Getting to the Core: How Early Implementers are Approaching the Common Core in California

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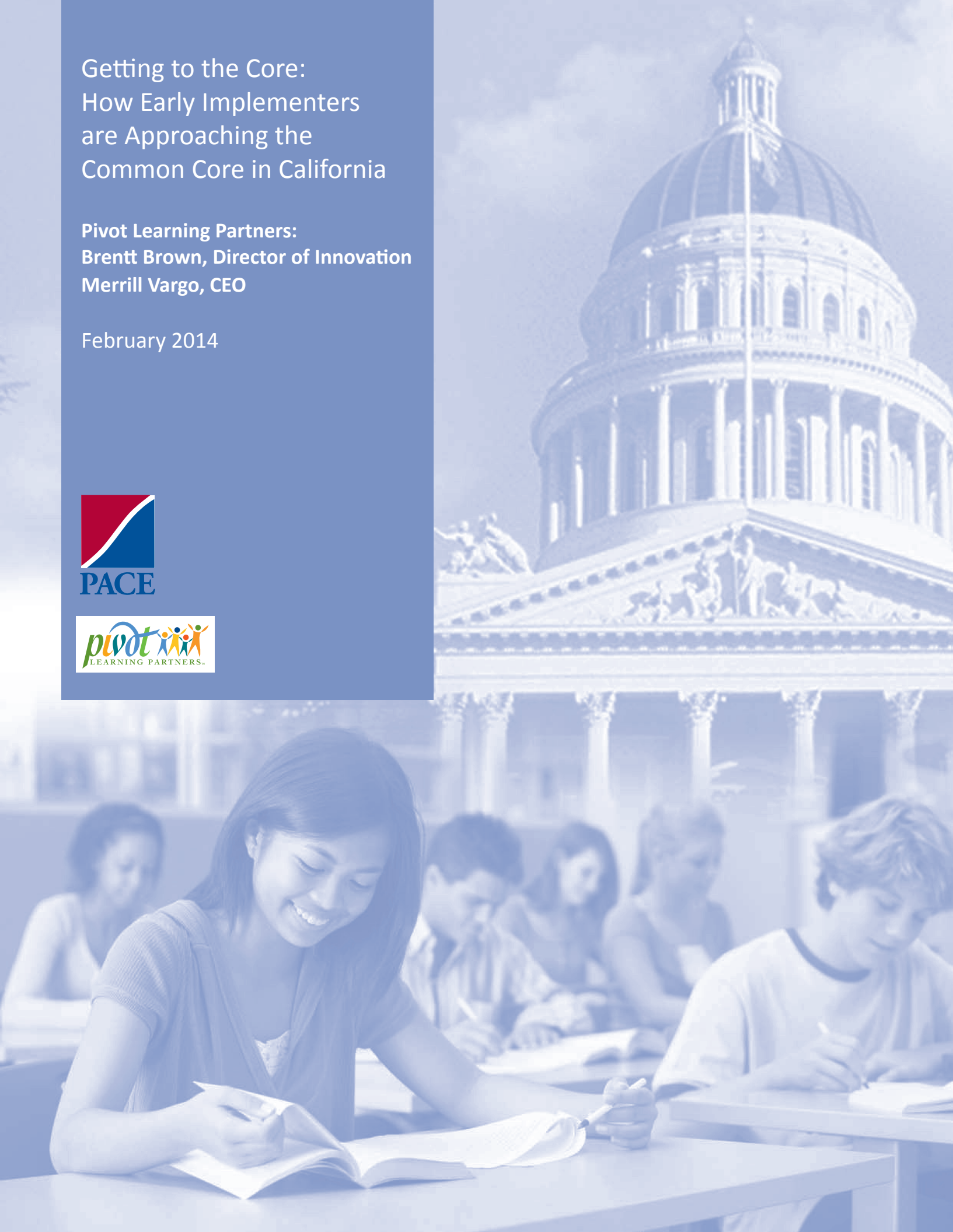

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SECTION I. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Background: California has embarked on a major new wave of curriculum reform with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the new English Language Development (ELD) standards, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The adoption of the CCSS builds on a legacy of standards-based education reform in California that began with the development of curriculum frameworks in the 1980s and continued with the adoption of the California State Standards and the approval of the Public School Accountability Act.

The environment for implementation of the CCSS has improved dramatically since the new standards were adopted in 2010. The state education budget is growing rather than shrinking. The state has reiterated its commitment to CCSS and expanded the scope of the statewide pilot of the new Smarter Balanced (SBAC) assessments, and provided earmarked funding to support CCSS implementation. Work on new curriculum frameworks is nearing completion, which means that districts will soon have a list of state-endorsed instructional materials to choose from. Each of these changes present new opportunities—and challenges—for districts as they design and implement a plan for CCSS.

This report is intended to inform both practitioners and policymakers about the wide variety of CCSS implementation strategies that California school districts are choosing. The report does not aim to evaluate these strategies, or paint a picture of how the average school district in California is responding to the challenge of CCSS implementation. Instead it offers an in-depth look at a small group of early implementers of CCSS, with the goal of chronicling the choices these pathfinders have made, identifying lessons they believe they have learned, and mapping potential pitfalls that other districts may seek to avoid.

Report Format and Methodology: Our report is based on interviews with executive leaders in 11 California school districts, most of whom are Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents or Directors. In the report we summarize key trends observed across districts, focusing on technical strategies, approaches to change management, responses to implementation challenges, and emerging learning. Appendix A profiles each of the districts in our sample, highlighting technical and change management strategies for each district as well as the theory of action behind these choices. These profiles also identify the major structures, systems and tools that

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A Summary of Key Findings:

- Districts are launching CCSS initiatives with a narrow focus on one or two core technical strategies for CCSS implementation. These include: capacity building for teachers on student-centered instructional strategies, curriculum design, assessment design, project-based learning, and personalized learning. Most districts have not started the initiative with a significant textbook adoption.
- Most districts are supporting the roll-out of these major technical strategies in two main ways: (i) building or repurposing structures, roles and systems to ensure that the changes districts have in mind change behavior in the classroom; and (ii) making an effort to engage teachers and other stakeholders as a way to manage the human side of the change effort. For example, many districts have decided to invest in building the capacity of teacher leaders and positioning them to support the transition in grade level or subject area teams. Others are developing instructional coaches to provide local follow up to professional learning opportunities. Similarly, many districts are engaging teachers in the work of curriculum and assessment design, both to build support for CCSS within the district and to deepen teachers' professional learning.

  Common obstacles to implementation include:

  - Too little time to work with teachers;
  - An uncertain policy environment;
  - The lingering effects of recent budget cuts;
  - A growing number of less experienced teachers who have little experience with curriculum design; and
  - Site-level leadership accustomed to the prescriptions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and lacking experience in designing and leading change.
- Districts have learned a number of lessons so far, including the importance of: (i) narrowing their focus and building in clear expectations for how new learning will be applied; and (ii) involving teachers and site-level leaders early in the design of the change effort.

each district has created to support implementation. The interview protocol used to capture the data for both sections is available in Appendix B.

A Note on the Districts Included in this Report: Our sample is intentionally selective and not designed to represent the average California district. Rather we seek to capture the variety of choices that districts are making, the strategies that they are implementing, the rationale or theory of action underlying their implementation plans, and some early lessons learned. Based on a variety of data, including an initial round of informal interviews with colleagues across the state, we used the following criteria to select districts for inclusion in the report:

- Did the district begin to design and implement a bold plan for CCSS early in relation to most districts (starting 2011-12 school year)?
- Does the district's CCSS strategy appear to differ significantly from those of other districts?
- Would including the district increase the diversity of our sample based on size, region and demographic data (e.g., race, ethnicity and income)?

