

Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards

State Education Agencies' Views on Postsecondary Involvement

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Introduction

Ensuring that students are prepared for college or careers by the time they graduate from high school is a major purpose of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which outline the knowledge and skills that students in grades K-12 should master in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The number of students who enter postsecondary education without the knowledge and skills they need to be successful and then require some form of remediation to “catch up” continues to be a challenge at postsecondary institutions (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Sparks & Malkus, 2013). Recognizing this problem, the governors and chief state school officers leading the Common Core initiative have sought to make the new standards more rigorous than most states’ previous standards. As of August 2013, the CCSS have been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia in both subjects and by one additional state in ELA only.

With its stronger emphasis on college and career readiness for all students, the Common Core almost demands better partnerships between K-12 education systems and postsecondary education institutions in adopting states. For example, expectations for high school students should be closely aligned with the expectations of postsecondary institutions for their incoming students. Postsecondary institutions that prepare future teachers and administrators should be revamping their curriculum to prepare their graduates to teach and lead in an environment shaped by the Common Core. But to what extent is this type of collaboration occurring?

To learn more about the collaborative efforts of state education agencies (SEAs) and postsecondary institutions to implement the CCSS, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at The George Washington University included several specific questions about postsecondary education involvement within a broader state survey on Common Core implementation. The survey was administered to state deputy superintendents of education or their designees from February through May of 2013. Forty states responded, including 39 that had adopted the CCSS in both ELA and math and 1 that had adopted the standards in ELA only. Thus, the survey findings represent the views of a majority of the adopting states at the time of the survey. The responses of specific states have been kept confidential to encourage frank answers. More information about the study methods is included in the appendix of the report.

This report, the fifth in a series of reports based on CEP’s 2013 state survey, describes states’ responses to questions in the survey that relate to the role of postsecondary institutions in implementing the Common Core. It is important to note that the state deputy superintendents or other officials who completed the survey oversee K-12 education, so the findings in this report are from their perspective. More research is needed to determine the perceptions of state higher education agency officials and postsecondary faculty on these same questions.

In addition, we sought to learn more about the role of postsecondary institutions in the Common Core by conducting informal interviews with officials from two higher education organizations—the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). We also talked with staff from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, one of two state consortia developing tests aligned to the CCSS; and Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit organization that is managing an outreach project between K-12 and higher education leaders in the 20 states (including D.C.) that belong to the other testing consortium, the Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Relevant information from conversations with these four groups is included throughout this report.

Key Findings

Several key findings emerged from the survey results:

- **The majority of state education agencies responding to the survey reported that they have forged formal partnerships with postsecondary education officials to implement the CCSS.** Only five states said they have not established any of these types of partnerships.
- **A large majority (35) of the SEAs surveyed said that working with higher education institutions in their state to transition to the CCSS is a major (16 states) or minor (19) challenge.** In addition, 27 respondents indicated that aligning the content of college and university teacher preparation programs with the CCSS was a challenge.
- **Nearly all (37) of the SEA respondents have provided or are preparing to provide briefings on the Common Core for school of education faculty in colleges and universities.** The majority of SEAs also reported they have worked with postsecondary institutions to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS, or are planning to do so.
- **The majority (31) of SEAs surveyed reported that postsecondary institutions have reviewed or will review the Common Core standards in ELA and math to determine if mastery of the standards indicates college readiness.** In addition, more than half of the responding SEAs said that postsecondary institutions in their state are considering making decisions about placing students in courses (21 states) or exempting them from remediation (21) based on their performance on the CCSS-aligned assessments. Nevertheless, 12 survey respondents did not know whether their state's postsecondary institutions are considering changing policies for entering students as a result of CCSS adoption.

Collaboration between SEAs and Postsecondary Institutions on the CCSS

The survey responses discussed throughout this report illustrate the variety of ways in which SEAs are collaborating with their state's postsecondary institutions to prepare for and implement the CCSS. To better understand the context for this type of collaboration, we asked SEA officials whether they had a formal partnership with higher education representatives in their state and what types of challenges, if any, they faced in working with higher education entities on the CCSS transition.

