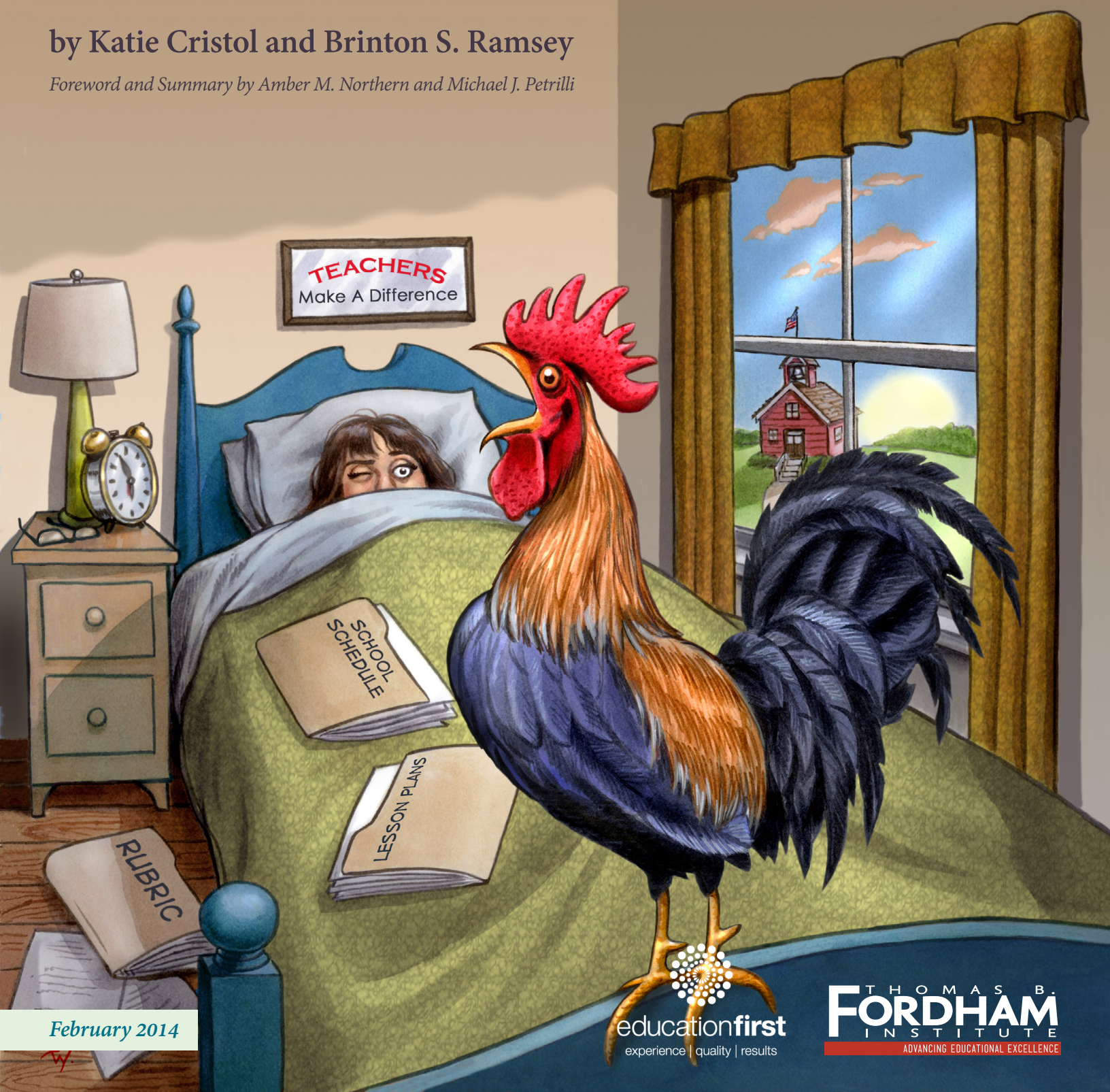
Common Core in the Districts

AN EARLY LOOK AT EARLY IMPLEMENTERS

by Katie Cristol and Brinton S. Ramsey

Foreword and Summary by Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli



February 2014

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Foreword and Summary

BY AMBER M. NORTHERN AND MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

The last year has found critics and advocates of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) duking it out in the political arena. That a common set of high expectations for K–12 students would catalyze such fierce fisticuffs reminds us of both the ugliness and the beauty of democracy. Indeed, we at Fordham, ardent supporters of high standards for some seventeen years, have recently lurched out of the safe haven of think tankery and into the boxing ring. It is not a role that we asked for—or particularly relish—but, confident that the interests of America's children and its future are worth fighting for, we laced up our gloves.

Yet wherever one stands on the merits of the Common Core, one thing is certain. All the political posturing and mudslinging distract attention and energy from the crucial work of implementation. Like it or not, the Common Core State Standards are in place in forty-five states and the District of Columbia—and in many of those jurisdictions, educators are hard at work trying to operationalize them in their schools and classrooms.

How's it going so far? In a word: bumpy. A handful of studies—surveys of state education officials, mostly—paint a discouraging picture. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) reported a year ago that states were struggling to provide CCSS training of sufficient quality and quantity, with less than a majority of teachers in adopter states having participated in such professional development. Around the same time, ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) found that educators, facing a steep learning curve with the CCSS, were not achieving "deep mastery" of the standards themselves, which made it impossible to get their students to do so. Meanwhile, analysts at the University of Rochester surveyed CCSS math teachers and found that two-thirds of them were using textbooks that were in place prior to adoption of the new standards, thereby handicapping their own efforts to lift pupils to these elevated expectations. And Fordham's own recent study of reading in CCSS adopter states found that most elementary educators are still assigning texts based on students' present reading prowess as opposed to their grade level—a practice discouraged by the new standards.

Clearly, lots more monitoring and evaluating lies ahead. Yet one important inquiry that's been lacking—until now—is an in-depth examination of real educators in real districts as they earnestly attempt to put the CCSS into practice. So we set out to find those instructors and the districts in which they teach. Our goal was to peer into this void via an up-close look at district-level, school-level, and classroom-level implementation in a handful of jurisdictions. We sought out "early implementer" districts (the "early risers," if you will) that have moved with fair speed to implement the new academic standards—most of them well ahead of their own state timelines for doing so—in the hope that they would reveal lessons worth sharing with the broader field.

To conduct this study, we teamed up with Education First, a consulting firm founded by standards-reform veteran Jennifer Vranek, who a decade earlier had herself launched Achieve's American Diploma Project—which is often viewed as the precursor to the Common Core standards. Ed First is doing valuable work on sundry topics related to Common Core implementation and we were fortunate to nab two of its finest analysts, Katie Cristol and Brinnie Ramsey.

With plenty of feedback from additional experts, including some at Fordham, the team identified four early implementer districts that appeared worthy of scrutiny: Kenton County (KY), Metro Nashville (TN), Illinois's School District 54 (Schaumburg and vicinity), and Washoe County (Reno, NV).

In each district, the analysts probed five areas that are key to smooth implementation of any standards-based reform: communications, leadership, curricular materials, professional development, and assessment and accountability. They collected data in the summer and fall of 2013. What follows is a summary of what they learned, as well as our own main takeaways.

Key Findings

1. Teachers and principals are the primary faces and voices of the Common Core standards in their communities.

A parent's impressions of the new standards are shaped, in large part, by the teachers and building leaders in her child's school. If educators believe in the Common Core, they communicate that conviction to their students' families—and through them, to the wider community that employs them.

Further, smart districts strive to roll out information about the standards gradually and deliberately, in the context of improved student learning, and with enough advance notice that parents are not surprised by changes. Early and often, they explain how the Common Core differs from prior standards, what students should know and be able to do by year's end, and what new testing items will look like.

Helped by public trust of educators and strategic communications, such districts can minimize politics and misinformation. They understand that if parents (and the wider community) have accurate knowledge about the Common Core, rumors and misinformation will have less influence. And that's largely how it has played out.

Still, major public opinion challenges lie ahead for these districts (as well as for states and the nation). The implementation of rigorous Common Core-aligned assessments could bring a backlash, particularly if and when parents see test scores plummet. In other words, we're still waiting for the—ahem—scores to hit the fan.

2. Implementation gains traction when district and school leaders lock onto the Common Core standards as the linchpin of instruction, professional learning, and accountability in their buildings.

That a school's principal serves as a strong instructional leader is sound practice under any set of standards. Of course, building leaders need not shoulder the responsibility of instructional leadership alone; it can be shared with master teachers, instructional coaches, or other experts.

Yet districts that are serious about high-quality Common Core implementation select, evaluate, and hold principals accountable based on their skills in instruction. Prior to the arrival of the Common Core, two of our four profiled districts already viewed such expertise as central to their hiring and promotion decisions. (For instance, two deputy superintendents had been promoted from prior roles in curriculum and instruction.) Likewise, principals who failed to demonstrate this sort of leadership were let go.

As with teacher professional development (more below), principal training in these districts is also focused on instruction—not administrative issues. (Those are dealt with in other ways on other days.) As a result, principals speak in compelling detail about their understanding of the new standards and can give examples of what Common Core-aligned instruction looks like in their buildings. Even more important, they can identify areas where teachers are struggling to make the instructional shifts (see Appendix B) that the Common Core demands.

That doesn't mean it's easy. Principals in the two larger districts profiled here say it is a struggle to give top billing to the Common Core given their other duties and scarce resources. What's more, teachers worry that uninformed leaders will fail to understand the primary tenet of the Common Core: that fewer standards, covered more deliberately, translate into deeper and better learning. Furthermore, teachers fret, will they be evaluated unfairly if their own principals don't appreciate the instructional shifts called for by the Common Core?

3. In the absence of externally vetted, high-quality Common Core materials, districts are striving—with mixed success—to devise their own.

Curriculum publishers were suspiciously quick to proclaim that what they are selling is aligned with the Common Core—and districts are rightly wary of such claims. It takes time to develop and vet high-quality textbook series and other curriculum. All four districts expressed caution about spending limited dollars on materials that were not truly aligned to the Common Core and are delaying at least some of their purchases until they see products that are.

For now, they have approached curriculum development in patchwork fashion. Even districts with the most extensively redesigned curricula have kept at least some of their previous instructional materials, with teachers pulling out isolated lessons, problem sets, assessment items, and so on, as they fit with the new standards. This is understandable; jettisoning all prior materials is expensive, time-consuming, and can make teachers uneasy. (And did we mention that there's a dearth of high-quality, expertly vetted, complete Common Core-aligned curricula?!) Yet creation of homegrown materials carries the same uncertainty as vendor-developed materials: Are they truly aligned? Are they any good? Will they produce the desired results in students?

Here we must flash a warning light, as several districts in this study are using materials that appear to be at odds with the philosophical underpinnings and instructional shifts at the heart of the Common Core. Indeed, many of the math curricula that pre-date CCSS are "spiraling": that is, mathematics concepts are introduced and revisited *each year*. By contrast, the Common Core requires a "major work" focus in each grade, with accompanying concepts to be introduced and taught to mastery in just a few grade levels. It's hard to imagine how one could reconcile such fundamental differences.

Still, for all the risks and uncertainties, homegrown stuff fosters buy-in and ownership. In fact, teachers in these districts support a district-wide, common curriculum—*precisely because* they've had a hand in creating, judging, and/or improving it. Engaged in such activities, they welcome the materials as an asset, rather than resist them as a ploy to undermine their autonomy or professionalism.

4. The scramble to deliver quality CCSS-aligned professional development to all who need it is both as crucial and (so far) as patchy as the quest for suitable instructional materials.

It's standard practice—almost boring—to sound the alarm for better professional development, but we're obligated to say it yet again. Think of professional development as a car that not only needs major body work (updated delivery methods, repurposing of resources) but a new engine, too (novel content delivered to teachers and administrators).

But where do teachers go to glean new expertise relative to the Common Core? Our four districts rely on familiar delivery mechanisms—instructional coaches and master teachers—who are themselves trained via a variety of methods. As early implementers, these educators have gone both to the "source" of the standards *and* used other proxies for quality and alignment: They've worked directly with and learned from the standards' authors themselves and/or used tools created by them (e.g., the Publishers' Criteria developed by Student Achievement Partners and several other groups). They've checked their understanding against instruments developed by field experts and other states (e.g., EQuIP rubric). And they've scrutinized their interpretations of the standards by consistently returning to them as the basis for professional development content.

Districts have put considerable thought and energy into cultivating Common Core expertise—and this report reviews their victories as well as their ongoing struggles, some of which are inherent in their chosen delivery systems. For instance, major inconsistencies exist in the quality of instructional coaching across buildings. Teachers and principals report that the stronger specialists help them analyze lesson plans and student work in the context of the new standards, while the weaker ones add little value at best and misinformation at worst.

Sufficient time for teacher reflection and collaboration has always been good school practice, but it takes on particular salience for the Common Core. When districts and schools provide such opportunities, teachers can focus on the standards themselves, how lessons support them, and whether student work shows mastery of them. By contrast, most previous state standards were too lengthy and convoluted to use as the basis for weekly planning and reflection. One secondary English teacher explained, "When I started teaching, we had two different documents: the state standards and what we actually tested. Now there's an app on my phone with the 10 [ELA Anchor] standards for speaking, listening, and reading."

5. **The lack of aligned assessments will make effective implementation of the Common Core difficult for another year.**

Most states and districts are in the unenviable position of having to implement new standards without the summative assessments in place that will measure student mastery. But they've had to make do, to the chagrin of most educators, who—at least in these early implementer districts—believe that their current state tests are poor measures of student

understanding relative to the new standards and may even detract from proper implementation. (According to CEP, at least twenty-seven states have "embedded" CCSS items in their existing tests.)

This void creates two problems. First, misaligned assessments undermine the critical link between what is reported in accountability systems (test score and teacher evaluation data) and what districts purport to value (Common Core-aligned instruction, student success with the new standards). Second, without Common Core-aligned summative data, districts don't know whether their implementation strategies are effective on a school- and district-wide scale.

Such misalignment understandably worries teachers, both on their pupils' behalf and in connection with the accountability systems that envelop them. In Metro Nashville, for instance, teacher performance data has been tied to student value-added scores on the state test (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, aka TCAP) and used in the overhauled teacher evaluation system, as well as on school and district report cards. Leaders in the district have been asking teachers to trust that good Common Core instruction will improve performance even on extant, non-aligned tests, but educators remain anxious so long as student growth on the TCAP is a part of their evaluation.

What do we take away from these findings? Here are four lessons for district leaders.

First, leave the politics to others. Discuss the merits (and drawbacks) of the Common Core as they relate to academic content, instruction, and assessment. Help parents understand the changes inherent in the CCSS and prepare them for the potentially upsetting test results to come.

Second, allow teachers to have a hand in developing and improving the shared materials they'll use in classrooms. At minimum, this enhances ownership and buy-in of the new standards.

That said, lesson three is to beware of recycling old materials (e.g., via a Balanced Literacy approach or a text like *Everyday Mathematics*) when they don't share the fundamental precepts of the Common Core. Square pegs simply don't belong in round holes.

Finally, take a serious look at the quality of your own implementation efforts. Educators spend a lot of time talking about the importance of professional learning communities, instructional coaches, reviews of student work, and so on. To those of us who have been in education for any length of time, it begins to sound like Charlie Brown's teacher. So ask yourself: Is my district engaging in business as usual? Or is it using familiar mechanisms and strategies in ways that truly bring these rigorous new benchmarks to life?

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Right now, districts are in the near-impossible situation of operationalizing new standards before high-quality curriculum and tests aligned to them are finished. Until we have those in place, implementation will remain confused and patchy. Yet time is passing and the new tests and truly aligned textbooks are coming. Think of it this way: we're still in spring training, a time when focusing on the fundamentals, teamwork, and steady improvement is more important than the score. But districts ought not dawdle: they are just a year away from the big game. Batter up!

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible through the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Louis Calder Foundation, and our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Many thanks to Katie Cristol and Brinnie Ramsey at Education First, who conducted the research and co-authored this report. We appreciate their hard work, attention to detail, and willingness to address our myriad questions. Also at Ed First, we are grateful for the contributions of a number of colleagues: Jennifer Vranek for her work as chief advisor for the report, Lisa Towne for her leadership in the research design of the pilot and full study, and Marc Frazer for his thought partnership in organizing our findings. We are indebted to the educators and administrators–and in particular, the site leads–in District 54, Kenton County, Metro Nashville, and Washoe County. We thank them for their time, thoughtful reflection, and willingness to speak candidly about their experiences in implementing this ambitious endeavor called the Common Core.

On Fordham's side, we extend thanks to Chester E. Finn, Jr., who provided insightful feedback and valuable advice during the report's drafting process; Victoria Sears, who offered feedback on drafts and oversaw production; Alyssa Schwenk, who kept funders abreast of findings and progress; and Michelle Gininger and Joe Portnoy, who managed dissemination. Kathleen Porter-Magee, our Bernard Lee Schwartz Fellow, helped get the project underway and commented on initial drafts.

We also thank Shannon Last, who served as copy editor; Samuel Whitehead, who created the report's cover; and Edward Alton, who designed its layout.

Introduction

Heralded by many education leaders and public officials as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to upgrade teaching and learning for all students, the Common Core State Standards are now ostensibly reaching the majority of U.S. classrooms in the 2013–14 school year. Unlike some other education reforms of recent decades, the Common Core enjoys fairly widespread support among teachers, many of whom view the standards as a way to boost their students' achievement and readiness for college and careers.[1]

But simply changing state standards does not mean that what happens behind closed classroom doors will change, even if teachers have positive feelings about the standards. Like any major overhaul of state standards, the Common Core won't affect student learning unless it is properly implemented—and that's a very heavy lift. Across America, aspirations for the Common Core are presently undermined by three widespread deficiencies on the implementation front:

- Ill-aligned curricular materials;
- State and district assessments that don't adequately measure the standards; and
- Ineffective professional development for teachers and other key players.

Complicating matters further is a recent swell of pushback against the standards themselves by critics on both left and right. Facing such political pressure, some states are considering whether to undo, forsake, or "pause" their Common Core implementation efforts, and several have withdrawn from multi-state consortia that are working to develop suitable assessments.

WHY THESE DISTRICTS? METHODOLOGY SNAPSHOT

We sought districts that were moving energetically to implement the new standards in their classrooms (in all cases, ahead of their state's formal timeline for transition).

To identify such districts, we sought input from expert partners, including Achieve, the Aspen Institute, EdLeader21, Student Achievement Partners, and state education agencies. Additionally, we conducted a web scan of news stories on Common Core implementation in districts and identified districts with major sources of funding for Common Core implementation.

We narrowed from seventeen to four recommended districts based on the following:

» Strength of district leadership on the new standards;

» Early promise in at least one critical area of implementation, such as professional development, communications, and/or curricular and instructional materials; and

» Potential to inform the field with lessons learned and potential pitfalls.

This paper eschews the political controversies. We start with the assumption that states that have adopted the Common Core want to implement it well. It's evident to the authors—and to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute—that a significant number of states and districts (and charter schools) are keen to do this right. Because the initial transition poses many challenges, we believe it's useful at this stage to examine a few districts that are off to a favorable start. This report highlights four districts that show particular promise in their early implementation of the Common Core.

Relying on expert advice, we sought out "early implementer" districts that have moved quickly on rolling out the standards and might have lessons to share with the field. After finalizing focus districts and obtaining their cooperation, we spent several days on the ground with district and school administrators, teachers, and parents, conducting interviews and focus groups and, where possible, observing meetings and professional development sessions. We supplemented these site visits by combing through classroom observation protocols, training materials, and other artifacts, and closely followed local media coverage of implementation efforts. (See sidebar, *Why These Districts?*, as well as Appendix A for details on our selection process and research methodology.)

We don't claim these districts represent "best practice"—it's far too early in the implementation of the Common Core to assign that label to any districts. But we think their early efforts are worth a close look and may be helpful to others as they ramp up their own implementation efforts.

The early implementers are:

The trailblazer. Kenton County School District, Kentucky—a mid-size bedroom community just outside Cincinnati with close to 15,000 students—is our earliest Common Core implementer. It has been working for more than three years on implementation, having started training its secondary teachers on learning and teaching to the standards shortly after the Common Core's release in 2010. Educators there are just beginning to observe gains in their students' performance.[2]

The urban bellwether. Metro Nashville Public Schools, with nearly 80,000 students, is in the literal and figurative center of a leading reform state. Tennessee's major education reforms of recent years include an "Expect More, Achieve More" campaign to raise academic standards, a first-round Race to the Top win, a first-in-the-nation revised system for statewide teacher evaluation, and nation-leading gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress between 2011 and 2013. Metro Nashville's leadership quickly and vigorously committed to the Common Core, introducing it in classrooms in 2011–2012, a full school year ahead of most Tennessee districts. Metro Nashville also maintains a close relationship with its state education agency, which has taken a strong role in Common Core implementation.

The high-performing suburb. Illinois's District 54, serving Schaumburg and surrounding municipalities, is a K–8 school district of about 14,000 students in the Chicago suburbs. It is a high-achieving, high-capacity suburban district located in an ethnically diverse and largely affluent community. With its enthusiastic embrace of the Common Core and extensive preparation during 2012–2013, District 54 illustrates what these standards may mean for high-flying districts wondering whether the Common Core is right for their kids, too.

The creative implementer. Washoe County School District, Nevada's second-largest with nearly 65,000 students, encompasses the Reno-Tahoe area and most of the state's northwest corner. Unlike districts that have received multiple federal or private grants, Washoe has instead grappled with consecutive years of budget cuts. But instead of decrying the Common Core as an unfunded mandate, Washoe built upon a new, teacher-created professional development model and reallocated resources to support standards implementation starting in 2011–12.

These four districts differ in many important ways, but what they share are thoughtful and encouraging approaches to Common Core implementation, bridging the sizable distance from state policy to actual classroom practice. In each, smart accountability practices and targeted professional development have increased teacher ownership of standards implementation and helped educators to align their instruction and curricular materials with the Common Core.

As the reader will observe, some of the practices and approaches that we highlight resemble "business as usual," in that districts are using methods and mechanisms that they (and many others) have used before. These practices may sound like an old, familiar song, having been touted in countless studies and reports pre-dating the new standards. Much of what they're doing is simply commonsensical: giving teachers more time to plan, review, and collaborate; ensuring strong instructional leadership at the school and district levels; and focusing professional development experiences intensively on instructional improvement.

Those things are self-evidently worth doing, but the "content" that drives them—the engine under the hood—matters most for effective implementation of the new standards. The Common Core represents the chance to install new engines—and only with considerably greater power than before will familiar-looking implementation practices result in the radical departures from customary procedures that the Common Core standards require. (See Appendix B, *The Depth of the Change*, for more.) For example, simply having professional learning communities, even those centered on instruction, isn't sufficient unless the discussions are focused deeply on the concepts that most challenge teachers within their grade level. And having a "culture of accountability based on assessment" is only useful insofar as those assessments are actually measuring student mastery of the Common Core. And so on.

This report covers our research in five categories that are crucial to effective district-level implementation of any academic standards: communications, leadership, curricular materials, professional development, and assessment and accountability. (In the real world, of course, these categories overlap.)

In Part One, we organize the report by those categories, offering a rationale for why each matters for effective transition to the new standards, a brief description of the state of Common Core implementation in the respective area, and the major themes and findings that crosscut these four early implementers.

In Part Two, we offer some advice, cautions, and recommendations for the field based on our observations in these districts. Part Three includes individual case studies for each of the four districts, explaining their approach and detailing their Common Core implementation efforts in depth.

Part One: Findings by Implementation Areas

Communications and Engagement: How are districts preparing parents for the Common Core?

Even as media attention to the implementation of the Common Core grows, the general public remains largely unfamiliar with the standards. In a May 2013 Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup poll of adult Americans, 62 percent of respondents said they had not heard of the Common Core. Unfamiliarity apparently breeds susceptibility to misinformation: Of those survey respondents who had heard of the new standards, PDK author William Bushaw noted that "many said—erroneously—that the standards are based on a blending of state standards, that the federal government is insisting that all states adopt the standards, and that there is a plan to create standards in all academic areas."[3]

Putting aside the major political debates around the Common Core, lack of knowledge about the new standards poses a large problem for districts. In the immediate term, unfamiliarity, skepticism, and misinformation are an obstacle to schools and districts that need parents as partners in their child's success with the Common Core. Within the next two years, a new set of assessments will kick in—and student scores will likely be lower than on previous state assessments. If this occurs, an ill-informed parent population might have trouble staying the course with the standards and tests. Districts need to communicate proactively with parents to help them understand the changes in teaching and learning that are coming—and why these will help, not harm, children.

Parents and stakeholders in the early implementer districts report that parent impressions of the new standards are most likely to start and end with their child's school. Teachers and principals are the primary communicators with parents. If they feel confident in the quality of the district's Common Core implementation (because of good professional development, aligned accountability practices, and high-quality curricular materials), then that confidence is the reassuring message that parents receive.

Across the early implementer districts, educators, administrators, and parents report that opposition and misinformation are not taking hold in their communities. Parents interviewed about Common Core implementation worry about other parents' lack of engagement, but their conversations with neighbors suggest that when their peers understand the new standards, they generally support them. District administrators echo this sentiment; their communications work is about spreading awareness of the standards rather than countering opposition to them.

Most of the interviewed stakeholders, educators, and staff in these early implementer districts were aware of anti-Common Core messages spreading nationally and in their states. But across the districts, parents in our focus groups reported that they trust their child's teacher and take their endorsement of the standards more seriously than any outside political opposition, such as the anti-Common Core flyers that appeared in the mailboxes of some District 54 families in 2013. As a Kenton County principal points out, "that says something about the level of trust [among] our parents that we're not hearing a lot about it [pushback]. They're trusting what we're doing as a school."

"Parents and stakeholders in the early implementer districts report that parent impressions of the new standards are most likely to start and end with their child's school."

Another related and useful strategy common across the districts is avoiding political debates by focusing their messages on instruction. Districts roll out information about the standards gradually and deliberately, in the context of instruction and student learning, and with enough advance notice that parents are not surprised by changes.

Kenton County, Kentucky, and District 54 in Schaumburg, Illinois have had an ongoing dialogue with parents about instruction that pre-dates Common Core implementation. They point to the changes happening in the classroom rather

than emphasizing the standards' implications for national education reform or state-level policy debates. As one Kenton County parent explains, "The message is [about] the [instructional] materials that they're choosing… not so much a billboard that 'the standards are new.'" For years, District 54 has communicated learning outcomes for each grade level with a short booklet given to parents on back-to-school "curriculum nights." The document explains what their child should know and be able to do by the end of the school year. When the district adopted the Common Core, leaders revised it to reflect the standards. Those pamphlets, the District 54 communications director notes, are "the first thing parents will see [from the district] related to the Common Core."

Teachers in Washoe County School District in Nevada are working with students to create e-mails for parents that explain what their child is learning, with the hopes of making Common Core more concrete. During the district's "Parent Academy" program, the Washoe director of assessments uses sample items from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to show parents specific examples of the new expectations for their child. Washoe administrators also introduce and explain a Smarter Balanced sample item at each public meeting of the school board.

Similarly, Metro Nashville Public Schools has been using its Parent Academies to focus on such practical considerations as understanding changes to student report cards under the new standards, rather than on lofty messages about the imperative of higher expectations.

Communication tides may change quickly, but for now, these districts seem to have warded off major opposition. They have done so by implementing the standards early and getting good information out about Common Core instruction, so that parents are informed and can reject inaccurate messages when they encounter them.

Still, major public opinion challenges lie ahead for these districts, as for the rest of the nation. The implementation of more rigorous Common Core-aligned assessments could be a major flash point for public opinion, particularly if parents see lower scores compared with earlier assessments. As one District 54 parent observes, "I get the feeling that's when…all these people who didn't care before are going to start caring."

Leadership: Who is "in charge" of the Common Core at schools and at the central office?

Principal Leadership

To ensure successful implementation of the Common Core standards at the school level, principals must set the tone for the importance of the ensuing changes, difficult as they may be. The success of Common Core implementation hinges on principals clearly prioritizing the standards as the basis for instruction and professional learning in their buildings. However, principals needn't shoulder the responsibility of instructional leadership alone; it can be shared with master teachers. Districts can also support principals by providing excellent instructional coaches in their buildings.

> "The success of Common Core implementation hinges on principals clearly prioritizing the standards as the basis for instruction and professional learning in their buildings."

Nationally, far too few principals are sufficiently prepared—or supported—in setting, developing, and implementing a robust instructional culture in their building. This leaves them ill-positioned to lead their schools through the changes of the Common Core. A 2012 survey of principals found, for example, that although a vast majority agrees that an effective school leader is able "to use data about student performance to improve instruction" and to "lead development of strong teaching capacity across the school," they struggle to execute these functions within the context of the Common Core. Fully 67 percent of principals say that implementing the new standards is "challenging" or "very challenging."[4]

Teachers and principals in all four early implementer districts explain that the Common Core standards require principals—or whoever is leading, evaluating, and providing feedback on instruction—to perform their own duties

differently. For example, teachers are now spending an entire class period, or multiple class periods, diving into one text or one mathematical concept to reflect the "less is more" mentality inherent in the Common Core. But teachers worry whether principals understand that slower and fewer can mean deeper and better. If principals are still looking for evidence of "coverage," or breadth, as was often the case under the old standards, classroom implementation will suffer.