Based on these criteria we selected the following school districts for inclusion in our sample: Baldwin

Park Unified, Corcoran Joint Unified, Corona Norco Unified, Coronado Unified, Elk Grove Unified, Lindsay Unified, Long Beach Unified, Milpitas Unified, Richland Union Elementary, Sacramento City Unified and Whittier Union High School.

SECTION II: TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The districts in our sample adopted technical strategies from a relatively limited menu to guide their work on Common Core. Most districts adopted just one or two main strategies, but many are gradually phasing in additional strategies in many of the areas described in the broad categories below.

Student-Centered Instruction: A number of districts decided to launch their CCSS initiative by building a strong instructional foundation among their teachers and site administrators. A key outcome for many of these districts is the development of a district-wide instructional model that includes expectations and agreed upon norms about the use of instructional strategies aligned to the CCSS.

This approach appeals to districts for a wide variety of reasons. Some choose it for its change management strengths. As one interviewee stated, "We knew our teachers would need to live it [the Common Core] first before they embraced it." Others choose it for financial reasons. Focusing on instruction is a practical choice while budgets remain low, with work on gaps in curriculum and assessment to be phased in as resources increase. Other districts had already built a strong instructional model (often with a focus on "direct instruction"), and view the implementation of CCSS as an opportunity to expand their current toolkit to include more student-centered instructional strategies and a focus on increased depth of knowledge.

Within this broad approach there is wide variety among districts in the instructional focus of their work, but there are some noteworthy common trends. First, almost all of the districts are prioritizing writing in their ELA work. It makes sense to focus on the writing because the CCSS writing standards:

- Reflect one of the biggest shifts between the previous standards and the CCSS;
- Allow the district to focus on student work (and not just teacher practice);
- Lend themselves to the design of a school-wide or district-wide assessment that can be used to teach pedagogy and evaluate effectiveness of practices; and
- Integrate other major shifts of the CCSS-ELA, including the increase of informational and complex texts.

In mathematics, most of the districts have focused on two main areas: essential math practices and how to design formative assessments that increase the rigor of student learning in their lessons.

Curriculum Design: Almost all of the districts are taking steps to address gaps in their curriculum in some way, but for many districts engaging teachers in the process of curriculum design is their central approach to the Common Core. A handful of districts have purchased new instructional materials, but most are designing their own curriculum, relying primarily on existing materials and making targeted purchases of textbooks and supplemental materials only when necessary. Designing curriculum offers teachers a chance to apply newly acquired knowledge about the CCSS to real work in their own grade levels and subject areas.

Some districts see engaging teachers in curriculum design as a change management strategy. Participation in curriculum design builds a sense of ownership over the transition to the CCSS, and it can help to develop a cadre of local experts who can influence and mentor others at the site level.

Districts are also eager to design curricula that are both flexible and adaptable, so that they can capitalize on newer and potentially more effective instructional materials when these became available. They also appreciate how a well-managed process of curriculum development can offer teachers a greater degree of control over curriculum decisions, while simultaneously allowing the district to ensure that these units meet certain quality standards district-wide.

Of the districts choosing curriculum design as a primary strategy, most are recruiting some teachers (e.g., lead teachers or teachers on special assignment) into curriculum teams that are designing a wide range of tools to support curriculum development. Some are designing units or digital textbooks that bring together existing materials and new materials created by the team, along with newly purchased supplemental materials and/or materials that are freely available on the Internet. Others are designing, testing and refining frameworks and templates to standardize unit and lesson development, which will then occur at the site level. A number of districts are creating frameworks that map out the standards on a timeline, providing broad guidance for how teachers working together at school sites should design curriculum units or lessons within fixed parameters. Most of the districts employing this strategy have standardized templates for designing curriculum units, but the "must-haves" in these templates vary significantly. Many of the templates require a performance-based assessment at the conclusion of the unit that is modeled on the SBAC. Others require that a portion of the unit include a collaborative learning project, or specify how technology should be incorporated within the unit.

Many districts engaging in curriculum design are using an online platform like Edmodo, My Big Campus or others to enable teachers to organize and share these units across sites. Technology as a support for professional collaboration can be overlooked in the push for on-line assessment and blended learning, but in many of the districts in our sample this was a key element in their strategies for CCSS implementation.

Assessment: For several districts creating or purchasing CCSS-aligned assessments is an essential part of their strategy, but their reasons for focusing on assessment vary. For one district that is rolling out CCSS implementation through data-driven Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), having high-quality, teacher-created assessments in place is critical to their plan. In districts that are more focused on developing a CCSS-aligned instructional model or curriculum design, designing assessments provides an opportunity to engage and support teachers as they adopt the profound instructional shifts required by the Common Core. Others view assessment as a way to engage teachers and leaders in the change initiative, and as a tool to measure their progress on implementation. The work to develop assessments is a good example of how districts are accomplishing multiple goals at once, in this case building teacher knowledge, skill, and support and in the process creating essential tools.

As they develop new assessments most of the districts in our sample are focusing on writing. More than half of the districts have created their own rubrics for writing or adapted existing rubrics, such as those developed by SBAC. Many of these districts have gone further, using new rubrics to establish a common pedagogy for writing. Other districts are focusing on assessment as a primary driver for instructional changes in mathematics.

Project Based Learning: A significant number of districts are responding to the CCSS transition by expanding their use of project-based learning (PBL). This is an especially popular strategy at the high school level. For some districts, organizing learning around

projects promotes the critical thinking skills espoused in the CCSS, while the student-centered framework of PBL provides a nice complement to other instructional strategies that are in place. For example, one district is maintaining a strong emphasis on direct instruction in order to ensure all children can access the core content, while simultaneously expanding the use of PBL to promote deeper learning and higher-order thinking. Some of the leaders we interviewed argue that PBL offers districts a way to strengthen the connection between CCSS and the new ELD standards. PBL promotes collaboration, speaking and listening, and other skills that English Learners need to engage in and access core academic content.

Personalized Learning: Two districts are leveraging the transition to Common Core as part of a larger strategy to improve the personalization of learning. One district is transitioning to a performance-based model of instruction from a time-based model. Another district is rapidly expanding the use of blended learning strategies, both to provide the deeper learning called for in the CCSS and to promote more personalized and differentiated instruction for their students.

Secondary Strategies: Our interviews also surfaced a number of support strategies for the core strategies above, including:

- *21st Century Skills:* Several districts are coupling the implementation of CCSS with a focus on 21st Century Skills, such as those described in the P21 Framework that was recently adopted by the California Department of Education. Many of these districts, but not all, are using PBL as a strategy for addressing both the Common Core and 21st Century Skills. Many of these districts are also emphasizing technology as a key element in their initiatives.
- *Technology:* With the exception of one district employing a blended learning model to address the CCSS, technology is an important but secondary piece of most districts' strategies for Common Core implementation. Among these districts, many are utilizing the SAMR model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition) as a framework for teachers to think about how they can use technology to increase the rigor of their instruction.[1] Others have purchased or designed digital or technology enhanced textbooks, or they have purchased tablets for teachers or students. A handful indicate that they are aiming for one-to-one computing capacity, and others are using online platforms to promote collaboration among teachers, including the sharing of CCSS-aligned lessons and units.
- *Integrating the new ELD Standards:* The majority of districts are just beginning work on the new ELD Standards, and only a few are deeply integrating this work into their CCSS efforts. In one district, however, all of their CCSS PD has been developed with a focus on diverse learners, with an emphasis on how to address English Learners and children with special needs. Another district is launching a pilot project on ELD integration in a small subset of schools.
- *Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS):* Only a few districts are working on NGSS, but one is engaging a teacher on special assignment to create science units that meet the CCSS and NGSS.
- *Middle School and High School Math Articulation:* Many districts are taking advantage of the choices embedded in the CCSS and are opting to redesign the course sequence for math in middle school and high schools.

