

Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards

State Education Agencies' Views on the Federal Role

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Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's deputy director. Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, edited the report and assisted with the writing. Jennifer McMurrer, CEP's senior research associate, oversaw and assisted in data collection, cleaning, and tabulation. Nanami Yoshioka and Matthew Frizzell, CEP graduate research assistants, helped to input and tabulate the survey data. Maria Ferguson, CEP's executive director, provided advice and assistance on the survey instrument and the report content. Wayne Riddle, a CEP consultant, reviewed and provided feedback on a draft version.

We are tremendously grateful to the state education agency staff who took time to respond to our survey amid their many critical responsibilities. Thank you for making this series of reports possible!

Based in Washington, D.C., at The George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

The Center on Education Policy receives nearly all of its funding from charitable foundations. We are grateful to the Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their support of this project. The George Gund Foundation and the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation also provide CEP with general support funding that assisted with this endeavor. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Center.

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State Education Agencies' Views on the Federal Role

As of June 2013, 45 states and the District of Columbia had adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in both English language arts and mathematics. (An additional state, Minnesota, adopted the standards in English language arts only.) Released in June 2010 and developed through the leadership of the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), these voluntary standards outline the knowledge and skills that students in grades kindergarten through 12 are expected to learn in English language arts and math to be prepared for college and careers.

For the past three years, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at The George Washington University has tracked states' progress in implementing the CCSS by conducting surveys of deputy state superintendents of education or their designees. CEP's first survey on this topic took place in fall 2010, just months after the standards were released. As described in the 2011 CEP report, *States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards*, the adopting states had taken initial steps to implement the CCSS at the time of that first survey. In the fall of 2011, CEP again surveyed the states. The ensuing report, *Year Two of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: States' Progress and Challenges*, found that the vast majority of survey states were taking steps to familiarize state and district officials with the new standards and to align curriculum and assessments but that most of the states surveyed did not expect to fully implement the standards until school year 2014-15 or later.

In February through May 2013, CEP conducted a third survey of deputy superintendents or their designees to gather more recent information about states' strategies, policies, and challenges during the third year of implementing the CCSS. This is CEP's most comprehensive survey to date, covering topics such as general implementation, the perceived rigor of the standards, the role of higher education in implementation, issues surrounding the CCSS-aligned assessments, and state actions to implement the CCSS for special populations. This report, the first in a series of reports on specific topics addressed by the 2013 survey, discusses how state education agencies view the federal role in assisting them with CCSS implementation and how a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) could be shaped to better support state implementation efforts.

Forty states responded to the 2013 survey, including 39 states that had adopted the CCSS in both English language arts and math and one that had adopted the standards in English language arts only. Thus, the survey findings represent the views of a majority of the states that had adopted the standards at the time of the survey. The responses of specific states have been kept confidential to encourage frank answers.

Key Findings

Several key findings from the survey shed light on states' views about the role of the federal government in assisting them with transitioning to the CCSS.

- In the vast majority (37) of the CCSS-adopting states participating in the survey, officials considered it unlikely that their state would reverse, limit, or change its decision to adopt the standards during 2013-14. In addition,

very few respondents said that overcoming various types of resistance to the Common Core posed a major challenge in their state; at the time of the survey in spring 2013, most respondents viewed this as a minor challenge or no challenge.

- A majority of CCSS-adopting states indicated support for particular legislative changes to the ESEA that would directly assist state and district efforts to transition to the Common Core.
- Only two survey states reported that they did not want any federal assistance with CCSS implementation.
- The Obama Administration's waivers of ESEA/No Child Left Behind Act provisions appear to have helped some states with their efforts to transition to the CCSS and meet federal accountability requirements.
- If ESEA is not reauthorized during the 113th Congress, many states that received waivers see the need for additional non-legislative actions on ESEA to help them implement the CCSS.

