

Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards

# States Prepare for Common Core Assessments

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# Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards States Prepare for Common Core Assessments

With the voluntary Common Core State Standards (CCSS), states have sought to establish clear, high expectations that are consistent across participating states and that signal what K-12 students should learn in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) to be prepared for college and careers. As of July 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.

The standards are intended to ensure that “all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Whether the CCSS bring about the rigor, equity, and consistency across states implied by this statement will depend not only on how the adopting states implement the standards themselves, but also on how they assess students’ progress in learning the content of the standards. Two state-led consortia—the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)—are developing common assessments aligned to the CCSS in math and ELA, which for the most part are scheduled to be ready for states to administer during school year 2014-15. Thus, states participating in the consortia have just one more school year to attend to the logistics of administering the assessments and ensure their teachers are well versed in the Common Core content on which students will be tested.

To learn more about states’ policies, progress, and challenges in assessing students’ mastery of the CCSS and preparing to implement assessments aligned to these standards, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at The George Washington University included several specific questions about assessment 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.

This report describes states’ responses to questions from the survey about assessments aligned to the Common Core. The total number of responses discussed below do not always equal 40 because some questions were directed only to states that belonged to one or both consortia and not all states answered every question.

## Key Findings

- **A majority (27) of the states surveyed have already taken steps to start assessing students’ mastery of the Common Core or will do so *before* the consortia-developed assessments are ready in school year 2014-15.** About one-fourth of the survey states are not currently making these testing changes.

- **Half (20) of the survey states have begun undertaking activities to prepare teachers to interpret and use the results of the diagnostic assessments being developed by the state testing consortia.** The approaches being used by various states include directly providing professional development services to teachers, training school district personnel who in turn will train teachers and principals, and directly providing professional development to principals, who will then work with teachers.
- **About half (19) of the states surveyed have started working with districts and schools to plan both extra assistance for students who may need help in passing CCSS-aligned exams and remediation for students who fail the exams on the first try.** A few additional states are planning either extra assistance or remediation, but not both. Nine states are not currently planning either extra assistance or remediation to address the potentially lower student passing rates on state tests that may occur when the more rigorous CCSS-aligned tests are implemented.
- **Currently, only eight survey states are considering temporarily suspending consequences for schools or individuals based on student performance once the CCSS-aligned assessments are administered.** Fifteen states are not presently considering a temporary suspension of consequences, and several more states said it was too soon to decide.
- **Thirty-three survey states are planning to conduct public relations efforts to help educate parents and other stakeholders about the reasons why students may not perform as well on the CCSS-aligned assessments as on current state tests.** In addition, 37 states are planning outreach activities to inform parents and the public about how the CCSS-aligned assessments differ in general from current state tests.
- **A majority of the survey states that belong to one or both of the state testing consortia expressed positive views about key features of the consortia-developed assessments.** Thirty of the 36 states that responded to a set of questions about their consortium's assessments agreed that these assessments will do a better job than their current state tests of measuring higher-order analytical skills and performance skills. In addition, 27 member states concurred that their consortium's assessment system will drive instruction in positive ways. A majority of consortia member states also expect their consortium's assessment to be an improvement over their current state tests in ELA (27 states) and math (26). States' responses varied little based on which consortium they belonged to.
- **Seventeen of the states surveyed are considering administering CCSS-aligned assessments in addition to or instead of those being developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC.** These include three states that do not belong to either consortium and will use a different assessment as their main CCSS-aligned test, as well as 14 states that are members of one or both consortia. Twenty states reported that they are *not* contemplating using non-consortia assessments.
- **A majority (34) of survey states report facing challenges with various aspects of preparing to administer the CCSS-aligned assessments.** These challenges include ensuring schools have adequate Internet access and bandwidth and sufficient numbers of computers to administer the online assessments. Many states also cited the challenge of providing expertise at the state, district, and school level to address technology problems that may arise during test administration.