[1] Puentedura, R. (2014). "Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) Model." Retrieved January 17, 2014: http://www.hippasus.com/rrpweblog/

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SECTION III: ROLLOUT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

While Section II covers *what* districts are implementing, this section highlights *how* they are implementing these technical strategies. This discussion includes the structures, roles and systems that districts are building or repurposing to ensure that these strategies are taking root in the classroom, and the strategies that they are using to manage the human side of this change effort.

A. Roles and Structures: Most districts are carefully designing, repurposing or leveraging existing organizational structures to successfully implement the Common Core. Examples of how districts are handling this aspect of the change include:

- *Steering Committees:* Most of the mid-to-large-size districts launched and are regularly convening steering committees to help design CCSS strategies and tactics and to monitor implementation. Bigger districts generally have more of these committees. Involvement of principals and teachers and other stakeholders varies, but many districts have gradually increased the level of involvement of these stakeholders as a change management strategy. An important role that steering committee members play is to collect implementation data and report it back to their peers. In fact, in a number of districts, there is a steering committee dedicated solely to monitoring implementation at the site level. Another common activity of these committees, especially during the start-up phase of the initiative, is to look to other districts nationwide for resources and new implementation ideas.
- *Principal Teams:* Districts acknowledge that the success of their strategy is largely dependent on the ability of principals to lead changes in instruction and curriculum at the site level. Many of the districts in our sample repurposed their regular principal meetings to focus on CCSS implementation issues. These meetings have offered principals professional learning opportunities that focus both on the technical changes and on the instructional leadership strategies that are necessary to successfully implement CCSS.
- *Teacher Leaders:* Many districts are focused on building a strong cadre of teacher leaders who can support and influence their peers at the site level or in their grade or subject area teams, and who can lead tactical planning for how to implement district or site level plans. Others are using teachers to "insource" professional development and other capacity-building efforts at the site level. In these districts, teacher leaders receive training and then are expected to take what they have learned and train others on their team. These trainings frequently combine information about CCSS with training on leadership and coaching skills.
- *Grade Level/Subject Area Teams or Professional Learning Communities:* Many districts are using these structures to roll out and help manage CCSS strategies. The focus of many of these teams has shifted away from the NCLB-era focus on data-driven inquiry about high-fidelity use of best practices to the creation and testing of new instructional strategies, assessments and curriculum more consistent with the goals of Common Core.
- *Curriculum Teams:* Most districts engaged in curriculum design have created or leveraged curriculum teams including both C&I staff and teachers.
- *Instructional Coaches:* Many districts are relying on instructional coaches, who are frequently teachers on special assignment or central office trainers, to help reinforce professional learning in instruction and curriculum design.

B. Tools and Processes: Most districts are beginning to align tools

and processes to support Common Core implementation, though the intensity of this work varies significantly. For example, two districts have launched initiatives to align principal and teacher evaluation tools and processes with the new standards. Others are retooling classroom observation protocols and tools to align with CCSS. Two districts are leveraging an Instructional Rounds process to promote instructional strategies that will support the shift to the CCSS. Realigning report cards to the Common Core is a common tactic for many districts, especially those with a focus on 21st Century Skills or college and career readiness. Several districts are beginning to align their ELD systems to support CCSS and the new ELD standards, but for most districts this work is still in the preliminary stage.

C. Managing the Human Side of Change: For many of our interviewees, Common Core implementation planning began with **connecting the initiative to a broader vision for improved teaching and learning.** Examples include connecting CCSS to a shared vision of more personalized learning and improved college and career readiness.

For most districts the vision work was a starting point, but they have also adopted ongoing change management strategies that have shaped their implementation choices. Most districts are carefully **managing the pace of change** by focusing on one or two core strategies, trying to support teachers to do a few things well, and then gradually addressing other issues. Districts are working hard to couple significant changes in practice with other components that are more familiar, or implementing a new strategy through an existing change infrastructure like PLCs or a familiar process like Instructional Rounds. Districts are also carefully designing the amount of content covered in their professional development so that teachers have the in-depth support they need to begin applying new strategies, but not so much information that they don't know where to start. In these efforts districts are modeling a fundamental Common Core precept by shifting away from professional learning that is "a mile wide and an inch deep." They are also setting achievable expectations for how teachers and site administrators are expected to apply what they are learning. One district expects all math teachers to add two questions that model the types of constructed response items being developed by SBAC to their existing formative assessments.

Most, but not all, districts indi-

Eight Common Change Management Strategies:

1. Connect the initiative to a broader vision for improved teaching and learning.
2. Manage the pace of change and narrow focus.
3. Increase the amount of site/classroom level of autonomy over curriculum and instruction, while providing enhanced support.
4. Enroll teachers and site administrators in the design process.
5. Build and/or repurpose feedback loops and refine strategies and tactics accordingly.
6. Increase leadership development opportunities for site administrators and teacher leaders.
7. Couple bottom up change management strategies with clear expectations and accountability.
8. Ensure parent and community members are informed and engaged.

cate that they are **increasing site and classroom level autonomy over curriculum and instruction.** As districts are shifting more autonomy to sites, however, they are not opting for an "anything goes" approach. Instead they are providing both more support and more standardized templates to help teachers make the best use of their control over curriculum and instruction. For example, many districts are creating curriculum templates that outline the essential components that a unit or lesson must include; within those parameters, however, teachers or sites have significant control over their curriculum. From the perspective of the two districts that are not increasing autonomy it was essential to begin the transition to Common Core with more central direction, increasing the autonomy of schools and teachers as they had built local capacity and acquired familiarity and confidence with the new standards.

Most districts are **enrolling teachers and site administrators in the design of their CCSS work.** Most have involved site administrators and to a lesser extent teachers in the design of their core strategies and plans, but all districts to varying degrees have engaged teachers at the tactical level in designing components of the change work. From curriculum templates, to assessments, rubrics, instructional models and technology use, teachers are playing a major role in creating the systems and tools for CCSS implementation. A common response to the question about lessons learned was "we should have involved our teachers sooner."

As noted in the previous section, principals and teachers are essential participants in implementing the technical change and in managing politics of change. Many of the districts in our sample have combined professional learning about technical changes with **leadership development activities for site administrators and teacher leaders.** Many district-level staff report meeting on a one-on-one basis with principals more frequently to ensure that they have the coaching, support and key messages they need to lead the change at their sites.

Most districts **are building or repurposing continuous improvement loops to inform and refine their strategies and tactics for CCSS implementation**, though the means through which they obtain these data vary across districts. Some are regularly convening steering committees and principal groups for feedback on implementation at the site level. Others are surveying teachers, principals, families and community members. A few are visiting classrooms and inspecting student work, including the evaluation of writing assessments to assess the level of implementation on improvements to writing pedagogy.

According to many of our interviewees, this kind of feedback has led to changes in their existing plans. For example, one district had initially decided to shift from common district to site level benchmark assessments. After seeking and receiving negative feedback through regular site level listening sessions, the district revised its approach. They created new district benchmark assessments and they are allowing sites to use or adapt the assessment to meet their needs.

