



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

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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 **Eric J. Smith’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.

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

Eric J. Smith

Commissioner, Florida Department of Education

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?

Something new needs to be created, such as a multi-state compact.

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

There is a long history of local control in education. There has been much emphasis and prioritization on the involvement of states in the development of the Common Core State Standards. There has been criticism regarding a possible top down approach and possible biases involved in the governance in the development of the Common Core State Standards and that the USDOE or NGA or NAGB or CCSSO or NAEP have potential political and fiscal stakes in the implementation of national standards. These standards should not be governed by a national organization already in place. The states should govern the future of Common Core State Standards. Each state has legislatively required policies and procedures that regulate state education standards and assessments. Although most states do require school districts to implement state standards, some states do not. States differ greatly in their sizes, diversities, and cultures. States should have the leading role in the governance of the standards for which they will hold their students accountable for.

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

Up to now there has not been equal participation by all states. Additionally, there have been differences in those invited to take leads and those who have not. The politics surrounding both these organizations changes over time and leadership decisions could impact decisions made in the future. It is wonderful that so much has been accomplished to date but to ensure transparency and equal representation states should take over the lead of this project.

- 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?

This is very urgent. Decisions such as: How frequently will these be amended or revised? What process will be put in place to evaluate the fidelity of implementation and the success of the efforts? What does "adopt" mean, how will it be monitored? Need to be made as soon as possible. We cannot afford to wait and temporarily have no plan for governance.

- 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?

A multi-state compact with by-laws that require a minimum percent of state participation and administered by a specifically designated compact administrator inside each participating state with an interstate governing board. The compact itself would establish the rules for state compliance. This needs to be a formal entity with by-laws and formal processes for membership and for a state to release itself from the compact.

Decisions to become a member state should be agreed upon by state leadership including the governor, state chief and legislators with buy-in from district leadership. Teachers and subject matter experts should be included at each state level compact committee and represented at the Compact Board level.

- 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 should be included; extent of involvement would be determined by the membership states.

- 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 CCSS process?

Once the compact is in place decisions about adoption cycle, process of validation, evaluation, etc need to be made by the Board and membership states.

An external evaluation process must be included and the compact must be lead by a vision that includes measurable goals to move the nation up internationally academically.

- 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)?

Many of these topics are dealt with differently in each state and some states do not have the authority to govern instructional materials or classroom curriculum. For this reason a compact that is represented by diverse states is vital. These representatives, as members of the Compact, will determine issues that are within the compacts governing agreement. Many of the above issues could be addressed by the compact that would be determined by the member states.

- 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?

A minimal state membership fee based upon state student population size to support the Governing Board and compact communications and activities that should include external evaluation of progress.

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

The article *E Pluribus Unum in Education?* By Partick McGuinn was very helpful for drafting this response. Other supportive information would be research on how national standards are governed in other leading nations and how entities within their nations are included in decision making and governing. Also of interest would be examples, possible outside of education, of multi-state cooperatives and the establishment of these (legal as well as governance and process).

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*?

Assessment consortia have already defined a governance system and have agreed to work together to the greatest extent possible. When federal funding for the design and development of assessments is no longer available, consortia may choose to form a legal entity to manage work and contracts of member states. Member states would purchase products/services directly from consortia-negotiated contracts. Governing bodies of assessment consortia and CCS should be separate with periodic, possibly annual, common convenings for review of status and future timelines.

- 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)?

Assessment consortia should coordinate all work relevant to the measurement and reporting of student achievement of the Common Core Standards. They should also continuously monitor the technical quality of these measures, innovations in the field of measurement that should be considered for the system, and identify research questions that might help improve student achievement. They should not, without all states agreeing, attempt to influence any state accountability criteria such as rating schools.

- 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. To extend the response in #8, the focus, expertise, and annual activities are too distinct. Once the assessment design is in place to measure achievement of the CCS, the work is on a separate path.

- 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?

The federal government should continue to support state costs for federally-required assessments under ESEA, IDEA, etc. This support may need to increase as expectations for innovative approaches to assessment may impact state budgets beyond expected capacity to sustain. Individual states must retain rights to determine standards and assessments independent of federal expectations. Funding through

ESEA, etc. provided for assessments should continue to come to states with no increase in federal control beyond that which currently exists.

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

The governance of common assessments should be state driven and by state choice. Some form of consortium management must exist and can be accomplished through a competitive bid process or through states forming a new legal entity for this purpose.