

Year Two of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: States' Progress and Challenges

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Introduction

As of January 2012, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics developed through the leadership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Released in June 2010, these voluntary standards outline the knowledge and skills in English language arts and math that students in grades kindergarten through 12 are expected to learn to be prepared for college and careers.

Adoption of the CCSS is merely the first step. Advocates envision that the standards will guide teaching and learning and help ensure that students receive a consistent, high-quality education. For this to occur, however, states and school districts, as well as teachers and school leaders, must make complementary changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, teacher professional development, and other areas.

For the past two years, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) has tracked states' progress in implementing the Common Core State Standards by conducting surveys of deputy state superintendents of education or their designees. Our first survey on this topic took place in fall 2010, just months after the standards were released. As described in the 2011 CEP report on that survey, *States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards*, the adopting states had taken initial steps to implement the CCSS but many did not expect to fully implement some of the more complex standards-related changes until 2013 or later.

In October through December of 2011, we conducted a second survey of deputy superintendents or their designees to gather more recent information about states' strategies, policies, and challenges during the second year of implementing the CCSS. This report describes findings about the CCSS from our 2011 survey. The survey also addressed other topics—including states' fiscal condition and capacity, progress in implementing the assurances required by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and waivers of Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements—that have been or will be covered in other CEP reports.

Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia, which is counted as a state in the tallies in this report, responded to the 2011 survey. Thirty-five of these 38 respondents (including D.C.) had adopted the CCSS in both English language arts and math at the time of the survey, while one respondent had adopted the standards in English language arts but not math, and two had not adopted the standards in either subject. These latter three states are not counted in the totals of adopting states in this report. Thus, our survey findings represent the views of a majority of the 46 states (including D.C.) that have adopted the standards in both subjects. The names of participating states have been kept confidential to encourage frank answers.

Key Findings

General summary of findings: States view the Common Core State Standards as more rigorous than their previous standards, according to our survey, and are making progress in transitioning to the new standards. But states face challenges in fully implementing the standards, particularly in finding adequate funding. The majority of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey do not expect to fully implement the new standards until school year 2014-15 or later.

- **States generally agree that the CCSS are more rigorous than their previous standards and will improve students' English language arts and math skills.** The vast majority of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey also acknowledge that implementing the standards will require substantial changes in curriculum and instruction.
- **States that have adopted the CCSS are taking steps to familiarize key stakeholders with the standards.** All of the CCSS-adopting states in the survey are providing information about the standards to state education agency staff and to school district leaders and staff. Many are also providing information to familiarize state leaders, higher education personnel, and parents and community leaders with the standards.
- **States that have adopted the CCSS are planning for their implementation and are aligning curriculum, assessment, and teacher policies with the standards.** All of the CCSS-adopting states that we surveyed have developed or are developing comprehensive state implementation plans, and most are requiring their districts to implement the standards. The vast majority of these states are revising curriculum materials or creating new materials aligned with the standards, and are adopting and implementing new assessments aligned with the standards. All of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey are conducting statewide professional development and designing professional development materials to help teachers master the standards, and most are changing their teacher preparation programs and evaluation systems.
- **Although most of the survey states that have adopted the CCSS survey are forging partnerships with higher education to implement the standards, fewer are aligning college admissions requirements or curriculum with the standards.** Sixteen CCSS-adopting states said they plan to align undergraduate admissions requirements or first-year undergraduate curriculum with the CCSS.
- **Most of the survey states that have adopted the CCSS expect to fully implement them by 2014-15.** Just six states expect the standards to be fully implemented by 2012-13, and another nine anticipate full implementation by 2013-14. These timelines are similar to those reported to states in CEP's 2010 survey on the CCSS, suggesting that states are on track with their plans. In general, survey states participating in the federal Race to the Top Fund expect to implement the standards somewhat sooner than non-participating states.
- **Finding adequate resources to implement the CCSS is a major challenge for states in school year 2011-12.** Twenty-one states cited resource issues as a major challenge to CCSS implementation. Many states also face major challenges in preparing teachers for the new standards.
- **Many states foresee major technology challenges in implementing online assessments aligned with the CCSS.** States cited major challenges in providing an adequate number of computers in schools to implement the new assessments (20 states), having adequate internet access and bandwidth in schools (15 states), and having access to expertise to address assessment-related technology problems (14 states).

