and meet expectations for specific standards.

Discussions about standards alignment are typically driven by publishers and school officials. Publishers use standards alignment documents to persuade schools that a particular set of curriculum materials will build student competence in a subject matter. These documents often include correlations between specific standards and lessons or even learning activities. School officials use standards alignment documents to guide their decisions about which curriculum materials to adopt. They compare standards alignment across curricula for those standards most important to their learning outcomes. In completing documents that show alignment to standards, the finEDge developers have had the opportunity to consider their own philosophy and to communicate the match between that philosophy and extant standards in financial literacy to school officials and others.

## finEDge's Approach to Standards Alignment

The development of finEDge occurred in the more ideal scenario described above for standards alignment. The finEDge team had the ability to study many different sets of relevant standards and use them as an integral foundation for developing a program philosophy, specific lesson and activity sequences, and instructional routines. As part of this process, the team examined considerable research related to financial literacy content and pedagogy, as well as specific standards within each content domain. The reviewed standards influenced the finEDge program philosophy; program learning goals; the recommendations made for the scope, sequence, and nature of lessons in each content domain; and the recommendations made for the approach to teaching the content. Of course, particular sets of standards influenced but did not dictate the content of the program, as the team balanced research, standards, and professional judgment in designing finEDge.

After the development of the program materials, the finEDge team used the available standards to create lesson-level standards alignment documents. To do this, a hierarchy of alignment was used. This hierarchy will allow educators to review how well finEDge emphasizes standards in terms of both quantity and quality.

### *Primary Alignment*

Wherever the instructional materials definitively target new learning or highlight an application of an expected outcome identified in the standards, finEDge refers to this as a **primary alignment**. “Definitively target” and “highlight” mean an entire lesson or activity richly engages a student in learning designed to produce competency in a specific standard.

For example, presume the standard is, “Analyze the costs and benefits of insurance, including the influences of an individual’s characteristics and behavior.” In Module 5 Lesson 6: Comparing Insurance Plans, students compare and decide between two auto insurance plans. As the lesson definitively targets new learning of a standard, it is tagged with a primary alignment. Similarly, in Module 5 Lesson 7: Insurance Decision-Making, the activities involve evaluating factors involving risk and financial circumstances when deciding whether or not to insure. As the lesson involves an application of the standard, it is tagged with a primary alignment.

### *Secondary Alignment*

Whenever a concept appears as foundational knowledge, but there is room to develop the concept further within the materials to better target a standard, finEDge refers to this as a **secondary alignment**. For example, suppose a standard is, “Analyze the costs and benefits of various strategies to increase income.” Students initially discuss the meaning of *income* and how it relates to financial well-being in Module 1 Lesson 1: Saving, Spending, and Financial Well-Being. This would receive a secondary alignment tag, because while students develop an understanding of *income* that could help them reach the standard (i.e., analyzing costs and benefits of various strategies to increase income), the analysis of strategies is not fully elaborated.

Additionally, whenever the materials provide an opportunity to revisit learning in a new domain or context, finEDge again refers to this as a **secondary alignment**. For example, suppose a standard is, “Explain how time, interest rates, and inflation influence saving patterns over a lifetime.” Students initially discuss this relationship in Module 1 Lesson 6: Tools for Saving. In Module 6 Lesson 5: The Post-Secondary Education Financing Landscape, they discuss how interest rates and time are factors that affect different saving options well suited to paying for post-secondary education. This is not initial learning about the influence of time, interest rates, and inflation on saving patterns, but a chance to apply an understanding of those concepts to a new domain. This lesson would receive a secondary alignment tag, because the skills are utilized in one part of the lesson, but are not fully developed.

### Module 0

Module 0 of finEDge is different from all other program modules in that it does not address a specific financial domain. These lessons provide students with a basic foundation for financial decision-making. The analytical framework students learn in Module 0 is revisited and applied throughout the program. For this reason, many of the Module 0 lessons receive secondary alignment tags. For example, suppose a standard is, “Evaluate risks and rates of return of diversified investments.” In Module 0 Lesson 6: Risk and Uncertainty, students describe the concepts of *uncertainty*, *possible outcomes*, and *risk*. Then they consider the likelihood and severity of possible outcomes. This lesson, while not specifically targeting the financial domain of investing, provides foundational knowledge for an understanding of *risk* as it applies to diversified investments and therefore receives a secondary alignment tag. Likewise, consider the standard, “Analyze the costs and benefits of insurance, including the influences of an individual’s characteristics and behavior.” In Module 0 Lesson 7: Economic Environments, students describe how financial options can differ depending on people’s circumstances and characteristics. This lesson, while not specifically targeting the financial domain of insurance, provides foundational knowledge for an understanding of economic environment as it applies to the cost of managing risk by purchasing insurance and therefore receives a secondary alignment tag.

Note, as stated previously, Module 0 lessons will also receive secondary alignment tags whenever a lesson concept appears as foundational knowledge, but there is room to develop the concept further within the Modules 1–6 materials to better target a specific standard. For example, consider the standard, “Explain how to make informed financial decisions by collecting information, planning, and budgeting.” In Module 0 Lesson 3: Examining Financial Attitudes, students discuss budgeting in terms of fixed and growth mindsets, but budgeting concepts aren’t definitively targeted until Module 1 Lesson 8: Budgeting, so the lesson receives a secondary alignment tag.