PARTNERSHIPS

As shown in **table 1**, the majority of survey respondents reported that their SEA has entered into a formal partnership to implement the CCSS with institutions of higher education in the state, the state higher education agency, and/or representatives of business and higher education. Eight states have formal partnerships with all three of these entities, while five states have no partnerships with any of these entities. The five states that selected the “other” response item indicated that SEA officials are at least in the beginning stages of some sort of collaboration with postsecondary institutions.

Type of SEA partnership	Number of states
With the state higher education agency	24
With institutions of higher education in the state	16
With representatives of business and higher education as part of a larger CCSS-related partnership	13
No such partnership	5
Don't know	1
Other	5

Table reads: SEA officials in 24 states reported that their agency has established a partnership with the state higher education agency to implement the CCSS.

Note: State survey respondents were instructed to select all applicable response items.

National organizations have also taken steps to promote collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary education on CCSS-related issues. As noted in the introduction, Achieve, Inc. is working with states that belong to the PARCC testing consortium to encourage outreach and engagement between these two levels of education. Although all states are trying to move forward on these efforts, according to Callie Riley, a senior policy associate at Achieve, the level of postsecondary engagement varies across states and often depends on staff capacity to create, mobilize, and maintain partnerships between the K-12 and postsecondary levels. An Achieve publication written by higher education leaders in the consortium summarizes specific strategies being used by K-12 leaders and postsecondary institutions to better align teacher preparation and professional development with the new standards and assessments (Achieve, n.d.).

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is using a more regional approach to postsecondary engagement, said Jacqueline King, the consortium’s director of higher education collaboration. More specifically, Smarter Balanced has organized five regional senior advisors with whom states may collaborate on the CCSS initiative.

CHALLENGES

The survey responses suggest that some aspects of collaboration between K-12 and higher education on CCSS transition issues are more challenging than others. As shown in **table 2**, most of the SEAs surveyed said that overcoming resistance to the CCSS from institutions of higher education was either not a challenge (17 states) or a minor challenge (16).

However, a large majority of SEA respondents (35 states) said they faced a major (16) or minor (19) challenge in working with institutions of higher education in their state to implement the CCSS, while only 2 states said this was not a challenge.

A notable number of SEAs considered it a major (15 states) or minor (12) challenge to align the content of college and university teacher preparation programs with the CCSS. Several more respondents said this was either not within the SEA's authority (7) or simply not an SEA activity (2). Given that, in some states, K-12 and postsecondary education have not historically worked together, it is not surprising that forming these new relationships would prove challenging.

Challenge	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Not an SEA activity	Not within SEA's authority	Too soon to tell	Don't know
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from higher education institutions	2	16	17	1	0	3	0
Working with higher education institutions in the state to implement the CCSS	16	19	2	1	0	1	0
Aligning the content of college and university teacher preparation programs with the CCSS	15	12	2	2	7	1	1

Table reads: SEA officials in two states reported that overcoming resistance to the CCSS from institutions of higher education is a major challenge to their efforts to transition to the CCSS.

Note: Rows do not add up to 40 because some state survey respondents left portions of the question blank.

Variations among states in their postsecondary education governance structures may account for some of the challenges SEAs face in collaborating with higher education, particularly in efforts to align college and university teacher preparation programs with the CCSS. For example, in South Dakota the board of regents is charged with considering policy initiatives like the CCSS and then voting on their use and implementation across postsecondary institutions in the state. In other states, such as Delaware, decisions about the adoption and use of the CCSS are made by individual campuses. According to Jacqueline King of Smarter Balanced, this array of governance structures affects the level of postsecondary institutions' involvement in CCSS implementation and their use of the results of CCSS-aligned assessments.

