



# AMERICAN PREPARATORY ACADEMY

## **American Prep and the Common Core State Standards (Utah Core Standards)**

American Prep incorporates The Core Knowledge Sequence, and has since its inception in 2003. The CK Sequence is a rigorous, sequential framework of content, organized grade by grade, and was created by a group of educators for students in Grades K-8. For the past 15 years or so, the CK sequence has been available to schools for voluntary adoption. Thousands of schools have adopted it (in part or all) and have had great success.

Many schools have recognized that their state standards generally are not rigorous, coherent, sequential or effective. Looking for something better, we found and adopted the CK Sequence. At American Prep, we found that by teaching according to the CK Sequence, our students have been easily able to meet the proficiency requirements of the Utah State Standards (USS), and have passed the annual CRTs at high rates. We feel the CK Sequence places our students 1-2 grade levels ahead of the state standards in many subjects.

For many, many years, we have maintained that the Utah State Standards were ineffective and therefore we focused on the CK Sequence and we didn't pay much attention to the Utah State Standards. Because we taught at a level significantly higher, we simply did not find we needed to focus on the USS.

We did, however, assist our students in reviewing the state standard concepts for their grade each spring, preparing them for the state CRT tests so they could demonstrate their mastery. We felt it was important that students not miss questions due to not having considered the concepts for a year or more, as our students are usually one to two years ahead of the state standards. We also found it helpful to acquaint students with particular testing vocabulary and strategies.

This preparation takes very little of our class time - 15 minutes 2-3 times per week for Math, a similar amount of time in Science. We don't focus on Language Arts specifically as our students tend to be well prepared, but we do spend some time on computer test taking strategies and practice.

When Utah decided to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), American Prep studied the CCSS and determined that our curriculum and programs would best prepare our students to exceed those standards as well. Therefore, we opted to not change any curriculum or programs in response to the new Utah Core Standards. Therefore, we have been providing the same academic program this year as we have in previous years. Just as in previous years, we will take some time this spring to do some focused instruction prepping our students to succeed on their end of level tests, but this is no different than in previous years and we feel the practice benefits our students academically, in addition to preparing them to test well.



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This spring, our students will take the new state assessments and we will review their performance and evaluate whether or not we need to further adjust our academic program. We don't anticipate changing our program to any significant degree, but we will likely continue to tweak our test preparation to the best benefit of our students.

## FAQ about the Common Core (Utah Core Standards)

1. How does the CCSS impact American Prep?

A: We have never "taught to" the state standards, but instead have provided a more rigorous academic program that exceeds the state standards. This has not changed with the adoption of the CCSS in Utah – our programs exceed the CCSS and therefore remain essentially identical to pre-CCSS adoption.

2. Isn't American Prep required to purchase new curriculum and adopt new programs that are "aligned" with the CCSS?

A: No, the CCSS DO NOT require any certain curriculum or programs. No school or school district in Utah is required to purchase new curriculum or programs because of the CCSS adoption. If districts and schools are purchasing new curriculum and changing their programs, it is completely by choice, and they are choosing the programs. There is NO GOVERNMENT involvement in the choice of curriculum in Utah schools. Choice of curriculum and programs is up to the districts (and schools if the district affords them that latitude).

3. Shouldn't Utah "opt out" of the CCSS?

A: CCSS only encompass the areas of Language Arts and Mathematics. Utah State Standards for the other subjects remain in effect. The CCSS and the USS together are now called Utah Core Standards. If Utah were to "dump" the standards for LA and Math at this point, what is the suggested standard they would use? If it is to return to the previous USS, we see that as a step backward. We don't believe Utah should opt out of the CCSS.

4. Isn't the federal government too involved in our schools? Aren't the CCSS just one more evidence of federal intrusion into our schools?

A: The federal government is overly involved in our state's affairs in many respects. From trust lands to healthcare, there is an alarming trend of the federal government imposing itself in our state's affairs.

Education standards are somewhat a different issue, in our view. We believe that it benefits students and parents if schools nationwide teach to standards that will prepare our students to compete well state to state, and with students from other nations. Students have been attending public schools for several hundred years in America, and we believe it is reasonable and rational to expect that the education professionals can come up with uniform education standards that are implemented across the nation.



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Most industries have codes and standards – we see this in engineering, architecture, scientific research, building construction, manufacturing and many other disciplines. It is ridiculous that America’s parents can’t clearly know what their 3<sup>rd</sup> grader should be able to do and what they should know by the end of their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year. Uniform standards are required if we are to hold teachers and schools accountable for their work. We believe that we need uniform requirements for each grade. Having 50 different requirements for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders does not benefit our nation’s families. We are the last developed nation to recognize that national standards are essential, and our students are paying the price for not having them.

Seeing this need over the past many decades, a group of education professionals set out to articulate what these standards should and could look like. Their work was acknowledged as good by many educators, and the standards they created were an improvement over most states’ current standards. This is one reason why 45 states have adopted the CCSS, freely, of their own choice. The federal government did not create the CCSS, nor have they mandated that we use them in Utah. They are NOT “federal” standards, however, because 45 states have willingly adopted them, they are considered “national” standards, an important distinction.

5. I heard that the federal government is using the year-end tests to get personal information about my child and my family. Is this true?

A: Our state office of education heard concerns from parents regarding this, and identified a group of volunteer parents to review EACH and EVERY question that may be on the tests this year to ensure the questions were appropriate and did not violate a student’s or family’s privacy in any way. This work is completed and the parent group has approved 100% of the questions on this year’s tests. They have certified there are no inappropriate questions that violate privacy.

6. I also heard that the tests will give the federal government information about my student, and they may use it in bad ways. Is that possible?

A: Since 1969 the federal government has been administering a test to 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). From the data they gather, they assess long-term trends in education quality in the U.S. To our knowledge, the government had never been found to have used this data inappropriately. We believe it is reasonable to assume that the federal government will be equally professional with the use of any additional data they may gather from a future assessment. Of course states will need to continue to hold them accountable to this standard.

7. Can I opt out my student from taking the state tests?

A: Yes, you can. Our policy clearly states that you are able to opt your child out of any academic or non-academic school activity. Our school opt-out policy, from our Parent-Student Handbook, provides a process whereby you can request an opt-out for your



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child. End-of-year testing is considered a school-wide activity, so you will need to obtain a Request for Waiver of Participation Form from your campus Administrative Director, fill it out and meet with her to discuss your objections. The AD may then approve the Request, with an alternate activity plan for your student, as outlined in the school policy.