The text and tables that follow describe these and other findings in more details. An appendix that explains the survey methodology is available on the CEP web site, www.cep-dc.org.

State Adoption of the CCSS

Very few states anticipate changing their decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards. When asked whether their decision to adopt or not adopt the standards might change during school year 2011-12, only three states—all of which have adopted the standards—said yes.

All three cited insufficient funds to implement the standards as a factor that might prompt such a change. In addition, one of these three states cited public opposition and a change in political leadership as other factors that might cause it to reverse its decision to adopt the standards.

Rigor of the CCSS

States that have adopted the Common Core State Standards broadly agree that these standards are more rigorous than their previous standards in either English language arts or math and will improve students' skills in these subjects. As shown in figure 1, 30 states view the CCSS as more rigorous than their previous standards



in English language arts, and 29 states feel they are more rigorous in math. In addition, a large majority of these states agree that implementing the CCSS will lead to improved skills in these two subjects among students.

These state views about the rigor and promise of the CCSS are consistent with the views of school district officials. In a survey conducted by CEP in the winter and spring of 2011 (*Common Core State Standards: Progress and Challenges in School Districts' Implementation*), the majority of district officials agreed that the CCSS in both English language arts and math are more rigorous than their states' previous standards and will lead to improved students skills.

States generally agree that implementing the new standards will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials. As figure 1 also reveals, most of the adopting states in our survey also agreed that transitioning to the CCSS will require fundamental changes in instruction in both English language arts and math.

State Provision of Information about the CCSS

Most of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey have provided information to familiarize key groups with the new standards, or plan to do so in 2011-12. As shown in figure 2, all of these adopting survey states are providing this type of information to state education agency staff and to school district leaders and staff. Most of these states are also providing information on the CCSS to state legislators and other state leaders, higher education faculty and staff, and parents and community leaders.

Figure 2. Number of CCSS-adopting survey states that have provided or plan to provide information to various groups to familiarize them with the new standards

