



STATE OF UTAH

GARY R. HERBERT
GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
84114-2220

SPENCER J. COX
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Governor's Remarks - Strengthening Utah Education for our Students

(July 17, 2014) Over the past year, I have listened intently to the growing chorus of concern with regards to certain aspects of public education. Much of that concern is over the adoption of the Common Core standards in mathematics and language arts.

Comments from concerned parents, residents and state lawmakers are increasing. Not all of the input is negative, and not all of it is related to the Common Core standards. I have received feedback from teachers who support the new standards and are pleased with the progress students are making. Some feedback is from residents who believe that we as a state are losing control over our academic standards. Many of the complaints I hear are from parents and grandparents who are simply frustrated over their student's math homework.

As I listen to these concerns, it seems we are too often talking past one another, using different terms to describe shared frustrations. The term "Common Core" has become so contentious that it is dividing us on things we all actually agree on, like the need for local control, setting high standards and preparing our students to succeed.

The discord is tied to issues larger than just the Common Core. We are all concerned about a loss of liberty that comes slowly with increasing federal encroachment into our lives, including the schools that our children attend. The "Common Core" was originally designed as a set of standards that states could voluntarily adopt to help improve academic outcomes for students. For those who are concerned that it has become some kind of a mandate, I want to re-assert that, in Utah, parents and teachers, principals and local school board members, in cooperation with the State School Board, are--and always will be--the primary decision makers. They should determine what is taught and how it is taught. I state unequivocally that today, we will not cede that authority or responsibility to anyone else.

We as a state need to resolve these contentious matters. And as we do so, there are three principles that should guide our actions:

1. We must maintain high academic standards in *all* subjects, not just math and English, and for *all* students.
2. We must monitor and limit the federal government's role in education.
3. And, we must preserve our state and local school district control of our education system, including curriculum, materials, testing and instructional practices.

With these principles to guide us, I am prepared today to take decisive action to help resolve the discord that has grown in volume and intensity... and to put our focus back where it should be: on helping Utah's 600,000 public and charter school students to succeed.

First, I have called for a thorough legal review and a report from the Attorney General's Office in regards to Utah's adoption of the Common Core Standards in mathematics and English language arts. This review will address questions regarding any current federal entanglements associated with the adoption of the Common Core standards. I have asked the attorney general to determine whether or not Utah has control of our academic standards, and if our local districts and charter schools still control the curriculum used in their respective schools. We are going to settle this question, once and for all.

Two years ago, I worked with Senator Margaret Dayton and the Legislature on SB287, which requires Utah to exit any agreements or contracts that relinquish control of Utah's standards or curriculum to the federal government. I have asked the attorney general to verify that we are in compliance with this state law.

Part of the challenge we face is the dissatisfaction states feel with regards to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act - also known as ESEA, or in its current form today it is known as No Child Left Behind. I have asked the attorney general to confirm that our waiver from No Child Left Behind is also in compliance with SB287.

Furthermore, I call upon our congressional delegation to lead the effort to fix No Child Left Behind. Utah should not be forced into the position of increased federal intrusion due to the impossible benchmarks that it sets. This is a problem that *Congress* has the responsibility to address.

Second, I firmly believe in the importance of high academic standards for Utah students. We have a proud history of Utah-based academic standards that pre-date adoption of the Common Core standards. The future success of our young people depends on setting rigorous standards and providing a high quality education.

During the most recent session, the Legislature passed HB342, sponsored by Representative Dana Layton, which I signed into law. This bill requires the establishment of a standards review committee, consisting of parents, teachers and experts who will review the current Utah standards in all subject areas, beginning with mathematics. The State Board of Education has already begun to move forward with this process.

While I believe this review is a critical step in the right direction, we need to do more.

As Governor, I have special responsibility for our system of higher education. I am concerned about the number of students who enter post high school programs needing remediation, particularly in the area of math. Today, in order to ensure that we have sufficiently rigorous standards, I'm calling for a review of our existing standards to make sure they truly prepare our students for college and careers.

To that end, I've asked Dr. Rich Kendell to work with Utah experts in math and English language arts to evaluate these standards and to ensure that they will, indeed, better prepare students for postsecondary success. Dr. Kendell is a former university president, school district superintendent, and education advisor to former Governor Mike Leavitt. He has a unique perspective that will guide a comprehensive examination of the standards. Dr. Kendell will lead a committee of members from stakeholder groups, including Matt Holland, president of Utah Valley University; Rob Brems from Utah's College of Applied Technology; Elizabeth Hitch from our System of Higher Education; and Alan Hall, who will represent the business community. They, and others to be named to the committee, will oversee smaller working groups of technical and content experts in examining the standards.

