Feedback Loops for Common Core State Standards Implementation
Survey Tools for State Education Leaders

Introduction: Using Feedback loops to monitor implementation

As state education agencies (SEAs) across the nation take on the ambitious work of implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), it is critical that they have a clear understanding of the effectiveness of their efforts: Are educators being reached with the correct messages? Are the SEAs' supports and resources meeting the needs of the field? What challenges exist and require the SEA's attention?

To better understand these issues, SEAs can use **feedback loops** to know whether implementation is taking place as intended. Feedback loops allow SEA leaders to know if their work is on-track for success, or if challenges exist that require more attention.

A feedback loop requires two things:

- An objective: what are you trying to learn about the quality of implementation?
- A source of evidence: how will you measure it? Where will you get the evidence?

There are seven critical objectives for feedback loops on CCSS implementation. The table below lists these objectives and some potential sources of evidence for each.

Figure 1: Feedback loops for CCSS implementation in the classroom

Objective	Potential sources of evidence
Assess awareness and support of the CCSS	□ **Surveys of educators/school leaders** □ Focus groups/interviews with educators
Gauge understanding of the CCSS	□ **Surveys of educators/school leaders** □ Focus groups/interviews with educators □ Results of "pre" and "post" tests of CCSS knowledge before and after professional development
Assess the reach of and satisfaction with CCSS resources (e.g., quality and alignment of curricular and instructional materials) that have been provided	□ Project management data (e.g., status of critical milestones in implementation plan) □ Website hits (e.g., download rates of provided resources) □ Professional development participation □ Formal evaluations of professional development offerings and other resources □ **Surveys of educators/school leaders**

	□ Focus groups/interviews with educators
Identify effective communication and outreach mechanisms for CCSS information and resources	□ Website hits □ **Surveys of educators/school leaders** □ Focus groups/interviews with educators
Identify challenges to CCSS implementation and potential solutions	□ Project management data □ **Surveys of educators/school leaders** □ Focus groups/interviews with educators
Assess changes in classroom practice that result from CCSS implementation	□ **Surveys of educators/school leaders** □ Focus groups/interviews with educators □ Site/classroom observations □ Review/audit of information from classroom observations
Assess impact of CCSS implementation on student outcomes	□ Compare any of the above measures with formative and summative assessment data (e.g., did educators who received resources, liked them, and/or used them to change their practice achieve better results with their students?)

As the table above shows, one commonly-used source of evidence for feedback loops is the survey, which is often utilized to gather information from a targeted sample of individuals. Most SEAs use surveys to periodically generate feedback on specific professional development opportunities or other resources that have been provided to the field. Typically, these surveys are administered sporadically, without a broader vision for how the information received can improve policy and practice. With a bit more planning and coordination, however, state leaders can take their use of surveys to the next level by using them to monitor implementation in more rigorous, deliberate ways.

This document contains guidance for using the accompanying set of "Common Core Survey Tools" for educators and instructional leaders. The purpose of administering surveys using these tools – and analyzing the data generated from them – is to support CCSS implementation efforts by giving state leaders a voluntary means to gather rapid, real-time feedback on the quality of implementation before the first common assessment results are available. This feedback will allow leaders to make course corrections in their CCSS implementation efforts by giving them insight into the inevitable challenges that will arise before it is too late to do something about them.

These tools are primarily aimed at SEA leaders. However, LEA leaders interested in gathering feedback from the field should be able to adapt and use them to gauge the quality of implementation at the district level as well.

Common Core Survey Tools

The survey questions in this document aim to accomplish six of the seven objectives listed above:

1. Assess respondents' awareness and support of the CCSS.
2. Gauge respondents' understanding of the CCSS.
3. Assess the reach of and satisfaction with CCSS resources that have been provided.
4. Identify effective communication and outreach mechanisms for CCSS information and resources.
5. Identify challenges to CCSS implementation.
6. Assess changes in classroom practice that result from CCSS implementation.

Who should use these tools?

