C-SAIL | THE CENTER ON STANDARDS, ALIGNMENT, INSTRUCTION, AND LEARNING

Implementation of Ohio's Learning Standards in English Language Arts and Math: **Insights, Innovations, and Challenges in Six Districts**

The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (**C-SAIL**), funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, examines through four lines of study how college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards are implemented, if they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation. This brief presents findings from C-SAIL's **Implementation Study**, which uses interview and survey data to explore how district administrators, principals, and teachers are understanding, experiencing, and implementing Ohio's Learning Standards in English language arts (ELA) and math. We examine how and what kinds of supports are provided to teachers of all students, including students with disabilities (SWDs) and English learners (ELs) who take the general state assessment.

Since our research began in 2015, C-SAIL researchers have conducted a state-representative survey of 42 district officials, 110 principals, and 408 teachers in Ohio. In addition, we have interviewed 12 state officials, and 20 district officials in six Ohio districts. In our future work, we plan to interview teachers in the Fall of 2018. We selected the six Ohio case study districts by identifying two urban, two suburban, and two rural districts with relatively high percentages of SWDs and ELs. We also examined other district characteristics—percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, student achievement or growth rates, and geographic location within the state—to ensure that our districts represented a range of contextual factors.

Below we highlight our key survey findings on teacher perceptions on curriculum, professional development, assessments, technology, SWDs, and ELs. We share detailed insights from the six case study districts, emphasizing Ohio's innovative practices and notable challenges.

Curriculum

A vast majority of teachers (75%) felt that their curriculum was aligned to the standards.

Insights   Some districts find the process of developing internal curricular materials or understanding external curricular materials to be a <u>form of professional learning</u> around the CCR standards.

» One rural district is realigning their curriculum to match the standards by requiring teacher teams to meet to develop scope and sequence documents, pacing guides, and short cycle assessments, which has been an eye-opening process for teachers in the district.

» One suburban district described how they adopted external curriculum materials as they look to align teacher practice across the district for the first time, with the ELA curricular materials adopted last in the sequence of subject areas (they adopted math materials first, then science, then social studies) as they waited for textbook companies to develop high-quality resources. The search process for a new curriculum involved professional learning around the new standards.

» One urban district invited external curricular experts to expose their teachers to model curriculum units for each grade and subject area and then required them to implement those units, creating "ah ha" moments for teachers as they engaged with new ways of teaching to the standards.

» In another urban district, district officials provide suggestions for aligned textbooks and curricular units that schools can use so they can learn to engage with the rigor of the new standards.

Innovations   Because textbooks encourage the mindset of following the order of the pages instead of intentionally lesson planning based on what students need, one suburban district moved away from textbooks to an externally developed digital curriculum that helps teachers think more deeply, on their own, about their instructional frameworks and about how they're going to meet the standards while scaffolding for their students. These digital resources also come with tools that parents can access so they can be involved in their children's learning at home.

Challenges   Officials in at least two districts are still working through the challenge of some teachers resisting having to follow district-wide curriculum that was rolled out to encourage similar shifts in instructional practice that align with the standards.

Professional Development (PD)

A majority (63%) of teachers across both subjects reported receiving PD on the content of the standards. However, most teachers did not receive PD on instructional strategies for SWDs (only 38%) and ELs (only 19%).

Insights

All six of the districts are actively designing and delivering PD to help teachers better understand, then apply, the content standards in their classrooms in conversation with their peers or with instructional specialists, though the districts are at varying stages of this process.

» Districts rely on professional learning communities (PLCs) and/or instructional coaching to help teachers engage with the standards, though urban districts are able to convene face-to-face meetings while rural districts have turned to the use of virtual platforms to facilitate opportunities for this learning.

» Two districts believe that exposing teachers to externally developed K-12 curriculum models aligned to the instructional shifts is a form of job-embedded PD, while others who develop their own curriculum also find that to be a form of PD, though it takes more time.

» Two districts find the Ohio Improvement Process model of data-driven PLCs to be helpful in getting teachers to unpack the standards, reflect on their practice, and exchange ideas with peers.