As part of their administrative capacities, principals need an intuitive understanding of how to structure teacher time to best meet the demands of the Common Core. For example, principals in Kenton County and District 54 carve out time for teachers to meet with their grade-level and subject-matter colleagues in order to focus on the major work of the grade and assure continuity between grades. A principal who doesn't take this need into account when establishing planning time could undermine the success of the standards in his or her building.

> **"They make sure that principal professional development is focused on instruction—not discussion of administrative issues. As a result, their principals speak in compelling detail about their understanding of the Common Core standards and can give examples of what Common Core-aligned instruction looks like in their buildings."**

All four early implementer districts have pushed principals to focus on instruction generally, and on the Common Core in particular. District 54 and Kenton County do this especially well. Beginning in 2013–2014, for example, Kenton County principals (and/or the administrative team in their schools) are expected to conduct fifty classroom walk-throughs every week (fifteen to twenty minutes each) to observe and provide feedback on Common Core-aligned instruction. That's nearly seventeen hours a week in classrooms, talking about instruction and providing feedback to teachers. As one principal explains, "a big part of [the fifty walk-throughs] is building a culture that this is to help them, not evaluate them. But it's changing habits. There are a lot of habits to break and [we need to] get them to see what we're looking for when we do those walks." Though it's too early to tell how these mini-observations are working, it's clear that Kenton County principals are expected to be fluent in instruction and lead by example.

Additionally, instructional leadership is highly valued within the principal pipelines in these two districts. They select, evaluate, and hold principals accountable based on their skills in instruction. In some cases, principals have been coached out or removed if they can't demonstrate this sort of leadership.

Under any set of standards, it is generally good practice that a principal be a strong instructional leader. But Kenton County and District 54 emphasize that the new standards are the content—the engine—powering all these practices. They make sure that principal professional development is focused on instruction—not discussion of administrative issues. As a result, their principals speak in compelling detail about their understanding of the Common Core standards and can give examples of what Common Core-aligned instruction looks like in their buildings. Even more important, they can identify areas where teachers are struggling to make the instructional shifts.

The larger districts of Metro Nashville and Washoe have communicated to principals that instructional leadership on the Common Core is a priority, but these districts aren't supporting principals as consistently or taking other work off of their plates. Here, teachers and principals alike report that insufficient principal training on the new standards is the biggest implementation challenge. Although these districts offer extensive learning opportunities for principals, leaders report that they have too many administrative obligations to engage deeply in the instructional implications of the Common Core.

As a result, teachers describe uneven implementation across buildings. Some report that, as one Washoe elementary teacher put it, "My administrator really has a grip on it. I'm able, from her feedback, to know I'm on track [with Common Core instruction] and she's always [walking] through the classrooms." But other teachers express anxiety that their principals do not know how to evaluate their Common Core-aligned teaching. While no principal can single-handedly improve instruction on her own, leaving the job entirely to others undercuts accountability.

District Leadership

The leadership shown by principals in some of the early implementer districts is connected to a serious central office commitment to Common Core. Central office leaders are vocal Common Core champions. District leaders prioritize and, where necessary, restructure and reallocate resources to support Common Core-aligned instruction.

In particular, a superintendent's attention can give an initiative the stature of a decree. Metro Nashville's superintendent has made the Common Core the district's top priority. When Nashville administrators and teachers were asked who leads Common Core implementation in their district, nearly everyone referred to the superintendent. One district administrator described the superintendent's leadership as the right balance between prioritization and delegation: "Our superintendent is at the forefront of what we're doing [with the standards] and he trusts the decisions that the curriculum team is making for students' learning."

Even prior to Common Core, these districts had already placed instructional leadership at the center of their hiring and organizational decisions. In both Kenton County and District 54, deputy superintendents were promoted from curriculum and instruction roles. These leaders demonstrate deep command of the Common Core and have experience with district systems that support instruction. Their promotions both reflect and perpetuate the emphasis on instruction as the districts' central work. Washoe County also restructured its Office of Academics to include the Department of Assessment (formerly in the Office of Accountability) in 2011–2012 as the district began planning for Common Core implementation. This move put the "testing team" into more direct collaboration with the district staff members who work on Common Core implementation, and better facilitates alignment of standards, curriculum, and instruction with assessment.

District leadership on the Common Core must also be supported by the state education agency. See *Who Leads on Common Core?* on page 13 for additional discussion of state-district relationships in the early implementer districts.

WHO LEADS ON COMMON CORE? STATE AND DISTRICT ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Each of the early implementer districts is navigating its relationship with the state a bit differently. Taken together, however, their experiences suggest that state agencies need to tailor the support and flexibility provided to districts based on the feedback they receive about each district's implementation efforts.

In these districts, administrators mostly say what they want from the state is flexibility. In particular, they'd like to continue to use their existing district practices—which they see as supportive of the Common Core—under new state evaluation systems. How to balance accountability and flexibility for districts is not a new challenge, and state agencies will certainly be vexed when it comes to granting flexibility for those that appear to be getting Common Core "right" (as well as ascertaining those that don't)—especially as the timelines for new standards and new evaluation systems converge.

Washoe and District 54 are generally outpacing their state education agencies in figuring out how to implement the Common Core with fidelity. Administrators in both districts report that their state education agencies are likely to follow their example, having invited administrators to share experiences and recommendations statewide, and largely allowing them to develop and execute their own implementation plans. Progress in Kenton County has been spurred by several factors: Kentucky's adoption of reform legislation* related to its college- and career-ready standards (i.e., CCSS); the state commissioner of education's outspoken public support of the Common Core; the development and administration of the state's aligned summative assessment; and revamped district- and school-level report cards.** Still, district leaders report that they often find themselves leading discussions within state-sponsored networks of districts, rather than learning new Common Core content or practices themselves.

Our research in Metro Nashville reveals a more interdependent relationship with the state education agency than in the other districts in our study. Nashville and its state partners have faced a bit of chaos as a result of the near-total overhaul of instructional materials and practices that the standards require—and the subsequent delay on the state's part to approve Common Core-aligned textbooks. The district chose to fill that void by accompanying the rollout of the standards with "transitional materials" (i.e., district-developed alignment and pacing guides for existing textbooks). The state has also held ongoing meetings and professional development for coaches across multiple school years, which has been essential in developing coaches' capacity. But such train-the-trainer models of professional development have obvious pitfalls. It's a tall order for instructional coaches to internalize the standards and instructional changes in a few days of training, and then customize peer learning to a diverse group of local teachers and schools. Like the districts profiled here, Tennessee has "gone first," aggressively marshaling resources and energy to support Common Core implementation (and occasionally stumbling). Though the statewide rollout hasn't been perfect, the district's efforts and material resources have, on balance, been useful and instructive to other districts in the Volunteer State.

It's unclear which model states should embrace during district implementation of the Common Core: partner, trainer, political advocate, bludgeon, or provider of flexibility and autonomy? Most likely, it depends on the particular district and the capacity of the state agency. These early implementer districts have shown promise in all different kinds of state contexts, both those with high levels of state control and support and those that largely delegate decisions and responsibility to the districts.

We take away from their experiences that, no matter the context, a successful state-district model for Common Core implementation requires real engagement and ongoing conversation so states know when and where to step in, when to back off, and when to share with other districts. It is a challenge with which all agencies must wrestle: Just as teachers develop their skill at differentiating Common Core instruction among their students, how will states provide support on the standards to districts at differing levels of implementation?

**Senate Bill 1, passed in 2009, required the Kentucky Department of Education and districts throughout the state to revise academic standards to better reflect college- and career-readiness expectations for students (leading to Kentucky's early, first-in-the-nation adoption of the Common Core) and to create and implement a more rigorous system of assessments and accountability structures.*

***The revamped report cards include student performance measures on state assessments and IB and AP assessments, as well as graduation rates, school attendance, and school learning environment (e.g., measures of parent engagement).*

Common Core-aligned curricular materials: What's taught in these districts?

Ultimately, implementation of the new standards hinges on what teachers are teaching in classrooms, and what curricular materials and assessments they are using. The Common Core standards are *not* a curriculum in and of themselves. Rather, they are a series of grade-level learning targets and a set of instructional shifts that manifest across grade levels. As famed curriculum expert E. D. Hirsch has noted, the Common Core "offer[s] a framework for any state or locality to create the curricular coherence that could lead to massive gains in student learning" by providing teachers with information about what students have already learned.[5] But the standards are just that—a framework. Teachers can't "teach the Common Core." They can only teach a curriculum that is well-aligned to the shifts reflected in the Common Core.

Unfortunately, it's not at all clear whether many existing instructional materials are sufficiently supportive or well-aligned to the Common Core. In a 2013 Editorial Projects in Education poll, more than half of teachers (56 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "My textbooks and other main curricular materials are aligned with the Common Core State standards."[6] A 2013 study published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which commissioned this report, found that majorities of teachers are still assigning texts that are insufficiently complex for the relevant grade level in English language arts, especially in the elementary years.[7]

Meanwhile, curriculum publishers have been suspiciously quick to proclaim alignment to the standards. As *Education Week* described in 2012, "many [publishers] issued statements within a month or two of the standards' final release, claiming their materials were 'aligned' to or 'compliant' with the Common Core."[8] This has sown skepticism about the quality of for-purchase curricular materials. And while states and national advocates have offered rubrics and criteria for vetting alignment, to date, no one is actually doing the judging. The field still lacks good external vetting and evaluation of currently available for-purchase or free materials. Major publishers need time to develop good, truly aligned textbook series; even pioneering states like New York, which is developing a voluntary set of Common Core-aligned curricular modules for preK–12 English and mathematics, have spent multiple school years doing so. Yet while new curricular materials are still in development, most states' implementation timelines call for full rollout of the Common Core standards either now or within the next school year.

Early implementer districts are doing their best to either adapt existing curricula or create new ones. All four expressed caution about spending limited dollars on materials that were not truly aligned to the Common Core and are delaying at least some of their purchases until they see products that demonstrate better alignment.

"Instead, as of publication, three of the four early implementer districts are edging toward a district-wide, common curriculum, in at least one subject area. Yet there is no "one size fits all," even with a "common" approach, and the districts have chosen different paths."

In the meantime, their experiences during this transitional stage are instructive, particularly with respect to 1) balancing demands for both quality and adequate teacher engagement with the new materials, 2) aligning existing materials to the standards, and 3) effectively using curricular alignment tools developed by external entities.

Ensuring Quality and Teacher Engagement in New-Material Development

Many districts continue to leave final decisions about curricular materials to individual principals or teachers. These districts may provide training to teachers on the new standards, perhaps offering them rubrics or examples of good Common Core lessons and texts, but ultimately allow them to make their own selection decisions. Unfortunately, letting a thousand curricular flowers bloom isn't consistent with ensuring that all teachers are using high-quality and well-aligned materials.

Instead, as of publication, three of the four early implementer districts are edging toward a district-wide, common curriculum, in at least one subject area.[9] Yet there is no "one size fits all," even with a "common" approach, and the districts have chosen different paths: In District 54, teachers and district leaders created a new curriculum nearly from scratch; in

Kenton County, secondary teachers have worked with the district to adopt a national pre-Advanced Placement program; and in Metro Nashville, the district chose a new multimedia literacy textbook vetted by the state for alignment to the standards. Washoe provides common sequencing guides and course maps that it has rewritten to support the Common Core, but different textbooks are used throughout the district. Despite the three districts' desire for a common curriculum across its schools, as of 2013–2014, only District 54 has a full curriculum for all grade levels in both English and mathematics. Kenton County and Metro Nashville haven't yet found—or built—a full suite of quality materials for all grades and subject areas.

Teachers in the early implementer districts tend to support a district-wide, common curriculum if they have had a hand in creating, judging, and/or improving it. When they are engaged in such development, they welcome the materials as an asset, rather than rejecting them for undermining their autonomy or professionalism.

Some believe that teachers want to develop their own curricula and will bridle at a uniform version. Yet the teachers interviewed in the two districts that had adopted a common curriculum in their grade and/or subject—Kenton County and District 54—said that they were quite comfortable with the district-wide curriculum. (Similarly, administrators in Metro Nashville, which adopted a common curriculum in ELA after our research visit, reported no complaints from teachers feeling restricted by the district-wide curriculum.)

These three districts heavily engaged teachers in developing or selecting materials, and they continue to amend the curricula based on teacher feedback. Educators in Kenton County and District 54 explained that, even with lesson materials and a sequence for teaching them, they still have sufficient autonomy over their classroom practices, including the option to supplement instruction with additional materials and the flexibility to differentiate instruction as needed.

For example, District 54 expects consistency in implementation of its English and math curricula. Principals expect teachers in different rooms to be on the same lesson on the same day. But interviewed teachers say they are comfortable with this level of prescriptiveness because they (or their building peers) helped write the curriculum and had input on its pacing—and because their feedback is taken seriously in continuing to revise it.

Similarly, during 2013, Metro Nashville engaged in a textbook adoption process to select a new elementary reading curriculum from a short list of eligible materials that the state had vetted and approved. The district's procedures put the judgments of teachers at the center of selection. Six to eight teachers and specialists per grade were nominated by principals, instructional coaches, and the union to participate in the committee that interviewed publishers and made final decisions about textbook adoption. The newly selected textbook joins the pre-existing district-wide classroom framework, curriculum map, and pacing guide (which the district determined to be Common Core-aligned) to comprise a full curriculum. Prior to the textbook adoption, teachers and instructional coaches reported struggling (and sometimes failing) to find Common Core-aligned lessons and activities to support these other materials.

“ But interviewed teachers say they are comfortable with this level of prescriptiveness because they (or their building peers) helped write the curriculum and had input on its pacing—and because their feedback is taken seriously in continuing to revise it. ”

Still, district leaders must navigate the tension between using a single, district-wide curriculum and honoring school-level autonomy. In Kenton County, site-based school councils in every secondary school voted to adopt SpringBoard, the College Board's math and ELA "college- and career-readiness" curricula (pre-Advanced Placement), after the district vetted, purchased, and offered it for adoption. Though use of SpringBoard was incentivized, site councils were also free to choose other materials if they could demonstrate to district administrators their alignment to Common Core. Ultimately site councils went with the common approach in part because of district assurances that SpringBoard was "a good first step" toward a Common Core-aligned curriculum. Its adoption also enabled collaboration among teachers in different schools. As one literacy coach explained, "When I started, we didn't have a common curriculum for literacy and it was like chasing a rabbit down the hole. Nothing looked alike and nothing was consistent at grade level or at school. So first thing we identified was that it's hard to

have conversations around these standards when everyone was doing something different with different text or assessments."

Kenton County does not have common curricula at the elementary level—largely because the district has not identified any programs they find suitably aligned to the Common Core and worthy of district-wide investment. Elementary teachers express frustration that they cannot engage in similar common planning and discussion around a single curriculum as their secondary peers do.

Washoe County provides extensive course guides that help align existing textbooks to the Common Core. It also offers access to materials from the Basal Alignment Project vetted by the Council of Great City Schools and Student Achievement Partners.[10]

That said, when interviewed at the end of the 2012–2013 school year, some Washoe teachers reported that their peers were either not using alignment guides and supplementary materials, or were using them incorrectly or superficially.

Aligning Existing Materials

Even districts with the most extensively redesigned curricula have maintained and tried to align at least some pre-Common Core instructional materials. This is reasonable; jettisoning all prior materials is expensive, time-consuming, and can make teachers uneasy. Perhaps most compellingly, there is now a dearth of high-quality, vetted, complete Common Core-aligned curricula.

In addition to the new curricula and materials described in the previous section, **the early implementer districts have kept and tried to align at least some of their current resources in some grades and subjects**. They've done so for many reasons, including funding limitations, out-of-sync textbook adoption schedules, and lack of well-aligned alternatives. All have been aggressive, however, in confronting and reevaluating materials and assessments in light of the Common Core. (See *Transitioning and Aligning to the Common Core: Districts Reevaluate their Materials* in the sidebar.)

But relying on old materials fitted to prior standards can undermine the structural soundness of the curriculum's overall alignment to the Common Core—even if the district creates new maps and guides that revise and reorder lessons for better alignment. For example, many of the math curricula pre-dating the Common Core are "spiraling": Mathematics concepts are introduced and revisited each year. In contrast, the Common Core requires a "major work" focus in each grade with accompanying concepts to be introduced and taught to mastery

TRANSITIONING AND ALIGNING TO THE COMMON CORE: DISTRICTS REEVALUATE THEIR MATERIALS

» **Kenton County** district leaders judged the College Board's SpringBoard curriculum, now adopted in all secondary schools, as best-aligned to the Common Core from available secondary curricula in math and ELA. Teachers continue to engage in rewriting and supplementing units, and benchmarking the curriculum against the standards themselves and a district-provided Common Core curriculum map. At the elementary level, the district hasn't yet found a program worth investing in, so teachers are using the district curriculum map and a timeline for guidance as they select their own materials.

» **Metro Nashville** has adopted Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's *Journeys*, a single curriculum in elementary reading, which was vetted and approved for alignment by the Tennessee Department of Education. (Nearly 80 percent of Tennessee districts have adopted this same series.) The district will follow a similar process to adopt a new math series, again vetted for alignment by the state, during a 2014–2015 adoption process. Meanwhile, Nashville provides an elementary math curriculum guide, organized by the grade-level Common Core standards, that suggests lessons and topics from existing textbooks, as well as from state resources, such as the comprehensive TNCore website and the Tennessee Early Grades Math toolkit. Although the current math textbooks provide some lessons that can be repurposed, district staff and some teachers report that their current math textbooks do not support student mastery of the appropriate grade-level standards.

» **District 54** rebuilt its English and math curricula, starting with the standards. It developed learning targets and end-of-unit assessment questions modeled on PARCC sample items, and then found supportive activities and materials from existing textbooks or programs.

» In **Washoe**, Houghton-Mifflin *Reading* and *Everyday Mathematics* are used in the elementary schools and Holt *Mathematics* and Holt *Elements of Literature* are used at the secondary level. The district provides course guides, paced by units, to give teachers further guidance on using their textbooks and series. The district Office of Academics has completely rewritten the course guides to address the Common Core, identifying additional resources outside of current texts to support the grade-level standards. The district also provides access to materials from the Basal Alignment Project for H-M *Reading*, the Read-aloud Alignment Project in the early grades, and the Anthology Alignment Project in secondary grades—all national materials developed with contributions from Washoe teachers.

in just a few grade levels. Even well-led districts struggle mightily to utilize appropriately pre-Common Core resources, outside of pulling together a handful of problem sets that might be incorporated into today's lessons. Districts agree that they are struggling to identify content that can be repurposed to support the new standards. As one District 54 principal explained, "The material in the [old] book is too easy… if you're asking kids to look for… the main idea and in every text the main idea is in the first sentence, that's too easy."

It's also not clear that teachers won't revert to using old materials in the same, non-aligned sequences, particularly if alignment guides and curriculum maps are dense and complicated. There's also potential for misunderstanding of the deeper implications of curriculum alignment. For example, one elementary teacher in Washoe explained that teachers in her building just replaced the "story of the week" (in the old reading series) with the Basal Alignment Project "story of the week," without addressing the significant changes in questioning techniques and student assignments reflected in the Common Core.

Utilizing National Curriculum Alignment Tools

Since the final Common Core State Standards were released, technical and advocacy organizations and leading state education agencies have invested heavily in developing model units for Common Core instruction, curating video and multimedia libraries of materials, and honing rubrics to judge the quality of extant (and new) materials. Uptake of such offerings is not as widespread as their developers hope, though, and these states and organizations are frustrated by frequent reports that teachers and administrators still lack high-quality materials.

The early implementer districts draw only sometimes on externally developed rubrics and other tools to evaluate curricular materials, preferring to rely on internally developed measures. In revising the district rubrics for adoption of new vendor products, Washoe administrators consulted examples such as the Student Achievement Partners (SAP) Publishers' Criteria and the Achieve Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuIP) Rubrics. But the districts that have overhauled their curricula and rebuilt according to the standards (such as Kenton County and District 54) are engaging in their own process of judging whether each unit supports student success with the Common Core (as described above). Washoe educators did not report using external rubrics in these efforts.

"The early implementer districts draw only sometimes on externally developed rubrics and other tools to evaluate curricular materials, preferring to rely on internally developed measures."

The early implementers' experiences also suggest that teachers will use national tools, such as quality rubrics and sample lessons, when the materials actually support teacher learning of the standards. For example, in introducing teachers to the new standards, most of the districts used exemplar lessons, such as those published on state websites in New York (www.EngageNY.org) and Tennessee (www.TNCore.org). District 54, in particular, relied on EngageNY's math modules for training the team responsible for math curriculum redesign, primarily because the district's math and science director believed they represented a more effectively sequenced set of units than District 54's existing math curriculum.

As teachers begin to write their own lessons and gauge their own understanding of the Common Core, tools that facilitate lesson building are helpful. For example, teachers in the secondary grades in Kenton County use lesson-planning templates and shells from the Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative, and secondary teachers in Washoe County use the Student Achievement Partners guide to writing text-dependent questions for social studies classes.

Finally, as teachers implement the Common Core in their classrooms, they want useful rubrics that help them reflect on their practice (rather than evaluate their curriculum). These tools help them check whether their new knowledge about the Common Core is transforming their classroom work. Washoe teachers cited using the SAP Instructional Practice Guides to self-assess and discuss their instruction with colleagues. They use the Smarter Balanced Argumentative Writing rubric to assess questioning techniques. Kenton County principals share with teachers the SAP checklists for evaluating the quality of questions. In both cases, such rubrics were introduced after teachers had participated in Common Core-pertinent professional development and had implemented the standards for at least a year.

Professional Development: How are teachers and principals prepared for the changes of the Common Core?

The track record of professional development in American education is unimpressive, with billions of dollars spent on teacher learning each year and very little to show for it. This is far from the first (or hundredth) report to proclaim that professional development must be improved and that dollars dedicated to it must be spent more wisely. But "business as usual" in teacher professional learning won't do; the standards require too much fundamental change in what teachers teach. Put simply, the Common Core can't succeed without extensive, *very effective* professional development, for new and experienced teachers—delivered now, delivered well, and delivered at scale. Think of professional development as a car that not only needs major body work (updated delivery methods, repurposing of resources) but a new engine too (novel content delivered to teachers and administrators).

A number of teachers in the early implementer districts are clear about just how much the Common Core demands of their own content and skills knowledge, citing the following changes:

- Text- and evidence-based reading and writing now require them to spend multiple class periods or blocks on teaching a single text, demanding more time for planning (i.e., locating appropriate texts and primary sources), and development of more sophisticated lessons;
- The Common Core's emphasis on text complexity means that they must know how to support a struggling student who has difficulty mastering a challenging text;
- The standards' emphasis on going deeper in math concepts, versus "mile-wide-and-inch-deep" coverage, means teachers sometimes reach the limits of their own content knowledge; and
- The emphasis on conceptual understanding in math means they must be prepared to engage with and redirect various student interpretations of a math problem, ensuring that students both arrive at the correct answer and articulate *how* they got there.

Yet these teachers are not alone. Nationally, educators are struggling to make the instructional shifts reflected in the Common Core: Barely half (54 percent) of the educators who responded to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher say that teachers in their school focus "a great deal" on abstract and quantitative reasoning, or on assessing how point of view and purpose shape content and style of a text (51 percent).[11]

Most teachers' pre-service training didn't prepare them for the specific demands of the Common Core, leaving school districts to address these adult learning needs and skill gaps if the standards are to be implemented well. In the words of one Metro Nashville elementary teacher, "all our teachers feel like they're first-year teachers right now."

"The standards' emphasis on going deeper in math concepts, versus "mile-wide-and-inch-deep" coverage, means teachers sometimes reach the limits of their own content knowledge."

Professional development must go beyond basic workshops describing the Common Core standards at a macro level. Teachers need extensive opportunities to deeply understand, practice, revise, and practice again the changes in content and instruction reflected in the Common Core.[12] As one district instructional coach replied, "I've seen a lot of rollouts in other districts, and someone just telling you what the standards are isn't effective." Nationally, too many districts continue to rely on the fly-by workshop model: short-term and episodic bursts of training that are disconnected from the everyday practice of teaching. Researchers point out that these traditional models "operate under a faulty theory of teacher learning. They assume that the only challenge facing teachers is a lack of knowledge of effective teaching practices. However, research shows the greatest challenge for teachers…comes in *implementing* those strategies in the classroom."[13]

We know a lot about what the structure of professional development should look like—dozens of papers predating this analysis have described the outlines of the "reliable car"—but shed little insight into what the content, or the engine powering that car, should comprise, or how it can be evaluated for quality. This is especially true with the Common Core:

although states and districts nationally are grappling with the same challenges, no reliable arbiter exists to distinguish between high- and low-quality training. As these early implementers have sought to develop and deliver effective professional development, they have relied on good proxies for quality and alignment to the Core. They use tools developed by the primary authors of the new standards (in some cases, working directly with and learning from the authors), check their understanding against instruments developed by the assessment consortia, and, above all, return often to the standards themselves as the "source text" for their professional development content.

Although the early implementers have not—or not yet—reached effective professional development at scale for all district teachers, they do boast some promising strategies that help teachers implement instructional changes in their classrooms. The two primary structures they use as alternatives to the one-shot workshop model—instructional coaching and common planning time—are not new to the field. What *is* new is that they have been using both of these structures well—either prior to or concurrent with the introduction to the Common Core—which has set them up to address the challenging new standards relatively quickly and more effectively.

Instructional Coaching

For coaches to be successful, they must be at the center of a district's Common Core professional development strategy, not an add-on or a disconnected, pre-Common Core legacy. As Kenton County's superintendent notes, "To have [good instruction], you need good people to support and coach, because once teachers leave college, they're only getting what the district can provide…you need the best to provide that support. You can't have just anybody in those positions. In some districts they will reassign people to critical positions and that's not necessarily the best person for that position." Less-than-thoughtful assignment of staff as Common Core instructional coaches can cause real damage. Weak or insufficiently trained coaches have the potential to harm instruction by giving teachers mixed or even incorrect messages about the new standards.

By contrast, in these four districts, **the majority of the Common Core instructional coaches have been specifically selected for their skill in improving instruction—most having been drawn from the teaching ranks.** They've also been trained—and continue to train—extensively on Common Core content themselves.

The source of the coaches' training on the Common Core varies across districts. Metro Nashville, for example, has a strong relationship with the Tennessee Department of Education, which helps prepare the Nashville coaches via repeated trainings, monthly meetings, and materials. Kenton County's consultants have worked closely with the national Literacy Design Collaborative and Math Design Collaborative for multiple school years to build their own understanding of the Common Core. In District 54, coaches and curriculum specialists glean Common Core guidance from two literacy and math curriculum consultants trusted by the district.[15] More importantly, however, the District 54 coaches—and the teachers that comprise the "task forces" led by them—started early, spending a year deeply immersed in the substance of the standards before leading the rollout in classrooms.

> "The founders of CTP conducted extensive research and planning to equip them to lead Common Core implementation in their buildings; such preparation illustrates how teaching the standards requires deep, intensive professional development at scale."

Washoe, on the other hand, went straight to the source to obtain professional development content. The small group of teacher leaders who created the district's Core Task Project (CTP) at the grassroots level (not district-sponsored) has aided over 1,600 district teachers in learning and implementing the Common Core. How were they trained? They initially corresponded with Student Achievement Partners before bringing that organization's resources and speakers to their peers. Similar to District 54's coaches, they spent an entire school year studying the standards—in addition to their full duties as coaches and curriculum specialists. They watched videos of the Common Core authors explain the standards and engaged with sample written and multimedia materials from several sources (including the Chief Council of State School Officers, the National Governors Association, and the two state testing consortia, PARCC and Smarter Balanced). Then they took the best of what they had learned and developed *their own* training course

for teachers. The founders of CTP conducted extensive research and planning to equip them to lead Common Core implementation in their buildings; such preparation illustrates how teaching the standards requires deep, intensive professional development at scale.

The early implementer districts also go to great lengths to treat their successful coaches like rock stars. In Kenton County, for instance, the coaches are called "consultants," a name deliberately chosen by the deputy superintendent to signify their specific content expertise and their value-added role in school improvement. The consultants, along with the directors of elementary and secondary education and the director of professional development, form a team that goes by the moniker "CIA." Technically an acronym for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, the name CIA is also an intentional double entendre, alluding to the team members' status as expert data analyzers. (These individuals were recruited to the district as expert coaches.)

Likewise, District 54's assistant superintendent for student learning called the district's group of instructional coaches into action at the start of their implementation year by likening them to the Chicago team that won the 2013 National Hockey League championship. She passed out hockey pucks as a reminder that the coaches were the "Blackhawks of the district," and the team that would rally teachers and students to success with the Common Core.

Promoting individuals with deep Common Core expertise elevates the standards' importance in schools, and early implementers intentionally draw from the ranks of their instructional coaches to find next-generation school leaders. At least three instructional coaches in Kenton County have been promoted to principal positions. In 2013, six Metro Nashville coaches were hired as assistant principals before any other candidates were hired; the district director of elementary instruction reports that "there was a big fight over them." Early in the 2013–2014 school year, seven additional Metro Nashville coaches were under consideration for the assistant principal pool and likely to advance in these roles. In Washoe, district leaders recognized the talent and efficacy of the CTP teacher leaders in training their peers and tapped them to help design and lead district-wide professional development starting in the 2013–2014 school year.

IMPROVING COACHING QUALITY IN METRO NASHVILLE

Eager to provide support to help teachers improve, Metro Nashville in 2009 rolled out a network of 300 coaches for its 140 schools (prior to the rollout of the Common Core). In 2010, however, an external evaluation of the district's professional development program identified problems with the coaching quality. Without a formal selection process, stakeholders in the district complained of favoritism and low quality, and a separate correlation study of literacy coaches and literacy scores showed that the coaches were having almost no impact on student performance.