These tools are primarily designed for state leaders who are supporting CCSS implementation via the provision of professional development, the creation of instructional materials, the development of new assessment systems, or other functions. Many of the questions are also applicable to leaders at the district and school levels who may wish to obtain feedback on their own CCSS implementation efforts.

When and how should we administer these surveys?

Leaders should administer these surveys as often as they feel they need the feedback. As a general rule, it is a good idea to survey major populations of interest (e.g., teachers, principals and other teacher leaders) more than once a year if possible. It may also be helpful to time surveys of specific populations around major events in CCSS implementation; for example, the survey questions may be used to create "pre" and "post" assessments of educator awareness and knowledge before and after summer professional development offerings.

How should we use these tools to develop a survey?

Given the complexity of CCSS implementation, it is highly recommended that SEA leaders begin by convening a team to lead the process of creating feedback loops, comprised of those responsible for key areas of implementation. This need not be an additional meeting or routine; in fact, it is likely that there are one or more groups that already convene regularly at the SEA to discuss CCSS implementation. If this is the case, feedback loops can become another dimension of their work together.

There are a number of steps that SEA leaders can take to structure a survey to meet their specific needs. These steps are generally good practice for preparing to administer any survey:

Step one: Identify the purpose of the survey and the targeted audience.

It is critical that the survey team has a shared understanding about why the survey is being administered. This clarity will help ensure that everyone is on the same page as they undertake this work together.

Key questions to consider:

- Which of the objectives on page 2 are most aligned to the SEA's needs?
- Who is being targeted for feedback?
- What information does the team want to collect?
- Who will be the primary users of the data?

Step two: Take context into account.

Before diving in to create the survey, the survey team should be clear about the state's work-to-date and future efforts on the horizon.

Key questions to consider:

- What is the state's timeline for implementing the new standards? Are the standards being phased in by grade or content area, or both? Are there districts that are ahead of the state timeline? If so, should survey administration look different for them?
- Based on this timeline, when must state leaders make key decisions on how to invest time and resources?
- What are the state's critical dates for CCSS implementation? For instance, are there any large convenings scheduled? Is a model curriculum being released? Is a new resource for educators under development? These critical dates may have implications for when state leaders should gather feedback from the field.
- What have been the SEA's implementation challenges in the past? When working to create the survey, state leaders can draw from their past experiences to better understand where weaknesses might exist and where more attention might be needed. With this knowledge, they can prioritize areas where feedback would be most helpful.

Step three: Address logistics.

The devil is in the details, as the saying goes. There's no doubt: taking the time to think through logistics can save time and energy down the line.

Key questions to consider:

- How often should the survey be administered to obtain the information needed? Just once, or periodically?
- In what format will the survey be administered: hard copy or electronically?
- Who will create the survey(s)? For electronic versions this work may be more time consuming than paper versions. However, using an online survey tool (like SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang) can make data analysis much easier.
- Who will compile the data?
- Who will be responsible for getting the survey into the hands of respondents? Your survey may present a good opportunity to work with other state partners (teachers' union, principals' association, regional service centers, etc.) or to reach out to school

and district leaders for their assistance. Not only can these partnerships make your survey administration much more successful, they can also help generate more buy-in for your efforts.

Step four: Create a plan.

Using the information and insights generated from the three steps above, create a plan to administer the survey. The template in Figure 2 below can be used to capture the most important elements of your survey administration plans.

Figure 2: Survey Planning Template

Survey Planning Template

Name of Survey:

Targeted audience:

Purpose of survey:

Related events:

Type of survey (hard copy or electronic):

<u>Lead SEA staff for key roles</u>

Drafting the survey:
Building the survey (for electronic versions):
Administering survey to respondents:
Compiling survey data and summarizing findings:
External partners involved in survey administration:

<u>Administration timeline</u>

Survey document approved:
Survey release date(s):
Survey close date (s):
Complete data analysis and findings:

If your team plans to administer more than one survey over a period of time, consider creating a timeline to show which surveys will be administered and when. The example in Figure 3 is one approach for how a timeline can be organized.

