

# What's New in the K–12 Learning Standards for Science

## Overview

The Washington State K–12 Learning Standards for Science (WA Science 2026) build on the *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS) by strengthening the learning experiences that are essential to three-dimensional science learning. The revised standards are grounded in the vision of students actively making sense of the world through science and engineering. They emphasize learning that connects to phenomena, communities, local environments, and real-world challenges. These revisions support rigorous, relevant, and equitable science learning for all Washington students.

## What is New

### Key Experiences Tags

These [tags] identify standards that provide strong opportunities for students to engage in key learning experiences associated with high-quality science instruction. They indicate where instruction should be adjusted to ensure these learning experiences occur. Each grade level includes at least one standard with each tag. See the *Key Experiences* document for more information.

- **Student-Led Investigations [INV]:** Students take ownership of the investigation process by developing questions, designing, and carrying out their own investigations, and using evidence to construct and refine explanations.
- **Student-Led Engineering Design [ENG]:** Students take ownership of the engineering design process by defining problems, designing, and testing their own solutions, and iteratively improving designs based on evidence.
- **Science Outdoors [OTDR]:** Students engage in authentic investigations of local phenomena through learning experiences in schoolyards, community spaces, and natural environments.
- **Climate Learning [CLIM]:** Students investigate climate-related phenomena and connect science learning to local, regional, and global climate impacts and solutions.
- **Environmental and Sustainability Education [ESE]:** Students engage with environmental systems, sustainability, and community-connected science across domains.

### Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE) Standards

ESE standards were previously a separate set of standards. They are now a domain alongside the NGSS domains. ESE standards include:



- **Five Environmental and Sustainability Categories:** Organized around Water and Air Quality; Natural Resources and Sustainable Systems; Food and Agricultural Systems; Energy Use and Transportation; and Ecosystems and Biodiversity.
- **Phenomena and Design Opportunities:** Provide opportunities to connect learning to local and global phenomena while engaging students in engineering design challenges.
- **Community and Place-Based Learning:** Encourage students to investigate how natural and human systems interact, connect learning to local communities, and explore pathways toward sustainability.

## Updated Clarification Statements

- **Phenomena-Centered Learning:** Emphasize that students learn science by investigating real-world events and situations ("phenomena") that connect to their lives and communities.
- **Additional Examples and Contexts:** Show how standards can be taught through place-based and community-connected learning experiences.
- **Students Doing Science:** Emphasize learning experiences in which students engage in the practices of science and engineering rather than mainly memorizing scientific facts.

## Updated Assessment Boundaries

- Refined to provide clearer guidance about the concepts and practices students are expected to demonstrate at each grade level.

## Prioritized Standards

- Prioritized standards identify a universal set of standards that every student should have the opportunity to learn and be able to do.
- Prioritized standards were selected using disciplinary core idea progressions from the *Framework for K–12 Science Education*, cross-standard connections, and educator feedback to preserve coherent learning across grades and disciplines.

## Consistency Across Content Areas

The revised standards are designed to be easier for educators to use:

- Standards follow the same overall format used in other content areas and are available in both Word and Excel formats.
- Standard names and codes follow a structure similar to other content areas, making them easier to navigate and use across district and school roles.
- Multiple file formats allow educators to use the standards in ways that best meet local needs.