

Common Core Facts

February 28, 2012

Has Utah adopted federally-mandated standards? Have we given up control of our education standards and curriculum? Is there a centralized group that now controls our standards?

No. In August of 2010, the Utah State Board of Education (State Board) adopted new state core standards in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics.

The Common Core Standards:

- **were not** developed or mandated by the federal government.
- **are not** federal or national standards.
- **may be** withdrawn from adoption or changed by the State Board at any time.
- **were not** obligatory because of Utah's Race to the Top application.
- **are not** under the control or manipulation of special interest groups.

The State Board adopted the common core standards based on the quality of the standards, for the opportunity to have nationally and internationally benchmarked standards, and to improve literacy and mathematics instruction across the state.

The common core standards were developed in a state-led effort led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The process used to write the standards ensured they were informed by the best state standards, the experience of teachers, content experts, states and leading thinkers, and feedback from the general public.

To write the standards, the NGA Center and CCSSO brought together content experts, teachers, researchers and others. The NGA Center and CCSSO received nearly 10,000 comments on the standards during two public comment periods. Comments, many of which helped shape the final version of the standards, came from teachers, parents, school administrators and other citizens concerned with education policy. The draft college and career ready graduation standards were released for public comment in September 2009; the draft K-12 standards were released for public comment in March 2010. The final standards were released in June 2010.

An advisory group provided advice and guidance to shape the initiative. Members of this group included experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers. The Utah State Office of Education provided extensive input during the production phase.

The Common Core Standards are aligned to scientifically-based research, college and career readiness standards and international content standards. The Common Core Standards have been endorsed by an unprecedented and wide variety of businesses, private foundations, educational organizations, research groups, and experts in reading and mathematics.

What is a standard?

The Utah Core Standards establish a framework for high quality instruction in reading/language arts and mathematics. They help Utah teachers *ensure literacy and numeracy* for Utah students by defining the **essential knowledge, concepts, and skills to be mastered** at each grade level or within critical content

areas. They are like a set of building codes. They define **what students should know and do** to be ready for post high school jobs and schooling.

State standards help us ensure students are measured against a stable target. Utah has had standards for decades. They help us develop and provide high quality curriculum and courses. The new standards are based on rigorous post-secondary and career ready expectations. Data shows that students need literacy and numeracy skills that will help them be ready to compete in the emerging global marketplace. This expectation is just as important for young people who enroll in occupational certificate programs after high school; success in these programs and in on-the-job training requires the skills and knowledge embedded in the core standards.

The standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need **for success in college and careers**. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

Did we adopt a new national curriculum?

No.

What is a curriculum?

The curriculum includes content, instructional elements, methods, pedagogy, materials and resources that are used to teach the high standards Utah has adopted. The **core standards do not dictate the curriculum** or delivery of content. Utah's **core standards and the curricula are not the same**. The standards help teachers organize and prepare for instruction just like building codes help an architect prepare a blueprint. Homes built using building standards or codes are not identical. They are built based on the needs and values of the owner but still use the code. The curricula used to implement the core standards varies according to district or charter needs. Locally selected textbooks are used as tools in implementing the core. At a state level, research-based strategies and materials are recommended, not mandated, leaving the final instructional decisions to district, charters and classroom teachers. Local stakeholders will continue to innovate and make improvements to their curriculum over time.

Did the State Board of Education adopt the standards because of Race to the Top?

No. The work on our standards began in 2007. The timeline below details the work that went into the adoption of new standards in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics.

Summer and Fall 2007

The Fordham Foundation, a conservative think-tank and education watch-dog, evaluated state standards in Mathematics and Language Arts. The report gave our Mathematics standards a D. Utah and other states were encouraged to re-think and strengthen standards. In addition, international comparisons showed that students lagged behind their world-wide peers. Prominent mathematicians and higher education leaders asked for stronger standards. In a letter to the Utah State Board, the co-chairs of the Education Interim Committee of the Utah Legislature asked the State Board to review Utah's mathematics standards. Specifically they wanted the standards to be "world-class" and more competitive and similar to those of high performing countries and states

such as Massachusetts or Indiana. USOE with the assistance of an advisory panel began reviewing Utah's mathematics standards, instruction and pre-service teacher training. Other states were asked to make the same revisions and reviews.

January 2008 – January 2009

State education leaders began talking informally about the advantages of working together to upgrade Mathematics and Language Arts Standards.

April 2009

Utah participated in the common core standards meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) held in Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of a common core, determine a potential process and timeline for the work, examine the tasks needed for state adoption and come to consensus on whether the states should proceed. After the meeting, Superintendent Harrington discussed the issue with the USOE administrative team, the State Board leadership, Governor Huntsman, and the governor's deputy, Christine Kearn. A decision was made to bring the matter to the State Board's attention for their consent to sign a MOU committing Utah to the common core standard process. Adoption would be a state decision and would only be sought after a review of the proposed core. It was also decided that the common core standard proposal would be presented to the LEAs for comment and to the Legislature at an interim committee.

May 2009

On May 1, 2009, Superintendent Harrington presented the common core standards proposal to the State Board. After considerable discussion the Board gave consent to sign the MOU. Governor Huntsman also signed the MOU. Superintendent Harrington discussed the common core standards proposal with the LEAs at a meeting held on May 14, 2009. The LEAs expressed support for moving forward with development of the common core standards.

