CENTERVIEW

**Informing Leaders on Innovative Practices
in Teaching and Learning**

CenterView Series

District Insights into California
Standards Implementation

CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF
Teaching & Learning
AT WestEd

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Introduction

In fall 2015, staff from the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning at WestEd had the privilege of interviewing 42 district leaders in California about their districts' progress in implementing the Common Core State Standards, now also known as the California Standards. From these interviews, we gained timely insights about how districts are addressing challenges and working to deepen teacher knowledge and improve standards-aligned instructional practice.

To share these insights, we published a three-part *CenterView* series:

- The first issue in this series provides a snapshot of districts' progress in implementing the standards, including internal capacity, teachers' progress toward proficiency in standards-aligned instruction, the conundrum of selecting appropriate standards-aligned curricula, and the various funding sources districts use for implementation expenses.

- The second issue explores how districts select technical assistance providers to support standards implementation, the types of partnerships districts seek to have with support providers, and how districts are building internal capacity to meet professional learning needs.

- The third and final issue describes the challenges in identifying quality instructional materials, including interim assessments, and providing effective professional learning amidst barriers of limited funding, time, and teacher availability.

The second and third *CenterView* issues offer related steps for technical assistance providers to consider in order to better support districts with their current standards implementation needs.

In this special compendium, we have bundled these three *CenterView* issues to provide a single resource that provides timely information from the field and contributes to the dialogue on advancing standards implementation in California and beyond.

CENTER**VIEW**
Informing Leaders on Innovative Practices in Teaching and Learning

Common Core implementation in California
A SNAPSHOT OF DISTRICTS' PROGRESS

It's been six years since California adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), also known as the California Standards inside the Golden State. District leaders have been busy building capacity and developing infrastructure to support effective CCSS implementation, while teachers have been working hard to implement CCSS-aligned instruction that supports academic success for all students. But, in a state as vast and varied as California, what exactly does CCSS implementation look like and what sort of progress are districts making?

To get an accurate snapshot of where California districts are in their implementation of the CCSS, we went straight to the source. Staff from the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning at WestEd (The Center) interviewed superintendents and instructional leaders from 42 districts and charter management organizations (collectively referred to as *study districts* in this issue) from urban, suburban, and rural areas across the entire state.*

California district leaders offer insights about Common Core implementation

District leaders told us about various key aspects of CCSS implementation in their districts: building capacity to support CCSS implementation; developing teachers' proficiency in CCSS-aligned instruction; adopting CCSS-aligned curricula; and using varied funds to cover CCSS implementation expenses.

Although the findings from our interviews cannot be generalized to all districts within and beyond state lines, the insights from this study reflect the state of CCSS implementation in California, the challenges that district leaders perceive, and the potential for opportunities to further support CCSS implementation that promotes the academic success of all students.

This issue is the first of a special three-part series. In the second and third accompanying *CenterViews*, we delve deeper into districts' reported implementation challenges and offer strategies that technical assistance providers can consider to better meet districts' current implementation needs.

Districts have built internal capacity over time to support CCSS implementation

When the California Department of Education (CDE) adopted the CCSS in 2010, districts were given flexibility to roll out the new standards using a multi-tiered implementation plan spread over five years in three phases — awareness, transition, and implementation. Consequently, this gradual and flexible approach led to varying implementation plans across the state, which, along with differing contexts and uneven access to resources and assistance, has resulted in a wide variety of unique local needs today.

- **During the *awareness phase*** (roughly 2010–12), study districts focused on building teacher knowledge of the standards, primarily relying on external expertise from the CDE, county offices of education, for-profit and non-profit organizations, and independent consultants to provide most of the technical assistance to districts.

* Combined, this representative sample of 42 "study districts," serves nearly 900,000 California students. For more information on methodology and district demographic data, see thecenter.wested.org.

- **During the *transition phase*** (2012–13), study districts began either full or partial implementation of the CCSS, with variation in the way they phased their content and grade-level implementation. While large districts often rolled out the CCSS in partial phases, rural and small districts overwhelmingly rolled out the CCSS in full implementation.

