



## 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 **Robert B. Schwartz**’s response 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](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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### **Robert B. Schwartz**

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**(A full response follows question 12)**

#### **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?

### **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?

### **CCSSI GOVERNANCE THOUGHTS**

**Robert B. Schwartz**

My general bias in situations like this is to look for an existing organization with the appropriate mission and capacity rather than add yet another new organization to an already crowded landscape. Fortunately, for the task of overseeing the ongoing development and revision of the Common Core standards, such an organization exists. It is Achieve.

Achieve came into being in 1996 at the behest of a bi-partisan group of governors and corporate leaders to provide public advocacy, leadership, and technical assistance to states as they moved forward with the development of standards, assessments, and accountability. Although Achieve’s early work was largely responsive to requests from individual states for reviews of the quality of their standards and tests, for the last six years Achieve has led the development of a network of states committed to working together on standards and assessments, and it is largely out of that network that CCSSI has emerged.

Achieve has two significant advantages that make it a much more appropriate candidate for the long-term governance role than the two organizations (NGA and CCSSO) that have steered the process to date. First, Achieve is not a membership organization, so it is much better insulated from dumbing-down pressures that might emanate from laggard states. Second, it is a single purpose organization, so over the last 14 years it has been able to build a staff and network of consultants that have substantive knowledge and expertise, as evidenced by the fact that most of those involved in the writing of the Common Core standards have had some prior affiliation with Achieve.

If Achieve were to be asked to take on the long-term governance role, however, its board composition would have to change. The current Achieve board consists of six governors (three from each party) and six corporate leaders. These are two of the four constituencies that need to be represented in order for any organization to have political legitimacy to take on this new role. If the Achieve board would agree

to replace half of its current members with three representatives from higher education and three from K-12, I think it could credibly provide the kind of public leadership and oversight required to keep the standards movement on track. One way to keep NGA and CCSSO connected to the process would be to assign them responsibility for nominating the higher ed (NGA) and K-12 (CCSSO) Achieve board members.

If Achieve were to be asked to play this role, I would keep it focused on standards and not load on any expectation that it would become involved in the development of aligned curriculum materials, professional development models, etc. For the near-term, at least, I think we should let the market work here and see how existing or new providers respond to the new standards. It may be that down the road a new quasi-governmental organization might need to be created to produce high-quality aligned curriculum and other instructional materials, but first let's see how the market responds.

I have a similar view on assessments. Assuming that both state consortia are funded, I would not try at the outset to create some new assessment entity to manage the process. If over time the consortia merge, then we would need to address the governance question. For now, let's see how each consortium organizes itself to address the questions you have posed. Let's keep NAGB focused on NAEP and make it clear that the states are in charge of managing the state assessment process.

I don't have a good answer on the funding questions. I think the ongoing financial responsibility for maintaining and upgrading both standards and assessments needs to belong to the states, but someone smarter than I needs to figure out how to make that work on a sustained, secure basis.