

States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards

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Most states are participating in the initiative led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop and adopt voluntary common core state standards that will outline what elementary and secondary school students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics. Implementing these standards will require complementary and sometimes complex changes to a host of education policies and programs, from teacher preparation to testing.

To learn more about states' progress and plans for implementing the common core state standards, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) surveyed state deputy superintendents of education or their designees in October and November of 2010. Responses were received from 42 states and the District of Columbia, which is counted as a state in the tallies in this report. Responses were kept confidential to encourage frank answers.

Key Findings

Several key findings can be drawn from states' survey responses.

- **State officials cited educational quality issues more often than they cited federal Race to Top (RttT) requirements as important factors in their states' decision to adopt the common core state standards.** States that have adopted the common standards most often cited the rigor of the standards and their potential to guide statewide education improvement as very important or important considerations in their decision. Somewhat fewer states cited the possible effect of adopting these standards on their RttT application as very important or important to their decision.
- **Many states anticipate it will take until 2013 or later to fully implement the more complex changes associated with the common core state standards.** Most of the responding states that have adopted the new standards plan to make related changes in assessment, curriculum, teacher policies, and other areas, but their timelines for putting in place these changes vary. Most of these states expect to accomplish changes in professional development programs by 2012 or earlier. But many states do not expect to fully implement major changes in assessment, curriculum, teacher evaluation, and teacher certification until 2013 or later, or to institute a requirement for local districts to implement the common standards until that time.
- **Although most adopting states will require school districts to implement the common core state standards, the majority of these states are not requiring districts to make complementary changes in curriculum and teacher programs.** Most of these states are expecting, rather than requiring, districts to undertake such activities as developing new curriculum materials and instructional practices, providing professional development to teachers and principals, and designing and implementing teacher induction programs and evaluations related to the standards.
- **The hope that the common core state standards will encourage a seamless system of education from elementary school through college is far from being realized.** Officials from most adopting states were unsure whether their state plans to align undergraduate admission requirements or first-year college curriculum with the common core state standards. Smaller numbers said their state intends to make these changes, and a few said they will *not* make these changes. Although many states plan to align the academic or pedagogical content of teacher preparation programs with the common standards, roughly similar numbers of states are unsure whether they will take these actions.

- **Developing teacher evaluation systems geared to the common core state standards and finding funds were most often cited by states as major challenges to implementing the standards.** Many states also viewed aligning teacher preparation to the standards, developing curriculum materials tied to the standards, and implementing new assessments aligned with the standards as major implementation challenges.
- **Race to the Top funding appears to be helping with implementation of the common core state standards.** Only a few states that won Race to the Top grants expect funding for standards implementation to be a major challenge, in contrast to other states. Many RttT winners expect to make standards-related changes in assessment, teacher certification, and teacher evaluation sooner than other states. A much higher proportion of RttT winners than of other standards-adopting states expect to link their teacher evaluation systems to students' mastery of the standards.

The remainder of this report elaborates on these and other findings from our survey.

States' Decisions to Adopt Common Core State Standards

In June 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers released common core state standards for grades K-12 in English language arts and mathematics. The state-led initiative to develop these standards grew out of concerns that the current array of different standards in every state is not adequately preparing students in our highly mobile society with the knowledge and skills needed to compete globally. Developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, these standards aim to set clear, realistic expectations for learning that are consistent from state to state and will ensure high school graduates are prepared for college and the workforce. The standards are state-initiated and state-developed, rather than federal. They are also voluntary, meaning that states decide whether or not to adopt them. More detailed information is available on the Common Core State Standards Initiative Web site (www.corestandards.org).

Most states have adopted the common core state standards.

At the time of our survey, which ended in mid-November, 32 of the 43 responding states reported that they had adopted the common core state standards.¹ These included 11 of the 12 states that received grants under the competitive federal Race to the Top program.² Authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, RttT is intended to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform. In their applications for RttT grants, states had to demonstrate they had adopted “internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace.” An additional four states reported in our survey that they had adopted the common state standards provisionally, meaning that formal legislative review and action would come later.

One of the states surveyed indicated that it had decided not to adopt the standards, and six states had not yet made a decision. Five of the six undecided states expected to reach a decision about the standards by the end of 2011; the other state did not know when it would decide.

Since the time our survey was completed, more states have signed on to the standards. According to the latest counts from the Common Core State Standards Initiative (www.corestandards.org), 40 states and D.C. had formally adopted the standards as of December 15, 2010, and an additional 2 states had provisionally adopted them. One state had adopted only the English language arts standards.

¹Responses to specific survey items do not always add up to 43 because not all states responded to all survey items.