- **During the *implementation phase*** (2013–15), districts' focus shifted from using external providers toward strengthening internal capacity to support their particular implementation plans. Accordingly, districts invested in instructional coaches and teacher leaders to help lead instructional change and focused on creating or sourcing — with varying degrees of success — interim and formative assessments to demonstrate student progress and inform instruction.

Although the state-defined, formal implementation phase has ended, districts say they are still in the process of strengthening their implementation capacity — which is not surprising, given the complexity involved in organizing the resources and assistance to shift the instructional practice of 300,000 teachers.

A continuum of teacher proficiency in CCSS-aligned instruction

District leaders are optimistic about their teachers' progress toward proficiency in CCSS-aligned instruction. While district leaders report that their teachers are still transitioning and developing their proficiency with instructional strategies that help students meet the California standards, they also report that teachers are deepening their understanding of the standards, learning to make instructional shifts aligned to the standards, and collaborating around instructional practice.

When asked to identify teachers' level of proficiency along a continuum of development in CCSS-aligned instruction, district leaders indicated that 100 percent of teachers know the CCSS, and of those teachers, nearly all (89 percent in English language arts [ELA], 90 percent in mathematics) "know instructional strategies to implement the standards." Additionally, district leaders indicated that about one-third of teachers (36 percent in ELA, 30 percent in mathematics) were "fluently using instructional strategies" to differentiate instruction.

> **"In math, [the Common Core] is quite a shift. The academic discourse — students being expected to justify responses — is very different than before. More resources are needed to support CCSS-aligned math instruction."**
>
> — District leader

District leaders' perception that teachers' proficiency with CCSS-aligned instruction is still evolving resonates with a message that middle and high school mathematics teachers shared with us in the early years of implementation — that they had never been taught the pedagogical content knowledge required to teach the new standards effectively and they desired targeted professional development from their districts.[1]

Districts have identified that teachers need more support through high-quality professional learning and coaching to reach the level of proficiency expected of them. (A forthcoming issue of this series focuses on how districts are building internal capacity to advance all teachers on the continuum of mastery of CCSS-aligned instruction).

Curricula conundrum: Adopt, adapt, or develop

The CDE adopted approved lists of CCSS-aligned mathematics curricula in January 2014 and ELA curricula in November 2015, leaving California districts to identify appropriate CCSS-aligned instructional materials on their own for the first four or five years of CCSS implementation. We asked district leaders how they selected CCSS-aligned curricula, and they identified three primary ways: adopting off-the-shelf curricula, creating hybrid curricula, and developing original curricula.

- **Off-the-shelf curricula.** Some districts invested early in identifying and adopting curricula, particularly for mathematics, where the pedagogical and content shifts were more of a challenge than for ELA. Many of these districts, however, indicated that they did not see strong alignment to the standards in these off-the-shelf materials, especially those from traditional publishers. Other districts have delayed their adoption of CCSS-aligned curricula, still waiting for education publishers to catch up and introduce new resources to the market.

- **Hybrid curricula.** Many districts that purchased off-the-shelf curricula have supplemented and adapted it with additional teacher-developed and/or open-source online educational resources. However, the vast amounts of unvetted curricula and resources available online have created a new challenge for educators. There is now a glut of resources billed as CCSS-aligned, but educators feel there is not enough guidance on how to identify quality resources and build a coherent curriculum.

> *"Can someone put credible, reliable instructional materials and resources all in one place? I think that would significantly relieve time, stress and the burden."*
>
> – District leader

- **District-developed curricula.** Due to the limitations of time, funding, and staffing to develop their own curricula, study districts have reported this approach to be the least common of the three. However, some districts responded to the lack of good existing materials by engaging teachers and coaches in the curriculum development process — using it as an opportunity for professional development.

