



EMBARGOED RELEASE: Thursday, Jan. 6, 2011, 12:01 a.m. EST

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Momentum Building for Common Core State Standards, Though Full Implementation is Years Away, CEP Survey Finds

*Few States Have Plans to Link Standards to Higher Education Policy
While Most See Budgets and Teacher Evaluation as Major Challenges*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – (Jan. 6, 2011) – States that have signed onto common core state standards in English language arts and math are moving forward with little resistance, though full implementation is several years away for most of them, a new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) released today finds.

Most states plan major changes to assessments, curriculum materials, professional development and teacher evaluation as part of the new standards. Many of these changes, however, are years away. For example, 23 of the 31 states that plan to require school districts to implement the common core standards do not expect to fully institute the requirements until 2013 or later.

States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core Standards is based on a confidential survey of state deputy education secretaries. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey between October and November 2010. The goal of the survey was to learn more about state progress toward adopting and implementing the voluntary K-12 common core state learning standards.

"States are making progress and see strong support for common core standards, but this is going to take a long time and a sustained effort to see through," said Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO. "It's also noteworthy that states vary on approaches to higher education policy and on how much they will require districts to do to support the new standards."

At the time of the survey, 32 states had adopted the standards; four had provisionally adopted the standards, which means that further action is necessary, such as legislative approval; one state decided not to adopt them; and five of the six undecided expected to reach a decision this year while the other was unsure when a decision would be reached.

Officials in 36 states said that the rigor of the common core state standards and whether they would serve as a foundation for statewide education improvement were very important or important considerations in their decision to adopt the standards. By contrast, 30 states said they decided, in part, to adopt core standards because they felt it would improve their chances of winning federal Race to the Top funding. (States could cite multiple reasons for adopting the standards.) "The federal incentive of Race to the

Top funding clearly played a role in states' decisions to adopt common core state standards," Jennings said. "But, the improvement of education was a more important factor for the states."

Many states said it will take until 2013 or later to fully implement the more complex challenges associated with the common core standards. Most states expect to make changes in professional development by 2012 or sooner, but it will take until 2013 or later to fully implement major changes in assessment, curriculum, and teacher evaluation and certification. Of the 27 states that plan to change student assessments by 2013 or later, six gave 2015 as the timeline. "Given the time it's going to take to fully implement the standards and the policy changes necessary to support them, it's going to be important that states continue to make progress on other immediate but related efforts to improve schools," Jennings said.

The survey found that states lack solid plans to coordinate with higher education on linking college admissions requirements or curriculum to the common standards. Just seven states plan to align first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the standards while 26 states did not know if this change would be implemented, and three said it would not. Twenty-four states did not know if undergraduate admissions requirements would be aligned to the standards, while eight said they would, and four said they would not. "Supporters hope that the common core standards will encourage a seamless system of education from elementary school through college," Jennings said. "This is far from being realized."

Many challenges remain for states implementing the common standards. Twenty-one states said that developing a teacher evaluation system that holds teachers accountable for the standards is a major challenge, and 19 states said that finding adequate funding was a major challenge. A total of 21 states expected to face a major or minor challenge aligning teacher preparation programs with the standards. "The challenge states expect to face with teacher preparation programs seems to reflect a disconnect between K-12 education and higher education around the standards," Jennings said.

Although most adopting states will require school districts to implement the common core state standards, the majority are not requiring districts to change curriculum and teacher programs to support the requirement. The district activities that are being required by the greatest numbers of states include providing professional development to support the standards (13 states), implementing evaluation systems to hold educators accountable for students' mastery of the standards (11 states), and developing new curriculum or instructional practices aligned with the common standards (10 states).

"The movement toward common state standards clearly has momentum that can help states navigate through the hard work ahead," Jennings said.

The full report is available online at www.cep-dc.org.

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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.