As a result, Nashville's superintendent and district leaders revamped the selection process, and, starting in 2011–2012, tightened standards for coaches with a new process for selecting and evaluating them. As new coaches came into the system, they were chosen and evaluated based on key responsibilities of the job: focusing efforts on instruction, leading change, developing accountability, building capacity, and growing professionally. Just as important, the district was also selective about which coaches it let go when the initial funding stream for coaching ended. (Coaches are now paid with Title I and II funding, allowing the program to continue year to year).

The coaches, who receive Common Core training directly from the Tennessee Department of Education, are the district's face of the standards at statewide meetings. They are central to the district's Common Core implementation plan, which relies on school-level delivery of professional development. District curriculum and instructional leaders are emphatic: "The coaches made the rollout of Common Core possible."

The district continues to refine its coaching standards, and the process for selecting and evaluating coaches, ensuring that it's conducted with fidelity as the district moves to school-based budgeting and gives principals additional control in selecting their staff. Encouragingly, the latest round of correlation studies (conducted in spring 2013) found a positive relationship between student outcomes and coaching, and the district is using the information to identify, replicate, and improve coaching practices.

Even with these successes, larger districts especially have encountered challenges in ensuring quality coaching across school buildings. Teachers and principals in Washoe, for example, describe major inconsistencies in the quality of coaching across their implementation specialists. Teachers and principals report that the stronger specialists help them analyze lesson plans and student work in the context of the new standards, while the weaker ones add little value at best, and spread misinformation at worst. Indeed, at least one teacher reported that the implementation specialist assigned to her building delivers inaccurate content about the standards. (See above, *Improving Coaching Quality in Metro Nashville*.)

Sustained Professional Development through Joint Planning

Like thousands of other schools and districts, many of the teachers in the early implementer districts have a recurring block of time set aside at least weekly for teachers to co-plan their lessons and reflect on results (in District 54 and Kenton County, these slots are district-decided and in place in every school). Unlike many other places, however, teachers in these districts use their time to focus relentlessly on instruction and the Common Core—not on administrative obligations. As one District 54 elementary principal describes, "Expectations have been set. Planning time is not to go over field trips. Teachers know that isn't the time to be talking about managerial things."

All of the districts use student writing and work samples as the basis for their collaborative work. Teachers also evaluate their instructional practice and associated outcomes. Teachers and administrators explain that dedicating time in this way means that teachers view co-planning as valuable professional learning and not just another distraction from their "real" work.

> "Teachers and principals report that the stronger specialists help them analyze lesson plans and student work in the context of the new standards, while the weaker ones add little value at best, and spread misinformation at worst."

Sufficient time for teacher reflection and collaboration has always been good school practice, but it takes on particular relevance for the Common Core. When districts and schools provide this time, teachers can actually use it to focus on the standards themselves, the extent to which current lesson plans support their goals (or need to be rejected or overhauled), and whether student work shows evidence of mastery of the standards. By contrast, many sets of previous state standards were much too lengthy to use as the basis for weekly planning and reflection. One secondary English teacher in Kenton County explains, "When I started teaching, we had two different documents: the state standards and what we actually tested. Now there's an app on my phone with the 10 [ELA Anchor] standards for speaking, listening, and reading."

Additionally, the conceptual mastery implicit in the Common Core shifts for math requires teachers to, in the words of a District 54 teacher, "think about what are the different solutions students might use to solve this [problem], and how are we going to redirect them, and what we will do if some groups get it and some don't." Teachers explain that it's nearly impossible to anticipate extensive classroom math dialogues without co-planning and testing ideas with their colleagues. And the joint planning structures serve as a good time to identify and remedy gaps in teacher content knowledge (also known as "just-in-time" professional development). A member of District 54's math curriculum task force—who received additional content training on the math standards as part of the curriculum redesign—describes helping her peers in the context of lesson planning: "There are parts where I've had to sit down with a team member to explain how this [math concept] works so they can teach it."

The Common Core is organized into the "major work of the grade" and the joint planning structures in Kenton County and District 54 reflect that. In other words, all third grade teachers sit down together to work through the third grade standards. This practice resonates with an emerging consensus around high-quality Common Core professional development: that teacher development on the standards should be delivered in grade bands or by subject areas.[16] Within the Core Task Implementation Project in Washoe, teachers meet across grade levels to ensure continuity from grade to grade. They frequently cite the importance of the "vertical staircase" (how respective grade-level standards build on those that occur both before and after them).

Frequency and effective use of planning time are the critical elements that make these joint planning structures worthwhile. Districts have bought into a culture of common planning around the Common Core, so they dedicate ample time to these structures and keep them focused tightly on instructional issues. District and school administrators have a "whatever it takes" attitude toward reallocating resources and altering contract provisions to support these efforts.

For example, District 54 and its local union affiliate wrote guidance into the district's most recent teacher contract to ensure that time in professional learning communities is focused on teaching and learning. Throughout the district, it's typical for a school-based planning team to meet twice a week for an hour each (a total of 120 minutes a week). In Kenton County,

principals coordinate classroom release time and pay for substitutes so that their teachers can observe the classrooms of the teachers with whom they co-plan. A Kenton County principal explains what this looks like in practice: "I've paid for people to go to other schools to watch. We have each grade level at each faculty meeting present strategies [for Common Core instruction] that are working for them. They can choose the topic. We got good feedback that this was real and relevant."

Assessment and accountability: How do these districts measure student success with the standards—and who is responsible?

Holding educators accountable for student performance on the Common Core will require improvements and changes in assessment measures and accountability systems at all levels—educator, district, and state. Early implementer districts still face challenges in fully aligning these systems with the standards. The assessment and accountability components of the Common Core may be the area where these districts—and the field in general—still have the furthest to travel. The reality is that these districts are currently implementing new standards without state summative assessments in place that will measure student performance on them. Thus, their teacher and school accountability systems cannot yet be linked to student achievement under the standards. Districts are working hard to make do and fill these gaps, but much policy and implementation work remains to be done.

“ For now, most educators and administrators in early implementer districts believe that their current summative tests are not good measures of student mastery of the Common Core and (in some cases) even detract from Common Core implementation. ”

State Summative Assessments

The development and selection of summative assessments is a choice made at the state, not district, level. And the lack of good summative measures makes effective implementation of the Common Core difficult in the immediate future—and impossible in the long term. The problem is twofold. First, misaligned assessments undermine the critical link between what is reported in accountability systems (summative assessment data, teacher evaluation data) and what the district purports to value (Common Core-aligned instruction, student success with the new standards). Second, without summative assessment data that measures student performance on the Common Core, districts lack information about whether their implementation strategies for the new standards are effective—or not—on a school- and district-wide scale.

For now, most educators and administrators in early implementer districts believe that their current summative tests are not good measures of student mastery of the Common Core and (in some cases) even detract from Common Core implementation.

In Illinois and Tennessee, state summative assessments (the ISAT and TCAP, respectively) have been at least partially aligned to the Common Core according to their state education agencies. Administrators and educators in Metro Nashville and District 54—who have gleaned the sample items—say that the partial alignment takes the form of moving concepts or skills to different grade levels and dropping some questions to match the sequence of the standards. These changes are positive steps toward ensuring that students are not tested on content that has not been taught, and are a reasonable approach for state leaders to take as they await completely new assessments. But teachers and administrators are concerned that the major Common Core shifts in teaching and learning (e.g., evidence from the text, applications of mathematical concepts) are not well reflected in their current state summative assessments.

Similarly, Nevada has revised its summative evaluations—Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) in grades 3–8—to include some Common Core items that count toward the students' scores.[17] The state also raised cut scores for proficiency. But Washoe teachers say frankly that they don't believe their students' CRT scores are well aligned to, or a good measure of, the Common Core. Kenton County administrators have a bit more faith in the K-PREP, the Kentucky state assessment that was overhauled after adoption of the new standards, subsequently unveiled as fully aligned to the Common Core, and first administered in 2011–2012.

Misaligned state tests undermine district efforts to emphasize the Common Core across subject areas. For example, teachers in Metro Nashville have been asked to integrate the standards for speaking, listening, reading, and writing into lessons for subjects outside of ELA. But Tennessee's summative assessments in social studies are based largely on previous state standards that encourage teachers to get through lists of "facts and figures." As one teacher explains, "When I look at my [previous Tennessee state] standards for geography, there's not a thing in there about discourse. I still have a TCAP that tests them on [that]… whether they know the capital of whatever."

The misalignment of summative assessments also creates significant anxiety for teachers around accountability systems. This is a major source of concern for teachers in Metro Nashville, where performance evaluation has been tied to value-added scores on the TCAP and used in the overhauled teacher evaluation system, per state law, as well as on school and district report cards. Leaders in Metro Nashville have been asking teachers to trust that good Common Core instruction will improve performance even on the previous, non-Common Core-aligned tests. Understandably, however, stress abounds for educators and principals as long as student growth on the TCAP is a component of their evaluation.

Because District 54, Kenton County, and Washoe do not have (or do not yet have) student growth-based teacher evaluation systems, educators in these districts report less concern about disconnects between summative assessments and Common Core-aligned instruction. In the words of one District 54 elementary teacher, "Our mentality is, forget about the [state summative] test…there is this big calm of 'do right by your kids and the content and you're fine.'" But eventually, student growth components on new teacher and principal evaluation systems will need to reflect the Common Core through aligned summative assessments. Otherwise, educators will continue to view these evaluation reforms as disjointed and disconnected from Common Core's mission of improving student learning.

> "Yet when asked about their states' plans for implementing the consortia assessments, staff across the early implementer districts did not express confidence that the tests would be ready on time or ultimately adopted and deployed by their states."

The need for better-aligned summative assessments is the driving force behind the two Common Core state assessment consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Illinois, Kentucky, Nevada, and Tennessee are all members of one or the other,[18] both of which promise full release of new assessment systems in the 2014–2015 school year (after field testing the previous year). Yet when asked about their states' plans for implementing the consortia assessments, staff across the early implementer districts did not express confidence that the tests would be ready on time or ultimately adopted and deployed by their states. A Metro Nashville curriculum administrator added that uncertainty about what the tests will look like is just as stressful as whether and when they will be ready and adopted: "We have not yet seen a full PARCC assessment, which is part of the problem [with teachers' anxiety about the transition]. With the TCAP, we have three predictive tests [that give teachers information about how students are likely to perform] but there are no predictors for PARCC."

District Formative Assessments

The early implementer districts are also eager for more frequent information about ongoing student performance, meaning better formative and diagnostic assessments aligned to the Common Core. Despite uncertainty about their states' adoption of new summative assessments, the districts are using PARCC and Smarter Balanced tools to benchmark and revise their formative assessments. For example, staff in District 54 and Kenton County use released PARCC sample items to build formative assessments and other curricular materials. Assessment administrators in Washoe use Smarter Balanced sample items in evaluating the alignment of district interim assessments.

In addition to "homegrown" district formative assessments, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is used in Washoe, District 54, and Kenton County. (MAP is a computer-based adaptive assessment available for English language arts and mathematics. More than 5,000 districts nationally use MAP to generate information on individual students' academic progress. MAP's publisher, Northwest Evaluation Association, recently released a version of the assessment that it describes as aligned to the Common Core, although that claim has not yet been independently validated.)

District 54 and Kenton in particular are committed to using MAP to gauge how students are performing and to hold schools and teachers accountable for student success—at least informally.[19] They have built a culture of goal setting and data monitoring using MAP. Students know the targets and receive feedback frequently on their performance, parents respect the results of the test as good measures of their kids' advancement, and districts, schools, and teachers are on the same page relative to their expectations for success. As one District 54 parent put it, "The thing that really caught parents' attention was MAP testing; you could see that they were tracking your child alone. That's been really important to me, and the kids know about their MAP scores and goals."

"The streamlined standards also mean that teachers can more easily articulate their students' deficits and competencies in a common language across grades and use that information to help each other improve."

The three districts have conducted internal checks of the recently updated MAP against the standards and consortia sample items. Though stakeholders in these districts value MAP, the test still lacks an external assessment of its Common Core alignment. Any misalignment between the MAP and next-generation Common Core assessments (like PARCC and Smarter Balanced) could cause a schism in the data-driven culture of these districts and may undermine educator, student, and parent buy-in for consortia-developed assessments.

Accountability Culture

In these districts, state teacher accountability systems are either not fully aligned to student performance on the Common Core (one district) or not yet based on student performance at all (three districts). Because of this disconnect, what we term a "culture of accountability"—among teachers and between each teacher and his or her administrator—becomes especially important.

Many of the teachers who participated in this research describe feeling accountable to their school leaders and their peers for developing and delivering Common Core-aligned instruction and for ensuring student success with the standards. For the most part, district administrators and teachers trust that principals recognize areas of weakness for individual teachers as well as across grades and in the building writ large. These building leaders communicate regularly with district staff and with coaches to get their teachers the training they need to improve. Across all four districts, most teachers openly acknowledge that they can't "close their doors and teach whatever they want."

Peer relationships have helped create greater accountability in Kenton County, District 54, and Washoe. Teachers there work together on lesson plans and reviewing student work. They say they are embarrassed to show up to meetings without examples and artifacts of Common Core-aligned instruction or without individual contributions to their teams' joint lesson planning.

The peer accountability culture that keeps teachers obligated to stay on schedule and help their pupils meet their targets isn't unique to the Common Core. Rather, it's the "reliable old car" of good school-level practice. But the new engine (Common Core content) is able to run smoother because it is supported by a professional culture that sees the value in accountability. For example, the vertical staircase[20] gives specificity to teachers' obligations to one another: teachers can quickly ascertain students' mastery of the previous year's standards in a way not possible with previous, more expansive standards. Three years into Common Core implementation in Kenton County, teachers report that they now see which kids come to them prepared or under-prepared because the standards are so much more cohesive (whereas broader state standards may not have built on material covered in the previous year). The streamlined standards also mean that teachers can more easily articulate their students' deficits and competencies in a common language across grades and use that information to help each other improve.

Part Two: Advice and Cautions for the Field

Though states must make many crucial decisions about Common Core, school districts (and charter and other independent schools) have the lion's share of the implementation responsibility. Although they are still learning and adjusting as they go, the experiences of these early adopters indicate that school districts must take forceful action on a number of fronts to transition effectively to the Common Core. Here are just four.

1. Districts should avoid the political tug-of-war over the Common Core, and get on to the hard work of helping parents understand the substance of the standards and what schools are doing to help kids meet them.

In these districts, teachers are the spokespeople—either by deliberate district design or because theirs are the voices that parents most trust (or both). A good parent engagement strategy can easily be undone by teachers and principals who communicate doubts or misgivings to parents. Conversely, a teacher who firmly believes that the Common Core is the right thing for students is a great line of defense for a concerned parent who wonders how to view the new standards.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: COMMUNICATE THE SUBSTANCE, NOT THE POLITICS.

District 54 keeps the Common Core dialogue strictly focused on instruction with parent materials that detail the academic expectations by grade level. The district encourages teachers to speak with parents about what the Common Core looks like in class. When parents hear misinformation about the Common Core—which occasionally happens in their suburban community—they discount outside sources and go straight to their teacher or principal with questions.

In other words, the experiences of the early implementers underscore that communication with parents about the Common Core hinges on effective school-level rollout. Their strategies recognize that most parent impressions of the new standards are most likely to start and end with their child's school, not a media campaign. Their examples suggest that districts should invest time and money in quality implementation up front, so that teachers and school leaders can communicate substantively about what students are learning and how it differs from previous standards.

These four districts also provide worthwhile models for communicating with parents on the academic substance, rather than the politics or rhetoric, of the Common Core. But some districts will doubtless require a more public-facing or full media campaign, particularly in communities where the new standards are especially embattled.

2. Bold action requires effective, knowledgeable leadership and focus at multiple levels.

Common Core implementation requires grand multitasking at the district level—the ability to understand which elements are interdependent and which should be sequenced when.

Wherever district leaders start in this ambitious reform, however, start they must. Although their Common Core implementation efforts are still works in progress, it's clear that these districts have taken forceful action on a number of fronts, including:

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: MAKE TIME FOR PRINCIPALS TO LEAD ON INSTRUCTION.

In Kenton County, principals and supporting administrators are expected to do fifty classroom visits (lasting fifteen to twenty minutes each) a week. That's 1,000 minutes—more than two full days—that administrators are required to spend in classrooms each week, looking for evidence of and giving feedback on Common Core-aligned instruction.

- supporting teacher understanding of the standards;
- vetting and rewriting instructional materials for alignment;
- reevaluating interim assessments to ensure that they produce useful data for teachers, administrators, and families; and
- marshaling administrative talent to support teachers in the work of instruction.

These four districts have proven willing to tackle implementation at the district-wide scale, by examining every Common Core-related component of their work and the efforts of many others impacted by the transition to the new standards.

All of this aggressive activity stems from district leaders who understand the multiple, deep, and concurrent changes in instruction as reflected in the Common Core. At the school level, most of these districts also have some recent history of hiring and promoting principals with instructional expertise. Their challenge now is to ensure that all their school leaders have sufficient grasp of the new standards to lead instructional change and to make the requisite administrative decisions about use of time and money that will support that change.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: HIRE COACHES AND PRINCIPALS WHO KNOW INSTRUCTION.

With 140 schools to reach, Metro Nashville realized it needed to dramatically change selection, training, and evaluation of instructional coaches as the front line on Common Core. As coaches' skills improved, Nashville began hiring them—more than a dozen so far have been hired or are under consideration—as assistant principals.

Nationally, by contrast, districts have traditionally valued in leaders management skills over expertise in instruction. But without knowledgeable leadership, the changes that the Common Core demands are likely to be glossed over or unaddressed.

3. Districts need to provide teachers with well-aligned curricular materials. This requires a *lot* of time, effort, and new material.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: ALLOCATE THE MAJOR RESOURCES—ESPECIALLY TIME AND PEOPLE—REQUIRED TO DESIGN A WELL-ALIGNED, TEACHER-ENDORSED CURRICULUM.

District 54 wrote a curriculum scope and sequence from scratch, and then treated existing textbooks as libraries in which they could find text selections, prompts, or problem sets that would support the learning targets within each unit—scrapping plenty of content from those textbooks along the way. They trained a cadre of teachers from each grade in each school, who drew from everything of quality available to them—including New York curricular modules (EngageNY) and PARCC sample items—to fill in lessons and activities. Together, the teachers and district curriculum specialists spent a year on this overhaul, the product of which is still being revised and improved with teacher feedback.

Implementing the Common Core is far more than just moving familiar concepts across grades and covering different content and skills—although the standards require that, too. Rather, teachers have turned many ingrained practices upside down in the early implementer districts. Multiple teachers described how their classroom-planning obligations had more than doubled as they prepared to teach a challenging math concept in far greater detail, or searched for multiple high-quality texts that would address the standards.

Given these demands on teachers, it's more imperative than ever for districts to offer them vetted, high-quality materials. Teachers can't just rely on their old worksheets and textbooks (even with new scope and sequence documents). Asking them to make a semester's or school year's worth of individual decisions about materials without some form of district support is not only frustrating for educators—it's unlikely to result in consistent implementation of the Common Core throughout the district.

Three of these four districts have so far worked with teachers to put in place full and overhauled curriculum for at least one subject area and school level (i.e., elementary or secondary). In all cases, this took significant resources—time, energy, and funds. It's beyond the scope of this report to evaluate the districts' curricula for alignment to the standards, and the district administrators and teachers agree that their curricula are still works in progress. Yet in the districts that most dramatically rewrote their materials (Kenton County and District 54), teachers can point to the instructional shifts they are making in their classrooms and how their new curricula support such key changes.

Further, these districts offer evidence that when teachers are given the opportunity to participate in crafting instructional materials, they are more likely than not to support a district-wide or central curriculum. Rather than decrying the lack of autonomy, all of the teachers interviewed for this research welcomed a district curriculum, as long as they and their peers

were engaged in its creation or selection. Having a common curriculum (assuming it is well designed) settles for them a nagging challenge: Do my materials for today, tomorrow, and the nine weeks after that support the Common Core?

The experiences of these districts raise an additional implication for the field. They have each mounted heroic efforts to create new curricula themselves in the absence of existing, high-quality alternatives. Their hunger for comprehensive, Common Core-aligned curricula underscore the critical need for reliable reviews of the quality and alignment of instructional materials.

4. The content of districts' professional development must focus on teacher understanding and application of the standards. Professional development structures must also support this focus.

The instructional changes reflected in the Common Core cannot be served through ineffective or low-quality professional development, which has historically been the status quo. Teaching training has, in many cases, been an expensive failure, and that same disheartening outcome still threatens the Common Core.

Yet for professional development to make an impact with the Common Core, teacher workshops, trainings, and guides have to address the content-knowledge gaps and skill deficits that perplex educators. And, as with curricular materials, professional development content must be truly aligned to the Common Core. The early implementer districts are rising to this challenge by going directly to the source—the standards themselves—to inform their curriculum writing. Rather than sign up with un-vetted professional development vendors, district leaders are wrestling with the primary-source documents to glean the original purpose and intent of the Common Core standards.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: FOCUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIGHTLY—AND REPEATEDLY—ON QUALITY COMMON CORE CONTENT.

Washoe has embraced the professional learning challenge, redesigning professional development so that teachers learn from the primary sources of the standards (e.g., video and other materials from the standards' authors and assessment consortia). The district is keeping the focus on translating teacher learning during professional development into classroom instruction. They've asked teachers to assess their own plans alongside the instructional practice guides provided by Student Achievement Partners (which helped to develop the Common Core State Standards) and to pilot an observation rubric aligned to the standards.

The structure of the professional development matters greatly. A promising model pairs instruction on the standards with follow-up, school-based coaching and extensive, repeated carve-outs of time for teachers to sit together and analyze student work and lesson plans. These approaches are consistent with what teachers know to be good professional development, so teachers and administrators value them. More importantly for the implementation of the Common Core, however, these structures have proven useful to teachers in learning about, applying, and then adjusting their practices to reflect the instructional shifts in the CCSS.

The use of time and tight focus on the standards has helped make professional development relevant to teachers' implementation of the Common Core in their districts. Many educators believe their training has helped them learn to cover fewer topics with greater rigor and depth, to design and facilitate class discussions with the text at the center, and to differentiate support to help low-level readers master complex texts. The enthusiasm of these teachers reflects their districts' strong commitment to revise professional development structures and consistently monitor and improve delivery of Common Core content.

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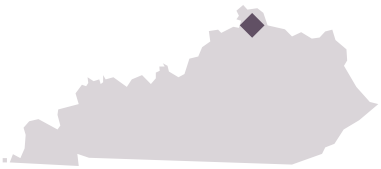
We are encouraged by these districts, which are looking hard at their existing practices, policies, and structures to ensure that they're delivering the right content and measuring the right targets to support the Common Core authentically. Each still has miles to travel before all their pupils come close to mastering the new standards. All need to stay focused on the alignment of their curricula, as well as on the capacity of their principals and instructional coaches to sustain teacher learning and improvement. For now, however, their efforts, challenges, and early victories provide worthwhile insights for other districts, state leaders, national organizations, funders, and experts eager to secure the promise of the Common Core through the challenging phase of initial implementation.

Although Common Core has now exited the starting gate, its potential impact for American students is hardly assured. The road ahead requires not only persistence with the new standards, but also a fundamental rethinking of our education status quo, particularly when it comes to instructional materials, assessments, and professional development. The success of the Common Core—and the promise of college- and career-readiness for all students—demand it.

Part Three:
District Case Studies

The Trailblazer

KENTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



Now in its fourth year of Common Core implementation, Kenton County School District in northern Kentucky has made aggressive strides in integrating the new standards into its classrooms. The district supports secondary teachers with rich curricular resources that help them make the transition. By contrast, the lack of a common curriculum at the elementary level continues to be highly problematic for teachers in the early grades. At all grade levels, content specialists who deliver ongoing, school-based professional development have been an essential investment for teacher understanding of the new standards. Also critical are district-mandated "learning walks," or informal observations, which require significant time from principals, but help to inform district-wide monitoring of Common Core implementation in every classroom.

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State and District Context

In 2009, sweeping reform legislation in Kentucky's Senate Bill 1 (S. B. 1) created systemic changes in the state's education system and led to early adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Kentucky's embrace of the new standards represented an effort to improve its historically lackluster education performance. The state was the first in the nation to implement the Common Core statewide, doing so in 2010–11 with strong support from state leaders, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and the Prichard Committee (a statewide education advocacy group). The following year, it launched the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) statewide assessment system (see timeline below). Kentucky is a participant in the multi-state PARCC assessment consortium (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and also administers the ACT in high school. As of January 2014, the state has yet to make a final decision about the assessments it will use in the 2014–15 school year.

KENTON COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

14,165 students

K–12: 11 elementary schools; 4 middle schools; 4 high schools, 6 three-year innovation and technology academies (operated within the high schools)

37.9% free- and reduced-lunch eligible

2.4% limited English proficient

3.2% Hispanic; 90.2% white; 1.4% Asian; 2.2% African American; 2.9% multiracial

Northern Kentucky/suburban Cincinnati-area district

The state is also pursuing major reforms in the areas of accountability and teacher quality. In 2013–2014, the state is piloting new teacher and principal evaluation systems designed to align to the Common Core. The evaluation systems will be fully implemented in the 2015–2016 school year, alongside a new district and school report card that tracks college-and career-readiness indicators. Most of the $41 million in Race to the Top funds, which Kentucky won in December 2011, will go to support the implementation of these new accountability and assessment systems.

Kenton County School District is located in northern Kentucky, but its proximity to Cincinnati (about twelve miles away) makes it a commuter town for that Ohio city. The district is one of the earliest implementers of the Common Core in an already early-implementing state. Shortly after the release of the new standards in summer 2010, Kenton County began supporting and encouraging secondary teachers to pilot the Common Core in their classrooms, and moved to full implementation in all grades and schools the following school year.

Table 1. Kentucky CCSS Implementation Timeline

2009–10	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
S. B. 1 mandating new assessment and accountability system became law in 2009; in February 2010, Kentucky adopted the Common Core; continued use of the ACT test as the state's college- and career-ready (CCR) assessment	Full implementation of CCSS statewide; launch of K-PREP statewide	K-PREP assessment administered for second year; state adopted new school report card with new data relative to college- and career-readiness, accountability, and assessment scores	K-PREP administered for third year	PARCC assessments come online: at that time, Kentucky will determine whether the PARCC final assessments meet the assessment requirements of S. B. 1.; until then, the state plans to continue using the ACT as the CCR assessment

When statewide scores dropped after adopting the more rigorous (and Common Core-aligned) K-PREP assessment in 2011–2012, Kenton County's did as well; since then, however, student scores in the district have been on the rise. Under the state's new accountability system (also introduced in 2011–2012), the district's overall college- and career-ready accountability score increased about five points (out of one hundred) between the 2011–2012 school year and the 2012–2013 school year, placing Kenton County at the 84th percentile for performance among districts in the state. As of the 2013–2014 school year, most of the district's schools moved into the proficient or progressing categories, and the district expects that its few remaining focus schools will move up in within the next two school years. Kenton County officials will look at the third year of performance on the K-PREP to determine whether this rise in performance—concurrent with its Common Core implementation efforts—is in fact a pattern of growth.

Politically, early and strong support from the business community and education advocates, such as the Prichard Committee, have thus far helped head off serious political challenges to implementation at the state or district level. While Kentucky is not immune to efforts to dismantle the Common Core, the district has been quite proactive in its communication with parents and the public. The superintendent routinely appears on local media outlets to discuss the new standards and district administrators use social media, newsletters, and parent meetings to communicate with parents about the Common Core.

Detailed Research Findings

Teachers and administrators in the secondary schools in Kenton County cite their curriculum as a critical resource in helping them to make the instructional shifts reflected in the Common Core standards. The secondary curriculum is a district-developed curriculum map and pacing guide heavily supported by lessons and materials from the College Board's SpringBoard program. Although elementary teachers have district maps and guides, they are clearly challenged by the lack of a complete set of common curricular materials—as is the district. The time and effort needed to provide support across eleven different curricula at eleven different elementary schools stretches resources thin.

All middle and secondary schools in Kenton County use a common curriculum for ELA and math that has been adopted and revised for alignment to the Common Core. That curriculum is comprised of a district-developed curriculum map and pacing guide, paired with lessons and materials from the College Board's SpringBoard program. By contrast, elementary schools do not have a single, Common Core-aligned curriculum, though the district provides supports (including a map and pacing guide, as well as coaching) to help elementary teachers adjust their instructional materials to support the new standards.

> "SpringBoard's publisher, the College Board, touts the program as fully aligned to the Common Core. However, district leaders in Kenton County say that SpringBoard provides a "good first step" toward an aligned curriculum...but that the materials still require supplemental texts and lessons to support the new standards wholeheartedly."

Kenton County organized an inclusive process for curriculum development. Teachers helped create elementary and secondary curriculum maps that describe the standards to be taught in each unit, learning targets for each grade level, and a pacing guide that includes a timeline for teaching the units. Teachers and administrators report that all teachers were involved in creating the curriculum maps and district assessments through work within their common planning structures. These materials are also reviewed annually by administrators and lead teachers for quality and alignment to the Common Core. A number of educators report that these district-wide curriculum maps and assessments create greater coherence across grades; students now come to them much more prepared for the next level of work under the standards, and teachers are better able to identify gaps in student understanding.