Using varied funding sources for CCSS implementation expenses

CCSS implementation has generated a wave of new expenses for districts, including costs related to offering professional learning for teachers and administrators, vetting and/or developing standards-aligned curricula, organizing the necessary infrastructure and technology for state assessments, and supporting personnel in a variety of other CCSS implementation efforts.

The CDE has offered districts some sources of funding to support these sort of CCSS implementation expenses. In 2013, the CDE offered districts a one-time Common Core State Standards Implementation Fund, which most districts used to upgrade their technology infrastructure and scale their technology hardware, a necessity for administering the new state tests. While these one-time funds provided some relief, districts remain concerned about not having sources of long-term and continuous funding to sustain CCSS implementation.

> *"We've received some nice one-time money from the state, but the challenge is that you can't buy personnel with it. You can buy resources and professional development ... but when you're thinking about reducing class sizes and adding interventions ... those all require human capital. You can only do so much with funding you're going to have [just] once."*
>
> – District leader

In 2015, California districts gained access to Educator Effectiveness funds through a three-year, state-funded program to improve teacher support. In addition to providing coaching and support services for teachers needing improvement, districts plan to use these funds for teacher and administrator professional learning aligned to the state standards.

Local needs shape budgets

California districts use different combinations of funding sources to support their particular CCSS implementation expenses. Urban and suburban districts, for example, mostly used the one-time Common Core Implementation Funds, as well as funds allocated through the state's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and foundation-based grants. Rural districts rely primarily on general funds, Title I funds, and Educator Effectiveness funds.

While many districts have been developing their internal capacity to provide on-site professional learning, certain streams of funding do not allow for staffing expenses, such as payments for district coaches and teacher leaders. Accordingly, some districts are using other streams of funding, such as LCFF allocations and soft money from Title I and Title II, to pay for teacher leaders who are doing much of the work to sustain the CCSS. This approach of investing in personnel, while possible for districts in regions with an adequate supply of teachers, is less feasible for rural districts facing critical teacher shortages.

For more on this study, or California Standards implementation:

• Go to https://thecenter.wested.org/

• Contact Robert Sheffield, The Center's Director of California Initiatives, at rsheffi@wested.org

Districts voice a need for new kinds of support

While there have been various challenges to implementing the CCSS, districts have made significant progress on implementing the standards and building educators' CCSS-aligned instructional practices. Districts were given significant local autonomy to identify their needs and decide on the approaches they believed would work best for supporting CCSS implementation. We've learned from district leaders that districts have increased their capacity to provide essential services and resources to their sites to support CCSS implementation.

However, districts have also articulated that as teachers and administrators are ready to deepen California standards-based instruction and distribute instructional leadership, what they now need is no longer the same as in previous years. In forthcoming *CenterViews*, we describe the kind of assistance that the study districts are seeking at this stage of CCSS implementation, such as job-embedded professional learning, on-point assessments that inform standards-based instruction, time to collaborate, and new ways to partner with providers. We also describe the challenges that study districts face in providing teachers and administrators with these types of support and ways that technical assistance providers — from state education agencies to a variety of other external organizations — can take action in the collective effort to raise the bar for standards-aligned teaching and learning in California and beyond.

End notes

1 WestEd, Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning. (2012). *Willing but not yet ready: A glimpse of California teachers' preparedness for the Common Core State Standards* (CenterView). San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
[https://www.wested.org/resources/centerview-willing-but-not-yet-ready-a-glimpse-of-california-teachers-preparedness-for-the-common-core-state-standards/]

CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF
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The Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning at WestEd is dedicated to strengthening teacher practice. For over two decades, the Center has been steadfast in the pursuit of its mission to ensure that every child learns from a fully prepared and effective teacher.

WestEd is a research, development, and service agency whose mission is to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults.

CENTERVIEW
Informing Leaders on Innovative Practices in Teaching and Learning

Increasing district capacity to implement the Common Core
IT BEGINS WITH A PARTNERSHIP

In this second issue of a special three-part series, the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning (The Center) continues to report on what California district leaders have to say about how they are advancing Common Core in their districts and the kinds of assistance they seek in support of standards implementation.