² One of the RttT grantees did not respond to the survey.

Most states do not foresee changing their decision about the common state standards.

Of the states that had adopted, provisionally adopted, or decided not to adopt the standards, 31 reported that their decision would not change in 2011. The 31 states that expected to hold firm included all of the responding states that received RttT grants and a large majority of those that did not. Only three states said they might change their decision about adopting the standards. Changes in the state board of education membership or the state's political leadership were the most common reasons states cited for possibly revisiting their decision. Other reasons included public opposition to the original decision, insufficient funds for implementation, or an unsuccessful Race to the Top application.

State decisions to adopt common core state standards have been positively influenced by federal encouragement, such as Race to the Top grants.

In our survey, 27 states indicated that federal encouragement, such as RttT incentives, had helped in their decision to adopt the common core state standards, while 2 states said federal encouragement had hurt, and 8 said it had had no effect. The federal influence was especially pronounced for the 11 survey states that won RttT grants; officials in all but one of these states said federal encouragement had helped their state decide to adopt the standards, while the responding official in the remaining state said federal incentives had no effect.

The rigor of the common core state standards was more often cited as an important factor in states' decisions about adopting the standards than the effect of their decision on their Race to the Top application.

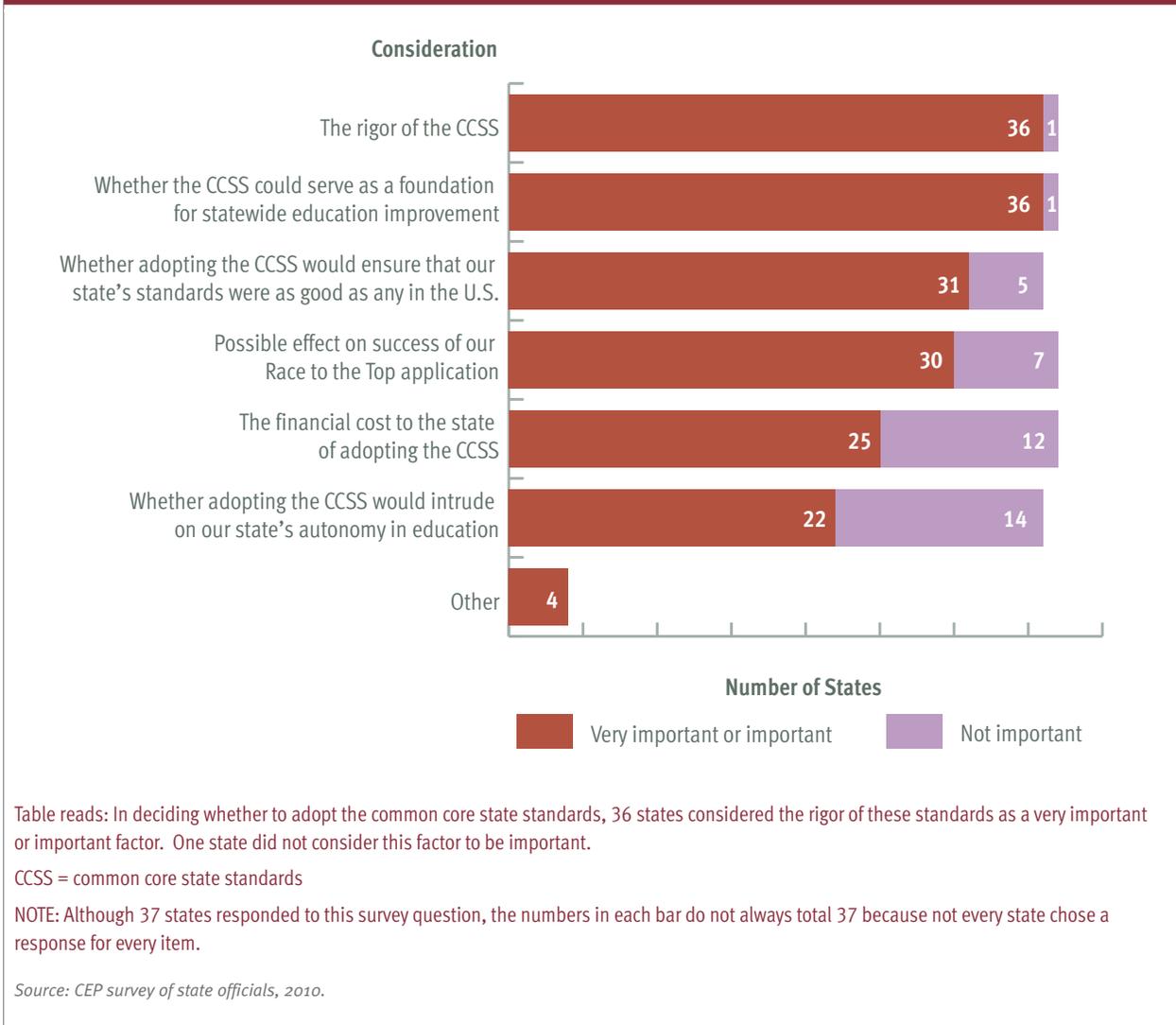
As shown in **figure 1**, states most often cited the rigor of the common core state standards and the possibility that the standards would serve as a foundation for statewide educational improvement as very important or important considerations in their decision to adopt these standards. Altogether, 36 states—including all 11 survey states that received RttT grants—rated these considerations as important or very important to their decision, while only 1 state saw them as not important. A related consideration, the desire to ensure the state's standards were as good as any in the U.S., was rated as very important or important by 31 states.