## Background on Assessments Aligned to the Common Core and This Report

Assessments aligned to the Common Core will play a crucial role in ensuring that schools are teaching and students are learning the content in these standards. And without some degree of commonality in the assessments that measure students' mastery of the standards, some states could choose to test less advanced portions of the content in the CCSS, which would undermine the rigor, equity, and consistency across states that the Common Core was intended to achieve.

Recognizing the value and potential cost effectiveness of working with other states on common assessments, most states that have adopted the Common Core have joined the Smarter Balanced or PARCC consortium or both. Funded with a grant from the federal Race to the Top program, these consortia are developing state-of-the-art assessments aligned to the CCSS in math and English language arts. These will include “summative” assessments of student achievement and learning growth that can be used for program evaluation and accountability purposes, as well as “formative” assessments that can provide teachers with information to diagnose students’ learning needs. The consortia-developed assessments, which will be administered in a computer-based online format, are scheduled to be available during school year 2014-15, except for the non-summative parts of the PARCC assessments, which may be delayed for a year (Gewertz, 2013a).

When the CEP survey was conducted in the spring of 2013, 25 states were participants in Smarter Balanced, while PARCC’s membership included 21 states and the District of Columbia. Of the 40 states that responded to the survey, 37 belonged at that time to one or both consortia; however, one of these states is omitted from certain response tallies in this report due to response errors. The data reported here represent the membership of the consortia at the time of the survey; since then, a few states have dropped out of the consortia.

Like the standards themselves, the assessments aligned to the Common Core have attracted controversy. Opponents of the CCSS have been unsuccessful to date in getting states to repeal their adoption of the standards, and some have begun urging states to reconsider whether they will administer the consortia-developed assessments (Ujjifusa, 2013). In addition, the consortia have released estimates of the costs of their assessments, which are projected to be \$29.50 per student for the PARCC assessments, and \$22.50 per student for the “basic” Smarter Balanced assessments and \$27.30 per student for a complete Smarter Balanced system. The costs of the assessments and the opposition to their use have been factors in the decision of some states to curtail their participation in the consortia (Gewertz, 2013b).

Another source of potential controversy surrounding the CCSS-aligned assessments is their impact on student test scores and passing rates. Because the CCSS are viewed as more rigorous than many current state standards, analysts are predicting that a substantial percentage of students may not pass the CCSS-aligned exams, at least not on the first try. In Kentucky and New York, two states that have begun testing students’ mastery of the Common Core, fewer students scored at or above the proficient level than had done so on the previous state assessments (Ujjifusa, 2012; Hernandez & Gebeloff, 2013).

Test scores and passing rates on CCSS-aligned assessments could not only affect support for the standards, but could also affect the status of states, districts, and schools under federal and state accountability systems. State test results are used to determine whether districts and schools meet the accountability requirements of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). States that have received U.S. Department of Education waivers of certain ESEA requirements must still measure student achievement and determine schools’ progress using assessments aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards, such as the CCSS. Recognizing that the transition period to aligned assessments could create problems with accountability, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has announced that the Department will consider state requests for schools to retain their federal accountability designations for an additional year (Duncan, 2013).

This report on states’ preparation for Common Core assessments is the fourth in a series of CEP reports based on the 2013 state survey. The first report focused on states’ views of the federal role in supporting CCSS implementation. The second highlighted state actions to prepare teachers, principals and school systems to carry out the Common Core. The third report focused on CCSS-related professional development activities. Later reports will take a closer look at the treatment of special populations and higher education involvement in the Common Core.

The 2013 survey marks the third year that CEP has surveyed state officials about states’ progress in implementing the CCSS. Findings from previous years’ surveys are available at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

## Assessing Mastery of the CCSS Before Consortia-Developed Assessments Are Available

A total of 27 survey states—including both consortia members and non-member states—have begun taking steps to measure students’ mastery of the Common Core or plan to do so in 2013-14, before the consortia-develop assessments are ready to administer in school year 2014-15. (This number comes from a special analysis not shown in the table below.)