Since adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, California has given districts significant flexibility in how they support teachers in implementing the standards. This flexibility, along with vastly differing local and regional contexts, has resulted in a wide variety of district-level approaches to training teachers in content knowledge and pedagogical strategies aligned to the CCSS (which are now also known as the California Standards*). From a small rural district in the northern reaches of the state to a large urban district on the coast, local education agencies across California have experienced unique successes and challenges in providing professional learning to help teachers prepare the state's six million K–12 students to meet the rigorous California (CA) Standards in mathematics, English language arts, and content-area literacy.

In this second of a three-part *CenterView* series, The Center continues to report on what we learned from interviews with over 40 district leaders across California in which we asked for their perspectives on implementing the CA Standards. This issue focuses on various ways districts have worked to scale their implementation of the CA Standards and deepen their teachers' pedagogical content knowledge of the standards — from drawing on the expertise of external technical assistance providers to developing internal resources, such as teacher leaders that can provide instructional leadership. The issue concludes with strategies that technical assistance providers can use to better assist districts with their current professional learning and resource development needs as they strengthen their implementation of the CA Standards.

Drawing on external expertise

How districts select technical assistance providers

Overwhelmingly, district leaders tell us that the need for *expertise* is a key driver for investing district funds and time in technical assistance, including professional learning, to deepen educators' knowledge of the CA Standards and to help districts scale their implementation. We learned that districts typically prefer to draw on internal capacity to develop instructional leaders and teacher leaders who can train and support other teachers — as this approach generally offers districts more control and flexibility. However, when internal capacity for this type of support is lacking, districts

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* The CA Standards encompass standards for all content areas, including science, social sciences, English language development, and world language. However, in this *CenterView* issue, the CA Standards refer specifically to the CCSS for English language arts and mathematics, as that was how the CA Standards were framed in the study interviews.

reach out to external technical assistance providers, including state education agencies, county offices of education (COEs), non-profit and for-profit organizations, independent consultants, and institutions of higher education (IHEs). This strategy was especially common when districts were first getting started in rolling out the standards and building internal knowledge of them.

When district leaders have chosen to invest in external expertise to help with standards implementation, they indicate that three primary factors influence how they select their technical assistance providers:

- **District leaders' professional networks.** A significant number of district leaders from the study have been in their current positions less than two years. The majority have worked in their district in other capacities and have pre-existing partnerships with external providers who had delivered previous technical assistance to the district. Accordingly, district leaders often leverage these established relationships to continue advancing and improving standards implementation in their district. It's unclear, however, if the providers in these established relationships are always the best option for providing the right kinds of information to meet district needs.

> **"We ask, 'Where have you done this before? Did that district look like us?' We look for people who take the time to understand who we are. We do not do off-the-shelf."**
>
> **– District leader**

- **District's geographic proximity to providers.** Districts in metropolitan areas have more access to nearby resources and technical assistance providers than rural districts. With fewer opportunities for external local support, rural and smaller districts often turn to their local county office of education (COE) and the Internet for needed support.

- **Readily available technical assistance from county offices of education.** Most district leaders we interviewed report that when they were in the early stages of implementing the CCSS, they particularly relied on their local COE for support. Overall, district leaders have been pleased with the technical assistance provided by their COE and they express a desire to continue working with the COE to develop ongoing professional learning to help them progress in their implementation of the CA Standards.

Districts seek partnerships with technical assistance providers

By far, district leaders are most satisfied with technical assistance providers who have a responsive, collaborative relationship with the district. District leaders want to know that providers will listen, consider the unique context of their district, and tailor services to meet the district's particular needs — in essence, to work as partners.

District leaders also indicate that they seek providers who are experts in adult learning theory and are able to apply those principles to help districts develop teacher leaders who can, in turn, facilitate professional learning and lead peers in collaborative efforts. Districts identified those two abilities — flexibility to address contextual needs and expertise in adult learning — as key factors for high rates of satisfaction with providers.