A few state officials who elaborated on their survey responses said their state wanted to make sure the common standards would not result in *lowering* their standards. "Our standards were already as good as or better than any other state," wrote one respondent. "Our concern was that the CCSS [common core state standards] not dilute our existing standards."

Thirty states viewed the possible effect of the common core state standards on the success of their RttT application as a very important or important deciding factor—a sizeable majority of the respondents but still fewer than the numbers citing the educational quality factors mentioned above. All of the states that won RttT grants, however, viewed the effect of their decision on their RttT application as a very important or important factor.

Somewhat fewer states rated two other factors as very important or important to their decision: the financial costs of adopting the standards (25 states) and the possible intrusiveness of the standards on the state's autonomy (22 states).

Figure 1. Importance of various considerations in states' decision to adopt common core state standards



Although the common core state standards have been designed so that states may add a limited amount of their own content, most of the states surveyed do not plan to do so at this point.

States that adopt the common core state standards must adopt all of the standards in English language arts and math. They have the option, however, of adding up to 15% of their own state-determined content standards on top of the core in either subject.

Twelve states do not plan to incorporate state-determined content in the new set of standards, while 11 states do plan to do so and another 11 are unsure. Of the 11 states that do intend to add content, 9 expect to add elements from their current standards in reading or English language arts, and 8 expect to add content from their current standards in math. One state plans to add prekindergarten standards, as explained in additional comments to the survey.

Changes to State Policies and Practices in K-12 Education

The major work of implementing the common core state standards takes place after the standards have been adopted, as states tackle complementary changes in curriculum, assessment, professional development, and other areas. Our survey asked states whether they planned to make certain changes in policies and practices for elementary and secondary education as part of their approach to implementing the common state standards, and how soon these changes would be fully implemented.

As part of implementing the common core state standards, most states plan to change their assessments, curriculum materials, professional development programs, and teacher evaluation systems.

Figure 2. Number of states adopting common core state standards that plan to make various changes in policies and practices for K-12 education

