

# California and the Common Core State Standards

## *Early Steps, Early Opportunities*

*The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have the potential to drive a sea change in education in our nation. Adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia, the CCSS are rigorous, research-based, globally-benchmarked frameworks that articulate a new set of expectations for students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as in calculating, reasoning, and solving problems. Together, these standards provide a vision for what it means to be well prepared for postsecondary education and work in the twenty-first century.*

While leaders and educators in school districts across California have expressed excitement about the prospect of transitioning to these more rigorous standards, they also have many questions and concerns about making the change to the new practices and systems that the CCSS require. Their questions focus on making shifts in curriculum and instruction, securing CCSS-aligned instructional resources, and putting systems in place at state, district, and school levels to achieve CCSS implementation by the 2014–15 deadline.

To help address these questions, the California Comprehensive Center and the Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd, the California Collaborative on District Reform at American Institutes for

Research, and California Education Partners collaborated to convene a two-day symposium in August 2012. The purpose of the symposium was to strengthen district and state implementation efforts in California and to foster learning opportunities and collaboration among districts as they begin the transition to the CCSS. Attended by over 250 educators in teams from 32 school districts and 12 county offices of education, the conference was the first in a series of jointly sponsored activities focused on supporting district-level implementation of the CCSS.

This report stems from that meeting and is organized into four sections:

1. **What Are the CCSS and Why Are They Needed?** features highlights from conference

» This report is based on *Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California*, an August 2012 symposium produced by the California Comprehensive Center, the California Collaborative on District Reform at the American Institutes for Research, California Education Partners, and REL West at WestEd.

presentations by CCSS experts, who describe the rationale for these new “fewer, higher, deeper” standards and what they will look like when implemented in classrooms, schools, and communities.

2. **What Are Districts Doing to Implement the CCSS, and What Can We Learn?** describes key themes that emerged in educator questions about and approaches to implementing the CCSS during panel presentations, large-group discussions, and break-out sessions.
3. **Next Steps for CCSS Transition in California** offers initial ideas about useful topics for future activities, based on feedback from symposium participants.
4. **Conclusion and Resources** »

## 1. What Are the CCSS and Why Are They Needed?

Conference speakers, experts in developing and implementing Common Core State Standards, addressed the knowledge base and some current best practices for implementing the new standards. They focused their remarks on unpacking key concepts that make the CCSS different from prior standards, and describing what the new standards might look like when well implemented at classroom, school, and district levels.

### 21st-century Learning Standards

To reinforce the argument that the CCSS are necessary, Linda Darling-Hammond, professor of education at Stanford University and a nationally recognized expert in school restructuring, teacher quality, and educational equity, cited a 2003 University of California, Berkeley study by Hal Varian and Peter Lyman that tracked the growth of knowledge in the world. That study, she reported, found that between 1999 and 2003, more new knowledge was created in the world than had been created in all of prior human history.

“We used to think that you could take all the things that a kid would need to know, line them up, divide them into the 12 years of schooling, [deliver the appropriate instruction], and students would know all they needed to know for life,” she said. Noting that that is clearly not the case today, she added: “What you need to be able to do now is *learn to learn*: you need to be able to understand core ideas and concepts

deeply, have extraordinary capacity to assemble new information, analyze and synthesize that information, evaluate the credibility and utility of that information, put it together ... and apply it to new situations.”

**“Right now, we give way too much prereading. When we do this, we’ve given kids the main idea before they actually read the text! ... This is an example of smoothing students’ experience, rather than giving them the tools to do it themselves.**

— David Liben

Darling-Hammond also commented on systemic supports necessary for teachers to make the big shifts in instruction and assessment that the standards require. She noted that, “In countries that are at the top of the international education rankings, like Finland, Singapore, South Korea, and many others, teachers usually have about 15 or 20 hours a week ... to design curriculum together, to develop lessons, to do lesson study, to do action research on the implementation of curriculum, to engage in scoring and developing assessments together, and so on. And most of our [U.S.] teachers

still have only three to five hours a week of independent planning time.

