

Common Core State Standards in 2014:

Districts' Perceptions, Progress, and Challenges

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Leslie Anderson of Policy Studies Associates led a team of PSA staff that worked with CEP to develop and administer the district survey and analyze survey data. Others at PSA who worked on the project include Julie Meredith, Alisha Butler, Jackie MacFarlane, and Kenne Dibner.

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States, school districts, and schools are at a crucial phase of implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) at the very time when mounting criticisms and attempts in some states to derail the standards make their future uncertain. These voluntary, state-developed standards outline the knowledge and skills that students in grades K-12 are expected to learn in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) to be prepared for college and careers. As of September 2014, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS in both subjects, and an additional state, Minnesota, has adopted the ELA standards only.

To learn more about districts' strategies, policies, and challenges in this somewhat volatile year of implementing the CCSS, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at the George Washington University conducted a comprehensive survey of school superintendents or their designees in a nationally representative sample of districts located in the 43 states that had adopted the Common Core at the time the survey was administered, from February through June of 2014. Responses were received from 211 districts, and the responses were weighted to reflect a nationally representative sample. This research builds on previous CEP surveys of district leaders in 2011 and of state education officials in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

This report represents the first in a series of CEP reports based on the 2014 district survey. Additional findings from this survey about other critical aspects of district implementation—preparing for CCSS-aligned assessments, providing professional development for teachers and principals, and developing or obtaining CCSS-aligned curriculum materials—will be the focus of future reports.

This report discusses several general topics related to district implementation of the Common Core:

- The views of district leaders about the rigor of the CCSS, their impact on learning, and necessary changes in curriculum and instruction
- Timelines for fully implementing curriculum and instruction aligned to the CCSS and other key aspects
- Implementation challenges
- Efforts to provide outreach about the CCSS to stakeholders
- District collaboration with other entities to implement the CCSS
- District participation in assistance from the state education agency (SEA) on CCSS implementation, and the views of district leaders about the helpfulness of this assistance

A Volatile Year

During the past year, the number of states implementing the CCSS has shifted. Three states that had earlier adopted the CCSS—Indiana, South Carolina, and Oklahoma—have dropped them outright or are phasing them out. Other states have paused their implementation. Several lawsuits pertaining to the CCSS have been filed in state and

federal courts. In a related development, some states have withdrawn their participation in the state consortia that are producing assessments aligned to the Common Core.

Recent polls have found an increase in public awareness of the Common Core but a decline in public support. A Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll conducted in May-June of 2014 found that 60% of Americans oppose “having the teachers in [their] community use the Common Core State Standards to guide what they teach.”¹ According to a 2014 poll by Education Next, 53% of the public support the use of the CCSS in their state, but this marks a steep decline from the 65% who favored the CCSS in 2013. It is interesting to note, however, that when Education Next framed the question in more general terms that omitted the label “Common Core,” 68% of the public supported the use in their state of “standards for reading and math that are the same across the states” and “will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance.”²

Amid these controversies, several aspects of CCSS implementation are having, or will soon have, a major impact on districts and schools, and on principals, teachers, and students. The CCSS-aligned assessments developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced consortia are expected to be ready to administer during this coming school year, 2014-15, in participating states. Also during this coming year, states that have adopted the CCSS *and* have been granted a waiver of certain Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements—even those CCSS-adopting states that are not participating in a consortium—must tie their accountability systems, including consequences for schools and districts, to performance on the CCSS-aligned assessments, among other factors. In addition, many states are implementing or will soon introduce systems for evaluating teachers and principals based on their students’ mastery of the CCSS, among other measures. Students, too, will be affected—not only because they will be expected to learn and pass tests on more rigorous academic content,³ but also because many postsecondary institutions are considering using scores on CCSS-aligned assessments to make decisions about such issues as which students need remedial courses.

Summary of Key Findings and Discussion

Below is a summary of key findings from the 2014 district survey about each of the main topics covered in this report. The findings for a particular topic are followed by a brief discussion of possible explanations and implications.

The findings in this summary are described in more detail, with accompanying figures and tables, in subsequent sections of the report.

DISTRICT LEADERS’ VIEWS ON THE COMMON CORE

Key findings

- About 90% of school district leaders in adopting states agree that the Common Core standards are more rigorous than their state’s previous math and ELA standards and will lead to improved student skills. The proportions of district leaders concurring with these views have increased substantially since 2011.
- More than 80% of district leaders agree that implementing the CCSS will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials and new instructional practices. The percentages of leaders who subscribe to these views have increased since 2011.

¹ W.J. Bushaw & V. J. Calderon, The 46th annual PDK/Gallup poll of the public’s attitudes toward the public schools, *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2014, <http://pdkintl.org/programs-resources/poll/>.

² M.B. Henderson, P.E. Peterson, & M.R. West, No common opinion on the Common Core, *Education Next*, Winter 2015, <http://educationnext.org/2014-ednext-poll-no-common-opinion-on-the-common-core/>.

³ For evidence about the rigor of the CCSS compared with states’ previous standards, see, for example, *The state of state standards—and the Common Core—in 2010* (Fordham Institute, 2010). For other studies, see CEP’s *A compendium of research on the Common Core State Standards*, specifically the Content, Curriculum, and Alignment section.

Discussion

Even as support for the Common Core has diminished among some policymakers and the public, as suggested by the policy changes and poll results cited above, CEP's survey shows that *increasing* proportions of district leaders concur that the CCSS are providing students with a more rigorous curriculum and will improve students' skills in math and ELA. We speculate that these changes in districts leaders' views between 2011 and 2014 are likely the result of three additional years of first-hand experience with implementing the CCSS in classrooms and with gaining a deeper understanding of the content of the CCSS.

In addition, a greater proportion of district leaders in 2014 than in 2011 agree that changes will be needed in curriculum and instruction to fully implement the standards. We speculate that the 2014 responses represent a more informed view of the magnitude of changes that will be required, based on additional years of working with the standards in classrooms.

PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION

Key finding

- In more than half of the districts in CCSS-adopting states, leaders do not expect their district to complete important milestones of CCSS implementation—such as adequately preparing teachers to teach the Common Core and implementing CCSS-aligned curricula—until school year 2014-15 or later.

Discussion

Although states expect to administer CCSS-aligned assessments this school year, it is noteworthy that about half of the districts in CCSS-adopting states have not yet completed key activities related to curriculum and teacher preparation that are likely to affect student performance on assessments. In other words, many districts do not expect to have the key elements of a fully-aligned system in place before districts and schools are held accountable for student performance.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Key findings

- The vast majority of districts are facing major or minor challenges in implementing the Common Core. These include providing professional development, securing CCSS-aligned curricula, preparing for CCSS-aligned assessments, and finding enough resources to support all of the activities associated with implementing the CCSS.
- Nearly 90% of district leaders cite challenges with having enough time to implement the CCSS before consequences related to student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments take effect.

Discussion

Many of the challenges districts cite in implementing the CCSS are interrelated. For example, professional development affects teachers' ability to teach a CCSS-aligned curriculum. Teacher preparation and curriculum implementation affect student performance on assessments. And funding affects most aspects of implementation.

Since many districts will not have met key implementation milestones until 2014-15 or later, it is not surprising that the attachment of consequences to performance on CCSS-aligned assessments presents a challenge for the vast majority of districts.

Forthcoming reports in this series will discuss in more detail the challenges related to professional development, curriculum, and assessment.

RESISTANCE TO THE CCSS AND DISTRICT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Key findings

- In 2014, 34% of district leaders reported that overcoming resistance to the CCSS from *outside* the educational system was a major challenge, and 39% viewed this as a minor challenge. In addition, 25% of leaders saw resistance to the CCSS from *within* the system as a major challenge, and 49% as a minor challenge. Higher percentages of leaders reported major challenges due to resistance to the CCSS in 2014 than in 2011.
- A large majority of districts in CCSS-adopting states have conducted outreach activities to explain to stakeholders how the CCSS are more rigorous than previous state math and ELA standards (84% of districts) and why student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments may be lower than on previous state tests (76%).
- Greater proportions of districts targeted outreach to principals and teachers and to parents and students than to other audiences, such as community members or business leaders.

Discussion

Given the current level of backlash to the Common Core, it is not surprising that a greater share of district leaders cited overcoming resistance to the CCSS as a major challenge in 2014 than in 2011. Still, it is noteworthy that the majority of district leaders in CCSS-adopting states viewed resistance from inside or outside the system as a minor challenge or no challenge in 2014.

The efforts being undertaken by a large majority of districts to inform key stakeholders about the rigor of the CCSS and their impact on test scores may be a direct response to this resistance. The decision of many districts to target outreach on educators, parents, and students may reflect a pragmatic approach of focusing limited capacity for outreach on those with the most direct connections to local schools. It may also indicate that districts see outreach to broader audiences as a state responsibility. CEP's 2013 state survey, for example, showed that the majority of CCSS-adopting states are undertaking public relations efforts about assessments aligned to the Common Core, including explaining why scores or pass rates on CCSS-aligned assessments may differ from results on previous state math and ELA exams.

