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California's Transition to the Common Core State Standards

The State's Role in Local Capacity Building

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Summary

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Local Control Funding Formula are introducing major changes to California's K–12 system. Implementation of new curricula and instruction is under way at the district level, but California started its transition relatively late and it has taken a more decentralized approach than most other states. Though California budgeted \$1.25 billion in 2013 and CDE has taken several steps to implement CCSS, the state has preferred to place the responsibility for implementation in the hands of the districts. In other states, such as Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee, strategies were developed centrally to train teachers in the new standards and improve instruction and curriculum at the local level.

In addition to changing what goes on in the classroom, the CCSS are altering the state's role in K–12 education. Under the CCSS, California will no longer establish learning standards or develop student assessments in mathematics and English language arts (ELA). In addition, the new standards create a national market out of what used to be many state-controlled markets for textbooks and teacher training services. As a result, districts have many more choices of materials and services, and the existing state review process no longer meets district needs. At the same time, the new Local Control Funding Formula eliminates most categorical funding programs, which gave CDE an array of policy and regulatory powers. By ceding primary responsibility for determining how best to use funding to meet the needs of students to school districts, the new law further reduces CDE's clout.

Given these changes, California needs to think about new ways to help school districts improve the quality of education. For example, we suggest transforming the textbook review process into a “consumer reports” guide to the quality of the many commercial and open-source materials available to districts. Similarly, CDE could use its assessment expertise to evaluate the quality of available high school tests that districts could use to replace the recently eliminated statewide tests. In addition, CDE could use state testing data to give districts longitudinal perspectives on student performance. The department would need new resources to implement these ideas and time to learn how to assist districts most effectively. But this transition period offers the state a new opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the K–12 system in California.

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Abbreviations

CCSESA	California County Superintendents Educational Services Association
CDE	California Department of Education
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
CST	California Standards Tests
KDOE	Kentucky Department of Education
NCLB	No Child Left Behind (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001)
NYSED	New York State Education Department
SBAC	Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium
TDOE	Tennessee Department of Education

Introduction

California’s K–12 policies are undergoing major changes. First, educators are implementing the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Adopted by California in 2010, the new standards are intended to provide states with high-quality curriculum guidance. To gauge student progress under the new standards, California is also replacing its testing system with tests developed by the multi-state Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), one of two federally funded consortia of states working on new assessments.¹At the same time, districts are developing plans to implement the recently enacted Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which increases local spending autonomy, sets in place a long-term plan for increasing support for disadvantaged students, and creates a new local accountability program.

The CCSS were developed by two organizations—the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governor’s Association. While the new standards cover mathematics and English in all grades, assessments are being developed primarily in grades that must be tested under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

One of more than 40 states to commit to using the Common Core standards, California has moved slowly to implement them. In a companion report, *Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California*, we conclude that many teachers will implement the new standards for the first time in 2014–15, when the SBAC tests are first administered. As of fall 2013, many teachers are still in the process of learning about the standards and developing lessons based on them. The state has also moved more slowly than some other states to support district implementation of the new standards. As a consequence, the implementation of CCSS in California at both the state and local levels will continue well past 2014–15.

Both the new standards and the new funding formula establish a fundamentally different policy landscape for California’s Department of Education (CDE). The fact that the standards are shared by so many states creates a national market for instructional materials and teacher training resources, greatly expanding district choices and diminishing the state’s oversight in these areas. In addition, the new SBAC tests significantly reduce CDE’s role in assessing the standards. The ongoing implementation of these new policies offers an opportunity for the state to develop a new role in supporting districts by becoming a hub of information for school districts in search of high-quality training and materials.

In the first section of this report, we compare state-level implementation activities in California to those in other key states. In the second section, we outline some ways in which the governor, legislature, and CDE could support district implementation of the new standards.

¹ The second collaborative is called Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Two collaboratives were established to give states assessment choices.

Comparing CCSS Implementation Strategies

In this section, we compare California’s progress in implementing CCSS with the activities of Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee.² These states were chosen because they are relatively large with diverse student populations, who began to implement the standards early, scored close to the national average on student performance tests, and employed different approaches to implementation.³ We look at four areas: professional development, instructional materials, assessments, and funding. What we find is that while California has treated implementation mostly as a local responsibility, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDOE), the New York State Education Department (NYSED), and the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) developed and disseminated training to improve the local implementation of the new standards.

Professional Development

Helping teachers, principals, and other district staff adjust to the new standards is probably the single most important CCSS implementation activity. California’s CDE began its outreach to local educators much later than the other state agencies, which were directly involved in a multi-year effort to design and deliver training (Table 1).