> **"We look for providers that truly partner with us, have regular conference calls, and ask 'Have we met your goals?' — rather than just presenting and leaving."**
>
> **– District leader**

Overall, most districts report being "neutral" to "satisfied" with services by technical assistance providers in support of standards implementation. When asked to rate satisfaction levels of internal providers and external providers, districts were most pleased with the services from internal providers. Ultimately, district leaders seek collaborative partnerships that enable them to co-create plans with the provider, implement the plans with provider support, and receive help to build the district's internal capacity.

Districts build internal capability

While many districts turned to external expertise in the early years of CCSS implementation, more disticts are now tapping into their own internal resources for professional learning, standards-aligned tools and curricula, and guidance in assessment development. Specifically, districts are relying on their teachers on special assignment, instructional coaches, and professional learning communities to provide at least half of the support dedicated to standards implementation in their schools (see figure 1).

Districts have the advantage of knowing firsthand the unique context of their schools and, thus, are often able to offer greater insight and flexibility for meeting specific needs than external organizations. The exception is rural districts, where drawing on internal resources is less common and specialized knowledge is scarcer.

For the most part, districts want to deepen local expertise and increase their own capability, thereby becoming less dependent on the services of outside providers as they advance their work toward achieving full implementation of the standards.

Figure 1. Supports that districts use most often for implementing the California Standards
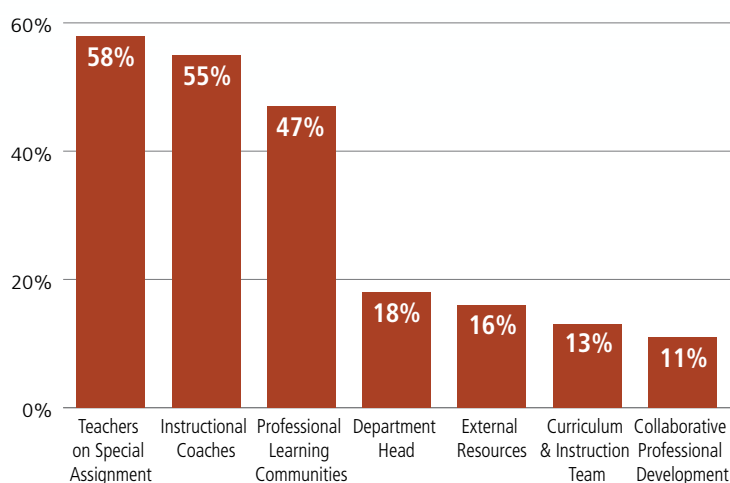
Source: Insights into California State Standards Implementation (2016), https://thecenter.wested.org/insights/

Strengthening internal professional development capacity

The CA Standards have created a new opportunity for teachers to play a significant role in the shared leadership of their district's implementation of the standards.[1] To strengthen their professional learning capacity, districts are relying on teacher-to-teacher connections, such as developing teacher leaders to provide professional learning within the district.

To become teacher leaders — also called teachers on special assignment, instructional coaches, or Common Core facilitators — teachers are trained on pedagogical content knowledge aligned to the CA Standards and are released part- or full-time from teaching responsibilities to support their peers. They work closely with the district's curriculum and instruction team, developing new professional development and instructional materials for the school sites. Teacher leaders can also provide support to site leaders, who may depend on them for instructional leadership or professional learning facilitation. Despite the perceived value that teacher leaders bring to school sites, there are generally not enough of them to reach all the district's teachers consistently or to adequately meet all of the district's professional development needs.

Reclassifying teachers as teacher leaders is generally only possible in large districts where a greater pool of teachers exists. Small, rural districts are less able to reassign teachers away from the classroom, so, instead, they typically concentrate their internal professional learning efforts by leveraging their subject-area departments and existing professional learning communities.

