

How Common Core Lives: Successes and Challenges of the “New” College- and Career- Readiness Standards

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This brief is derived from “[Successes and Challenges of the ‘New’ College- and Career-Ready Standards: Seven Implementation Trends](#)” by Laura M. Desimone, Amy Stornaiuolo, Nelson Flores, Katie Pak, Adam Edgerton, T. Philip Nichols, Emily C. Plummer, and Andrew Porter.

Is the Common Core really “**dead**”? Though no longer called the Common Core in our three study states, the “new” college-and-career readiness standards still guide much of education policy in Texas, Ohio, and Kentucky. In our new [feature article](#) in *Educational Researcher*, lead author Dr. Laura Desimone, along with other faculty and doctoral students at the Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL), reveals seven trends guiding standards implementation today.

Trend 1: “Local control” is king again, which creates new openings for states and districts. Policymakers are taking advantage of more policy flexibility to provide more detailed guidance on how to implement their state’s standards. Across our principal surveys, three-quarters of respondents report receiving specific guidance on instructional content in math and English, and on the order in which it should be taught. This specificity may be helping principals to serve as instructional leaders. Likewise, teachers feel that they understand the standards well, but they want more resources on how to implement them, especially digital tools.

Trend 2: In this environment of local control, districts are struggling to provide well-aligned resources, including curricula and professional development. There is a wide range in the amount of time practitioners spend on professional development. Teachers report receiving only about 10 hours, on average, of mentoring or coaching during a school year, despite the well-established effectiveness of coaching. Based on our interviews and the existing research (e.g., [Kraft & Blazar, 2018](#)), we recommend investing in coaching instead of other forms of professional development.

Trend 3: Districts that are succeeding at providing specific and aligned guidance provide more professional development. One rural district that we surveyed invests in school-based coaches in every school. Other districts, however, struggle to provide this level of support because of financial constraints, including one-time infusions of grant money that evaporate over time. Consistent with the large body of literature on professional development, we caution against one-time interventions, as they may decrease teacher buy-in towards standards ([Edgerton & Desimone, 2018](#)).

Trend 4: We find a clear turn away from No Child Left Behind-era accountability. Across our interviews, states and districts are moving away from harsh consequences for poor achievement scores. Across our surveys, teachers, principals, and district officials also report relatively weak sanctions. We find no appetite for returning to harsh accountability despite some mixed and positive evidence for these practices (see [Polikoff & Korn, 2018](#)).

Trend 5: We find relatively high buy-in towards individual state standards among teachers. This finding stands in stark contrast to negative public opinion surrounding the Common Core. Without the burden of the Common Core label, states and districts are implementing standards in ways that seem to build buy-in among educators for each state's standards.

Trend 6: For English learners (ELs), we find that two consortia, WIDA and ELPA21, are playing increasingly prominent roles in shaping standards-based policies. This trend is especially true in Ohio and Kentucky, two states with smaller proportions of ELs compared to Texas. Districts are appreciative of the specificity these consortia provide to help ELs reach grade-level expectations. We recommend continued participation in these consortia as states with newer populations of ELs work to build capacity to serve them.

Trend 7: Unfortunately, teachers of students with disabilities (SWD) lack needed infrastructure, and as a result resources are more disparate and disconnected.

Consequently, buy-in for the standards among teachers of SWDs is significantly lower across all three states. However, support for standards is still moderate, and some districts are succeeding at providing clear models of instructional support for SWDs. For example, one district clearly prescribes and describes a co-teaching model, rather than leaving it up to individual teachers to negotiate classroom expectations.

Consequently, while the Common Core brand may be dead, college-and-career readiness standards in each of these states show the potential to change teacher practice for the better. Without the gaze of the federal government and overly punitive state sanctions, districts may be able to internalize the standards and make them meaningful for instructional practice. Ongoing instructional coaching seems to be the most popular and the most effective means of achieving this goal.

For more information, see the journal article on which this brief is based:

Desimone, L. M., Stornaiuolo, A., Flores, N., Pak, K., Edgerton, A., Nichols, T. P., ... Porter, A. (2019). Successes and Challenges of the "New" College- and Career-Ready Standards: Seven Implementation Trends. *Educational Researcher*, 48(3), 167–178. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19837239>

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Polikoff, M., & Korn, S. (2018). School accountability. In J. G. Dwyer (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law* (pp. 1-36). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.