



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 **Gene Wilhoit’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?

The Common Core State Standards have been a state led initiative from the beginning, and states must play the central role in this effort moving ahead.

- Does something new need to be created or can existing organizations or structures handle it?

A new structure that incorporates existing organizations, pieces of the structure that led the Common Core work, and lessons learned from other organizations' governance is the best solution.

- What's the argument for/against turning this whole thing over to NAGB to run (in addition to NAEP)?

While the development of the Common Core may lead to new discussions about the future role of NAEP and leaders of both need to be in contact, decisions about the two need to be made separately in the best interests of both initiatives.

- What about letting the ad hoc coalition that got us this far (led by NGA and CCSSO) continue to lead the process?

States should continue to be intimately involved in the work, however that takes place is important to get right.

- 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?

Deciding on next steps soon is very important, but in the interim, the existing structure will stay in place.

- 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?

Having broad representation with states in a central role was essential to the success of the Common Core work and will continue to be essential moving forward. More specific decisions will depend upon the funding structure and the roles that the body decides are essential to the future of the work.

- 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"?

Higher education and business must continue to be involved in ways that provide meaningful input to the work to ensure that the standards continue to prepare students for college and careers.

- 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?

For the integrity of the standards, a “validation committee” or something similar must monitor the work so that the standards continue to be research-based and are revised based on lessons learned from implementation and new developments. However, the role of such a body must be clearly defined ahead of time.

- 5) What roles, if any, should the governing body of the CCSS 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 CCSS governing body doesn’t oversee these activities, who should (particularly if any of this is to be done in a “common” way)?

Roles that are central to the on-going quality of the standards themselves must be guided by states and the governance structure, but implementation activities like developing curriculum should not be part of this structure. States may decide to work on implementation together because collective state action in developing the standards has been so successful, but the Common Core must continue to be about expectations—the what, not the how.

- 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?

To ensure a central role for states, a combination of states and private funding is probably the best way to pay for this work.

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

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 most important implication of having more than one set of assessments is working to make sure that the results of the summative assessments are comparable.

The governance of the consortia and the Common Core standards should be separate.

- 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)?

None of those roles need necessarily be part of the consortia's work directly.

- 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?

No, decisions should be made in the best interest of each set of work.

- 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?

As with other assessments, federal support of required testing is essential to state implementation of standards-based accountability.

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