As shown in **table 1**, 11 of these states embedded test items aligned to the CCSS in, or removed items not aligned to the CCSS from, their state’s math tests in school year 2012-13 or earlier, and 11 states made these changes in their ELA tests. Several more states plan to make these changes in school year 2013-14 in their math tests (seven states) and/or ELA tests (eight states). In addition, some states have begun phasing in these types of changes to align their tests with the CCSS in certain grade levels or subjects; eight states are phasing in changes over multiple years in math, and seven states are doing so in ELA.

Several states reported that they are *not* currently modifying their current assessments in math (10 states) or ELA (11). One state respondent did not know if this was the case in math. A few states (not shown in the table) checked the “other” response. One such respondent explained that the state is field testing items but not currently assessing student mastery; another reported that the state is preparing to administer new tests in 2013-14 that are aligned to both the CCSS and existing state standards; and a third noted that the current state ELA test is already closely aligned to the CCSS according to alignment studies.

**Table 1. Number of states modifying their current tests to assess mastery of the CCSS before 2014-15**

School year in which state embedded/will embed test items aligned to CCSS in current state tests or removed/will remove items not aligned to CCSS	Mathematics	English language arts
2012-13 or earlier	11	11
2013-14	7	8
Has already begun and is phasing in over multiple school years	8	7
Not currently making modifications	10	11

Table reads: Eleven states embedded CCSS-aligned test items in or removed non-aligned items from their current state mathematics test in school year 2012-13 or earlier.

## Professional Development on the Use of Assessment Data

Teachers and principals are likely to need professional development to access and use the rich online information about student learning that is expected to become available through the consortia-developed assessments. A total of 20 survey states that belong to one or both consortia reported undertaking one or more activities to prepare educators to interpret and use the results of the consortia’s CCSS-aligned diagnostic assessments. (This total was arrived at by analyzing responses across items and is not shown in table 2.)

**Table 2** shows the number of states using various specific approaches to provide professional development on the consortia-developed assessments. The most common approach, cited by 18 states, is to provide professional development to school district personnel, who in turn will train teachers and principals to use the assessment data. Thirteen states are directly providing assessment-related professional development for teachers, while 12 states report that entities other than the state education agency (SEA) are delivering professional development. Ten states are

targeting professional development services to principals, who will then work with teachers. Four states responded that they had no plans to provide this type of professional development, and two did not know.

Most of the seven states that gave the “other” response said they are waiting to provide assessment-related professional development until the consortia assessments are administered or until more information about the tests is known.

**Table 2. Number of states using various approaches to prepare teachers to interpret and use the results of consortia-developed diagnostic assessments**

Professional development approach	Number of states
Professional development for school district personnel who will then train teachers and principals	18
Professional development for teachers	13
Professional development is being provided by entities other than the SEA	12
Professional development for principals who will then train the teachers	10
Nothing is planned	4
Don't know	2
Other	7

Table reads: Eighteen states are providing professional development on the consortia-developed diagnostic assessments to school district personnel, who will then train teachers and principals to interpret and use the results.

## State Plans for Extra Assistance and/or Remediation for Students

As noted in the background section, the rigor of the standards could lead to lower test scores or passing rates on state assessments that are aligned to the CCSS. Consequently, increasing numbers of students may require extra help to pass the tests on the first try or may need remediation after they fail a test.

As displayed in **table 3**, just under half (19) of the survey states have started working with districts and schools to plan both extra assistance for students who may need help passing CCSS-aligned tests *and* remediation for students who fail the tests. A few states are working with schools and districts to plan only extra assistance before the test (two

**Table 3. Number of states planning extra assistance or remediation to help students pass CCSS-aligned assessments**

Type of support	Number of states
Both extra assistance and remediation	19
Extra assistance only	2
Remediation only	1
Neither extra assistance nor remediation	9

Table reads: Nineteen states are working with districts and schools to plan extra assistance for students who may need help in passing the CCSS-aligned assessments and remediation efforts for students who fail these assessments.

states) or remediation after a failure (one state), but not both. Nine states are not currently planning either of these student supports.

Six states did not know whether this is occurring (not shown in table 3). Five states chose the “other” response. Most of these states said they have begun planning or considering these types of assistance, although it may hinge, as one state noted, on the availability of state funding and policy support.

