



Catching Up to the Core: Common Sense Strategies for Accelerating Access to the Common Core in California

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By joining 45 other states in adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, California policymakers acknowledged the need for a new set of education standards and assessments aligned with measures of college and career readiness. They also positioned the state to take a leading role in implementing standards-based reform.

Yet when it comes to actually implementing the CCSS, California is lagging behind other states, leaving hundreds of districts and thousands of schools without meaningful support. While a number of pioneering California districts have sought to fill this vacuum with their own efforts, many more are waiting for state leadership. For low-income, Latino, African-American, and English learner students, who constitute the vast majority of our student population, the state's failure to provide them access to high-quality, standards-based instruction will leave them even more unprepared for college and the workplace.

Meeting the demands of the Common Core will require our districts and schools to transform teaching and learning. In support of this work, state leaders must take the steps to:

1. **Prepare educators** across the state to teach the new standards.
2. **Create broad access to high-quality instructional materials** aligned with the CCSS.
3. **Expand technology infrastructure and capacity** in order to support new web-based tests aligned with the CCSS and offer teachers ready access to instructional materials and professional development opportunities.
4. **Align systems of higher education with the CCSS**, particularly around teacher preparation programs and credentialing requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

California must accelerate the pace of CCSS implementation. It can leverage lessons learned from states like Ohio, New York, and Georgia, as well as the eight member districts of the California Office to Reform Education, including Sacramento City Unified. Specifically, we recommend that state leaders focus on the following:

- **Communication:** Better communicate the shift in standards and expectations to teachers, parents, and community members.
- **Professional Development:** Disseminate high-quality professional development plans being developed by local school systems and certify professional development providers.
- **Instructional Materials:** Set standards that ensure instructional and supplemental materials are of the highest quality and fully aligned with the CCSS.
- **Implementation Costs and Technology:** Share the cost of CCSS implementation with other states, deploy cost-saving technologies, and access funding through a statewide school bond focused on technology.
- **Alignment with Higher Education:** Align expectations in colleges and universities with the new standards, particularly to streamline student placement decisions and improve teacher preparation programs.
- **Evaluation of Implementation:** With independent evaluators, examine the extent to which the CCSS are being effectively and equitably implemented in the state's schools, and use this information for continuous improvement.