“I would say that that’s going to be a critical piece [of implementing the CCSS]: how to help teachers work collaboratively and collegially,” she asserted.

### Shifts in English Language Arts

David Liben has worked for several years as a consultant with Student Achievement Partners to reform reading instruction and develop the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA). Student Achievement Partners and others summarize the major shifts from California’s current ELA standards as follows:

- » Students read as much non-fiction as fiction.
- » Students learn from fiction and non-fiction by reading, not by being told about the text.
- » Teachers provide time and support for close reading of challenging text.
- » Students use evidence from text to make points during discussion of readings.
- » Students use evidence to support points in expository or persuasive writing.
- » Teachers help students build increasingly complex academic vocabulary.

Liben noted that supporting these instructional shifts requires an emphasis on mastering K–2 foundational skills for reading. “There is not enough attention paid to

these new standards in grades K–2,” he told participants. “Don’t ... forget the foundational skills. They are more important than ever because when students leave K–2, they are going to be asked to read more complex text [than before] in third grade.”

To meet the new standards for reading complex materials, he added, read alouds will need to play a whole new role in K–2. “First of all,” Liben asserted, “even the first-grade complexity standards cannot be met with materials students read themselves. [An example is] Standard 3, the interaction standard: ‘Students will recognize or describe how characters respond to events and challenges.’ Now, think about that; can they do that with what they read on their own in first grade? It can only be done with read aloud.”

To compensate for the lack of text complexity in current curricular materials, Liben suggested, districts can augment existing tools, such as basal readers—for example, by replacing current text passage questions with standards-based questions, and teaching students more of the vocabulary in the text than the basals call for. “Even with the support we talk about, ... complex text is still a challenge for kids,” Liben commented. “But one way to [address] that is to tell the kids that the text is complex, that they are not expected to understand it right away. They are expected to read it more than once. ‘We are going to do it together. We are going to chunk it into portions. And we are going to work on it.’ And if you throw that challenge to the kids and they know it’s different and they know it’s difficult, that helps the way that they respond to it.”

## Fewer, Higher, Deeper Standards in Mathematics

Philip Daro, a site field director for the Strategic Education Research Partnership, chaired the Common

**“Correct answers only matter in that they are part of the process. Wrong answers are part of the process. We spend way too much focus on answer-getting and not enough on making sense of the mathematics learning in the course of getting to the problem.”**

— Philip Daro

Core Standards mathematics work group that wrote common College and Career Readiness Standards on behalf of 48 states and was also a member of the lead writing team for the K–12 Common Core State Standards.

The CCSS call for several major shifts from California’s current mathematics standards, as described by Student Achievement Partners and others:

- » Students learn more deeply about fewer, key topics.

- » Educators ensure that skills are taught coherently within and across grades.

- » Students develop fluency—i.e., speed with accuracy—in performing simple calculations.

- » Educators ensure that students deeply understand and can operate easily within a mathematics concept before moving on.

- » Students can use mathematics and choose the appropriate concept for application without teacher prompting.

- » Students are able to both think fast and solve problems.

Daro has studied and observed mathematics teaching in several other countries whose students are top math performers, including Japan and Singapore. Among the key lessons the U.S. must learn from these countries, Daro says, are: Teach fewer concepts more deeply, slow instruction down to student “learning speed,” and focus more on the mathematics of problems, not just getting the right answer.

The standards are interdependent and thus should not be approached in isolation, Daro asserted, as is common practice under existing standards frameworks. “Asking ‘What standards are you teaching today?’ is nonsense,” noted Daro. “The smallest mathematics standard now [requires] about a week [to teach]; it’s not 55-minute-sized. Each lesson in a chapter should make progress toward the chapter-sized standard.”

The overemphasis on quickly getting the right answer that prevails in U.S. classrooms often shortcuts the very mathematics concepts that need

to be taught, Daro asserts. “If you teach mathematics superficially—as a hundred different ways to get right answers a year—that’s a hundred different procedures and methods students have got to learn. If you go just a little deeper, not way deep like mathematicians, not even as deep as scientists, just a little deeper, where you learn some small number of basic mathematics principles and then learn how to apply them to different situations, there is actually a lot less to learn, and the things you are learning fit together a lot better.