CDE’s website contains a range of materials that describe the new standards and tests and provides links to additional resources developed by the department and other organizations. These include CDE-developed training modules developed in 2013, which describe the new standards and explain the concepts behind their design. In addition, CDE is establishing an Online Professional Learning Support Network, which will maintain a list of approved training providers based in California. To qualify, applicants must show they use standards-aligned materials, conform to the National Standards for Quality Online Courses, and are willing to reveal the cost of their services through the network.

CDE also has focused on materials designed to help educators create classroom lesson plans. Curriculum frameworks in mathematics were completed in 2013 and similar frameworks in ELA are expected to be finished in 2014. The ELA frameworks will break down the skills and knowledge included in the frameworks and combine them with California’s new standards for English Learner (EL) instruction.

² In addition to reviewing state-developed materials related to CCSS implementation, we spoke with senior state-level officials responsible for implementing the CCSS: Tom Adams, Director of the Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division, California Department of Education (October 18, 2013); Karen Kidwell, Director of the Division of Program Standards, Kentucky Department of Education (October 23, 2013); Mary Cahill, Director for Curriculum and Instruction, New York State Education Department (October 23, 2013); and Emily Barton, Assistant Commissioner for Curriculum and Instruction, Tennessee Department of Education (October 9, 2013).

³ New York and Kentucky scored 224 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2013, and Tennessee scored 220. The national average is 222. California scored 213.

TABLE 1
Common Core professional development activities

	California	Kentucky	New York	Tennessee
Training/ Outreach	Online Professional Learning Support Network launched to highlight high-quality training providers.	Lead teachers (ELA and Math) recruited from each district to form network teams with school and district leaders. Teams agreed to meet monthly for three years and work with regional field staff and higher education institutions to identify instructional gaps and needs.	Implementation phased in via district network teams and existing regional education support network.	TDOE provided no-cost teacher training; more than 40,000 teachers and 2,500 administrators participated over two years.
Materials	Math curriculum framework approved in November 2013. ELA frameworks will integrate CCSS and new ELD standards. CDE-developed training modules on new standards and tests.	Detailed curriculum materials available since 2010.	Training and curriculum resources made available to educators in both ELA and mathematics to provide examples of Common Core-aligned instruction.	Website includes materials for teachers who did not attend the sessions and ongoing support based on feedback from the field.

SOURCES: For California: California Department of Education, 2013d and 2013e. For Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee, we reviewed state-developed materials pertaining to the transition to the new standards, including websites established to support the effort, NCLB waiver applications, Race to the Top applications, and other documents. We also spoke with the senior state-level official with responsibility for implementing the CCSS in each state.

Kentucky’s Common Core implementation strategy complemented the department’s broader focus on building capacity at the district level (Jochim and Murphy, 2013). KDOE facilitated the formation of district teams to lead local implementation efforts. Participation was voluntary, but all but a handful of the state’s 174 districts made the commitment. These district network teams, consisting of teachers and administrators, were grouped into eight regions. Each region partnered with one of the state’s public higher education institutions. Over the next three years, the teams in each region met monthly. Facilitated by higher education institution representatives state field staff, these meetings were not training or “train the trainers” sessions.⁴ Instead, they were designed to help districts develop their own approaches to the new standards and to support the implementation of those plans. In addition to covering issues of curriculum and instruction, these meetings provided training in how to use test scores to identify areas of need. KDOE also maintains a variety of online instructional resources accessible intended to help teachers understand the new standards and develop lesson plans.

In New York, NYSED ramped up implementation efforts in 2011. The strategy called for developing of high-quality training and instructional materials centrally and introducing them to districts via a regional support network. To develop the materials, the department issued an open request for proposals for different grade levels and subjects. To introduce these materials to local educators, NYSED had districts form network teams that were trained through the existing system of regional support centers and cooperatives. The department strategy was to phase-in the roll out, implementing the new standards in different grades and subjects over the course of nearly three years. The effort was backstopped by NYSED’s Common Core-dedicated

⁴ In an interesting innovation, KDOE asked districts to “loan” them some of their best subject specialists to serve as field facilitators. The department would pay their salaries for the three-year period and afterward, they would return to their home district and remain a valuable asset in the region.

webpage, which served as a clearinghouse for materials, a guide to best practices at the local level, and a portal for critical feedback to the state agency about what was needed in the field.⁵

Tennessee’s approach to implementing the new standards began with a focus on training the teachers. TDOE recruited and trained several hundred math and English teachers to help develop and lead voluntary, four-day training sessions over the summers of 2012 and 2013; tens of thousands of teachers took part. The training modules were developed by external contractors with input from the initial group of teacher/trainers. The department provided similar training for school and district administrators. Local follow-up sessions for both teachers and administrators were also conducted, and the materials from these sessions were posted on the department’s CCSS-dedicated website⁶. An advisory committee comprised of experienced superintendents provided guidance during the outreach phase and feedback during implementation.

Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee each developed a multi-year strategy to deliver training to teachers and administrators. While it is difficult to assess the quality and usefulness of these activities, the fact that it began shortly after the states committed to using CCSS put districts on notice that the transition was beginning.

California’s contribution has been more limited, and has only recently begun to bear fruit. CDE views the curriculum frameworks as an important aid to lesson planning at the local level. These materials, however, are just now becoming available. CDE’s Online Professional Learning Support Network also is a step in the right direction. The network will share information with schools and districts about the availability of online training services and the cost of those services. This network could expand the options available to educators and help them “shop” for what they need at the lowest price.

The CCSS will challenge some teachers to acquire new teaching skills. A group of California teachers who reviewed the Common Core standards concluded that many are unprepared to teach some of the mathematics content in CCSS (WestEd 2012). Experience shows that helping teachers acquire new classroom practices requires sustained training and support (Connected Mathematics Project). Given these challenges, the transition to the new standards may extend well beyond 2014–15.

Instructional Materials

Textbooks are often the backbone of classroom curricula, and many states have policies designed to influence the quality of textbooks available to districts. In California, CDE is in the process of reviewing and approving—known as adopting—textbooks that are aligned with standards and meet other guidelines contained in law. Among the other three states, New York stands out for its innovative approach to provide aligned *digital* instructional materials at no costs to districts.

Table 2 summarizes the activities of the four states. CDE’s instructional materials adoption process is moving forward in its review of standards-aligned textbooks and digital materials. The process ensures that books satisfy the many requirements in state law and adequately address the state content standards. The process, however, applies primarily to K–8 materials, and occurs every eight years. The department had teams reviewing mathematics materials in 2013, and the State Board adopted recommended materials in January 2014. In 2012, the State Board approved ELA materials that would supplement existing textbooks until the planned state adoption in 2015–16.

⁵ The URL is www.engageny.org/common-core-curriculum-assessments/.

⁶ See www.tncore.org.

Kentucky and Tennessee are in the process of updating instructional materials approved for use by districts in those states. Tennessee also provided guidance on adapting existing materials. New York decided to create its own materials rather than depend on existing publishers. To accomplish that goal, NYSED departed from the old model, which allowed vendors to maintain proprietary control over the materials they developed. Instead, NYSED covered the upfront costs associated with developing the new materials and made them available at no cost.⁷

TABLE 2
Common Core instructional materials development

California	Kentucky	New York	Tennessee
<p>Math:</p> <p>Adoption based on CCSS approved in early 2014.</p>	<p>Beginning the ELA adoption process. School leader training encourages districts to be "critical consumers" of instructional materials.</p>	<p>Commissioned vendors to produce open-source (free) online materials. Materials are being posted to the state web page as they become available.</p>	<p>Work on materials is in progress. As of fall 2013, there has been training on how to adapt existing materials to CCSS standards.</p>
<p>ELA:</p> <p>In 2012, SBE approved supplemental materials to "bridge the gap" between existing textbooks and the CCSS. Adoption of new textbooks planned for 2015–16.</p>			

SOURCES: For California: California Department of Education, 2013d. For Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee, we reviewed state-developed materials pertaining to the transition to the new standards, including websites established to support the effort, NCLB waiver applications, Race to the Top applications, and other documents. We also spoke with the state-level senior official with responsibility for implementing the CCSS in each state.

CDE is implementing a CCSS instructional materials adoption process, which identifies the materials that are sufficiently aligned with the Common Core standards and meet other requirements of state law. The CDE list is a resource for districts seeking to purchase new materials. New York’s strategy, however, is quite innovative and could dramatically reduce the costs of materials to districts in the state—and around the nation. By developing its own digital materials, the state realized it could save districts millions by not having to purchase them from commercial vendors. Of course, the success of this strategy hinges on the quality of the state-developed materials.

California has long recognized the importance of digital resources as a supplement to other materials. Since 1999, CDE has administered the California Learning Resource Network (CLRN) through a consortia of county offices of education. CLRN identifies open source textbooks (primarily at the high school level), online courses, and supplemental resources that are aligned with state learning standards. CLRN was consolidated in the LCFF reforms, and as a result, the program is not funded after 2013–14.