The district's elementary and secondary schools diverge, however, in the texts and materials used to buttress each standard. At the secondary level, all district middle and secondary schools have adopted SpringBoard, a College Board pre-advanced placement curriculum. The district-wide curriculum maps for secondary grades include SpringBoard-suggested materials to be used and recommendations for activities, as well as lessons developed by Kenton County teachers (see Appendix for an example of a secondary math curriculum map). By contrast, at the elementary level, multiple textbooks are in use across schools and the elementary curriculum map does not reference specific texts or materials. To maintain some coherence across elementary and secondary grade levels in spite of the curricular divergence, the district developed common assessments that align to both the elementary and secondary curriculum maps.[1]

Additional detail on which materials are in use and how they were adopted follows.

- **Curriculum adoption throughout the district:** In Kenton County, site-based school councils choose curricular materials and set policies for instructional practices—such as mandating instructional block scheduling, or the use of particular reading strategies—for each school.
- **Selection of SpringBoard for the middle and high schools:** Kenton County administrators selected and encouraged the adoption of SpringBoard materials for English language arts and mathematics in the high schools and, later, in middle schools. SpringBoard's publisher, the College Board, touts the program as fully aligned to the Common

Core. However, district leaders in Kenton County say that SpringBoard provides a "good first step" toward an aligned curriculum—especially with its emphasis on problem solving, academic language, and text analysis—but that the materials still require supplemental texts and lessons to support the new standards wholeheartedly.

- **Adoption of SpringBoard at the middle and high schools:** Once the district identified SpringBoard as a promising Common Core-aligned program, administrators went to each secondary school council to ask them to approve it. To encourage adoption, the district first offered a carrot—the district would pay for the materials and training. Then came the stick—any schools that elected not to adopt SpringBoard would be required to create a Common Core-aligned curriculum themselves (complete with assessments and materials). As a result, in 2010–2011, all of the middle and high schools in the district adopted the SpringBoard program.
- **Supplementing SpringBoard:** As teachers and administrators worked with the SpringBoard curriculum, they recognized the need to adjust, rewrite, and further supplement the program. They began to use materials from Student Achievement Partners (SAP) and from the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC)[2] to supplement SpringBoard content and adjust the sequencing of lessons within their curriculum maps. The district supports teachers in rewriting and refining lessons, and maintains online wiki pages for each subject area, where teachers publish and share their curriculum revisions.[3]
- **Multiple, pre-Common Core textbooks in use at the elementary level:** At the elementary level, district-wide maps and pacing guides are in use but are not supported by a single textbook or program. To date, district leaders report that they haven't found a program they believe to be well-aligned with the Common Core for the elementary grades—even a program that provides a promising foundation for revisions, as does SpringBoard—and that they do not want to invest major funds in an ill-aligned ELA or math program. As a result, individual elementary schools operate with different textbooks and curricula that must be supplemented in different ways to support the new standards.

Though they lack a shared, Common Core-aligned curriculum, elementary teachers do receive district support to align their curricular materials. Three district "consultants" (content specialists) work with them to supplement the guides with instructional materials, pulling from what is available in their schools and online (such as resources from the Basal Alignment Project).[4] But consultants who serve the district's eleven elementary schools report that they sometimes struggle to keep up with all of the different needs and contexts for these schools and feel stretched thin. Unlike their secondary counterparts, elementary teachers convey that their collaborative lesson planning and evaluation of materials happens within, not across, schools, because textbooks differ across schools. And while principals work hard to provide common planning time, the level of support at the elementary level appears uneven.

> "The time and effort needed to provide support across so many schools may result in much shallower support for elementary teachers compared to their secondary counterparts, leading to fragmented or poor implementation in the early grades."

Kenton County's lack of good options for a single, well-aligned curricular program at the elementary level reflects the broader field's lack of vetted, nationally recognized Common Core programs. It also poses problems for deepening educator understanding of the standards at the elementary level. The time and effort needed to provide support across so many schools may result in much shallower support for elementary teachers compared to their secondary counterparts, leading to fragmented or poor implementation in the early grades.

Kenton County's investments in professional development are helping teachers make the instructional shifts required by the Common Core. The deliberate use of internal content specialists or "consultants" to deliver site-based professional development across all schools provides a consistent and unified focus on the content of the standards. The choice to invest heavily in content experts creates a valuable resource for the district, but raises questions of sustainability and turnover. The district has also invested in a collaborative team structure, supported by content specialists, to improve teachers' application of the standards in the classroom.

Kenton County has organized its professional learning to focus on understanding and practicing the instructional shifts required by the Common Core.[5] Consultants and building administrators provide most of the school-level coaching and leadership for the Common Core. The district's literacy consultant was hired in 2006, and the math and science/STEM consultants were hired in 2008. Selected for their strong content expertise, the consultants were trained on the Common Core through the district's membership in the LDC and MDC (see Appendix for descriptions of both), and continue to receive training on the Common Core through national conferences led by Student Achievement Partners and others.

Paid directly by the district out of a mix of the general operating budget and some Title I and Title II funds, consultants are full-time district employees. They spend their time in school buildings developing and facilitating trainings, and supporting individual teachers with curriculum planning, modeling instruction, analyzing student work, and creating assessments. Although they collaborate daily with administrators as well as teachers, consultants do not evaluate educator performance. They have been trained and certified to teach the SpringBoard curriculum used in the middle and high schools and to represent the district at PARCC trainings and other state meetings. Using consultants in this way helps the district keep its teachers and administrators in classrooms working directly with students, and develops a set of content experts—conversant with both standards and curriculum—who are available to all teachers in the district. However, this model also has significant drawbacks: the district loses its investment when turnover occurs, and replacing such expertise and familiarity is difficult.

LEARNING WALKS

An informal but organized visit to classrooms to see how teachers teach and students learn. Learning walks focus on specific instructional activities and generally conclude with a reflective activity or discussion for observers to compare or calibrate their observations.

Kenton County has also made collaborative teams a key part of its strategy to improve teacher practice. Consistent with the district's site-based decision-making model, each school decides how often teacher teams will meet and the organization of the teams varies. Elementary and middle school teams meet in grade-level and content bands, and high school teachers meet in departments or course-specific teams. Irrespective of the structure, however, teachers, administrators, and consultants independently report that the teams are tightly focused on Common Core instruction. Teachers analyze student work and plan lessons or units together using MDC or LDC guidance. Teachers and administrators stress that the emphasis on collaboration holds them accountable to one another. They also believe that sharing the work of redesigning and planning lessons, changing their classroom practices, and monitoring student achievement is critical, and they couldn't make these changes independently. As one district leader explained, "[The teachers] have realized they have to lean on each other for this [transition]. Those that aren't choosing to be part of the team are sinking. There's just no way to encompass and plan for...the standards by yourself."

Kenton County mandates frequent formative assessments of teacher practice in the form of administrator "learning walks." These learning walks illustrate the challenges of ensuring Common Core-aligned instruction in every classroom. They require major investments of principal time, plus prowess in instructional leadership. Another challenge? Kenton County developed and refined its own instrument for assessing fidelity to the Common Core standards in classrooms—and subsequently had to defend its choice to the state, which had its own (somewhat similar) measure.

As part of its strategy to align teacher practice to the Common Core, Kenton County requires that administrators conduct classroom observations and "learning walks" (see sidebar above) that enable them to see what is happening in classrooms and understand exactly where teachers need support. Starting with the 2013–2014 school year, building administrators must conduct fifty walks per week in their schools. Learning walks must be fifteen to twenty minutes each, focus on observing instruction, and include a "feedback conversation" with the teacher after the walk. District leaders are asking principals or other building administrators to be in classrooms at least sixteen hours—more than one-third of their time—each week. This is an enormous shift in focus for principals, who, prior to this policy, didn't spend nearly as much time in classrooms conducting observations.[6]

The learning walks demand not only time, but also serious skill to recognize and improve Common Core-aligned instruction. Kenton County has been laying the groundwork for this change in instructional leadership since it began

implementing the Common Core. Almost all the new principal hires in elementary schools have a background in coaching or consulting. They bring with them experience in instructional leadership and knowledge of the Common Core and related instructional shifts, augmented by the district through intensive administrator training. At the same time, many principals are young, at the beginning of their careers, and filled with enthusiasm for the work. District leaders acknowledge the long hours and weekends that principals put in to get the job done. Although district leaders are excited about the changes they see in principals' ability to recognize Common Core elements in classrooms and to have targeted, instructional conversations with teachers, it is questionable whether the demand on principal time and capacity can be sustained.

> "District leaders are asking principals or other building administrators to be in classrooms at least sixteen hours—more than one-third of their time—each week."

Though the walks are separate from formal teacher evaluations, principals use the same evaluation rubric for informal reviews and coaching. The Kenton County Professional Practice Rubric (PPR), originally developed in 2005–2006 by the district's teachers' association, is based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching and has since been customized with language from the LDC and MDC initiatives to ensure better alignment to the Common Core. Because teachers requested that the district's evaluation and coaching systems be combined, administrators now use the PPR as the primary observation form for both formal evaluations and learning walks.

Starting in 2013–2014, the district directors of elementary education and secondary education are also required to conduct two learning walks per week in schools, accompanied by the principal. These jaunts help the directors and principals calibrate what they are seeing in the classrooms with the specific requirements in the PPR. "Really those walks are practicing what we've learned in district CIA [curriculum, instruction, assessment] meetings," one district leader explained. "We're talking about what good instruction looks like with our leaders, but it's learning for principals and teachers. We get a snapshot of what is happening in all schools across the district." Principals and district leaders use the information to direct targeted supports to teachers and schools as needed, including extra coaching or additional resources.

Both because their PPR predates the state's newly developed teacher evaluation system and observation rubric, *and* the district's educators and administrators are already invested in their own rubric, Kenton County leaders requested a waiver from the requirement to use the state's rubric.[7] The district will adopt all of the other components of the state's new evaluation system, including the student growth component, but wants to use its own customized observation rubric (the PPR). Before making its final decision, the state asked that Kenton County provide a qualitative analysis and comparison of the two rubrics, which it did. The state has not rendered its decision as of this writing.

> "Districts like Kenton County already have processes and tools for evaluating Common Core-aligned instruction in place, and local educators feel strong ownership of these tools, which were largely created with their input. States may have to tread lightly in order not to frustrate or disenfranchise those who sprinted out of the implementation gate."

This issue highlights a common difficulty that early implementers and their states face: how to leverage the work of the early implementers while building common systems across the state. Districts like Kenton County already have processes and tools for evaluating Common Core-aligned instruction in place, and local educators feel strong ownership of these tools, which were largely created with their input. States may have to tread lightly in order not to frustrate or disenfranchise those who sprinted out of the implementation gate. As Kentucky and Kenton County move through this waiver conversation, the state-local balance that they negotiate will be instructive for other states and districts grappling with similar issues.

Summary of Findings

Kenton County school district offers an encouraging look into the future for many districts embarking on the Common Core path: now in their fourth year of implementing the standards, teachers in the district describe the new standards as the basis for all their instruction. They are both supported in and held accountable for delivering instruction that reflects the Common Core shifts through significant investment in coaching, instructional leadership, and classroom observation tools. Even four years in, however, Kenton County is still contending with knotty implementation challenges. These include balancing new teacher evaluation requirements with formative feedback on instruction and ensuring that all teachers—especially those in the elementary grades—have sufficient access to a Common Core-aligned curriculum.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Kenton County

Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials	◆ In 2007, the district received a grant to join the Gates Foundation-funded Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Math Design Collaborative (MDC) in middle and high school (and has since expanded this program to fifth grade). LDC modules are incorporated into social studies and science to meet the CCSS literacy requirement in those subjects (see Appendix for description of LDC and MDC frameworks). ◆ Middle and high schools use the College Board's SpringBoard curriculum for English language arts and math, revised and re-sequenced to align to the CCSS. Elementary schools do not use a common curriculum. ◆ The district (with input from state content experts and local teachers) created a CCSS-aligned curriculum map and pacing guide that incorporates all of the standards and gives learning targets by grade level. Intentionally, there are no references to specific texts at the elementary level, but the secondary map refers to the SpringBoard curriculum used by all middle and high schools. The map is posted on a wiki site for teachers to access easily. Timelines are revisited every year to check for alignment. ◆ Supplemental materials are drawn from Student Achievement Partners (SAP), the Basal Alignment Project (which has developed text-dependent questions), or from teacher-developed materials on online wiki sites for each subject. ◆ Teachers, consultants (content experts), and district curriculum leaders use LDC/MDC frameworks and materials from SAP's www.achievethecore.org website to determine the quality of instructional materials and their alignment to CCSS. ◆ Site-based school councils determine the curriculum for each site. These decisions vary by individual school. ◆ The district worked with elementary teachers to create a new standards-based report card for kindergarten and grades 1–3. These were implemented in 2012–2013. All other grades continue to use the report cards that have been in place for years.
Use of CCSS-aligned Formative and Interim Assessments	◆ The district administers common formative assessments in all grades. District content specialists write the assessments with input from teachers, and exams are based on the district's curriculum guide and timeline. Consultants and principals review these regularly to track student performance and to check for continued alignment to CCSS. ◆ MAP assessments are administered three times per year across the district in grades 1–10 for diagnostic purposes. Teachers use MAP to set learning goals with students. ◆ Formative assessments are built into the LDC, MDC, and SpringBoard curricula. ◆ All students take the K-PREP, the CCSS-aligned state assessment. The district now has two years of K-PREP data so it can begin looking for trends in student performance with the CCSS. ◆ High school juniors take the ACT test, as mandated by state policy. ACT may be replaced by the PARCC assessment, but the state has not yet made a decision to adopt PARCC. It is unclear whether the state will replace the K-PREP test with PARCC.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Kenton County (cont'd)	
Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	◆ The state's Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) for teachers uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching and includes a student survey and a student growth component. Kenton County is requesting a waiver from the state to be able to use its own version of the Danielson framework, which the district adapted locally and has been using for three years. The district's current evaluation system includes its version of the Danielson rubric, teacher self-reflections, observations, and professional growth plans. Student growth is not currently a part of teacher evaluations in Kenton County. To date there has been no decision from the state. ◆ In 2013–2014, two district principals will participate in the state's pilot of PGES for principals, a rubric-based system with seven performance standards. The PGES for principals includes a student growth component and data from the Kentucky Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey reflecting teacher perspectives on working conditions. PGES will be fully implemented for teachers and principals in 2015–2016. ◆ District leaders, consultants, principals, and teachers use "learning walks" to monitor Common Core implementation. Principals are required to observe classrooms fifty times per week. District supervisors are required "to walk" twice a week. Teachers are given opportunities for peer observation and learning walks during collaborative time. ◆ Consultants and principals use evidence from teacher work, student work, and formative assessments to monitor and support implementation.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	◆ Collaborative teams are in place in middle and high schools, although the structure varies depending on the school. Elementary school teachers are provided with common planning periods. Principals also give teachers common planning time during faculty meetings. ◆ Most district professional development is designed and conducted by district-paid consultants, who provide school-based support through on-site training, observation, and coaching for teachers and administrators. The consultant role is non-evaluative. Consultants also attend the state regional instructional support network meetings and other national trainings (SpringBoard, PARCC, etc.). ◆ Principals participate in collaborative teams within their schools and also attend a weekly principals' meeting and a weekly curriculum and instruction meeting. ◆ The district keeps records on professional development participation at the school level. If a school is not performing (based on test scores) and is not participating in professional development to address problem areas, district leaders will intervene. ◆ Each summer the district hosts a three-day Professional Growth Academy with hundreds of offerings developed by consultants. Modules offered at the Academy are designed to align to CCSS.
Communication and Buy-in	◆ District leaders send a consistent message to educators and the public that the Common Core supports the overarching district goal of college- and career-readiness for all students. The focus of communication is on rigorous instruction and CCSS support of such instruction. ◆ Kenton County leaders use public radio, local TV, local newspapers, social media, district and school websites, and blogs to communicate about the CCSS. The superintendent has appeared on local TV and in newspapers talking about the CCSS.

Appendix: Excerpt From Kenton County's Customized and Annotated Springboard Curriculum

MATH SPRINGBOARD CURRICULUM MAP – COURSE 3

Curriculum Map Year At-A-Glance

Total Days: 157.5

APPROXIMATE DATES	DURATION	UNIT	INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS
8/14-10/2	32	Unit 1	Patterns and Numerical Relationships
10/3-11/8	24	Unit 2	Expressions, Equations, and Inequalities in One Variable
11/9-2/21	57	Unit 3	Equations and the Coordinate Plane
2/22-4/4	27.5	Unit 4	Proportional Relationships
4/5-5/9	17	Unit 6	Three-Dimensional Geometry

Please read this before looking through the map: The "approximate dates" include a few non-instructional days to help plan for field trips, MAP testing, Explore testing, shortened schedule days, etc. Any highlighted sections under the "SpringBoard Activities" columns need close attention. They include added sections from other courses, deleted sections, and Mathematics Design Collaborative tasks, added fluency practice or anything that is a change to the flow of the book. There are many references to "the Wiki."

Unit 1: Patterns and Numerical Relationships

Duration: 32 Days • Approximate Dates: 8/14-10/2

UNIT OVERVIEW	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	ACADEMIC VOCABULARY	ALGEBRA/AP/COLLEGE READINESS
In previous courses, students have learned to investigate patterns, apply number and operation procedures to specific situations, and analyze solutions as reasonable or unreasonable. This unit expands upon fundamental and procedural aspects of number and operations through contextual applications of pattern investigation, laws of exponents, decimal and fraction operations, scientific notation, and properties of rational and irrational numbers.	How are fractions, percents and decimals related? Why is it important to understand the procedures for working with different kinds of numbers?	◆ power ◆ reciprocal ◆ scientific notation	Unit 1 builds a deeper student understanding of number and operations and expands to concepts of arithmetic and geometric sequences, inverse, limits, and infinity by: ◆ Allowing students to explore and explain patterns involving both arithmetic and geometric sequences. ◆ Using manipulatives in a contextual situation to introduce students to the concepts of limits and infinity. ◆ Modeling the concept of inverses through analysis of patterns and multiple representations. ◆ Encouraging students to communicate about mathematics and explain solutions both verbally and in written sentences. ◆ Giving students opportunities to analyze data and make predictions about further applications.

SPRINGBOARD ACTIVITIES	DURATION	CONTENT FOCUS	COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES	COMMENTS
1st Day Activity- MDC Chicken Nuggets AND Administrative/Procedural/ Expectations Related Items	3 days total			Materials ◆ Copies of MDC "Chicken Nuggets"- On Wiki
Getting Ready Assignment Unpack Unit 1- EA1 Patterns and Exponents (EDITED Version)-On wiki	.5 day			Getting Ready Assignment can be worked in as homework or warm-ups. There is not class time built into the map for this.
SKIP 1.1				
1.2 Properties of Exponents (INVESTIGATIVE) Then complete Algebra I	4 days	◆ Laws of exponents	8.NS.1-Supporting 8.EE.1-Major 8.EE.3-Major 8.EE.4-Major	**Possible HW or Enrichment:** Math Shell Center Task- 'Apprentice' task: "A Million Dollars"
Unit 1-EA1 Patterns and Exponents (EDITED)-On wiki Formative Quiz over 1.2 and 1.4 (Course2)-Self Created	1 day 1 day	◆ Laws of exponents	8.EE.1- Major	

LITERACY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE[8]

The Literacy Design Collaborative, a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, offers an instructional system for developing the college- and career-ready levels of reading, writing, and thinking called for by the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History, Social Studies, and Science & Technical Subjects. This Framework document establishes the technical specifications for that instructional system for use by current and potential LDC partners.

The LDC Framework offers a common "language"—in the broadest sense—useful for capturing and sharing instructional expertise. At the same time, the Framework takes a minimalist approach, holding the system together with a lean model while being clear enough to give users a framework for building out their own instructional choices. The LDC Framework consists of these items:

- **LDC Template Task Collections**, providing approved, partially built task templates with scoring rubrics, all aligned to the Common Core State Standards.
- **LDC Module Specifications**, spelling out requirements and options for designing LDC Modules and using LDC template tasks. LDC modules consist of four sections in which educators engage to design Common Core-aligned assignments they will teach:
  - » **Section 1: What task?** What tasks set clear, rigorous goals for learning?
  - » **Section 2: What skills?** What skills do students need to succeed on the teaching task?
  - » **Section 3: What instruction?** How will you teach students to succeed on the teaching task?
  - » **Section 4: What results?** How good is good enough?
- **LDC Terminology**, defining the required terms and definitions used by LDC.
- **Jurying Rubric for LDC Tasks and Modules**, specifying the criteria that make tasks and modules exemplary and "good-to-go," as well as the features that qualify modules as being works-in-progress. Only work that meets the requirements of the LDC Module Specifications is eligible for jurying.

For more information, see the *1.0 Guidebook to LDC*, available at www.ldc.org. Ultimately, the LDC Framework is pragmatic in its purpose: literacy skills are so important in the lives of students that they must be intentionally and frequently taught. If students are to acquire and refine their ability to use language as readers, writers, and speakers to achieve their personal and professional goals, literacy instruction must become the staple of all instruction. LDC aims to assist teachers in the core disciplines and beyond by meeting them partway in the effort to deliver quality literacy instruction in classrooms. It is teachers and our partners who bring their expertise to the crafting of a completed teaching task and its module. Accordingly, LDC views teachers as co-designers in transforming LDC templates into quality teaching tasks and modules.

MATHEMATICS DESIGN COLLABORATIVE[9]

The Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC), a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides schools with instructional tools needed to help teachers understand and implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other rigorous standards effectively, while allowing teachers the flexibility to select topics and adapt assignments to their specific instructional plans. MDC helps teachers embed the new standards into instruction and engage students in assignments that address math understanding.

MDC uses formative assessment lessons (FALs) to engage students in a productive struggle that builds fluency with their procedural skills, and deepens mathematical reasoning and understanding. Students participate in both individual and group learning as teachers use FALs and questions to check for students' math understanding and correct common misunderstandings. Rather than following predetermined steps to find an answer (the "GPS" approach), students are supported to deepen their math reasoning to solve problems.

Formative Assessment Lessons

Central to MDC are sets of FALs. The FALs are aligned to the CCSS and other rigorous standards and are designed to be embedded within courses. The FALs represent a major innovation in teaching and learning math by:

- Focusing on student understanding of math concepts
- Allowing students to have a productive struggle and make sense of math concepts
- Assisting teachers in determining what changes in content and instructional strategies are needed to allow students to master rigorous standards
- Engaging students in reasoning and increasing their ability to think through math problems

Endnotes

1. Separate from the statewide K-PREP, Kenton County has used its own district interim assessments since 2008–2009, and recently revised them to align to the Common Core. Revisions included re-sequencing concepts to match when they are taught according to the CCSS, retooling questions to ensure they are related to standards-based content, and revising multiple choice options to be more rigorous.

2. More information on the Math Design Collaborative is available at http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/LearningMathDesignCollaborative and on the Literacy Design Collaborative at http://www.ldc.org/. Please also see the Appendix for descriptions of the two initiatives.

3. A *wiki* is a web application that allows people to add, modify, or delete content in a text in collaboration with others.

4. The Basal Alignment Project is a national, collaborative initiative coordinated by Student Achievement Partners, a national nonprofit organization founded by the primary writers of the Common Core State Standards.

5. Please see "The Depth of the Change" (Appendix B to the main report) for a more detailed discussion of the Common Core "shifts" and implications for teacher practice.

6. District curriculum directors, who monitor the walks and accompany principals twice a month, report that 95 percent of principals met the fifty-walks-a-week goal in the first semester.

7. The observation tool that the state developed is very similar to Kenton County's—it is based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching and includes four levels of improvement. However, the state rubric has assigned numeric values to its evaluation model and does not include the customized elements that the district added.

8. Excerpted from the project description here: http://www.literacydesigncollaborative.org/intro/.

9. See http://publications.sreb.org/2013/MDC_Brochure.pdf.

The Urban Bellwether

METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE

Metropolitan Nashville Public School District approaches Common Core implementation with significant advantages, including dedicated dollars, strong district leadership, an active and helpful state partner, and communications savvy gained from prior experience with raising academic standards and then seeing the resulting drops in student test scores. Overall, the district is thoughtfully drawing on these resources to support its transition to the Common Core, and initiated implementation well ahead of other Tennessee districts. But with great resources come high expectations for effective implementation. One particular challenge Metro Nashville encountered early in its transition was identifying and adopting high-quality, Common Core-aligned curricular and instructional materials. Now, the large urban district's continued challenge is to hold educators responsible for student success with new standards as the state also transitions to a new accountability system.

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State and District Context

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is a large, urban school district located in the capital of Tennessee, a state that has made headlines in recent years for instituting major reforms to its learning standards, teacher evaluation system, and accountability policies. In 2009, Tennessee overhauled its (pre-Common Core) academic content standards and graduation requirements, accompanying the change with an aggressive state-wide communications strategy aimed at minimizing the anticipated public outcry when student achievement numbers declined under new assessments. This prior experience with standards reform helped prepare Metro Nashville for the Common Core by familiarizing stakeholders with the importance of strong communication and driving home the central argument for raising academic standards: higher standards—and their successful implementation—are essential for students to be college- and career-ready.

METRO NASHVILLE DEMOGRAPHICS

74,680 students

5,127 teachers

140 schools (74 elementary, 38 middle schools and 16 high schools)

72.4% free- and reduced-lunch eligible

14.3% limited English proficient

16.4% Hispanic; 33.5% white; 46% African American; 4% Asian

Urban location encompassing the city of Nashville and the surrounding county

Tennessee adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. The same year, the state won a major Race to the Top (RTT) grant from the U.S. Department of Education for more than $500 million to support Common Core implementation and other statewide reform initiatives. From this total, the state gave a sub-grant of $30.3 million to Metro Nashville for the district's own set of comprehensive reforms, including $6.8 million to support Common Core implementation at the district level. To date, the district has used these funds largely to support data coaches and school-embedded professional development for teachers.

The education policy context in Tennessee is generally one of central control, with the state playing a strong role in both textbook adoption and professional development, among other areas. This centralized governance model, coupled with Race to the Top funds that enabled state-supported CCSS professional development, has resulted in a tight working relationship between Metro Nashville and its state education agency.

Politically, Tennessee also benefits from strong state leadership on the Common Core. Its two recent governors (of both parties) have stood firmly behind the new standards, and the chiefs of the state's K–12 system and postsecondary Board of Regents are also vocal Common Core advocates. Even so, political opposition to the Common Core gained steam in Tennessee in the second half of 2013, stoked by right-of-center organizations claiming the standards represent federal overreach and a "national curriculum."

Table 1. Tennessee CCSS Implementation Timeline

2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
Tennessee adopts the Common Core in July 2010; Tennessee wins RTT grant of $501 million; Nashville receives $30.3M sub-grant	Began implementation of K–2 math and English language arts (ELA) standards	Full implementation of K–2 math and ELA standards; partial math standards implementation in 3–8	Full implementation of 3–12 math and ELA standards	Scheduled implementation of ELA and math PARCC assessments (of which Tennessee is a governing state)

In terms of student performance, over the last three years, Metro Nashville has seen steady growth on the state's Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) results. Math proficiency has improved in grades 3–8, with a particularly dramatic improvement in high school math (up 9.6 percentage points in Algebra I and 7.1 in Algebra II) from 2011–12 to 2012–13. Graduation rates increased from 76.2 to 78.4 percent and science and social studies proficiency scores also increased. Overall, the district is ranked as "intermediate" status in the state, meeting eight of eleven Tennessee benchmarks for student achievement, though it continues to struggle with reading achievement scores in grades 3–8.

Note that most of the academic functions in Metro Nashville Public Schools are organized into two parallel "central offices": one for elementary and one for middle and secondary levels. Research was conducted in the 2012–13 school year when implementation of the Common Core was fully underway in grade K–2 and partially underway in grades 3–8, so the following findings focus on the elementary-level functions and efforts of the district.

Detailed Research Findings

As Metro Nashville embarked on its initial Common Core rollout, dedicated dollars smoothed the road ahead. But non-financial resources have also been critical in preparing the district for effective implementation. These resources include strong leadership, good relationships with the state, and successful communication practices honed through previous experience with raising standards. Together, these factors created a generally positive context for implementation in the district.

Metro Nashville has worked hard to foster a supportive district climate for implementation to take root. Spurred by the superintendent's unequivocal direction to prioritize the new standards, district staff are working across divisions to integrate assessment, instruction, and professional development to buttress the standards. The district is well down the (sometimes rocky) path of transitioning its existing elementary curricular materials to a common curriculum vetted by the state for alignment (and selected by a committee of district teachers). Metro Nashville's instructional coaching program has also evolved and improved to better support teachers with in-depth, customized training on the new standards. Despite reservations about how the new standards will affect their evaluation system, many teachers expressed support for the Common Core and described examples of implementing the shifts in their classrooms. Similarly, most parents and community members interviewed reported that they were at least somewhat familiar with the standards and believed that they represented higher expectations for their kids.

Race to the Top and Title I dollars have supported a number of elements of Metro Nashville's Common Core transition. These funds have been primarily used for two purposes: 1) to place instructional coaches in every elementary school, who work with teachers to adapt their instruction based on formative data, and 2) to support professional development for teachers on the standards. Metro Nashville also draws on community resources, namely a supportive mayor's office and Chamber of Commerce, to fund and/or articulate support for reforms in the district. Yet this support alone is not sufficient to explain the district's promising start to Common Core implementation. Metro Nashville has drawn equally on several key non-material resources: district leadership, a strong relationship with the state, and prior experience with preparing the community for higher standards, followed by lower student scores.