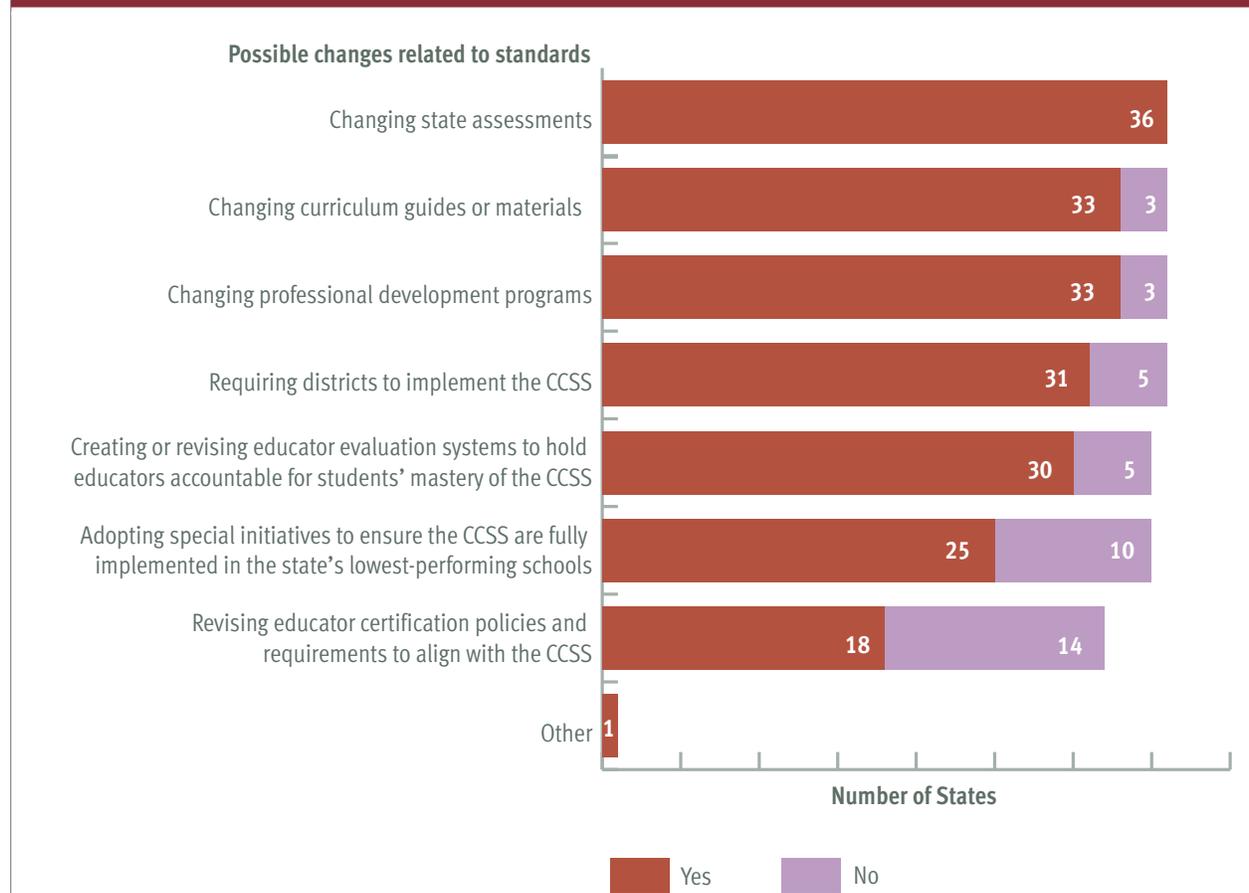


Figure reads: Among the states surveyed that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards, all 36 states plan to change their state assessments as part of their implementation of the standards. Thirty-three of these states plan to change their curriculum guides or materials, while 3 states do not intend to make this change in curriculum.

CCSS = common core state standards

NOTE: Although 36 states responded to this survey question, the numbers in each bar do not always total 36 because not every state chose a response for every item.

Source: CEP survey of state officials, 2010.

All 36 survey states that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards plan to change their state assessments as part of the standards implementation process. As shown in **figure 2**, 31 states or more also intend to revise their curriculum guides or materials, change their professional development programs, or require districts to implement the standards. Thirty states—including 10 of the 11 RttT winners in our survey—plan to create or revise educator evaluation systems linked to students’ mastery of the standards.

Somewhat fewer states expect to adopt special initiatives to implement the standards in the lowest-performing schools (25 states) or to align teacher certification requirements with the standards (18 states).

Some of the most complex policy changes associated with the common core state standards will not be accomplished until 2013 or later in many states.

States that plan to make certain changes as part of instituting the common core state standards were also asked when these changes would be fully implemented. **Table 1** shows their responses. Several major changes—including changes in assessments, curriculum materials, teacher evaluation, and teacher certification—are not expected to be fully implemented until 2013 or later by a majority of this subset of states. For example, 19 of the 30 states that plan to revise their teacher evaluation systems do not expect to accomplish this task until 2013 or later. Particularly noteworthy is the longer timeline for implementing changes in assessment; 27 of the 36 states that plan assessment changes do not expect to fully implement these changes until 2013 or later—and 6 of these 27 states gave 2015 as the timeline.

Table 1. State timelines for fully implementing various changes in K-12 education related to common core state standards

Possible changes related to standards	Total number of states making change	Number of states implementing change by year	
		2012 or earlier	2013 or later
Changing state assessments	36	6	27
Requiring districts to implement the CCSS	31	7	23
Creating or revising educator evaluation systems to hold educators accountable for students’ mastery of the CCSS	30	9	19
Changing curriculum guides or materials	33	14	18
Adopting special initiatives to ensure the CCSS are fully implemented in the state’s lowest-performing schools	25	11	11
Revising educator certification policies and requirements to align with the CCSS	18	5	10
Changing professional development programs	33	21	9

Table reads: Of the 36 states that plan to change their state assessments as part of their implementation of the common core state standards, 6 states expect to fully implement the change in assessments by 2012 or earlier, while 27 states expect this change to be fully implemented by 2013 or later.