COLLABORATION ON CCSS IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Key findings

- Nearly all districts have collaborated with at least one other entity in implementing aspects of the Common Core. For example, 75% of districts are collaborating with other partners to create CCSS-aligned curricula, and 65% are working with partners to develop interim and benchmark assessments to measure student mastery of the CCSS.
- In carrying out specific CCSS implementation activities, higher proportions of districts are collaborating with other districts in their state and their state educational agency than with nonprofits, institutions of higher education, or school districts in other states.

Discussion

By having the same set of academic standards across many states, advocates for the Common Core hope to create opportunities for collaboration on implementation, including cross-state collaboration and the potential to realize

economies of scale related to instructional materials and professional development tools and strategies. The survey results suggest this is occurring to some extent; the vast majority of districts reported partnering with at least one other entity to implement the Common Core. Most of these districts are collaborating with other districts in the state or with their SEA, however. Only 20% or fewer districts are partnering with higher education institutions or nonprofit organizations, or are working with districts in other states on CCSS implementation activities.

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY ASSISTANCE WITH CCSS IMPLEMENTATION

Key findings

- The majority of districts in CCSS-adopting states have received assistance from their SEA on one or more aspects of implementation, such as teacher or principal professional development or informational meetings about the Common Core.
- Of the districts that reported receiving assistance from the SEA, about one-third found these services to be very helpful, and about two-thirds found them somewhat helpful. A very small proportion of districts—3% to 8%, depending on the service—did not find the SEA assistance helpful.

Discussion

State education agencies are providing assistance to districts in implementing the Common Core, but most districts that have received this support rate it as only somewhat helpful. This may be due in large part to the lack of capacity in most SEAs to implement the CCSS, as reported in a 2013 CEP state survey. In general, state officials in most of the CCSS-adopting states reported that their state lacked one or more elements of capacity, which we defined as having adequate staff expertise, staffing levels, and resources, to carry out various CCSS implementation activities. Specifically, only 5 of the 40 states in the 2013 survey reported having adequate staff expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources to support district implementation of the CCSS.

Notes about Methodology

Throughout this report, the percentages for 2014 are nationally representative of school districts in those states that had adopted the CCSS when the survey was administered in the spring of 2014. The responses have been weighted to reflect a nationally representative sample, and therefore the percentages of districts cited are estimates.

In the sections that follow, some of the apparent differences between two estimated responses in the tables and figures are not statistically significant. However, the narrative preceding each table or figure discusses differences that *are* statistically significant and other findings that are notable for various reasons. Some statistically significant differences are not discussed in the narrative but may be of interest to some readers. Users of this report are encouraged to consult the technical appendix accompanying this report, available at www.cep-dc.org, for specific information about which differences are statistically significant.

For some of the topics discussed in the sections that follow, the 2014 findings have been compared with findings from CEP's 2011 survey of district leaders (see, *Common Core State Standards: Progress and Challenges in School Districts' Implementation*). The pool of states that had adopted the CCSS in 2011 was slightly different from that of 2014. However, additional analyses indicate that these differences in the pool are not sufficient to account for the large differences in responses on some topics.

More detailed information about study methods and confidence intervals for the survey data is available in the technical appendix accompanying this report.

District Views about the Rigor and Impact of the CCSS

The 2014 survey included several questions for district leaders in CCSS-adopting states about the characteristics and impact of the Common Core. We then compared the responses from 2014 with responses to the same questions from CEP's 2011 district survey.

RIGOR

About 90% of district officials agree that the Common Core State Standards in math and ELA are more rigorous than their state's previous standards in these subjects. This represents a notable increase since 2011, when less than 60% of the district leaders surveyed by CEP agreed or strongly agreed that the CCSS are more rigorous.

Figure 1. District leaders' views on whether the CCSS are more rigorous than their state's previous standards

Percentage of respondents, 2014 and 2011

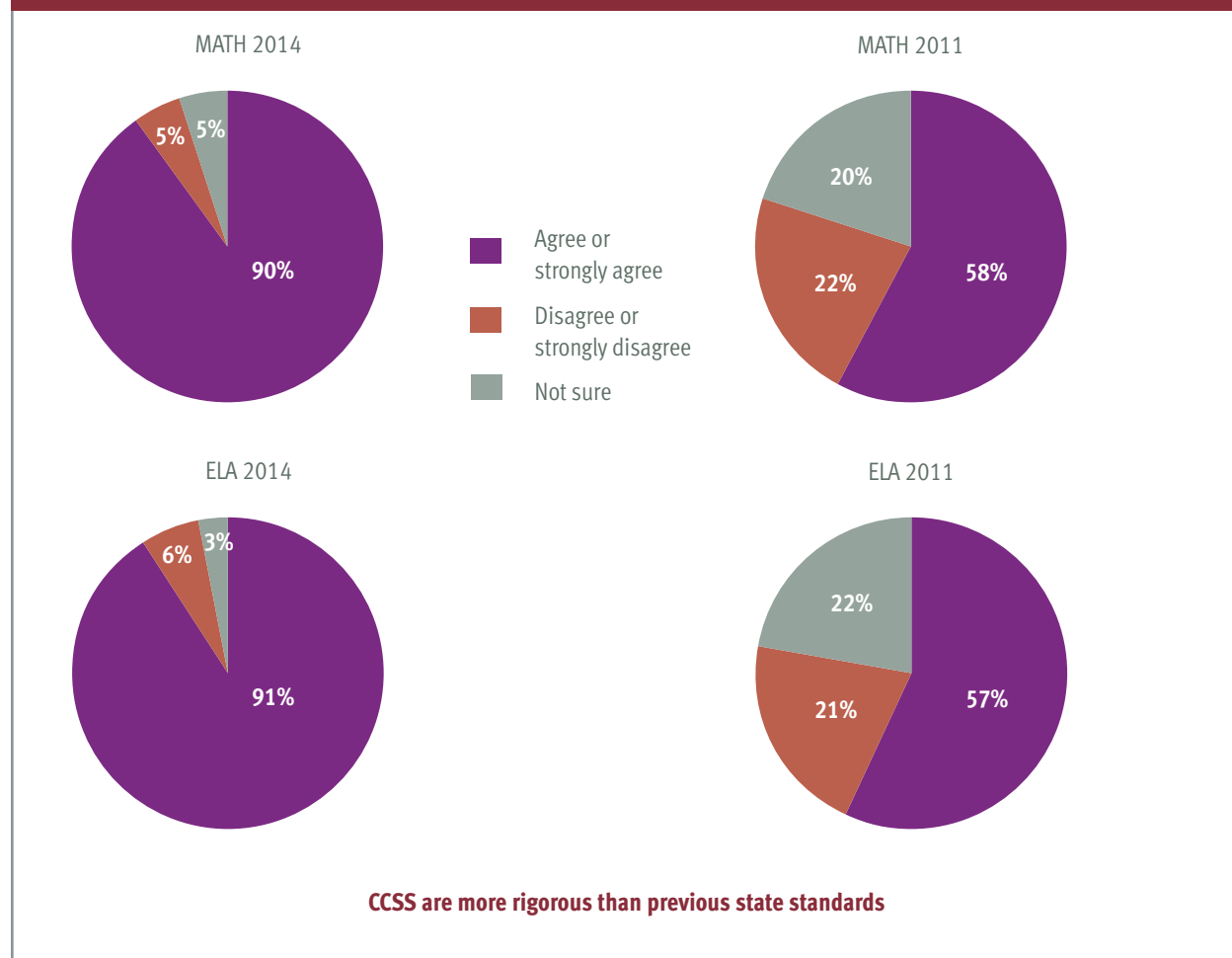


Figure reads: In 2014, an estimated 90% of districts in Common Core-adopting states agreed that the CCSS are more rigorous than their previous state standards in math. In 2011, an estimated 58% agreed with this statement.

Note: The populations of sample districts in the 2011 and 2014 surveys differ slightly.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

IMPROVED STUDENT SKILLS

Nearly three-quarters of district leaders agreed that the CCSS will lead to improved skills in math and ELA among students in their districts—far greater than the 55% (math) or 58% (ELA) who agreed with this statement in 2011.

