

Washington County School District

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: The Common Core, Utah State Core Standards, and SAGE Testing

1. What is the Common Core?

The Common Core State Standards are a set of rigorous standards for student achievement in English language arts and mathematics (not science or social studies). The standards can be thought of as statements such as: “*At the end of this course/grade the student will be able to.....*” The Common Core State Standards are intended to provide a consistent, clear understanding to parents and teachers of what students are expected to learn in each grade level or course.

2. Who developed the Common Core State Standards?

In 2007 an initiative was launched by the *National Governor's Association* and the *Council of Chief State School Officers*, both private organizations under the control of the governors and superintendents, in coordination with 48 state school boards, to upgrade educational standards in English language arts and mathematics.

3. Why these standards? Why now?

Public education has been confronted with the achievement gains of students in other countries which suggest that American students are falling behind. Leaders from colleges and universities have indicated that many students graduating from high school are not prepared for higher education. The standards are designed to be relevant to the real world and reflect the knowledge and skills our young people need for success in college and careers.

4. Was the federal government involved in developing the Common Core State Standards?

No. The Common Core State Standards are not a national mandate or a national curriculum. States voluntarily choose whether or not to adopt the standards and retain full authority for implementation.

5. How were the Common Core Standards adopted to be our Utah State Core Standards?

Utah educators and subject-area experts participated in the creation of the standards. They were reviewed thoroughly by the Utah State Board of Education and by parents at several public meetings held across the state. The standards have been endorsed by higher education and business leaders across the state and nation.

6. Are we giving up local control because our state adopted the Common Core State Standards?

The standards define what students need to know; they do not dictate how teachers teach or how students learn. The standards do not dictate what lesson plans, programs, or textbooks we will use for curriculum. Teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum. The State Board may add to, subtract from, or rewrite, standards as deemed necessary to meet the needs of Utah students.

7. Is the adoption of the Common Core tied to funding we receive from the federal government?

No. Adoption of the State Core Standards does not affect federal funds the Washington County School District receives for programs such as Title I (schools with a high % of students receiving free or reduced price lunch), special education, and school lunch.

The federal *Race to the Top* (RTTT) grants gave more points to states that adopted the Common Core Standards. When Utah prepared its RTTT application the Utah State Board of Education discussed the Core in depth. The State Board decided to include adoption of the Core in the application based on: 1) the quality of the standards, 2) the opportunity to have nationally and internationally benchmarked standards and, 3) to improve literacy and mathematics instruction across the state. The State Board did not adopt the Common Core Standards because of federal pressure or promise of an RTTT grant. Utah's application was rejected because the State Board did not include other high-point options. Based on this experience, the State Board decided not to apply for an RTTT grant again.

8. Aren't these standards "untried"? Are we experimenting with our students?

The Common Core State Standards have been heavily researched and refined by experts in the field. They are based on what has been learned about college and career readiness over the past decade from organizations such as *ACT* and the *College Board*. The content standards were reviewed by groups such as the *National Assessment Governing Board* and the *National Council of Mathematics*. International comparisons helped ensure the standards were set at a high level. The governors and state school officers organized a *Validation Committee* comprised of experts in the development and implementation of national and international standards in education. The committee overwhelmingly confirmed the standards and validated them as representative of the knowledge and skills necessary for students to be career and college ready.

9. How are students assessed in relation to the standards?

As has been the case for many years, students across the state take end-of-year tests in English language arts, math, and science in grades 3-11. The new, more rigorous core standards required that new tests be created. The Utah State Office of Education received proposals from 13 companies to provide a computer-adaptive testing platform upon which the state would create its own assessments. The contract was awarded to *American Institutes for Research* (AIR). The State Board of Education actually began the process of adopting computer-adaptive testing in 2008 (before the Common Core). Utah would have moved to computer-adaptive testing regardless of what standards were adopted.

10. Did AIR create the Utah end-of-year assessments?

No. AIR provides the computer-based framework. The process of creating Utah's end-of-year assessments was carried out by 300 Utah educators.

11. Is there a national end-of-year test?

No. Each state adopts their own assessments to fit their needs.

12. What is SAGE?

The *Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence* (SAGE) is the state's assessment system created by Utah educators using the AIR technology for measuring student achievement on the new Utah State Core Standards.

13. Does SAGE include psychological or behavioral testing?

No. While AIR offers many services through their company such as behavioral assessments, surveys, program evaluations, etc., Utah's contract with AIR does not include these services.

14. What does it mean that the SAGE test is "computer-adaptive"?

In order to assess these more rigorous standards we need to know more about what the student knows. To do this, the SAGE assessments are adaptive, meaning if students are answering questions correctly the computer will provide more challenging questions in order to measure the student's depth of knowledge in that area. As such, each student's experience with the SAGE test may be different depending on how they are answering questions. Students who are particularly capable in a subject may find they do not know the answers to all the questions on the SAGE test.