Background

When NGA and CCSSO kicked off the CCSS Initiative, it was, by intention, a state-instigated, state-led activity that would produce *national*, not federal, standards. The Initiative continues to emphasize that “the federal government had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards and will not have a role in their implementation” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). In the three years since the standards were released, this state/national focus has aided the adoption of the standards by many states that would have been opposed to adopting any federal education standards. The only direct federal funding provided for the CCSS was \$437.5 million in economic stimulus money to support the development of assessments aligned to the CCSS.¹

The Obama Administration, however, has encouraged the adoption of college- and career-ready standards in other ways. States applying for Race to the Top funds must adopt “internationally benchmarked standards and assessments.” In addition, states seeking a waiver of key provisions of ESEA as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) must adopt “college- and career-ready standards” and “aligned, high-quality assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009; 2012). While states could meet the requirements of either program by adopting the CCSS, both programs stop short of actually requiring states to do so. States could fulfill these requirements by adopting other sets of internationally benchmarked or college- and career-ready standards that meet program criteria. In fact, two states approved for waivers did use alternative standards: Virginia, which did not adopt the CCSS in either subject, and Minnesota, which did not adopt the CCSS in math.

Opposition to the Common Core

The perceived tie of the federal government to the CCSS has fueled opposition to the standards in some states. Conservative opponents, including some Tea Party members, assert that the standards are really federal standards or that they come with federal directives on which textbooks to purchase or instructional methods to use and with requirements to report student information to the federal government. Other critics, while acknowledging that the standards were not developed by the federal government, still oppose any indirect federal encouragement of the

¹This amount included \$360 million to two state consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced, to develop CCSS-aligned assessments; \$45 million to the National Center and State Collaborative and \$22 million to the Dynamic Learning Maps consortium to develop alternate assessments for students with disabilities; and \$10.5 million to the Wisconsin Department of Education, World Class Instruction Design and Assessment, and their partners to create assessments for English language learners. See <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/index.html>; <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-education-department-awards-grants-improve-assessments-students-disabilities>; and <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/eag/awards.html>

CCSS and contend that the national, interstate nature of the standards removes local decision-making about what students should be taught (Strauss, 2013; Wallsten & Layton, 2013). This view that the standards subvert local control was endorsed by the Republican National Committee in April 2013 when it adopted a resolution officially opposing the Common Core. In part, the resolution states that the standards represent “inappropriate overreach to standardize and control the education of our children” (Vander Hart, 2013). Reacting to these criticisms, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan repudiated claims of federal overreaching and defended the Common Core movement in a June speech (Layton, 2013).

Some traditionally liberal constituencies, such as teachers’ unions and some Democratic state senators in Pennsylvania, have also raised concerns about the impact of the Common Core on students who are not adequately prepared to meet a high academic bar and on schools that lack the financial resources to help all students succeed under the standards (Ujjifusa, 2013).

This opposition to the CCSS on various grounds has led to attempts to delay or roll back the standards in several states. These include Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota. The situation remains fluid (Exit strategy, 2013; McGuigan, 2013; O’Donnell, 2013; Wallsten & Layton, 2013). To date, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful, although Michigan and Indiana have halted funding for CCSS implementation.

At the time of the CEP survey, most responding state education agency officials did not perceive opposition to the standards as being strong enough to derail state adoption of the CCSS in the near future. Our survey specifically asked participating states about the likelihood that their decision to adopt the standards would be reversed, limited, or changed in some way in 2013-14. As displayed in **figure 1**, 37 states said this type of action was not likely, and 2 said they did not know. One state replied that it was somewhat likely the adoption of the standards would be reversed, limited, or changed. None of the responding states said this type of backpedaling away from the standards was very likely.