The CLRN process, though, is more in line with the newly nationalized textbook market than the old adoption process. Before CCSS, each state developed its own standards, which meant that each state had its own textbook market. With CCSS, the market for these materials is national, which is already creating a wide

⁷ Since the training and instruction materials are open source, they are also available to schools in other states without fear of copyright infringement.

range of choices. California school districts, for instance, can use the *free* CCSS materials developed by New York. Add in the publishers nationwide who charge for materials, and the choices for districts can be overwhelming. Moreover, while publishers claim that their materials are aligned with CCSS, most have not been reviewed by any objective source (Garland, 2013), including CDE.

California's adoption process may not meet district short- or long-run needs. On the one hand, there is evidence that CDE's mathematics adoption comes too late. With full implementation of CCSS on the horizon, many California districts have already found open-source materials, developed materials locally, or adapted existing textbooks (California Department of Education, 2013e). On the other hand, there is concern that the mathematics adoption occurred too early—many of the adopted textbooks merely adapt materials originally developed using the 1997 standards, and do not fully align with the CCSS (Farrand, 2014). Current law calls for adoptions every eight years, so these mathematics textbooks will be in place for some time. We discuss these issues in the second half of this report.

Assessments

As discussed above, state tests create incentives for teachers to align curriculum with learning standards. They also encourage teachers to consider new teaching methods that could boost student achievement. Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee used state testing to signal the transition to CCSS and to help educators assess the success of the CCSS implementation process. In California, by contrast, most state testing was cancelled in 2013–14, and new tests will be implemented in 2014–15. The decision to suspend the old testing system was intended to send a clear message to educators to focus on implementing CCSS (Torlakson 2013). Legislation passed in 2013 ended most CST testing (except in science) in 2014 and authorized SBAC assessments beginning in 2015. In lieu of CST testing in 2014, districts are required to participate in the spring 2014 SBAC pilot test. This will help educators familiarize themselves with the content and design of the tests and the computer capacity needed to administer them. The 2013 legislation also directs the state superintendent of public instruction in 2016 to recommend whether to add tests in additional grades or subjects (CSTs, for instance, included annual tests in high school ELA, mathematics, science, and history/social science).⁸

Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee used state testing to alert their K–12 systems to the change in standards and to assess student performance under the new standards. In 2012, Kentucky first administered tests aligned with CCSS, and Tennessee added aligned questions to its state tests. New York first administered aligned tests in 2013. These three states retained other components of their testing programs. New York and Kentucky continue to give “end of course” tests in high school, and Tennessee is developing similar assessments. The tests, which are not required by federal law, measure student performance in specific courses, such as geometry or biology, and are similar to California's now-abandoned high school CSTs.

⁸ CDE also plans to develop a new test of English proficiency to replace the existing California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The new test will be based on revised English language development standards that are aligned with CCSS.

TABLE 3
Implementation of Common Core assessments

California	Kentucky	New York	Tennessee
Discontinued most CSTs in 2014; pilot testing of SBAC test questions planned for spring 2014; SBAC assessments in grades 3–8 and 11 begin in 2015.	Administered CCSS-aligned tests starting in 2012. Maintains its own state tests in high school.	Administered CCSS-aligned tests starting in 2013. Maintains its own state exams in high school.	Added CCSS-aligned questions to state tests starting in 2012. Will implement PARCC tests in 2015. Developing its own state tests in high school subjects.

SOURCES: California: Assembly Bill 484 (Bonilla), Statutes of 2013 and (California Department of Education, 2013(c)). For the other three states, we reviewed materials pertaining to the transition to the new standards, including websites established to support the effort, NCLB waiver applications, Race to the Top applications, and other documents. We also spoke with senior officials at the state departments responsible for implementing the CCSS.

Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee used testing as a way to inform educators about the changes created by CCSS. This involved early state action in Kentucky and Tennessee to develop test questions that are aligned with the new standards. New York also began developing new tests that are aligned with CCSS early in the process. By choosing to wait for SBAC testing, California missed the opportunity to signal the coming changes and to use testing data to give teachers and administrators feedback on local implementation efforts.

As discussed above, the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in Kentucky and New York on the CCSS-aligned tests was much lower than on previous state tests. The results from New York, in particular, triggered a spirited debate. A group of 1,500 principals, for instance, wrote an open letter claiming among other things that testing was occurring too early in the transition process—even though the state’s implementation of CCSS has been ongoing for several years (Washington Post, 2013). Others argued that the low scores reflected a more accurate measure of student proficiency (Simon, 2013). California needs to consider how best to prepare educators and the public for scores that are likely to be much lower in 2014–15.