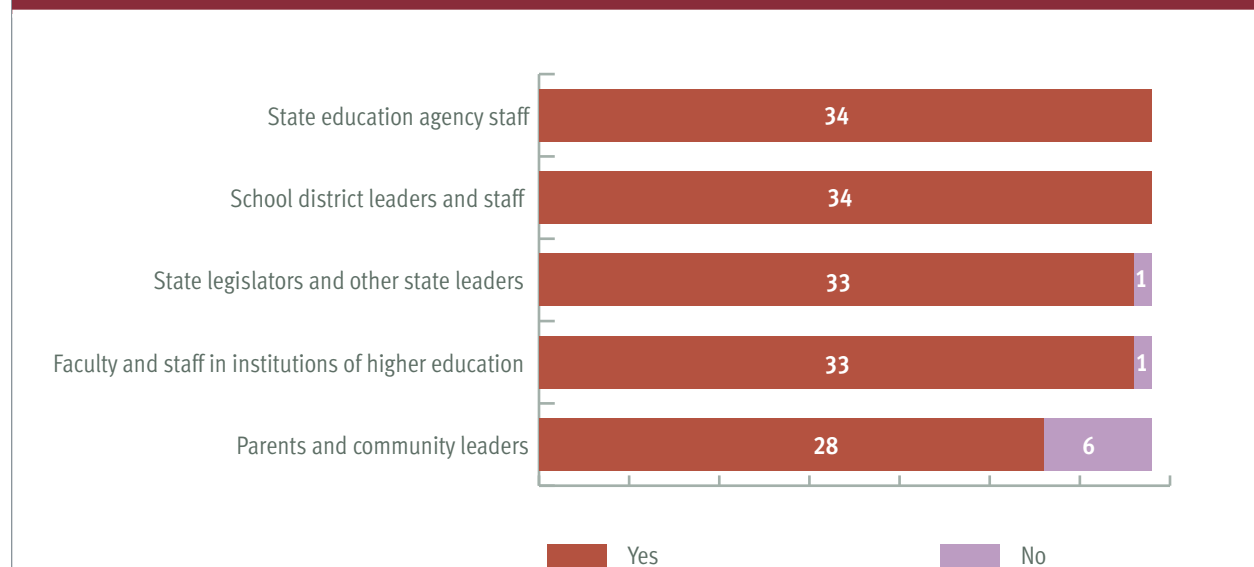


Figure reads: Thirty-four states have provided or plan to provide information to state education agency staff in order to familiarize them with the Common Core State Standards.

Note: Not all CCSS-adopting states that participated in the CEP survey answered this question.

State Policies and Practices to Support CCSS Implementation

States that have adopted the Common Core State Standards are pursuing various state policies and practices to facilitate the transition to the new standards. **Table 1** shows the number of states making changes in general state planning, assessment, and curriculum policies and in policies affecting teachers, school districts, and higher education.

Table 1. Number of CCSS-adopting survey states that are pursuing various policies and practices to facilitate implementation of the standards		
	Yes	No
<i>State planning, assessment and curriculum</i>		
Develop and disseminate a comprehensive, long-term state plan for implementing the CCSS	34	0
Adopt and implement new state assessments aligned with the CCSS	34	0
Revise/create curriculum guides or materials aligned with the CCSS	33	1
<i>Reform activities related to teachers</i>		
Develop and disseminate materials and guides for school districts to use in providing professional development to help teachers master the CCSS and use them to guide instruction	34	0
Carry out statewide professional development initiatives to help teachers master the CCSS and use them to guide instruction	33	0
Align academic content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS	27	5
Modify/create educator evaluation systems and/or requirements for these systems that hold educators accountable for student mastery of the CCSS	25	6
Develop and implement new teacher induction programs that help new teachers master the CCSS and use them in instruction	23	9
<i>Reform activities related to districts and schools</i>		
Require districts to implement the CCSS	28	6
Carry out special initiatives to ensure that the CCSS are fully implemented in the state's lowest performing schools	27	4
Require districts to develop long-term comprehensive plans for local implementation of the CCSS	15	16
<i>Reform activities related to higher education</i>		
Establish a formal partnership between the state education agency and institutions of higher education and/or the state higher education agency to implement the CCSS	26	5
Align undergraduate admissions requirements with the CCSS	16	13
Align first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the CCSS	16	13

Table reads: Thirty-four states have developed or plan to develop and disseminate a comprehensive, long-term state plan for implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Note: Not all CCSS-adopting states that participated in the CEP survey answered this question. In addition, not every state provided an answer for each response item in this question.

Nearly all of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey are involved in long-term planning for implementation of the standards and are aligning their curriculum and assessments with the standards. Thirty-four of the adopting survey states have developed or intend to develop and disseminate a comprehensive, long-term state plan for implementing the CCSS. Thirty-four states are adopting and implementing new state assessments aligned with the standards, and 33 are revising or creating curriculum guides or materials aligned with the CCSS.

States that have adopted the CCSS are taking various actions to help teachers master the new standards and use them to guide instruction. All of the CCSS-adopting states that responded to survey questions about teachers are developing and disseminating materials for local teacher professional development programs, and all are carrying out statewide professional development initiatives for teachers about the new standards. Moreover, a majority of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey are making the following changes to facilitate teachers' implementation of the new standards:

- Twenty-seven are aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS, while five do not intend to do so.
- Twenty-five are modifying or creating educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for student mastery of the CCSS, while six do not plan to develop these types of evaluation systems.
- Twenty-three are developing and implementing new teacher induction programs to help new teachers master the CCSS, while nine do not plan to do so.