Role of Postsecondary Institutions during the Transition to CCSS

Both within and outside of formal partnerships, state survey respondents report working with postsecondary institutions on several transition activities, ranging from reviewing the CCSS standards and developing CCSS-aligned K-12 curriculum to preparing students in teacher preparation programs to teach the CCSS content. The CEP survey asked SEA officials about the role of postsecondary institutions in carrying out certain activities related to the CCSS transition.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

In many states, curricula and instructional materials are developed or selected at the district or school level rather than the state level, so partnerships with postsecondary institutions to carry out certain CCSS transition activities may take place at the local level. As shown in **table 3**, more than half (25) of the SEAs surveyed reported that postsecondary institutions in their states are working directly with schools and/or districts on the CCSS transition. Fewer SEAs reported that postsecondary institutions are involved in developing CCSS-aligned K-12 instructional materials (19 states) and curricula (17), but it should be noted that in more than one-third of the survey states (15) the development of aligned instructional materials and curricula for K-12 schools is not an SEA activity, according to survey respondents.

A majority (28) of the SEAs surveyed did, however, report some participation of postsecondary institutions in statewide or regional partnerships among ELA and math content specialists, college faculty, and teachers. Eighteen SEA respondents said that postsecondary institutions are conducting research on the effectiveness of CCSS implementation efforts, but 17 respondents did not know if this was the case—perhaps because it is still early in the CCSS implementation process in many states.

Role of postsecondary institutions	SEA reports that postsecondary institutions are playing a role in activity	Not a state activity	Don't know
Participate in statewide or regional partnerships that include ELA & math content specialists, college faculty & teachers	28	2	8
Work directly with schools and/or districts on efforts to transition to the CCSS	25	3	8
Assist in developing CCSS-aligned K-12 instructional materials	19	15	4
Conduct balanced research on effective CCSS implementation & the efficacy of implementation efforts	18	2	17
Assist in developing CCSS-aligned K-12 curricula	17	15	5

Table reads: SEA officials in 28 states reported that postsecondary institutions are participating in statewide or regional partnerships among ELA and math content specialists, college faculty, and teachers.

Note: Rows do not add up to 40 because some state survey respondents left portions of the question blank.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PREPARATION

Another key aspect of CCSS implementation centers on providing professional development and preparation to help current and future teachers and principals teach and lead under the new standards. But are postsecondary faculty and leaders, particularly those in colleges of education, aware of the CCSS and using them to help guide their educator preparation programs? And what, if anything, are SEAs doing to inform postsecondary institutions about CCSS implementation in K-12? Below we address these issues from the perspective of SEA officials who oversee K-12 education.

As shown in **table 4**, nearly all the state respondents indicated that they have provided or are preparing to provide CCSS briefings for school of education faculty in colleges and universities. Only 2 of the 40 state respondents said this was not a focus of their SEA's efforts on the Common Core. Similarly, nearly all the state respondents reported that they have worked with (33 states) or are preparing to work with (4) higher education institutions to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS.

Table 4. SEA strategies to help postsecondary education faculty understand and prepare for the CCSS

	Implementing in 2012-13 or earlier	Will implement in 2013-14 or later	Not a focus of SEA's CCSS efforts	Not within SEA's authority	Don't know
Provide CCSS briefings for school of education faculty in colleges and universities	34	3	2	0	1
Work with institutions of higher education to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS	33	4	2	1	0

Table reads: SEA officials in 34 states said their agencies provided CCSS briefings for postsecondary school of education faculty in 2012-13 or earlier.

Our conversations with higher education representatives suggest that more could be done to inform higher education faculty about the Common Core. Jane West, senior vice president of policy, programs and professional issues at the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, observed that the postsecondary efforts have primarily emphasized the college freshman readiness piece of the CCSS initiative and only secondarily emphasized the preparation of educators to teach the Common Core.

At a session on the CCSS held at the AACTE state affiliate meeting in June 2013 and attended by CEP researchers, representatives of the eight participating member states had different levels of familiarity with the Common Core. These participants seemed to agree that while plenty of information is available about the CCSS, there is not a trusted and efficient method to find reputable sources of information for postsecondary institutions. Thus, although SEAs may be holding briefings about the CCSS for school of education faculty, the available materials may not be designed for faculty who prepare teachers and leaders. State affiliates reiterated that further work is needed to ensure that CCSS materials speak directly to the needs of educator preparation faculty.

Despite these difficulties in obtaining reliable information on the CCSS, postsecondary institutions are starting to prepare new teachers for the Common Core, according to a majority of SEA survey respondents. As displayed in **table 5**, 35 states reported that postsecondary institutions are involved in preparing students in teacher preparation programs to teach the CCSS content. State responses were similarly high about postsecondary institutions playing a role in principal preparation programs.

