

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- **may be** withdrawn from adoption or changed by the State Board at any time.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 State Board's **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 still retain the freedom and autonomy to make decisions about materials and methods.

Do the standards identify the basic knowledge, skills and competencies each student is expected to acquire or master? Do they increase in depth and complexity from year to year? Is there progress between grade levels and core academic areas?

Yes. The common core state standards include rigorous and essential skills and knowledge in Mathematics and Reading/Language Arts that progress and increase in depth from kindergarten through twelfth grade. They are clear, understandable, and require mastery of both basic and complex concepts.

Does the Reading/Language Arts core include explicit phonics, spelling, grammar, reading, writing, vocabulary, speech and listening?

Yes. The standards clearly include the items listed above. The following website lists the Reading/Language Arts core standards. http://www.schools.utah.gov/core/DOCS/Utah_ELA-Standards.aspx

Does the Mathematics core include basic computational skills?

Yes. The standards clearly include the items listed above. The following website lists the Mathematics core standards. <http://schools.utah.gov/core/DOCS/Utah-State-Mathematics-Standards.aspx>

Were the Kindergarten core standards designed for a full day kindergarten?

No. They simply define what kindergarten students need to know and be able to do by the end of Kindergarten, regardless of their schedule.

What does college and career ready mean?

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 as it is for those who enroll in two or four year college degree programs. Success in these programs and in on-the-job training requires the skills and knowledge embedded in the core standards. Other skills are also essential for post high school success including; study and work habits, problem solving, teamwork skills time management and technology proficiency.

More Facts about the Utah Core Standards

March 28, 2012

Has the federal government created the standards and mandated that Utah implement them?

No. In a letter dated March 7, 2012, Arne Duncan, the Secretary of the United States Department of Education affirmed that “states have the sole right to set learning standards.”

The responsibility and authority for education clearly resides with the states. As former Florida Governor Jeb Bush stated in support of the core standards “It is the states’ responsibility to foster an education system that leads to rising student achievement. State leaders, educators, teachers and parents are empowered to ensure every student has access to the best curriculum and learning environment. Governors and lawmakers across the country are acting to adopt bold education reform policies. This is the beauty of our federal system. It provides 50 testing sites for reform and innovation. The Common Core State Standards are an example of states recognizing a problem, then working together, sharing what works and what doesn’t”(Wall Street Journal, June 23, 2011).

At a federal government level, the Department of Education is very supportive of the core standards and has in the past two years issued grants that encourage the use of the Common Core. Occasionally, the Department of Education has wrongly and problematically appeared to take credit for the standards. For example, an application for a federal grant for development of assessments erroneously stated that the standards were released by the Department of Education. This has led to confusion over who wrote the core. Stephanie Shipton from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) reaffirmed in an email to the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) on March 27, 2012, “The statement ‘Common Core Standards released by the Department of Education’ is factually incorrect (assuming you are referring to the U.S. Department of Education). The NGA Center and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) hold the copyright. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education played no role in the development process (including but not limited to financial contributions, input on the standards, and input on the process).”

There are those who are genuinely worried that the federal government will try to take over the standards, change them and use them for their own agenda, and try to create a national mandated curriculum. The State Board and our members of Congress continue to work with those in Washington to keep that from happening. Conservatives like Chester Finn from the Fordham Foundation, Jeb Bush, and Condoleezza Rice are encouraging states to implement the core, while remaining vigilant and resistant to federal intrusion and reminding politicians of states’ rights. The politicization of the core standards is an unfortunate by-product of the states’ voluntary efforts to produce an outstanding set of standards for our students. To reject the standards, which are not political, merely to be oppositional to the current administration would be regrettable, especially when the standards have not been mandated and were created by the states.

Is Utah a part of Race to the Top? Does Utah receive Race to the Top federal funds?

No. Utah applied to receive a Race to the Top (RTTT) grant, but did not receive one. Utah is under no obligation associated with RTTT and does not receive any RTTT funds.

The Race to the Top grants gave more points to states that adopted the Common Core. When Utah prepared the RTTT application, the Utah State Board of Education discussed the core in depth. The Board decided to include adoption of the core in the grant 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 Board did not adopt the Common Core Standards because of federal pressure, RTTT points, or any other grant. Utah's grant was rejected because the Board did not include other high-point options. They wanted to retain our autonomy and work on our own state solutions to Utah challenges. Based on this experience, the Board decided not to apply for a RTTT grant again. When the State Board finalized the adoption of the Common Core Standards in August of 2010 it was with the understanding that we were in control of them from that moment forward.

Does Utah receive federal ARRA money for assessments?

Utah participates in a consortium of states to develop assessments and a computer adaptive assessment system. The consortium receives federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funds. When the consortium's assessment system is finished, Utah has complete power and authority to use it or reject it. In fact, Utah already has a system in place for vetting test items and using RFPs to determine assessment purchases.