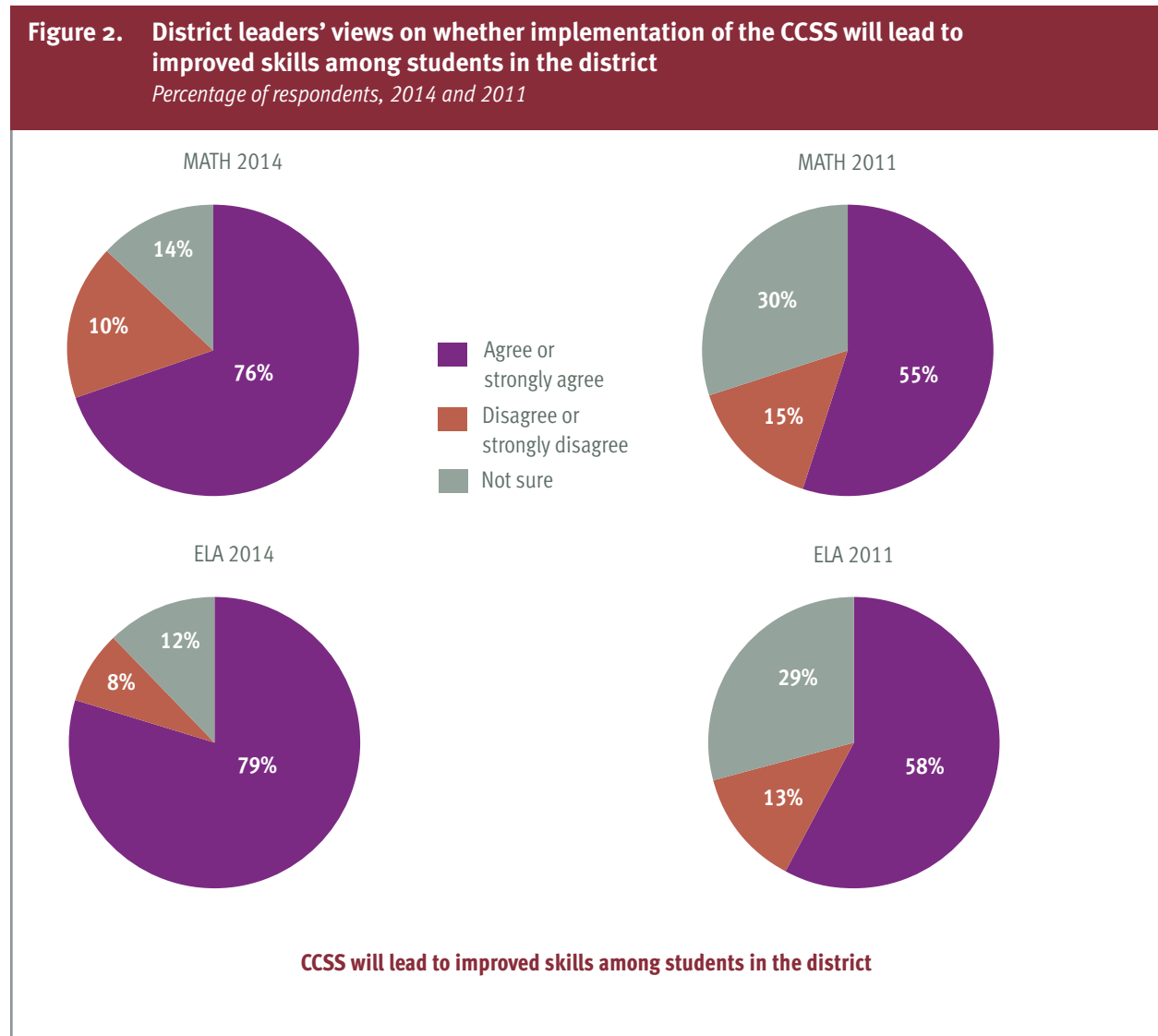


Figure reads: In 2014, an estimated 76% of districts in Common Core-adopting states agreed that implementation of the CCSS will lead to improved skills in mathematics among students in this district. In 2011, an estimated 55% agreed with this statement.

Note: The populations of sample districts in the 2011 and 2014 surveys differ slightly.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

CURRICULAR CHANGES

A large majority of district officials agree that a new or substantially revised curriculum will be needed to implement the Common Core in math (88%) and ELA (82%). This represents an upsurge since 2011, when the comparable proportions were 64% in math and 56% in ELA.

Figure 3. District leaders' views on whether implementation of the CCSS will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials
Percentage of respondents, 2014 and 2011

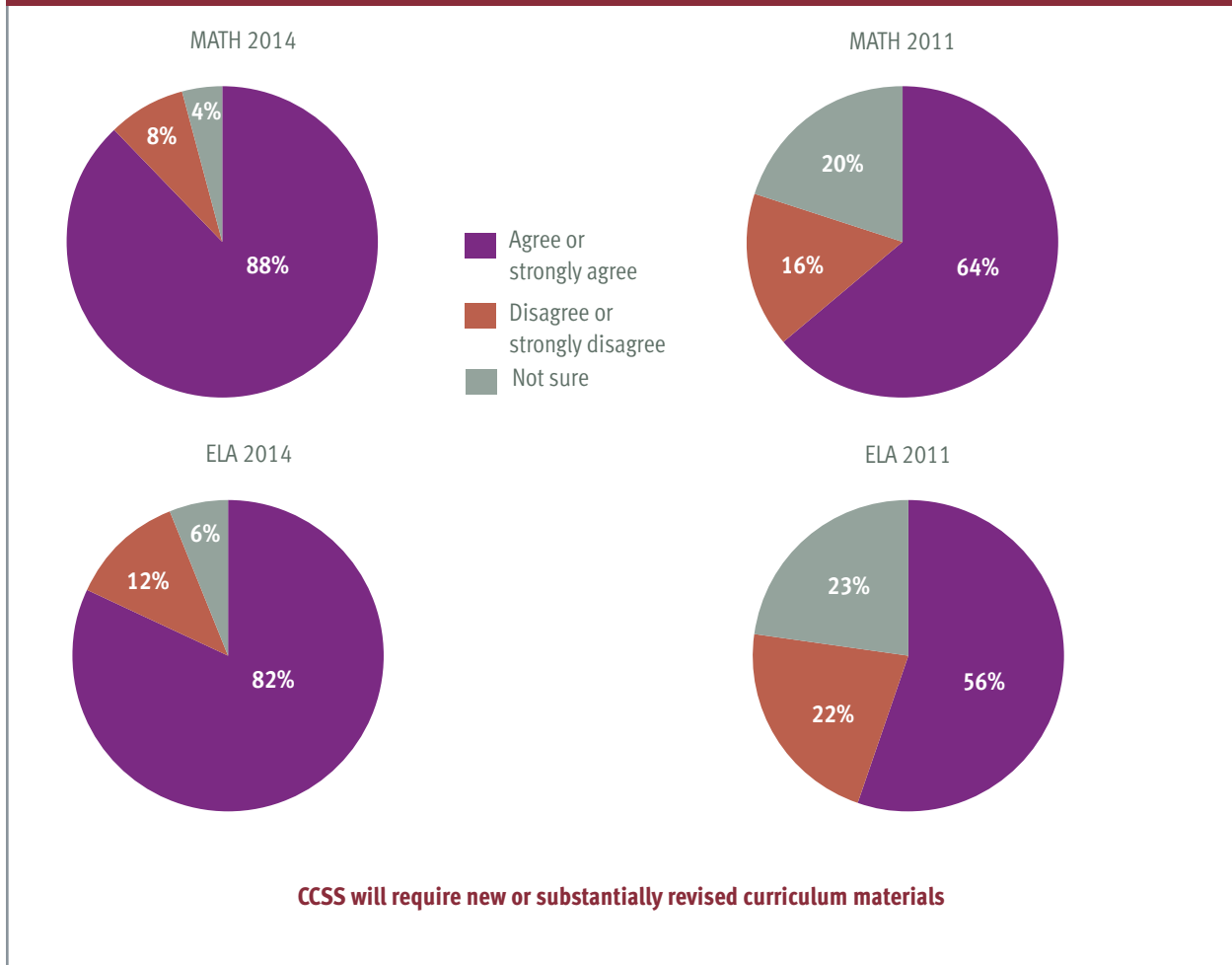


Figure reads: In 2014, an estimated 88% of districts in Common Core-adopting states agreed that implementation of the CCSS will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials in math. In 2011, an estimated 64% agreed with this statement.

Note: The populations of sample districts in the 2011 and 2014 surveys differ slightly.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGES

The vast majority of districts agree that fundamental changes in instruction will be required to implement the Common Core in math (89%) and ELA (86%). In 2011, only half of the districts agreed that fundamental changes in instruction would be necessary.