“One of the things that strikes American visitors to classrooms in Japan and Singapore—the first thing you hear people saying—is, ‘They are going so slowly. How can they go so slow?’ Daro comments. “At one point in a classroom observation in Japan, [our hosts] were asking us what we saw, and I [said] the teachers are so *patient*. The [Japanese educator] shook his head and scolded me: ‘You call it patience. It’s not patience. We teach at the speed of learning. Learning doesn’t happen faster than that.’”

### Special Considerations for English Learners

Kenji Hakuta is professor of psycholinguistics at Stanford University and co-director of the Understanding Language initiative. The CCSS ELA and mathematics standards both emphasize the way in which content is expressed through language. In the old paradigm of teaching English to non-English speakers, Hakuta said, content and language do not traditionally overlap. Instead, English language development is typically focused on vocabulary and grammar. Hakuta

asserted that the shift to CCSS is a recognition that content and language are inextricably linked and, therefore, that English language development instruction and the CCSS must be connected. They intersect, he added, in classroom

**“Since the Common Core ELA standards focus on creating more challenges for students rather than ‘smoothing the road,’ educators must resist the challenge of removing these challenges for ELs.”**

— Kenji Hakuta

discourse requiring rich academic conversations in which English learner students will be supported to participate.

“English learners learn language best when they are engaged with academic content,” Hakuta pointed out, “which has huge implications [for] how ELD and content staff [might] collaborate in schools. Focusing on both text and discourse gives English learners opportunities for extended engagement with complex ideas.”

Hakuta emphasized that the CCSS are not just about raising the bar for learning. “Raising the bar is a metaphor that [suggests that] you do the same thing, but you just do it higher,

as you might jump higher,” he commented. “But the CCSS really [address] rigor; and the way you get to rigor is when students engage with one another [during academic tasks] through language. [This includes] understanding the reasoning of others,” he added, “which really requires students to listen to the language of not just the teacher but of other students and to try to understand and articulate what [for example] might be the source of a mathematical misconception. That involves language, and it’s that kind of language that’s important.”

To view videos or read transcripts of complete presentations, go to: <http://relwest.wested.org/events/51>.

## 2. What Are Districts Doing to Implement the CCSS, and What Can We Learn?

The CCSS introduce a new map for achieving the goals of college and work readiness, and they propose a deeper instructional approach that fuels student progress by helping them *learn how to learn*. However, the standards themselves don’t lay out a specific route to the desired destination, nor do they provide the vehicles necessary for the journey. Instead, they identify a series of essential grade-level progress markers. It is up to educators to develop the new generation of curricula, assessments, resources, and professional learning that will pave the way to student achievement.

Even in the absence of CCSS-aligned assessments to provide guidance, districts throughout California

have already taken the initiative to develop a compendium of strategies and tools that will bring the standards to life in classrooms, schools, districts, and communities. Although there are differences in CCSS implementation approaches among districts, some common themes emerged as district teams shared their strategies and experiences during panel presentations and break-out sessions addressing a wide range of CCSS topics.

### Communicate the CCSS Vision to Stakeholders and Align Resources to Implement It

Leaders from the California Department of Education (CDE) shared ways that they are actively working to engage education stakeholders throughout the field in the new standards. In fact, a position has been created and filled to work with both the State Board of Education and CDE on communication and outreach regarding the CCSS, and department leaders stressed the importance of collaboration between state and local leaders.

Several district leaders who attended the conference suggested that engaging stakeholders—for example, teachers, administrators, parents, community organizations, and local politicians—is a vital step in implementing successful education reforms. The required substantive changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment require that districts create a common sense of urgency about implementing the standards, develop a shared vision for where they are going, and build a strong constituency of support.

Stakeholders are more likely to support dramatic change efforts that are transparent and understandable. During a conference break-out session on the topic, district leaders and communication experts from Spitfire Communications

**Key to implementing the CCSS is [a] focus on building awareness and knowledge of the new standards; building stakeholder buy-in; soliciting stakeholder feedback; supporting stakeholders during implementation; and sharing implementation success stories, lessons learned, and next steps.**

emphasized the importance of effective communication and consistent messaging at key stages such as conceptualization of a district vision and key reform strategies, design of a transition plan, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of district efforts.