CCSS = common core state standards

NOTE: Although 36 states responded to this survey question, the numbers in each row do not always total 36 because not every state chose a response for every item. Additional state comments indicate that some of the non-responding states felt it was too soon to know the year of implementation.

Source: CEP survey of state officials, 2010.

In addition, 23 of the 31 states that plan to require school districts to implement the common core state standards do not expect to fully institute this requirement until 2013 or later.

Revisions to professional development programs are the only major change that a majority of these states expect to accomplish sooner. Of the 33 states that plan changes in professional development, 21 states expect these changes to be fully implemented by 2012 or earlier.

Several of the states that expect to accomplish the changes shown in table 1 by 2012 are Race to the Top winners. For example, a majority of the states that expect to implement changes in teacher certification, teacher evaluation, and assessment by 2012 won RttT grants. RttT winners also make up a majority of the states that expect to put in place standards-related initiatives for low-performing schools by 2012 or to require school districts to implement the common standards by that time. Even so, a sizeable number of RttT states will not fully implement these changes until 2013 or later.

District Activities Related to the Common Core State Standards

Our survey asked states whether they expect or require their school districts to undertake certain activities relating to implementation of the common core state standards. States had a third option of responding that a particular activity is not a district responsibility.

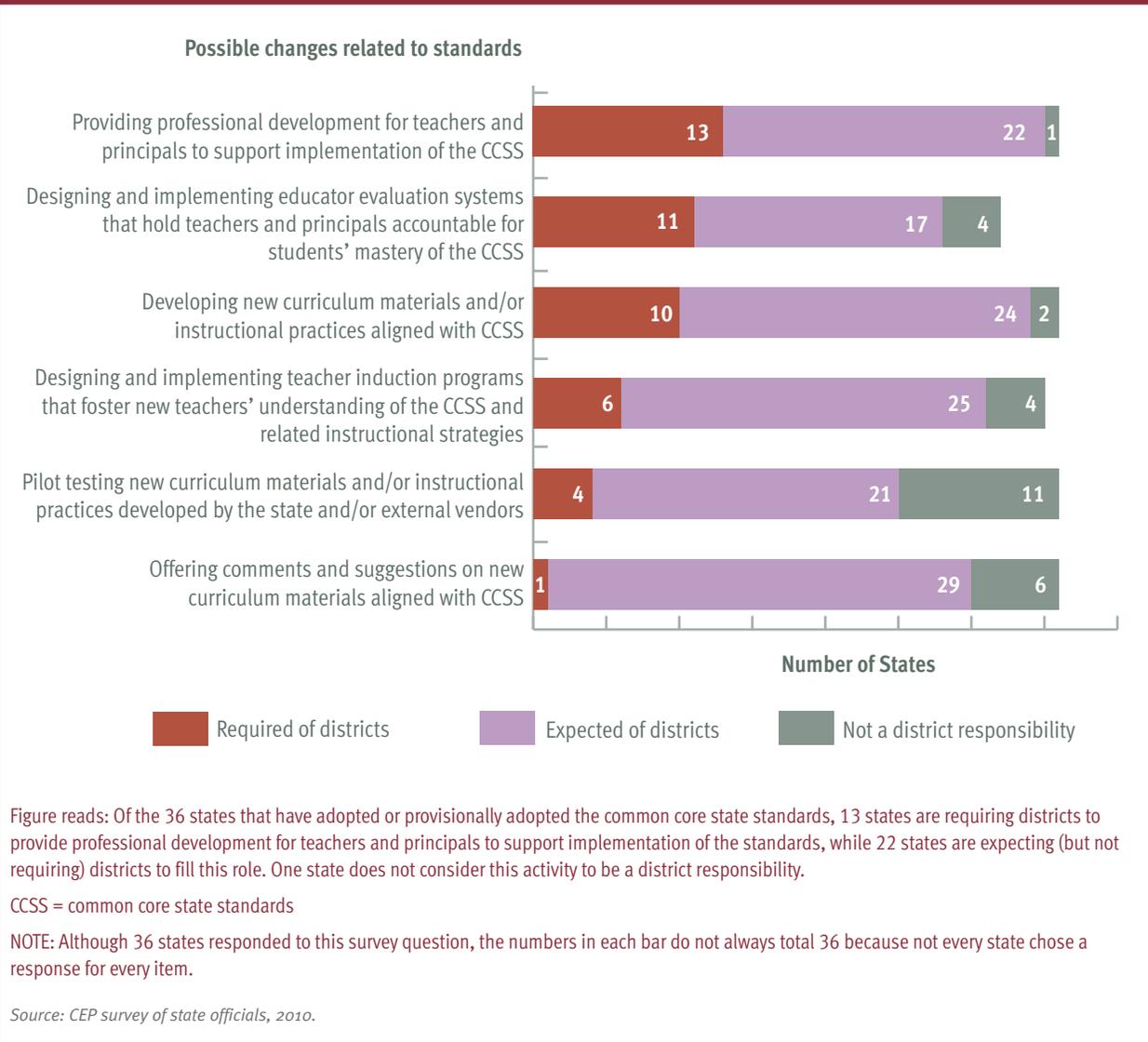
Although many states plan to require their school districts to implement the common core state standards, most are not requiring districts to initiate new programs or practices to support or complement implementation.