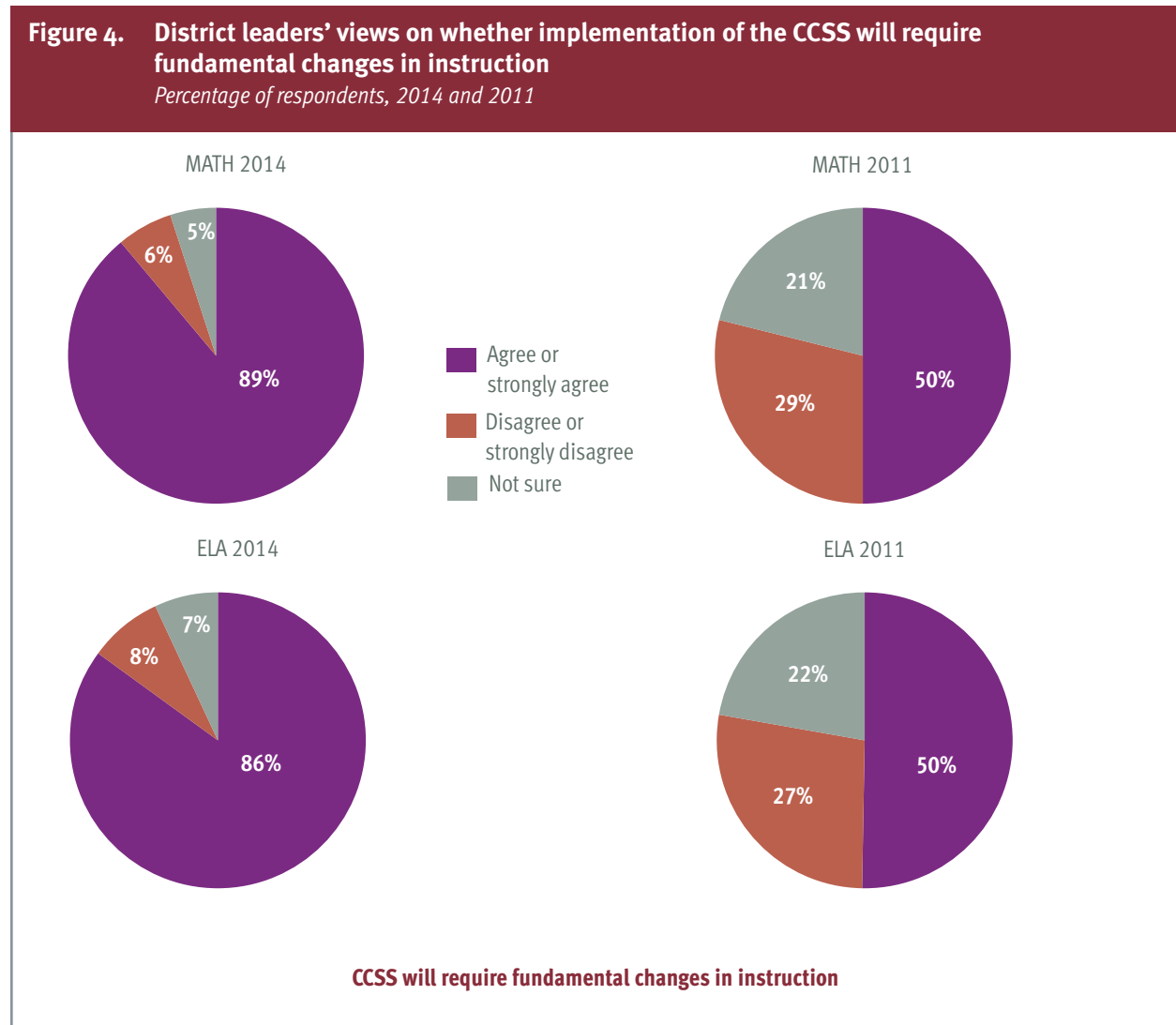


Figure reads: In 2014, an estimated 89% of districts in Common Core-adopting states agreed that implementation of the CCSS will require fundamental changes in instruction in mathematics in their district. In 2011, an estimated 50% agreed with this statement.

Note: The populations of sample districts in the 2011 and 2014 surveys differ slightly.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Anticipated Timelines for Fully Implementing the Common Core

Although districts are proceeding at different rates in putting in place key aspects of the Common Core, the majority of districts do not expect to achieve major implementation milestones until school year 2014-15 or later. For most of the milestones shown in **table 1**, roughly one-third of districts have already accomplished that milestone, about one-third expect to complete it in this school year, and an estimated one-quarter to one-third do not expect to fully achieve it until school year 2015-16 or later. Smaller percentages of districts are not sure when they will fully implement particular milestones. It should be noted that the survey question did not define “adequately prepared” or “implement,” so it was left up to the individual responding to the survey to answer the question from his or her point of view.

For example, slightly more than one-third (37%) of districts report that they have implemented a CCSS-aligned curriculum in math in all schools, and roughly another third (32%) expect to reach that milestone this school year. About the same proportion (27%) of districts anticipate that they will have implemented a CCSS-aligned curriculum in math in all schools in 2015-16 or later. An estimated 4% are unsure when this will happen.

The response patterns were similar across districts for achieving the other milestones in table 1. It is also noteworthy that although many states plan to administer CCSS-aligned assessments in school year 2014-15, more than half of districts do not expect to have the technological infrastructure for these assessments in place until this school year or later.

Table 1. School year in which districts expect to complete key implementation milestones
Percentage of respondents, 2014

	SY 2013-14 or before	SY 2014-15	SY 2015-16 or later	Not sure
Implement CCSS-aligned curricula in math in all schools	37%	32%	27%	4%
Implement CCSS-aligned curricula in ELA in all schools	36%	36%	23%	6%
Adequately prepare all principals to be instructional leaders around the CCSS	36%	34%	23%	8%
Adequately prepare all ELA teachers to teach the CCSS	33%	36%	24%	7%
Adequately prepare all math teachers to teach the CCSS	30%	34%	30%	7%
Adopt CCSS-aligned textbooks and other instructional materials*	21%	29%	34%	16%
Have the necessary technological infrastructure to administer CCSS-aligned assessments [†]	32%	29%	26%	14%

Table reads: An estimated 37% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that they have already implemented curricula aligned to the CCSS in math in all of their schools. An estimated 32% reported that they will do so in school year 2014-15, and an estimated 27% said they do not expect to do so until school year 2015-16 or later. An estimated 4% of districts were unsure when they would implement CCSS-aligned curriculum in math in all of their schools.

*1% of district leaders responded that this was not applicable.

[†]These results reflect only those school districts located in states that are participating in one of the two CCSS assessment consortia. In addition, 2% of district leaders responded that this was not applicable.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Challenges for Districts in Implementing the CCSS

Implementing any new set of academic standards creates challenges for school districts, but the potential challenges associated with Common Core implementation are particularly difficult because of the comparative rigor of the new standards and the use of CCSS-aligned assessments to meet federal testing and accountability requirements beginning in school year 2014-15. As indicated by the survey responses below, districts face multiple challenges related to funding, curriculum, staffing, professional development, time, and assessment. (Challenges related to resistance to the standards from various stakeholders and SEA assistance on standards implementation are discussed in later sections.)

FUNDING, CURRICULUM, STAFFING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND TIME CHALLENGES

Finding adequate resources to support all of the activities necessary to implement the CCSS remains a major challenge for districts, just as it was when CEP last surveyed districts on this issue in 2011. In the 2014 survey, more than 90% of districts reported experiencing major (67%) or minor (25%) challenges with finding adequate resources to implement the CCSS, as shown in **table 2**. These proportions are similar to CEP's findings in 2011, when 76% of district officials said that inadequate funding was a major challenge and 21% deemed it a minor challenge.

In 2014, a majority of districts— 86% or more—also reported experiencing major or minor challenges with several other issues listed in table 2; districts could cite as many challenges as applied to them. These include having adequate staff *expertise* and staffing *levels* to implement the CCSS, identifying and/or developing CCSS-aligned curriculum materials, and providing CCSS-related professional development. Finally, nearly 90% of district leaders reported facing major or minor challenges in having enough time to implement the CCSS before consequences take effect based on student performance on CCSS-aligned tests. (The 2011 survey question about challenges did not address most of these topics.)

Table 2. Challenges related to funding, curriculum materials, staffing, professional development, and time

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell
Finding adequate resources to support all of the activities necessary for implementing the CCSS	67%	25%	7%	2%
Having adequate district staffing levels to implement all aspects of the CCSS*	50%	37%	10%	2%
Having adequate district staff expertise to implement all aspects of the CCSS	42%	44%	13%	2%
Identifying and/or developing the curriculum materials necessary to implement the CCSS	45%	45%	9%	1%
Providing high-quality professional development and other support to ensure that teachers are able to implement the CCSS instructional activities	46%	42%	10%	2%
Having enough time to implement the CCSS before consequences (i.e. school accountability, teacher evaluations) are tied to student performance on the CCSS-aligned assessments	67%	22%	7%	4%

Table reads: An estimated 67% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that finding adequate resources to support all of the activities necessary for implementing the CCSS was a major challenge, while an estimated 25% indicated it was a minor challenge, an estimated 7% responded that finding resources was not a challenge, and an estimated 2% said it was too soon to tell if this was a challenge or not.

*1% of district leaders responded that they were not sure

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

ASSESSMENT-RELATED IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Preparing to implement new assessments aligned to the Common Core represents a challenge for the vast majority (92%) of districts in CCSS-adopting states, as displayed in **table 3**. Half of districts identified this as a major challenge, and 42% saw it as a minor challenge.

Because new CCSS-aligned assessments developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced will be administered by computer, it is crucial that districts in states participating in these consortia have the technological infrastructure, such as adequate bandwidth, internet access, and computers with sufficient processing speed, to support these assessments. Therefore, we did a special analysis of survey data from districts in states that were participating in one or both of these consortia at the time of the survey. An estimated 87% of these districts in consortia member states reported facing challenges in finding resources to acquire the necessary technological infrastructure for the consortia assessments; 46% considered this a major challenge, and 41% saw it as a minor challenge.

More information about district implementation of assessments will appear in a separate report in this series.

Table 3. Assessment-related implementation challenges

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell
Preparing for the implementation of new CCSS-aligned assessments*	50%	42%	7%	1%
Identifying resources to acquire the necessary technological infrastructure to administer the assessments†	46%	41%	14%	0%

Table reads: An estimated 50% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that preparing for the implementation of new CCSS-aligned assessments was a major challenge, while an estimated 42% indicated it was a minor challenge, an estimated 7% responded that such preparation was not a challenge, and an estimated 1% said it was too soon to tell if this was a challenge or not.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

*These responses are from all districts in the sample in CCSS-adopting states.