Figure 1. Likelihood that the state’s decision to adopt the CCSS will be reversed, limited, or changed in 2013-14

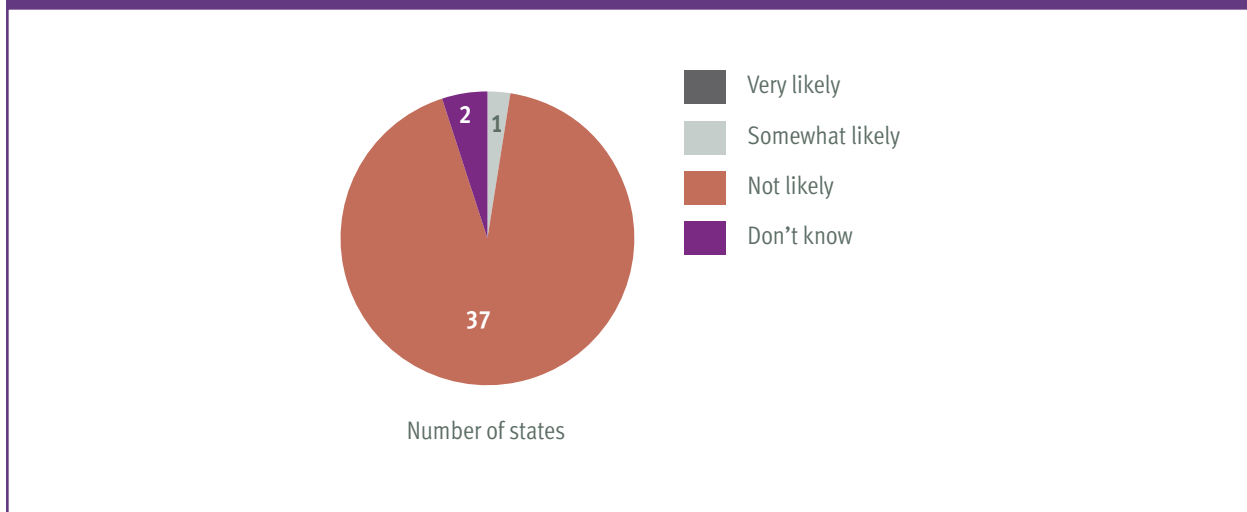


Figure reads: One state reported that it was somewhat likely that the state’s decision to adopt the CCSS will be reversed, limited, or changed in some way in 2013-14, while 37 states said it was not likely, and 2 states did not know. No state said these types of actions were very likely.

The one state that said a change in its adoption of the Common Core was somewhat likely cited public opposition to the original decision and opposition from state legislators as possible reasons for such an action. Also, some of the states that declined to participate in our survey are among those that have faced challenges to the standards, so their experiences are not captured in the survey. Nonetheless, our survey respondents do include some of the states that were dealing with opposition to the standards during the time of survey administration.

A related survey question asked states about the challenges they faced in overcoming resistance to the CCSS from three possible sectors—sources outside the K-12 school system, sources inside the system, and higher education institutions. At the time of the survey in spring 2013, relatively few respondents saw resistance from any of these sectors as a major challenge (see **table 1**). Rather, most states viewed these forms of resistance as a minor challenge or no challenge.

Table 1. Extent of challenges states face in overcoming resistance to the CCSS

Source of resistance	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Not an SEA activity	Not within SEA's authority	Too soon to tell	Don't know
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from sources outside the K-12 system (other than higher education)	5	24	7	1	0	1	1
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from within the K-12 system	0	21	17	1	0	0	0
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from institutions of higher education	2	16	17	1	0	3	0

Table reads: Five states reported facing a major challenge in overcoming resistance to the CCSS from sources outside the K-12 system, while 24 states viewed this as a minor challenge and 7 said it was not a challenge. One state responded that overcoming resistance from sources outside the system was not an activity for the state education agency (SEA), while one state said it was too soon to tell whether this would become a challenge.

ESEA and the Common Core

States and school districts are ramping up their CCSS implementation efforts at the same time Congress is considering the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the main federal law that assists K-12 education. To date, the Obama Administration and Congressional education leaders have said very little about how ESEA could be shaped to *directly* support the Common Core.