Also shown in table 5, the majority (26) of SEAs surveyed said that postsecondary institutions are involved in providing professional development to prepare current teachers to implement the CCSS in math and ELA.

As explained in an earlier CEP report in this series, *Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: Professional Development for Teachers and Principals*, other organizations such as the SEA and nonprofit entities are also providing professional development for current teachers.

Table 5. Role of postsecondary institutions in CCSS-related preparation and professional development for teachers and principals

Activity	SEA reports that postsecondary institutions are playing a role in activity	Not a state activity	Don't know
Prepare students in teacher preparation programs to teach the CCSS content	35	0	2
Prepare students in principal preparation programs to be instructional leaders in CCSS implementation	32	1	4
Provide professional development for current teachers to prepare them to implement the CCSS in math and ELA	26	6	5

Table reads: SEA officials in 35 states reported that postsecondary institutions are playing a role in preparing teacher education students to teach the CCSS content.

Note: Rows do not add up to 40 because some state survey respondents left portions of the question blank.

In the same vein, the CEP survey asked what changes have been or will be made by colleges of education to equip new teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach the CCSS. As displayed in **figure 1**, 24 SEA respondents said that colleges of education have revised or will revise teacher preparation curriculum to reflect the CCSS. Many SEAs reported that colleges of education have made or will make entry requirements for teacher preparation programs more rigorous (17 states) or have revised or will revise the course requirements for a teaching degree to include more courses in subject matter content (12). Ten SEA respondents did not know what changes might be made by colleges of education.

Figure 1. Changes being made by colleges of education to prepare prospective teachers for the CCSS

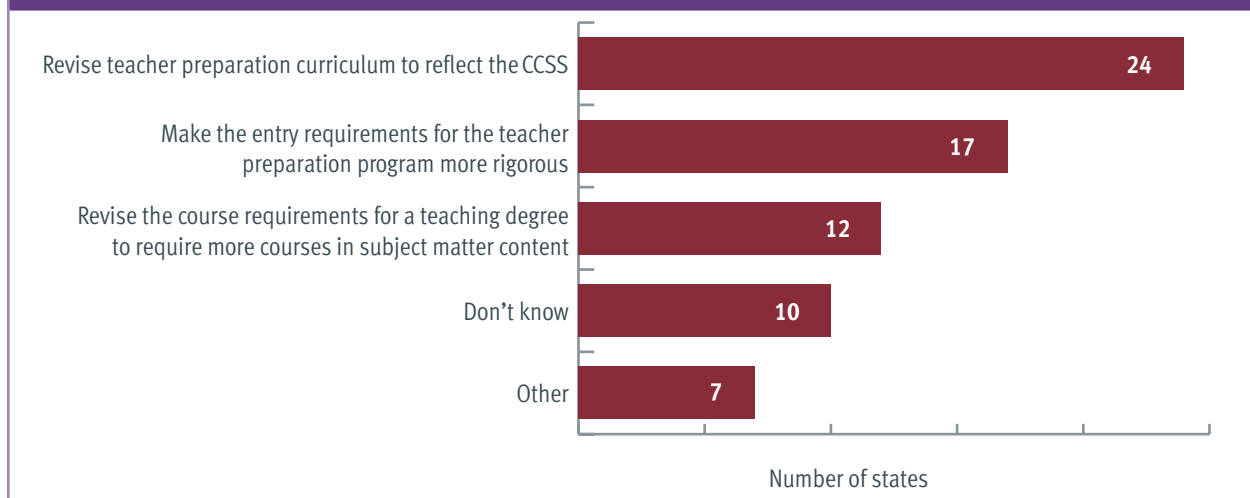


Figure reads: SEA officials in 24 states reported that colleges of education have revised or will revise teacher preparation curriculum to reflect the CCSS.

Note: State survey respondents were instructed to select all of the applicable response items to this question.

The seven states that selected the “other” response gave the following explanations:

These types of decisions about teacher education are outside of the SEA’s authority.