#### *Create a coherent message about the CCSS*

Conference participants heard from district leaders from Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Florida, which has invested two years in strategic communications

and stakeholder engagement strategies throughout the community. Key to implementing the CCSS is their focus on building awareness and knowledge of the new standards; building stakeholder buy-in; soliciting stakeholder feedback; supporting stakeholders during implementation; and sharing implementation success stories, lessons learned, and next steps. The district has learned that, in order to maintain coherence and focus in the CCSS, all messaging must be clearly linked to their ongoing major initiative to build teacher effectiveness. To achieve their CCSS communications goals, the district established focus groups and committees to provide two-way communications channels for its reform plans, and developed a multipronged communications strategy that included emails, podcasts, e-zines, anonymous surveys, and on-site, face-to-face presentations. Each of the superintendent's series of podcasts, The Things You Need to Know, is available in long and short versions and lays out various changes taking place. The district approaches communications planning as the driver to systems change, as represented in the figure on page 6.

#### *Develop messages for targeted audiences*

Attendees participated in a communications session that focused on the importance of identifying target audiences and tailoring messages about the importance of the CCSS based on the specific audience (e.g. parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers). Presenters suggested that messages be tied to values that each audience supports. They also noted that messages **■**



**"Never before ... have we had such collaboration, not only across districts but across states."**

**— Deborah Sigman, CDE**

might need to be tailored to the stage of readiness each audience has regarding CCSS implementation. Some audiences may need information in order to build their knowledge, others may need messages that help build their will to implement new standards and call them to action, and still others may need messages that reinforce and encourage efforts that are underway.

*Discover stakeholder opinions by soliciting their input on the CCSS*

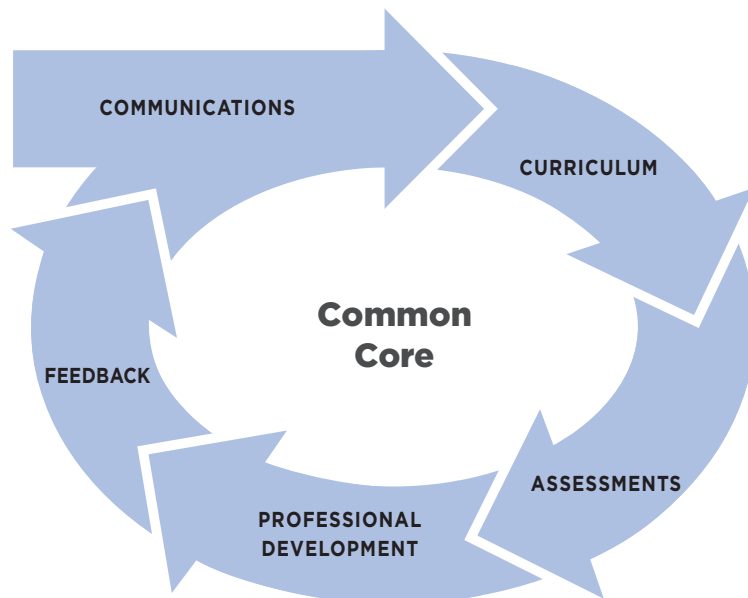
Understanding and addressing stakeholder groups' responses to and questions about the CCSS will help build support for the message that the district conveys to stakeholders about the CCSS, and, ultimately, lead to better implementation of the standards. Baldwin Park Unified School District in Los Angeles County intentionally integrated the CCSS implementation process into their existing strategic planning process: First, the district met with and surveyed teachers, principals, parents, and students in order to get their input for creating a new vision for learning that the CCSS require. They then conducted a series of districtwide meetings in which they described that vision

and facilitated discussion about it among stakeholders as a means to bring the vision to life and get feedback from their constituents, including specific suggestions about how to build the district's strategic plan. The CCSS became a cornerstone of the district's new vision for learning and its strategic plan. This grassroots approach offers stakeholders opportunities for both collaboration and autonomy: it engages those at every level of the education system in making teaching and learning decisions, and it allows local school sites the freedom to develop curricular guides and assessments within the parameters of those decisions.