## Temporary Suspension of Consequences Based on Test Performance

Student performance on state tests is a factor in federal and state accountability determinations and other decisions with important consequences for districts, schools, and individuals. When the CCSS-aligned assessments are administered, the potentially lower scores on these tests could trigger negative consequences. For example, states that adopt the Common Core will use student results on CCSS-aligned assessments to determine whether districts and schools meet performance targets under Title I of ESEA and/or under the ESEA waivers. Schools that experience decreases in student performance may be subject to interventions. As another example, states with federal Race to the Top grants or with ESEA waivers must develop teacher and principal evaluation systems that incorporate student mastery of state standards as a factor. If students do not perform well on CCSS-aligned assessments, teachers or principals may receive substandard evaluations and may be subject to interventions, transfer, or removal. Furthermore, some states may consider students’ performance on CCSS-aligned assessments in decisions about whether to promote them to the next grade or award them a high school diploma.

Only eight states reported that they are considering temporarily suspending at least one of the test-based consequences listed in the CEP survey (decisions related to school accountability, student diplomas, teacher evaluations, or principal evaluations) once the CCSS-aligned assessments are administered. Fifteen states are not considering temporarily suspending any of these consequences. However, the survey was administered before Secretary Duncan decided to allow states with ESEA waivers to request a delay in making personnel decisions based on the “student mastery” component of their teacher and principal evaluation systems. Therefore, additional states may decide to delay personnel consequences, in addition to the few that reported they were considering doing so.

**Table 4** displays the specific responses to this question. Four states are considering temporarily suspending policies that use state test scores to determine whether students receive a high school diploma. Three states are considering temporarily suspending accountability consequences for schools based on student test results, while a few states are considering temporary suspensions of consequences for teacher (two states) or principal (one state) evaluation systems. Some of these states checked more than one type of consequence.

**Table 4. Number of states considering temporarily suspending consequences based on student test performance once the CCSS-aligned assessments are administered**

Consequence for individuals or schools	Yes	No	Too soon to tell	Don't know
High school diploma decisions	4	22	9	2
School accountability decisions	3	19	13	2
Teacher evaluation systems	2	22	9	4
Principal evaluation systems	1	21	9	5

Table reads: When the CCSS-aligned assessments are administered, four states are considering temporarily suspending the use of state test results to decide whether students receive a high school diploma. Twenty-two states are not considering a temporary suspension for diploma decisions, while nine said it is too soon to tell and two do not know.

As shown in the table, the number of states that were not considering temporarily suspending a particular consequence ranged from 19 to 22. Roughly one-quarter of the survey states (9 to 13) said it was “too soon to tell,” which suggests they have not yet decided whether to temporarily suspend consequences.

## Public Relations Efforts Concerning Common Core Assessments

As noted above, it is anticipated that student passing rates on the CCSS-aligned assessments will be lower than on most current state tests due to the comparative rigor of the Common Core. While many parents and other stakeholders support the concept of Common Core standards due to their increased rigor, there may be a backlash when the aligned assessments are administered and many students do not receive passing scores. Some groups, such as the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and Achieve, Inc., have initiated public relations campaigns to address a possible backlash and educate stakeholders about the reasons for lower scores and the general importance of the Common Core (Ujjifusa, 2012; Achieve, Inc., 2013).

According to our survey, a majority of Common Core-adopting states are undertaking similar public relations efforts. As displayed in **figure 1**, 37 states are planning public relations efforts to inform parents and the public about how the CCSS-aligned assessments will differ from current state assessments. And 33 states are planning to conduct public relations about the reasons why scores or passing rates on CCSS-aligned assessments may differ from those on the current state tests.

