

TEACHING HIGHER

Educators' Perspectives on Common Core Implementation

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Now that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has resolved the struggle over the federal role in education, leaders in the remaining Common Core states can refocus attention on the standards, the assessments, and the supports teachers and students need to succeed on them. To inform those efforts, the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University surveyed a representative sample of teachers in five states (Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Nevada) as they prepared their students to take the new Common Core-aligned assessments in the spring of 2015. We asked teachers and principals about the types and amounts of professional development they received, the textbooks they were using, the online resources they found most helpful, and the alignment between Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and teacher evaluations. We studied how each of the above was related to students' performance on the new assessments, after controlling for students' demographic characteristics and prior achievement on state assessments. We report four primary findings:

1. Teachers in the five study states have **made major changes** in their lesson plans and instructional materials to meet the CCSS.
 - ➔ *Four out of five mathematics teachers (82%) and three out of four English teachers (72%) reported that they have changed more than half of their instructional materials in response to the Common Core.*
 - ➔ *Seven out of eight English teachers (85%) reported having increased writing assignments in which students are expected to use evidence to support their arguments. A similar percentage have increased assigned reading of nonfiction texts.*
2. Despite the additional work, teachers and principals in the five states have largely **embraced the new standards**.
 - ➔ *Three out of four teachers (73%) reported that they have embraced the new standards "quite a bit" or "fully."*
 - ➔ *More than two thirds of principals (69%) believe that the new standards will lead to improved student learning.*

3. In mathematics, we identified three markers of successful implementation: more **professional development days**, more **classroom observations with explicit feedback** tied to the Common Core, and the **inclusion of Common Core-aligned student outcomes in teacher evaluations**. All were associated with statistically significantly higher student performance on the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments in mathematics.
4. In English language arts, we did not find evidence for or against any particular implementation strategies. However, the new English assessments appear **more sensitive to instructional differences** between teachers, especially in middle school grades. The greater sensitivity seems to be due to the greater weight on student writing in the new assessments. Although prior research has found math achievement to be more sensitive to instructional differences between teachers than English, the new English assessments are nearly as sensitive to teacher effects as the math assessments have been.

Our study highlights an important advantage of having a common set of standards and assessments across multiple states. Leaders in multiple states can now share the cost of learning about the challenges teachers are facing and the effectiveness of the resources they are using. Moreover, by linking teacher responses to their students' achievement and controlling for student characteristics, we can provide early evidence on the efficacy of educational initiatives much faster and cheaper than has been possible in the past.



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