» Two districts discussed the benefits of their scaffolded, three-year PD plans, where each year builds on the learning from the year before. In both districts, year 1 of this plan was devoted to introducing teachers to the standards, year 2 to the instructional shifts, and year 3 to the curricular models aligned to the instructional shifts.

» One district has recently implemented an accountability system for monitoring teachers' attendance in PD, following up when teachers are absent and visiting teachers' classrooms to ensure that they are using the materials rolled out in PD.

Innovations Districts are <u>deepening the impact</u> of their PD by bringing together general education and intervention teachers and by ensuring that the coaches themselves are well-trained.

> » Five districts intentionally include SWD/EL intervention teachers in content-focused PD (both formal workshops and PLCs) with general education teachers so they can plan lessons together.

> » One district is beginning to design voluntary sessions outside of school hours on specialized instruction specific to ELA and math content areas, which are open to both general education and intervention teachers.

> » One district convenes their instructional coaches once a week so they can norm their work with the schools and engage in their own PD around the standards, which they know they will push out to the schools.

Challenges Districts note obstacles regarding collaborative <u>structures</u>, addressing teachers' <u>knowledge gaps</u> in a way that will resonate with everyone, and leadership <u>turnover</u>.

> » Though districts are emphasizing increasing levels of teacher collaboration in PD, at least one district acknowledged that their teachers need structure and guidance around how to use their extra collaboration time.

> » Given that general education and SWD teachers have not been historically trained on the same content, at least two districts noted the knowledge gaps that each group faces. Sometimes, districts may seem like they are going back to basic teaching concepts to address these gaps, but then they are criticized for being too "elementary" in their strategies. Other times, districts try to help teachers get on the same page regarding the instructional shifts in the Learning Standards, but teachers feel like they are already teaching in those ways.

> » High rates of central office turnover add difficulties to their PD planning.

Assessments

A small majority of teachers (57%) believed that district summative assessments, formative assessments, and school-based assessments were aligned to the standards.

Insights
There is large variation in the <u>resources</u> that districts have available to administer formative assessments and apply that information to daily practice.

» Three relatively well-resourced districts purchased data tools that help teachers create formative assessments and track student results.

» One rural district is working on developing short-cycle assessments for the first time, while the other rural district is providing monthly formative assessments as a progress monitoring tool.

» The three districts that view the Ohio Improvement Process in a positive light shared how the focus on formative assessment data creates "strong professional learning communities" among the teacher-based teams, leadership teams, and district teams.

Innovations
One district employs a data coach that attends school-based meetings to help them analyze their formative assessment data and drive decision-making, while another district has a data director that performs a similar function.

Challenges
The <u>changes</u> to the state assessment created challenges related to curriculum alignment, data analysis, and parent engagement.

» One district described still being in the process of learning how to align their materials with the new test.

» At least two districts referenced the difficulty of getting reliable student performance data when the state assessments keep changing. Also, the districts do not get the assessment results in time for them to plan for the next year.

» One district spoke of the challenge of introducing parents, and getting their buy-in, to the "new ways" of doing elementary math and how this math is assessed.

» Almost all districts explicitly shared how they are looking forward to having the same assessment for more than a year.

Technology

The most desirable resource for teachers (68%) in helping all students were digital tools—more than additional professional development on the standards and information about how they should change instruction.

Insights

A few districts offer supports beyond technological access (e.g., laptops for every student) to job-embedded technological use to drive instructional decisions.

» One district compiles all data in one internet-based hub of information, and each school has technological support staff to help teachers use the data. These support staff members also provide inservice PD every week to work with teachers to integrate technology into their classrooms.

» One district aligns the goals of the Office of Teaching and Learning with the goals of the Office of Technology, which enables the technology specialists to conduct PD that focuses on the pedagogical use of technology in the classroom.

» One district utilizes Google platforms to bring teachers across a large, rural district together once a week, where they develop instructional tools together and share best practices.

Innovations

Two districts shared how they use technology as a new means for parent engagement.

