



Contact: Megan Cotten
(301) 656-0348
megan@thehatchergroup.com

Many District Leaders are Withholding Judgment on Common Core Consortia Assessments

Frontline Implementers Are Acting Locally on Curriculum and Professional Development

WASHINGTON – Oct. 30, 2014 – School districts are taking actions to develop curriculum and prepare educators for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), but district leaders in states that belong to a CCSS assessment consortium appear to be reserving judgment on the impact of the consortia-developed assessments, according to two new reports by the Center on Education Policy at the George Washington University.

Both reports offer an in-depth look at the action being taken on the front lines of CCSS implementation, and both are based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of school districts in states that had adopted the CCSS in the spring of 2014. The first report focuses on district preparations for the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by the Smarter Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment consortia. The second report examines district efforts to obtain CCSS-aligned curriculum materials and the professional development services being provided for teachers and principals in districts in Common Core adopting states.

A majority of districts in CCSS consortia member states said it is “too soon to tell” whether the consortia-developed assessments will be an improvement over their state’s current assessments (54% of these districts), will drive instruction in positive ways (55%), or will produce results that will be understood and used by parents and students (64%). Nearly half of these districts said it is too soon to tell whether the new assessments will yield data to inform instruction in math (48%) or English language arts (46%).

“It is important to remember that most district leaders are still relatively unfamiliar with the new assessments,” said Maria Ferguson, Executive Director of the Center on Education Policy. “District leaders are going to need time to familiarize themselves with the assessments and create an infrastructure of support for both teachers and students before they can determine their impact.”

Even with the move to administer a consortium-developed assessment in the spring of this year, many districts are keeping in place the local assessments used by teachers to track students' progress and make instructional decisions, although about half of the districts plan to revise these interim and formative assessments in math and ELA. The vast majority of districts are also making plans to provide targeted support services to help students who scored below the proficient level on previous state math and English language arts (ELA) exams and students who may need extra assistance to pass the new CCSS-aligned assessments. In addition, a majority of districts report that they are facing technological challenges in terms of adequate equipment and expertise to implement the consortia assessments.

As regards curriculum, more than 80% of districts in CCSS-adopting states report that they have already begun teaching math and ELA curricula aligned to the Common Core, while just over 10% will begin teaching such curricula in school year 2014-15 or later. However, only about one-third of districts report that they have fully implemented CCSS-aligned curricula in all schools, while two-thirds expect to do so this school year or later.

“Despite some concerns expressed by some Common Core opponents that the standards will lead to a nationalized curriculum, CEP’s survey shows that in more than 80% of districts in CCSS-adopting states curricular materials aligned to the CCSS are being developed locally, often by teachers or school districts,” said CEP’s Deputy Director Diane Stark Rentner.

Professional development is also being delivered locally: school districts and states were among the entities cited by the greatest proportion of districts as providers of CCSS-related professional development for teachers and/or principals. Large proportions of districts also reported that teachers themselves are providing Common Core-related professional development.

At least two-thirds of districts indicated that the vast majority (90–100%) of their teachers and principals had participated in at least some CCSS-related professional development as of school year 2014-15. In many districts, this professional development has focused on the content of CCSS, instructional strategies to teach the standards, and the use of data from CCSS-aligned assessments. However, only about a third of districts report that *all* of their teachers have been adequately prepared to teach the Common Core as of the 2013-14 school year, or that *all* of their principals have been adequately prepared to provide instructional leadership on the new standards.

The reports, *Common Core State Standards in 2014: District Implementation of Consortia-Developed Assessments*, and *Common Core Standards in 2014: Curriculum and Professional Development at the District Level*, are available for download at www.cep-dc.org.

###

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University is a national 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.