

Common Core FAQ*

*** Provo City School District recognizes Seth Sorensen, the Curriculum and Assessment Specialist for Nebo School District for his work in creating the original FAQ document on which this is based.**

Q1. Who led the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

A. The Common Core was a grassroots initiative initiated by state governors and Superintendents in 2007. The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders have provided input into the development of the standards.

Q2. What are core standards?

A. Core or educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning. Standards are concepts that need to be taught, such as addition of fractions in mathematics, and the grade level where they should be taught.

Q3. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

A. Standards are the required skills and concepts for the students to achieve. Curriculum include the materials and content that is used to teach the standards.

Q4. Who chooses/adopts state standards and curriculum?

A. The Utah Constitution designates to the Utah State School Board the responsibility to choose state standards. Local school boards and the Utah Legislature do not. Local school boards and schools select the curriculum, which is generally the textbook or program for delivering the standards. Local school teams and individual teachers choose the everyday lesson content. The Federal Government has no say in either standards, curriculum or everyday lesson content.

Utah State Code states in **53A-1-402.6. Core curriculum standards:** "(1) In establishing minimum standards related to curriculum and instruction requirements under Section [53A-1-402](#), the State Board of Education shall, in consultation with local school boards, school superintendents, teachers, employers, and parents implement core curriculum standards which will enable students to, among other objectives:

- (a) communicate effectively, both verbally and through written communication;
- (b) apply mathematics; and
- (c) access, analyze, and apply information."

The Utah Code also spells out local school board control of materials: “(4) Local school boards shall design their school programs, that are supported by generally accepted scientific standards of evidence, to focus on the core curriculum standards with the expectation that each program will enhance or help achieve mastery of the core curriculum standards.

(5) Except as provided in Section [53A-13-101](#), each school may select instructional materials and methods of teaching, that are supported by generally accepted scientific standards of evidence, that it considers most appropriate to meet core curriculum standards.”

http://le.utah.gov/code/TITLE53A/htm/53A01_040206.htm

Q5. Are the standards internationally benchmarked?

Yes. International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career ready standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data used in the benchmarking process.

Q6. Does the federal government play a role in Common Core standards implementation?

A. “The Federal Government had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards and will not have a role in their implementation. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory. “

<http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

Q7. Will Utah taxpayers have to pay more money to implement the new Utah Core Standards?

A. The Utah State Board of Education regularly updates the Utah Core Standards. The funding for the implementation of this latest set of standards will not cost Utah taxpayers additional money. The professional development that takes place in the districts will remain at the same level it has for the past decade; the only change will be the content focus. School districts are concerned with their ability to provide the technology and infrastructure necessary to support electronic testing associated with the new SAGE assessment of the Utah Core Standards. **The Utah Legislature has not raised taxes to fund this change.** Provo City School District supports the advancement of student access to technology and related programs and has been using existing local and state funding to move in this direction.

Q8. How does the local school board fit into the Common core?

A. School Board powers and duties generally, according to State Code [53A-3-402](#), include:

“ (1) Each local school board shall:

(a) implement the core curriculum utilizing instructional materials that best correlate to the core curriculum and graduation requirements;

(b) administer tests, required by the State Board of Education, which measure the progress of each student, and coordinate with the state superintendent and State Board of Education to assess results and create plans to improve the student's progress which shall be submitted to the State Office of Education for approval;" http://le.utah.gov/code/TITLE53A/htm/53A03_040200.htm

Q9. Do these standards incorporate both content and skills?

A. Yes. "In English Language Arts, the Common Core State Standards require certain critical content for all students, including:

- Classic myths and stories from around the world;
- America's Founding Documents;
- Foundational American literature: and
- Shakespeare.

The remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the Common Core State Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In Mathematics, the Common Core State Standards lay a solid foundation in:

- whole numbers;
- addition;
- subtraction;
- multiplication;
- division;
- fractions; and
- decimals.

Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically."

Q10. Do the math standards cover all the key math topics in the proper sequence?

A. The mathematical progressions presented in the Common Core State Standards are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State

Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

Q11. What requirements do the Common Core State Standards give to teachers?

A. The Common Core State Standards are merely a clear set of expectations and curriculum standards for the knowledge and skills students need in English/ language arts and mathematics at each grade level to prepare students to graduate college and career ready. The standards establish what students need to learn, but **they do not dictate how teachers should teach**. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms, as well as select instructional materials they feel are most appropriate for their students.

Q12. If Utah were to abandon the Utah Core Standards, what would that mean?

A. The relationship with Federal Government would not change, because the Utah Core Standards are not Federal. Utah Law still requires adaptive testing, so the testing will continue with AIR. The Longitudinal Data system would still be in place. Utah would have to go through the expense of writing a new core or adopt the former core--which is not seen as "College and Career Ready" standards. There may be an expense if newly purchased materials have to be discarded. If Utah writes unique standards, there will be little or no available materials or textbooks to support their instruction.

Q13. What assessments are required by the Federal Government?

An ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) was originally passed in 1965 and had major revisions in 1980, 1994, and 2001 (This latest revision called No Child Left Behind). The current requirements of this act require states to have assessments in place in Math, Language Arts, and Science. They leave the decision to the states to determine the assessments and this selection is submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Q14. What assessments are required by the Utah State Legislature?