CenterView Action Steps for Technical Assistance Providers

Drawing on input from district leaders, as well as existing practices in standards implementation, we offer the following list of ways that technical assistance providers can help districts increase ownership and ability to support implementation of the CA Standards, develop teacher leadership capacity, and collaborate strategically with service providers throughout the state.

- **Partner with district leaders to increase district capability and ownership.** Think strategically about how to provide technical assistance as a partnership — with the goal of relinquishing ownership to the districts over time. To achieve this goal, assist districts in developing strategic plans that help them gradually increase their internal capacity.

- **Empower districts to monitor their own progress.** Help districts self-assess their standards implementation using tools like the *Local District Common Core Implementation: Progress and Capacity Rubric*,[2] which addresses categories including systems alignment and change, educator and student supports, and engagement.

- **Develop district capacity for teacher leaders to lead and support effective professional learning and coaching.** Explicitly help districts build the knowledge and skills of both their centralized and site-based coaches and teacher leaders. Help these district staff deepen their leadership skills and implement high-quality peer-to-peer professional learning and coaching.

- **Participate in The Center's (forthcoming) California Initiative network of external technical assistance providers to leverage expertise and support California districts.** Leverage shared knowledge among local education agencies and technical assistance providers to improve district capacity to implement the CA Standards. This sort of strategic collaboration and knowledge sharing can help technical assistance providers spread effective practices across their client base more rapidly, similar to work currently being performed by the California Collaborative on District Reform[3] and the California CORE districts.[4]

> **For more on this study:**
> - Go to **https://thecenter.wested.org/**
> - **Contact Robert Sheffield, The Center's Director of California Initiatives, at rsheffi@wested.org**
> - **Read the first issue of this series:** *Common Core implementation in California: A snapshot of districts' progress*

Endnotes

1 Barth, R. S. (2013). The time is ripe (again). *Educational Leadership*, 71(2), 10–16.

2 CCSSO and U.S. Education Delivery Institute. (2013). *Local district Common Core implementation — Progress and capacity rubric.* http://www.csai-online.org/resource/595

3 California Collaborative on District Reform [website]. http://www.cacollaborative.org/topics/common-core-state-standards

4 Knudson, J., & Garibaldi, M. (2015). *Considerations for cross-district collaboration: Early lessons from the CORE districts.* http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/CORE-Cross-District-Collaboarion-Brief-August-2015.pdf

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**Informing Leaders on Innovative Practices
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California district leaders on Common Core:
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GAPS PERSIST

In this final installment on how California districts are faring with implementing state standards, the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning (The Center) reports on the challenges of identifying quality instructional resources and providing effective professional learning, amidst ongoing barriers to funding, time, and teacher availability.

In California, as in many other states across the nation, implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has been a complex endeavor impacting every public school educator. Not surprisingly, California districts have encountered bumps along the way in their efforts to provide much-needed support to all K–12 teachers as they continue to learn how to teach to the rigorous standards, which are now also known as the California (CA) Standards* within the Golden State.

As we wrap up our three-part *CenterView* series about California district leaders' views on the state of implementation of the CA Standards, The Center focuses this final issue on the challenges districts face with ensuring that teachers have the right instructional resources and professional learning they need to prepare their students for postsecondary success. This issue concludes with action steps that service providers can take to help districts address barriers in the way of effectively advancing implementation of the standards.

Wading through a sea of resources and assessments

Despite the abundance of curricula, assessments, and professional learning products on the market purported to be aligned to CCSS, district leaders are often overwhelmed by the enormity of offerings and wish they had more guidance on identifying high-quality resources and services. District leaders report that their teachers and instructional support teams are wading through a sea of resources and assessments, only sometimes finding what they need.

Smarter Balanced Digital Library and interim assessments are underutilized

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) developed the computer-adaptive testing platform that all California districts must use to administer the state's standards-aligned tests. Additionally, Smarter Balanced offers a Digital Library that includes practice tests, interim assessments, formative assessment guidance, scoring rubrics, and educator-developed instructional modules — all intended to support educators in teaching and assessing in standards-aligned ways.