Thirty-one of the 36 states that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards intend to require their school districts to implement these standards. But smaller numbers of states are requiring districts to undertake particular activities to foster implementation of the standards, as shown in **figure 3**. The district activities that are being required by the greatest numbers of states include providing professional development to support the standards (13 states), implementing evaluation systems to hold educators accountable for students' mastery of the standards (11 states), and developing new curriculum or instructional practices aligned with the common standards (10 states). Five of the 11 RttT states in our survey plan to require districts to implement educator evaluation systems tied to mastery of the standards—a greater proportion than of other survey states.

Fewer states are requiring districts to offer suggestions on new curriculum aligned with the standards, design and implement teacher induction programs to foster understanding of the standards, or pilot test new curriculum and instructional practices developed by the state or outside vendors.

Most states that have adopted standards are expecting, rather than requiring, districts to carry out the standards-related activities listed in figure 3. Relatively few states indicated that these activities are not a district responsibility at all; the exception was pilot testing of state-developed or externally-developed curriculum materials, which 11 states do not see as a district responsibility.

Figure 3. State requirements/expectations of school district activities related to common core state standards



Higher Education and the Common Core State Standards

A main goal of the common core state standards is to ensure that high school graduates have learned the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and careers. Accomplishing this goal will require coordination between the elementary-secondary and higher education systems. Our survey asked states whether they plan to make certain changes in higher education policies and practices as a part of their implementation of the common core state standards.

State education departments lack solid plans to coordinate with higher education entities on linking college admissions requirements or curriculum to the common core state standards.

As shown in **figure 4**, just 7 survey respondents from state education departments said their state plans to align first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the common core state standards. Respondents from 26 states did not know if this change will be implemented, and 3 said it will not. Similar numbers of respondents (24) did not know if undergraduate admissions requirements will be aligned to the common standards in their state, while 8 states said they will, and 4 said they will not.

State education agency officials were somewhat more certain about policy changes intended to coordinate teacher preparation programs with the standards. Seventeen states plan to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the standards, and 15 plan to modify the pedagogical content of teacher preparation programs around the standards. Still, sizeable numbers of respondents did not know whether their state will make these changes to teacher preparation.

Figure 4. Number of states adopting common core state standards that plan to make various changes in policies and practices for higher education



Figure reads: Of the states surveyed that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards, 17 states plan to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the standards, 2 do not plan to make this change, and 16 states do not know whether they will take this step.

CCSS = common core state standards

NOTE: Although 36 states responded to this survey question, the numbers in each bar do not always total 36 because not every state chose a response for every item.

Source: CEP survey of state officials, 2010.

The uncertainty of state respondents about plans for aligning the common core state standards with higher education programs may reflect a broader disconnect between the agencies that administer elementary-secondary and post-secondary education. One state respondent explained the situation in this way: “We are currently working to educate our higher ed programs about the common core but have little control over their systems.”

Changes in teacher preparation programs are likely to occur sooner than changes in college admissions or curriculum.

Timelines vary for implementing changes in higher education related to the new standards. The vast majority of states that plan to align undergraduate admissions or curriculum with the common core state standards do not foresee making these changes until 2013 or later. Roughly half the states that intend to revise the academic or pedagogical content of teacher preparation programs anticipate doing so by 2012, while the other half plan to do so in 2013 or later.

Challenges in Implementing the Common Core State Standards

States will undoubtedly face challenges during school year 2010-11 as they make the transition to the common core state standards. Our survey listed possible challenges and asked state officials to rate whether each of these was a major or minor challenge or not a challenge, or whether it was too soon to tell. The survey also invited respondents to note other challenges not on the list.

Developing teacher evaluation systems geared to the common core state standards and finding funds to support implementation of the standards were most often seen as major challenges for 2010-11.

As displayed in **figure 5**, 21 states that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards expect major challenges in developing teacher evaluation systems. Nineteen states see funding as a major challenge. As one survey respondent pointed out, “many of the challenges reflected, whether major or minor, relate to the need for funding.” An additional 11 states viewed funding as a minor challenge.