All of our sample districts **have developed and are regularly refining a communications and engagement plan for teachers, parents and other stakeholders.** Many districts have developed clear messages for Common Core to inform stakeholders about the initiative and what they can expect to see in their child's class. They are delivering these messages through a variety of methods, including summer institutes, newsletters, town-hall meetings, back-to-school nights, parent information nights, and parent-teacher conferences. Most have developed webpages explicitly for the initiative where resources are shared, and many have created similar internal platforms to share resources with their teachers. Only

a handful of districts report that they have involved families and community members in the design and strategies they have developed, though many report that they are seeking input from these stakeholders about implementation.

There is also a set of **key change messages** that the districts in our sample have found helpful in engaging teachers and site administrators. These include:

- *Promoting risk taking:* Most districts have explicitly affirmed that the implementation challenges that accompany Common Core will not produce negative ramifications for teachers in the first few years of the transition. Many of these districts had already begun to deemphasize performance on the CST even before the passage of AB484, in order to send a clear message that CCSS should be the focus.
- *Growth Mindset:* A number of districts report that Carol Dweck's "Growth Mindset" conceptual framework is a helpful tool for working with teachers and students on Common Core.[2]
- *Common Core as a Journey and Not A Destination:* A number of districts are using this metaphor or something similar to it when communicating about their implementation of CCSS. As one interviewee said, "We are not asking them to get there tomorrow, but we are asking them to make progress every day."

Many districts have tried to balance bottom-up engagement and change management strategies such as those listed above with **accountability strategies.** These usually start with setting clear expectations about what central office staff, site administrators, teachers and students should be doing as they move forward with CCSS implementation. Other strategies range from developing common site level goals and metrics related to CCSS implementation to redesigning teacher and principal evaluation systems to align to the Common Core.

SECTION IV: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

While this report is not intended to evaluate the various CCSS implementation strategies that California school districts have adopted, these early adopters have nevertheless learned some important lessons about what's working and what's not in the implementation process. These include:

A. Obstacles: In their own view, lack of time is the biggest obstacle facing districts in our small sample. Many are finding creative ways to free up time for professional learning without pulling teachers out of the classrooms, but all find that the amount of content they must cover is too much for the time and resources they have available. To address this issue many are relying on a train-the-trainer model where teacher leaders are providing a significant amount of professional learning to their peers during regular collaboration time.

Others note that an uncertain policy environment is hindering their ability to move more swiftly on implementation. There is particular frustration about the new assessments. For example, many are unsure as whether the state will purchase the SBAC interim assessments and make them freely available to districts. With no guarantees in the short term, many districts are purchasing interim assessments from other vendors, or creating their own.

For a number of districts, the fact that the CCSS initiative launched at a moment when virtually all California school districts were obliged to make significant budget cuts and roll back or delay pay increases made engaging teachers in the implementation effort especially difficult. On a similar note, many districts still lack the fiscal

[2] Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success.* Random House.

resources to address gaps in curriculum with the purchase of new instructional materials, and many report that the materials available are not yet very well aligned to the Common Core.

Lastly, many of the districts in our sample are finding that their less experienced teachers need significant support as they seek to adapt their curricula and instructional practices to the Common Core. These teachers entered the field during the NCLB era, when much of the curriculum was scripted, and they consequently lack skills and experience in curriculum design.

B. Lessons Learned: What follows is a list of lessons cited by interviewees reflecting on their own experiences.

1. **Involve stakeholders early, often and at higher levels in the organization:** Reflecting on their experience with CCSS implementation, many interviewees either expressed regret about not involving stakeholders earlier in the process or are currently expanding involvement to a wider group of stakeholders. For some, this means involving site administrators more deeply in strategy development. Others are working to engage teachers in the design of tactics such as curriculum units, instructional models and assessments.
2. **If you increase autonomy, you should also increase support:** Of the districts increasing site or classroom autonomy over curriculum and instruction, many are finding that they must also increase the level of support they are providing. This includes providing clear expectations for what teachers and leaders should be doing, and what the central office is going to do to help. This is especially true for newer teachers who may be less accustomed to having this level of autonomy. To accomplish this they are creating tools and templates, providing professional learning opportunities and coaching, and regularly sending teachers and site administrators resources. Many districts found they needed to make multiple adjustments to get the balance between autonomy and clear expectations right for all concerned.
3. **Provide more training and support for site administrators:** Many districts are learning that site administrators need intensive training and one-on-one coaching. NCLB demanded that principals supervise teachers to implement research-based best practices with high fidelity. CCSS challenges principals to lead teachers to experiment, take risks, and model and teach creativity and collaboration. Respondents reflected that this change was large and beyond what many principals were currently ready or able to do well.
4. **Start early, but go slow to go fast:** Many districts are struggling with the pace of the change. Many wish they had started earlier, but they also recognize that overwhelming their teachers and site administrators with too many different activities will only slow them down in the long run.

C. Early Indicators of Success: The following common themes emerged when we asked our interviewees about the changes they are seeing since they started Common Core implementation. On balance these findings are promising, though many of our interviewees stated that they were not yet seeing as much change in the classroom as they were aiming for. Again, given the selective nature of our study and the fact that this data is self-reported, the reader should not assume that these shifts are common for all districts implementing the Common Core:

- More student conversation, collaboration and academic discourse.
- Instruction is becoming more student-centered.
- Math classrooms are focusing on the essential math practices

and assessments are improving.

- Teachers are taking more risks and trying new things.
- Teachers are using more informational texts and they are connecting these texts to writing tasks.
- Principals are more involved in instructional leadership activities.
- Lessons are at a greater depth of knowledge and students are engaged in more critical thinking. They are able to provide a rationale for their answers, and in math especially they are able to demonstrate multiple methods for getting an answer.

D. Policy Implications: While not a major focus of this report, there are two policy implications worth sharing. First, a number of districts indicate that they are hoping the state will purchase interim assessments from SBAC and make these available to districts for free or at a reduced price. At the least, districts would appreciate clear signals about the state's intentions in this regard. Secondly, based on our small sample size, it does not appear that districts are very far into implementation of the new ELD Standards or the NGSS. Only a handful are integrating their work on ELD in an in-depth way with their CCSS implementation activities. Policymakers should consider ways they can reinforce the message that this dual focus on ELA and ELD is essential. Finally, district leaders made few connections between their work on CCSS and the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). This is not surprising, as these policies and tools and both new and still partly undefined. However, since the intent of LCFF is to provide flexible funds to support work including CCSS implementation, policymakers can help districts by clarifying this intent.

Conclusion

In 2010, California adopted the Common Core State Standards, and last year the state reaffirmed its commitment to the standards by investing $1.25 billion in categorical funding to support district implementation. The CCSS present districts with an opportunity to fundamentally improve teaching and learning, but they also present significant design and implementation challenges. In this report we aim to inform California school districts as they develop and implement their transition plans, based on the strategies and experiences of 11 early implementers. Our key findings suggest that three things are especially important.

- **Technical Focus:** Most early implementers launched the initiative with a narrow technical focus. Common entry points include building the instructional pedagogy of teachers to deliver the types of instructional strategies implied by the new standards and/or enrolling teachers to design CCSS-aligned curriculum and assessments. Most districts are gradually phasing in work on addressing gaps in other areas of their system.
- **Rollout Strategies:** The districts in our sample are carefully structuring the technical work on instruction, curriculum and assessment to reach every site, every classroom, and every child. Common strategies include: (a) relying on a "train-the-trainer" model where teacher leaders deliver much of the training and coaching through grade level or subject area teams or PLCs; (b) expanding the use of instructional coaches to help reinforce concepts from professional learning; and (c) designing and delivering professional learning for principals that is tightly aligned to professional development for teachers.
- **Managing the Human Side of the Transition:** Early implementers are connecting their CCSS initiatives to a locally

designed and broadly shared vision for teaching and learning. They are carefully managing the pace of change by focusing closely on professional learning and setting clear and feasible expectations for central office staff, site administrators and teachers. Most of these districts are increasing site and classroom level autonomy over curriculum and instruction, but they are also learning that they must match increased autonomy with increased support and tools from the central office, and they are often engaging teachers and administrators in the design of these tools. Finally, every district in our sample is ensuring that parents, community members and even students are informed and engaged as the design and rollout of their CCSS implementation strategy.