15. Did parents review the SAGE test questions?

Yes. A committee of 15 parents from across the state was selected to review the thousands of test items that will be used in the SAGE assessments over the next several years. The following is a quote by a member of the committee following their review:

"I didn't see any real social problems with the test or things that would be controversial. [W]e all feel comfortable with the test." --Alean Hunt, Parent Review committee member, as quoted by the Deseret News.

16. Who decides the "passing" score on the SAGE tests?

Utah educators came together after the first administration of the SAGE tests to see how students did overall. Based on that information and their knowledge of the standards, they designated the passing score for each test. The Utah State School Board approves the passing scores. The federal government is not involved in deciding who passes our tests.

17. How do SAGE results affect a student's grade?

As it was with our old end-of-the-year tests, individual teachers determine what weight to give SAGE scores and how to factor them into their course grade.

18. What student information does the Utah State Office of Education collect?

The Common Core State Standards do not contain requirements related to data collection or reporting. The new Utah SAGE assessments will not change any of the data that are collected or reported. The Utah State Office of Education already collects data on such things as: birthdate, gender, race/ethnicity, enrollment, graduation, grades, credits, schools, enrollment in special programs such as Title I, special education, gifted education, English language learning programs, and free & reduced lunch. The State does not collect information about political affiliations, sexual behavior or attitudes, or religious practices.

19. What testing information is shared with the federal government?

No student-level testing results are provided to the federal government. Results are reported in terms of groups of students, for example, Utah reports the number of students in special education that pass the 3rd grade math test, and the number of female students that pass the chemistry test, etc.

20. What's to prevent AIR from misusing our testing data?

Utah's relationship with AIR and the services it provides are defined by contract. AIR has similar contracts with other states. A data breach or misuse would have severe financial implications for their company and would be a violation of federal law. AIR's goal is to abide by the contract and foster a good relationship in order to keep Utah as a customer. In the end, Utah is free to choose another contractor.

21. What can we expect from the Utah Core Standards and SAGE testing?

With new rigorous standards and a new, more challenging testing system, we expect fewer students to score "proficient" on the SAGE than under our old standards and testing system. This is not because student achievement has decreased or that teachers are not teaching as well, but because our new standards and tests are more challenging. We expect better information from the SAGE testing. Parents and teachers will get detailed reports about how their students are performing relative to the Utah State Core Standards. This information will assist us to better target instruction to students' learning needs. We expect to see students better prepared for college and careers.

22. What is Governor Herbert doing about the concerns with the Utah State Core Standards?

On July 17th Governor Herbert announced he had asked the State Attorney General to look into what, if any, federal entanglements have been involved in Utah's adoptions of the Common Core Standards. He outlined three principles to guide this review process:

1. Maintain high academic standards in all subjects, and for all students.
2. Monitor and limit the federal government's role in education.
3. Preserve our state and local school district control of our education system, including curriculum, materials, testing and instructional practices. He also outlined immediate steps to move forward in resolving growing concerns:

1. A legal review and report from the Attorney General's Office in regards to Utah's adoption of the Common Core Standards in mathematics and English language arts. In this review, the Attorney General will clarify Utah's level of control of academic standards, and local districts' and charters' control of the curriculum.

2. Utah experts in mathematics and English language arts, led by Dr. Rich Kendell, will evaluate education standards in mathematics and English language arts from a higher education perspective to ensure they will prepare students for post-secondary success.

3. Parents, teachers, community members and organizations across the state are invited to review current standards and give feedback starting today by visiting www.utah.gov/governor/standards

23. Where can I view the standards and get answers to questions about them?

The Governor's web site is an easy place to start looking at Utah's standards in English language arts and math.

<http://www.utah.gov/governor/standards/>

You are encouraged to take the survey you'll find there. If you have questions about specific standards, you are welcome to contact your school principal or Superintendent Bergeson, at the Washington County School District office.

24. Where can I get more information about the Utah Core Standards, SAGE testing, AIR, etc.?

** A good starting point is provided on our district web page. Go to washk12.org and click on the *Utah State Core Standards* banner. Or, go directly via the following address:

<http://washk12.org/parents-students/parent-resources/2013-08-23-19-34-08/utah-core-information>

** A summary of the rationale and development process of the Common Core can be found at:

http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2014/CCSS_Insight_Into_Development_2014.pdf

Sources:

Conley, D. T. (2014). The common core state standards: Insight into their development and purpose. Council of Chief State School Officers.

Deseret News. July 17, 2004: Utah gov wants academic standards re-examined.

Utah Governor Gary Herbert: Utah Core Standards

<http://www.utah.gov/governor/standards/>

Utah State Board of Education: Core Standards brochure.

Utah State Office of Education: State Longitudinal Data Systems

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/computerservices/Services/USOEDataPoliciesAndProcesses.aspx>

Utah State Office of Education: Utah Core Standards>Parent Resources.

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/core/Parents.aspx>