At the highest level, implementation of the Common Core in Metro Nashville is supported by the superintendent's vocal endorsement and elevation of the standards. Nearly all district staff that we interviewed reported hearing the strong, consistent message that Common Core-aligned instruction is the superintendent's top priority and that they trust his leadership on the new standards. The superintendent, in turn, is backed by a supportive, reform-minded local Board. As the superintendent noted, "lots of folks are looking for fireworks, but the Board really does get it and did a nice job of asking questions [during district staff presentations on the standards]."

"At the highest level, implementation of the Common Core in Metro Nashville is supported by the superintendent's vocal endorsement and elevation of the standards."

Such strong district support for the new standards has helped to focus the energies of Metro Nashville's large and diverse corps of educators and administrators. The superintendent describes the transition as an opportunity to create coherence across the district, explaining that the Common Core "takes us in [the] right direction in terms of what to spend time on" relative to the old, "mile-wide and inch-deep" standards and tests. That requires "making sure teachers and principals know what to abandon." Leaving behind familiar practices and content means that teachers need not only the support but also the trust of the district, especially since they are operating a year ahead of the state's formal timetable for implementation (more below). For their part, many teachers and school administrators in Nashville cite a culture, a number of years in the making, of respectful leadership and frequent communication from the central office. This has been key to gaining educator trust while making the difficult transition to the new standards and assessments.

> "We already took the hit [in 2009] when proficiency levels fell from 90 percent to 30–40 percent. That made the transition to the Common Core a little easier to face."

Insight gleaned through recent experience with raising standards has also proven valuable for the district. Metro Nashville staff report that when the state adopted the Common Core standards, their district was able to adapt the communications structures used during the rollout of higher state standards in 2009, such as community liaisons to churches and parent academies. Given their recent experience with raising academic standards, educators and the general public were less fazed by Common Core adoption. As one district staff member explained, "We already took the hit [in 2009] when proficiency levels fell from 90 percent to 30–40 percent. That made the transition to the Common Core a little easier to face." Conversations with parents and community members revealed similar support for Common Core. Many reported that they understood and believed that higher standards are needed to benchmark students in Nashville against others around the country and the world. The ongoing dialogue around higher standards has also buffered Metro Nashville somewhat from the conservative anti-Common Core backlash around the state. District administrators report hearing some community dissatisfaction around the amount of testing, but little pushback in the vein of "federal overreach" or widespread political opposition.

Finally, Metro Nashville draws extensively from the well of Common Core resources and leadership of its active state education agency, particularly in the areas of curriculum and professional development. Since adopting Common Core, district administrators have worked closely with the state's department of curriculum and instruction to adapt the statewide "training of trainers" program to fit Metro Nashville's model of instructional coaching. District coaches have a sustained relationship with the state, frequently participating in state-led Common Core training and attending monthly statewide meetings. During the district's 2012–13 ELA textbook adoption process, Metro Nashville relied on the state's judgment about which products were truly aligned with the Common Core, considering only those five publishers approved by the state. District administrators and coaches also report consistently using the state's TNCore.org site for Common Core-aligned supplemental curricular resources and professional development materials.

Like many districts, Metro Nashville started implementing the Common Core before fully aligned textbooks were available. The district now has a state-vetted ELA textbook in place for K–6 and will adopt a new math text in 2015. Transitioning to the Common Core without a completely aligned curriculum was a substantial challenge for Metro Nashville teachers, though the district reports targeted trainings on the standards themselves helped teachers better understand the new teaching and learning expectations.

Metro Nashville's Common Core implementation considerably predated the textbook adoption calendar. With district staff and leadership enthusiastic about the promise of the new standards, Metro Nashville started implementing the Common Core two years ahead of the time that reading textbooks were to be adopted, and three years ahead of math textbook adoption. During the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years, Metro Nashville teachers and administrators relied on district-wide frameworks based on the principles of Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math—which emphasize student-centered pedagogy—to guide instruction.[1] The district also provided curriculum maps and guidance to help teachers adapt their current textbooks to the demands of the Common Core. Individual educators report supplementing these guides with lessons and units adapted either from textbooks that pre-dated the Common Core or from national, online resources.

Metro Nashville started the 2013–14 school year with a new textbook for K–6 English, vetted by the Tennessee Department of Education for alignment and adopted with significant input from MNPS teachers. Adoption of this textbook—Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's *Journeys* (adopted by 78 percent of districts in the state)—was the result of an extensive process executed by a cadre of six to eight district-vetted and trained teachers and specialists at each grade level (see Appendix for *Journeys* review). The textbook adoption committee interviewed five publishers whose materials were evaluated and approved by the state Department of Education as aligned to the standards. District administrators express

confidence in the alignment of *Journeys* to the Common Core ELA standards, citing its complexity of text selections and its organization per the grade-sequential development of each Common Core standard.

The district will replicate this process during math textbook adoption in the 2014–15 school year, and in the meantime continues to provide annually updated guidance to teachers for adapting the current math textbooks (adopted in 2011–12, before high-quality aligned textbooks were widely available).[2]

> **“ District leaders articulated at least one positive aspect of transitioning to the Common Core prior to formal textbook adoption: The process empowered Metro Nashville educators to take ownership over curricular materials and supported a deeper understanding of the new standards. ”**

However, for a district as large as Metro Nashville, implementing the standards without a full, Common Core-aligned curriculum posed a substantial quality-control risk during the transition. Elementary teachers were left without an aligned textbook for reading for two years—and will be without an aligned math textbook for three years. This has understandably led to real implementation challenges during the transition. Instructional coaches work with teachers in each school to find, evaluate, and disseminate materials that support the new standards, such as lesson plans and texts. But there is no formal measure of quality in place in the district to ensure that the materials are truly Common Core-aligned. During the first two years of implementation, coaches reported that, in some cases, teachers were not questioning or being discerning enough about the alignment of the lessons and activities that they found online or from other sources. Teachers themselves described at times feeling overwhelmed by the demands to find, rewrite, and implement all-new lesson plans, explaining that “all our teachers feel like they’re new teachers right now.”

District leaders articulated at least one positive aspect of transitioning to the Common Core prior to formal textbook adoption: The process empowered Metro Nashville educators to take ownership over curricular materials and supported a deeper understanding of the new standards. When interviewed during this transitional period, many teachers explained that they appreciated the opportunity to exercise their professional judgment over materials, especially compared to a district-enforced “checklist mentality” (i.e., simply getting through or covering that day or week’s lesson). Other teachers reported shelving their old and not particularly well-liked textbooks with enthusiasm.

District administrators also felt that, while challenging, the transition “gave teachers a baseline” for the Common Core, helping them to recognize the kinds of materials that the new standards demand. Teachers were trained using the textbook, *Journeys* (Houghton Mifflin), throughout the summer of 2013 and start of the 2013–14 school year. (It was adopted in 2012–13.[3]) During this time, district administrators reported that teachers were evaluating the new materials, and judging where they needed supplemental texts, based on their now two years of experience with implementing the standards.

In short, district leaders in Metro Nashville believe that their transition to the new standards, despite its many challenges, has helped teachers grapple with the implications of the standards and hone their judgment about alignment of materials. In the end, student performance and mastery of the standards will be the ultimate evidence of whether this strategy was successful. As an early implementer, Metro Nashville will provide key insights as to whether the additional transitional learning years for teachers—spent in “trial and error” with materials—has helped facilitate the major classroom changes required by Common Core.

Tennessee's teacher evaluation system, tied to student achievement, has raised the stakes of student performance for Metro Nashville teachers. These higher stakes, coupled with a lack of information about pending PARCC assessments, are leaving teachers uneasy and the district without accurate data about Common Core-aligned teaching and learning.

As part of its Race to the Top proposal, and consistent with two decades of pioneering work in value-added analysis of teacher quality, Tennessee implemented the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluation system statewide in 2011–12. Under TEAM, teacher evaluations are comprised of observations (50%), student growth (35%) and student achievement (15%). Once the state consortia-developed, Common Core-aligned PARCC assessment is fully operational in the 2014–15 school year, the state and district plan to transition to PARCC as the summative measure of student growth. In the interim, however, teachers remain accountable for student growth on the state's Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessments, which Metro Nashville administrators and educators admit are not fully aligned to the new standards.

> "District trust and rapport with educators will likely hinge on how the upcoming transition to Common Core-aligned assessments and accountability is handled."

The Tennessee Department of Education adjusted the TCAP in 2012–13 to align better to the Common Core by narrowing the focus of the test and dropping some of the state performance indicators that were extraneous to the standards. However, the TCAP-to-PARCC transition creates a situation wherein teachers are teaching to new standards, but students are being tested (and teachers' value-added evaluation scores are therefore based) largely on the old standards. Though PARCC tests will not be available until the 2014–15 school year, the state has decided to continue its use of the TEAM evaluation model during the implementation of the new standards. Teachers are understandably uneasy; as one district administrator explained, "You're telling teachers that Common Core is the most important thing, but testing them only slightly on the Common Core. The [TCAP] assessments do not have the same depth that the new standards do." Given the lag in rolling out Common Core-aligned assessments, the district has to ask teachers to trust them that teaching to the new standards will translate to better student performance on not only the PARCC assessments in 2015, but the TCAP too. "The message," one administrator said the district is sending, "is if you have depth of knowledge and understanding in Common Core, it will translate to end of year tests, but we can't demonstrate it with data."

The district's recent 2013 TCAP results shed some light on these tensions. Similar to other districts around the state, Metro Nashville student performance was flat in reading, but showed growth in math. Administrators suspect the improvements in math stem from teachers' use of Common Core-aligned pilot assessments over the past two school years, which featured constructed-response items.[4] Administrators expect reading performance to improve as teachers gain more familiarity with aligned instruction (and as that instruction is supported by a new textbook, as described in the preceding section). Like teachers, though, they are still in a "wait and see" holding pattern until fully aligned Common Core assessments are available.

In the meantime, teachers report feeling anxious about the lack of information regarding the new PARCC assessments and the sample formative assessments based on PARCC. Given the magnitude of the shifts in practice and student expectations required by the Common Core versus the current Tennessee standards, many of Metro Nashville's teachers feel, as one described, that the new assessments are "the monster off in the woods" for their performance evaluations.

In many other districts, the mismatch between standards and assessments (and therefore teacher evaluation) would likely lead to teacher resistance to the new standards. While this may be the case among some pockets of teachers in Metro Nashville, most teachers reported moving forward with Common Core implementation because of the trust they place in central office and the superintendent. Going forward, however, district trust and rapport with educators will likely hinge on how the upcoming transition to Common Core-aligned assessments and accountability is handled.

Summary of Findings

Uniquely poised going into the transition, Metro Nashville Public Schools has drawn on dedicated funding, good partnerships with the state, and strong local leadership in its early rollout of the Common Core. High levels of communication and a culture of trust among educators, the district, and the central office have helped Metro Nashville to move forward with the Common Core without major opposition, despite emerging pushback in other areas of the state. The transition to the new standards has not been without challenges in the district, and the early adoption of the standards—prior to the state's textbook adoption timeline—presented a particular challenge as teachers struggled to find and create high-quality transitional curricular materials. But the district believes the short-term challenges and at times rocky transition have deepened teacher learning about the demands and details of the new standards, improving conditions for quality implementation in the long run. Metro Nashville's continued implementation challenge now lies in navigating the complexities of integrating teacher evaluation reforms with the ongoing transition to new Common Core-aligned assessments.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Metro Nashville

ALL ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, REFER TO METRO NASHVILLE'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND ELEMENTARY DIVISION OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE.	
Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials	◆ District-level instructional leaders developed guidance documents that cite specific lessons in existing textbooks to support each Common Core standard for the grade; these materials are provided to teachers online, via a wiki site. ◆ In addition, teachers are finding and using supplemental content-rich informational texts from *Limitless Libraries* (municipal library access). ◆ The district is still using instructional frameworks built upon Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math approaches, which were in place before CCSS adoption. The district is also using the *Envision* math textbook, adopted prior to full implementation of the Common Core, which is not fully aligned to the new standards. ◆ In 2012–13, the district adopted a new ELA textbook for K–6 (*Journeys* by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing) through an extensive process executed by vetted, trained teachers and specialists at each grade level. The textbook was approved by the TDOE for alignment to the CCSS in 2012.
Use of CCSS-aligned Assessments	◆ District RTT funds support twelve data coaches across the district to work with schools on analysis and interpretation of student data. ◆ The district is implementing a new instructional management system called School Net and hosts a "scorecard," an interactive tool that enables teachers and schools to access and use student learning data. ◆ During spring of the 2012–13 school year, TN DOE was in the process of aligning the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) to CCSS (e.g., removing 15–25 percent of the state performance indicators (SPIs) in each grade for math to reflect greater focus). Revised TCAP assessments (with fewer SPIs) were administered starting in the 2012–13 school year. ◆ The district uses the following formative assessments: » Discovery Education Assessments (DEA), formerly ThinkLink. This assessment is administered two to three times per year in math and reading/ELA for grades 2–8. DEA is aligned to Tennessee content but not necessarily to CCSS. » DIBELS assessment (a screening for reading issues) in grades K–4. ◆ The district tests students in math and ELA/reading in grades 2–8 three times per year. The district assesses a subset of students in grades 9–12 in Algebra I, English II and Biology throughout the year. Results are provided back to schools within a few weeks. ◆ Other formative assessments are largely school-based. Schools are starting to use sample items from PARCC as they are released.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Metro Nashville (cont'd)

ALL ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, REFER TO METRO NASHVILLE'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND ELEMENTARY DIVISION OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE.	
Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	◆ The Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) was implemented statewide in 2011–12. Under TEAM, teachers' final evaluation status is comprised of observations (50%), student growth (35%) and student achievement (15%). Once CCSS-aligned TCAP (and, in 2015, PARCC) assessment data are available, student achievement against the CCSS measured by these tests will be part of teachers' scores. ◆ The district reports that its classroom observation instruments are closely aligned to CCSS expectations, emphasizing the standards' depth and instructional shifts.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	◆ The district pays for a coach in every elementary school (using Title I and Title II funds) who serves as the key deliverer of professional development. The district elementary curriculum director identifies a pool of coaching candidates and what they are expected to do; principals select from that pool. (Secondary teachers report a lack of dedicated coaches for middle schools; high schools do not have coaches.) ◆ The district trains coaches to work with school staff and sends them to state trainings. Metro Nashville also hosts intensive summer institutes for teachers focused on the CCSS, starting with K–2 in 2010–11 and 2011–12, and grades 5–8 in 2012–13. The district tracks participation (and to some extent, quality) of PD offerings through electronic registration and real-time teacher feedback. ◆ Coaches or assistant principals lead school-based weekly team meetings that support CCSS implementation. Principals identify teachers' needs through observations and raise them to coaches, who conduct the training. ◆ Coaches facilitate the professional learning of principals and assistant principals.
Communication and Buy-in	◆ The district developed a communications plan based on previously successful initiatives, such as the TN SCORE's "Expect More, Achieve More" campaign. ◆ Metro Nashville offers workshops for parents called "Parent University," which include dedicated sessions on CCSS; the district also hosts a website, *Parent Resources for Common Core*, with resource links. ◆ The district tracks media mentions, customer service calls, attendance, and requests for parent workshops and presentations on CCSS.

Appendix: Tennessee Textbook Review Instrument: Reading (3-8 content)

Program category (choose one):

☒ Basal
☐ Co-basal
☐ Alt. level: high
☐ Alt. level: low

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin
Edition: Journeys Common Core
Title of program: Journeys
Copyright year: 2014

Ratings **M -** meets requirement **N -** does not meet requirement

A. NON-NEGOTIABLE REQUIREMENTS	COMMENTS
I. Quality of Text	
1. RANGE OF TEXT: 50% of reading selections in the submission are high quality non-fiction/ informational texts and instructional time is divided equally between literary and informational text. **Rating: M**	A review of the tables of contents in grade 3–5 reveals the ratio of fiction to nonfiction/informational text to be approximately 50/50.
2. COMPLEXITY OF TEXT: The submission exhibits concrete evidence that research-based *quantitative* and *qualitative* measures have been used in selection of complex texts that align to the standards. Further, submissions will include a demonstrable staircase of text complexity as materials progress across grade bands. **Rating: M**	The program gives concrete evidence that quantitative and qualitative measures have been used. The teacher's editions include documentation of this component. The reading levels and text complexity chart can be located in the bound CCS Correlation component provided by the publisher. *Quantitative: Lexile levels seem more sporadic than arranged on a demonstrable staircase of text complexity. In the first unit for 3rd grade, the Lexile progression is 660, 760, 660, 700, 960, 810, 610, 630, 860. In the final unit for 3rd grade, the Lexile progression is 480, 870, 920, 570, 750, 720, 770, 570, 660. It is interesting to note that the Lexile level for the final reading selection of the year is identical to the Lexile Level for the first reading selection of the year.* Qualitative: The publisher assigns each text with clear indicators of text complexity, such as text structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands, and purpose/levels of meaning. Each indicator is justified by specific evidence from the reading selection.
3. SUFFICIENT PRACTICE IN READING COMPLEX TEXTS: The submission provides all students, including those who are below grade level, with extensive (at least weekly) opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex text as required by the standards. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re- reading, discussion, and writing about the ideas, events, and information found there. This opportunity is offered regularly and systematically through all K–5 materials. **Rating: M**	All students encounter complex texts several times per week. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re-reading and discussion of ideas offered there. Examples include "When Manny says he thinks he can score, how is Gayle's reaction different from Hiro's?" (Grade 3, "A New Team of Heroes") and "What evidence does the author provide to support the idea that Erik was going to succeed and be a leader at rock climbing?" (Grade 3, "Becoming Anything He Wants to Be").
II. Quality of Questions & Tasks	
4. FOCUS ON THE TEXT IS THE CENTER OF ALL LESSONS: Significant pre- reading activities and suggested approaches to teacher scaffolding are highly focused and begin with the text itself. Pre-reading activities should be no more than 10% of time devoted to any reading instruction. **Rating: M**	Pre-reading discussions are short and consist of previewing the topic and previewing the text.

5. INCLUSION OF TEXT DEPENDENT AND TEXT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: 80 % of all questions in the submission are high-quality sequences of text- dependent & text-specific questions. The overwhelming majority of questions are text-specific and draw student attention to the particulars in the text. **Rating: M**	The Journeys teacher's edition used textual evidence-based questioning throughout the anchor text in the First Read question boxes. The student book also gives a systematic way of digging deeper into the text. There are comprehension questions, essential questions, and writing in response to the text questions after each anchor text.
III. Writing	
6. WRITING TO SOURCES: Written and oral tasks at all grade levels require students to confront the text directly, to draw on textual evidence, and to support valid inferences from the text. Writing tasks should be balanced between argumentative, explanatory, and narrative (conveying real or imaginary experiences) modes. **Rating: M**	Writing tasks are evenly balanced between argumentative, explanatory, and narrative modes. Writing tasks require students to use the text as a direct model, such as in the 3rd grade Unit on "Judy Moody Saves the World". Students write a persuasive letter during the unit and are consistently referring back to the anchor text to use it as a model for writing. Other examples of text-dependent writing tasks include the 5th grade Lesson 10 "Write about Reading" task, "Would you agree that one of the main ideas of this section could be stated as 'mother cougars know best'? Write a paragraph explaining your opinion" and the 5th grade Lesson 17 "Write about Reading" prompt, "Write a paragraph in which you discuss whether you are satisfied with the resolution of the story".
IV. Foundational Reading	
7. INCLUSION OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR ALL ASPECTS OF FOUNDATIONAL READING: Materials provide explicit and systematic instruction and diagnostic support in **1) concepts of print, 2) phonological awareness, 3) vocabulary, 4) development, 5) syntax,** and **6) fluency**. These foundational skills are necessary and central components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines. **Rating: M**	**1) Concepts of print -** There is some instruction for analyzing illustrations, text features, etc., primarily in the pre- reading discussions. **2) Phonics** - Phonics are taught systematically throughout the reading units. **3) Vocabulary** - here is a comprehensive language and literacy guide with small group and whole group lessons, a word study teacher's guide, and an intensive Oral Vocabulary component in the 3rd grade which includes two Read Aloud books and lesson plans. **4) Development** - Attention is given on the second reading of each passage to the author's development of theme or central idea. **5) Syntax** - Not much attention is paid to the unpacking of longer sentences, analysis of sentence length, word order, etc. **6) Fluency** - Expression, intonation, phrasing, reading rate, and accuracy are taught systematically. There are systematic assessments for student fluency.
Note: Do not proceed to the following sections until following non-negotiables protocol in instructions document	
B. PUBLISHERS' CRITERIA REQUIREMENTS *B(2): 3–8 Content*	**COMMENTS**
I. Key Criteria For Text Selection	
I. a. Text Complexity	
1. Texts for each grade band align with the complexity requirements outlined in the Common Core Standards.	The texts are leveled according to Lexile rating. In Component 3 of the Correlation document, the median number for the selections from the student book, magazines, and trade books fall in the appropriate range. The qualitative measures for the text complexity are met.
2. All students (including those who are behind) have extensive opportunity to encounter grade-level complex text.	Grade-level texts are a key component in whole-group instruction.
3. Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and re-reading are provided regularly at each grade.	Shorter, challenging texts such as informational articles are provided regularly in each unit in each grade level.
4. Novels, plays, and other extended full-length readings are also provided with opportunities for close reading.	Full-length readings such as plays, descriptive articles, persuasive articles, and realistic fiction pieces are provided at least once in each unit. Novels were included as trade books but did not seem to be part of regular whole-group instruction.
5. Additional materials aim to increase regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students' interests while developing both their knowledge base and joy in reading.	High-quality literature in the form of full-length trade books aim to increase regular independent reading. These texts appeal to student interests and aim to develop their knowledge base and joy in reading.

I. b. Range and Quality of Texts	
1. In grades 3–5, literacy programs shift the balance of texts and instructional time to include equal measures of literary and informational texts; informational texts cover content from across the disciplines. In grades 6–12 (where applicable), the balance shifts toward reading substantially more literary nonfiction.	Informational texts cover content from across the disciplines, such as American history, the arts, civics, communication, world cultures, earth science, health and safety, math, media, physical science, social relationships, and technology/ innovation. Although the balance of texts is shifted toward informational reading and literary non-fiction, there is not a demonstrable increase in attention devoted to non-fiction as grade levels progress, as evidenced by the following percentages: 3rd grade: Literature 45%; Informational text 55%, 4th Literature 45%; Informational text 55%, 5th grade: Literature 51%; Informational text 49%, and 6th grade: Literature 44%; Informational text 56%.
2. The quality of the suggested texts is high—they are worth reading closely and exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide useful information.	Texts with grade-level Lexile levels and text complexity are a key component in whole-group instruction. Texts exhibit exceptional craft and are worth reading and re-reading.
3. Specific texts or text types named in the Standards are included.	The specific text types named in the Standards for Grade 3 (fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures) are included. The specific text types named in the Standards for Grade 4–5 (stories, dramas, and poems) are included, although the number of drama selections is limited.
4. Within a sequence or collection of texts, specific anchor texts are selected for especially careful reading.	Anchor texts are labeled as such and are selected for especially careful reading.
II. Key Criteria For Questions and Tasks	
II. a. High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks	
1. A significant percentage (at least 80%) of tasks and questions are text- dependent.	The overwhelming majority of questions are high-quality sequences of text-dependent and text-specific questions.
2. High-quality sequences of text-dependent questions elicit sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their impact.	Text-dependent questions, both teacher-to-student and student-to-student, are high-quality and elicit sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their impact.
3. Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting valid inferences from the text.	Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting valid inferences from the text.
4. Instructional design cultivates student interest and engagement in reading rich texts carefully.	High quality materials for vocabulary in context and student reflection about the central issues of the text provide for high student interest and engagement with the anchor texts.
5. Materials provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close reading of specific texts.	Questions involving attention to text features and development of the author's central idea, for example, require students to build knowledge through close reading.
6. Questions and tasks attend to analyzing the arguments and information at the heart of informational text.	Questions and tasks after anchor texts require analysis of the central information or argument, such as analyzing how well the author achieved his/her intended purpose.
II. b. Cultivating Students' Ability to Read Complex Texts Independently	
1. Scaffolds enable all students to experience rather than avoid the complexity of the text.	Scaffolds such as pre-teaching, focused teacher questioning during reading, and close reading for follow-up allow all students to experience rather than avoid the text.
2. Reading strategies support comprehension of specific texts and the focus on building knowledge and insight.	Reading strategies such as forming predictions, asking questions, summarizing, and making comparisons support comprehension of specific texts.
3. Design for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction cultivates student responsibility and independence.	Instructional materials are devoted to whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction.

4. Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further evaluation or interpretation.	Questions and tasks facilitate student comprehension of the text first before students move to questions requiring further evaluation or interpretation.
5. Materials make the text the focus of instruction by avoiding features that distract from the text.	Text features support the text by inciting curiosity about what the text says explicitly. These features enhance the text rather than distracting from it.
6. Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.	Weekly tests and periodic assessments in vocabulary, reading comprehension, decoding words, and grammar provide genuinely measured progress.
III. Key Criteria For Academic Vocabulary	
1. Materials focus on academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.	Vocabulary instruction is rich and varied through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Tier II and Tier III vocabulary levels are emphasized.
IV. Key Criteria For Writing to Sources and Research	
1. Materials portray writing to sources as a key task.	Writing to Sources is a key question at the end of each anchor text. The most significant writing tasks for each unit are both inspired by the anchor text and encourage explicit textual evidence for support. Some questioning from the student text related more to self rather than text evidence. For example, in Grade 3 unit 2 page 264, students are asked, "Do you think the author did a good job illustrating this book? Why or why not?"
2. Materials focus on forming arguments as well as informative writing.	Major writing tasks are evenly divided among narrative, informational, and argumentative writing prompts.
3. Materials make it clear that student writing should be responsive to the needs of the audience and the particulars of the text in question.	The Common Core writing handbook contains instruction in the Purposes for Writing. The students are asked to identify the task, audience, and purpose before beginning to write.
4. Students are given extensive practice with short, focused research projects.	Research performance tasks are incorporated into each of the six major units of study. These research tasks are divided up into smaller, regular steps.
V. Additional Key Criteria for Student Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking	
1. Materials provide systematic opportunities for students to read complex text with fluency.	Each unit the materials cycle through a variety of fluency skills such as intonation, accuracy, and rate, and apply these skills to complex texts. These fluency skills are assessed regularly through the "Cold Reads" assessment component.
2. Materials help teachers plan substantive academic discussions.	Guiding information in the margins of the teacher's edition helps the teacher to plan substantive academic discussions.
3. Materials use multimedia and technology to deepen attention to evidence and texts.	Digital resources such as the Write-In Reader eBook encourage students to pay particular attention to evidence in the text.
4. Materials embrace the most significant grammar and language conventions.	Significant grammar and language conventions are addressed regularly through a grammar focus as part of each lesson.
C. PROGRAM DESIGN	**COMMENTS**
I. Equity and Accessibility	
I. a. Equity	
1. Content is accurate and free of bias (social, religious, racial, gender, ethnic).	Materials seemed free of social, religious, racial, gender, and ethnic bias.
2. Content represents a wide array of cultures and experiences, allowing students to learn about situations similar to and different from their own personal experiences.	Materials address a wide array of cultures and experiences.

I. b. Accessibility for all Students, Including Special Populations	
1. Materials and activities are responsive and adaptable to a variety of learning styles and developmental differences, including students requiring remediation, and offer teachers strategies to meet the needs of a range of learners.	Ample resources are provided for strategic and intensive intervention for students needing extra support.
2. The program provides resources for acceleration and extension of learning.	During small group activities, there are strategies and materials provided for advanced learners. There are also challenge activities at each literacy center activity (comprehension and fluency, word study, and think and write).
3. The program provides resources for supporting English Language Learners (ELL's) regular and active participation with grade-level text.	Resources such as visuals, gestures, comprehensible input, peer supported learning, help with idiomatic language, sentence frames, and expanded language production assist English Language Learners access core content with the whole group.
4. The program incorporates strategies, materials, activities, etc., that consider the special needs of all students, especially students with disabilities, and follows the principles of Universal Design.	The program incorporates strategies such as leveled readers, full audio texts, and multiple strategies for differentiation to serve students with special needs. Materials follow principals of Universal Design such as "3c. Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills, 3d. Arrange information consistent with its importance, and 3e. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion."
5. The program allows and encourages all students, regardless of aptitude or background, to work with rich and rigorous grade-level texts, questions, and writing prompts.	All students encounter complex texts several times per week. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re-reading and discussion of ideas offered there.
II. Structure and Ease of Use	
II. a. Physical Design and Structure	
1. The materials and sections within books are arranged in a logically- ordered/organized, clear structure so that teachers and students can easily access the content.	Overview materials and where each lesson/unit is in the sequence of learning are clear and easy to find.
II. b. Usefulness for Teacher and Students	
1. Materials provide clear and concise directions to teachers and students that are clearly connected to expected learning outcome.	The language of teacher questions and teacher tips is clearly connected to the expected learning outcomes.
2. Materials include features to help in searching and locating information (e.g., table of contents, menu or map of content, index, goals/objectives, outlines, checklists, etc.) and a list explaining where the relevant Common Core Standards are covered in the program.	Common Core Standards are clearly identified on each page. The table of contents, index, etc. are prominently located and easy to find.
3. Student resources include review and practice resources.	Multiple kinds of review and practice resources are included.
4. Strategies and activities are engaging, interactive, authentic, and of high- interest, using grade-appropriate content relevant to students' lives.	Writing activities, discussion topics, and multi-media ancillaries are just a few of the strategies for instruction that add interest/engagement.
II. c. Focus, Coherence, and Rigor	
1. The teacher and student can reasonably complete the amount of content presented in the submission within a regular school year.	Pacing guides are included and seem reasonably accurate/feasible.