1. Baldwin Park Unified School District[3]

County: Los Angeles
Size: 18,885 students

Core Strategy: Baldwin Park's core strategy has been to leverage the transition to the Common Core to further its vision of students graduating high school with the 21st Century attributes or skills necessary to thrive in college, career and beyond. Using the P21 Framework as an umbrella, the district has been gradually phasing in Common Core by deeply focusing on changing instructional practices. A key lever in this strategy has been to improve the instructional leadership capacity of site administrators. For example, the district shifted the focus of monthly site administrator meetings from being primary informational and mostly focused on the managerial aspects of the job into high-quality professional learning opportunities focused on teaching, learning and implementing CCSS. In these meetings, district staff model the type of teaching and learning implied by the CCSS. Furthermore, the district has updated its accountability system for principals to include goals that are connected to instruction and CCSS. For example, all administrators this year have two goals in the areas of the 4Cs and/or the 3Rs.

The district has also focused on building the instructional capacity of their teachers. After offering a 10-day summer institute for 150 teacher leaders across the district in 2012, BPUSD started to focus on math instruction this school year by hiring experts from UCLA to train all of their elementary school teachers and principals in Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI). The district has engaged teachers in a new district-wide benchmark assessment that models the rigor and complexity expected on SBAC. They have also taken strides to begin integrating the new ELD standards into the transition to CCSS.

Managing Change

To gain buy-in and momentum for CCSS, BPUSD has phased in implementation efforts by starting with the elementary level and focusing on math. They have also leveraged Edmodo, site visitation and other tools to listen closely to their site leaders and teachers. This has enabled the district to be responsive to their stakeholders and make quick course corrections when something is not working. For example, their initial strategy focused on curriculum design, but they responded to feedback from teachers to focus professional development on instructional techniques. Lastly, they have designed their Strategic Plan and its focus on 21st Century skills based on feedback from community stakeholders, including business leaders, who informed them that BPUSD students were not graduating with the soft skills needed for the workplace.

Theory of Action: By connecting the transition to the Common Core to the district's existing focus on 21st Century Skills, while building the instructional leadership capacity of their principals and teachers, the district can meet the instructional shifts implied by the Common Core.

Systems & Structures
- Principal/AP Group Meetings (vertically and by grade-span)
- Curriculum Committees

Implementation Tools
- Revised Progress Reports, aligned to P21/CCSS
- Redesigned District-wide Benchmark Online Assessments
- Walkthrough Tool
- Edmodo, online platform where teachers can share resources, provide feedback on implementation, etc.

[3]This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Arturo Ortega, Assistant Superintendent, K-6, and Madalena Arrellano, Assistant Superintendent of Student Achievement.

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2. Corcoran Joint Unified School District (CJUSD)[4]

County: Kings
Size: 3,354 students

Core Strategy: CJUSD's primary focus has been on helping teachers make the instructional shifts necessary to meet the level of rigor called for in the Common Core. In response they revised their instructional model to combine direct instruction with "collaborative" or "project-based" learning (PBL). As they assessed their options, they acknowledged that all students would still need "good first teaching" to access the content and to be capable of engaging in deeper learning activities. But they would also need a new set of instructional strategies to promote more academic conversation, more collaboration and other 21st Century skills. So they decided to expand the use of PBL in all grades, while maintaining a strong focus on "good first instruction".

CJUSD has also engaged a Curriculum Team to begin mapping out the standards and developing templates for sites to develop units. This template embeds a requirement that sites design a PBL component at the end of each unit. They have also taken a unique approach to leveraging technology to support CCSS. Rather than replacing good first instruction or instructional materials with technology, the district is focusing on how to use technology in performance-based assessments connected to the project-based or collaborative learning portion of their units. To support this shift, the district has invested significantly in one-to-one computing.

Managing the Change: The district's primary strategy has been to build off of existing assets, or as Superintendent Rich Merlo notes, "not throw the baby out with the bathwater." For example, they leveraged the CCSS to go deeper and wider with PBL, while holding the focus on good first instruction, strong PLCs and Instructional Rounds constant. Each site has developed a problem of practice related to CCSS that they are focusing their Instructional Rounds process on this year. This has helped to create alignment, coherence and focus on the Common Core. Similarly, as a way to build ownership over the change without overwhelming teachers and site administrators, CJUSD has adopted a "tight-loose" approach to implementation. They will be requiring all sites to follow a common curriculum unit template and implement the SBAC interim assessments when they become available, but each site will have autonomy to design their units within that framework, including the formative and performance based assessments. To support this increase in autonomy, they focused on increasing the instructional leadership capacity of site administrators, while building off a strong existing PLC infrastructure to drive a lot of the changes to CCSS at the grade and subject level. Site administrators and teacher leaders have therefore received additional PD and coaching to perform these essential roles.

Theory of Action: By building off a strong foundation in direct instruction while expanding and systematizing the use of project-based learning strategies district-wide, all teachers are prepared to engage students in the types of deeper and collaborative learning activities necessary to succeed in the Common Core and beyond.

Systems & Structures
- District Leadership Team that includes principals
- Instructional Rounds
- Curriculum Team
- Grade/Subject PLCs

Implementation Tools
- Curriculum unit templates
- Tablets for all students

[4] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Rich Merlo, Superintendent, and Lora Cartwright, Director of Educational Services.

3. Corona Norco Unified School District (CNUSD)[5]

County: Riverside County
Size: 53,000 students

Core Strategy: CNUSD's two-pronged CCSS implementation approach emphasizes curriculum design and leadership development. In 2012-13, they enlisted and trained 150 teachers and administrators from across the district in grade level/subject area committees in order to rapidly expand participation in the transition to CCSS for each grade and appropriate subject area. For elementary schools, guides containing instructional modules (units) were produced, and for secondary schools, performance tasks modeled after the SBAC were developed. The guides and performance tasks will be piloted this year and refined based on feedback from teachers. There is an expectation that these guides and performance tasks will be used throughout the district.

CNUSD's second main strategy has been to build the capacity of principals, teachers and administrators to lead the change to the CCSS in their sites. Principals and APs receive PD monthly, and teacher leaders receive PD through their curriculum committee work and participation in CCSS-based professional development offerings. Teacher leaders are expected to communicate and guide other teachers on their teams.

CNUSD has also targeted instructional PD focused on differentiation and engagement to their Title I sites. Another tactic has been to integrate the transition to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) by having intermediate and high school science curriculum committees develop performance assessments that meet both standards in the CCSS and NGSS.

Managing the Change: CNUSD describes its approach as "centralized-decentralized"; they have system-wide curriculum guides for teachers, but they have extensively involved each site in its development. Significant autonomy is given to site teams over how to implement the guides (i.e. how to plan each lesson and what instructional techniques will be employed). Also, the district has made it clear that 2013-14 would be a "year of implementation," when teachers are encouraged to focus on trying new things and not worrying about the CST. The Steering Committee has also developed a strong community engagement plan that includes videotaping, and posting online, town-hall style meetings. They have also developed strategies to regularly capture feedback on implementation through surveys and committee work, and they have been revising their plan based on this feedback.