Figure 3: Survey administration timeline

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Figure 3: Survey administration timeline

	2012							2013				
Target groups	**Jun**	**Jul**	**Aug**	**Sept**	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**
▪ CCSS Summer Institute participants	▲											
▪ Teaching and learning conference participants					▲						▲	
▪ Curriculum coordinator network				▲					▲			
▪ Principals (statewide)					▲					▲		
▪ Pre-K – 5 educators (statewide)						▲					▲	
▪ MS and HS educators (statewide)							▲					▲

▲ Survey Administration

Step five: Customize the survey.

The surveys included here are generic templates meant to be customized by survey teams. They are organized by objective to facilitate the process of your team selecting the questions that will be most useful. Here are some tips to consider as you read through the templates and adapt them for your purposes:

- Choose only the questions that are most likely to generate the information you need. As you prioritize some questions over others, be sensitive to the time needed to complete the survey you create. Typically, surveys that take more than 5-10 minutes to complete are considered too long.
- There are a variety of question types included in this survey, all with different implications for your data analysis. For instance, open ended questions have the benefit of providing respondents the opportunity to provide their personal feedback, but they can be time-consuming to analyze when looking at hundreds, or even thousands of responses. Conversely, multiple choice responses are very easy to code for data analysis, but do not typically provide respondents an opportunity to go in to much depth with their feedback. Be sure to choose question types that best match your needs and capacity to analyze data.
- After identifying the questions that would be most helpful to you, be sure to edit them as needed. Phrases in brackets within the template indicate places where the language

needs to be customized or removed prior to being released publicly. Update these areas with the correct information.

- You may opt to ask for respondents to provide the name of their school and/or district as part of this survey. If you choose to include these questions, it is highly recommended that they be clearly listed as optional, and be placed at the end of the survey so individuals are fully aware of what will be shared prior to providing their information.
- Explore ways you can also use this survey as a communication tool. At the beginning and end of each survey there is space provided to add information specific to your state's implementation of the CCSS. In these spaces, consider including brief background information about the state's adoption of the CCSS, links to important resources like the state department's CCSS website, or the websites of national resources on the CCSS. Some national resources could include:

➢ Common Core State Standards Initiative: http://www.corestandards.org/

This website is produced with the collaboration of the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)—the two organizations that supported the state-led process to create the CCSS. The website provides links to download the standards, background information about how the standards were developed, and updated information about standards adoption across the nation.

➢ Achieve: http://www.achieve.org/achieving-common-core

Achieve has developed materials to help states, districts, and others understand the organization and content of the standards and the content and evidence base used to support the standards. This portion of the website includes advocacy and communication tools, instructional support and alignment resources, implementation planning tools, and highlights from state materials and websites.

➢ Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC): http://www.parcconline.org
➢ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC): http://www.smarterbalanced.org

These websites include information on PARCC and SBAC, two consortia of states working to create common sets of K-12 assessments aligned to the CCSS. They provide background information about the creation of the assessment, in addition to free resources for educators and instructional leaders.

➢ Student Achievement Partners: http://achievethecore.org

This website includes free tools and resources to help teachers implement the" shifts" required to incorporate the CCSS into their classroom practice. It also provides a compilation of external resources related to CCSS implementation.

Step six: Test the survey.

Though these survey questions have been tested with national policy experts, authors of the CCSS, and educators, it will still be important for you to test it with educators and instructional leaders in your system before releasing it broadly. Ask a small group of educators to take the survey and then report back on their experience of it. Were the questions clear? Did they make sense, given your system's context? What message did the survey send to educators – and was anything unintentional conveyed? This feedback will allow you to finalize the survey for the final step in the process.

Step seven: Send out the survey.

After you complete drafting the survey, send it out broadly. Be sure to schedule time after the survey period closes for the survey team to compile and review the data.