2. All components of the program interact and complement each other to reflect an integrated, comprehensive design which is coherent, sequenced, and systematic.	Materials are closely knit together to support unit themes.
3. As grade levels progress, materials reflect an increasing level of rigor to match the changing expectations of the Common Core State Standards.	The materials reflect an increasing level of rigor as the grade levels progress.
III. Assessment Components	
1. The program offers multiple easily-implemented assessments for use in diagnosing student ability and monitoring ongoing progress.	Quick, on the spot assessments are included in the teacher edition margins alongside the text. Other easily- implemented assessments include ready-to-use sentences for vocabulary assessments, rubrics for writing assessments, pre-made reading comprehension assessments, and teacher guides for writing conference assessments.
2. Assessments are aligned with instructional materials and standards from *all* strands of the Common Core State Standards (and clearly denote which standards are emphasized in each assessment), with a special focus on reading foundations and fluency.	Common Core State Standards are referenced on the Teacher's Edition assessment pages, clearly denoting which standards are emphasized in each assessment.
3. The program includes aligned rubrics and scoring guidelines that provide sufficient guidance to teachers for interpreting student performance and suggestions for follow-up.	Each lesson in the Teacher's Edition includes Progress Monitoring pages that offer specific guidance on how to proceed based on student assessment results.
4. Assessment tasks come in multiple formats (including both quick- response items and extended constructed response/performance-based items) and assess a variety of types of knowledge/thinking; the format is chosen carefully and specifically to adhere to the relevant standard and learning outcome.	Both quick response items and extended constructed response/performance-based items are utilized for assessment. Various types of thinking from Webb's Depth of Knowledge are reflected in the assessments.
IV. Technology and Media Components	
1. All technology and media components serve the crucial purpose of enhancing instruction/learning and support scientifically-based instructional practices.	Technology resources include background videos and interactive whiteboard student writing samples for editing/revision, both of which are scientifically based instructional practices.
2. Technology-rich resources work properly without the purchase of additional software, are platform-neutral (i.e., will run on Windows or other platforms), and run without error.	According to the publisher, all of the Interactive Whiteboard lessons are fully operational, involve no costs, and can be downloaded once per computer.
3. Resources are user-friendly and interactive, have an easy-to-operate interface, and allow the user to control the pace and choice of activity.	According to the publisher, all of the Interactive Whiteboard lessons are fully operational, involve no costs, and can be downloaded once per computer. There are over three hundred Journeys Interactive Whiteboard Activities on a Smart Board.
IV. Research Base	
1. Materials have a clear and documented research base, with evidence of usability and efficacy with a wide range of students, and a research plan for how the efficacy of materials will be assessed and improved over time.	Instructional strategies are sound and research-based. In the Teacher's Edition, the publisher provides the names of the individuals who conducted significant portions of the research. Evidence of usability and efficacy with students is not documented in the teacher's edition or on the website.
LETTER GRADE (A-F)	**A**
RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION (Y/N)? *(To be recommended, program must meet all seven non- negotiables and receive a letter grade of C or above)*	**Y**

Endnotes

1. At this time, we lack expert reviews and evidence for whether or not the Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math approaches are compatible with the greater rigor expected in the Common Core standards. Curriculum administrators in Metro Nashville believe that these approaches support student success with the Common Core in their schools.

2. This research focused on the elementary divisions and functions in Metro Nashville. The plans and sequence for adoption and rollout of curricular materials for math, ELA, and other courses at the middle and secondary level are critical for the district's ultimate success with implementation but outside the scope of this report.

3. In 2012–13, the district adopted *Journeys* via an extensive process spearheaded by vetted, trained teachers and specialists at each grade level. The textbook had been approved by the TDOE (in 2012) for alignment to the CCSS. See the Appendix for the district's review of *Journeys*.

4. Constructed-response questions ask students to apply knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to real-world, standards-driven performance tasks. They are also called "open-response" items.

The High-Performing Suburb

SCHOOL DISTRICT 54

Shaumburg, Illinois and Surrounding Areas

School District 54 has taken a hands-on, focused, and collaborative approach to Common Core implementation. Teacher support of the standards has been spurred by several factors: a unified message from district leaders, a curriculum overhaul led by educators, dedicated time to collaborate, a focus on student performance data and continuous improvement, and the deliberate use of resources to support classroom instruction. With a new, Common Core-aligned curriculum and intensive professional development in place for teachers and principals, District 54 is well prepared to move forward; however, full implementation of the standards in classrooms is only just beginning in the 2013–2014 school year. Already, the simultaneous implementation of the Common Core in all grades and subjects led to major changes for teaching and learning in this mid-sized district, making it a particularly instructive site for other districts.

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State and District Context

The Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, with the goal of fully transitioning to the new standards by the 2013–2014 school year (see timeline below). In 2011, Illinois won a relatively modest ($42.8 million) Race to the Top grant in the third and smallest round of the federal program, whereby the state committed to implementing the Common Core standards and instituting a statewide teacher evaluation system by 2016–2017. Aside from occasional political pressure for Illinois policymakers to review their decision to adopt the standards, there have not yet been any serious, organized challenges to Common Core implementation in Schaumburg.

DISTRICT 54 DEMOGRAPHICS

14,083 students

2,483 teachers

K–8 only: 21 elementary schools; 5 junior high schools (7–8 grade); 1 K-8 school

18.9% free- and reduced-lunch eligible

18.9% limited English proficient

22.9% Hispanic; 45.4% white; 20.5% Asian; 6.8% African American; 3.4% multiracial

Suburban Chicago area district

District 54, located in a suburb of Chicago, is a relatively wealthy and moderately diverse elementary school district with a recent track record of academic success. From 2001 to 2012, the district raised the percent of students meeting proficiency on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) from 78 percent to 92 percent overall, though significant achievement gaps still exist for African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students. More recently, the state raised the ISAT cut scores in the 2012–2013 school year to reflect the rigor of both the Common Core standards and the upcoming PARCC assessment (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). As a result, District 54 experienced a significant drop to 77 percent of students meeting the new bar in math and 81 percent in reading.

As the district transitions to Common Core, District 54's leaders present a tightly aligned and unified message focused on collaboration and transparency, while pushing the high-achieving district into more rigorous engagement with the new standards. District leaders have presented Common Core to parents as a stepping stone to higher-quality teaching and learning and an opportunity to move from good to great. Representatives from the district's strong union vocally support the Common Core and the district's implementation strategies; both labor leaders and district administrators credit open and frequent communication as key to the union's endorsement.

As a result of its Race to the Top grant award, District 54 has committed resources to implement the standards at every grade level, beginning with the development of a new Common Core-aligned curriculum scope and sequence in the 2012–2013 school year.[1] A district-wide professional development effort held during the 2012–2013 school year and following summer aimed to prepare every teacher and administrator in the district for effective Common Core implementation prior to the start of the 2013–2014 school year. District leaders' consistent message to administrators, teachers, and parents is that they consider Common Core to be integral to moving toward the district's goal of performing in the top 10 percent of schools nationally.

Table 1. Illinois CCSS Implementation Timeline

2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
June 2010, Illinois adopts the CCSS	Illinois designs implementation process and begins to develop and align resources	Illinois raises cut scores for Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) to better align with CCSS and upcoming PARCC assessment	Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA and mathematics; ISAT revised again (after raising cut scores) for better alignment with CCSS	Implementation of PARCC assessments for school accountability (all of the state's two- and four-year institutions have committed to using PARCC as one indicator of student readiness)

Detailed Research Findings

Administrators in District 54 knew that widespread teacher support of the Common Core was critical if the new standards were to gain traction. So they implemented the standards in all grades and provided the requisite training for all teachers via a new Common Core-aligned math and English Language Arts curriculum.[2] Both the development of and training on the new curricula for all grades represented tremendous investments of resources and energy; as a result, teachers appear to demonstrate a solid grasp of how their classrooms, lessons, and plans will need to change to address the demands of the Common Core. However, they are concerned about the increase in rigor demanded by the standards, and early first-semester assessment results are lagging, indicating the need for continued curricular improvements.

Rather than implement the Common Core in phases, District 54 chose to implement the standards in all grades, K–8, in 2013–2014. To prepare for this major transition, district leaders reviewed nationally available curricular materials claiming to be Common Core-aligned, but did not find any programs they felt were satisfactory, particularly regarding complexity of texts and lessons and supporting student mastery instead of just exposure to mathematical concepts. Instead, the district spent the 2012–2013 school year developing an aligned, unit-by-unit scope and sequence for each grade level in both mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). Two task forces (one for math and one for ELA) comprised of representative teachers from all grade levels and schools in the district oversaw scope and sequence development. Task force members received training on the Common Core standards and the instructional shifts at conferences hosted by Student Achievement Partners and met monthly to develop their own understanding of the standards and the requisite instructional shifts. Rather than adopt new, purportedly Common Core-aligned materials, the task forces chose to work with existing curriculum materials, believing that their core programs contained viable curricular resources that, when repurposed, re-sequenced, and supplemented, could be effective tools in teaching the standards.[3] One of the primary aims of the makeover was to increase the cognitive complexity of the materials and tasks (see Appendix for sample scope and sequence for English and math). Teachers developed targeted supplements to address gaps between the existing curricula and the new CCSS-aligned scope and sequence. Each unit includes assessment questions, modeled on PARCC sample items, and aligned to essential outcomes.[4] The district also purchased, based on recommendations from the task force, nonfiction texts that tie into the demands of the standards and the district's new scope and sequence.

“ Rather than adopt new, purportedly Common Core-aligned materials, the task forces chose to work with existing curriculum materials, believing that their core programs contained viable curricular resources that, when repurposed, re-sequenced, and supplemented, could be effective tools in teaching the standards. ”

The new unit template, organized into a singular scope and sequence, asks teachers to use existing materials in new ways: in a new order, in newly designed lessons aligned to new assessments, and alongside (when not replaced by) new content, in the form of new nonfiction/informational texts, new formative assessment questions in reading, and new mathematics activities that require more conceptual engagement from students. The new units are designed to be taught consistently at each grade level so that every teacher in the same grade level is teaching the same lesson at the same time. However, the year ahead will shed light onto whether teachers are able to present familiar material in a novel way—or whether familiarity breeds bad habits and simplistic “tweaking” of old lessons.

As the task forces developed the scopes and sequences for math and ELA during the 2012–2013 school year, individual task force members shared them with their colleagues during faculty meetings, Wednesday early release days, and in their collaborative teams. In the spring of 2013, District 54 provided a full day release for all teachers at all

grade levels to introduce them to the Common Core and to the new scope and sequence for math and ELA and offer training in their use. The district also provided intensive professional development during the summer for teachers to work with their learning teams to plan for full implementation of the standards in 2013–2014 school year. "Our goal was that no teacher would leave here without knowing the expectation for them in August," a district leader explained. Approximately 63 percent of the district's teachers attended the multi-day summer planning courses.[5] Although all teachers reported understanding the expectations, teachers who were part of the task forces appeared more confident in their ability to plan lessons using the new curriculum than those who were not part of the development process.

The district has also built feedback mechanisms into the task force structure so teachers can weigh in on the new curricula throughout the first year of implementation. District leaders expect this feedback to help raise the quality of the materials as teachers and administrators grapple with the realities of implementation. During task force meetings in mid-October 2013, for example, teachers noted that students did not do well on their first mathematics mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments, which were modeled on the PARCC sample items. As a result, the task forces made adjustments to the curriculum-embedded assessments (including a greater balance of item types), developed study guides for teachers to help them with the next round of unit assessments, and worked with teacher teams to reiterate the need to use assessments to guide planning.

> "...district leaders reported that teachers were taking longer to plan lessons than to teach them, at least during the first few weeks of school. Now, however, they appear to be moving into a rhythm."

As District 54 began its first year with the new Common Core-aligned materials, teachers and administrators seemed clear about district expectations and the impact that the new standards should have in their classrooms. Yet some educators expressed concern about the higher levels of rigor demanded by the standards. Before the school year started, teachers reported that lesson planning was taking much longer, partly because the new questioning techniques they are asked to use demand that they think through and prepare for varied student responses to much more open-ended questions. Teachers found that applying the shifts in instruction—greater focus on questioning and the quality of student responses—and using the revised scope and sequence quickly exposed gaps in student knowledge and preparation at all grade and performance levels. Already, the district has added acceleration blocks for literacy and math to support students who are behind or to provide enrichment activities for high-performing students.

Union leaders noted that that some teachers were feeling overloaded with the additional planning required by the acceleration blocks, and that others were uncomfortable with the new unit templates. As the 2013–2014 school year began, union leaders were working tightly with district and building administrators to address these types of issues. When interviewed again two months into the new school year, district leaders reported that teachers were taking longer to plan lessons than to teach them, at least during the first few weeks of school. Now, however, they appear to be moving into a rhythm. District 54 administrators plan to monitor implementation closely during the remainder of the 2013–2014 school year to see whether educators are making Common Core-aligned instruction the "new normal" in their classrooms.

District 54 has a longstanding mechanism for teacher collaboration (a professional learning community) that drives improvement in the district and is central to school-level Common Core implementation, providing peer support and peer accountability.

District 54 moved to a professional learning community (PLC) structure about eight years ago (see sidebar on the next page). This move was a big change for the district, introducing transparency in teaching practice and materials, teacher teaming, and a laser focus on data and results. The shift to PLCs resulted in some initial turnover in school leadership over several years as a new emphasis on data helped identify principals who were not meeting district expectations and were subsequently let go. The district's commitment to PLCs is evident in its induction of new teachers (who are provided with specific materials and training on PLCs before they set foot in their schools) and in its structuring of school-embedded professional development (which uses the PLC as the primary delivery unit). The district's current union contract also includes collaborative time for teachers.

Of course, time spent in collaboration may prove to be either be a waste of time or time well spent. The PLC is not a silver bullet, yet administrators and teachers believe that having this structure has laid a strong foundation for Common Core implementation. As one teacher put it, "We've been practicing in the PLC model for so long that we've been able to have these kinds of conversations [about instruction] and we have a level of transparency that is necessary to do this kind of work." Expectations for PLCs are set by the district and monitored by school principals, instructional coaches, and mentors. The district expects that collaborative teams will spend most of their time on common planning, developing shared formative assessments, and analyzing assessment data to determine student needs and teacher actions. At the junior high level, the Common Core has placed a premium on grade- and subject-specific curricular conversations: although teams historically met within departments, they shifted to cross-subject (and single-grade) teams temporarily so that they could learn deeply about the standards specific to their grade. Now, the teams again meet departmentally (cross-grades) so that they can focus on the new curriculum for their subject area; principals and teachers felt it was easier for same-subject teachers to engage in in-depth instructional conversations. (Department teams also include resource teachers who support curriculum planning and assessment.) Administrators are expected to drop in on collaborative team meetings regularly and to provide support as needed, including calling on district coaches or identifying additional resources.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

A **professional learning community (PLC)** is specifically designed to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. In education, core characteristics of PLCs include team work in which leadership and responsibility for individual student learning are collectively shared. PLCs are generally structured to provide educators with time to reflect on their practice, using extensive peer feedback, with the overall goal of improving student learning.

"Of course, time spent in collaboration may prove to be either be a waste of time or time well spent."

With the new math and ELA materials introduced in 2013–2014, collaborative teams now focus on implementation of the new scope and sequence, instructional strategies, and formative assessments. Administrators also plan to be more involved in facilitating Common Core implementation, troubleshooting issues as they arise. Given the district's heavy investment in this collaborative structure, proper implementation will likely depend on how well teams use their time to focus on aligned instruction, curriculum, and assessments. Two months into the school year, district leaders reported that the quality of implementation mirrors the quality of the collaborative teams, with weaker teams struggling far more than stronger ones when it comes to teaching to the new standards and making the necessary instructional shifts in the classroom.

Regular use of student performance data, mostly gleaned from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), enables a culture of improvement and accountability in District 54. District leaders have used MAP to set and track growth targets over the last eight years, so it has gained great credibility with teachers and school leaders. But uncertainty about the new PARCC assessment and its correlation with MAP may present a challenge to the district's culture of data-based accountability.

Concurrent with the introduction of PLCs eight years ago, the district also instituted the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) as a common, district-wide diagnostic assessment. The MAP assessment is administered three times a year in all grades. Test data are used by teachers to monitor student growth over the school year, identify areas of support for struggling students, and establish areas of acceleration for high-achieving students.

MAP is a key component of the district's transparent and ongoing process of data sharing. The district conducts a ninety-day reporting cycle for all schools, by which every school reports to lead district administrators and the superintendent three times per year on their progress toward district goals as determined by MAP data, team-created common assessments, and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). District leaders also hold an annual data retreat for all

district and school staff to present current ISAT and MAP data. At the school level, each grade level develops an action plan, which is updated every six weeks. In 2013–2014, all action plans will focus on Common Core instructional strategies. Examples of such strategies featured in a school improvement plan include: "Teach academic language explicitly to students using sentence starters and sheltered instruction strategies"; "Monitor reading comprehension and build critical-thinking skills by implementing higher-level questioning and written response throughout the content areas"; and "Increase the quantity and quality of content area reading."

The data-sharing process helps district leaders see and hear themes and track data closely so that interventions—for individual teachers, across grade levels, and even building-wide—can occur swiftly. The process also encourages inter-school collaboration. "Every time we do [these 90-day reviews] principals are calling other principals to make site visits to other schools to learn about something that was shared. That was not the culture when I came here," a district administrator explained.

> "Yet district leaders and teachers don't feel they'll know for sure whether MAP assessments are truly aligned to the Common Core until results can be correlated with the upcoming PARCC results."

Since its adoption, MAP testing has provided District 54 with a reliable, nationally normed benchmark for growth. As the district moves into full implementation of the Common Core, however, the MAP test itself also changed, adapting to align more directly with Common Core. Before the current school year started, teachers expressed some concern over the changing format of the questions and a potential disconnect between the purpose of the test—to measure growth—and the benchmarking of students' ability to meet the standards.

With the first of three MAP administrations now complete in the 2013–2014 school year, district administrators report that they have seen positive changes in the MAP test. These include new types of questions similar to PARCC sample items and computer elements similar to PARCC, such as drag-and-drop responses that allow students to more easily cite evidence from the text. These changes in the MAP also appear to have ameliorated some of the concerns teachers expressed at the beginning of the year. As of this writing, ten of the district's twenty-seven schools are outperforming on the new MAP where they were a year ago in both reading and math.

Yet district leaders and teachers don't feel they'll know for sure whether MAP assessments are truly aligned to the Common Core until results can be correlated with the upcoming PARCC results. The district is operating under the assumption that PARCC will be well aligned to the Common Core standards, but neither District 54 nor national researchers will be able to conduct a validation study until well after the PARCC assessments are released and in use. The PARCC assessment also presents district leaders with critical operational challenges: the logistical challenges of how the tests will be administered (including whether the formative components will overlap with MAP testing cycles or replace MAP altogether), and how the district will update its technology infrastructure to share data in quick turnaround cycles. Early insight into how District 54 will meet these challenges—and, more importantly, how well its new curricula and the MAP are preparing students for Common Core-aligned assessments—will come in Spring 2014, as the district participates in field-testing the PARCC assessments.

Summary of Findings

District 54 prepared intensively for a year prior to implementing Common Core by collaborating with teachers in all grades and schools and updating the district's learning and accountability structures. The district purposefully and thoughtfully rebuilt its curriculum to align more closely to the Common Core, and provided substantial school-embedded professional development support for educators and principals. Going forward, successful implementation of the new standards throughout the district will depend on school and district administrators' ability to learn from this first year of implementation, make adjustments to the curricular scope and sequence as needed, and continue to provide strong support for teachers. Uncertainty about the MAP's relationship to the as-yet-developed PARCC assessment may present a significant challenge if District 54's teachers do not feel that the consortium's assessments are consistent with the MAP tests they have come to value; such a mismatch could undermine District 54's data-driven accountability culture.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in District 54

Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials	◆ Two curriculum task forces (for math and ELA) met monthly during the 2012–2013 school year to develop a CCSS-aligned district scope and sequence that repurposed, realigned, and re-sequenced curriculum already in use. ◆ Task forces used supplemental materials from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), EngageNY, PARCC (for formative assessment questions), and other state websites. Two books, *Navigating the English Language Arts Common Core Standards* (A. Peery et al.) and *Common Core Mathematics in a PLC at Work* (M. Larson et al.), were central references for the revised scope and sequence. ◆ The new scope and sequence is designed to be taught in coordination with acceleration blocks (additional forty-minute blocks for math and literacy) and consistently at each grade level, so that every teacher in the same grade level is teaching the same lesson at the same time.
Use of CCSS-aligned Assessments	◆ ISAT, the state summative test, is administered annually and required by the state. In preparation for the CCSS and to better align the test to the ACT, the state raised the cut scores for the ISAT in 2012–2013. ◆ The district uses the Measures of Academic Progress (an online, adaptive test that measures student growth in reading, math and science) testing in all schools to track student growth and set growth targets, AIMSweb (an assessment system that provides progress monitoring to support interventions and tiered instruction) to assess struggling readers, and end-of-course assessments for algebra and geometry. ◆ The new district curriculum includes formative assessment questions (modeled on PARCC sample items) that teachers use to design their own formative assessments in professional learning communities (PLCs). Once the PARCC assessments are available, the district will determine how well teacher-developed formative assessments align to them. ◆ District 54 will field-test the PARCC assessment in spring 2014 in twenty-five of its twenty-seven schools.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in District 54 (cont'd)	
Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	◆ The district conducts a ninety-day reporting cycle for all schools. Every school reports to the cabinet and superintendent three times per year on its progress toward district goals as determined by MAP data and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). ◆ District leaders hold an annual data retreat for all district and school staff to present current ISAT and MAP data. Each grade level develops an action plan with actionable goals, updated every six weeks. In 2013–2014, all action plans will focus on CCSS instructional strategies. ◆ Principal evaluations are linked to building-level growth components and leadership standards, and include multiple measures and frequent observations. District leaders expect that principals will focus on and support the CCSS, the new curriculum, and the shifts in instructional practice. ◆ Teacher evaluations currently are linked to building-level student growth components (this may change once the new system is developed by the state). Teacher evaluations include observations using the Charlotte Danielson framework. ◆ PLCs and the CCSS curriculum task forces hold teachers accountable for implementing the CCSS and provide feedback loops to inform the district about specific issues or problems as they arise. Expectations for PLCs are clearly set so that they focus on instruction and assessment rather than managerial issues.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	◆ The district plans and delivers all district PD. Outside consultants Rick and Becky DuFour lead annual PLC trainings. ◆ In 2012–2013, the district provided one release day for staff, by grade level, to attend training on the CCSS and the new curriculum. In addition, the district provided intensive summer trainings for classroom teachers and their PLCs to start planning using the new CCSS-aligned curriculum. Sixty-three percent of teachers attended these trainings. ◆ The district provides embedded PD and support in schools through a team of full-time released teachers who act as instructional math and literacy coaches and instructional mentors. Principals work with the coaches and mentors to determine and meet educator needs. Principals receive the same training as educators during their own PD time or side-by-side with their teachers. District leaders are available to principals and teachers who have questions about the CCSS, the curriculum, or other instructional issues.
Communication and Buy-in	◆ District leaders are tightly aligned on their messages to staff about their goals, the CCSS, and continuous improvement. This messaging is enforced in district-led trainings for coaches, mentors, and support staff and through talking points provided by the district to administrators and teachers. Talking points are also translated into several other languages and distributed to bilingual resource teachers. ◆ The district community relations director is developing a communications plan to support CCSS implementation specifically. ◆ The superintendent meets with union representatives several times per year to keep them informed and problem-solve. ◆ The district has a strong partnership with the PTA, which assists in making presentations about the CCSS to parents. The district developed and distributed parent guides at the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year that included information about the CCSS. ◆ The district distributes a monthly newsletter to parents and the community, and maintains a Facebook page and a website. The superintendent also writes a monthly article published in the local newspaper. ◆ A District Citizens Advisory Committee, made up of district leaders and representatives from each school and the community, provides an in-house focus group for the district, assisting the district to determine community responses to issues such as the CCSS implementation.

Appendix: Sample District 54 Scope and Sequence - English

Grade 3 • Unit 1 • Week 1

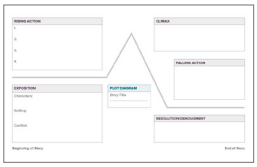
ESSENTIAL OUTCOME

RL.3.5 Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

I CAN STATEMENT

I can analyze a story to identify elements of prose (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution) in order to explain how one event builds on an earlier section.

I can identify parts of a poem.

SHARED READER: REALISTIC FICTION	GRAPHIC ORGANIZER	HIGH COGNITIVE DEMAND TASKS	COMMON ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS
◆ First Day Jitters – Unit 1 p. 14-31 ◆ Tina's Try-Out Day – Unit 1 p. 12-13 ◆ Give Me Normal - Read Aloud Anthology p. 10 **GUIDED READING: REALISTIC FICTION** ◆ The New House ◆ The New Kid ◆ The New Hometown	(see detail, below) 	Defend the author's decision to _____. *(wait to reveal a character, not state something explicitly, write the ending of the story the way they did).* (DOK [Depth of Knowledge Level]3) Critique why you think the author chose to imply rather than state certain information important to the plot? (DOK 3)	**Part A:** Is there an identifiable problem in the story? **Part B:** Cite evidence that supports your thinking. **Part C:** How can you distinguish the problem you chose in Part A from other events that occurred in the story?

RISING ACTION

1.

2.

3.

4.

CLIMAX

FALLING ACTION

EXPOSITION

Characters:

Setting:

Conflict:

PLOT DIAGRAM

Story Title

_____

RESOLUTION/DENOUEMENT

Beginning of Story

End of Story

Endnotes

1. "Curriculum" is defined here as a series of lessons that roll up into units that are sequenced appropriately, based on the discipline and paced to fit into a school year. Each lesson includes (1) a target standard for student learning and (2) activities and materials, including formative assessments, used to help the students meet that target.

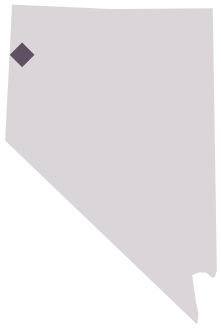
2. "Scope and sequence" refers to a listing of the content and skills and the order in which the content and skills are taught in a lesson, unit, or grade level.

3. Existing district curriculum included the following textbooks: *Everyday Math* and *Treasures* (McGraw-Hill) and *Language of Literature* (McDougal Littell). Whether these materials are aligned to the Common Core is up for debate; authors of *Everyday Math*, for instance, have penned a piece that explains how their curriculum diverges from the Common Core deliberately. See: http://everydaymath.uchicago.edu/teaching-topics/standards/common-core-article/.

4. Essential outcomes are prioritized learning outcomes that the district believes all students should know and be able to do. These outcomes are assessed using formative and summative assessments.

5. District 54 offered optional full-day classes during the summer of 2013 to help teachers and school teams prepare to implement the Common Core in their classrooms in the 2013–2014 school year. Teachers could register as many days as they wanted throughout June and again in August. Sessions were staffed with Literacy or Math Task Force participants as facilitators to answer questions and provide guidance as school teams prepared lessons and unit plans for the upcoming year.

The Creative Implementer



WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Reno-Tahoe, Nevada, and Surrounding Areas

Restricted by a tight budget, Washoe County School District has creatively approached its existing resources and built on partnerships with national experts to roll out the new Common Core State Standards to teachers, students, and the community. The district's innovative and grassroots Core Task Project, which has reached about half the teachers in the district, is a model for teacher-centered, Common Core-aligned professional development. Washoe is now trying to ensure that this sustained professional development reaches all district teachers, and that it has reliable measures to gauge whether classroom change is truly taking hold. Lacking a comprehensive, Common Core-aligned curriculum, Washoe must assess whether current professional development offerings and curricular guidance are sufficient in helping teachers to make the extensive modifications demanded by the new standards.

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State and District Context

The Nevada State Board of Education adopted the Common Core in 2010. The state's transition timeline staggered the initial rollout of the ELA and mathematics standards, committing to full ELA implementation by 2012–2013 and mathematics by 2015–2016 (see timeline below). Nevada was also granted a waiver from the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ("No Child Left Behind") in August 2012, contingent in part on its commitment to implement both the Common Core standards and a new Nevada School Performance Framework, under which schools receive a star rating on a scale of 1–5. Nevada also plans to transition its summative assessments to state-consortia-developed Smarter Balanced assessments in 2015. Until then, the state continues to gauge student achievement using Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) and the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE), which students must pass in order to graduate. During the transition, CRTs were revised for greater alignment to the Common Core and math cut scores were raised for grades 6–8 in 2012–2013, leading to dramatic drops in overall proficiency throughout the state.