†These responses are limited to districts in states that have adopted the CCSS and belonged to the PARCC and/or Smarter Balanced consortium at the time of the survey.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Resistance to the Common Core and Outreach Efforts

The questions on the 2014 district survey about challenges to implementing the CCSS included items related to the challenges posed by resistance from within and outside the educational system. The responses are discussed in this section.

Another set of questions sought to learn whether districts were conducting outreach activities aimed at one or more of the following groups: principals, teachers, parents, students, community members, business leaders, news media, higher education institutions, or other stakeholders. The survey defined outreach activities as convening information sessions, sharing written materials, and/or making presentations at meetings. In particular, the survey asked districts whether they were undertaking outreach to inform these groups about two topics:

1. How the CCSS are more rigorous than previous state math and ELA standards
2. Why student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments may be lower than on previous state math and ELA tests

More than three-fourths of districts reported conducting outreach activities on each of these topics, as explained in this section.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO RESISTANCE TO THE CCSS AND OUTREACH

Overcoming resistance to the CCSS presented more of a challenge to a greater share of districts in 2014 than in 2011, according to CEP's survey results.

In 2014, 25% of the nation's districts in Common Core-adopting states cited overcoming resistance to the CCSS from *within* the K-12 education system as a major implementation challenge, and 49% considered this a minor challenge; 22% did not see it as a challenge (see **table 4**). Resistance to the CCSS from *outside* the education system was cited as a major challenge to implementation by 34% of district officials and as a minor challenge by 39%, while 18% did not view this as a challenge.

Although not shown in the table below, the 2011 survey included similar questions about resistance to implementing the CCSS. When asked about resistance among teachers and principals (key players *within* the system), 10% of district officials considered this a major challenge and 58% considered it a minor challenge; 32% reported that it was not a challenge. When asked about resistance to the CCSS from parents and community members (key stakeholders *outside* the system), just 5% of district officials reported that this was a major challenge in 2011, while 35% called it a minor challenge, and 60% said it did not pose a challenge.

A related area of resistance that may impact districts' implementation of the Common Core is the movement among some state policymakers to roll back a state's adoption of the CCSS or pause implementation of the CCSS. CEP's 2014 survey asked districts whether these rollbacks or pauses presented challenge to their implementation efforts. As shown in table 4, 42% of district leaders deemed this to be a major challenge, while 20% viewed it as a minor challenge. An estimated 24% of district officials said these actions did not pose a challenge, but it is likely that many or most of these districts are located in states where policymakers have not taken these steps. (The 2011 survey did not ask about these types of state policy challenges.)

Table 4. Challenges related to resistance to the CCSS and outreach

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from within the K-12 system*	25%	49%	22%	3%
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from other sources outside the K-12 system†	34%	39%	18%	6%
Concern about state officials reconsidering the adoption of the CCSS or putting the implementation of the CCSS on hold‡	42%	20%	24%	8%
Conducting CCSS-related communications/outreach activities to inform stakeholders§	27%	50%	18%	3%

Table reads: An estimated 25% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that overcoming resistance to the CCSS from within the K-12 system was a major challenge, while an estimated 49% indicated it was a minor challenge, an estimated 22% responded that such resistance was not a challenge, and an estimated 3% said it was too soon to tell if this was a challenge.

*1% of district leaders responded that this was not a district activity.

†3% of district leaders responded that they were not sure, while 1% reported that this was not a district activity.

‡3% of district leaders responded that they were not sure, while 4% reported that this was not a district activity.

§2% of district leaders responded that they were not sure.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

As explained below, many districts are undertaking outreach efforts to inform various stakeholder groups about the Common Core—efforts that might help mitigate resistance to the CCSS in some communities. But conducting outreach also brings challenges. An estimated 77% of district leaders reported that communication and outreach efforts to stakeholders are presenting challenges; this includes the 27% of districts that cited it as a major challenge and the 50% that deemed it to be a minor challenge.

OUTREACH TO EXPLAIN THE RIGOR OF THE COMMON CORE

According to the CEP survey, 84% of districts are conducting outreach to explain how the CCSS are more rigorous than previous state standards in math and ELA, as shown in **figure 5**.

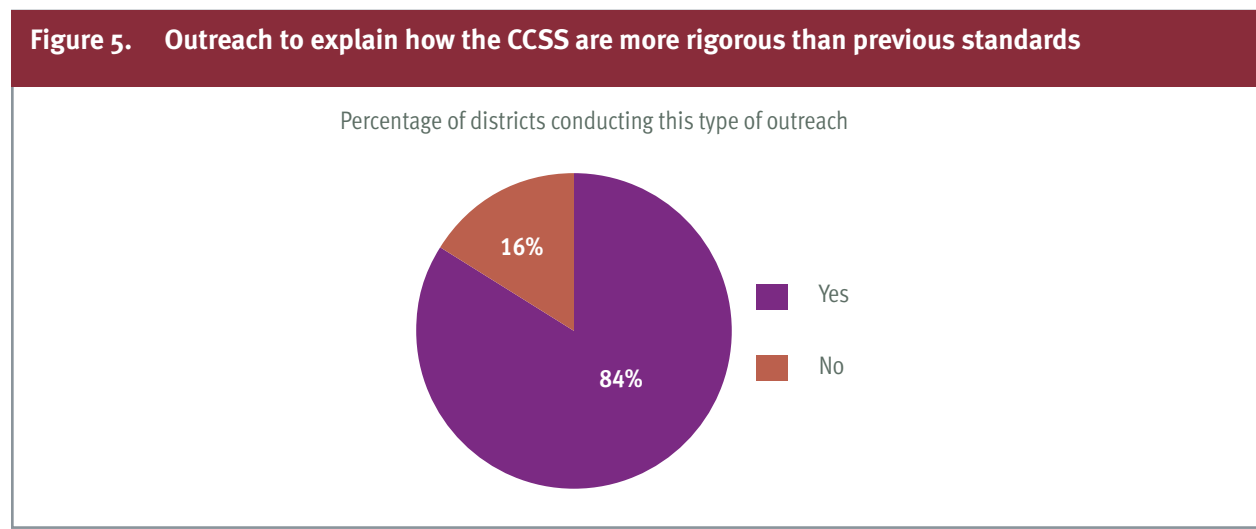


Figure reads: An estimated 84% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that they had conducted outreach to various stakeholders to explain how the CCSS are more rigorous than previous state standards.

The survey asked districts to identify which groups were the target audience for their outreach efforts; districts could name more than one. Greater proportions of districts were targeting outreach on the rigor of the CCSS to principals and teachers (87%) and to parents and students (77%) than to community members, business leaders, and the news media (62%) and/or institutions of higher education (11%). (See **table 5**).

Target of outreach	Percentage of districts
Principals and teachers	87%
Parents and students	77%
Community members, business leaders, news media	62%
Institutions of higher education	11%
Other	5%

Table reads: An estimated 87% of districts in Common Core-adopting states have conducted outreach targeted to principals and teachers to explain how the CCSS are more rigorous than previous state math and ELA standards.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, which is available at www.cep-dc.org.

OUTREACH TO EXPLAIN WHY STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON CCSS TESTS MAY BE LOWER

More than three-fourths (76%) of districts reported that they are conducting outreach to explain why student performance may be lower on CCSS-aligned assessments than on previous state math and ELA tests (see **figure 6**).

Figure 6. Outreach to explain why scores on CCSS-aligned tests may be lower than on previous tests

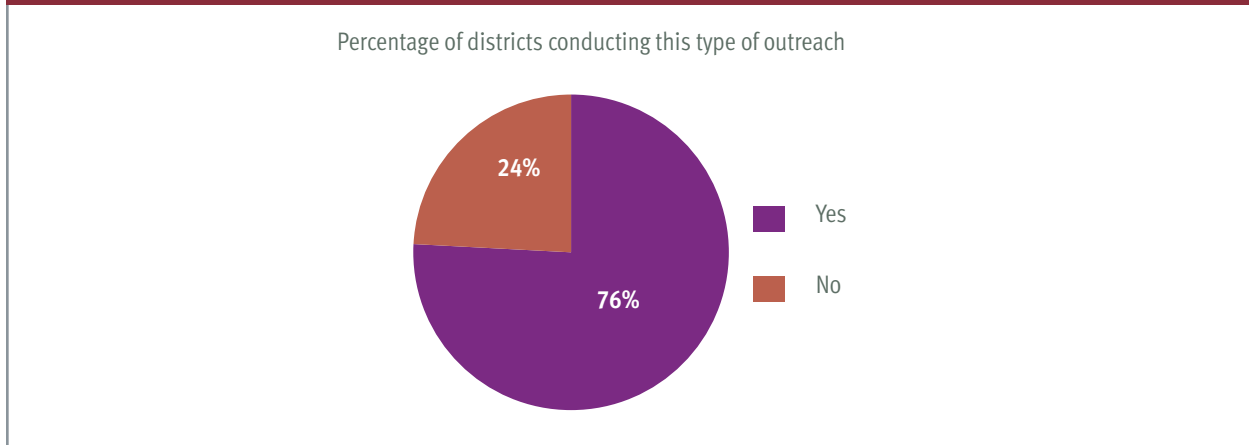


Figure reads: An estimated 76% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that they had conducted outreach to various stakeholders to explain why scores on CCSS-aligned tests may be lower than on previous state math and ELA assessments.