Twenty-eight of the adopting states in our survey are requiring districts to implement the CCSS, but only 15 intend to require districts to develop long-term, comprehensive plans for local implementation. In addition, 27 states are planning special initiatives to ensure that the lowest-performing schools in their states will fully implement the CCSS.

In 26 of the CCSS-adopting states in our survey, the state K-12 education agency is establishing partnerships with the state higher education agency or with postsecondary institutions to implement the standards. Far fewer states, just 16, plan to align undergraduate admissions requirements or the first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the CCSS.

State Timelines for Fully Implementing the CCSS

Most of the survey states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards expect to fully implement them by school year 2014-15. As shown in **table 2**, just six of the adopting states in our survey expect to fully implement the CCSS before school year 2013-14. Nine states anticipate full implementation by 2013-14, and 16 expect to complete the task by 2014-15. One state does not expect to fully implement the CCSS until 2015-16.

These timelines reflect states' recognition that many of the changes needed to fully implement the standards are comprehensive and will require considerable time to accomplish. In addition, most CCSS-adopting states belong to one or both of the two state consortia that are developing common assessments aligned to the standards. These consortia—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium—expect to have their assessments ready in 2014-15. It is likely that states' timelines for implementing the CCSS also reflect the schedules of the consortia.

The implementation timelines shown in **table 2** are similar to what states reported in our 2010 state survey, which suggests that states are on track with the plans they outlined in 2010. At that time, a majority of the CCSS-adopting states surveyed did not expect to fully implement changes in such critical areas as assessment, curriculum, teacher evaluation, and teacher certification until 2013 or later.

Table 4. Number of CCSS-adopting survey states that expect to fully implement the standards in various years

School year of full CCSS implementation	Total	States <i>not</i> participating in Race to the Top	States <i>participating</i> in Race to the Top
2011-12	2	2	0
2012-13	4	0	4
2013-14	9	6	3
2014-15	16	13	3
2015-16	1	1	0

Table reads: Two CCSS-adopting states expect to fully implement the Common Core State Standards in school year 2011-12. Neither of these two states is participating in the Race to the Top program.

Note: Not all of the 12 states that were first-round Race to the Top winners participated in the CEP survey. In addition, not all of the CCSS-adopting states that participated in the survey answered this question.

States participating in the Obama Administration's Race to the Top Fund appear, as a group, to be somewhat ahead of other states in implementing the CCSS. Race to the Top rewards states that are creating the conditions for education reform, including the adoption of standards that will prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace. Twelve states won Race to the Top grants in the first round of competition, and four of these winners expect to implement the CCSS fully before school year 2013-14. Three Race to the Top winners expect to fully implement the standards by school year 2013-14 and three by 2014-15. One Race to the Top winner did not participate in our survey, and one that participated in the survey did not answer the question.