Our state’s colleges of education are largely independent so there is a variety of activities occurring in relation to CCSS; however, most are in pockets of individual faculty and/or institutions, so the SEA cannot say as a system that all colleges of education are doing any one of these activities.

SEA will convene a workgroup of stakeholders to determine how teacher and principal preparation programs can document the integration of CCSS.

SEA is currently at work on this issue.

Colleges of education may also change the criteria for supporting [the] clinical practice portion of their programs as a result of the state’s adoption of the CCSS.

CEP also asked SEA officials about potential changes that colleges of education are making to prepare principals with the knowledge and skills necessary to be instructional leaders on the CCSS. Responses to this question were similar to those about the teacher education programs and are displayed in **figure 2**.

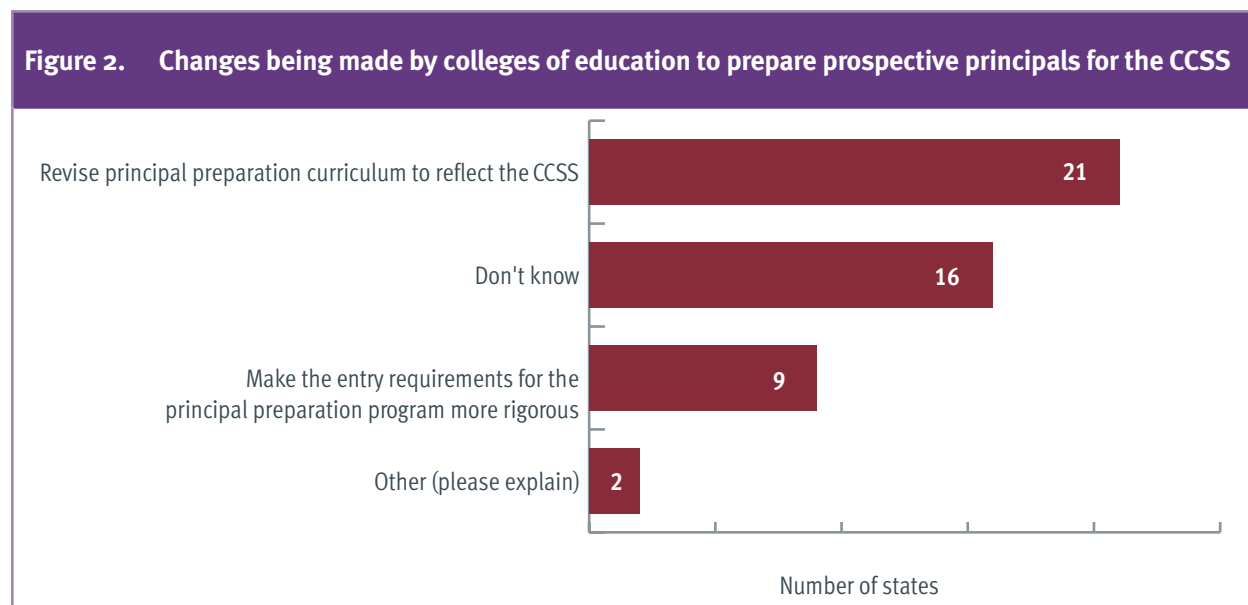


Figure reads: SEAs from 21 states reported that colleges of education have revised or will revise their principal preparation curriculum to reflect the CCSS.

Note: State survey respondents were instructed to select all of the applicable response items to this question.

Postsecondary Review and Use of the CCSS and Aligned Assessments

The CEP survey asked SEA officials whether postsecondary institutions in their state had reviewed the CCSS from a college-readiness perspective and how these institutions planned to use the standards and aligned assessments.

COLLEGE READINESS

As shown in **table 6**, the majority (31) of SEA survey respondents reported that postsecondary institutions have been or will be involved in reviewing the CCSS in ELA and math to determine if mastery of the Common Core indicates college readiness.

Postsecondary role	Planning, implementing, and/or completed	Not a state activity	Don't know
Review the CCSS in ELA to determine if mastery of the standards indicates that a student is college-ready	31	3	4
Review the CCSS in math to determine if mastery of the standards indicates that a student is college-ready	31	3	4

Table reads: SEA officials in 31 states reported some level of involvement of postsecondary institutions in reviewing the CCSS in English language arts to determine if mastery of the standards indicates college readiness.