An estimated 79% of districts have conducted outreach activities aimed at principals and teachers to explain why student scores on CCSS-aligned tests may be lower than on previous state math and ELA assessments (see **table 6**). Smaller proportions of districts have focused outreach on this topic on parents and students (57%), community members, business leaders, and the news media (45%), and/or institutions of higher education (9%).

Table 6. Targets of outreach to explain why student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments may be lower than on previous assessments

Target of outreach	Percentage of districts
Principals and teachers	79%
Parents and students	57%
Community members, business leaders, news media	45%
Institutions of higher education	9%
Other	4%

Table reads: An estimated 79% of districts in Common Core-adopting states have conducted outreach targeted to principals and teachers to explain why student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments may be lower than on previous state math and ELA assessments.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Collaboration

Supporters of the Common Core often point to the potential for collaboration across districts and states as a positive feature of the standards. The 2014 survey found that districts are indeed working with other entities to implement various CCSS-related activities. However, further research would be needed to determine if districts' collaboration with other entities on Common Core implementation are greater than their previous collaborative efforts on implementation of their prior state math and ELA standards.

FOCUS OF COLLABORATION AND NUMBER OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

An estimated 97% of districts are engaging in some type of collaboration to implement the Common Core. (The survey defined “collaboration” as working in partnership with another institution or organization.) As discussed later in this section, most of these collaborative efforts are occurring with other districts in the state or with their state education agency.

Table 7 shows the percentage of districts engaged in collaborations to implement specific activities related to the CCSS. A large majority of districts reported collaborating with one or more entities to provide the following types of professional development—

- To teachers on CCSS-aligned curriculum (90% of districts)
- To principals to help them become instructional leaders for the CCSS (85%)
- To teachers on the use of CCSS assessment data to inform instruction (84%)

Activity	Percentage of districts collaborating with <i>any</i> entities on this activity	Number of entities with which district is collaborating on this activity				
		1	2	3	4	5
Professional development for teachers on CCSS-aligned curriculum	90%	54%	27%	13%	5%	1%
Professional development for principals to prepare them to be instructional leaders around the CCSS	85%	61%	27%	10%	1%	1%
Professional development to prepare teachers to use CCSS-aligned assessment data to inform instruction	84%	56%	23%	17%	2%	1%
Development of CCSS-aligned curriculum materials	75%	58%	26%	11%	3%	1%
Development of benchmark or interim assessments to measure student mastery of the CCSS	65%	70%	20%	8%	1%	2%
Parent/public information and outreach efforts around the CCSS	52%	65%	27%	6%	0	3%
Obtaining financial resources to support CCSS implementation	48%	79%	16%	2%	2%	1%

Table reads: An estimated 90% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that they have collaborated with one or more entities to provide professional development for teachers on CCSS-aligned curriculum. In carrying this professional development activity, an estimated 54% of districts collaborated with one other entity, an estimated 27% partnered with two other entities, and an estimated 13% worked together with three other entities. Very small proportions of districts partnered with four (5%) or five (1%) other entities.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

A sizable majority of districts are collaborating with other partners to create CCSS-aligned curricula (75%) and to develop interim and benchmark assessments to measure student mastery of the CCSS (65%). Roughly half of districts are collaborating to provide outreach on the CCSS (52%) and to find financial resources to support CCSS implementation (48%).

Table 7 also shows the number of entities with which districts are collaborating. Most districts are collaborating with just one or two other entities to carry out these activities.

TYPES OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The survey also asked districts which entities they are collaborating with to carry out various CCSS activities. In general, greater proportions of districts are collaborating with other districts in their state and with their state education agency than with school districts in other states, institutions of higher education, or nonprofit organizations.

The survey also invited districts to list “other” partners they were collaborating with that did not fit into the given response categories. Among the other collaborators listed by respondents were for-profit entities and various types of intermediate educational units.

We asked districts specifically about collaborations to provide three types of professional development shown in **table 8**: to teachers about CCSS-aligned curriculum; to teachers about the use of results from CCSS-aligned assessments to inform instruction; and to principals about instructional leadership on the CCSS. For all three types of professional development, half or more of the districts reported partnering with other districts in their states to provide services, and roughly half of the districts were collaborating with their SEA. Lesser proportions of districts were partnering with higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, or districts in other states.

Table 8. Percentage of districts collaborating with various entities on professional development

	SEA	Other districts in state	Districts in other states	Higher education institutions	Non-profits	Did not collaborate with any entity	Not sure
CCSS-related professional development for teachers on CCSS-aligned curriculum	54%	61%	5%	20%	15%	6%	3%
Professional development to prepare teachers to use CCSS-aligned assessment data to inform instruction	52%	53%	7%	15%	15%	11%	4%
Professional development for principals to prepare them to be instructional leaders around the CCSS	48%	50%	5%	13%	15%	10%	3%

Table reads: An estimated 54% of districts in Common Core-adopting states collaborated with their state education agency on professional development for teachers on CCSS-aligned curriculum, while an estimated 61% worked with other districts in the state on this activity.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, which is available at www.cep-dc.org.

This survey question also asked about collaborations to carry out four other aspects of Common Core implementation shown in **table 9**: developing CCSS-aligned curriculum materials, obtaining funding to implement the CCSS, providing information and outreach to parents and the public on the CCSS, and developing benchmark or interim assessments to measure students' mastery of the CCSS.

For each of these aspects, the largest proportions of districts reported collaborating with other districts in the state and with their state education agency, while smaller percentages are collaborating with nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, or districts in other states. To develop CCSS-aligned curriculum materials, for example, 49% of districts are partnering with other districts in their state, and 40% are collaborating with the state education agency. Smaller proportions are not collaborating with any entity (17%) or are working with nonprofit organizations (16%), institutions of higher education (11%), or districts in other states (7%).

For three of the activities in table 9, one-fourth or more of districts have not collaborated with any partners. This is the case for securing funding to implement the Common Core (43%), providing parent and public outreach (38%), and developing benchmark or interim assessments (25%).

Table 9. Percentage of districts collaborating with various entities on CCSS-related curriculum development, funding, outreach, and interim assessment development

	SEA	Other districts in state	Districts in other states	Higher education institutions	Non-profits	Did not collaborate with any entity	Not sure
Developing CCSS-aligned curriculum materials	40%	49%	7%	11%	16%	17%	7%
Obtaining financial resources to support CCSS implementation	30%	22%	3%	4%	5%	43%	6%
Providing parent/public information and outreach around the CCSS	35%	26%	3%	4%	8%	38%	6%
Developing benchmark or interim assessments to measure student mastery of the CCSS	36%	34%	5%	7%	13%	25%	4%

Table reads: An estimated 40% of districts in Common Core-adopting states collaborated with their state education agency on developing CCSS-aligned curriculum materials, while an estimated 49% worked with other districts in the state on this activity.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

State Education Agency Assistance

CEP's 2013 survey of state education agency officials found that SEAs are providing many services to school districts and schools regarding the Common Core, as described in the report, *Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: An Overview of States' Progress and Challenges*. The 2014 district survey included questions about some of these services in order to determine the proportion of districts receiving assistance from the SEA, learn whether district officials considered these services to be helpful, and ascertain whether districts were experiencing challenges with aspects of SEA assistance.

In general, a large majority of districts participated in these SEA services. Of those that participated, a majority of districts found them at least somewhat helpful. Still, many districts reported challenges in such areas as obtaining adequate guidance from the SEA.

SEA MEETINGS TO EXPLAIN THE CCSS

All 40 CCSS-adopting states that participated in CEP's 2013 survey of state officials reported conducting meetings with superintendents, principals, and teachers to provide information about the Common Core and answer questions. The 2014 district survey results indicate that these state efforts have reached the vast majority of districts. As shown in **figure 7**, 87% of district officials reported that superintendents, principals, and/or teachers had participated in SEA informational meetings on the CCSS, and just 8% said their leaders and staff had not participated. Among the districts in which leaders and staff participated in SEA-sponsored informational meetings, 32% reported that the meetings were very helpful, 63% said they were somewhat helpful, and 5% indicated the meetings were not helpful.

