

The Common Core Meets State Policy: This Changes Almost Everything

The full policy implications of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematics and English Language Arts K-12 are just beginning to unfold across the 45 states (and DC) that are working to implement them. The CCSS will impact almost all key state education policies in fundamental ways. As we learned from the 1990-2005 era of systemic state standards-based reform, when academic standards change, so do policies related to student assessment and school accountability. Moreover, many other specific policies (see Figure 1 below) must be aligned and harmonized, including state curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, K-12 and college assessment, K-12 finance, professional development, teacher evaluation/preparation, preschool, and others

(Fuhrman, 1993). In this brief, I outline what the Common Core will mean for California education policy in each of these important areas.

Some background: Before 1990 most states, including California, did not have a single set of grade by grade K-12 academic content standards in ELA and Mathematics that every district was required to adopt and every school was required to teach. A student in a family that moved from one district to another might wind up studying very different material, even if he or she stayed in the same grade. Eventually the idea of creating uniform K-12 academic standards within a state took hold, although each state in the U.S. developed and adopted its own set of standards for its schools and students.

As states pursued a standards-based reform strategy from 1990 to 2011 they also

created assessment-driven instruction policies designed to penetrate into classrooms. Many California teachers merely posted the state standards to be taught each week at the front of their classrooms. However, teacher content coverage gradually began to change, and many teachers began meeting with their colleagues to work on attaining state standards. Public awareness and acceptance of the concept of state adopted academic standards is now well established. Today California residential real estate brokers routinely provide the state Academic Performance Index results of local school to parents shopping for homes.

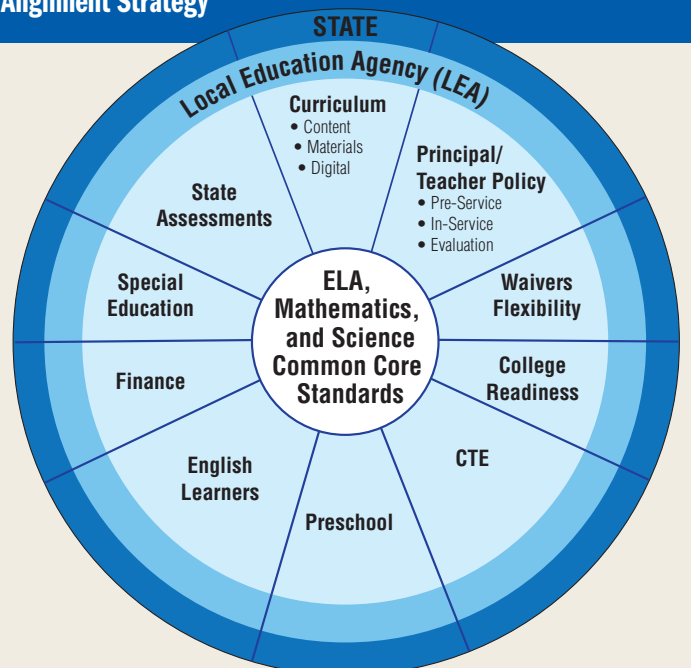
Where we are now: Figure 1 depicts graphically many of the state policies that must change to be aligned and coherent with Common Core State Standards. As elsewhere, policymakers in California must elim-

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Figure 1: State Policy Alignment Strategy



inate contradictions between policies, look for gaps where no policy currently exists, such as instructional transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten, and ensure that newly aligned policies like those concerning professional development have sufficient breadth and depth to cover all teachers who need help.

For example, in the past the introduction of ambitious learning standards conflicted with assessment policy because existing multiple choice assessments failed to measure the deeper learning needed by students, and provided too little information to teachers about student performance. This conflict should be avoided with the Common Core State Standards because an equal amount of effort is going into the development of next generation, computer-adaptive student assessment systems that will more robustly measure student learning against the standards.