Note: Rows do not add up to 40 because some state survey respondents left portions of the question blank.

USING THE CCSS AND ALIGNED ASSESSMENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY DECISIONS

As shown in **figure 3**, more than half (21) of the 40 responding SEAs reported that postsecondary institutions in their state are considering making course placement decisions based on student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments. The same number of states said that their state's postsecondary institutions are considering exempting students from remedial courses based on their performance on these assessments. Fewer states indicated that their postsecondary institutions were contemplating aligning first-year courses with the CCSS (13 states) or making scholarship decisions based on student performance on aligned assessments (2).

Altogether, 21 SEAs (not shown in the figure) said that postsecondary institutions in their state were contemplating at least two of these actions, while 10 SEAs reported at least three of these actions, and two states reported all four actions.

About one-third (12) of the responding SEAs did not know what actions for entering students are being considered by their state's postsecondary institutions as a result of CCSS adoption. Again, this lack of knowledge may be due in part to variations across states in postsecondary governance structures and the disjuncture in some states between K-12 and postsecondary education (Domina & Ruzek, 2012; Kirst & Venezia, 2004).

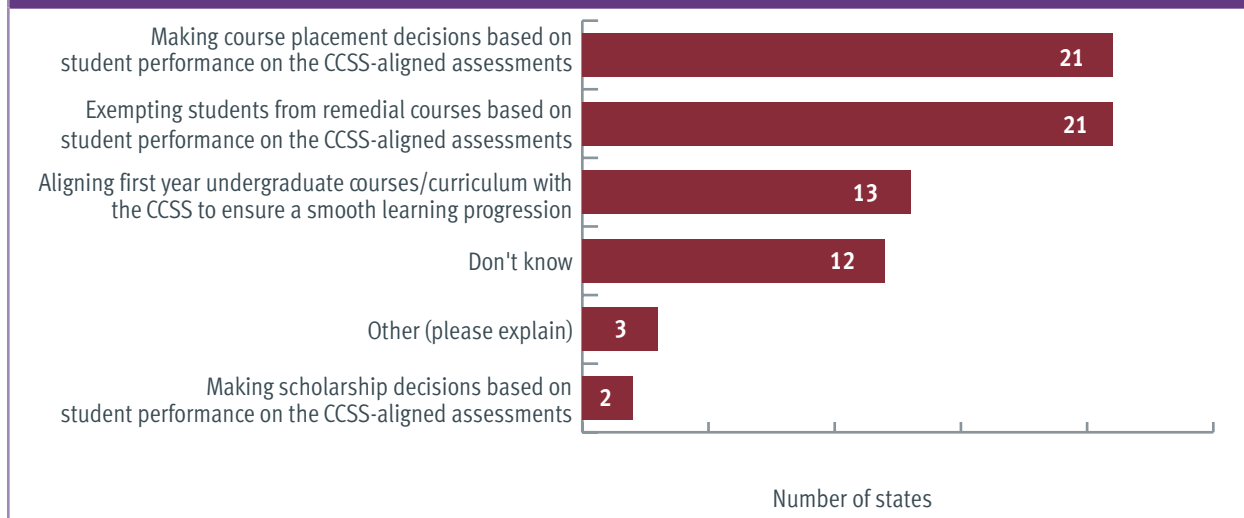
Figure 3. CCSS-related actions for entering students being considered by postsecondary Institutions

Figure reads: SEA officials in 21 states reported that postsecondary institutions in their state are considering making course placement decisions based on student performance on CCSS-aligned assessments.

Note: State survey respondents were instructed to select all of the applicable response items to this question.

