



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

(Response to questions 1-7)

The "Standards" and the "Assessments" have very different governance needs. The Standards governance process can be looser and can evolve. The Assessment governance must be more structured and operational.

The Standards governance process, at least for several years, will be similar to setting the rules for an athletic competition. At some relatively high level of representation those involved agree on the rules (the standards). This is by definition a process heavily dependent on consensus decision making. Those who set the rules (standards) are not charged with officiating or enforcing the rules. They do not have operational responsibilities. There will be many organizations and businesses that will be “operational” under the rules (standards) that are established. The process that developed the Standards will be challenged within a year or two as public and private “free-market developers” present instructional materials, professional development activities, teacher preparation, etc. There will be a wide variety of products and services offered to schools and states and likely with a wide variety of quality and effectiveness. How a Standards’ governance arrangement will need to respond to this is not clear, but it is likely that in three or four years the process that created the Standards will need to evolve or change to deal with issues and problems that will arise.

Governance of the Common Core State Standards is not a front-burner matter. Trying to “solve” the Standards governance problem before there is a Standards governance problem will be a mistake. It may sound wise to solve this issue before there is an issue, but I believe 1) trying to do so will put unnecessary stress on the new and untested State Standards agreement; and 2) the answers to what is needed in three or four years will be defined as the issues and problems emerge. The timeline for the Assessments development and phased-in implementation may provide a companion timeline for Standards issues, and governance, to develop.

There will be a lot that will be uncommon about the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Just as the National Assessment of Educational Progress has struggled with bringing a more uniform approach to how states deal with inclusions/exclusions and accommodations, the State Standards Initiative will have a series of on-going challenges to define and implement the “common” in Common Core State Standards.

The early focus should not be on solving a governance problem that does not exist but rather on the numerous implementation issues that will surface rather quickly. This will be messy. There will likely not be sufficient support for a structure and rules for getting the fidelity of state and local implementation right until we have gotten it wrong in enough places to signal a problem calling out for a solution.

The NGA and CCSSO should not sit passively by as issues and problems develop but the Standards coalition is too fragile to deal with “anticipated problems” on which there is no overwhelming demand for action.

The role of higher education and employers in the Standards’ structure can evolve. Yes, the “college-career readiness” reality needs to be addressed, but not immediately.

How should the CCSSI, the Standards portion that is, be paid for going forward?

First, what is it likely to cost? Initially the cost of the Standards work could be much less than the Assessment work. Until the Standards work moves beyond the ongoing development and revision of the standards and into the myriad of implementation issues the costs may be manageable. I am not fully aware of the level of funding that has been necessary in the initial round of Standards development.

The Assessment work cannot be done without federal funding. The Standards work might. But it matters whether this is a \$5 million direct cost (with states picking up indirect, in-kind costs) or a \$25 million direct cost (and indirect, in-kind costs for states). Without a fairly good estimate of the Standards' costs how can we consider who should pay them?

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*?

The consortia to develop tests should go out of business when the tests are developed and operational. An Assessment governance structure will be needed to receive the work of the consortia and create a workable Assessment program (not a two-track Assessment program but a unified program).

- 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)?

Again, the consortia should be transitional in this process and when their development work is done they should be done. The Assessment governance structure must be ready, before the assessments are ready, to take the work of the consortia and implement the Assessment program.

- 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?

There could be an Assessment governance structure before there is a Standards governance structure (a successor to the NGA/CCSSO arrangement, that is). Getting agreement on an Assessment governance structure could easily take a couple of years. It is logical, I believe, that the Standards governance could fall under the Assessment governance structure if the Assessment governance structure is as carefully thought out (and fought over) as I suspect that it will be.

- 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?

Getting clarity, and better yet ... agreement ... on what is to "be paid for going forward" is needed. Some of the cost estimates vary wildly. The state expenditures on assessment do not go away, so the CCSS Assessments' costs are a combination of CURRENT + NEW spending as states' current spending shifts, over time, into CCSS Assessments. Even with the huge expenditures by the federal government on initial test development the costs for the first several years of the CCSS Assessments could be in the

tens of millions of dollars. (Again it is important to get clarity and agreement on whether the new/added costs for student assessment in the states/nation will be in the tens of millions, scores of millions ... or hundreds of millions and how these numbers will change after several years when a new round of assessment development is required.)

Almost regardless of the added costs (and I am assuming that the added costs will not be in the “ones of millions” of dollars), a single, stable (reasonably stable ...) funding source for the large majority of the added costs will be needed. If the added costs are in the “tens of millions” of dollars it is conceivable that private sources might initially ensure a decade-long funding plan. If the added costs are greater than a private source(s) will provide, the option shifts to federal funding. It would be a logistical nightmare, and an unworkable nightmare, to have a forty-some state or fifty-state funding plan. It is theoretically possible to do so but practically, impossible.

There are ways to insulate federal funding from federal control and while they may not be perfect they are preferable to a plan that relies on state legislative appropriations actions in 40-some states every year (or every other year in a few biennial budget states perhaps). An assured, decade-long private funding plan would be preferable, assuming there are no onerous strings attached, but groups are not lining up to provide this funding.

12) What other comments or suggestions do you have that might be considered for the governance of the common assessments?

The Assessments’ governance and funding will be the biggest challenges. The Assessments’ governance must be created. The Standards’ governance can evolve based on the initial work, and success. The Standards’ governance could evolve and become part of the Assessment governance if it can be successfully created in the next two years, or so. The Assessment consortia should have a defined mission and “completion” date. An Assessment governance arrangement and consortia governance arrangements will not be needed when the consortia test development work is completed.