



Now What? Imperatives & Options for “Common Core” Implementation & Governance October 2010

With the release of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math, as well as the current assessment-development efforts tied to those standards, much of the U.S. is on the way toward shared academic expectations and measures for K-12 education—a remarkable development. Yet a thousand “next steps” must be thought through and implemented if these standards and assessments are to get real traction and yield real benefits for American kids, schools and educators in the years ahead.

With help from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute have been considering those steps along with a set of thorny issues that will determine the *long-term* viability of this endeavor. What needs to happen in the next five years? A decade hence, who will be in charge of the common standards-and-testing effort? How will these activities be governed? Paid for? And more.

Below you will find **Michael W. Kirst**’s responses (in red) to a dozen perplexing questions on the future of the Common Core initiative. The questions are split into two sections, the first focusing on standards and the second on assessments. Responses from additional education experts, along with Fordham’s own October 2010 synthesis and recommendations (by Chester Finn and Mike Petrilli), *Now What? Imperatives & Options for “Common Core” Implementation & Governance*, can be found online at http://edexcellence.net/index.cfm/news_now-what-imperatives-and-options-for-common-core-implementation-and-governance.

(Questionnaires and responses are from June 2010. Some references may be out-dated.)

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Governance of the Common Core State Standards

- 1) Who should oversee the ongoing development and revision of the Common Core State Standards over, say, the next twenty years?
 - Does something new need to be created or can existing organizations or structures handle it?
 - What’s the argument for/against turning this whole thing over to NAGB to run (in addition to NAEP)?

- What about letting the ad hoc coalition that got us this far (led by NGA and CCSSO) continue to lead the process?
 - How urgent is this? Could the “Common Core” initiative proceed for a time with *no* governance per se, then reconvene the original partners to take stock and determine next steps?
- 2) If it’s a new governing body, how should it be constituted? What should be its governance? Members? Selected by whom? Should it include (for example) governors? State chiefs? Legislators? Superintendents of major districts? Teachers? Subject matter experts? Who else?
- Since most people believe it’s important to maintain state ownership/leadership of the CCSSI venture going forward, what are the best ways of ensuring this?
 - Does it need to be a formal entity or could it be a looser confederation or network?
- 3) How, if at all, should *higher education* be involved in the governance of K-12 standards (and assessments)? How about *employers*? Particularly considering that meeting these standards and passing these assessments should signify “college and career readiness”?
- 4) How can the governing body be constituted to increase the likelihood that it will maintain rigor in the face of political push-back? In other words, how to protect the common standards from getting dumbed-down over time? Is there a role here for something like the “validation committee” that participated in the initial CCSSI process?

(Response to questions 1-4)

Common Core should not be governed by NGA and CCSSO in the long run. Moreover, I agree with all assertions in the Musick paper concerning the feasibility and need for a very limited federal role for common core. Moreover, I sense a decentralized governance view emerging in 2010 elections. I recommend an organization independent of all governments, with operations financed by an endowment. Foundations and individuals would be solicited for this endowment by a select group of successful funders and fund raisers (more on this later). An endowment would provide the majority of funds for the three new governance entities outlined below.

The top level governance body would be a Board of Directors (a new entity). This board would be nominated by states, national organizations, and content standards “experts”. It would contain 2 governors and 2 state CSSOs.

The Board of Directors would be responsible only for standards and assessment development (not curriculum), and would approve final products for potential state adoption. The Board would establish the rules and regulations for 1) standards criteria and 2) cyclical review and revision of standards. These processes should be systematic, credible, and provide ample justification for the ultimate recommendations. Part of the Board of Director’s role is to certify that the process used to revise the standards is valid. Also, the Board’s role is to ensure the integrity of the standards review process, and to verify that it is not politicized or dominated by any particular point of view.

A key role for the Board of Directors is approval of appointments to a “Coordinating Board” and a separate “Review/Validation Panel”. Board choices for these subsidiary Boards would be guided by a

nomination process that would include varied organizations like NRC, NAE, and former members of the Coordinating Board and Review Panel. The Board of Directors' major written product would be a formal report after each review that would summarize changes in standards and assessments, and the reasons for the changes.