Funding

States’ distribution of funds to school districts helps ensure that districts have sufficient resources to create high-quality programs at the local level. It can also reduce local resistance to change. California stands out among the four states as providing the largest amount of local resources for the CCSS transition. But the mix of local and state spending in the other three states makes it difficult to draw many conclusions from the data. One thing is clear: all four states are spending significant sums on CCSS implementation.

Table 4 shows the amounts used in the four states to implement CCSS to date. California allocated about \$210 per student in 2013 to districts to pay for training, textbooks, and technology. This amount is much higher than in the other three states. New York spent an estimated \$77 per student over multiple years, Tennessee about \$46 per student over three years, and Kentucky dedicated about \$22 per student.

TABLE 4
Funding for Common Core implementation

California	Kentucky	New York	Tennessee
\$1.25 billion (about \$210 per student) included in the 2013–14 Budget Act for district implementation costs. This one-time appropriation is intended to cover costs incurred in 2013–14 and 2014–15.	About \$15 million (\$22 per student) for capacity building efforts—mostly to support additional personnel in the field.	About \$218 million (\$77 per student).	About \$45 million (\$46 per student) over three years—covered mostly by federal Race to the Top funds.

SOURCES: For California: 2013–14 Budget Act. For Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee, we reviewed state-developed materials pertaining to the transition to the new standards, including websites established to support the effort, NCLB waiver applications, Race to the Top applications, and other documents. We also spoke with the senior state-level official with responsibility for implementing the CCSS in each state.

These figures, however, are not directly comparable, because there are differences in the mix of state and local costs. California’s \$210 per student appropriation is exclusively for local implementation activities. In contrast, the amounts identified by the other three states contain spending for both state and some local expenses, with state education agencies making most of the decisions about how the resources are allocated.⁹ In addition to this state-directed spending, districts are incurring additional costs for training and other expenses.

The data show that all of four states are making a significant investment in CCSS. In Kentucky, Tennessee, and New York, the funding—and consequently the planning—for the implementation was centralized. In California, the CDE received none of the funding; instead, it was distributed among districts. The funding for local CCSS activities will help districts improve the implementation of the new standards, but it comes rather late.

California’s Approach May Slow Its Transition

As we have seen, California’s approach to CCSS has differed from that of Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee. Our review suggests that CDE treated the transition as a local issue. Most of California’s early efforts have focused on instructional materials— reviewing materials that could help schools adapt existing ELA textbooks to the new standards (2012) and publishing a new list of approved mathematics materials (2014). In addition, the state appropriated \$1.25 billion in one-time funding to cover local implementation costs (2013). California began to prepare for implementation later than the other three states. With the exception of the instructional materials adoption process, most of CDE’s activities were not completed until 2013 or are still in process.

In contrast, Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee employed active and centralized implementation strategies over several years. They focused on teacher training, as well as on school leaders and administrators. They also revised or replaced state tests to align with CCSS. New York addressed the textbook issue by creating free CCSS-aligned resources for educators. The three states also partnered with intermediary regional entities to provide training and guidance to schools and/or districts. The regional entities served as “boots on the ground.”

⁹ However, we do not know the amount spent on local implementation by school districts in these other states that is not included in our figures.

Perhaps the most important common element in the approach of the three comparison states was that none viewed the transition to the CCSS as an “update” of existing practices. Instead, they appeared to view the new standards as an opportunity to significantly improve their approaches to teaching and learning. At this time, it is not possible to say which, if any, of these state implementation strategies will have the greatest impact on student learning. As noted above, New York educators are not convinced that the state’s multi-year transition program adequately prepared them for the CCSS. But these early actions helped educators understand the changes introduced by the new standards and signaled the need for preparation at the local level. Thus, it seems likely that schools in these states have something of a head start over California in making the transition to the CCSS.

CDE Can Become an Information Hub

Our investigation shows that the new standards have eliminated some traditional state activities but also created incentives for states to find new ways to influence curriculum and instructional quality at the school and district levels. We find some evidence of states experimenting with new program areas and models. For example, CCSS spurred the creation of new ways for states to improve teacher training, which has traditionally been a district issue or a professional requirement connected to certification. In preparing for the new standards, Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee created special multi-year training programs in league with regional agencies to improve instruction and prepare teachers for the new standards. Also, instead of relying on the traditional state adoption process, New York responded to the increasing use of digital materials with an innovative open-source strategy.