When we conducted interviews with district leaders in late 2015, the Smarter Balanced resources had been available to California educators for less than a year. With little to no training on the digital resources, educators began to access them

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with limited guidance for how best to utilize them. Consequently, 89 percent of district leaders report that teachers were either not using the Smarter Balanced resources or didn't find them effective in supporting standards implementation. Specifically, district leaders indicate that teachers found the digital library too overwhelming to navigate and the instructional modules too specific, with limited applicability to their classrooms. Moreover, district leaders report that the interim assessments, which are not adaptable, provide data on student results at too global of a level to inform instruction.

Overall, districts report that they lack the tools and assessments that would give teachers useful formative data on students' performance on the CA Standards. One-third of districts indicate that they need standards-aligned, formative and interim assessments — beyond those offered by Smarter Balanced — to achieve their vision for full implementation of the CA Standards. Consequently, districts are either creating their own interim assessments — which has been time-intensive and has not always resulted in assessments aligned to the end-of-year tests — or they are searching for external products or expertise.

> "There's a glut of resources. It would be helpful if someone we trust could say, 'This is a good one,' so we don't have to wade through vendors constantly peddling their wares."
>
> — District leader

Districts want guidance on selecting standards-aligned curricula

Districts acknowledge that there is a plethora of CCSS-aligned instructional and curricular resources — except for textbooks — available on the market and online. However, it is difficult and time consuming to identify the right resources to match particular instructional needs and to vet the materials for quality. District leaders say that their curriculum and instruction teams need time to research the options in order to identify appropriate instructional materials. They also report that they would appreciate a trusted source to advise them on the quality of available resources aligned to the standards or a website that offered current information about vetted standards-aligned resources.

Gaps in professional learning

California district leaders report that helping teachers make the necessary shifts to align their instruction with the CA Standards for math and English language arts (ELA) has been a major challenge. While districts have focused much of their professional learning on helping teachers learn new pedagogical approaches, district leaders say that additional targeted professional learning is still needed to further advance standards-aligned instruction.

Support for teachers as curriculum developers

In our first issue in this series, we discussed how California's delay in adopting math and ELA curricula led many districts to using various approaches to selecting standards-aligned curricula, including taking a hybrid approach in which they supplement or modify off-the-shelf curricula with teacher-developed curricula. The use of teacher-developed curricula is corroborated by a recent national study involving about 1,100 K–12 teachers of math and ELA, in which nearly all the teachers stated that they regularly use self-developed or self-selected instructional materials for standards-aligned instruction.[1]

> "In many districts, NCLB took away teachers' ability to be creative with instruction…. Our teachers need confidence that they can effectively design instruction."
>
> – District leader

However, while many teachers develop or select their own curriculum, teachers are generally not provided with adequate training to develop curriculum. Districts need to invest in more time and professional learning to help teachers acquire skills in developing curriculum and assessments aligned to the standards.

Teachers need training and resources to better support English learners

District leaders also indicate that teachers in California, the state with the largest English learner population in the nation,[2] need targeted professional learning from experts who have extensive pedagogical knowledge for teaching English learners. With the CA Standards' increased expectation of analyzing informational text and a greater emphasis on discussion-based problem solving, teachers need appropriate materials and pedagogical strategies to help their English learners maintain the same level of academic and linguistic rigor as native-English-speaking students.

> "We want more guidance and time to assist English learners.… the new assessments are very language-heavy. Districts with high [proportions of] English learners are struggling."
>
> – District leader

School leaders also need support in effectively implementing CA Standards

While it is essential to provide professional learning to teachers to help them implement effective standards-aligned instruction, school leaders also need appropriate supports. Most of the California district leaders we interviewed acknowledge that, initially, there was a sense of urgency to provide standards-related professional learning for teachers, but not necessarily for school site leaders.