Instead, the Obama Administration's plan for reauthorizing ESEA, outlined in its March 2010 document *A Blueprint for Reform*, calls for states to adopt "college- and career-ready standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to the *Blueprint*, states can meet this requirement by upgrading their existing standards; by working with four-year colleges and universities to certify that the mastery of their state standards ensures that a student will not have to take remedial courses in college; or by working with other states to create state-developed common standards. Other parts of the plan explain how ESEA could support states and districts in implementing their college- and career-ready standards but do not explicitly mention the CCSS.

The ESEA reauthorization bill approved by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on June 12, 2013, similarly calls on states to adopt their own college- and career-ready standards in reading and math without requiring states to accept the CCSS. The bill specifically states that the federal government cannot "mandate,

direct, or control a State's college and career ready academic content or student academic achievement standards" (Strengthening America's Schools Act, 2013). A Republican-sponsored amendment was defeated that would have rolled back existing forms of indirect federal support for the Common Core and allowed states to change their standards and assessments without federal approval. All of the committee Republicans voted against final passage of the bill out of committee (Karhuse, 2013). The Senate committee bill authorizes funds for states to continue their work on developing and administering assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards. It also authorizes two programs to improve instruction and achievement in literacy and in science, technology, engineering, and math; although these programs do not mention the CCSS, this type of funding could be helpful in implementing the Common Core.

The ESEA bill voted out by the House Education and the Workforce Committee on June 19, 2013, would also continue the current law's requirement for states to adopt academic content and achievement standards in English language arts, math, and science. But unlike the *Blueprint*, NCLB/ESEA waivers, and Senate bill, the House bill does not reference "college and career-ready standards" (Student Success Act, 2013). In addition, the House bill prohibits the federal government, directly or indirectly, from a) mandating, directing, or controlling state or local instructional content, academic standards, curricula, or instructional programs, or b) making financial support conditional on the adoption of specific content, standards, curriculum, or instructional programs. These provisions could curtail the kinds of incentives for internationally benchmarked or college- and career-ready standards found in the Administration's Race to the Top program and NCLB/ESEA waiver initiative.

Because most discussions regarding federal support and the CCSS have been fraught with controversy, CEP thought it prudent and timely to ask state education officials about their views on the federal government assisting them and their districts with implementing the Common Core through ESEA. A majority of the responding states (and a majority of all states that have adopted the CCSS) indicated that federal assistance through a reauthorized ESEA would be helpful in their efforts to transition to the Common Core.

Specifically, 30 states or more responded that legislative changes to authorize and appropriate federal funds for the following activities would help their state's efforts to transition to the CCSS:

- Generally assisting states and school districts with CCSS implementation-related activities
- Providing state and district professional development activities for teachers and principals regarding the Common Core
- Helping states with the costs of implementing the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia
- Supporting the updating and maintenance of the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced

In addition, 30 states favored legislative revisions to ESEA Title I—which supports educational services for low-performing students in high-poverty schools—to help teachers in Title I schools teach the CCSS content. Twenty-nine states expressed support for revisions to ESEA Title III—which funds instructional services for students with limited English language proficiency—to help teachers of English learners teach the content in the CCSS. Also, 26 states indicated that it would be helpful to have federal funding to support district implementation of the CCSS-aligned assessments.

Among the four states that selected "other" as a response to this question about legislative changes to ESEA, one responded that it did not know if these type of changes were needed to help with Common Core implementation; one wanted relief from ED reporting requirements; one sought to continue the Title II teacher professional development program; and one suggested revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to help teachers of students with disabilities teach CCSS content.

Only two states responded that their state did not want federal assistance with implementing the standards.

Table 2 provides more detail on states' responses.