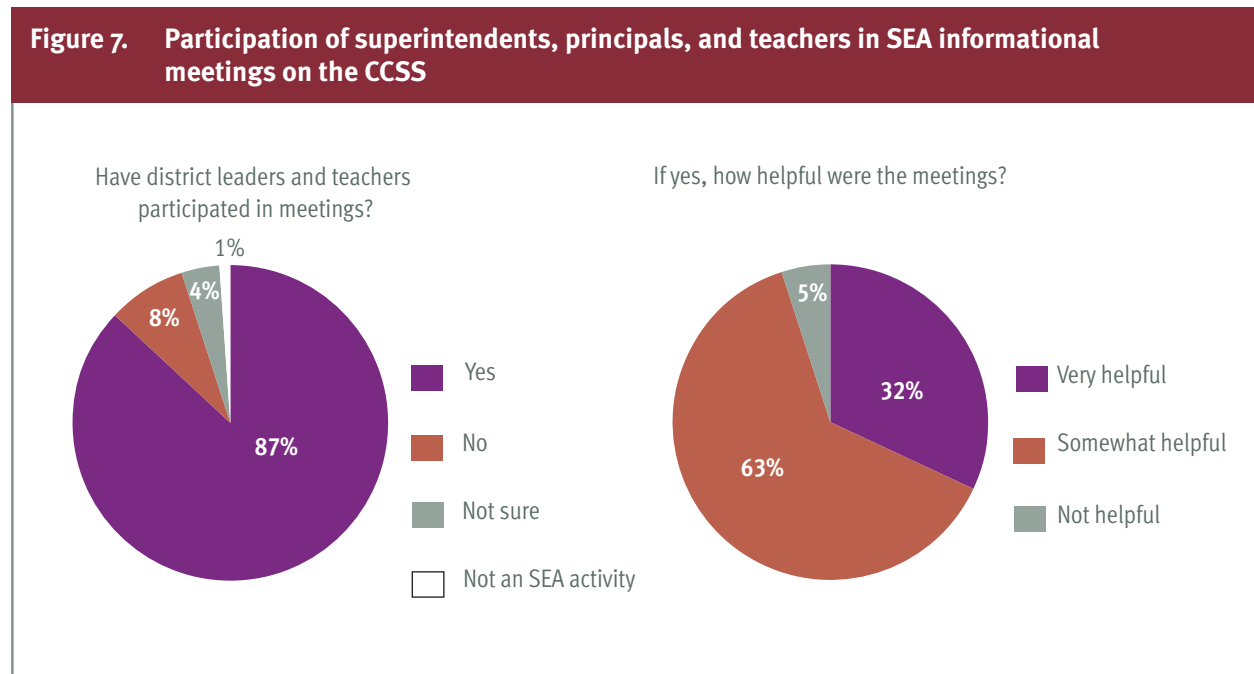


Figure reads: In an estimated 87% of districts in Common Core-adopting states, district leaders and teachers have participated in SEA informational meetings on the CCSS. Of those districts with leaders and teachers participating, an estimated 32% reported that the meetings were very helpful.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

SEA ADVICE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

All 40 states in the 2013 state survey indicated that in school year 2013-14 or earlier, SEA staff had provided districts with advice and assistance about the CCSS. In the 2014 district survey, 79% of district officials said that district staff had received advice or technical assistance from their SEA regarding the CCSS, while 14% reported they had not (see **figure 8**). Among districts that received advice and/or technical assistance, 32% indicated it was very helpful, 61% found it somewhat helpful, and 8% did not find it helpful.

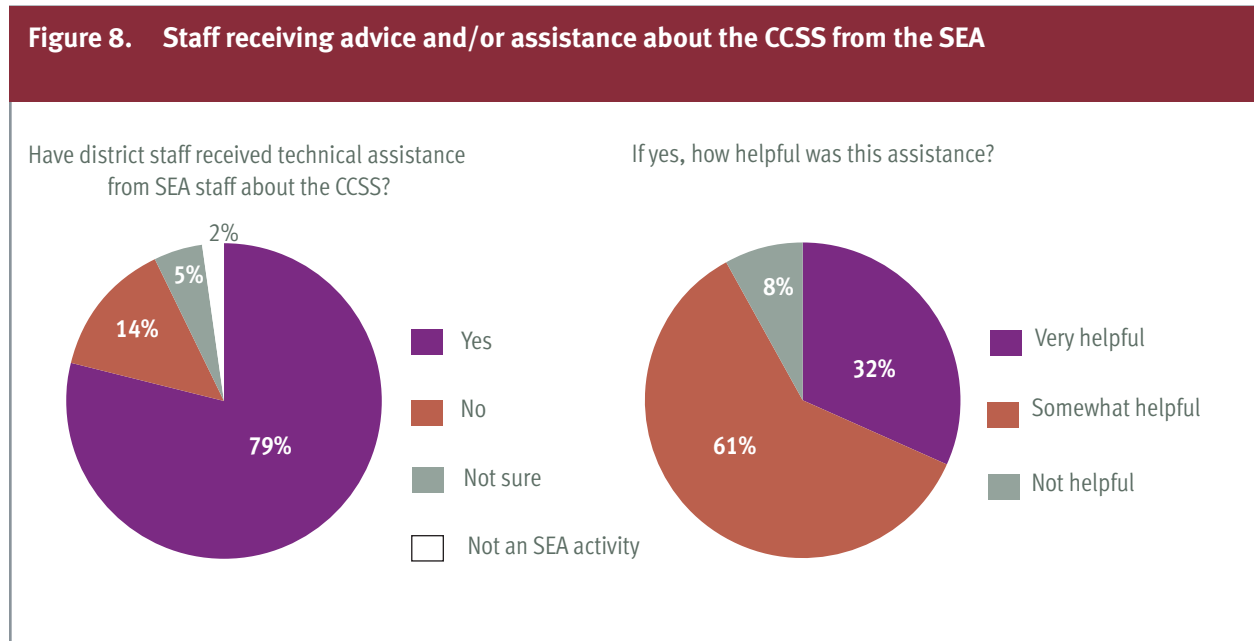


Figure reads: An estimated 79% of districts in Common Core-adopting states have received advice and/or technical assistance from SEA staff regarding the CCSS. Of those districts that received SEA advice and/or technical assistance, an estimated 32% reported that it was very helpful.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

SEA-SPONSORED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

All 40 states participating in CEP's 2013 state survey reported that the SEA is providing CCSS-related professional development to *teachers*, through direct services from the SEA, a "train the trainer" model, or state regional service agencies. All but one of these survey states also indicated that the SEA is providing CCSS-related professional development to *principals* through one or more of these means. (The remaining state reported that those services were just getting underway as of spring 2013.)

As shown in **figure 9**, a large majority of districts (70%) indicated that their teachers have participated in SEA-sponsored professional development on the CCSS. Of the districts with teachers participating in SEA-sponsored professional development, 65% rated it as *somewhat* helpful, 31% rated it as very helpful, and just 4% reported that it was not helpful. The patterns were similar for SEA-sponsored professional development for principals, in terms of both participation (69% of districts) and ratings of helpfulness (67% of districts found it somewhat helpful).

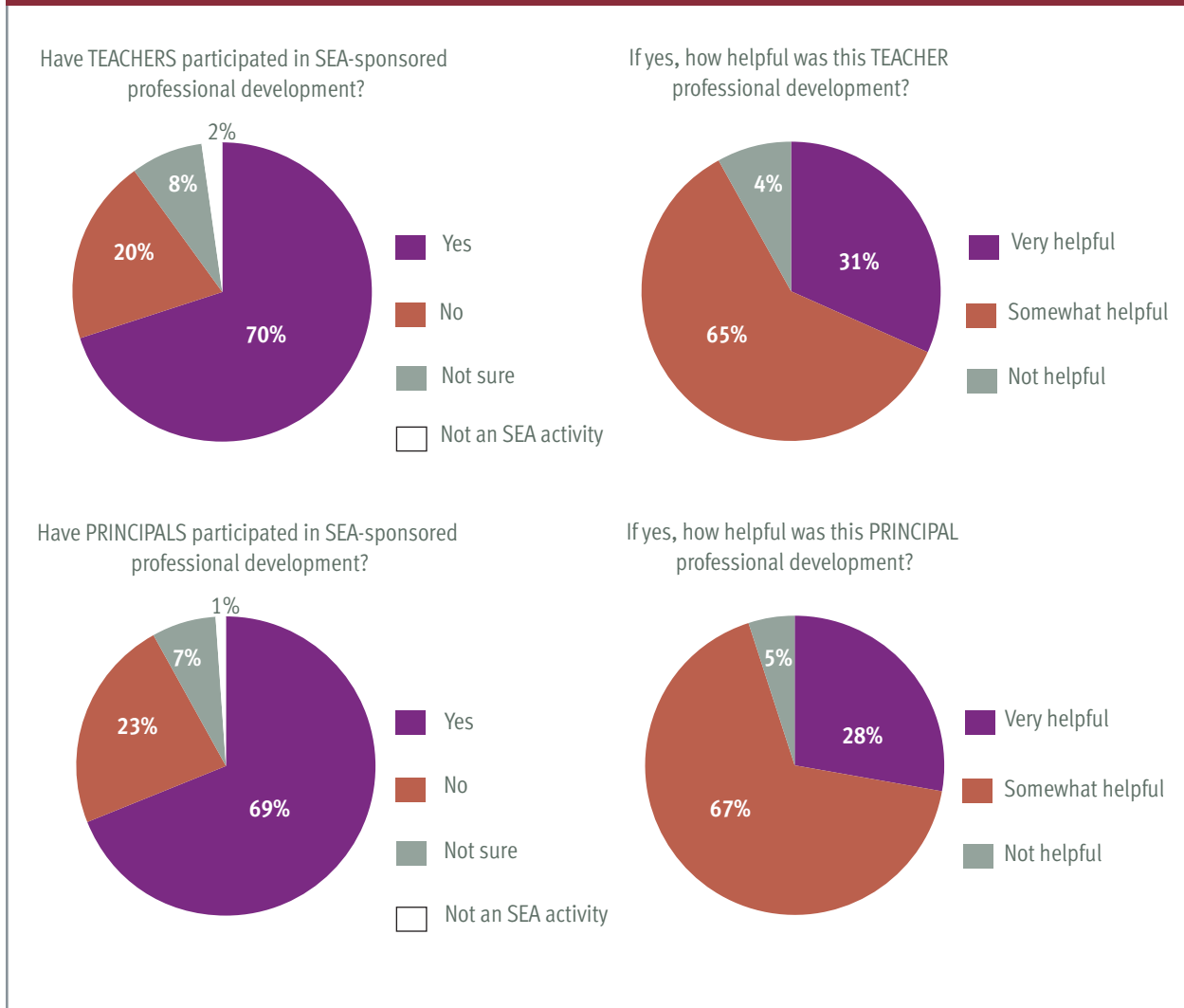
Figure 9. Participation in and ratings of SEA-sponsored professional development on the CCSS

Figure reads: In an estimated 70% of districts in Common Core-adopting states, teachers have participated in SEA-provided professional development about the CCSS. Of those districts in which teachers participated, an estimated 31% reported that the professional development was very helpful.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

SEA CCSS CURRICULUM

The 2014 survey asked districts whether they have obtained SEA-developed or SEA-recommended curriculum guides and/or materials aligned to the Common Core. (These responses cannot be compared directly with findings from the 2013 state survey, which did not ask states whether they had recommended CCSS-aligned curricula.)