Theory of Action: By expanding involvement in curriculum design and building the capacity of site leaders, CNUSD can ensure that all teachers are implementing high-quality curriculum aligned to CCSS. They will also increase the number of staff who have influence to change the instructional practice of their peers through a collaborative, rather than top-down process.

Systems & Structures
- District Steering Committee
- PLC of Site Administrators
- Curriculum Committees

Implementation Tools
- Videos used for PD and for outreach to parents
- Curriculum guides with modules, performance assessments, etc.
- Implementation timeline and website

[5] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Matthew Witmer, Director of Educational Services.

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4. Coronado Unified School District (CUSD)[6]

County: San Diego
Size: 3,174 students

Core Strategy: Coronado launched its CCSS initiative with a focus on making sure foundational instructional strategies were in place before addressing gaps in curriculum. For example, the district is redesigning its instructional approach to writing. Starting with elementary schools, a team of teachers has redesigned writing rubrics and developed text-based district-wide writing assessments. They decided to lead with writing because it was a good way to focus the transition on student-centered instruction and student work and critical thinking, while also connecting to some of the other ELA literacy shifts like the increased use of informational text.

The district is slowly and strategically beginning to address gaps in CCSS-aligned curriculum. While they have purchased some CCSS-aligned supplemental instructional materials, their main strategy has been to test a teacher-driven and digital approach to developing or repurposing CCSS-aligned curriculum. Starting with middle school, they utilized a teacher on special assignment to develop a "digital textbook" that consists of a combination of district-created and freely available resources from the Internet. After this approach is tested and refined, Coronado plans to scale the approach TK-12.

Managing the Change: When California first adopted the CCSS, CUSD knew that it "had to get out in front of the change" and quickly developed a flexible plan to implement CCSS. But they also knew that they had to simultaneously manage the pace of the change, so they focused early implementation efforts on building the capacity of a strong cadre of teacher leaders before scaling system wide. This tiered approach would enable them to build bottom-up demand for instructional and curricular change as other teachers began to notice the effectiveness of the new strategies and materials their peers were using.

They have also been very opportunistic and strategic about how they have invested limited CCSS resources. When the economy rebounded and their fiscal situation improved, they directed resources into PD instead of backfilling cuts that had been made during the recession. They are also hoping that their approach to curriculum development will save them resources that can be used to provide more intensive support to their teachers. Lastly, they knew that a transition of this magnitude would require reinforcement and alignment across the district's systems and departments. For example, they recently redesigned their teacher and principal evaluation system to align with the CCSS and the P21 framework in order to focus teacher and administrators on the practices that would support the initiative.

Theory of Action: By starting with a focus on instruction and in particular writing, the district will have the instructional practices necessary to implement CCSS in place as they slowly phase in a flexible curriculum that can be updated regularly and save the district resources it can spend on PD and other supports necessary for CCSS implementation.

Systems & Structures
- Management team meetings with site administrators
- Redesigned Teacher and Administrator Evaluation System aligned to CCSS and the P21 Framework
- Grade Level/Subject Area PLCs

Implementation Tools
- Writing rubrics and a writing performance assessment
- Digital textbooks

[6] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Jeff Felix, Superintendent, and Claudia Gallant, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

5. Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD)[7]

County: Sacramento
Size: 62,137 students

Core Strategy: Following the CDE's recommended three phases for CCSS implementation (awareness, transition and implementation), EGUSD is operationalizing a comprehensive plan that focuses on building the capacity of teachers to meet the instructional shifts, while gradually addressing gaps in curriculum and assessments. For example, over the past two years, EGUSD has tested, piloted and formally adopted a new web-based and CCSS-aligned K-6 math curriculum called Go Math. They have also added some supplemental materials, such as secondary ELA curriculum units from Odell Education and the Expository Reading/Writing Course. Additionally, they designed and launched a district-wide writing formative assessment resources in grades 2-12 modeled after the SBAC performance tasks. However, the rest of their strategy has focused on how to utilize new instructional techniques to design and deliver rigorous lessons and formative assessments that meet the new standards. This strategy enables them to move forward on Common Core with many of their existing materials.

Another key aspect of their approach has been to integrate a "diverse learner lens" into all of their PD rather than design separate modules dedicated to language acquisition, student engagement, etc.

Managing the Change: To implement this strategy, EGUSD is: (a) offering a wide range of PD opportunities for teachers and site administrators; (b) leveraging a strong existing PLC infrastructure to reinforce professional learning at the site level; and (c) building the instructional leadership capacity of their site administrators to work collaboratively with their grade level and subject area teams to implement the CCSS.

EGUSD is also carefully managing the pace and sequencing of their implementation efforts. As one leader notes, "We tell our teachers that CCSS is a dimmer not a light switch." This mindset manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, they gradually phased in the new K-6 math curriculum, and instead of going a "mile wide and inch deep" on their professional learning, they are narrowing focus on a few key concepts or practices at a time and allowing for deep application. Major areas of emphasis include: (a) increasing academic conversation and collaboration; (b) leveraging new instructional questioning techniques to promote deeper understanding of content; and (c) refining their existing assessments to model the SBAC/CCSS.

Theory of Action: By focusing on the instructional capacity of teachers to meet the shifts in the CCSS and gradually addressing gaps in curriculum and assessments over time, the district can cost-effectively prepare teachers for the Common Core. This approach, which leverages a strong existing PLC structure, combines new learning with a process that is familiar to everyone in the district.

Systems & Structures
- Common Core Planning Committee?
- Monthly principal professional learning meetings
- Grade level/Subject area PLCs
- C&I trainers
- Instructional coaches

Implementation Tools
- CCSS Implementation Guide for using Open Court/Basal Readers
- PD modules in math, ELA that principals, department heads and grade level leaders can use on site
- Learning rubrics for performance-based assessments
- Presentations for parent engagement

[7] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Steve Ladd, Superintendent, LaRae Blomquist, Curriculum Specialist, and Mark Freathy, Curriculum Specialist.

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6. Lindsay Unified School District (LUSD)[8]

County: Tulare
Size: 4,130 students

Core Strategy: For the past eight years Lindsay has been transitioning towards a performance-based learning system, which personalizes and focuses curriculum and instruction on the developmental needs of the learner as opposed to a time-based model. Thanks to a Race-to-the-Top (RTTT) grant, the district is accelerating the transition to this system and integrating Common Core. Last year, Lindsay focused on making sure that the instructional strategies essential for implementing CCSS and their performance-based system were in place before making adjustments at the curricular level. For example, curricular construction includes forming a common set of instructional norms for using technology to promote rigorous learning.

This year they began transitioning to the new standards. After providing the foundational CCSS PD, they focused their implementation efforts on math and writing. A district math instructional model was developed, which focuses on using the math practices necessary to develop more rigorous lessons that reflect Common Core expectations. In writing they are developing rubrics, an instructional model for writing and improving teacher pedagogy. At the high school level they have also worked on writing across the curriculum.

Lindsay has also leveraged the transition to the Common Core to expand the use of project-based learning, especially at the secondary level, and have hired the Tulare County Office of Education specialists to provide training for teachers.

Managing the Change: After building a shared understanding and a solid knowledge base about the Common Core, they engaged their principals to identify some common priorities and goals (e.g., writing, technology, project-based learning) that were aligned to a broader vision of learning in the district. After agreeing upon shared goals, the district office has worked with site administrators to ensure that systems of support (instructional materials, assessments, training, tools, etc.) are in place. They also established feedback mechanisms that range from listening to conducting walk-throughs and observing student work. This data is used to refine and intensify support if needed. Lastly, the district has adopted what Carol Dweck calls a "growth mindset," which is an attitude that intelligence and performance is not fixed. They have found this to be a helpful tool for teachers, leaders and learners to embrace change, such as the Common Core.