Challenges to CCSS Implementation

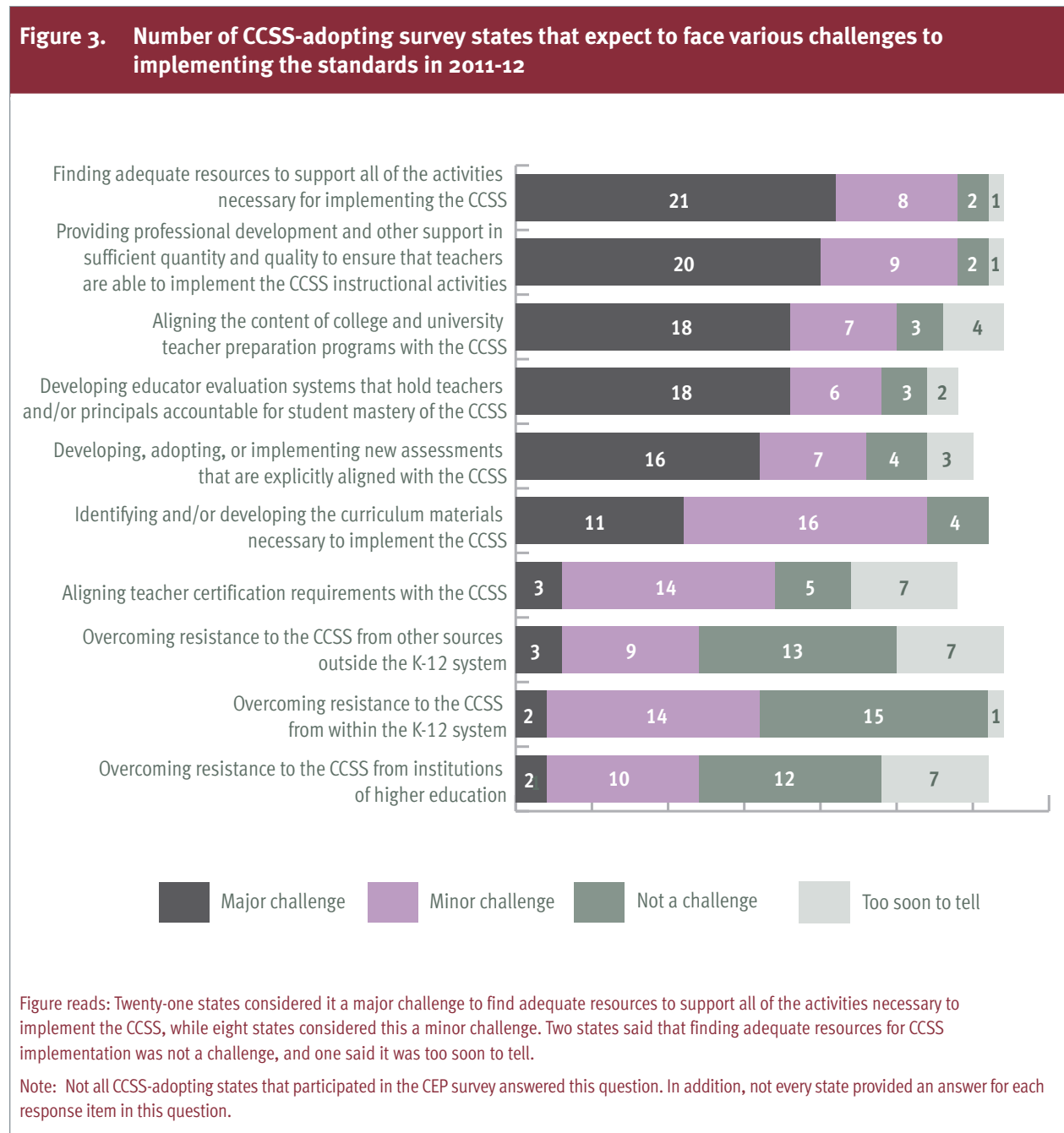
States are likely to encounter challenges over the next few years as they undertake the complex, long-term process of implementing all aspects of the Common Core State Standards. Our survey included a list of possible implementation challenges and asked states to rate whether each of these issues posed a major challenge, a minor challenge, or no challenge in school year 2011-12. States could also note that it was too soon to tell whether a particular issue would be a challenge.

Finding adequate resources to support all of the activities necessary to implement the CCSS was considered a major challenge for school year 2011-12 by 21 adopting states. Eight more states viewed this as a minor challenge, as displayed in **figure 3**.

Many states also cited teacher-related challenges in their efforts to transition to the CCSS. These challenges include providing professional development in sufficient quality and quantity (considered a major challenge by 20 states), aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS (18 states), and developing educator evaluation systems to hold teachers and principals accountable for student mastery of the CCSS (18 states). Just three states considered the alignment of teacher certification requirements with the CCSS to be a major challenge, although 14 states viewed this as a minor challenge and 7 said it was too soon to tell.

Sixteen states expect to face major challenges in 2011-12 in developing or adopting assessments aligned with the CCSS. Eleven foresee major challenges in identifying or developing curriculum materials aligned to the common standards.