Table 2. Number of states supporting specific legislative changes to ESEA to help with their implementation of the CCSS	
The authorization and appropriation of federal funds to—	Number of states
Generally assist <i>states</i> with CCSS implementation	33
Generally assist <i>districts</i> with CCSS implementation	32
Help <i>states</i> with the costs associated with the implementation of the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced	30
Help <i>states</i> to provide CCSS-related professional development services to teachers	30
Help <i>districts</i> to provide CCSS-related professional development services to teachers	30
Help <i>states</i> to provide CCSS-related professional development services to principals	30
Help <i>districts</i> to provide CCSS-related professional development services to principals	30
Support the updating and maintenance of the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced	30
Other potential legislative changes	
Revision of the Title I program to help teachers in high-poverty schools teach the CCSS content	30
Revision of the Title III program to help teachers of students who are English language learners teach the CCSS content	29
Federal funds to help <i>districts</i> with the costs associated with implementing the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced	26
Other	4
Not applicable—My state does not want federal assistance for its efforts to transition to the CCSS	2

Table reads: Thirty-three states indicated that authorizing and appropriating federal funds through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to assist states generally with CCSS implementation would help their efforts to transition to the Common Core.

Non-Legislative Changes to Help with CCSS Implementation

Because it is a distinct possibility that ESEA will not be reauthorized during the 113th Congress—the Act has been awaiting renewal since 2007—we asked states about non-legislative actions related to ESEA that could help with their CCSS implementation efforts. These non-legislative actions might include revised federal ESEA regulations and guidance or streamlined approval processes that could be issued by the Secretary of Education without Congressional action.

Several ESEA programs contain requirements that are relevant to CCSS implementation and could be revised to facilitate this process. For example, Title I requires states to submit to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) a state plan that describes its accountability system, including its standards and assessments. If a state modifies or changes its standards or assessments, it must submit an amended plan. ED must approve the accountability plan and any amendments before a state can implement them. In addition, ESEA authorizes various grant programs that could serve as funding sources for state and district implementation of the CCSS. These include the aforemen-

tioned Title I and Title III programs, as well as Title II, which provides funding for professional development for teachers and principals.

As displayed in **table 3**, 16 responding states agreed it would be helpful to have guidance or policy documents illustrating how ESEA funds could be used to support state and district efforts to implement the CCSS. Twelve states favored federal regulations, guidance, or streamlined approval processes that would help them use the CCSS for Title I accountability purposes, and 12 expressed support for these types of changes to help them use CCSS-aligned assessments for Title I accountability.

The survey question allowed states to select “other” as a response if they wanted to write in non-legislative changes not listed or provide additional information, and eight states took advantage of this option. Four of these eight states indicated that their state had an NCLB waiver application pending. One state that selected the “other” response said it did not know if non-legislative changes were needed, while another wanted relief from ED data reporting requirements. Finally, two states that selected the “other” response made the following specific comments about federal help with the Common Core:

This section was intentionally left blank. As we discussed this item, we essentially concluded that no additional regulation or guidance is necessary in order for our state to move forward to full implementation of the CCSS. We believe seamless adoption of the CCSS and our updated assessment can be accomplished without guidance and further regulation as we understand the law accommodates these changes.

[The state] feels very strongly [that] the Federal Government should have a limited role in the Common Core Standards. If constituents begin seeing Common Core as federal co-opted then we will struggle to keep them at the state level. The Federal Government has never approved standards and should not begin now and should not financially support them. Money for testing is appropriate as standardized testing is required under ESEA.

Only one state (not shown in table 3) responded that it did not want non-legislative federal changes to assist its transition to the Common Core.

Table 3. State support for non-legislative changes that could help with CCSS implementation

Potential non-legislative change	Total number of states	Waiver states*	Non-waiver states
Guidance or policy documents illustrating how ESEA funds, such as Title I, Title II, and/or Title III, can currently be used to support state and district efforts to implement the CCSS	16	13 (8)	3
Regulations, guidance, or a streamlined approval process to assist states to get approval to use the CCSS for Title I state accountability plan purposes	12	9 (4)	3
Regulations, guidance, or a streamlined approval process to assist states that plan to use the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments for Title I state accountability plan purposes	12	9 (4)	3
Other	8	3 (1)	5

Table reads: A total of 16 states, including 13 states with waivers and 3 without waivers, indicated that the CCSS transition in their state would be helped by federal guidance or policy documents illustrating how ESEA funds can currently be used to support state and district efforts to implement the CCSS.