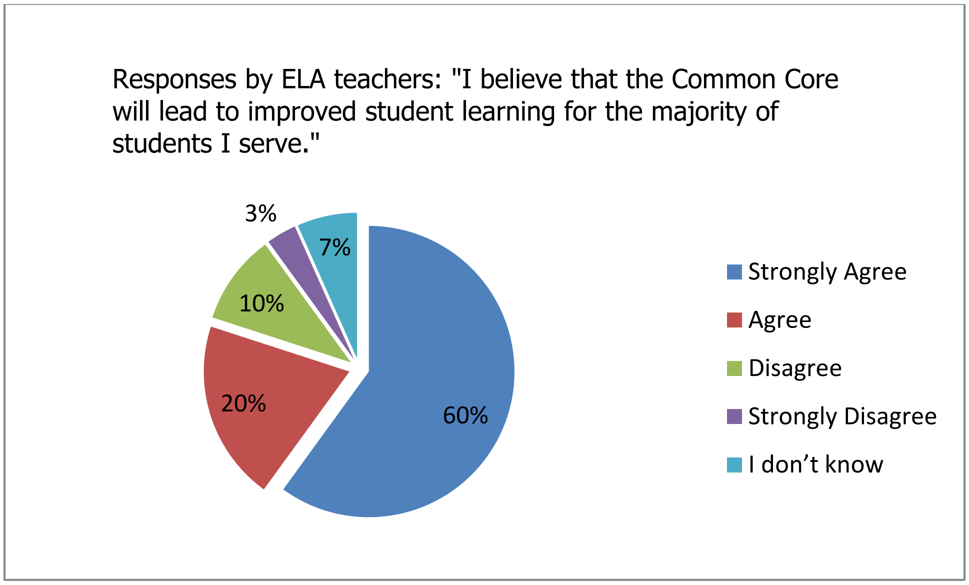
THE SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN; NOW WHAT?

After your team has successfully created and administered the survey, it is time to turn the piles (or spreadsheets) of raw data into useful, actionable information. Your work now turns to data analysis and identifying ways to use the data to improve the SEA's efforts.

Analyzing your data

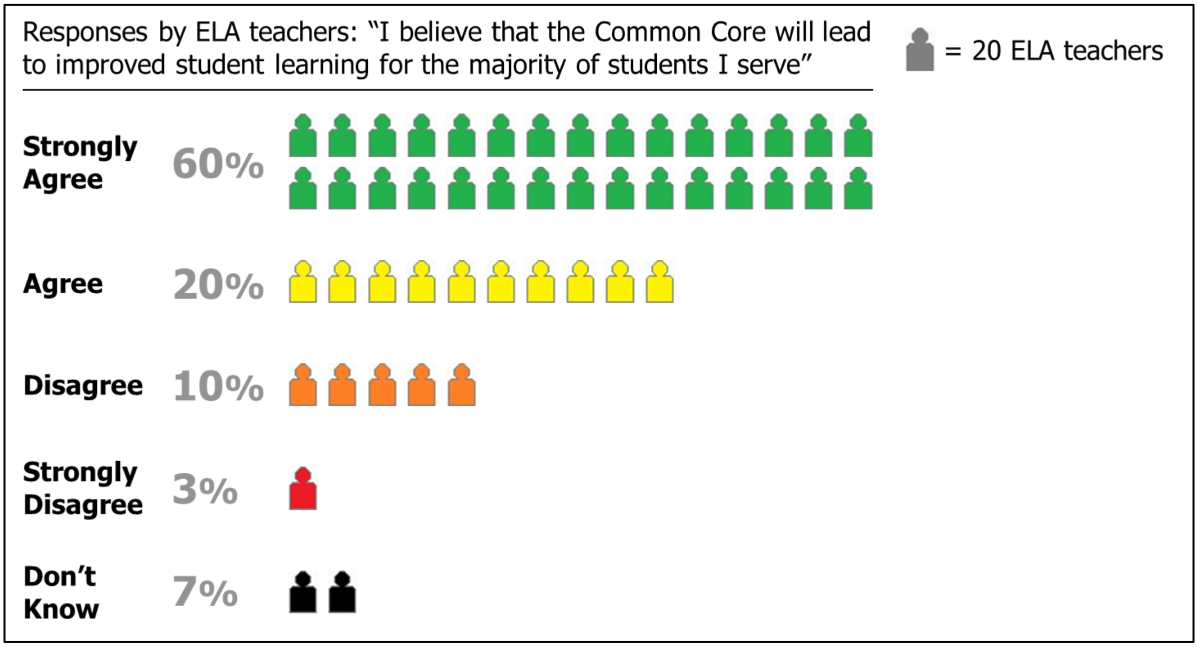
One basic approach to analyzing your data is to identify overall trends in the responses. One way to organize the data is to summarize the number of respondents that answered each question and the percentages each answer option received. This data could be presented in chart format or with graphs. An example is provided in Figure 4a.