- A. The Utah State Legislature requires the following assessments in State Statute:
- Computer Adaptive Assessment in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and an alternate assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities. These assessments are given to all students in 3rd-11th Grade (CRTs and UAA).
 - Statewide Reading assessment given 3 times per year to every K-3rd grade student (DIBELS).
 - Kindergarten-2nd grade end of year assessments, which are developed by school districts.

- Direct Writing Assessment given to all 5th and 8th grade students (DWA).
- New College and Career ready Assessments given to all 8th -11th grade students (ACT and companion assessments, Explore and Plan).
- An English Language Learning assessment, which places students at various levels of English proficiency (WIDA).

Q15. Who writes the questions that will be used in the new assessment system?

Utah teachers will write all of the questions that will be used in the new assessment system. Every teacher in the state has been invited to participate in the item writing and all volunteers meet together for weeks with administrators and curriculum specialists from the Utah State Office of Education to develop test items that will accurately measure student learning of standards within the core curriculum.

Q16. Are all questions on the new assessments reviewed by a parent group?

A. Yes. All questions are reviewed by a group of 15 parents. This parent group will verify that all test questions are strictly academic. See the following link: Utah State contract with AIR:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/Adaptive-Assessment-System/136199-AIR.aspx>

(See page 7 for the language that requires USOE and Parent review to approve any test question before they are used by students.)

Q17. Was AIR assessment required by the Federal Government?

A. No. Utah Legislature passed an Adaptive Assessment law after a successful piloting of adaptive testing. (House Bill 15, 2012) Utah issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an adaptive assessment vendor and AIR was chosen. AIR is a leader in academic testing and had a superior product for end of level tests, formative tests and interim tests.

H.B. 15, 2012: <http://le.utah.gov/~2012/bills/hbillenr/hb0015.pdf>

State Adaptive Assessment RFP Link:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/Adaptive-Assessment-System/USCAAS-RFP.aspx>

Q18. What individual student information is given to the Federal Government from the assessments given in Utah?

A. None. The only data provided to the federal government by the State of Utah is aggregate school-level data. No individual student data is provided. The Federal Government does not have a direct connection with the Utah data base. School districts do not gather personal information from families such as religion affiliation or political party.

Q19. What is the Longitudinal Data System in Utah?

A. With 41 school districts and 84 charter schools that use at least 10 different types of student information systems, Utah needed a way to communicate within the education system. The Longitudinal Data system is called UTREx. The first task of UTREx was to assign each student a unique number (SSID), so that two school districts or charter schools could not claim funding from the state for the same student. It is also used to help transfer student transcript information to higher education. A great benefit is the ability to transfer student records for students who move from one district or charter to the next. The UTREx system improves accuracy and efficiency of education. Hundreds of hours of time for school personnel will be saved because of the UTREx system. The Federal Government has no access to this system.

Q20. Are we as schools and districts required to collect more student information as a result of Utah Senate Bill 82, known as the “Digital Backpack”, passed in 2013?

A. Yes This Utah bill requires a new system that “collects longitudinal student transcript data from LEAs (districts and charter schools) and the unique student identifiers as described in Section 53A-1-603.5.”

The bill summary states:

“This bill:

- defines terms;
- requires the State Board of Education to **establish the Utah Student Record Store** where an authorized LEA user may access student data in a Student Achievement backpack that is relevant to the user's LEA or school;
- specifies the data to be included in a Student Achievement Backpack;
- and
- requires the State Board of Education to ensure that student data in a Student Achievement Backpack is accessible through an LEA's student information system by June 30, 2017.”

This bill effectively doubles the amount of data districts are required to send on to the State office of Education. This new data includes things like school attendance, student growth scores, student reading level, student writing sample, student performance by standard and objective, etc...

Text from SB 82: <http://le.utah.gov/~2013/bills/sbillamd/SB0082S01.htm>

Q21. Can the State of Utah change their core standards at any time?

A. According to state code **53A-1-402.6**. Core curriculum standards.

“(6) The state may exit any agreement, contract, memorandum of understanding, or consortium that cedes control of Utah's core curriculum standards to any other entity, including a federal agency or consortium, for any reason, including:

- (a) the cost of developing or implementing core curriculum standards;

(b) the proposed core curriculum standards are inconsistent with community values; or

(c) the agreement, contract, memorandum of understanding, or consortium:

(i) was entered into in violation of Part 9, Implementing Federal Programs Act, or Title 63J, Chapter 5, Federal Funds Procedures Act;

(ii) conflicts with Utah law;

(iii) requires Utah student data to be included in a national or multi-state database;

(iv) requires records of teacher performance to be included in a national or multi-state database; or

(v) imposes curriculum, assessment, or data tracking requirements on home school or private school students.

(7) The State Board of Education shall annually report to the Education Interim Committee on the development and implementation of core curriculum standards.”

http://le.utah.gov/code/TITLE53A/htm/53A01_040206.htm

Q22. Was any feedback given from the public or any group on the common core prior to adoption by states?

A. Yes. There were a number of opportunities given for the public, as well as other groups such as educators to give feedback on the core standards, as well as the college and career ready standards.

Summary of public feedback on K-12

standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/k-12-feedback-summary.pdf>

Summary of Public Feedback on College and Career Ready Standards:

<http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CorePublicFeedback.pdf>