*The numbers in parentheses in this column indicate the responses of states that had received a waiver and also responded that “the flexibility provided through the waiver is helping my state transition to the CCSS.” The number not in parentheses in this column represents all states in the survey that received waivers. A discussion of the waiver states’ responses follows on page 8.

Waiver States and Non-legislative Changes

In addition to tallying the overall responses to this question, we also separately analyzed the responses of the 29 participating states that had been granted a waiver from the Secretary of Education of key provisions of ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act. This is pertinent because states that received waivers may already have sufficient flexibility to support Common Core implementation without a need for additional non-legislative changes. In fact, the survey included a response where states with NCLB/ESEA waivers could indicate whether the flexibility provided through the waivers was helping them transition to the CCSS.

Twenty-two of the 29 waiver states participating in the survey said the waiver flexibility is helping them transition to the CCSS. The remaining 7 participating waiver states did not check this response. Of the 22 states that said the waiver flexibility was helping with the CCSS transition, 14 did not indicate support for any of the other non-legislative changes listed in the survey question. Perhaps this signifies that in these 14 states, the waiver alone is sufficient to help them navigate the ESEA requirements and the Common Core.

The remaining 8 states, out of the 22 that said their waiver was helping with the CCSS transition, did indicate support for other non-legislative changes:

- Four of these waiver states responded that it would be helpful to have guidance, regulations, or a streamlined approval process for the standards to comply with Title I accountability requirements.
- Four said it would be helpful to have guidance, regulations, or a streamlined approval process for the CCSS-aligned assessments to comply with Title I accountability.
- All eight of these waiver states indicated that it would be helpful to have guidance or policy documents outlining how funds under ESEA can be used to support the CCSS implementation.

Seven waiver states did not select the response indicating that the waiver flexibility was helping with the CCSS transition. However, these states did indicate support for some of the non-legislative changes listed in the survey. Thus, some waiver states appear to want more assistance from ED to help them transition to the CCSS and meet the accountability requirements under Title I.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite opposition to the Common Core that stems, in part, from a perception that the standards are federally related or controlled, most CCSS-adopting states would welcome additional help from the federal government in implementing the standards. Whether this type of assistance will be feasible or politically palatable depends on several factors.

At the time of our survey in spring 2013, most responding state education officials did not see opposition to the Common Core as a major challenge, and most said it was unlikely their state would back away from the standards. As implementation progresses, however, the costs and impact of changing curriculum, professional development, and assessment to align with the standards will become more evident, and the consequences for schools that are not adequately preparing students to master the content in the standards will become more decisive. It remains to be seen whether limited brush fires of opposition will flare up into more widespread threats that could halt the course of implementation. More specific issues related to implementation will be discussed in other reports in this CEP series on state education agencies' views of the Common Core.

In addition, the pending reauthorization of ESEA offers an opportunity for Congress to respond positively or negatively to the desire of many states for assistance in implementing the CCSS. To date, the federal government has played an indirect but significant supporting role in states' adoption and implementation of the Common Core,

through the Race to the Top program, NCLB/ESEA waivers, funding for aligned assessments, and general rhetorical support from President Obama and Secretary Duncan. A key question is whether the opponents of the Common Core in Congress will use the reauthorization to curtail this current federal role or whether supporters will expand federal assistance for this major new national education policy.

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Appendix: Study Methods

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

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



Center on Education Policy

Graduate School of Education and Human Development
The George Washington University
2140 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 103
Washington, D.C. 20037

Ph: 202-822-8065

Fax: 202-994-8859

E-mail: cep-dc@cep-dc.org

Web: www.cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org