With the realization that professional learning for school leaders on the standards lagged, districts are now investing in building the capacity of school leaders with the state standards through a variety of opportunities, including principal professional learning communities, principal induction and coaching, cross-district planning sessions, and executive coaching with external providers. These professional learning opportunities enable school leaders to connect their standards implementation efforts to other leadership activities such as site-based data review, data-informed decision-making, norm development for site walkthroughs, and change management.

Barriers to more professional learning: Shortage of money, time, and teachers

The majority of district leaders identify insufficient time and funding as the two greatest constraints to investing in more professional learning. These constraints, intertwined with many other system-level factors such as teacher shortages and teacher contract requirements, impact how effectively and consistently districts can provide professional learning.

- **Lack of funds for release days.** Despite implementation of the CA Standards being a major initiative, districts indicate that lack of funds prevents them from offering enough dedicated time to enable teachers to collaborate, create materials, and assess progress. In fact, the number of professional release days has actually decreased as districts have transitioned to full implementation of the CA Standards. Half of the districts we interviewed report providing three to five release days during the academic year, while the other half of the districts we interviewed are split between allocating more than five or fewer than three release days.

- **Lack of time in the school day.** The current school day offers limited embedded time for consistent professional learning and peer collaboration. Though teachers are expected to learn deeply about the standards and refine their practice accordingly, they have few opportunities in the school day to carry out this work.

- **Lack of teachers and substitutes.** Throughout California — and most acutely in rural areas — districts are experiencing difficulty staffing their schools with permanent qualified teachers, particularly in math, science, special education, and English language development. Districts are also having difficulty sustaining adequate pools of substitutes, which can limit districts' ability to release teachers from the school day to engage in professional learning.

The Center View: Action Steps for Technical Assistance Providers

Despite challenges, California educators are making progress in implementing the CA Standards. Technical assistance providers can help districts address persistent barriers and bolster their progress by offering targeted professional learning and helping them identify effective instructional resources.

- **Build greater assessment literacy in schools and districts.** District resource developers and teachers need to be skilled at creating formative and interim assessments that are flexible, relevant, and informative to instruction. A development tool that matches the four components of the Smarter Balanced formative assessment process,[3] for example, would enable teachers to plan lessons more deliberately and begin to incorporate the formative assessment process more routinely.

> **For more on this study:**
> - Go to https://thecenter.wested.org/
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> - Read the first and second issues of this series found at http://www.WestEd.org

- **Provide guidance about vetted standards-aligned resources and services.** Decisions about selecting standards-aligned instructional resources and service providers are made at the local level. Districts need guidance about identifying high-quality support that meets their local needs from the flood of available options.

- **Build capacity of site leadership to support standards implementation.** Increase site leaders' capabilities as instructional leaders of the standards. Deepen site leaders' knowledge of the standards and strengthen their familiarity with tools that can help them support teachers in improving standards-aligned instruction. Include relevant support for school leaders in professional learning designed for teachers.

- **Strengthen teacher capability to develop standards-aligned curriculum.** Provide teachers with templates, tools, and frameworks — such as those offered by the Literacy Design Collaborative and the Math Design Collaborative — to guide curriculum development. Help teachers develop skills to design differentiated, standards-based curriculum that supports all students in meeting the CA Standards.

- **Provide professional learning that enables teachers to better support the academic achievement of their English learner students.** Build teachers' knowledge base of language acquisition and academic literacy, and train teachers in research-based instructional practices to scaffold learning for English learners.

Endnotes

1   Opfer, V. D., Kaufman, J. H., & Thompson, L. E. (2015). *Implementation of K–12 state standards for mathematics and English language arts and literacy: Findings from the American Teacher Panel.* http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1529/RAND_RR1529.pdf

2   Ruiz Soto, A. G., Hooker, S., & Batalova, J. (2015). *States and districts with the highest number and share of English language learners.* Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/states-and-districts-highest-number-and-share-english-language-learners

3   Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. (2015). *The formative assessment process.* https://www.smarterbalanced.org/

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