Figure 4a: Example of basic data analysis



The same information can be presented in multiple formats depending on your audience, as Figure 4b shows.

Figure 4b: Example of basic data analysis with infographic



Most online survey administration tools include functions that help users create charts and graphs to display this kind of information. In addition, Microsoft Excel has easy-to-use wizards to help create charts and graphs as well.

A more in-depth approach to analyzing your data could involve the use of cross-tabulations (cross-tabs) to show side-by-side comparisons of two or more survey questions to determine how they are interrelated. This approach allows you to quickly compare how different groups of respondents answered your survey questions.

Cross-tabs can be created using any one of the characteristics collected in the survey (such as grade level or subject taught, or affiliated school or district), and then cross-referencing it with any question on the survey. Cross-tabs can also be used to cross-reference two questions against one another. Figure 5 is an example of a cross-tab analysis.

Figure 5: Example of cross-tab analysis

Question: I believe that the Common Core will lead to improved student learning for the majority of students I serve.

	Total Responses	Please identify your role/title	
		Teacher	**School Counselor**
Answer Options	150	100	50
Strongly Agree	90	70	20
	60%	70%	40%
Agree	30	15	15
	20%	15%	30%
Disagree	15	10	5
	10%	10%	10%
Strongly Disagree	5	0	5
	3.3%	0%	10%
I don't know	10	5	5
	6.7%	5%	10%

A number of online survey administration tools can help users create cross-tabs with their survey data. Also, in Microsoft Excel users can create pivot tables to create cross-tab charts.

Figure 6 provides a few ideas of cross-tabs that may provide interesting data for deeper analysis on some important areas of implementation.

Figure 6: Sample cross-tabs for CCSS survey

Focus Question	Possible Cross-Tab Analysis
Do respondents feel prepared to support CCSS implementation?	Analyze educators' perceived preparedness to teach the CCSS (objective 1/#7) by grade level.
Do respondents recognize CCSS-aligned instructional practices as important to student learning?	Analyze respondents' identification of CCSS-aligned practices as "important" or "very important" (objective 2/#3 and #6) by educator's subject area.
Are respondents satisfied with the resources provided by the department?	Analyze respondents' perceptions of the quality of the department's resources (objective 3/#1) by educator's subject area or instructional leader's title.
Are respondents being supported to teach the CCSS?	Analyze respondents' perceptions of their professional development experiences (objective 3/#7) by grade level or subject area. Analyze respondents' identification of a CCSS point of contact (objective 4/#1) by their school or district.
What will be the challenges to CCSS implementation across the state?	Analyze respondents' perceived challenges to CCSS implementation (objective 5/#1) by grade level served, affiliated school or district, or instructional leader's title.
What changes are respondents making in their practice as a result of the CCSS?	Analyze educators' self-reported changes in practice (objective 6/#2) by grade level served or affiliated school or district. Analyze instructional leaders' self-reported changes in practice (objective 6/#7) by title or affiliated district.

Using data to spur action

Once you have compiled the data and identified trends within it, work to translate your findings into action. This work should involve convening critical stakeholder groups to review the data and delving more deeply into areas needing further investigation.

