

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE?

A SET OF STANDARDS: “Common Core” is short for Common Core State Standards. For years, Utah has established standards, or academic benchmarks, in all subjects. The Common Core standards were developed in math and English language arts, and adopted by the Utah State Board of Education in 2010, replacing Utah’s previous standards in these areas. These Utah Core Standards set clear, grade-level expectations in these subjects for students, parents, and teachers.

IMPLEMENTED BY YOUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS

— **NOT THE FEDS:** Instructional materials are reviewed, purchased or developed by local districts and charters. Locally elected school boards work to provide the very best instructional materials to teachers. The State Board sets the standards, but all curriculum decisions are made by local boards, charters and teachers.

THE BEST KNOWN WAY TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR

COLLEGES AND CAREERS: The Utah Board of Regents estimates that up to 40 percent of college freshman are not ready for college-level math and writing courses, requiring remedial courses that carry no credit. The Utah Core Standards spell out what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level to be ready for their freshman year – without remediation.

BETTER FOR FAMILIES ON THE MOVE: Families that move across district and state lines can now count on a smoother adjustment for their kids. Keeping the academic core “common” throughout the U.S. allows families to move with the standards and know their children can jump right in without being behind or ahead of their class. This is especially helpful to military families, and several military groups have voiced strong support for the Common Core.

AN OPPORTUNITY: Utah has had core standards for decades, created by state officials working with the resources available. Working together with other states has provided all involved a chance to bring the best to the top and eliminate what hasn’t worked. This cooperative effort, which allows for individualization, puts students in a better place now than they’ve ever been.

WHAT IT IS NOT:

IT’S NOT A FEDERAL MANDATE. In Utah, standards are not connected to any federal funding or directive. The state neither gains nor loses money based on its adoption of the Common Core standards. Utah voluntarily chose to adopt the standards in 2010. Additionally, Utah can change its standards at any time without penalty.

IT’S NOT A SNEAKY WAY TO CHANGE OUR SCHOOLS.

All states received at least four drafts of the proposed standards throughout the development process, and there were two public review and comment periods that yielded nearly 10,000 comments, including thousands from parents. The Utah State Board of Education also requested public comments in 2009 and 2010.

IT’S NOT A SET CURRICULUM. In Utah, local school districts and charters control the curriculum – textbooks, teaching materials and lesson plans – used in the classroom. The Common Core State Standards Initiative does provide examples and suggestions, but in Utah these decisions are left up to districts, schools and teachers.

IT’S NOT A TESTING SYSTEM. Students have been required to take year-end tests for years. No Child Left Behind brought an increased emphasis on testing, with tests being used in a “high stakes” fashion. In 2008, Utah began to field new computer adaptive tests, and the success of this testing system led the Utah State Legislature to establish a computer adaptive testing system statewide in 2013-14. This new CAT system is not mandated by any involvement with the Common Core standards initiative, and will include assessments in science as well as math and English language arts.

IT’S NOT A DATA-SHARING METHOD. The Common Core Standards are just that – standards. And in Utah, standards are not connected to data sharing. The state has been using longitudinal data to improve public and higher education since 1998, long before the Common Core standards were ever discussed.

“The more we go toward core standards, the more opportunity we have to individualize education.”

Dave Long

Former principal of Logan’s Bridger Elementary,
National Title I Distinguished School Award 2011

“The 2007 Utah [math] Core was a strong document... but the new Utah Core Standards (Common Core) are even better. They incorporate the idea of integration of content, and reliance on student active involvement in context for understanding. Perhaps the opposition feel that the 2007 Standards are good enough, something they did not express when opposing them (in 2007). So the question is this: Is ‘good enough’ sufficient for our children’s education? It wasn’t for my parents.”

Dr. Hugo Rossi, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, University of Utah. Task Force member of the 2007 re-write of the Utah math core standards

“I felt enormous and demoralizing amounts of restriction and ‘top down’ control under the No Child Left Behind mandates when I taught fifth grade. I don’t feel that at all with the language arts Common Core. I think the key to keep in mind is that it is a ‘core’ like the core of an apple. There is still an enormous amount of ‘fruit’ that is entirely up to me, as an educator, to build. I have flexibility in how I meet the standards, and I love that the Common Core doesn’t dictate reading lists. The language arts Common Core strikes a healthy balance between having common objectives without robbing teachers, schools, or communities of autonomy.”

Eric Newell, Educator
Mount Logan Middle School Discovery Program

“I spent many hours with students who could read well but lacked the skills to dissect informational text. This core addresses the need for children to read not only literature but informational text. This core sets students up for success.”

Jeanette A. Christenson

Principal of Nibley Elementary
2013 Highest Ranked Elementary School in Utah

“The Common Core State Standards are superior to Utah’s previous language arts standards. They are the best possible standards now available to make Utah children competitive in a global society. We must now focus our time and resources on supporting districts’ and teachers’ implementation of the standards, including curriculum development and teacher training.”

Dr. D. Ray Reutzell, Emma Eccles Jones Distinguished Professor of Early Literacy Education at Utah State University

“As a teacher, I am grateful for the Common Core Standards. Teachers now have a strong base that they can use creatively to help students reach their potential. These standards do not limit good teaching, rather, they give assurance that more of it will happen. Children have the added benefit of not being penalized for moving to a different school or state.”

Jan Theobald, Educator
Heritage Elementary (Nibley)

“I have seen no evidence that there is anything sinister in the Common Core Standards. Rather, I see them as a sincere effort by the states involved to create a set of consistent, high standards that will assist teachers and students to raise their level of performance and to help our country remain competitive in an increasingly competitive world.”

Tim Smith, Assistant Principal
Skyview High School (Smithfield)