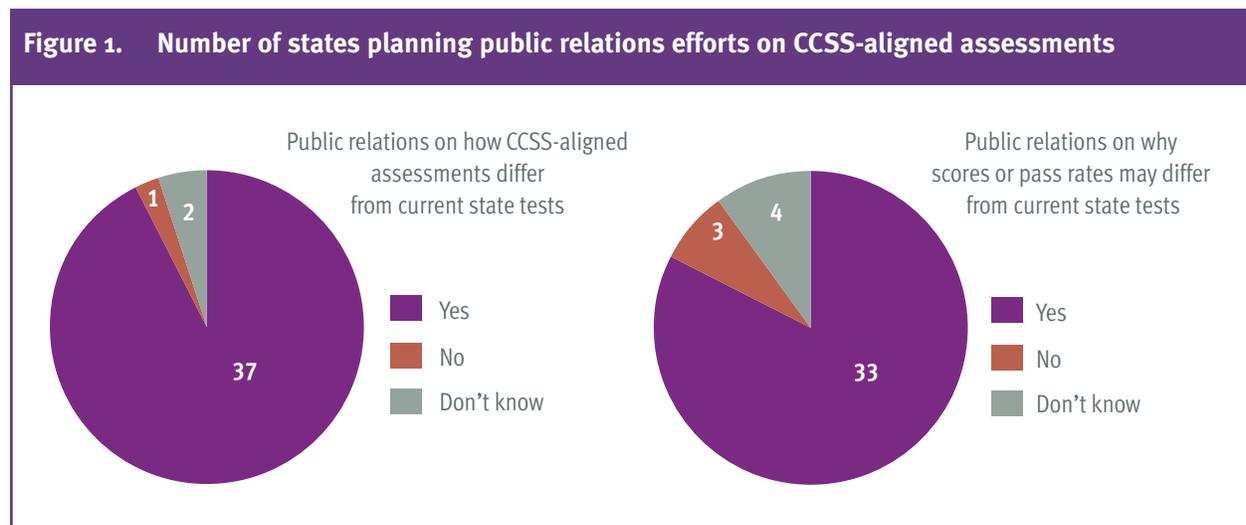


Figure reads: Thirty-seven states are planning public relations efforts to inform parents and the public about how the new CCSS-aligned assessments will be different from current state tests, while one state is not planning any such effort and two states did not know.

## State Views on the Smarter Balanced and PARCC Assessments

At the time the survey was administered, 36 of the responding survey states were participating in one or both testing consortia.<sup>1</sup> We asked these state education agency officials for their views on different features of the pending CCSS-aligned assessments.

<sup>1</sup> One additional state was a member of one or both consortia at the time of the survey but is not included in this total or in any of the tallies in this section due to response errors.

As displayed in **table 5**, a majority of the consortia members responding to this question have positive views of key features of these assessments. A large proportion of these survey states agreed that the assessments developed by the consortium to which they belonged will—

- Do a better job of measuring higher-order analytical skills and performance skills than their current state assessment does (30 states)
- Drive instruction in positive ways (27)
- Be an improvement over the current state assessment in English language arts (27)
- Be an improvement over the current state assessment in math (26)

Somewhat fewer states agreed that the assessments developed by the consortium to which they belonged will—

- Meet their state’s needs for student achievement information (24 states)
- Produce information that will be understood by teachers (21 states)
- Yield information that is suitable for diagnostic purposes (18 states)
- Produce results that will be understood and used by parents and students (17 states)

As shown in the table below, many states said it is too soon to tell about certain features of the consortia-designed assessments, especially whether these assessments will provide diagnostic information and produce results that will be understood by parents and students.

**Table 5. State education agencies’ views on the consortia-development assessments**

The assessment systems being developed by the consortium to which my state belongs will—	Agree	Disagree	Too soon to tell	Don’t know
Do a better job of measuring higher-order analytical skills and performance skills than the state’s current assessments	30	0	5	1
Drive instruction in positive ways	27	0	8	1
Be an improvement over the current state assessment in ELA	27	0	8	1
Be an improvement over the current state assessment in math	26	0	9	1
Meet the state’s needs for student achievement information	24	0	11	1
Produce results that will be understood and used by teachers	21	0	14	1
Yield information that is suitable for diagnostic assessment purposes in ELA	18	1	16	1
Yield information that is suitable for diagnostic assessment purposes in math	18	1	16	1
Produce results that will be understood and used by parents and students	17	0	17	1

Table reads: Thirty states agreed that that the assessment systems being developed by the consortia to which they belong will do a better job than their current state tests of measuring higher-order analytical skills and performance skills, while five states reported it was too soon to tell and one state did not know.