As Mike Kirst, Stanford professor and chair of the California State Board of Education puts it, California's adoption of the CCSS affects "almost all key state education policies."¹⁰ The CCSS reduces CDE's influence over instructional materials, standards, and assessments. In addition, the LCFF eliminates categorical programs that have been a source of CDE regulatory power. There are good policy rationales for these changes. If successful, the system of shared state standards and tests will strengthen classroom incentives for good teaching. Similarly, giving districts more financial latitude recognizes that districts have better information than the state about the needs of students.

Now that it is no longer making choices on behalf of the districts, the state can play a productive role by improving the quality of local decision-making. State and federal accountability programs, for example, try to increase the importance of student outcomes on decisions made by school boards and educators. Information is another avenue for promoting better incentives and decision-making. Just as information on school and district performance is designed to strengthen the voice of parents and community members, data on best practices allow local educators to benefit from research that is not always easily accessible. Many districts in California are only now training teachers on the new standards and making decisions about instructional materials. Over the next few years, they will be looking for ways to improve curricula and instructional quality.

In this section we describe several areas in which the state can help districts make informed decisions. Rather than a definitive list of proposals, we provide examples of the direction that the department could head as CCSS implementation continues. CDE would need funding and statutory authorization to make these changes. Over time, though, CDE can develop programs that support districts in making choices that lead to improved student performance.

There are several ways the state can contribute to building local capacity. First, the new standards will create a huge national market for instructional and staff development materials. With such a wide range of choices, districts will need good information on the pros and cons of the various options. By reorienting its role in the process, the state can meet this need. The CDE's role as information broker can extend far beyond CCSS implementation. The new LCFF creates an opportunity for CDE to provide information to districts about the

¹⁰ Kirst, Michael, *The Common Core Meets State Policy: This Changes Almost Everything*, Policy Analysis for California Education, Policy Memorandum, March 2013, p. 1.

broad range of educational programs, including special education and English Learner programs. Similarly, CDE could use its longitudinal database to supply districts with better data on student success.

Offer a “Consumer Reports” Guide on Course Materials and Professional Development Services

As discussed above, more than 40 states have adopted CCSS, and what was once a state market for textbooks has blossomed into a national market. Similarly, the market for professional development services has also been expanded. After all, schools in all of these states need standards-aligned textbooks and professional development that helps teachers communicate higher-level content. But in this wider market, it may be more difficult to assess the quality and suitability of materials.

CDE’s adoption process has not adapted to this new market reality. In fact, current law and procedures present significant obstacles. For example, CDE’s review of mathematics materials was completed in 2014. This means that districts implementing CCSS in 2013 or earlier used materials that had not been reviewed by the department. And while the new mathematics adoption will be useful to districts, the eight-year review cycle means that any new materials created after CDE began its review (or that will be published in the coming years) will not be reviewed for many years.

Another problem with the current structure is the instructional materials review fees. State law requires publishers to pay a \$5,000 fee per grade-level for CDE review (California Department of Education, 2013b).¹¹ Publishers of open source materials usually do not have the financial interest to pay for California’s review, and this creates a barrier to the state adoption process. But why should New York State pay for CDE’s review when NYSED vouches that the materials are aligned with CCSS?

This raises another issue with California’s process: state law does not permit CDE to “adopt” materials that have been approved by other states as aligned with CCSS. If the New York State department of education believes its materials are aligned with CCSS, is it necessary for California to make its own determination? These questions suggest that California’s instructional materials policies could be revised to take advantage of the national market for textbooks.

CDE’s online support network seems like a promising way to use information to inform district choices among professional development options, and the concept could be expanded. The current plan is for the site to advertise approved California providers, offering useful information on service offerings and prices. However, the network will include only suppliers that meet CDE’s specific online training model: providers must maintain a large video library of CCSS-aligned lessons, provide blogs or discussion boards for teachers to share experiences, and ensure the availability of online instructors.

While these requirements may reflect “best practices” for online providers, they are likely to significantly reduce the range of services listed. For instance, the CDE requirements would exclude open-source materials—free online training courses—that do not include discussion boards or instructors, even though districts could supply these services. Similarly, providers from outside California are ineligible to be listed on the network, as are products that are not delivered over the Internet. As a result, it is not clear how useful the network will be, since not all districts are searching for training that meets the department’s

¹¹ This is the fee charged for the 2014 mathematics adoption. For a textbook series spanning grades 1 through 8, the fee would be \$40,000.

requirements. Thus, CDE's online network seems like a good resource that could be expanded to meet a broader range of district information needs.