Is it true that the test consortium in which Utah participates has already developed and piloted test items that ask personal questions or questions that promote certain political views?

No. The consortium in which Utah participates hasn't developed or piloted **any** test items. When the items are prepared, Utah will vet them through a strenuous process that will eliminate items that are biased, insensitive, political, controversial and don't fit Utah values.

Are there conservatives or Republicans who support the Common Core Standards? Are there Democrats or liberals who support the Core? What about moderates?

Yes. The standards have been endorsed by a wide variety of politicians, educational organizations, research groups, businesses, private foundations and experts in reading and mathematics, including:

- Jeb Bush, former Governor of Florida and Joel Klein, former Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, June 23, 2011 - *"The Common Core State Standards are an example of states recognizing a problem, then working together, sharing what works and what doesn't."*
- Craig Barrett, former CEO, Intel Corp. April 6, 2010 - *"As a former CEO of a Fortune 500 company, I know that common education standards are essential for producing the educated work force America needs to remain globally competitive. Good standards alone are not enough,*

but without them decisions about such things as curricula, instructional materials and tests are haphazard. It is no wonder that educational quality varies so widely among states.”

- Chris Christie, Governor of New Jersey, September 13, 2011 - *“The Common Core State Standards are a building block in our state’s education system meant to ensure that teachers and districts can innovate within a framework of high expectations and accountability. They are based on the fundamental belief that every child in every classroom deserves an education that will properly equip them with the skills they need for college and a career. Our aggressive implementation of these standards in partnership with districts will ensure that our children have an education that will serve them well in the next stages of their lives.”*

Is there evidence that the United Nations, the federal government or gay rights activists developed and started the work on the Common Core?

No. The Common Core Standards were developed in a state-led effort initiated by the NGA Center and the CCSSO. The process used to write the standards ensured they were informed by the best state standards, standards in countries with stand-out student test scores, the experience of teachers, content experts, states, leading thinkers, and feedback from the general public.

Is it true that California, Massachusetts and Missouri have core standards that are better than Utah’s standards?

No. All three states have adopted the Common Core Standards.

What are the costs associated with core standards?

Utah has been adopting, maintaining and revising state core standards for decades. The ordinary costs associated with past standards apply to our new standards. Every core has costs for core development, professional development, curriculum and materials, and assessments.

Utah has a five-to-seven year revision cycle for core standards. Revisions are based on the need to ensure that students learn what they need to know to be successful after graduating from high school. The former core in Mathematics was adopted in 2007. The former core in Reading/Language Arts was adopted in 2003. The new cores were adopted in August 2010 with limited implementation in the 2011-2012 school year. Utah began revising the standards in 2007 after concerns were raised about the rigor of our current standards. If Utah had chosen to reject the Common Core Standards, the core adoption and revision process for both academic areas would have been the same. Both adoptions would also have incurred the same costs.

Is Utah spending more money than usual to implement the new Utah core standards?

No. School districts and charter schools have received no additional funds, federal or state, to implement the new core standards or new instructional materials and curriculum. In fact, funding for professional development, which is used to train Utah’s public school educators in new core standards, has decreased significantly. Before the current economic downturn school districts and charter schools

had \$78 million in state funds for professional development through the Quality Educator Block Grant. This has been almost completely eliminated for the past three years. For the 2011-12 school year, Utah lawmakers allocated only \$2 million in state funds for professional development, and halved this amount for the following school year. Furthermore, textbook costs will remain the same. Typically, when a new core is implemented, school districts and charters phase in new materials. Due to restricted finances many do not purchase new books after a core adoption. Instead most have a five-to-seven year textbook replacement plan.

Is Utah spending money to create new assessments?

Yes. In 2007, former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman convened a Blue Ribbon Panel on Assessment. The panel, stakeholders throughout the state and the Utah State Board of Education concluded technology-assisted assessments should be studied and, if successful, should be adopted statewide. Successful pilots were conducted and the State Board concluded that state funds should be sought for technology-assisted assessments aligned to state standards. This request would have been made for whichever state standards were adopted by the State Board.

Do the core standards prevent gifted students from receiving the enrichment or acceleration they need?

No. The new standards are much more rigorous, with increased complexity beginning in Kindergarten. For example, students in ninth grade mathematics classes will be studying topics formerly taught in Algebra, Geometry and Algebra 2 courses. By the end of eleventh grade, students will have the quantitative skills they need for post-secondary work and study. Each grade features the study of topics in depth and examines the interrelationships among mathematics concepts. The new core's structure allows more flexibility to accelerate learning for students as they progress through their education.

The information about new assessments uses the term "psychometric." Is this something parents should be worried about?

No. Psychometrics is a field of study used by statisticians, mathematicians and others who design and evaluate tests. Test makers use psychometrics to ensure that a test measures what it is supposed to measure.