Theory of Action: By meeting students where they are and not where they are supposed to be based on how old they are, and taking a systems approach to differentiation that can accelerate learning, every child will have the foundational knowledge and understanding they need to grow as learners every day and attain the deeper levels of learning called for in the Common Core.

Systems & Structures

- Management team meetings with site administrators
- Performance-based assessment (mastery assessments) and grading system

Implementation Tools

- Student-centered instructional model
- Writing rubric and a writing instructional model
- Measurement Topic (similar to a unit of study)
- SAMR Rubric for effective technology use

[8] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Lana Brown, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

7. Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD)[9]

County: Los Angeles
Size: 82,256 students

Core Strategy: LBUSD launched CCSS implementation with a focus on the instructional shifts. This year, curriculum and assessment teams are designing new units of instruction and districtwide formative assessments (modeled after SBAC) that are the focus of this year's classroom implementation efforts.

LBUSD's "train-the-trainer" model enrolls a cadre of "lead teachers" from each site by grade level and subject area to receive PD, access new resources, collaborate on implementation, etc., and to take what they have learned back to their teams for implementation. In a parallel process, site administrators convene monthly for PD that is delivered through an instructional leadership lens. Principals are expected to support their lead teachers in their new role and to provide school-wide support and accountability for implementing what they are learning.

Managing the Change: Instead of phasing in implementation by grade level or content area, LBUSD has had a common CCSS-ELA/Math focus district-wide. By standardizing and systematizing what lead teachers and principals are working on district-wide, the district can both provide high-quality central office support, while promoting learning and continuous improvement across sites and in the central office. For example, they are working across departments to design and sequence PD sessions for lead teachers and principals, so that they overlap and mutually reinforce one another without being duplicative. Through a set of interconnected steering committees, LBUSD is also redesigning many of the major system areas for CCSS implementation, including teacher evaluation, technology, assessment and communication. To balance this system-wide work, they are allocating some of the newer resources for CCSS implementation to the site level, where sites will have autonomy over how they accelerate implementation.

Lastly, LBUSD has created a Communications Steering Committee that is responsible for ensuring that common messages about CCSS implementation are disseminated across the district. This involves both macro level messages delivered through newsletters, a CCSS webpage, triannual community meetings, etc. Along with the CCSS Communications Steering Committee, Level Offices provide common messages and communication that can be delivered via teachers in parent conferences or electronically distributed to parents across the system.

Theory of Action: By rolling out their CCSS strategies system-wide through a cadre of "lead teachers" and site administrators, the district can provide deep and on-going support to all teachers in a cost-effective and sustainable way. Having a similar focus system-wide allows them to offer more in-depth central office support, while promoting fidelity to implementation and cross-site learning and collaboration.

Systems & Structures

- Common Core Transition Planning Committee (steering committees for Teacher Evaluation, C&I, Implementation, Assessment, Technology and Communications)
- Lead teachers/Dept. Heads
- Grade/Subject Teams
- Curriculum Teams
- Principal PD (monthly)

Implementation Tools

- Principal CCSS
- Implementation Toolkit with common walkthrough tool
- District-wide CCSS assessments
- Curriculum units

[9] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Jill Baker, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary and K-8 Schools, and Pamela Seki, Director, Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Learning.

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8. Milpitas Unified School District (MUSD)[10]

County: Santa Clara
Size: 10,033 students

Core Strategy: MUSD is leveraging Common Core to improve the personalization of learning district-wide. At the forefront of this effort is the expansion of the district's blended learning strategy. While not a mandate for all teachers, there is a strong expectation that all teachers experiment with blending learning as they transition to the Common Core. With an emphasis on small group work, effective use of technology, and differentiated and deep academic support, blended learning is an excellent tool to promote the type of learning implied in the Common Core (e.g., academic conversation and collaboration, critical thinking and deeper understanding). A major component of this strategy has been the investment in iReady, an online and CCSS-aligned learning and diagnostic assessment platform, which every student is using K-8. All teachers have been trained. Milpitas has also focused on how to create an environment that facilitates personalized learning. For example, one site tore down many of the classroom walls and now resembles a Silicon Valley design laboratory more than a traditional middle school.

The district is also expanding the use of project-based learning, especially at the secondary level, and they are launching teams of teachers who are developing model curriculum units aligned to the CCSS.

Managing the Change: MUSD has adopted a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up change management strategies. First, the superintendent has developed a strong vision for personalized learning for students. However, his team has engaged teachers, "those closest to the students," in designing and refining the action steps that it will take to make this vision a reality. From curriculum units and CCSS-aligned report cards to how the district will incorporate blended and project-based learning, teachers have played a major role in designing how the district will meet the expectations of the CCSS. The district also recognized the importance that site administrators and teacher leaders will have in driving implementation at the site level and have therefore invested significantly in building instructional leadership capacity. For example, they have changed the focus of leadership meetings (principals and central office staff) from managerial topics to instruction. Lastly, they realized that parent and community engagement was essential, especially given the bold strategy they were pursuing, and have taken a number of steps to increase engagement activities.

Theory of Action: By expanding the use of blended learning instructional strategies, all sites can increase the amount of time students spend engaged in personalized and deeper learning experiences, including more small group and one-on-one interaction with teachers and their peers. As a result, students will get the differentiated practice and support they need to succeed.

Systems & Structures
- Management team meetings
- Curriculum Teams
- APs for each site to focus on instructional leadership

Implementation Tools
- iReady blended learning and diagnostic assessment platform
- Curriculum units
- CCSS-aligned report cards
- Walkthroughs

[10] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Matthew Duffy, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services.

9. Richland Union Elementary School District[11]

County: Kern County
Size: 3,500 students

Core Strategy: Based off the conceptual framework of Pivot Learning Partners' *Leadership Cycle*, Richland's primary strategy is one that could be summarized as "insourcing." While almost all teachers have received three days of CCSS PD, they have targeted external support to build the capacity of instructional leaders, including site administrators, who are leading efforts to change instructional practice in the classroom. To date, teacher-leader driven CCSS work has focused on two main activities: (a) developing templates for curriculum development (called Learning Maps) that will be used across sites; and (b) revising the district's Instructional Action Plan, which outlines the instructional strategies that all teachers should be using every day.

The district has also adopted a unique technology strategy. Instead of making a district-wide technology purchase to support CCSS implementation, they created a small R&D grant program for technology, which will inform any future decisions about district wide purchases. They have also invested in release time to support collaboration between "tech savvy" teachers and those that are relatively inexperienced in order to deepen the rigor in which teachers are using existing technology.

Managing Change: Richland has focused on building teacher ownership over CCSS-aligned curriculum by involving teachers from each site in the development of Learning Maps and providing significant autonomy and support (e.g., PD) for all teachers to creatively design lessons and units that meet the standards and outcomes developed by the Committee. As Superintendent Ken Bergevin said, "We are trying to empower a cadre of vocal believers." They have also implemented a set of other change strategies, including: creating feedback loops, developing key messages that clearly emphasize the rationale behind CCSS, and they have paid special attention to getting the pace of change right by focusing on curriculum and instruction first, and slowly and strategically phasing in changes to technology and assessment. Lastly, they are being careful to leverage the foundation they have built prior to Common Core, while emphasizing the significance of the "second order" changes they are making to curriculum and instruction.

Theory of Action: By engaging teachers, especially teacher leaders, in a new vision for 21st Century teaching and learning, focusing on a manageable set of implementation activities that build off a foundation of previous efforts, students can make the transition to the kinds of learning that is called for in the CCSS.