Now, I don't want to presuppose the outcome of this review, but I want to emphasize that Dr. Kendell and his team of experts may recommend that some standards be removed, some standards might be made more rigorous, and some standards might not be changed at all. These recommendations will be given to the State Board of Education for their consideration. Regardless, this committee will be charged with ensuring that our current academic standards in math and English language arts are not only Utah

standards, but are sufficiently rigorous to prepare Utah students to be college and career training ready. Our goal is a significant reduction of the need for post-high school remediation, which costs schools and students precious time and money.

In addition, we will also take steps to ensure that parents, teachers, community members and other concerned citizens and organizations across the state have the opportunity to provide feedback on these standards. To give us your feedback, we've created a webpage, utah.gov/governor/standards, where anyone with a concern can review the current standards and give us their opinion. This can be either positive or negative feedback, but it needs to be specific. If there is a standard or grade level benchmark that you disagree with, I want to hear about it. This input will be shared with Dr. Kendell's work group and will be invaluable, as the group completes its evaluation. This site is now open for comments... and it will be open through the end of August.

Third, the majority of complaints I've heard about the Common Core are related to the *implementation* of the standards, the development of new courses and curriculum, and the full rollout of a new testing system.

In the past, when the State Board of Education updated academic standards, training was also provided for the teachers. However, due to a significant reduction in professional development resources for teachers in the past four years, this level of training has been reduced. Therefore, it is more difficult than ever for our teachers to implement the new standards.

I would ask the State Office of Education and the State Board of Education to work with my Office, and the Legislature, to make sure our teachers have the training that they need to teach effectively.

Of course, we cannot forget the important role parents play in education. Hours after the school bell rings, parents are there to help with homework. Now, a lot has changed since mom and dad were students, and I understand the frustration of parents who have had little exposure to the new standards and, the new teaching methods. They are often left without any resources to help them, as they try to help their own children. I believe we can do a better job of facilitating parental involvement.

I am confident that the State School Board, working with the PTA, teacher associations, local school boards, and other educational partners, can resolve this particular problem. I'm offering the full support of my Office to come up with solutions to this challenge.

As I mentioned before, this is bigger than just the so-called "Common Core." I want to comment on two issues that are *not* part of the Common Core standards, but deserve our attention today: (1) the state's new SAGE computer adaptive testing system, and (2) the protection of student data.

Utah has been a leader in the implementation of computer adaptive testing. Beginning in 2008 - before the Common Core Standards were developed - Utah schools began piloting this type of testing. After positive reviews from Utah schools, and with the encouragement and support of the Legislature, the State Board of Education moved forward with the development of a uniquely Utah test - with questions written, edited and reviewed by Utah teachers and Utah parents.

There have been concerns from parents with the recent statewide implementation of these tests. Some schools report a lack of technology, which required students to begin testing well before the school year had ended. Other concerns were in regard to the length of time students were spending on individual test questions. In addition, some parents are concerned about adequate access to the test questions and transparency. I recognize that there are bound to be bumps in the road during the rollout of any new program. But I also state today that where there are problems, we will fix them. Privacy issues are also of critical importance to all of us. Today we use phones, tablets and computers to generate significant amounts of personal data, and we are just beginning to recognize the power of data

collection and data mining. Of course, some data is critical to evaluation and improvement. But, I share the concerns of many about the types of data being collected, the use of that data and, critically, the security of that data.

Over a year ago, the State Board of Education passed two resolutions, stating their concerns regarding the appropriate use of testing and adequate protection of a student's personal information. They requested specific legislation to address those concerns. Unfortunately, they don't have it yet; but they need it.

That's why I am asking legislative leadership to work with my Office and the State Board of Education to address these issues of privacy and testing to ensure that we have the necessary protections in place while *appropriately* using testing and information to improve educational outcomes for our students.

Even as these issues have become a source of some contention, I am grateful that we have so many parents, students and educators who care passionately that all Utahns have the opportunity to receive a good education.

The simple fact is, these aren't issues a governor can address alone. That's not the system we have established by our State Constitution.

While I am committed to doing my part, our State Board of Education, the Legislature, our local school boards, our educational groups, and, in fact, all Utahns have an important role to play.

Unfortunately, no matter how we move forward, we will never satisfy all the critics. But we cannot let our desire for "the perfect" be the enemy of "the good." We must work together, and we must keep the focus on the success of our students.

When it comes to achieving educational excellence in Utah, more than ever, we must all work together to give students the best education possible, so they can compete in the global marketplace and reach their full potential.

###