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Standards--Not Curriculum: Three Analogies

By [Stu Silberman](#) on August 5, 2013 2:16 PM | [4 Comments](#)

Telling a story repeatedly doesn't make it true. Such is the case with the chatter circulating lately asserting that the Common Core State Standards force local schools and districts to use a specific curriculum. This simply is not the case. And it is important to understand that there is a big difference between standards and curriculum. A helpful way to make this point is with analogies illustrating that standards set the bar and destination while curriculum is the way to get there. Toward that end, I offer the following in the hope of providing some clarity:

1. If you've ever used Google maps, you know Google gives you a choice of different routes to get to your destination. The destination is the standard and the route is the curriculum.
2. Track and field high jumpers try to clear a bar that is set at different heights. They can use different ways to do this - including the traditional jump and the Fosbury Flop (popularized by Olympic gold medalist Dick Fosbury). In this case, the bar is the standard and the Fosbury Flop is the curriculum.
3. Every field in the National Football league is the same length and width. No matter the location of the game, the field is exactly the same. So are the rules of the game. But the playbook for each team is significantly different. The field and rules are the standards while the vastly different playbooks make up the curriculum.

No one is proposing a common curriculum for our schools because the way teachers teach and what methods and materials they use are decisions best made by local professionals and districts. Each local school district can and should develop its own *curriculum* to reach a *standard* that will help students become college and career ready. I hope these simple analogies help illustrate the difference between the two.

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