Note: The response of one consortia member state in the survey was omitted from this table due to response errors.

Note: Officials in three states (not shown) responded that their state is not a member of the Smarter Balanced or PARCC consortium.

We also analyzed the responses to these questions about consortia-developed assessments to determine whether there were significant differences in states' views based on the specific consortium to which they belonged. The differences we found between the two groups of consortia members were minimal.

## Use of CCSS-Aligned Assessments Not Developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC

In addition to the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments, other assessments aligned to the CCSS are being developed by individual states and by test publishers, such as ACT. These alternatives may be less expensive to administer and may have other advantages over the consortia-development assessments.

We asked all survey states, including those that belonged to a consortia and those that did not, whether they were considering administering CCSS-aligned assessments other than those being developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC. Seventeen of the survey states said they were considering this option, while 20 states do not intend to do so. Two state respondents did not know whether their state is considering assessments other than the consortia-developed ones.

We also asked the 17 states that were considering non-consortia assessments how these other assessments might be used. The responses are shown in **table 6**.

Three states indicated that they were not members of either Smarter Balanced or PARCC, so the other assessments will be their state's primary assessment. Six states intend to consider all CCSS-aligned assessment options and select the one that is cost-effective and works with their state's policies. Five states plan to use these other assessments *in addition to* the assessment developed by the consortium to which they belong, while one state plans to use another assessment *instead of* the consortia-developed assessment.

Officials in two states selected the "other" response. One explained that the state will use non-consortia assessments aligned to the CCSS for end-of-course exams, while the other state has not yet decided whether to use an assessment developed by the state or one developed by its consortium.

**Table 6. How states plan to use CCSS-aligned assessments other than those being developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC**

Use of non-consortia assessments	Number of states
Not a member of the Smarter Balanced or PARCC consortium so the other assessment(s) will be our primary CCSS-aligned assessment	3
Will consider all CCSS-aligned assessments and select one that is cost-effective and works with our state's policies	6
Will use the other assessment(s) <i>in addition to</i> the assessment(s) developed by the consortium to which my state belongs	5
Will use the other assessment(s) <i>instead of</i> the assessment(s) developed by the consortium to which my state belongs	1
Other	2

Table reads: Of the 17 survey states that said they were considering using CCSS-aligned assessments other than those being developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC, 3 states indicated that these other assessments would be their state's primary CCSS-aligned assessment because they are not a member of either consortium.

## General and Technology-Related Challenges in Preparing for CCSS-Aligned Assessments

A majority of the states surveyed report facing challenges in preparing to implement assessments aligned to the Common Core.

We first asked states whether they considered it a challenge to develop, adopt, or implement CCSS-aligned assessments. Most states (34)—including both consortia members and non-members—considered this a challenge. The specific responses were as follows:

- Major challenge (13 states)
- Minor challenge (21)
- Not a challenge (4)
- Not an SEA activity (1)
- Too soon to tell (1)

We also asked states about a variety of technology-related challenges they might confront in preparing to administer the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments. These will be computer-based assessments, administered online, although initially states will be given a paper-and-pencil option. Many states do not currently administer online state tests, so they may face challenges in preparing for all of their public school students to take tests in this format.