**Align Resources to Implement the CCSS**

In the Long Beach Unified School District, external resources such as partnerships and grants are aligned with CCSS implementation to support and be supported by that overarching initiative. For instance, at the high school level the district has promoted implementation of CCSS professional development and materials within Smaller Learning Communities/Pathway Programs and the Linked Learning Initiative. The district is also working with its higher education partners to align teacher preparation to the new standards. Superintendent Chris Steinhauer believes that goals for every department and school should

**Figure 1. Hillsborough County Public Schools Common Core Implementation Plan, 2012**



align to the CCSS so that different interests, time, and resources are not competing with one another. In many other districts, educators are acknowledging that the CCSS define college and career readiness in a way that pushes beyond traditional criteria for academic competence and that reflects many skills and dispositions that youth development organizations have long championed (e.g., problem-solving, perseverance, independence, effort to understand other cultures). These districts are seeking to align their resources to promote utilization of this new definition of success.

### Strengthen and Deepen Partnerships

Several participating districts at the conference noted that implementing the CCSS provides districts the opportunity to strengthen and align local partnerships and policy, especially in the face of tough economic times. To support CCSS implementation, district personnel can identify initiatives, partnerships, and funding policies that might align with CCSS goals as they develop or refine their strategic plan. For example, the San Francisco Afterschool for All Advisory Council is exploring how local Out of School Time (OST) providers can best integrate and support the district's transition to CCSS mathematics standards. The Council recently invited five local OST providers to a middle school mathematics learning circle to learn about new standards-based mathematics practices, share best practices in integrating STEM learning into applied and project-based learning, and begin exploring how OST providers can support the district's transition to the new standards.

Going forward, the Council plans to expand the learning circles to include front-line OST and school staff and test new approaches to ensure greater coherence between school-day and OST programming related to the CCSS, such as joint professional development and information-sharing mechanisms. Districts are now beginning to explore the practice of incorporating after-school providers and other partners into staff meetings and/or professional development events in order to build their understanding and support of the schools' CCSS purpose, goals, and strategies.

### Align Tools, Policies, and Practices to Support Instructional Shifts

The CCSS are clearly more rigorous in their learning demands on students and, therefore, require teachers to deliver instruction in new ways. To make these instructional shifts, teachers need new instructional materials, greater resources for planning and reflecting on instruction, professional development in new assessment methods, and preparation for new teacher evaluation processes. Throughout the conference, it became clear that districts are approaching this transition in a variety of ways and are eager to learn from one another as they take their next steps toward implementing CCSS-aligned instruction, assessment, and related systemic changes.

#### *Revise instructional materials*

Some districts have discovered that when teachers acquire knowledge and skills related to CCSS at the same time they are implementing

**“We’re too afraid to ask our kids to wrestle with questions. The CCSS ask teachers to give students the tools to deal with the bumps rather than smoothing the road for students.”**

— David Liben

the standards, they achieve the required instructional shifts more quickly. Districts also report that teachers are energized by the new ways of thinking about teaching and learning called for by the CCSS. For example, Corona-Norco Unified School District, located southeast of Los Angeles in Riverside County, is rallying content teams to work on common pacing guides.

As another example, the Council of the Great City Schools and Student Achievement Partners are supporting convenings of volunteer educator writing groups from many districts in California at which authors of the CCSS guide teachers to revise their current curriculum materials to meet the new standards. Teachers learn to write text-based questions whose responses require students to use more evidence from the text than has previously been the case, and which are followed by a culminating writing task requiring those same skills. These collective efforts are part of an ongoing cooperative effort between school districts and state education agencies. ▀

### *Focus on professional learning*

Other districts represented at the conference provided additional examples of how they have started developing staff capacity, including holding professional development opportunities over the summer, creating a task force to train teachers, and allowing teachers time to “dig into” the standards and sample assessment items. Irvine Unified School District has begun disseminating videotaped model lessons aligned to the CCSS, allowing teachers to see exactly what high-quality instructional changes look like in action. Santa Ana Unified School District has utilized teacher leaders to facilitate the rollout of CCSS at school sites. Teacher leaders across that district are also receiving CCSS training to enable them to provide coaching and professional development at their school sites. Whittier Union High School District has invested in week-long institutes over the past two summers for all of its high school teachers to learn about the CCSS and develop curricular plans to support the new standards. Sanger Unified School District shared its success with using professional learning communities among teachers to examine student performance data and implement instructional changes.

