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States Report Progress, Raise Concerns about Financial Challenges In Year Two of Implementing Common Core State Standards

Common Core will raise rigor of tests, though full implementation of the standards is a few years away according to new state survey data from the Center on Education Policy

WASHINGTON, D.C.—(January 25, 2012)—The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will be more rigorous than previous state academic standards, but most states do not expect to have them in place until the 2014-15 school year or later, according to a new report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP).

The report also finds that while state education agencies are taking steps to familiarize state and district officials with the new standards and are aligning curriculum and assessments, they caution that adequate resources and technology related to test administration remain major challenges to full implementation of the CCSS.

“Even in a time of limited funding and budget cuts, states are pushing ahead with their efforts to implement the Common Core State Standards,” said Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant and co-author of the study. “Many of these states are also making special efforts to smooth the transition of the new standards in their lowest-performing schools.”

Today’s report is the second in a series by CEP about state implementation of the CCSS. It is based on a survey of state education agencies conducted from October through December of 2011 to get updated information on state strategies, policies and challenges in the second year of transition to the CCSS. As of January 2012, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS in English language arts and mathematics. The survey data included in this report is based on 35 states and D.C. that both adopted the CCSS and responded to the survey.

When asked about the rigor of the CCSS compared with current academic standards in their states, 32 of the responding CCSS-adopting states agreed that implementing CCSS will lead to improved student skills in English language arts and in math. Thirty of these states agreed that the CCSS will be more rigorous than current standards in English language arts while 29 states echoed that view for mathematics.

Survey states that have adopted the CCSS are taking actions to help teachers master the new standards and use them to guide instruction. Among the findings in this area:

- All of the states that responded to survey items about teacher strategies are creating professional development materials to help teachers master the CCSS (34 states) and are conducting statewide professional development initiatives (33 states);
- 27 states are aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS, while five do not intend to do so;
- 25 states are modifying or creating educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for student mastery of the CCSS, while six do not plan to do so; and

- 23 states are developing and implementing new teacher induction programs to help new teachers master the CCSS, while nine do not plan to do so.

When it comes to working with districts, 28 of the adopting survey states are requiring districts to implement the CCSS, but only 15 states intend to require districts to develop long-term, comprehensive plans for local implementation. In addition, 27 states plan special initiatives to ensure that the lowest-performing schools fully implement the CCSS.

The state K-12 education agencies in 26 of the CCSS-adopting states in the survey are establishing partnerships with the state higher education agency or with postsecondary institutions to implement the standards. But just 16 states plan to align undergraduate admissions requirements or the first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the CCSS.

Reflecting the complex nature of the transition to the CCSS, implementation is moving at different rates in different states. Six states in the survey expect to fully implement these standards before or during school year 2012-13. Nine states anticipate full implementation in 2013-14, 16 in 2014-15, and one in 2015-16. These state timelines are affected somewhat by the work of two state-led consortia, which are developing assessments aligned to the CCSS and do not expect their tests to be ready until 2014-15.

At the same time, several challenges remain. Twenty-one survey states said that finding adequate resources to fully implement the standards will be a major challenge. Other major challenges include providing sufficient professional development (20 states), aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS (18 states) and developing CCSS-aligned educator evaluation systems for teachers and principals (18 states).

States do not expect strong resistance to the CCSS to be a major challenge in 2011-12, though several states foresee minor challenges in the form of resistance from inside the K-12 system (14 states), from higher education (10 states), and from outside the K-12 system (nine states).

Technology related to the administration of aligned assessments is one final area of concern for many states. The CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by the two state consortia could be administered online, but many of the states planning to use these assessments do not currently administer their state tests online. When asked about technology related to the administration of assessments, 20 survey states said that the availability of sufficient numbers of computers in schools is a major challenge, while 15 states cited adequate internet access and bandwidth in schools as a major challenge. Of the states that cited technology as a major challenge, 10 states have plans in place to address these challenges and 16 do not.

“Fully implementing the CCSS is a complex undertaking that will take time and affect many aspects of the education system,” said Diane Stark Rentner, director of national programs for CEP and co-author of the study. “Looming over this entire process is the major challenge of adequate resources. Policymakers should be aware that funding problems could cause states to curtail or delay some of their plans.”

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.