States do not expect resistance to the CCSS to be a major challenge in 2011-12. However, several states said they face *minor* challenges in the form of resistance from within the K-12 education system (14 states), from higher education institutions (10 states), and from outside the K-12 system (9 states). Moreover, some states felt it was too soon to tell whether resistance from various stakeholders would pose a challenge.



Challenges to Administering Tests Aligned to the CCSS

The PARCC and SMARTER Balanced Assessment consortia anticipate that their assessments could be administered online, but many of the states participating in these consortia do not currently administer their state tests online. In light of this situation, we asked the CCSS-adopting states in our survey about the challenges they face in implementing the consortia-developed assessments. The responses are shown in **table 3**.

A substantial number of states anticipate major technology challenges in implementing the online assessments being developed by the consortia. In 20 states, providing an adequate number of computers in schools constitutes a major challenge, while in 15 states, having adequate internet access and bandwidth in schools is a major challenge. Several states foresee major challenges with a lack of available expertise at the state level (14 states) and district and school level (14 states) to address technological problems that may arise during test administration. Only 5 states foresee major challenges in providing adequate security to protect online assessments from cheating and fraud, although 16 states see this as a minor challenge.

A noteworthy number of states felt it was too soon to tell whether some of these technology-related assessment issues would pose major challenges.

We asked states that cited any of the technology issues in table 3 as a major challenge whether they had developed and disseminated a plan to address these challenges in the next three years. Ten states said they have developed such a plan, while 16 had not.

Table 3. Number of CCSS-adopting survey states facing various technological challenges in implementing new assessments developed by the PARCC and SMARTER Balanced Assessment consortia

Challenges associated with district implementation of the CCSS	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell	Don't know
Availability of sufficient numbers of computers in the schools	20	4	3	6	0
Availability of adequate internet access and bandwidth in the schools	15	10	6	2	0
Availability of expertise in the state education agency to address technology problems as they arise during test administration	14	7	6	6	0
Availability of expertise in schools and districts to address technology problems that may arise during test administration	14	8	2	8	0
Adequacy of security measures to protect the online assessment from cheating and other fraud	5	16	2	7	2

Table reads: Twenty states viewed the availability of a sufficient number of computers in schools as a major challenge to implementing the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by two state consortia. Four states considered school computer availability to be a minor challenge, three states said it was not a challenge, and six states thought it was too soon to tell.

Note: Not all CCSS-adopting states that participated in the CEP survey answered this question. In addition, not every state provided an answer for each response item in this question.

Conclusion

Our survey suggests that even in a time of limited funding and budget cuts, states are making serious efforts to implement the Common Core State Standards. In school year 2011-12, they are moving ahead with many of the changes they outlined in CEP's 2010 survey on the CCSS. All or nearly all of the CCSS-adopting states we surveyed are engaging in long-term planning for CCSS implementation, revising or creating aligned curriculum materials, and adopting and implementing new assessments aligned to the standards. Most of these states are making a range of CCSS-related changes to teacher professional development, preparation, induction, and evaluation. A large proportion of these states are carrying out special initiatives to implement the new standards in their lowest-performing schools.

Most of the CCSS-adopting survey states are requiring their school districts to implement the new standards, although less than half are requiring districts to develop long-term implementation plans. And compared with other CCSS implementation actions, fewer states are taking steps to align college admissions requirements and first-year curriculum with the CCSS.

Many of these activities, such as implementing assessments aligned to the CCSS, will take a few years. Most states do not expect to fully implement the CCSS until school year 2014-15.

It is important for policymakers to understand that fully implementing the CCSS is a complex undertaking that will take time and will affect many aspects of the education system—from curriculum, instruction, and assessment to teacher policies and higher education. Looming over this entire process is the major challenge of finding adequate resources for the job at a time when many states remain in tough financial straits. Policymakers should also be aware that funding problems could cause states to curtail or delay some of their plans.



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