Convene critical stakeholder groups to review the data

Survey data can be a powerful lever to drive planning and collaboration. To maximize the use of your data, consider convening stakeholder groups to identify trends within the data, make plans to address those trends, and identify areas in need of further research.

Some key groups you may wish to convene include SEA staff responsible for different areas of CCSS implementation (including those involved in curriculum and instruction, communications, assessment, and educating special populations); external stakeholders, such as the teachers' union, principals' association, and regional service centers; and school and district leaders.

Use these convenings to explore the following questions:

- What patterns exist in the data? What areas show promise? What areas show challenge?
- Do obvious solutions exist?
- If not, what data will help us identify solutions?
- What are the implications of this data on our work? What are we doing that seems to be most helpful? How can we expand it? Is there anything that is hindering progress and needs to be rethought?
- What areas require further investigation?

These meetings should be structured to lead to participants toward developing new ways of addressing the challenges that exist. For example, if the data show that middle grades teachers are the least likely to feel prepared to teach the CCSS, SEA professional development staff could seek out ways they can collaborate with professional associations to target this group of teachers in particular. Or, if a large percentage of respondents express misunderstandings or apprehensions about CCSS implementation, communications staff could modify the SEA's CCSS communications strategy to address those concerns in particular. Regardless of the focus area, these meetings should be used as opportunities to generate ideas and set a path toward improvement.

Delve into areas needing further investigation

In many cases, the information that is produced by surveys opens doors to ask more questions and research different avenues of your implementation effort. If so, consider incorporating other feedback loops to explore these areas in more depth.

The table in Figure 1 gives some options for creating additional feedback loops. For example:

- You may wish to learn more about districts that seem to be showing promising signs of CCSS implementation. In this circumstance, a few targeted site visits to these districts or interviews with leaders in them may help you to get the information you need.
- You may wish to dig deeper into the implementation challenges identified by educators on the survey. In this case, focus groups with educators in the most challenged districts may be a good option to learn more.
- You may want to learn more directly about whether practices are changing in the classroom. If your state is implementing a teacher evaluation system, you may begin by "auditing" some of the information that is beginning to come out of that system – for example, by convening focus groups of principals about what they are observing, or by reading samples of observation records filled out by teacher leaders. You may follow up on some of this work by visiting some of the referenced classrooms to see if there is evidence of progress.

In any of these cases, the survey questions should serve as a guide for how to structure your inquiry. They can be adapted to form focus group or interview protocols, or can serve as guiding questions for your team as they look at other evidence.

Conclusion

State leaders have recognized that the successful implementation of the CCSS requires innovative approaches in a range of areas. In particular, educators will need to be well-supported by clear communication of expectations, high-quality professional development, aligned curricular and instructional materials, and formative assessment tools. The far-reaching scope of this work requires that states strengthen their efforts to receive feedback from the field on an ongoing basis. Feedback loops can fill this need by helping state leaders feel confident that their efforts are likely to pay off and result in increased student achievement. The alternative to this approach—waiting until 2015 to know whether implementation was successful—is simply not acceptable. The stakes are far too high for our schools and students. Feedback loops can play a critical role in SEAs' implementation efforts, and can help ensure that today's efforts translate into long-term, sustainable improvements in student learning in the years to come.

Acknowledgments

These CCSS implementation survey questions and guidance were the result of collaboration between Achieve, the U.S. Education Delivery Institute (EDI) and Education First. Sharon Gaskins from EDI provided the overall guidance for this effort. Alissa Peltzman, Nick Rodriguez and Jenn Vranek provided leadership for this collaboration. Additional thanks to the following staff members who shared insights and provided helpful feedback throughout the process: Allison Barr, Chad Colby, Kathy Cox, Cory Curl, Laura Kohn, Marie O'Hara, and Doug Sovde. Special thanks to Marie Henderson and Sarah Payne at the Delivery Unit in the Louisiana Department of Education, Sandra Alberti and Amy Briggs from Student Achievement Partners, and Wendy Uptain from Hope Street Group and the Hope Street Group Teacher Fellows.