The state should also consider expanding the breadth of information it provides on instructional materials and professional development resources. Perhaps most important would be information about the quality of instructional materials and teacher training services. In evaluating instructional materials, for instance, CDE assesses whether texts meet specific quality criteria and other state requirements. But the state does not assess the relative effectiveness of adopted materials in promoting student achievement. Many publishers cite studies of the effectiveness of their materials, but there is not much data on the *relative* impact of different instructional materials on student success in school. Not surprisingly, some books are more effective than others (Agodini, 2010). Despite this, comparative information on textbook quality remains the exception rather than the rule; as a result, educators have very little good information on which instructional materials would be most effective in addressing the needs of students (Chingos and Grover, 2012).

As with textbooks, there is little information on the relative effectiveness of different training regimens, and states are being encouraged to collect data and evaluate the impact of professional development services on teaching and learning (Killion, 2012). CDE's professional development network requires suppliers to include evidence of effectiveness. CDE's evaluation of these claims could prove valuable to districts, many of which do not have in-house expertise on program evaluation. CDE could also survey educators who have used these materials in the past.

Like any consumer, educators would benefit from information on the cost and quality of available goods and services. The state could satisfy the need for data on alignment to standards, strengths and weaknesses in the critical dimensions of quality, and overall effectiveness as measured by student achievement gains in several ways:

- **Streamline the adoption process so that new materials are reviewed more frequently.** CDE could conduct an ongoing review of the most promising new instructional materials packages. In addition, the legislature and governor should provide funding to allow CDE to review open source materials. CDE also should consider providing information about the strengths and weaknesses of adopted materials, as other states already do.¹²
- **Develop a process for reviewing materials and training certified by others.** For instance, the department could develop a process to endorse materials that were reviewed and recommended by other qualified groups, such as other state departments of education. In addition, CDE could provide guidelines to help districts review materials, offer training to district staff in evaluating alignment, and post district reviews on the internet for use by others.
- **Create a website devoted to providing information about available materials and services.** This would include lists of open-source and for-pay providers, online or in-person services, and published reviews or evaluations of those goods and services. The site also would offer guidelines on evaluating the quality of these inputs.¹³
- **Administer an annual survey of California educators to obtain informed feedback on the quality of instructional materials and training.** Local teachers and administrators could provide a great

¹² See, for instance, Kentucky's evaluations of mathematics materials at <http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/books/ag/Pages/Adoption-Group-IV-Mathematics-2009-2015.aspx>, and Washington State's list of at www.k12.wa.us/curriculumInstruct/InstructionalMaterialsReview.aspx.

¹³ In fact, such guidelines are already available for free, so the state would not have to create them. See, for example, www.achievethecore.org/page/686/publishers-criteria.

deal of valuable information on the strengths and weaknesses of these materials. The state could develop annual surveys of these professionals and use the information to create “consumer reports” ratings, which would be available on CDE’s website.

- **Conduct evaluations of instructional and training materials based on student progress.** The department could fill an information void by using state test scores to measure the relative effectiveness of instructional materials for different groups of students. What currently limits the department from doing this type of analysis is information on the materials used in the classroom.

The CDE adoption process and online professional development network show that the state can play an important role simply by developing information and making it accessible and useful to district administrators and teachers. But given the quantity and diversity of available choices, the state needs to push its efforts further. Expanded activities will require additional funding, and CDE will need time to learn how best to collect good information and report it to educators. But California does not have to take these issues on alone. It could form consortia with other states to develop these resources. A consortium—such as the “tri-state” collaborative established by New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts to develop a formal process for evaluating the quality of classroom lessons and units¹⁴—could reduce the cost and administrative effort of implementing this new role and help create nationally accepted standards in this area.

Use Assessment Data to Expand District Perspectives

The state has developed a longitudinal database of student characteristics, program participation, and test scores, known as the California Pupil Assessment Data System (CALPADS). In a recent PPIC report, *Increasing the Usefulness of California’s Education Data*, we identified several ways the state could use this data system to help inform districts of the progress of students (Warren and Hough, 2013). Most districts lack a data system that can track individual students over time. By feeding these data back to districts in useful ways, CDE could provide districts with new information about student success and generate value from the state’s investment in the data system. CDE could also collaborate with researchers to use CALPADS to evaluate instructional materials, staff training services, and other critical programs.

Help Districts Evaluate Testing Options

The lack of state high school tests in California will encourage some districts to obtain tests from other sources. Districts that enter the market for high school tests will face a situation comparable to the textbook and teacher training markets—where districts face a multitude of options with little objective data available on quality. Thus, CDE could undertake an effort similar to what we described above for instructional materials: it could develop information about the quality of available assessments and make it available to districts.