### *Transition to assessment*

State leaders are actively engaged in the development of new assessments through California’s leadership as a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). SBAC is developing a set of comprehensive assessments for grades kindergarten through eight and grade 11 in

**“In Japan, kids start mathematics problems without seeing the question right away. The teacher covers up the question and the answer, and instead, they look at the mathematics. It helps to slow down and focus instead on the mathematics along the way. We need more time per topic, and fewer topics. We need to teach at the speed of learning.”**

— Philip Daro

English language arts and mathematics that will become operational in the 2014–15 school year. The consortium is releasing sample items, encouraging participation in pilot tests, assessing technology readiness, and developing a digital library of formative tasks and instructional strategies aligned to the CCSS in order to help the field prepare for the new assessments.

To support the shifts in instructional focus, teachers from the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts—Clovis, Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, Sanger, and San Francisco—are working together to develop and pilot a set of assessment

modules aligned to the CCSS that will allow teachers to deepen their understanding of the expectations of the standards, reflect on their students’ progress, and make mid-course instructional modifications. Through their partnership, the CORE districts will eventually develop a library of performance assessments available online to any teacher. These districts and others have concluded that the new standards require deeper understanding of content as well as the ability to think critically and apply content knowledge in a variety of learning environments. To foster this learning, districts and schools must provide teachers sustained support to understand and make the paradigm shift in their instruction necessary to make the transition to the CCSS.

### *Align teacher evaluation*

In the Roseville Unified School District, administrators are beginning to realign their teacher evaluation process to the CCSS as a way to signal the importance of the new standards and provide informal observation and real-time feedback on strategies to strengthen implementation. Importantly, this observation process is oriented toward instructional improvement, not “grading” teachers. Administrators and teachers are engaged in discussion about what to look for in teacher evaluation, which is guiding plans for professional development and instructional improvement. District leaders believe that such informal observations can be “teachable” moments, when the administrator and teachers are learning together about what good instruction aligned to the CCSS looks like.



Presenters at the conference noted that CCSS implementation requires that teachers take risks and believe that this different way of approaching teaching and learning is the right way to improve academic achievement. Ultimately, though not necessarily immediately, CCSS implementation will engage students in deeper, more meaningful learning, they believe, and improve the knowledge and skills they bring to post-secondary endeavors. District presenters stressed the importance of supporting teachers in taking such risks, creating time for teacher teams to share what they are doing and learning, and drawing upon resources from other districts and states.

### 3. Next Steps for CCSS Transition in California

While districts have identified many promising strategies for implementing the CCSS, the work is still in its early stages and important challenges remain. Several specific challenges and implementation steps related to California's transition to CCSS emerged from conference discussions.

#### Aligning Resources

Jurupa Unified School District in Riverside County summarized the challenge of identifying adequate resources to support successful CCSS transition: "Our emerging implementation challenges involve funding. We know that our current materials are not fully aligned to the CCSS, but funding for supplemental materials will be a big challenge. Technology at the classroom level needs upgrades ... and our teachers

need a great deal of professional development, which is difficult because our budgets are limited. But those are challenges we will have to solve." One solution to this issue, district participants at the conference noted, is to reevaluate current district initiatives, including professional development, to ensure the most effective use of resources and systemwide alignment to the CCSS.