WASHOE COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

65,206 students

3,364 teachers

63 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, and 13 high schools; 8 charters and 1 online school

44.2% free- and reduced-lunch eligible

16.8% limited English proficient

37% Hispanic; 48% white; 6% Asian; 3% African American; 2% Native American; 4% multiracial

Urban district that encompasses Reno-Tahoe

Washoe County, a large district encompassing the urban center of Reno-Tahoe, recently underwent a leadership transition, hiring a new superintendent who started in the 2012–2013 school year. In his action plan for the district (which built on a 2010–2011 strategic plan already in place), the new superintendent emphasized high-quality Common Core implementation as a primary goal for the district. Central office and funding decisions have subsequently supported this emphasis; for example, the district moved its Department of Assessment from its Office of Accountability to its Office of Academics to prioritize a tighter relationship between new Smarter Balanced assessments and instruction.

Table 1: Nevada CCSS Implementation Timeline

2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
October 2010, Nevada adopts the CCSS	Full implementation of CCSS in K–8 ELA and K–2 math; grades 3–8 math remain under NV standards with "targeted CCSS" expectations;* grades 9–12 ELA and math remain under NV standards	Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA; full implementation of CCSS in K–2 math; 3–8 math under NV standards with "targeted CCSS" expectations; implementation of CCSS in Algebra I and Geometry in grade 9; NV standards in grades 10–12	Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA; full implementation of CCSS in K–8 math; implementation of CCSS in Algebra I and Geometry in grade 9 and Geometry in Algebra II in grade 10; NV standards in grades 11-12	Full implementation of K–12 ELA and K-11 mathematics (NV standards in grade 12); implementation of Smarter Balanced assessments for school-level accountability purposes

*See state-provided transition documents clarifying expectations for overlapping NV standards and CCSS at http://www.doe.nv.gov/NDE_Offices/APAC/Standards/Math/Transition_Documents/.

In recent years, the district has seen modest gains in reading performance for fourth grade and grades 6–8, based on state CRT data. This includes a 4 percentage point increase in fourth grade and a 5 percentage point increase in seventh grade between 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. Consistent with statewide drops in proficiency in under the revised CRT cut scores, the percentage of Washoe County students in grades 6–8 meeting proficiency in math dropped sharply in 2012–2013; math scores in the elementary grades, however, improved by a percentage point. Achievement gaps have narrowed slightly in both reading and math, but persist.

Washoe County district staff report a good relationship with its state education agency. By law and culture, Nevada is a "local control" state for education. Consistent with this governance approach, the Nevada Department of Education has provided minimal direction to its districts about either curriculum adoption or teacher training relative to transitioning to the Common Core. Washoe County is an influential district and leader in Nevada (together, Washoe County and Clark County—the state's largest district—encompass more than two-thirds of the state's schools), and the state has proven willing to defer to the district's implementation priorities and plans. Politically, although some anti-Common Core sentiments have gained traction elsewhere in Nevada (particularly in the northern, less populated part of the state), pushback in Washoe County has been a relatively insignificant factor in its implementation efforts.

Washoe County also privileges school-based autonomy. Principals are held accountable through a 100-point index of school accountability created by the district and implemented in 2012–2013 (separate from the state's school performance framework mentioned earlier). The index measures student growth, student proficiency, and overall learning conditions. District administrators are seeking to ensure that the Common Core is reflected in the index (e.g., by adjusting student performance measures to reflect Smarter Balanced assessments and requiring that schools address the Common Core in their "family engagement plans").

Detailed Research Findings

Absent major new investments from the state or federal government, Washoe County faces a tight education budget, and has made smart use of partnerships with national experts and organizations to ease the transition to Common Core. District staff has also maximized relationships with the local press to communicate clearly with the public about the intent of the new standards.

Like many districts throughout the country, Washoe is attempting to implement major reforms with a budget decimated by the Great Recession. The district lost $40 million, or 9 percent of its budget, in 2012–2013, and faced another shortfall of $46 million–$55 million in the 2013–2014 school year. Hence Washoe has made smart use of partnerships with national organizations to help tackle the resource challenges inherent in transitioning to the Common Core.

One such partnership is with the Basal Alignment Project (BAP), a national, collaborative initiative led by the Council of Great City Schools, which seeks to augment and align existing English language arts (ELA) curricular materials to the new standards. Starting in 2012, about twenty teachers in Washoe County participated in BAP, joining with other educators across the country to re-write questions and lessons in elementary curriculum materials to ensure that they reflect the rigor and intent of the Common Core ELA standards (Houghton Mifflin, McGraw Hill, and Pearson materials were revised). The work of the BAP teams is coordinated by Student Achievement Partners (SAP), a national nonprofit organization founded by the primary writers of the Common Core and a widely respected arbiter of alignment, to ensure quality of the resulting materials. The final products were disseminated to Washoe teachers via Edmodo, an interactive online platform that allows teachers to download and share lessons and tools. In the spring and summer of 2013, the same national collaborative (including Washoe teachers) began rewriting and aligning materials in literature anthologies for grades 6–10 ("Anthology Alignment Project") and K–2 (the "Read-aloud Alignment Project").

> "Washoe has made smart use of partnerships with national organizations to help tackle the resource challenges inherent in transitioning to the Common Core."

Although the BAP and its spinoffs don't address the full scope of Washoe's curricular needs (they provide only ELA instructional materials), participation in them allowed Washoe to leverage the work of a core group of district teachers and gain access to a suite of materials created and vetted by national experts. Washoe has also taken the tools that Student Achievement Partners developed to train BAP writers and used them as professional development materials for other district teachers.

At both the secondary and elementary level, Washoe has drawn extensively on its relationship with Student Achievement Partners. Teachers use SAP-developed rubrics and practice guides (described further below) to improve lesson delivery and materials. The district also has hosted experts from SAP to train teachers on the key instructional shifts called for by the Common Core. Similarly, Washoe leaders are participating in a (free) pilot project with Charlotte Danielson—a national field leader in teacher observation—to help them align district observation tools and practices with the Common Core.

Washoe has also leveraged local, non-monetary support to buttress Common Core implementation. For example, district leaders have approached journalists at the *Reno Gazette-Journal* in an effort to convey their plans to the community. The paper has proven willing to cover the Common Core consistently, featuring the new standards themselves, the district's plan to implement them, and multiple articles explaining the differences between the old and new expectations (drawing from national sources like Smarter Balanced and CoreStandards.org). Recent articles have also compared sample assessment items under the former Nevada standards and the Common Core, illustrating the relative rigor of the latter.

Communications outreach and new partnerships cannot cover all of the resource gaps, however, and Washoe has real needs—particularly in funding the technology upgrades needed to deliver new Smarter Balanced assessments. Some components of the district's strategy have also required significant reallocation of resources, not just innovating to stretch dollars. But Washoe's commitment to maximizing local advantages and seeking out national partners demonstrates a smart start to implementation for other cash-strapped districts.

Washoe's initial Common Core professional development activities have focused on key learning shifts and instructional changes, rather than developing a new curriculum. Their voluntary, teacher-led professional development programming—to date, reaching about half of the district's teachers—has helped elementary teachers make major changes to their ELA practice and empowered social studies teachers to lead Common Core implementation in the secondary grades. But addressing instructional shifts in the absence of a full Common Core-aligned curriculum has raised significant challenges, too.

ABOUT THE CORE TASK PROJECT

The Core Task Project (CTP) is a two-year-old Washoe grassroots professional learning experience designed to help teachers understand the Common Core and make changes to their practice. The project initially began as a small group of elementary teacher leaders using training materials (including rubrics, sample lessons, and videos from national organizations) to address the instructional shifts inherent in the new standards. Under the direction of an interested social studies teacher leader, CTP grew to include secondary social studies in 2012–13. CTP is a three-week model, with three to four full days of professional development to support teachers' classroom implementation experience.

In 2012–2013, the team also piloted the Core Task Implementation Project (CTiP), a sustained professional development program for two to three teachers from sixteen elementary schools who met in grade bands throughout the year.

To date, approximately 1,675 teachers, about half those in the district, have participated in CTP or CTiP, which is delivered and led by teacher leaders and program coordinators housed within the district's Curriculum and Instruction Department.

CTP has since expanded into half of elementary schools by the 2013–2014 school year.

Please see Appendix: *Core Task Project Overview and Core Task Implementation Project Plans* for additional information.

While Washoe offers extensive curricular tools for supporting Common Core instruction,[1] the district currently does not provide teachers with a comprehensive, Common Core-aligned curriculum. (This absence, in part, reflects the field's general lack of strong, Common Core-vetted materials that constitute full curricula). As the district chief academic officer explains, "We didn't have the text to support the new standards, so we had to make our text fit the standards by supplementing, rewriting questions, etc. We don't want to spend money until we know there is a 100 percent aligned product." The district recognizes that these activities still leave gaps in instructional materials; for English language arts, it has sought to bridge them in part through its partnership with the different alignment projects described above.

Even so, it will be difficult for a district as large as Washoe to effectively implement the Common Core at scale without a high-quality, fully aligned curriculum available in every classroom. While Washoe waits for the publishing field to catch up, the district has energetically embraced a teacher-generated professional development strategy that is helping educators make major changes in their practice.

Washoe's signature Common Core professional development program, the Core Task Project (CTP), as well as the related Core Task Implementation Project (CTiP), includes both elementary and secondary social studies teachers. (See *About the Core Task Project* sidebar). Because the district is adapting its curricular materials through a series of course guides, the Core Task Project focuses deeply on the learning shifts and instructional changes reflected in the standards, as opposed to training teachers specifically on a new set of materials. Teachers engage with curricular exemplars as models of what aligned English language arts instruction should look like (e.g., materials from the Basal Alignment Project and close-reading lessons developed by SAP).

The emphasis on classroom-level changes is complemented by collaborative planning. Multiple teachers explain that common planning with their grade-band peers means that they feel accountable to fellow teachers to execute the lessons crafted together properly. As one elementary teacher explained, "Your colleagues depend on your students' mastery of the standards." ELA teachers frequently cite the importance of the "vertical staircase," meaning how the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (within the Common Core) organize each set of grade-specific standards by gradually building their complexity. Understanding the standards above and below each grade (and reflecting those standards in curriculum planning) is critical.

To support one another, the CTiP participants use the "Instructional Practice Guides" developed by SAP to assess their own lesson plans and guide reflection with their peers. For example, the guides ask whether, in early elementary lessons, "a majority of read aloud time is spent reading, listening to, speaking, or writing about text(s)"; in all grades, the guides ask whether "the text(s) are at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year."[2] District leaders also describe the importance of the Instructional Practice Guides in establishing a common district-wide language about Common Core instruction, giving everyone a shared set of practices to look for in observing and providing feedback.

> "'We didn't have the text to support the new standards, so we had to make our text fit the standards by supplementing, rewriting questions, etc. We don't want to spend money until we know there is a 100 percent aligned product.'"

At the secondary level, the focus on aligned instruction rather than a single, comprehensive curriculum has enabled the Core Task Project to expand to social studies teachers, including those in history and government. Washoe social studies teachers have generally welcomed the opportunity to align their instruction with the Common Core in English language arts/literacy, and explain that the emphasis on close analysis of primary sources supports the shifts to content-rich nonfiction and using text-based evidence. They particularly appreciate that the stress on literacy skills empowers them to spend more time on complex texts, and that the emphasis on text-based evidence levels the playing field somewhat for students with less background knowledge.

They also say that their department's decision to move to performance-based assessments frees them to explore texts more deeply with their students (obviating concerns about "getting through" a certain amount of material). These same teachers have chosen to adopt Common Core ELA tools—such as the Smarter Balanced Argumentative Writing Rubric—to assess how their materials and students are performing against similar goals. As Common Core implementation moves forward in Washoe, these secondary teachers are poised to lead colleagues who teach other subjects.

Still, the lack of a comprehensive, shared curriculum makes it easier for some to avoid change or fail to grasp the magnitude of the shifts. For example, at the close of 2012–2013, some teachers report that their peers who had not yet undergone intensive professional development had transformed very little in their classrooms. Given the clear need for explicit guidance on adapting teaching and materials, district-level administrators are not shying away from the task of curricular alignment. In addition to the aforementioned grade-by-grade overhauls of course guides, the district has also sought to revise, discard, and create new interim assessments aligned to the Common Core (see next section). Yet without a singular, content-rich curriculum in place, teachers still have to connect the dots between the new course guides, new interim assessments, and their existing materials as written—and principals and coaches have to both guide and hold them accountable for doing so.

> "Still, the lack of a comprehensive, shared curriculum makes it easier for some to avoid change or fail to grasp the magnitude of the shifts."

For some teachers, the paradigm shifts fostered by intensive professional development like the Core Task Project will be sufficient to make these connections. Whether that will be the case for all of Washoe's 3,000-plus teachers remains to be seen.

Washoe has committed significant time and resources to scaling the Core Task Project in 2013–14 and 2014–15 to improve the effectiveness of its professional development offerings. Whether these efforts translate into improved instruction is to be determined, but early feedback from teachers is promising.

The Core Task Project stands in contrast to Washoe's previous district-wide approach to professional development, which was considered largely insufficient in helping teachers make major changes in their practice or curriculum. Washoe's director of professional learning, new to the district in the 2012–2013 school year, explains that the district's prior approach had been school-based and not mandatory, leading to instructional silos, repetition, and unevenness across

schools. Mandatory, all-district trainings had been few—usually just once a year—and insufficiently focused on the standards to deliver the kind of intensive reflection and learning fostered in the Core Task Project. The train-the-trainer professional development delivery system that pre-dated the new standards had also fallen short; the superintendent described it to the *Reno Gazette-Journal* as "like a game of telephone."

Given these shortcomings, Washoe implemented major changes to its district-wide professional development team beginning in the 2013–2014 school year. The Department of Professional Learning, in collaboration with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and others, developed a comprehensive professional development plan, approved by the superintendent and school board, to expend $1.7 million a year, for two years, on fifteen hours of annual training for all teachers, along with optional but encouraged follow-up (more below). Although not all training is specific to the new standards and shifts, the district's goal is to integrate all professional development "through the lens of the Common Core." For example, Washoe continues to deliver teacher training on its Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives, but now does so through activities such as looking at SEL competencies in the context of the speaking and listening standards. The new plan also helps the district to reach all teachers directly, so that Common Core information isn't secondhand, diluted, or fragmented. The goal, in the words of Washoe's chief academic officer, is to "keep a healthy tension on teachers and principals through concentrated professional development and [keep everyone] living in a zone of productive discomfort."

> "Although not all training is specific to the new standards and shifts, the district's goal is to integrate all professional development 'through the lens of the Common Core.'"

The district has also tapped the teacher leaders behind the Core Task Project to develop and lead district-wide professional development. At the end of the 2012–2013 school year, teachers who had undergone the CTP process reported cautious optimism that the district had identified the right priorities and team to deliver to others the high-quality training they'd received themselves.

The new professional development approach launched with an "8/8@8" event (held at 8:00 a.m. on August 8, 2013) for all district teachers, including specialists, arts, and physical education teachers. The kickoff began with a full-day professional development session on the Common Core English language arts/literacy standards, facilitated by site-based coaches and specialists, teacher leaders, building administrators, and central office administrators—all of whom were given tightly vetted materials to ensure consistency of message. Ongoing follow-up professional development will be delivered once a month on early-release Wednesdays, focusing in alternating quarters on the math and English standards. Initial response to the district-wide session was positive,[3] encouraging district leaders who are dedicated to making professional learning more engaging and relevant to teachers' needs.

As Washoe's Common Core implementation and professional development efforts accelerate, a critical next step is assessing whether genuine change in classroom practice is taking hold. To do so, it will need to ensure its accountability tools accurately measure Common Core-aligned teaching and learning.

In order to improve the quality of instructional feedback for teachers, Washoe is participating in a pilot with the Danielson Group during the current school year (2013–14) to refine its classroom observation rubric (already in use in the district) for greater alignment with the new standards. The district expects the revised rubric to foster greater coherence across observers. Similarly, the district has trained all teachers on the SAP practice guides to self-assess their own areas of weakness and strength in implementation.

Washoe has also made extensive efforts to revise its interim assessments to align more closely to the new standards. The district has required all teachers to discontinue use of interim assessments aligned to the old standards. At the elementary level, teachers have been asked to develop new interim assessments with district support. The Curriculum and Instruction Department trains teachers on new rubrics they should use to develop Common Core interim assessments, and the

Assessment Department helps ensure that teacher-developed interim assessments are technically sound. At the secondary level, the district has common end-of-semester assessments, and the Office of Academics has revised these assessments to align with the Common Core in math (there are no common district-wide end-of-semester assessments in ELA).

Ultimately, Washoe hopes to utilize a fully aligned system of assessment, including interim and summative tests, to help determine whether its professional development approach translates into improved student performance under the Common Core. The district eagerly awaits the arrival of the state-consortia-developed Smarter Balanced assessment and plans to field it in spring 2014.

Summary of Findings

Despite budget cutbacks, Washoe County School District is off to a promising start relative to Common Core implementation, driven by a grassroots approach to comprehensive professional development that has resonated with teachers. At the district level, administrators have sought and maximized partnerships that have helped them to improve upon their curricular resources, professional development, and monitoring of implementation. In the near future, the district has its hands full. It plans to scale sustained professional development (for all teachers) beginning in fall 2013, disseminate new accountability and curricular tools developed with national partners, and closely analyze whether these initiatives are paving the way for high-quality implementation.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County

Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials	◆ Washoe County has central textbook adoption for math and reading at the elementary grades, with supplemental texts in use in different schools. These texts must be approved by the district's vendor product review (which was revised in 2013–2014 for greater Common Core alignment—see below). The elementary grades use Houghton *Mifflin Reading*; many grade 3–5 teachers are using the Basal Alignment Project materials, which are disseminated to all teachers through a virtual network called Edmodo. Beginning in 2013–2014, K–2 teachers are also using materials from the Read Aloud Alignment Project and secondary teachers are using materials from the Anthology Alignment Project. *Everyday Mathematics* is in use throughout the district for elementary math, and Washoe County curriculum administrators offer professional development trainings focused on how teachers can revise their *Everyday Mathematics* materials to better support the Common Core. ◆ In secondary grades, social studies teachers are using primary source documents purchased by the district through a Teaching American History grant. Teachers participating in the Core Task Project for secondary social studies have also developed close-reading and questioning tasks, as well as a rubric to score student work. *Holt Mathematics* is a commonly used text for 6–8 math, and grades 7–12 English courses widely use *Holt Elements of Literature*. ◆ While no single, Common Core-aligned curriculum has been adopted, the district provides course guides, paced by units, to help teachers make decisions about what and when to teach from their different textbooks. The Office of Academics has dramatically re-written the guides (one grade at a time) to ensure that they support the appropriate grade-level standards and sequence of the CCSS. ◆ The district relies on principals and implementation specialists to have discussions with teachers about using the course guides instead of the publisher materials as written; at the secondary level, the district has common end-of-semester exams in math, which holds teachers accountable for using the guides and adjusting their materials. ◆ The Office of Academics has also rewritten its rubrics and process for purchasing vendor products. For the former, they drew from EngageNY, the Publisher's Criteria, the Tri-State Rubric, and the EQuIP Rubrics in the rewriting of the ELA rubrics. For the rewriting of the math rubrics, they drew from The Mathematics Curriculum Analysis Project and National Council for Teachers of Mathematics/National Council of Supervisor of Mathematics. The new vendor rubric and process have not yet been applied to the adoption of new materials.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County (cont'd)

Use of CCSS-aligned Formative and Interim Assessments	◆ Regarding **interim assessments**, the district has updated its common assessments as follows: » The district adopted a new version of the *Measures of Academic Progress* (MAP) for math in grades 1–9 and reading in grades 3–9. The Department of Assessment reviewed items in the new MAP for consistency and alignment with Smarter Balanced sample items and has found the test to be largely consistent. » The Kindergarten Portfolio (an alternative assessment for kindergarteners, which draws from pieces of a student's combined work) is designed to evaluate early numeracy, reading, and writing behaviors. Washoe's kindergarten program coordinator encouraged schools to change assessment windows to prioritize year-end mastery of standards for consistency with the CCSS. Additionally, a committee of kindergarten and pre-K teachers modified the portfolio assessment for greater CCSS alignment. » The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) will be administered three times per year (formerly twice) and changed to electronic input to give teachers timely, accessible data to adjust instruction. The district assessment specialist and an external expert evaluated DRA's alignment to CCSS and found that it aligned to the Foundational Standards. ◆ At the school level, teachers are required to discontinue use of interim assessments aligned to the old standards. At the elementary level, teachers are asked to develop new interim assessments and the district provides support to do so: Curriculum and Instruction trains teachers on new rubrics they should use to develop Common Core interim assessments, and Assessment staff help ensure that teacher-developed interim assessments are technically sound. At the secondary level, the district develops a set of common end-of-semester exams. ◆ Regarding summative assessments, Nevada plans to implement the Smarter Balanced assessment in 2014–15. In Washoe, twenty schools participated in the Smarter Balanced pilot in spring 2013 and the Assessment office is widely distributing SBAC sample items (released May 2013). Thirty-eight schools will participate in the field test in spring 2014.
Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	◆ Washoe implemented a new school-level accountability system in 2012–13; ratings are released every September. The system is points-based and relative across the district, and the CCSS will be reflected in different components (e.g., Smarter Balanced assessments will re-norm student performance measures; schools will have to demonstrate family engagement plans that address the CCSS). ◆ The district's new teacher evaluation framework was also implemented in 2012–13 year (although principals and teachers have experienced it largely as a pilot and are implementing gradually); current components are the Danielson rubric for evaluation and teacher-created growth plans. The district is participating in a pilot with the Danielson Group and Student Achievement Partners during the 2013–14 year to refine observation rubrics for greater alignment. A new measure of teacher effectiveness will be piloted in 2013–14.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	◆ The centerpiece of district's professional development on CCSS-ELA is the Core Task Project. (See *About the Core Task Project* sidebar.) ◆ The 2013–14 PD plan includes approximately fifteen hours of professional learning for each teacher in the district. The programming is developed to be consistent with CTP principles and in consultation with the CTP teacher leaders, and is differentiated by grade band and site. Follow-up PD is to be provided by implementation specialists and via optional Saturday enrichment. ◆ Professional learning communities are in place throughout the district; the extent to which PLC time is used strictly to discuss instruction (vs. administrative or other planning issues) varies by school. ◆ As of 2013–14, a network of thirty-three implementation specialists serves the district's elementary and middle schools and delivers PD programming and guidance as requested by teachers and principals; the expertise of these specialists skews toward better knowledge of the elementary CCSS than the high school standards and varies throughout the district. ◆ Thirty principals participated in a "Leading the Core" class (eighteen hours across six classes) taught by CTP teacher leaders in 2012–2013; the course was offered again in summer and fall 2013, and the district will deliver "Leading the Core" content through mandatory bimonthly principal trainings. ◆ The CTP teacher leaders also attend administrator and supervisor meetings to communicate about the CCSS.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County (cont'd)	
Communication and Buy-in	◆ The *Reno Gazette-Journal* has provided extensive and positive coverage of the CCSS and Washoe's implementation plans. ◆ Six CCSS-focused courses were offered through Parent University, a grant-funded, district-wide parent training program, in 2012–2013; courses focus on content of standards and academic vocabulary and what to look for to support children. Halfway through 2012–2013, Parent University has reached 750 unduplicated parents of Washoe County School District Students, or approximately 63 percent of its target of 1,200 for the program year. ◆ The new accountability framework for schools includes points within the index for student and family engagement. ◆ District administrators present a different Smarter Balanced sample assessment item to the School Board at each monthly meeting to educate these decision makers and the community about the specifics of the changes in instruction and expectations.

Appendix: Core Task Project Overview and Core Task Implementation Project Plans for Years 1 and 2

IMPLEMENTING THE CORE TASK PROJECT

Overview:

The Core Task Project occurs over three weeks. During the first week, teachers are released for a half-day professional learning to learn about the CCSS and collaboratively explore a Close Reading Exemplar. During the second week, they implement the lesson with their students. As available, CTP facilitators are in the field taking notes and supporting teachers through the work. In the third week, teachers are released for a half-day debrief and professional learning on assessing/measuring text complexity and writing text dependent questions.

Week 1: Learning about the CCSS and the Close Reading Strategy

The purpose of this half-day of professional learning is to frame the inquiry for what it means to shift instruction to the Core. Although some educators have heard of the "instructional shifts," few have had a sheltered opportunity to explore and discuss the implications for working with text complexity and text-dependent questions, particularly with the Close Reading Strategy.

The first half of the session focuses on building a shared foundation. Teachers review the "instructional shifts" via video content that includes CCSS authors, and share thoughts with partners and groups. Teachers juxtapose their personal experience to what is described in the video and what is explicitly stated in the Common Core Standards documents.

In the second half of the session, teachers experience the Close Reading Strategy via the text exemplar they will be teaching the following week. Teachers in K–2 approach this work through the read aloud, as foundational skills are vital but are not the focus of this work. Considerable time is also spent reading and discussing the elements of the lesson and how they differ from current practice. There may be some angst, as teachers are asked to suspend many of the practices they typically engage in introducing the text.

At the close of the session, teachers are asked to gather a range of student samples and closely monitor how their students performed as well as personal reflections during instruction.

Week 2: Implementing the lesson

During this week teachers implement the lesson. As available, facilitators offer to support teachers during instruction. This might include observing, sharing materials, and answering questions.

Week 3: Debriefing the Lesson and More Professional Learning

The focus of this half-day is on reflection and professional learning. Teachers spend nearly an hour reflecting on their experience with colleagues, including sharing student samples and considering next steps for this work. Facilitators engage with teachers in the reflections, learning from the experiences, and considering how to move the project forward.

In the second half of the session, teachers explore tools for understanding text complexity and writing text-dependent questions. Specifically, they analyze a piece of text using the text complexity qualitative rubric. Then they collaboratively write text-dependent questions.

CORE TASK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT 2014: FULLY INTEGRATING CCSS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM YEAR 1 (2013–14)

Tools, Resources, and "Instructional Shifts" to Move Students to College- and Career-Readiness; Building Sustainable Instructional Leadership

Overview:

By design, the CTiP functions as a cross-school PLC, employing the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Using exemplar resources from Student Achievement Partners and the Basal Alignment Project, teachers plan common lessons, reflect on student work, learn and plan again for lessons to be taught between meetings. Integrating new learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, teachers systematically insert close reading exemplar lessons and BAP lessons into the literacy block, shifting instruction toward CCSS outcomes. The work of the CTiP helps inform and drive the successful implementation of the CCSS in WCSD, offering a replicable model for site-based learning.

In Year 1, three teachers from each school site are brought together in a cross-school PLC to safely explore the instructional shifts and to gain confidence in the power behind the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Monthly sessions are spent in reflection (on instruction and student data), professional learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, and planning anchored in the BAP resources and Close Reading Exemplars. In between sessions, teachers implement the lesson, engage in blended learning on Edmodo, and reflect on their implementation and focus students.

Essential Questions:

1. How does the Basal Alignment Project and the Core Task Project fit within a strong literacy block?
2. How do we assess/monitor student progress using BAP and close reading exemplars?
3. How can the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium (WIDA) be integrated into this process?
4. How does collaborating shift instructional practice to align with the CCSS?
5. How can facilitating conversations in PK–3 align instructional practice to support student learning?
6. How does building capacity in individual teachers empower instructional site and district leadership? What tools and processes can be shared across the district?

CTiP 1 DATES	CONTENT	FOLLOW-UP
½ day sessions: SRG: 8:30 – 11:30 a.m.; C&L: 12:30 – 3:30 p.m.		
Sept. 17 (PK–2) Sept. 19 (3–6)	Close read, Collecting student evidence	Edmodo professional learning & reflection; lesson implementation; informal sharing with colleagues
November 5 (PK–2) November 7 (3–6)	Using BAP Resources	
December 3 (PK–2) December 5 (3–6)	Speaking and Listening SEL connections	
January 23 (PK–2) January 30 (3–6)	Text-dependent Questions/Text Complexity (SPED & ELL – supporting ALL students with questions)	
February 25 (PK–2) February 27 (3–6)	Writing to Sources	
March 18 (PK–2) March 20 (3–6)	Academic Vocabulary/ SLO Connections	
May 22 8:30 – 3:30 (full day)	Celebrations/Reflection/Planning 12:30 – 3:30 will include 6-12 vertical participants	Leadership role for following year's planning

** SRG will have a vertical meeting (PK–12) on January 16, 8:30 – 11:30—more information forthcoming.

Key Points:

- Meet monthly with teams from each elementary site for three hours in grade band groups
- Teachers should be chosen across the teacher continuum (novice, effective, expert) but must possess a positive attitude and effective classroom management
- Embed learning in cycle of planning/instruction/assessment: complex text, TDQs, resources, writing, speaking, and listening
- Stipend for Edmodo work between classes
- Implementation Specialist support follows the class and is embedded, working on the goals for the month

Outcomes:

- Through the inquiry-based PLC, collaboratively explore and develop CCSS messaging and resources to share with the district
- Align instruction to the Common Core and the SBAC Claims
- Create models of exemplary instruction that district personnel could visit (e.g., What does a close read look like?)
- Communicate across departments to effectively implement district initiatives including CCSS, MTSS, PGS, WIDA, and CASEL

CORE TASK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT 2014: FULLY INTEGRATING CCSS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM YEAR 2 (2013–14)

Tools, Resources, and "Instructional Shifts" to Move Students to College- and Career-Readiness; Building Sustainable Instructional Leadership

Overview:

By design, the CTiP functions as a cross-school PLC, employing the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Using exemplar resources from Student Achievement Partners and the Basal Alignment Project, teachers plan common lessons, reflect on student work, learn and plan again for lessons to be taught between meetings. Integrating new learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, teachers systematically insert close reading exemplar lessons and BAP lessons into the literacy block, shifting instruction toward CCSS outcomes. The work of the CTiP helps inform and drive the successful implementation of the CCSS in WCSD, offering a replicable model for site-based learning.