A majority of survey states that belonged to one or both consortia reported facing technology-related challenges that could affect administration of the consortia-developed assessments. As displayed in **table 7**, 31 consortia member states said they faced major (22) or minor (9) challenges in securing adequate Internet access and bandwidth in the schools. Twenty-nine states are dealing with major (19) or minor (10) challenges in ensuring a sufficient number

**Table 7. Number of consortia-member states facing various technological challenges in implementing Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments**

Challenges associated with the administration of the CCSS-aligned assessments	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Too soon to tell	Don't know
Availability of adequate Internet access and bandwidth in the schools	22	9	0	5	0
Availability of sufficient numbers of computers in the schools with adequate processing speed and screen characteristics	19	10	1	6	0
Availability of expertise in schools and districts to address technology problems that may arise during test administration	15	12	1	5	2
Availability of expertise in the SEA to address technology problems as they arise during test administration	13	11	5	6	0
Adequacy of security measures to protect the online assessment from cheating and fraud	9	13	4	9	0

Table reads: Twenty-two states considered it a major challenge to ensure adequate Internet access and bandwidth in the schools in their state to administer CCSS-aligned assessments, while nine states considered this a minor challenge. Five states indicated that it was too soon to tell whether this was a challenge.

Note: Three states are not included in the table because they do not intend to administer PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments.

of computers in the schools with adequate processing speed and screen characteristics for students to use to take the tests. Many consortia members reported major or minor challenges with ensuring expertise in schools and districts (27 states) or at the state level (24) to address technology problems that may arise during test administration. Finally, 22 consortia members considered it a major or minor challenge to put in place adequate security measures to protect the online assessment from cheating and fraud. A few states reported that they were not experiencing challenges with various technological aspects of administering the consortia assessments, and some states said it was too soon to tell whether the issues listed in table 7 would pose a challenge for their state.

We asked the 33 states that reported facing a major or minor challenge with any of the technological issues in table 7 whether they had developed and disseminated a plan to remedy those challenges, so their state will be fully ready to implement the consortium-developed assessments. Thirteen of these states reported that they have developed such a plan, while 12 have not. Eight states did not answer the question.

## Funding and State Education Agency Capacity

Some of the challenges discussed above may be due to limited state education agency capacity to prepare for and administer the assessments. As shown in **table 8** and discussed in the second CEP report in this series, *Year Three of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: An Overview of States' Progress and Challenges*, 23 states reported having adequate SEA staff expertise to support the development and implementation of a new assessment system aligned to the Common Core, while 12 reported having adequate staffing levels, and 11 said they had adequate fiscal resources. Only nine states had all three dimension of SEA capacity for this activity—adequate expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources.

In a related question, we asked states about their SEA's capacity to provide technology support for CCSS-aligned assessments that are administered online. As indicated in table 8, 17 states reported having adequate staff expertise to provide technology support, while 8 have adequate staffing levels, and 7 have adequate fiscal resources. Only six states reported having all three dimensions of capacity to provide assessment-related technology support.

**Table 8. Adequacy of SEA expertise, SEA staffing levels, and state fiscal resources to carry out CCSS assessment-related implementation activities**

CCSS-related activity	Adequate staff expertise	Adequate staffing levels	Adequate fiscal resources	Not a current state priority	Don't know
Support development and implementation of a new assessment system aligned to the CCSS	23	12	11	2	4
Provide technology support for CCSS-aligned assessments administered online	17	8	7	1	8

Table reads: Twenty-three survey states reported having adequate staff expertise to support state development and implementation of a new CCSS-aligned assessment system, while 12 have adequate staffing levels, and 11 have adequate fiscal resources. Two states reported that this activity was not currently a state priority, and four states did not know whether they had adequate expertise, staffing levels, or fiscal resources for assessment implementation.

Finally, our analysis revealed that assessment activities related to the CCSS have often suffered in states with decreased or level funding for general K-12 education and/or for their SEA operating budgets. As displayed in **table 9**, six states with decreased or level funding have reduced or eliminated their efforts to acquire computers, software, and other technology needed to administer the CCSS-aligned assessments. Six states with these budget issues have eliminated or reduced their efforts to create or maintain the technology infrastructure for CCSS-aligned assessments. Five states in this situation have cut back or curtailed their participation in an assessment consortium. Finally, four states with budget issues have reduced or eliminated training to support state, district, or school personnel in administering CCSS-aligned assessments.