The elimination of the state end-of-course exams in high school will also affect some state policies. For instance, the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS) has used CST data to foster conversations between local school districts and higher education institutions about student preparation for college. The CST data help these groups align secondary and post-secondary programs, identifying skills that students need to learn in high school for success in college. In addition, community colleges have been considering using CST data to help place new students. Both CSU and the community colleges are

¹⁴ These rubrics are accessed at www.engageny.org/resource/tri-state-quality-review-rubric-and-rating-process/.

participating in the development of the SBAC 11th grade test. While this test may provide useful information about student achievement, this data will not be as in-depth and broad as that provided by the CSTs.

To address the local need for assessments and the desire to have standardized data on student achievement in high school for local alignment studies or for placing students, CDE could work with the higher education institutions to identify high quality tests on the national market that would meet both objectives. This would give districts a choice of good tests, and it would also allow districts working with higher education campuses on alignment and placement to collaborate on which test to use.

Become a Center for Information on Educational Quality

Finally, the state could use information to support districts across educational areas. The LCFF introduces a mechanism—the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)—that could give CDE a focus for this work. The collaborative was created to provide technical assistance to districts that are not making progress in meeting local goals under LCFF or to any district that requests assistance. The 2013–14 budget contains \$10 million for these services. The details of how CCEE will operate are still under development.

The CCEE could fulfill its statutory role *and* become the hub of CDE information on the types of services and suppliers that would be most helpful to districts. For instance, special education and English Learner students face specific educational challenges. CDE could develop and disseminate information on materials or teacher training services that have shown to be effective with these subgroups. Similarly, some educators are placing a greater emphasis on student non-cognitive skills in contributing to success in school. CDE could be an evaluator and supplier of information on programs and services that are effective in communicating these skills.

The creation of the CCEE offers an important opportunity for CDE to promote quality services in schools by creating expertise on the types of activities that build local capacity. To help CCEE become effective, the department needs access to the tools that could help districts improve instruction. Whether these tools reside within CDE or in another entity is not the critical factor. What is important is that the state has access to the skills and knowledge that could be applied in districts that are struggling to raise student achievement. These include instruments for measuring alignment of instruction to standards, data on longitudinal student progress, and information on effective staff development services that meet specific district needs. Rather than providing all the answers, CDE could work collaboratively with districts on options that address local needs. In sum, at a time when CDE has lost many of the tools it has used in the past to affect district behavior, it could assume a new and immensely valuable role: helping districts build the capacity to serve students well.

Conclusion

The Common Core State Standards and the Local Control Funding Formula are fundamentally changing key components of California's K–12 system. The impact of the curriculum changes is far-reaching, as the new standards will change curriculum and instruction in nearly every classroom. The switch to CCSS in California, however, started slowly, and survey data suggest that many teachers will not be implementing the new standards until 2014–15—the first year new CCSS-aligned tests are administered. It is clear that implementation will continue at both the state and local level well past 2014–15.

Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee began the transition to CCSS earlier than California; their state education departments developed strategies to train teachers in the new standards *and* improve instruction and curriculum at the local level. Moreover, these states were directly involved in designing and implementing professional development for local teachers and administrators. Though CDE has taken steps to implement CCSS, an apparent preference for decentralization resulted in leaving much of responsibility and all of the resources for implementation in the hands of the districts.

The CCSS also changes the role of the state in overseeing education. California no longer defines its own student learning standards or develops student assessments in mathematics and ELA. In addition, the new standards create a national market for textbooks and teacher training services aligned with the new standards, and the state's adoption process is slow and inflexible compared to district needs. Combined with the new Local Control Funding Formula, the CCSS further cedes to school districts primary responsibility for determining how best to use resources to meet the needs of students, thereby reducing CDE's leverage in the process.

The combined effect of these changes presents the state and the CDE with an opportunity to take on a new role in supporting decision making at the local level. Implementing the common core, in particular, suggests the development of new mechanisms that take advantage of the economies of scale and state's unique perspective in providing information for districts. For example, we suggest the state's move from adopting textbooks and other materials to producing a "consumer reports" guide that would help districts assess the quality of the many commercial and open-source materials available. This idea could be extended to other areas as well. The new California Collaborative for Educational Excellence could become the hub for information about resources that assist districts to improve a wide range of program areas. The department will need new resources to implement these ideas and time to learn how to assist districts most effectively. But they offer the state an important and constructive way to build the capacity of its K–12 system.

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