**"One of the greatest challenges that we have found is preventing teachers from thinking they can just 'tweak' what they are currently doing. Some of the teachers just wanted to do a crosswalk from California State Standards to CCSS, thinking that practices would not necessarily need to change. It wasn't until we provided sample performance events that the teachers began to understand the profound change that needs to occur."**

**— Carlye Marousek Olsen,  
Whittier Unified  
School District**

Additionally, given the challenges ahead, especially the current fiscal environment, many districts at the conference expressed great interest in collaborating with one another to leverage their collective power to accelerate learning by securing guidance and resources from early implementers across the state and the nation. Sharing resources—including professional development strategies, formative assessments, or classroom observation rubrics used for instructional support and monitoring—can reduce both time spent and financial costs.

Conference participants also identified possible changes in regulations and policies to fund CCSS implementation, including leveraging Title I and Program Improvement funds to support these efforts. One discussant specifically highlighted new curriculum flexibility in California, reinforced in part by the State Board of Education's shift toward *recommending* instructional materials rather than requiring adoption from a set list. This will move state policy toward an "open and flexible process for naming and selecting instructional materials."

District participants responded favorably to such policy shifts, though many underscored the challenges they face as they attempt to implement fundamental changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to implement the CCSS. A number of districts, for example, noted that they view the lack of instructional materials and assessment items aligned to the CCSS as significant obstacles. They stressed that integrating curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher development into

a coherent system of teaching and learning will take significant organizational and professional development shifts.

## Ensuring Access and Equity for All Students

The CCSS are an opportunity for states and districts to take stock and ensure they are providing access for all students. For example, an overarching theme of conference discussions was the challenge of ensuring that English learners access and achieve the new standards. Discussants stressed that English learners should not be removed from the challenges set out in the standards but rather supported in meeting them. Participants discussed an exemplar unit developed by WestEd for pilot testing through Stanford's Understanding Language initiative. The unit provides an example of helping middle school English learner students develop their persuasive writing skills with appropriate supports for accessing challenging language and content. Participants discussed the fundamental instructional changes that such complex content will require for English learners as well as all students.

Even though the symposium didn't include a session dedicated to special education populations, states/districts will have to provide all students with an education that enables them to be career-ready when they leave their K-12 experience. Special education students will be held to the same standards both in the classroom and on the assessments. The only exception will be assessments that apply to what's known as two percent special education

students, those with severe cognitive disabilities.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers propose a type of learning that requires that students

**“Asking ‘What standards are you teaching today?’ is nonsense. The smallest mathematics standard is now about a week, not 55-minute-sized. Each lesson in that chapter should make progress toward the chapter-sized standard.”**

**— Philip Daro**

be given proper entry points or access to the curriculum based on an Individualized Education Program, as required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, that includes: a) annual goals designed to facilitate attainment of grade-level academic standards; b) teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services; c) instructional supports for learning-based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which foster student engagement

by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression; d) instructional accommodations in materials or procedures which do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the CCSS; and e) assistive technology devices and services to ensure access to the general education curriculum and the CCSS.

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial supports and accommodations in both instruction and assessment to have meaningful access to certain standards. These supports and accommodations should ensure that students have access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

The CCSS do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the standards prior to the end of high school. Although the CCSS are considered to be more rigorous than most current state standards, they fall short in meeting the specific needs of gifted learners. If those students are held strictly to the standards, they could actually limit learning. To overcome this pitfall, it is imperative that educators of gifted students create a full range of supports for high-ability learners through differentiated curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

In addition, it will become increasingly more important for gifted education coordinators, facilitators, and teachers to reaffirm and advocate for the need for specialized services for academically advanced

and high-potential students. Beyond providing direct student services, gifted education professionals play an important role in the translation of the CCSS to the classroom by collaborating with other teachers and serving as a valuable resource for implementing differentiated curriculum and assessment. Gifted education professionals may also need to expand their role and act as mentors/peer coaches to provide sustained, job-embedded professional development to school personnel. Moreover, the gifted education research base can contribute to the professional development that school administrators may need to support complex curriculum and deep student learning.

