VIII.   OLD BUSINESS
A. Idaho Core Standards

The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in entry-level careers, introductory academic college courses, workforce training programs, and life regardless of where they live.

Recognizing the value and need for consistent learning goals across states, in 2009 the state school chiefs and governors that comprise the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices coordinated a state-led effort to develop the Common Core State Standards. Designed through collaboration among teachers, school chiefs, administrators, and other experts, the standards provide a clear and consistent framework for educators. Forty-four states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have voluntarily adopted and are moving forward with the Common Core.

The Common Core is informed by the highest, most effective standards from states across the United States and countries around the world. Idaho adopted the Common Core State Standards in January, 2011 as the Idaho Core Standards.

The standards are:
- Research- and evidence-based
- Clear, understandable, and consistent
- Aligned with college and career expectations
- Based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills
- Built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards
- Informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society

The standards are not:
- A national curriculum. In Idaho, the state sets academic standards (what students should know by the end of each school year). Curriculum is set by local school boards.
- A federal requirement. The Idaho Core Standards are the result of a state-run effort to improve education standards. The U.S. Dept. of Education has never, and does not now dictate state education standards. Participation is completely voluntary and no funding or waiver is withheld from those states electing not to participate. The federal government has developed some incentive programs

like Race to the Top to encourage states to participate, but Idaho elected not to participate in Race to the Top.

- A way to lower standards in Idaho. The Idaho Core Standards are more rigorous than Idaho's previous standards.
- Linked to any plan to upload identifiable student data to a national database. Idaho implemented a state-wide longitudinal data system in 2009, 2 years before the Idaho Core Standards were adopted. Idaho's data system is not tied to any national database. Further, neither the state nor local school districts collect data on things like religious affiliation, nor does the state have the technology to collect any biometric data.
- Deemphasizing the importance of literature and historical texts. The standards require a balance of literature and informational texts. They encourage the inclusion of more informational and primary source texts in classes other than English Language Arts. English classes still focus mostly on literature.
- Standards set in stone. Idaho has flexibility to add onto these standards, as do local districts.

What will the Idaho Core Standards accomplish?

- The standards will help us achieve our goal of 60% of Idaho adults having a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2020 by better preparing students for the rigors of school/work beyond high school. Today only 39% of Idaho adults have a postsecondary degree or certificate.
- There is a gap between skills students need to be successful in college and the skills with which they are graduating from high school. Consequently, a significant number of students must take remedial courses once they get to college. Students pay for them, but those courses do not count toward a degree. Students waste time and money on learning what they should already know, or they become discouraged and drop out.
- Employers report that high school graduates do not have the skills required for available jobs. Raising our standards will help close that gap.
- The standards emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills; students need those skills to succeed in college, career and life.
- The standards require the use of evidence to support arguments rather than merely students' opinions.
- Students who move from state to state will have fewer gaps in their education due to differing standards in those states.

Some Criticisms of Idaho Core Standards:

- The testing takes too long and is too hard for students. Testing can take up to 8.5 hours for the average student. This allows time for performance tasks and

writing and is not done in one day. This is really a criticism of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) evaluation, not the Standards.

- Standards are too hard/not appropriate for younger grades and for those learning English. Some early childhood experts have expressed concern that the Standards do not allow for learning through play and other early childhood learning techniques.
- Common Core is untested and unpiloted. The Standards were drawn from the evidence and work of high-performing states and nations. They were founded on data that identifies college and career-ready performance. Therefore, while it is untested, it is far from a shot in the dark. There will be challenges in implementing Common Core, as there are with any large scale change.
- The reading list (Appendix B) is inappropriate and out of date. Appendix B is a list of titles to be used as exemplars, not a required reading list. Educators may choose to use any appropriate text.

Idaho Core Standards Timeline:

- January, 2011: Idaho adopted the Common Core State Standards as Idaho's Core Standards in Math and Language Arts.
- Fall 2013: Idaho first implemented the standards in schools.
- Spring 2014: Idaho students take a road test of the SBAC.
- Spring 2015: Idaho students will first take the new test aligned with the higher standards and receive scores back.

Sources:

Idaho State Department of Education*. A Quick Overview of the Idaho Core Standards.* Accessed May 20, 2014 at http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/ics/.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium website. Accessed May 28, 2014 at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/.

Strauss, Valerie. *6 reasons to reject Common Core K-3 standards – and 6 rules to guide policy.* Washington Post.com, May 2, 2014. Accessed May 27, 2014 at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/05/02/6-reasons-to-reject-common-core-k-3-standards-and-6-axioms-to-guide-policy/.