Systems & Structures
- Cabinet Team
- District Planning Committee
- ELD Committee
- Site Leadership teams
- Learning Map Committee
- 21st Century Learning Committee (Instruction)
- Assessment Committee
- Instructional Coaches

Implementation Tools
- Instructional Action Plans
- Learning maps
- CCSS Walkthrough Tool
- Curriculum guides with modules, performance assessments, etc.
- My Big Campus to share resources online

[11] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Kenneth Bergevin, Superintendent.

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10. Sacramento City Unified School District[12]

County: Sacramento
Size: 47,616 students

Core Strategy: SCUSD's inquiry-based approach includes building the capacity of its site leaders, teachers and instructional aides. Their hybrid curriculum design model enrolls and trains teachers to design lessons and units utilizing a common template, while the district designs and implements district-wide units in ELA and math. The district is developing common formative assessments for these units, as well as common benchmark assessments. Lastly, they are building the capacity of their teachers to implement student-centered instructional strategies. While the district has not yet adopted or designed a formal instructional model, they are identifying and training teachers in utilizing research-based instructional strategies to address:

- Content standards (e.g. math practices and college and career readiness standards)
- Instructional shifts, such as those from EngageNY
- Equity strategies that will engage and differentiate learning for all students

Managing Change: The district describes its rollout strategy as "cascading" because site administrators select teacher leaders for professional learning. In turn, these teachers are expected to facilitate the learning of their peers through subject area or grade level teams. Each professional learning session provides clear expectations for the application of the new learning, and the district employs a team of instructional coaches to support teachers as they implement new strategies, design new lessons/units, etc.

SCUSD employs a range of change management strategies that aim to both "push" and "pull" teachers and other stakeholders. These include: (a) carefully sequencing and designing key strategies to have a narrow focus with feasible application steps; (b) balancing increased autonomy with significant supports from the central office (e.g., coaching, tools and templates); (c) waiting to adopt new textbooks in order to reinforce that the transition to Common Core is a second order change; (d) intensively engaging parents, so that they can support their children as the districts shifts instructional practices; and (e) regularly analyzing and refining methodology based on feedback, classroom observations, student work, etc.

Theory of Action:
- Cultivate communities of practice
- Promote collaborative inquiry
- Create multi-dimensional assessments
- Implement teacher- and district-developed instructional units of study
- Utilize data inquiry (e.g., student work)
- Engage in reflective practice

Systems & Structures
- Professional Learning for principals, teacher leaders and instructional aides
- Instructional Aides
- Principals' Networks
- Instructional Coaches
- On-site Collaborative Learning Time
- Parent Workshops

Implementation Tools
- Curriculum maps (in development)
- Curriculum unit and lesson design templates
- District-wide units of instruction
- Benchmark assessments (in development)
- CCSS webpages
- Standards-based Report cards (in development)

[12] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Olivine Roberts, Chief Academic Officer.

11. Whittier Union High School District (WUHSD)[13]

County: Los Angeles
Size: 13,486 students

Core Strategy: For the past 12 years WUHSD has taken a PLC- and data-driven approach to implementing changes to instruction and curriculum, and they are leveraging this work to transition to the CCSS. Beginning in the summer with week-long PD and planning sessions, course leads from across the district came together to redesign their existing common assessments in each course to reflect the shifts of the CCSS and to model the performance-based and open response assessment questions from the SBAC. This work also included developing rubrics to score the assessment, such as one for "brief constructed responses," and the revision of the accompanying course pacing guides. WUHSD led CCSS implementation with assessment because their data-driven model requires a high-quality assessment that allows teachers to identify where students need more support and begin to test instructional strategies that will improve performance. Additionally, through the design and administration of these assessments teachers will get to experience firsthand the significant shifts that the CCSS call for and make connections to their own practice. Throughout this year, all teachers are expected to continue their common PLC practice using the new assessments and pacing guides: administer the common assessments, examine the resulting student work in their regular PLC meetings, and collaborate to determine how to best adjust their practice in order to help students meet the new expectations of the CCSS.

Change Management: Whittier adopted a simple but strategic change management approach: draw from your strengths and focus on teacher leaders. They recognized that the transition to CCSS calls for significant changes in their instructional model, from assessments to curriculum and instructional strategies. While their PLC process needed some reinforcement and retooling, they knew it was well-suited to apply to their CCSS design and implementation work. This strategy built off their existing culture of collaboration, and it signaled to their principals and teachers that they were expected to lead this transition. They recognize that this strategy hinges on having site administrators and course leads who can handle this level of autonomy. They have therefore spent significant time identifying the right leaders, helping them understand what the expectations are for their role and providing tools and training to support them.

Lastly, to encourage experimentation with new instructional strategies and more rigorous assessments, the district clearly messaged that in the short term there would not be negative ramifications for results on assessments. This has helped teachers let go of the old standards and begin taking on the new ones in more innovative ways.

Theory of Action: By focusing a strong existing PLC infrastructure on designing, implementing and using data from a CCSS-aligned common assessment, teachers will be able to identify and put into practice instructional strategies necessary to meet the more rigorous demands of the Common Core.

Systems & Structures

- Superintendent Council (all directors and principals)
- PLCs (by subject area)
- Course Leads who lead the PLCs
- Curriculum and Assessment Support Coaches
- Quarterly District Best Practice Days

Implementation Tools

- District Guide to Instructional Direction
- Rubric for Brief Constructed Response (BCR)
- Moodle, web-based platform to share resources

[13] This profile is based on interviews and email correspondence with Sandra Thorstenson, Superintendent.

1. Strategy

   a. What is your district's overarching strategy or approach to Common Core Implementation? What are the major components?

   b. Why did you choose this approach? If you use this language, what is the theory of action?

   c. What other approaches did you consider but rule out? Why?

   d. What was the process used to get to the strategy? Who was involved?

   e. How are you thinking about integration with ELD standards? NGSS?

2. Leadership and Autonomy

   a. Did you think about allowing more autonomy with CCSS? Why and on what?

   b. Can you provide examples of some things that you are standardizing across all sites in relation to CCSS, and things that you are allowing sites or individual teachers to develop on their own?

   c. If you have decided to give sites significant autonomy:

      i. Is this a change from how things were done prior to CCSS?

      ii. How does the Central Office support site level autonomy?

      iii. If this is a change for your district, what did you do to support this shift?

   d. What has your strategy been to develop and support leaders at different levels of the system to support Common Core?

3. Rolling It Out

   a. What is the process you are using (or have used) to rollout the strategy?

   b. What was your strategy to manage the change process?

   c. How will you know if you are on track?

   d. What happens if/when you get stuck?

4. How's it Going?

   a. What were the biggest obstacles you faced during implementation?

   b. What are the major lessons learned?

      i. What would you do differently?

      ii. What would you repeat?

   c. Have you had to go back and change any major components of the plan? If so, what were they and why?

   d. Shifts in practice and culture: What shifts in instructional practice have you seen already? Shifts in leadership practice (district, principals and teachers)? Changes in culture?

   e. What has been your experience so far in managing the human side of this change process?

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About Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is an independent, non-partisan research center based at Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Southern California. PACE seeks to define and sustain a long-term strategy for comprehensive policy reform and continuous improvement in performance at all levels of California's education system, from early childhood to post-secondary education and training. PACE bridges the gap between research and policy, working with scholars from California's leading universities and with state and local policymakers to increase the impact of academic research on educational policy in California.

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About Pivot Learning Partners

Pivot Learning Partners is a non-profit organization of K-12 experts that provides strategic vision for reform along with the on-the-ground training and implementation support needed by schools and districts to address the biggest challenges they face in creating more equitable systems of schools.

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