One urban district communicates with all of their parents by creating voice-over PowerPoints that provide detailed guidelines for accessing data portals to check student attendance records, etc. They provide these voice-over presentations in different languages to reach more parents. Officials in this district speculate that the translated state documents are likely helpful for smaller districts that do not have the capacity to provide these supports on their own, as this urban district does.

One district partners with a company that provides online curricular resources to provide Homework Helper videos that parents can watch to support their students' work at home.

Challenges

The only challenge that district officials raise regarding technology is the move towards testing students online, which comes with internet connectivity issues, some students' unfamiliarity with using technology, teachers needing technological training to supervise this testing, etc.

Students with Disabilities (SWDs)

Students with disabilities received significantly less standards-emphasized instruction across grades and subjects compared to students without disabilities. Compared to general education teachers, teachers of students with disabilities were significantly less likely to believe the standards were appropriate for their students.

Insights
An enduring finding here is that educators continue to struggle with the tension between compliance with SWD regulations to individualize instruction and differentiating instruction to meet grade-level standards.

Innovations
One district partners with their Educational Service Center to provide one-on-one support for teachers offering intensive workshops for both SWDs and general education students with behavioral challenges.

Challenges
District officials share concerns around SWDs not accessing the same learning opportunities as their general education peers, teachers, and administrators not having access to consistent levels of supports, and inappropriate state accountability practices for SWDs.

» Commonly referenced instructional obstacles include the lack of time general education and SWD teachers have to co-plan instruction, confusion around Response to Intervention (RTI), SWD teachers not being invited to participate in district-level work around curriculum realignment, teachers redeveloping instructional materials each year instead of reusing what has already been developed, and inconsistent use of assessments to write IEPs (creating challenges for students who move from school to school).

» At least two districts alluded to the state's focus on compliance-based supports rather than instructional-based supports. State officials offer assistance when districts are being audited or when they are on a corrective action plan, but before or after these processes, there is not much communication.

» One district interviewee shared that they sometimes lose school psychologists to Kentucky, because there they do not need to take the three additional classes that Ohio psychologists need to take to get certified.

» One district referenced the growing gap between the achievement levels of their SWDs and general education students, and how this gap led to their inclusion in the Ohio Improvement Process, even though district officials attribute this gap to more students going through RTI and not needing special education classifications.

» Many of our districts do not believe that the state assessments are appropriate for SWDs.

English Learners (ELs)

English learners received similar standards-emphasized instruction compared to general education students. Compared to general education teachers, teachers of English learners were similarly likely to believe the standards were appropriate for their students.

Insights

While districts are appreciative of the flexibility and ease with which they can implement programs for ELs in their district, they struggled with this flexibility often citing their desire for tangible resources to assist in this process.

Innovations

Districts felt that their partnership with ELPA21 provided resources that moved EL instruction in the right direction. Yet, perhaps due to the recent nature of this partnership, few districts mentioned ELPA21 beyond reference to the ELP standards and the OELPA assessment.

Challenges

Though district officials believe that they are following existing state policies for ELs, they do not have a way of knowing to what extent high-quality programming for ELs is being consistently offered.

> » One district hired an EL coordinator to oversee programmatic supports, but because they have to focus on procedural work, they do not have the time to offer instructional PD to teachers. They therefore offer it to principals, but they do not know if this PD makes it back to their teaching staff in the buildings.

> » Officials in one rural district speculate that because of the limited state guidelines around EL supports, students receive varying qualities of supports, especially once they score sufficiently high on the OELPA assessments as that then causes little follow up with those students.

> » District officials in one district have worked within their teacher evaluation procedures, requiring teachers to cover content and ELP standards, in an effort to emphasize the need for collaboration between EL and general education teachers. Despite this push, district officials were concerned that not all teachers embraced their shared responsibility for ELs.

> » In one district, officials worry that OELPA results are not shared fast enough with the districts, making it hard to act upon those results. In this same district, they were hesitant to prepare for the changes to EL supports in response to ESSA regulations until they had official guidance from the state.