Year 2 of the CTiP draws on the learning of the Year 1 teachers, employing the CCSS Evidence Guides to frame learning for site teams. Grounded in the 2012–13 CTiP (Year 1) foundational work with the instructional shifts, quarterly meetings focus on extending the learning to larger school-based teams. Following each quarterly meeting, it is expected that sites devote two to four early-release Wednesdays to professional learning with the full site. Leadership teams reflect on implementation and professional learning (specific to the Evidence Guides) through Edmodo.

Essential Questions:

1. How does continuing to build capacity in individual teachers empower instructional site and district leadership? What tools and processes can be shared across the district?
2. How does using the Basal Alignment Project and close reading exemplars within the teaching and learning framework support teachers in meeting CCSS and SBAC expectations?
3. How do the CCSS Evidence Guides guide site leadership teams in professional learning?

CTiP 2 MEETINGS		CONTENT	FOLLOW-UP
Whole school team	**Grade bands**		
August 27 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 -3:30	**August 29** 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30	Review close reading, planning, CCSS Evidence Guides, monitoring, and collecting student evidence	Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle
September 24 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30	**September 26** 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30	Speaking and Listening, Student Evidence within T/L framework, CCSS Evidence Guides	Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle
January 28 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30	**January 30** 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30	Text sets, Resources, CCSS Evidence Guides	Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle
March 4th 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30	**March 6th** 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30	Performance Tasks, Reflection, Planning, Celebrations	Engage in planning for following year

Key Points:

- Nine to ten teachers from each site: last year's two to three CTiP participants, plus seven to eight new members; meet with two to three other schools in same vertical/ similar socio-economic status
- Instructional Support follows the class
- Use Edmodo for class reflection
- Planning for the core, evidence guides, assessment/data use, text sets
- Following each meeting: Quarterly staff meeting then the following two to four focused PLCs at the site that support the work

Outcomes:

- Develop CCSS messaging and resources to share
- Increase site-based capacity and confidence around CCSS-aligned instruction
- Capture models of exemplary instruction through video and scheduled observation (e.g., What does a close read look like?)
- Collaborate for a deeper understanding and effective use of CCSS Evidence Guides and engage in conversation around implications for Framework for Teaching

Endnotes

1. The district provides course guides aligned to the CCSS math standards and separated into instructional units (along with assessment activities) to help teachers decide what and when to teach from their textbooks (*Houghton Mifflin Reading and Everyday Math* in the elementary grades and *Holt Elements of Literature* and *Holt Mathematics* in the secondary grades). The Office of Academics has dramatically re-written the guides, one grade at a time, to ensure that they support the appropriate grade-level standards and sequence of the Common Core. (See Part One: Findings by Implementation Areas of this report for concerns about the use of "spiraling" curricula, such as *Everyday Math*.)

2. Student Achievement Partners, "CCSS Instructional Practice Guides," updated September 2013, available at http://www.achievethecore.org/page/434/ccss-instructional-practice-guides.

3. The majority (60 percent of 1,000) of teachers responding to an evaluation survey reported that the new professional development rollout "help[ed] deepen [their] understanding of the instructional shifts" either "quite a bit" or "a lot." Another 29 percent reported that the session "help[ed] deepen [their] understanding of the instructional shifts" "a moderate amount."

Appendix A

METHODOLOGY

Education First and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute jointly developed research questions and data collection instruments, and between November 2012 and September 2013, Education First conducted research in select districts that had begun implementing the Common Core in earnest. This section describes the development of our research strategy and tools, our district selection process, and the data collection activities.

Research Phases

Research was conducted in two parts. First, a two-district pilot study in Buffalo Public Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools was conducted in November and December 2012. The purpose was to fine-tune research questions, hone methods (i.e., interviews, observations, focus groups), and test data collection tools. Following the pilot, three additional districts were added to the study; data were collected for them between May and September 2013.

To assure continuity in data collection and methods across districts, data from Metro Nashville (a pilot site) were updated and refreshed based on extended phone interviews of district leaders in fall 2013 (original data were collected in person). Unfortunately, remotely collected data on Buffalo Public Schools did not yield sufficient content and depth for inclusion in the full study.

Research Questions

Drawing on lessons learned from the 2012 pilot, we refined our initial research questions to elicit more targeted data on the state of Common Core implementation in the four selected districts. Key research questions for the full study fall into five major focus areas:

1. Access to Common Core-aligned curricula and instructional materials

- What process does the district use to adopt, distribute, and/or encourage the use of textbooks and instructional materials, and how has this process changed (or not changed) to accommodate adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
- How does the district evaluate the alignment of these materials to the CCSS and monitor their use in classrooms?
- How do teachers, school administrators, and district leaders know that the materials used in classrooms are well-aligned to the CCSS?
- Do samples of instructional materials provided by the district and used in classrooms demonstrate alignment with the CCSS (e.g., do they prioritize topics that reflect the instructional shifts and align to the correct grade-level standards)?

2. Use of CCSS-aligned assessments

- What process does the district (and/or schools and teachers) follow to develop CCSS-aligned assessments? How has this process changed (or not changed) to accommodate CCSS alignment?
- How, if at all, have assessments in the district changed to reflect the CCSS and associated instructional shifts? What is the timetable for transitioning the assessment system (or components of it) to align to the Common Core, and to what extent does that sequencing line up with other teacher supports (professional development and instructional materials)?
- Are new assessment tools, if they exist, aligned with the CCSS?
- Are CCSS-aligned assessment results used at the district and building levels to drive instructional improvement? If so, how?

3. Teacher- and principal-level accountability under the Common Core

- How are teachers held accountable for student success under the Common Core?
- How are principals held accountable for student success under the Common Core?

4. CCSS-focused professional development for teachers and principals

- How has the content and process for providing professional development to teachers changed to accommodate the instructional shifts reflected in the CCSS?
- To what extent are professional development activities well-aligned to the CCSS?
- What, if anything, is the district doing to gauge the effectiveness of CCSS-focused professional development offerings? How does the district know that the professional development it provides is helping teachers make the transition to CCSS, and helping principals to support teachers in doing so?
- How is the district building the capacity of new teachers to teach to the CCSS, through hiring, induction, and professional development?

5. CCSS communication and engagement

- How does the district communicate with and engage stakeholders in district-wide initiatives, and how have these processes changed (or not changed) during the implementation of the CCSS?
- To what extent are internal stakeholders—teachers, principals, and staff—familiar with the rationale for adoption of the CCSS and how it could impact teaching and learning? What messages and methods have been more or less effective in communicating with them on this topic?
- Are external stakeholders—parents, community leaders, nonprofit and business advocates—familiar with the CCSS and its implications for their students and school community? What messages and methods have been more or less effective in communicating with them?

Site Selection and Rationale for Decisions

Education First and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute developed a set of criteria to vet school districts for possible participation in the 2012 pilot and the full 2013 study. As Table 1 shows, we developed both *individual site criteria* and *group criteria*. For individual sites, we applied criteria such as "implementation well underway" and "potential to instruct or lead field"; across the cohort, we sought a balance of certain factors across the entire group, such as the size and geographic makeup of the districts.

Table 1. Summary of Site and Group Criteria

CRITERION	APPLIES TO ALL SITES	REPRESENTED ACROSS GROUP
Implementation Well Underway	X	
Strong District Leadership	X	
Potential to Instruct or Lead Field	X	
Illustrate Lessons in Key Areas of Study	X	X
Participation Likely and Easily Secured	X	
State Climate and Level of SEA Involvement in Implementation		X
Size and Demographics		X

In order to identify districts that met our criteria for participation in the 2012 pilot and 2013 full study, we gathered research from publicly available sources and input from expert partners. We conducted a web scan of recent stories from *Education Week* and other publications on Common Core implementation in districts, and compiled a list of districts with major sources of funding for CCSS implementation, such as from philanthropies and/or the U.S. Department of Education.

To further inform district selection, we solicited input from leaders in the field with deep knowledge of school districts, Common Core implementation overall, and/or one or more of the five major focus areas of the study.

Seventeen potential districts were identified by sharing the selection criteria with Common Core field leaders, including the following (*areas of expertise noted parenthetically; organizational affiliations as of time of interview*):

- Sandra Alberti, Student Achievement Partners (CCSS implementation, curricular materials)
- Susan Bodary, Education First (Ohio districts)
- Sheila Brown, Aspen Institute (CCSS implementation, districts)
- Catherine Gewertz, *Education Week* (CSSS implementation, districts)
- Heather Graham, Education First (North Carolina districts)
- Heidi Guarino, Education First (CCSS implementation and communications)
- Ken Kay, EdLeader21 (Districts and standards reform)
- Katya Levitan-Reiner, Student Achievement Partners (Curricular materials, professional development and assessments)
- John Luczak, Education First (Illinois districts)
- Maggie Niedsweicki, Ohio Department of Education (Ohio districts)
- Cindy Parker, Kentucky Department of Education (Kentucky districts)
- Emmy Partin, Thomas B. Fordham Institute (Ohio districts)
- Alissa Peltzman, Achieve (CCSS implementation)
- Terry Ryan, Thomas B. Fordham Institute (Ohio districts)
- Audrey Soglin, Illinois Education Association (Illinois districts)
- Ross Wiener, Aspen Institute (CSSS implementation, districts)
- Jenn Vranek, Education First (CCSS implementation, nationally)

Once potential districts were identified, Education First and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute reviewed recommendations based on the site and group criteria to determine final candidates. Education First then engaged contacts at the relevant state education agencies to ask specifically whether the districts had the potential to lead or instruct the field, largely based on whether they considered that district's implementation efforts to be leading within the state. The four districts ultimately included in the study were deemed to possess such potential.

Document and Website Research Methods

Once pilot and study districts were selected, we conducted thorough document and website reviews of the state and district websites, published research articles, and other available data to produce a background memo for each of the four sites. These memos included information on district demographics, district strategic planning (on Common Core implementation and in general), and state policies and practices (particularly around assessment and accountability). The memos were used to inform our general knowledge of the sites as well as the interview protocols.

In-Person Data Collection Methods

The 2012 pilot study enabled us to test out two basic approaches to data collection: on-site and remote. We concluded that the on-site method, particularly having access to in-person focus groups and informal observations, allowed for collection of richer data on the experiences and perspectives of school-based educators and other district stakeholders. Going forward, we used the on-site data collection model for the full study.

Education First worked with district contacts to set up interviews and focus groups at each site. Specifically, we identified a "site lead" in each district to assist with identifying and providing introductions to appropriate district staff and focus group participants; work with researchers to identify a date, time, and location for focus groups; identify appropriate alternate staff as needed; and respond to follow-up questions and interview requests.

During the summer and fall of 2013, Education First researchers conducted two- to three-day site visits to each district. During these visits, researchers:

1. Conducted one-on-one interviews with the following groups of individuals to assess Common Core implementation efforts:

- Superintendents
- Deputy Superintendents
- Directors of Curriculum and Instruction
- Directors of Assessments, Research, and Evaluation
- Chief Financial Officers
- Directors of Communications and Directors of Parent and Community Involvement
- Directors of Human Resources

2. Conducted focus groups with the following stakeholders to discuss Common Core implementation:

- Teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels
- Principals from the elementary, middle, and high school levels
- Parents and community leaders

3. Observed professional development sessions and curriculum team meetings in two districts (Washoe County School District and Schaumberg District 54).[21]

Interview Protocols

We built our interview protocols around the research questions and areas of focus noted in *Research Questions* above. We used the same interview protocols in each site, tailoring questions wherever possible based on our background memos and research.

As the interview protocol was fairly long, in practice, we prioritized sets of questions for various interviewees depending on their role. Wherever possible, we began research visits with district leaders who had oversight over all CCSS implementation work, and asked about the district's priorities in order to customize protocols for remaining interviewees and focus groups. A set of common, framing questions about the district's priorities and leadership of the CCSS were asked across all interviewees to gain the widest perspective on these overarching issues.

Interviewee List for Each Site

Below we list the district staff interviewed in each participating district.

Table 2. Interviewee List, by Participating District

SITE	INTERVIEW/ FOCUS GROUP TYPE	TITLE OR ORGANIZATION
Kenton County	Central Office Staff	◆ Superintendent ◆ Assistant Superintendent of Academic and Certified Personnel ◆ Deputy Superintendent ◆ Director of Assessment ◆ Director of Communication ◆ Director of Professional Development ◆ Director of Secondary Education ◆ Literacy and math consultants
	Parent Focus Group	◆ Four parents with students in grades 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 ◆ One parent was a school board member and another was a member of the Pritchard Committee (a statewide education advocacy organization)
	Principal Focus Group	◆ Six elementary and middle school principals
	Teacher Focus Group	◆ Eight teachers representing the following grades and/or subjects: fourth grade, sixth grade social studies, seventh grade ELA, seventh grade math, high school ELA, and high school math

Table 2. Interviewee List, by Participating District (cont'd)

SITE	INTERVIEW/ FOCUS GROUP TYPE	TITLE OR ORGANIZATION
Metro Nashville	Central Office Staff	◆ Superintendent ◆ Coordinator of State Summative Assessments ◆ Executive Director of Assessments and Research ◆ Director of Communication ◆ Director of Parent and Community Involvement ◆ Executive Director of Instruction for Elementary Schools ◆ Executive Officer for Elementary Schools ◆ Chief Financial Officer ◆ Director of Human Resources ◆ Manager of Recruitment and Staffing ◆ Executive Director, Talent Strategy
	Parent/Community Focus Group	◆ Seven parents and community members from organizations including the Promise Neighborhood Alliance and Alignment Nashville
	Principal Focus Group	◆ Six elementary and middle school principals
	Teacher Focus Group	◆ Nine teachers representing the following subjects and/or grades: high school numeracy coach, literacy coach, eighth grade literacy, middle school ELA, and high school ELA
District 54	Central Office Staff	◆ Superintendent ◆ Assistant Superintendent, Student Learning ◆ Assistant Superintendent, District Improvement ◆ Associate Superintendent ◆ Director of Literacy ◆ Director of Math and Science ◆ Director of Community Relations
	Parent Focus Group (Conducted Remotely by Skype)	◆ Five parents of students ranging from grades 1–3, 5–8, and 12
	Principal Focus Group	◆ Eight elementary and middle school principals
	Teacher Focus Group	◆ Nine elementary and middle school teachers representing the following subjects and/or grades: kindergarten, grades 5–6, seventh grade math, eighth grade ELA, math and literacy instructional coaches, ELL resources and special services
	Union Focus Group (Conducted Remotely by Phone)	◆ Schaumburg Education Association president ◆ Three Schaumburg Education Association board members (and current teachers/instructional

Table 2. Interviewee List, by Participating District (cont'd)

SITE	INTERVIEW/ FOCUS GROUP TYPE	TITLE OR ORGANIZATION
Washoe County	Central Office Staff	◆ Chief Academic Officer ◆ Director of Curriculum and Instruction ◆ Director of Striving Readers ◆ Administrator of Family – School Partnerships
	Principal Focus Group	◆ Four elementary and middle school principals
	Teacher Focus Group	◆ Eight teachers representing the following grades: Pre-K, grade 1, and grades 3–5

Review of Artifacts and Documents

In addition to the two- to-three day site visits, we also reviewed a variety of artifacts that helped us tailor interview and focus group questions and synthesize data from these interactions. Examined artifacts, by district, appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Additional Artifacts Examined, by Participating District

SITE	TYPE OF ARTIFACT	ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION
Kenton County	Assessment and Accountability	◆ Kindergarten report card revisions ◆ First grade report card revisions ◆ Second grade report card revisions ◆ Third grade report card revisions ◆ ELA walk form ◆ Math walk form ◆ Science walk form ◆ Social Studies walk form
Metro Nashville	Assessment and Accountability	◆ Forms for instructional coaches selection ◆ Forms for instructional coaches evaluation plan
	Curricular Materials	◆ State textbook adoption rating sheets for new Houghton Mifflin curriculum

Table 3. Additional Artifacts Examined, by Participating District (cont'd)

SITE	TYPE OF ARTIFACT	ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION
District 54	Assessment and Accountability	• Board of Education PowerPoint presentation on state and district assessment results, October 2012 • CCSS and PARCC update PowerPoint presentation to district and school administrators, October 2012 • PowerPoint presentation to all elementary administrators and school teacher leadership teams on structural and instructional changes dictated by the CCSS and PARCC, February 2013 • Talking points on ISAT for school administrators about AYP targets • Correspondence from district administration to principals regarding changed ISAT cut scores and resulting drop in scores
	District Structure	• Mission, Vision, and Goals statement
	Parents and Community Engagement	• Parent/Community guides • Letter to parents from State Superintendent about CCSS • Talking points on ISAT for parents about AYP targets
	Professional Development and Instructional Support	• Professional development schedules and brochures • New teacher induction week materials • PowerPoint presentation on instructional leadership: embedding the CCSS-aligned curriculum and structures into daily practice, August 2013 • PowerPoint presentation on PLCs at work (induction week presentation) • Materials used by math and literacy task forces to develop their curricular materials (timelines and work assignments) • PowerPoint presentation on literacy instruction aligned to the CCSS, May 2013 • PowerPoint presentation on transitioning to the CCSS for kindergarten teachers, May 2013 • PowerPoint presentation for the Department of Student Learning kick-off, August 2013

Table 3. Additional Artifacts Examined, by Participating District (cont'd)

SITE	TYPE OF ARTIFACT	ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION
Washoe County School District	Assessment and Accountability	◆ FY 10–11: Washoe County district accountability report ◆ FY 11–12: Washoe County district accountability report ◆ FY 12–13: Elementary School – Washoe County assessment calendar ◆ FY 12–13: Middle School – Washoe County assessment calendar ◆ FY 12–13: High School – Washoe County assessment calendar ◆ Washoe County assessment philosophy ◆ Washoe County assessment descriptions
	Budget	◆ December FY 13: Augmented budget board item ◆ March FY 13: Budget workshop document ◆ PowerPoint presentation: Final FY 13 Budget
	Community Engagement	◆ Background information on the Education Alliance of Washoe County ◆ FY 12–13: Mid-year report on Parent University
	Curricular Materials	◆ Vendor Product Review: Rubric for Assessing Supplementary Programs, ELA ◆ Vendor Product Review: Rubric for Assessing Supplementary Programs, Mathematics
	District Structure	◆ Washoe County School District list of sponsored charter schools ◆ Washoe County School District traditional school year schedule ◆ FY 13–14: Balanced school year schedule ◆ Information on education options ◆ Information on Washoe County School District charter schools ◆ List of year-round Washoe County schools ◆ Office of Academics organizational chart
	Professional Development and Instructional Support	◆ Washoe County School District professional development plan from the Office of Academics ◆ List of currently adopted textbooks and core materials ◆ Survey results from the district “8/8@8” professional development re-launch in August 2013
	Strategic Planning	◆ Community update on Washoe County School District’s strategic plan ◆ Staff update on the strategic plan ◆ Washoe County School District Envision 2015: Strategic Plan ◆ Superintendent Pedro Martinez’s action plan for his first 90 days

Data Analysis

Once we collected all interview, focus group, and background data, Education First coded them to facilitate closer analysis. Specific codes or tags varied across the districts (for example, the code set for District 54 included "task forces," a key element of their Common Core implementation strategy; Washoe's code set included "financial resources"), but in all cases included the study's five major focus areas: curricula and instructional materials, assessments, accountability, communications, and professional development.

We then analyzed coded data for themes and takeaways within each of the four districts and across the districts for each of the five focus areas. Draft findings were honed within the Education First research team and then with the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. As questions or inconsistencies across sources arose, Education First researchers returned to district leads or key interviewees to ask for clarification and additional detail to supplement existing data.

Appendix B

THE DEPTH OF THE CHANGE: WHAT'S DIFFERENT UNDER THE COMMON CORE?

The Common Core State Standards differ dramatically from many previous academic standards. Perhaps most importantly, the new standards in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics introduce coherence across grades. Coherence means that the knowledge and skills of focus in each grade are made clear and relevant in subsequent and preceding grades: what's taught in the third grade builds upon what's taught in the second grade, what's taught in the second grade builds upon what's taught in the first grade, and so on. The lack of such coherence has been one downfall of many prior sets of standards and curricula: each entering class of students arrived with a variety of knowledge, skills, and experiences. As E. D. Hirsch describes, "Teachers in a typical American classroom cannot rely on their students having acquired any specific item of knowledge,"[22] undermining effective classroom teaching. In the districts in this study that have made the most progress in implementing the Common Core, teachers are starting to see how students' skills and mastery of the standards build (or stagnate) based on previous years' instruction. That curricular coherence, explains one principal, "has really changed the makeup of how they [teachers] work together and plan together."

The standards also reflect significant instructional shifts:

- More complex fiction and nonfiction texts, academic vocabulary, and text- and evidence-based reading and writing;
- Math units and sample problems that foster deep focus on fewer topics in each grade level, with a coherent, rigorous approach to mathematics that builds through the grades; and
- Emphasis in math on both procedural fluency and deeper conceptual understanding.

These shifts are at the heart of all areas of district and school practice explored in this report. As Sandra Alberti of Student Achievement Partners has written, the greatest challenge to quality implementation is the race to transition without full understanding of these shifts, which are the foundation for all other components of implementation. "The shifts," she explains, "should guide all aspects of implementing the standards—including professional development, assessment design, and curriculum." [23]

At times, these shifts have been misunderstood. For example, a number of educators and observers have worried that the Common Core's emphasis on content-rich nonfiction will crowd out literature in the classroom. While the Common Core does represent a shift from the current near-exclusion of nonfiction texts in the elementary grades, in fact, students will need to read content-rich literature alongside nonfiction to master the new reading and writing standards. As Alberti explains, "In today's classrooms… a great amount of time and energy has been invested over the years in creating extended literacy blocks that often crowd out time for learning social studies and science. During these blocks, students overwhelmingly read stories; on average, fewer than 10 percent of elementary English language arts texts are nonfiction."[24] In the secondary grades, the Common Core clearly articulates the expectation that the balance of nonfiction reading is spread across subject areas. Interestingly, because the Common Core's standards are tighter and more focused, there is more room for rich, discipline-specific content in history, science, art, and music. The Common Core shifts also prescribe richer and more complex literature relative to what is currently taught: A 2013 paper by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute cited evidence that "a majority of the most-read books in high school were only at the middle school level in terms of text complexity" and that nationally, "the works of literature and literary nonfiction assigned across grades 9, 10, and 11 did not increase in difficulty."[25]

The early implementer districts we highlight in this report have begun to reflect these shifts in lessons and classrooms. In line with the Common Core, teachers are using more paired texts[26] and primary sources/materials. In doing so, their classrooms are reflecting the suggested balance of content-rich nonfiction and fiction and helping students master more difficult and diverse texts.

The mathematics standards also represent a sea change for educators and administrators compared to most prior standards. In writing the Common Core mathematics standards, the developers looked to research on college and entry-level job expectations, along with the standards of the world's highest-performing nations, and determined that the typical U.S. mathematics approach needed dramatic revision.

A large number of states' prior state mathematics standards and textbooks were "a mile wide and an inch deep." The Common Core standards correct this with their deep focus on far fewer topics each year, calling for mastery in depth over breadth. Prior state standards often "spiraled" the math curriculum, handling all domains in mathematics in every grade. Achieve's analysis of the Common Core relative to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Curriculum Focal Points (widely used by states prior to the adoption of the Common Core) highlighted differences in where algebraic thinking appears in different sets of standards. Achieve concluded that curriculum designers and teachers themselves "will need to be vigilant as topics will be introduced at different grade levels than at present," and cautioned that teachers "will need to focus on different content that may be less familiar to them."[27]

In the early implementer districts we studied, teachers are indeed grappling with these kinds of big changes in math instruction. Fewer topics with greater rigor means that teachers need to have a strong grasp of the concepts. Teachers also need to design their lessons to stay on topics for longer and guide students to mastery, relying less on what Common Core lead writer Phil Daro has described as "clutter," or "answer-getting" strategies that don't address mathematical content.[28] This represents a significant challenge for teacher content knowledge. One elementary teacher admits, "Because the shift is going deeper, you need to understand the content at a deeper level…I like that we're just focusing on one thing but it's going to be a complete shift in the way I'm teaching."

Endnotes

1. In MetLife's Oct/Nov 2012 poll of teachers and principals, 69 percent of teachers said they were "confident" or "very confident" that the Common Core would improve student achievement; 71 percent said they were "confident" or "very confident" that the standards would better prepare students for college and the workforce. Dana Markow et al., *The MetLife Survey of the America Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* (New York, NY: MetLife, Inc., February 2013), https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf.

2. Kenton County has two years of data on the state's new Common Core-aligned assessments. Formal trend data will be available at the end of year three (2013–2014).

3. William Bushaw and Shane J. Lopez, *PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools: Which Way Do We Go?* (Arlington, Virginia: Phi Delta Kappa International, 2013), http://pdkintl.org/noindex/2013_PDKGallup.pdf.

4. Markow et al., *The MetLife Survey of the America Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership*.

5. E. D. Hirsch, "Why I'm for the Common Core: Teacher Bashing and Common Core Bashing are Both Uncalled For," *The Core Knowledge Blog*, September 4, 2013, http://blog.coreknowledge.org/2013/09/04/why-im-for-the-common-core-teacher-bashing-and-common-core-bashing-are-both-uncalled-for.

6. EPE Research Center, *Findings from a National Survey of Teacher Perspectives on the Common Core* (Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2013), http://www.edweek.org/media/epe_survey_teacher_perspctives_common_core_2013.pdf.

7. Tim Shanahan and Ann Duffett, *Common Core in the Schools: A First Look at Reading Assignments* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2013), http://www.edexcellence.net/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/20131023-Common-Core-in-the-Schools-a-First-Look-at-Reading-Assignments.pdf.

8. Catherine Gewertz, "Educators in Search of Common Core Resources," *Education Week*, February 29, 2012, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/24/22resources_ep.h31.html?r=1477816432.

9. "Curriculum" is defined by the authors as a series of lessons that roll up into units that are sequenced appropriately, based on the discipline, and paced to fit into a school year. Each lesson includes (1) a target standard(s) for student learning and (2) all activities and materials, including formative assessments as relevant, used to help the student meet that target.

10. Beginning in the 2013–2014 school year, Washoe will also offer access to the Read-aloud Alignment Project and Anthology Alignment Project, which are companion efforts for the early and secondary grades, respectively.

11. Markow et al., *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership*.

12. Jenny DeMonte, *High Quality Professional Development for Teachers* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, July 2013), http://www.americanprogress.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/07/DeMonteLearning4Teachers-1.pdf.

13. Allison Gulamhussein, "Professional Development and the Common Core," American School, August 2013, http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Archive/2013/August/Professional-Development-and-the-Common-Core.html.

14. See http://www.ldc.org/ and http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/Learning/MathDesignCollaborative.

15. Cathy Lassiter, who publishes with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Leadership and Learning Center, and Tim Kanold, who publishes with Solution Tree, respectively.

16. Consensus of expert educators from Student Achievement Partners, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the Illustrative Math Project and other distinguished educators. Forthcoming study on the Common Core State Standards and professional development, published by Education First, 2014.

17. These new questions were developed based on a sample of items from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

18. Nevada is a governing state in the Smarter Balanced consortium; Illinois and Tennessee are governing states, and Kentucky a participating state, in the PARCC consortium.

19. Although the MAP is not used as part of formal evaluation scores, these two districts use MAP data for classroom- and school-level conversations about student achievement, and teachers and principals have to "answer for" their students' MAP results. As one District 54 administrator explains, "What MAP has given us is a natural check in place on all the schools [and] data to initiate the conversation. The data starts the conversation about what you're doing instructionally. And because we share this data in front of colleagues and peers, it matters."

20. The vertical staircase refers to how each set of grade-specific ELA standards builds on the same set of "Anchor Standards," such that one can see the progression of content and skills within a grade level and how they lay the foundation for instruction for the next year.

21. Schedules in the other districts did not allow us to observe a major curriculum or training event and also to complete interviews with all stakeholders and focus groups in the same two- to three-day window.

22. E. D. Hirsch, "Why I'm for the Common Core: Teacher Bashing and Common Core Bashing are Both Uncalled For," The Core Knowledge Blog, September 4, 2013, http://blog.coreknowledge.org/2013/09/04/why-im-for-the-common-core-teacher-bashing-and-common-core-bashing-are-both-uncalled-for.

23. Sandra Alberti, "Making the Shifts," *Educational Leadership*, December 2012/January 2013, http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec12/vol70/num04/Making-the-Shifts.aspx.

24. Ibid.

25. Tim Shanahan and Ann Duffett, *Common Core in the Schools: A First Look at Reading Assignments* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2013), http://www.edexcellence.net/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/20131023-Common-Core-in-the-Schools-a-First-Look-at-Reading-Assignments.pdf.

26. Paired texts are additional, companion texts that support the understanding of the text at the center of a lesson (e.g., pairing nonfiction texts with fiction).

27. Achieve, "Comparing the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and NCTM's Curriculum Focal Points" (Washington, D.C.: July 2010), http://www.achieve.org/files/CCSSandFocalPoints.pdf.

28. Phil Daro, "Don't Leave Out the Math," Achieve the Core Introductory Videos on the Common Core State Standards, 2013, http://www.achievethecore.org/page/762/introductory-videos-on-the-common-core-state-standards.