Both the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia ask member states to commit to some use of students' assessment scores for course placement purposes at postsecondary institutions. According to Jacqueline King, the goals of Smarter Balanced are to encourage postsecondary institutions to do the following:

- Recognize the consortium's assessments as a valid measure of college-readiness, as defined by the CCSS
- Agree on common performance standards in ELA and math for exempting students from remediation
- Use the assessments as evidence that students are ready for credit-bearing course work

These goals for postsecondary institution involvement are still very much under development. Smarter Balanced plans to work with higher education representatives on standard-setting in the summer of 2014 and to make decisions about institutional participation beginning in the fall of 2014. According to the consortium's website, states belonging to Smarter Balanced have "agreed on a College Content-readiness Policy that guarantees exemption from developmental coursework to students who perform at an agreed-upon level on the grade 11 summative assessment and meet state requirements set jointly by K-12 and higher education for grade 12 course taking and performance" (Smarter Balanced, 2012).

According to the PARCC website, 640 colleges and universities have committed to participate in this consortium, meaning that they have "pledged to participate in the development" of the new assessments and "have signed on to ultimately use these tests as college placement tools" (PARCC, 2013a). In October 2012, the PARCC governing board and the advisory committee on college readiness adopted a Career-Ready Determination Policy and Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors after taking into account thousands of comments from various stakeholders, including higher education faculty (PARCC, 2013b). In July 2013, Achieve, Inc. hosted a meeting with teams of higher education leaders from 15 states, explained Callie Riley, to develop action plans for states to adopt and implement the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination as an instrument for placing students directly into college credit-bearing courses.

Conclusion

The relationship between K-12 and postsecondary education in the U.S. has never been seamless. However, the Common Core State Standards, with their strong focus on college- and career-readiness for all students, have challenged educators and policymakers to work more closely to assure that expectations and outcomes for K-12 students are aligned with those for postsecondary students. While a majority of state education agency leaders surveyed by CEP reported collaborating with postsecondary institutions as they implement the CCSS, the depth and impact of those partnerships are still undetermined.

There are important connection points between K-12 and postsecondary education. First is the issue of ensuring that incoming freshman are adequately prepared, or “ready,” for postsecondary education, but equally important is the need for postsecondary institutions to effectively prepare educators who will be teaching the Common Core.

While some states are working to involve postsecondary institutions in CCSS transition activities, the responsibility of developing or selecting CCSS-aligned curricula and instructional materials rests with districts or schools in many states. As a result, state leaders will need to determine the best and most effective role they can play in supporting schools and districts in their efforts to transition to the standards and aligned assessments. And while a majority of states reported that they have begun working with postsecondary institutions to align the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS, that effort brings with it a range of challenges. On a related note, many states did indicate that postsecondary institutions are involved in providing professional development for practicing teachers.

For both students and teachers, postsecondary institutions have an enormously important role to play in CCSS implementation. Putting in place K-12 standards that are meant to ensure all students are indeed ready for college and careers will have far less impact if postsecondary institutions do not recognize mastery of those standards as an indicator of readiness. For that to happen, the expectations of K-12 educators need to be in sync with those at the postsecondary level. Leaders and faculty in colleges of education are key players at the postsecondary level as well. Their knowledge and awareness of the CCSS will help ensure that the next generation of teachers is adequately prepared to both teach the standards and assess student performance.

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Appendix: Study Methods

The preliminary instrument for CEP's state Common Core State Standards survey was developed after considering information from prior CEP surveys and studies as well as other reports and media coverage about the CCSS. The CEP survey team also sought advice on the preliminary survey from staff at the Alliance for Excellent Education, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and National Governors Association. In January 2013, the survey questions and response items underwent further review and systematic pretesting. The survey team obtained feedback from state-level officials in three states about the questions and response items. The survey was revised based on their input. In February 2013, CEP staff mailed a letter to the state chiefs/commissioners of education containing information about the CEP CCSS survey.

The CEP survey was administered electronically in February through May of 2013 to deputy state superintendents of education or their designees in the 46 states (plus D.C.) that had adopted the CCSS in English language arts and/or mathematics at that time. Forty of these states completed the survey for a response rate of 85%. The survey responses were imported to an Excel file and the data were cleaned and checked for duplicate entries or missing response times. Additional follow-up via e-mail and telephone was necessary for some survey submissions. Most of the items in the survey were closed questions, and response item frequencies were totaled and percentages calculated using the formula functions in Excel.



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