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of districts reported that they have obtained SEA-developed or SEA-recommended curriculum guides and/or other materials, as displayed in **figure 10**. Another 17% have not obtained this type of curriculum from the state, 10% weren't sure, and 1% said their SEA was not involved in CCSS-aligned curriculum. Of the districts that did obtain SEA-developed or recommended curriculum materials, one-third (33%) found these materials to be very helpful, 64% found them somewhat helpful, and 3% did not think they were helpful.

Figure 10. District receipt of SEA-developed or SEA-recommended curriculum aligned to the CCSS

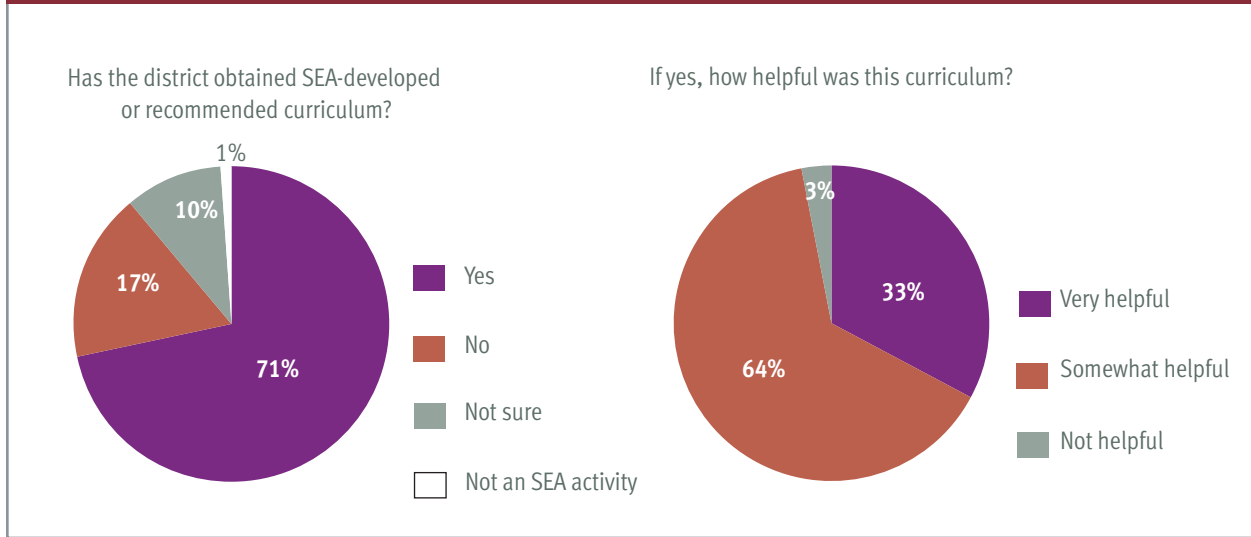


Figure reads: An estimated 71% percent of districts in Common Core-adopting states have obtained SEA-developed or SEA-recommended curriculum guides and/or materials aligned to the CCSS. Of those districts that have obtained such materials, an estimated 33% reported that they were very helpful.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this figure are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this figure can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO STATE ASSISTANCE

Although SEAs are assisting school districts with many aspects of Common Core implementation, district leaders report challenges related to the guidance provided by SEAs (see **table 10**). In particular, 31% of districts reported experiencing major challenges with receiving adequate guidance from the SEA to inform their implementation of the CCSS, and 46% cited this as a minor challenge. More than one-third of district leaders reported major (36%) or minor (39%) challenges with receiving adequate guidance from the SEA on the implementation of CCSS-aligned assessments.

For each of the issues in table 10 related to SEA assistance, roughly one-fifth of district leaders said the issue was not a challenge.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell
Receiving adequate guidance from the SEA to inform the implementation of the CCSS	31%	46%	21%	3%
Receiving adequate guidance from the SEA to inform the implementation of the CCSS-aligned assessments*	36%	39%	22%	2%

Table reads: An estimated 31% of districts in Common Core-adopting states reported that receiving adequate guidance from the SEA to inform the implementation of the CCSS was a major challenge, while an estimated 46% indicated it was a minor challenge, an estimated 21% responded that receiving adequate SEA guidance was not a challenge, and an estimated 3% said it was too soon to tell if this was a challenge or not.

*1% of district leaders responded that they were not sure.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Conclusion

The upcoming year is a crucial and event-filled one for those states and districts implementing the Common Core. Significant time and resources have already been devoted to implementation, and the next year will usher in some important new milestones for schools and districts, most notably the introduction of new assessments and accountability requirements. This report and CEP's past reports on Common Core implementation make clear that raising academic standards for a large majority of the nation's students requires a sustained effort on the part of many stakeholders. For this reason and others, the future of the Common Core remains uncertain at this important juncture. As this report shows, districts implementing the Common Core are facing increasing opposition to the standards while trying to reconcile misinformation and misunderstanding about their intent and impact. Districts are also managing other challenges and uncertainties related to curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment. Yet despite these challenges and concerns, district leaders continue to validate the increased rigor of the standards and their potential to raise the level of student skills.

The findings from CEP's district survey suggest that there are some important issues for both states and districts to consider as they continue to implement the CCSS.

First, the survey results indicate that more district leaders—the people who are responsible for implementing the CCSS at the local level and have worked with the standards for a few years now—are convinced about the rigor of the CCSS and their potential for improving student learning than in 2011. If district leaders see the potential of the standards, despite the challenges they may be facing regarding implementation, then they could be an important part of a strategy to maintain and/or restore support and reduce misinformation among the broader population, especially within their local communities. The report shows that some districts have begun to engage in this kind of outreach, but in the face of increased opposition, a more coordinated outreach strategy aimed at multiple stakeholder groups is likely needed.

Second, the report shows that many districts reported that they have not yet completed some of the important implementation milestones needed to prepare their students for mastery of the standards. Concerns regarding key activities related to curriculum and teacher preparation will undoubtedly have an impact on student performance, which will take center stage in 2015 as districts and state leaders manage the results of the new assessments and related accountability requirements. With nearly 90% of district leaders citing challenges regarding the timeline for implementation and the related consequences for student performance, the question of what constitutes a reasonable timeline for implementation and improved student performance looms large for local leaders.

Third, when seeking partners with whom to collaborate, districts tend to stick close to home, collaborating with other districts in the state or their own SEA. Only a small percentage of districts appear to be partnering with institutions of higher education, despite the fact that the CCSS are often viewed as a strategy to ensure college readiness. If the explicit goal of the CCSS is to better prepare a majority of students for the challenges of college and careers, it is reasonable to expect both SEAs *and* institutions of higher education to collaborate with districts as they implement the new standards. This report shows that district leaders are facing some significant challenges as they implement the CCSS. A broad coalition of support that involves SEAs, institutions of higher education and other related entities would be an important and valuable asset to district leaders hoping to maintain momentum for the standards over time.

Finally, the survey results suggest a need to strengthen SEA capacity to assist districts with Common Core implementation. Most districts reported that the assistance provided by their SEA was at least somewhat helpful, although they experienced challenges in obtaining adequate guidance from their SEA on particular issues. In addition, in CEP's 2013 state survey, most CCSS-adopting states reported that they lacked certain types of capacity to support district implementation of the Common Core. As implementation progresses, districts will likely need ongoing technical assistance and support from states on the same issues cited in the survey, most notably professional

development, assessment, funding, and curriculum. These findings suggest that there is a very real need for governors and state legislatures to think about the capacity of their SEAs, including how they are managing the multiple responsibilities they are now dealing with because of the CCSS. The standards have clearly presented local districts with a host of new challenges, and they are looking to their SEAs for support and guidance. This report suggests the time is right for state leaders to assess the capacities of their SEAs and ensure there is enough staff expertise and resources to support the needs of local districts.



Center on Education Policy

Graduate School of Education and Human Development
The George Washington University
2140 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 103
Washington, D.C. 20037

Ph: 202-994-9050

Fax: 202-994-8859

E-mail: cep-dc@cep-dc.org

Web: www.cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org