June 2009

On June 17, 2009, the common core standards proposal was discussed at the Utah Legislature's Education Interim Committee. USOE began monitoring the common core standards development process and providing feedback as requested.

July – December 2009

USOE held several meetings at locations throughout the state where common core standards were discussed as a part of the agenda. Meetings included conversations with superintendents, charter directors, curriculum directors, legislators, PTA members, higher education representatives, and business leaders. In addition, USOE continued monitoring the common core standards development process and provided feedback as requested.

January 2010

The State Board was briefed on progress toward developing the standards for Mathematics and Language Arts. The State Board agreed that revisions of the two cores and new assessments should be a part of the **Promises to Keep Initiative** and long term improvement plans. USSA was also briefed. USOE continued monitoring the common core standards development process and provided feedback to the developers.

February – May 2010

USOE continued monitoring the common core standards development process and provided feedback as requested. The State Board was kept informed of progress at each Board Meeting.

June 2010

On June 4, 2010, the State Board gave preliminary approval for Utah to move ahead in accepting the common core as a framework for setting the state's own standards in both English language arts and mathematics. A presentation on the core was made to the Board of Regents. They endorsed the adoption of the core

Summer 2010

USOE held several meetings where common core standards were discussed as a part of the agenda. Meetings included conversations with superintendents, charter directors, curriculum directors, legislators, PTA members, higher education representatives, and business leaders. Legislators were invited to attend a meeting and luncheon to discuss the common core and other education matters.

August 2010

The core standards for Mathematics and Reading/English Language Arts were approved during the Board's August 6 meeting. The State Board adopted them **based on the quality of the standards**. They were not adopted due to federal pressure or federal money.

January 2011 – March 2012

USOE continued to hold meetings to discuss the new standards. Presentations were made to legislators, the Governor's Commission on Education Excellence, LEA school board members and local school district meetings.

Were locally elected officials, school leaders, teachers and parents included in the discussion, evaluation and preparation of the core standards?

Yes. See the above schedule and activities listed in the timeline above.

Will the Common Core State Standards keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?

No. The Common Core State Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the

individual needs of the students in their classrooms. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

Is there research to support the standards?

Yes. The standards were based on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards. The standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including state departments of education, scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, educators from kindergarten through college, parents, and other members of the public. In their design and content, refined through successive drafts and numerous rounds of feedback, the standards represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over that previous work. They have been vetted and endorsed by members of both political parties, companies and foundations led by conservative and liberal owners, and educators from all walks of life.

The facts are, the standards are (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) aligned with the standards from high performing states and countries. A particular standard was accepted only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. Utah standards are intended to be a living work: as needed, the Utah's standards will be revised accordingly.

The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research, surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs, assessment data identifying college-and career-ready performance, and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In Reading/English Language Arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In Mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Do standards result in higher achievement?

Not by themselves. According to a recent article by Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institute, “The core will have little to no effect on student achievement.” He drew this conclusion based on research by Russell Whitehurst. Loveless ignored Whitehurst's and others conclusions that standards by themselves change very little, but implementation of standards through well thought out and executed instruction can and does impact achievement.

Do the standards mandate how to teach a certain subject?

No. The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That's why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Are Utah's standards considered educationally Progressive or Traditional in nature?

Neither. It is important to remember that standards **are not** practices or curriculum!!!! Standards define what students need to know and be able to do. However, using standards and highly structured objectives to develop curriculum or inform practice is generally considered to be Traditional in nature.

There are two main philosophies of educational practice. They are commonly referred to as Progressive practice or Traditional practice. Strict Traditionalists use a mode of instruction and curriculum that focuses on facts, drill, and memorization. It is very formal and relies on lectures and conformity. Strict Progressives use a free-wheeling model that focuses on creativity, problem-solving and group work. It is very informal and relies on coaching and discussion.

Educational practice is a local decision. Utah does not promote the exclusive use of either philosophy. Good teachers use elements of both. They give individual attention and assign facts to be learned. They give multiple choice tests and essay tests. They have children read plays and perform in plays. Using only one practice is bad practice. Students need to know mathematics facts and how to solve a story problem.

Do the new standards reflect Utah values?

Utah State Code 53A-13-109 states, “(1) (c) ‘Values’ means time-established principles or standards of worth.” It goes on to list many of those values:

“(2) (e) public schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of succeeding generations of informed and responsible citizens who are deeply attached to essential democratic values and institutions; and

(f) the happiness and security of American society relies upon the public virtue of its citizens which requires a united commitment to a moral social order where self-interests are willingly subordinated to the greater common good.

(3) Through an integrated curriculum, students shall be taught in connection with regular school work: (a) honesty, integrity, morality, civility, duty, honor, service, and obedience to law; and...

(f) the dignity and necessity of honest labor; and

(g) other skills, habits, and qualities of character which will promote an upright and desirable citizenry and better prepare students to recognize and accept responsibility for preserving and defending the blessings of liberty inherited from prior generations and secured by the constitution.”

The core standards are supportive of Utah values. They are designed to prepare students to become responsible, literate citizens. They are based on college, career and civic readiness that lead to honest labor. The standards are designed for the greater common good of our citizens, raising the level of expectations and defining what all students need to know and do. Since standards are not the same as curriculum, local communities and still retain the freedom and autonomy to make decisions about materials and methods.