Race to the Top grants appear to have helped assuage concerns about funding for standards implementation in the states that won these grants. Only 3 of the 11 RttT grantees in the survey expect funding to be a major challenge.

Many states also expect major challenges in 2010-11 in aligning teacher preparation to the standards (16 states), implementing new assessments geared to the standards (16 states), and developing curriculum materials linked to the standards (12 states). Altogether, 30 states cited curriculum development and assessment development as major or minor challenges. Many of these activities are interconnected, as pointed out by a survey respondent who noted the challenge of “implementing the CCSS through curriculum and instruction while still administering statewide assessments based on the state’s previous content standards.”

The ratings of possible challenges in figure 5 also reflect the disconnect between K-12 education and higher education as regards standards. A total of 21 states expected to face a major or minor challenge in aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the standards, and 13 additional states said it was too soon to tell. Just one state did not expect aligning teacher preparation content to be a challenge. Similarly, 18 states foresaw a major or minor challenge in aligning teacher certification requirements with the standards, while another 14 states said it was too soon to tell. Four states did not view aligning teacher certification requirements as a challenge.

Figure 5. Number of states expecting to encounter various challenges to implementing common core state standards in 2010-11

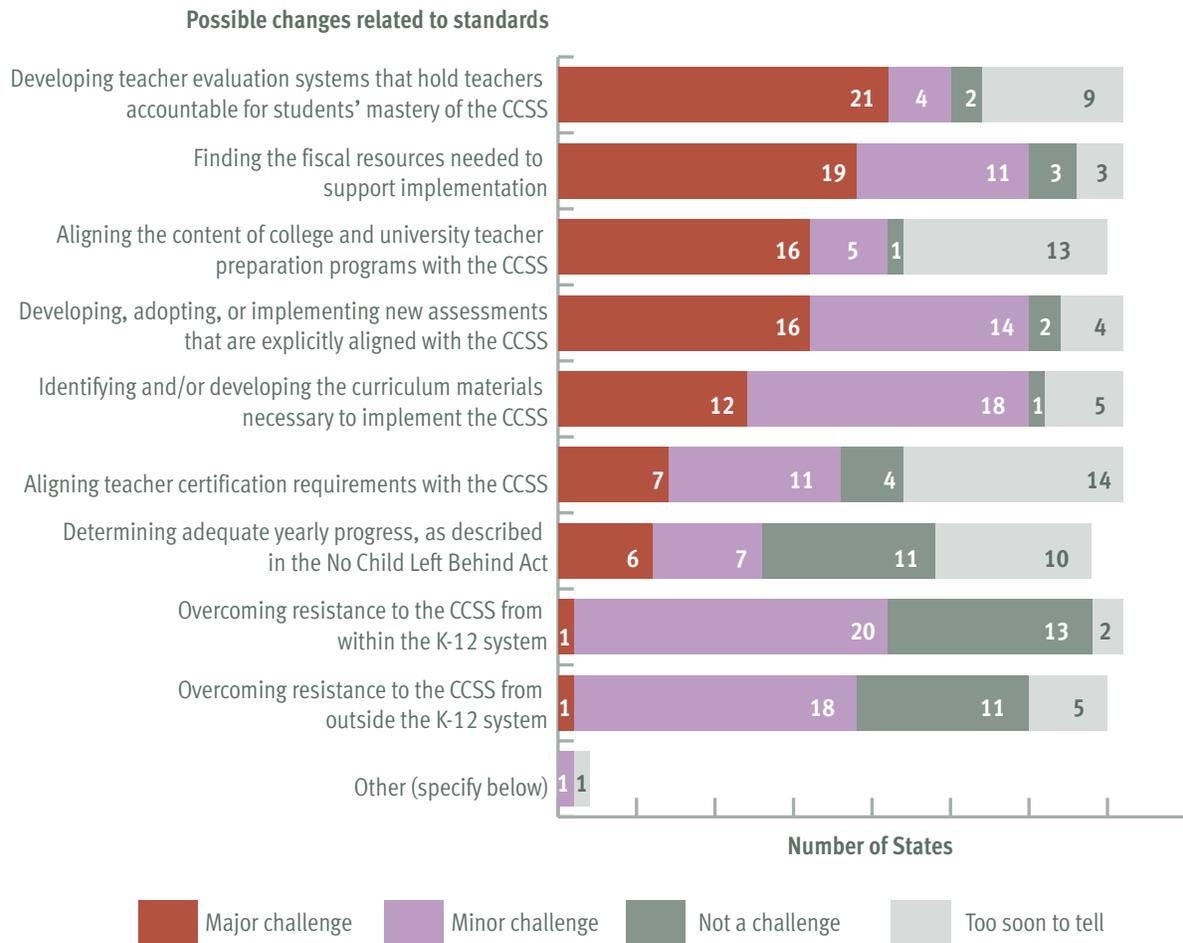


Figure reads: Twenty-one states that have adopted or provisionally adopted the common core state standards expect to face a major challenge in 2010-11 in developing teacher evaluation systems that hold teachers accountable for students' mastery of the standards, while 4 states anticipate this will be a minor challenge. Two states do not expect the development of teacher evaluation systems linked to common state standards to be a challenge, and nine states said it was too soon to tell if this will be a challenge.

CCSS = common core state standards

NOTE: Although 36 states responded to this survey question, the numbers in each bar do not always total 36 because not every state chose a response for every item.

Source: CEP survey of state officials, 2010.

Most states that have adopted the common core state standards do not view overcoming resistance to the standards or determining adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act as major challenges.

Only one state expected a major challenge in overcoming resistance to the standards from within the K-12 education system, and just one state anticipated a major challenge in overcoming resistance from outside the system. As shown in figure 5 above, the rest of the states surveyed considered these types of resistance to be minor challenges or no challenge.

Moreover, states do not seem to be overly concerned with the impact of the common state standards on determining whether schools and districts have made adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Just 6 states viewed this as a major challenge, 7 states considered it a minor challenge, and 11 said it would not be a challenge. Ten states felt it was too soon to tell.

Conclusion

A large majority of the states have adopted the common core state standards developed through the leadership of the governors and state education chiefs. State officials emphasize that this action was strongly motivated by a desire to set rigorous expectations for student learning that could guide educational improvement throughout the state. Federal encouragement, particularly from the Race to the Top initiative, has been a helpful factor in most states, but was less frequently cited by survey respondents than educational quality factors.