The Coordinating Board would aggregate, review, and approve/disapprove all recommended changes in common core content, examples, and assessments. It would approve the 15% state add on to the common core. It would receive input from many groups and individuals including states, professional organizations, higher ed, business, and special needs groups (ELL/Special Ed). The Coordinating Board would not act upon changes in content standards and assessments before receiving advice from a "Review/Validation Panel". The Review panel's procedures and criteria should be highly specified based in part on the 2010 validation experience. The Coordinating Board would appoint the members of the Review/Validation Panel.

These 3 new entities outlined above will be much more representative of the public and education community than the current NGO/CCSO groups. Many Governors directly or indirectly (through appointing the State Board) select the CCSO. Governors should not have this much influence over the future common core. I recommend against an interim board governance entity, and believe we should move expeditiously to create three new entities.

- 5) What roles, if any, should the governing body of the CCSSI initiative play beyond overseeing the ongoing development and revision of the standards? Should it undertake research to determine their validity? Their effectiveness? The fidelity of state and local implementation? How participating states handle the "additional 15 %"? Should it undertake any implementation activities itself? Developing curriculum, for example? Monitoring curricular alignment with the standards? Designing instructional materials? Developing professional development modules? Others? If the CCSSI governing body doesn't oversee these activities, who should (particularly if any of this is to be done in a "common" way)?

NAGB is useful as a process example that has successfully elevated standards over time. A separate study should be made of how NAGB did this. Postsecondary education representatives need to include more career/tech people than in the 2009-2010 common core process. The concept of career readiness is embryonic and requires more research and discussion by career educators and employers.

Someone should be contracted to study the usefulness of the NCAA structure and process currently used to regulate college athletics as a model for common core involvement of postsecondary education.

- 6) How should this be paid for going forward? If not by the federal government, then by whom? If by states, how would that work? If by the federal government, what should be the relationship of the government to the common standards' governing body?

The federal government should not provide the majority of operating funds. A fundraising group headed by people like Jim Hunt, Craig Barrett, and John Doerr. should be charged with raising an endowment sufficient to fund most operating costs. Federal funding and shorter term grants would provide a minority of total funds. This is the best way to guarantee independence for common core. Foundations should be urged to make a one time, large contribution to this endowment. One selling point is that common core has more potential for long term impact on K-16 education reform than the typical three

year foundation grants. Special endowment fundraising efforts should be directed at employers with more focus in the common core process (than in 2009-10) upon developing more explicit career ready standards. Otherwise, the college focus will dominate as it did in 2009-2010.

- 7) What other comments or suggestions do you have that might be considered for the long-term governance of the common standards?

The initial fundraising strategy of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a useful guide for launching all three new governance entities. It started with foundations, used federal funds for development, and then shifted to membership fees. State membership fees might help finance common core, but experience of ECS makes me dubious of long term state fees as a way to pay much of the operating expenses of common core.

Governance of the Common Core State Assessments

- 8) What are the governance implications of finding ourselves with more than one set of assessments aligned to the common standards? Will each successful “consortium” simply govern itself over the long haul? What should those governing bodies look like? How, if at all, should they relate to the governing body of the Common Core *standards*?
- 9) What roles should the assessment consortia play, beyond developing and updating the test specifications? Administering the tests over the long run? Ensuring test security? Setting guidelines for participation of special education students and English language learners? Setting “cut scores”? Publishing school-by-school results? Rating schools based on the results? Others? If the assessment consortia don’t oversee these activities, who should (particularly if any of this is to be done in a “common” way)?
- 10) If it turns out that only one assessment consortium wins the “Race to the Test” competition—or that states eventually opt for a single new assessment system—should its governing body be merged with that of the common standards? Why or why not?
- 11) How should the assessments be paid for going forward? If not by the federal government, then by whom? If by states, how would that work? If by the federal government, what should be its relationship to the assessment consortia?
- 12) What other comments or suggestions do you have that might be considered for the governance of the common assessments?

(Response to questions 8-12)

I see the governance process in 1) – 5) above as covering assessment, but not curriculum. Curriculum development should be left to state and local organizations. The work on assessments should be financed by the endowment discussed in 6).

The college and career cut score process should be informed by the research stimulated by “Making New Links,” the Final Report of the NAGB: Technical Panel on 12th Grade Preparedness Research.

Refinement of career ready standards should be guided by the research discussed in pages 20-22 of this report.