**Table 9. Impact of reduced or level state funding on implementation of CCSS-aligned assessments**

Activity related to CCSS-aligned assessments	Total	Number of states reporting that certain state CCSS-related assessment activities have been reduced or eliminated due to decreased or level funding for...		
		K-12 education funding	SEA operations	K-12 education funding and SEA operations
Acquiring computers, software, and other technology-related materials needed to administer assessments	6	2	1	3
Creating or maintaining the technology infrastructure needed to administer assessments	6	2	1	3
Participating in state consortia to develop assessments	5	2	0	3
Training to help state, district, or school personnel administer the assessments	4	2	1	1

Table reads: Among the survey states that reported decreased or level funding for K-12 education and/or SEA operations, six have reduced or eliminated activities to acquire computers, software, and other technology-related materials necessary to administer the CCSS-aligned assessments. These six states took this action due to decreased or level funding for K-12 education in general (two states), for SEA operations (one state), or for both K-12 education and SEA operations (three states).

## Conclusion

States are planning and moving forward on a range of activities to prepare for assessments aligned to the Common Core, including the tests being developed by Smarter Balanced and PARCC. A majority of states that have adopted the standards are not waiting to start testing student knowledge of the Common Core until the consortia-developed assessments are ready in school year 2014-15. States are also proceeding with activities to prepare teachers to interpret and use the results of the diagnostic assessments being developed by the state consortia.

In light of concerns about what will happen to students who struggle to pass CCSS-aligned assessments, 18 states have started working with districts and schools to plan both extra assistance to help students pass the tests and remediation for students who fail the tests. Ten states have no such plans in place.

States also seem aware of the need to play a more active role in maintaining public support for the Common Core standards and assessments. To help prepare parents and other stakeholders for the possibility of lower student test scores or passing rates on the more rigorous CCSS-aligned assessments, a majority of states are planning to conduct public relations efforts about the reasons why performance on the CCSS-aligned assessments may differ from that on the current state assessment.

Despite concerns about a potential public backlash from lower test scores, a majority of the survey states that are members of one or both state testing consortia are positive about certain features of these assessments. Most of these states expressed confidence that the new consortia-developed assessments will do a better job of measuring higher-order analytical skills and performance skills than current state tests and will drive instruction in positive ways. The responses of states varied little by consortia membership.

Yet challenges remain. As noted in an earlier report in this series, *An Overview of States' Progress and Challenges*, many SEAs have concerns about their capacity to implement assessments, especially in terms of staffing levels and fiscal resources. In addition, 34 states say it is a challenge in general to develop, adopt, or implement assessments aligned with the Common Core. And many states are facing difficulties in ensuring sufficient technology and related support to administer the online consortia-developed assessments.

Over the last year, a few states have chosen to drop out of or limit their participation in the assessment consortia. Many factors, including the efforts of groups who oppose the Common Core, may underlie these states' actions, but the lack of resources is one possible reason. Five of the survey states with decreased or level state funding for education have reduced or curtailed their participation in a consortium. Further, five survey states are considering adopting a CCSS-aligned assessment developed by an entity other than Smarter Balanced or PARCC in order to allow them to select an assessment that is cost-effective and works with their state's policies.

Many states would be open to federal support for CCSS assessment-related activities. As noted in the first report in this series, *Year Three of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: State Education Agencies' Views on the Federal Role*, 30 states would like to see federal authorizations and appropriations of funds to help them with the costs of implementing the consortia-developed assessments. Thirty states also support a similar federal role in updating and maintaining the consortia-developed assessments. And 26 states said it would be helpful to have federal authorizations and appropriations to support district implementation of the CCSS-aligned assessments.

Supporters of the Common Core who see state-of-the-art assessments as a key to increasing the consistency of student performance measures across states need to be mindful of the challenges—especially the financial ones—that states face in implementing these assessments. Governors, state legislators, and other state leaders should consider whether they are providing adequate funding and SEA staffing to administer these assessments. And, given that a majority of the state education agency officials surveyed are supportive of the federal government playing a role in helping states in this endeavor, the Congress should consider debating the merits of federal aid for updating and maintaining the consortia's assessments and providing funds to help offset states' and districts' costs in preparing for and administering the assessments.

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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 the 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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