For the common core state standards to work as intended, states and school districts will need to revamp many policies and practices. This process will take several years, our survey suggests. Several of the most complex changes—including revisions in assessments, curricula, teacher certification, and teacher evaluation—will take until 2013 or later in many states. Changes in teacher professional development are the only major change that states anticipate will happen sooner. States also have a long way to go to realize a seamless system that aligns the common core state standards with college admissions and curriculum.

States expect to face immediate challenges in implementing the common core state standards. Among the most frequently cited are finding sufficient funding for implementation and aligning systems for evaluating teachers with the standards. But overcoming resistance to the standards is not considered a major challenge by most states. The movement toward common state standards clearly has a momentum that can help states navigate through the hard work ahead.

Appendix: Study Methods

The findings in this report are based on responses to a survey that CEP and Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (CEP's contractor for this project) administered to the deputy state superintendents of education between early October 2010 and late November 2010. The survey team invited the deputies in the 50 states and the District of Columbia (counted as a state for purposes of this report) to complete the survey.

After consulting on the development of survey items with state leaders, the survey team sent initial letters to the deputies that explained the purposes of the survey and invited them to participate. The team also sent the survey via email. The survey team followed up with non-responders at weekly intervals, with a goal of achieving at least an 80% response rate. Forty-three states returned completed surveys.

The survey included 32 questions, divided into three sections. The sections focused on (1) adoption and implementation of the common core state standards; (2) state use of ARRA education funds; and (3) state education agency capacity.¹ All of the questions asked respondents to select a response (or multiple responses in some cases) from a set of options. Some questions dealt with the implementation of new policies and practices; these questions asked respondents to indicate the year in which they anticipated the change to be fully implemented in the state. Thirteen questions provided respondents with space to insert comments or explanations regarding their responses.

Questions about the common core state standards asked about the status of state decisions to adopt the new standards, factors that influenced these decisions, plans for implementing the new standards, and challenges associated with adoption and implementation.

The survey team used statistical analysis software to store, clean, and analyze the survey data. The team handled missing data in one of two ways. In most cases, if a respondent completely skipped a question, the response was counted as missing but not reported in the totals in this report (this is why not all of the response totals sum to 43). Some items asked respondents about specific changes or reform activities and the year in which the changes or reforms are expected to be completed. In these cases, if a respondent indicated that a change or reform was expected but did not indicate an anticipated year of completion, the response was counted in the frequency totals and the year was coded as missing. Finally, because there were very few responses to open-ended items, the survey team did not include these responses in any statistical analyses or frequency calculations. However, the report authors did review the open-ended responses and inserted them in the text when they illustrated key points and findings.

¹ This report presents findings from the first section of the survey. A subsequent report will present findings from the other two sections of the survey.



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