### Transitioning to a New Accountability System

Many district leaders who attended the conference discussed the dilemma of transitioning to the CCSS while operating under an accountability system that remains tied to the old standards and the current California standards assessments. Districts are trying to prepare students and teachers for the types of items that students will encounter when the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessments come on line in 2014–15. Anticipating a shift from the current multiple choice tests to assessments that include more constructed response items and performance tasks, district leaders expect that the new tests will measure students’ progress in new ways, hopefully allowing educators to better measure the depth of students’ content knowledge as well as their ability to apply that knowledge and associated skills to

novel problems and contexts. In the meantime, however, district leaders at the conference acknowledged that the interim period is one in which accountability signals are unclear. Some districts are jumping into the new standards with, as a leader from Baldwin Park Unified

**“We must move beyond technical changes, such as structures and schedules, to adaptive changes in beliefs, expectations, and practice.”**

**— Stacy Spector,  
San Juan Unified  
School District**

noted, the “belief that good instruction will lead to positive learning results regardless of the assessment instrument.” Others are moving more slowly, hoping that more consistent messages from the state will soon materialize.

In addition to the general issues raised above, districts mentioned a number of more specific challenges as they transition to the CCSS, including the following questions:

- » *What role can technology and digital learning play in professional development and local preparation for transitioning to the CCSS?*
- » *How do we align teacher and principal evaluations with the new expectations of the CCSS?*

- » *How can districts handle the gaps in assessment for the grade levels not covered by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?*
- » *How do we create a CCSS-aligned accountability system that more authentically supports all students to succeed in college and career?*
- » *How will we align efforts with the next-generation science standards adoption process?*
- » *How can Career Technical Education content be leveraged to support rigorous and engaging implementation of the CCSS, particularly in mathematics?*

### 4. Conclusion and Resources

Educators across California are excited about the transition to the CCSS. They are convinced that these new standards will serve students well in developing the skills, aptitudes, and mindsets they need to be successful in our modern world. To a large extent, districts are leading the way, even as they await further signals and supports from the state. Many district leaders believe that the CCSS establish a powerful foundation upon which to build a coherent, instructionally aligned system that effectively supports student success. They also understand that much work needs to be done and that capacity needs to be built before the new assessments and accountability are rolled out in two years.

While some districts are already progressing along the road toward the new standards, others are ▀

poised to begin the journey in the coming months. Regardless of where they are in their implementation efforts, district leaders expressed a desire to work together in this process. The four organizations that sponsored the August CCSS symposium will also continue to work together to support districts on their journey.



*This report was authored by  
Carla Hulce, American Institutes  
for Research (AIR); Natasha Hoehn,  
California Education  
Partners; Jennifer O'Day, AIR;  
and Catherine Walcott, WestEd.*

## Selected Conference Resources

- » For further information about conference cosponsors, please visit the following:
  - California Collaborative on District Reform: <http://www.cacollaborative.org>
  - California Education Partners: <http://www.edpartners.org>
  - REL West at WestEd: <http://relwest.wested.org>
- » For more information on state implementation activities in California, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>. For announcements of new resources from throughout the country, including California, join CDE's resources listserv by sending a blank message to [join-commoncore@mlist.cde.ca.gov](mailto:join-commoncore@mlist.cde.ca.gov)
- » For videos and transcripts of major presentations at the *Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California* conference and other conference-related materials and resources, go to the REL West website: <http://relwest.wested.org/events/51>
- » For more information on the CCSS, including implications of the CCSS for instruction, materials, and assessment, go to the Common Core State Standards Initiative website: <http://www.corestandards.org>
- » For key lessons, tips, and tools related to English learner students and the CCSS, visit the website for the Understanding Language project at Stanford University: <http://ell.stanford.edu/>



*California and the Common Core State Standards: Early Steps, Early Opportunities* by American Institutes for Research (AIR) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at [www.air.org](http://www.air.org).

The suggested citation for these proceedings should read: Hulce, C., Hoehn, N., O'Day, J., & Walcott, C. (2013). *California and the Common Core State Standards: Early steps, early opportunities*. Washington, DC: American Institute for Research.

These proceedings were made possible through the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. They are based on a symposium produced by the California Comprehensive Center, the California Collaborative on District Reform at American Institutes for Research, California Education Partners, and REL West at WestEd.