The Common Core State Standards are designed to transform current instruction by focusing teacher attention on fewer, higher, and deeper standards (NGA/CCSSO, 2010). Current state assessment and accountability systems in California, however, are not aligned with the Common Core's specific instructional approach.

The deeper learning that CCSS aims to encourage has many elements¹ including:

- An understanding of the meaning of ideas and their relevance to concrete problems
- An ability to apply core concepts and modes of inquiry to complex real-world tasks
- A capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new situations, to build on and use them
- The abilities to communicate ideas and to collaborate in problem solving
- An ongoing ability to learn to learn

More specifically, Common Core English Language Arts standards encompass:

- Reading increasingly complex texts closely
- Communicating effectively in multiple media and across content areas
- Using evidence; interpreting with justification
- Engaging in inquiry and research

Similarly, Common Core Mathematics standards contain several characteristics, including:

- Engaging in mathematical practices that use mathematical reasoning in application
- Using mathematical skills across content areas and contexts
- Being able to “understand,” “describe,” “explain,” “justify,” “prove,” “derive,” “assess,” “illustrate,” and “analyze”
- Being able to “model,” “construct,” “compare,” “investigate,” “build,” “interpret,” “estimate,” “summarize,” “represent,” “evaluate,” “extend,” and “apply” learning to a wide range of real world problems, including uses in science, engineering, and technology problems

Accomplishing these more ambitious learning goals will require the current policy debate on teacher evaluation to move beyond the question whether multiple-choice tests should be a crucial indicator of teacher quality. Discussions will focus on the extent to which student outcomes on the new types of assessment should be considered in assessing teacher quality.

The California Education Policy Process

California education policy is crafted within a complex educational governance structure that includes schools, school districts, and county education offices, along with a wide variety of state and federal agencies. All of these agencies have overlapping responsibilities. This section of the brief describes key areas of California state policy development in progress, and outlines prospective implementation.

Standards, Frameworks, and Instructional Materials

Standards: The federally reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1996 required by the beginning of the 1997–98 school year that states adopt challenging state content standards in at least reading and mathematics and performance standards showing the level students are expected to attain. In 1997, California adopted nationally recognized standards for

Mathematics and English Language Arts, followed by the adoption of standards for science and history-social science in 1998. In addition to the adoption of standards for these core courses, the State Board adopted standards for visual and performing arts, physical education, health education, world languages, and school libraries.

In June of 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts. The new standards build upon the strengths of the initial 1997 California standards and are research-based and internationally benchmarked. In August 2010, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the CCSS for California.

The standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn from kindergarten through grade twelve in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts (including literacy standards for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects). They are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills needed for high school graduates to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses, and workforce training programs.

Building upon the adoption of the CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics, California has also updated, revised, and aligned its English language development standards for English language learners. The California Department of Education (CDE) convened a group of experts in English language instruction, curriculum, and assessment. After receiving widespread public support, the new standards were adopted by the SBE in 2012.

In addition, California is one of 26 lead state partners developing the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The Winter 2012 release of the *Framework for K-12 Science Education* presented the second draft of the new science standards. This framework identified the core ideas and practices in natural sciences and engineering with which all students should be familiar by the time they graduate from high school. As a second step, through a state-led process, new K–12 science standards are now under development.

The new science standards will be rich in content and practice, and sequenced across disciplines and grades to provide all students with a thorough and coherent science education. They are also closely aligned by grade to the Common Core Mathematics standards. The final version of the NGSS will be presented to the state board to consider for adoption in November 2013.

Frameworks: While standards designate what students should learn at specific grade levels, curriculum frameworks provide guidelines and research-based approaches to instruction to ensure optimal learning for all students. Frameworks also include guidance and criteria for publishers who are developing instructional materials for kindergarten through grade eight that are aligned to the standards.

An Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), established by legislation in 2011, is charged with recommending curriculum frameworks and instructional materials to the State Board of Education. The commission will also advise and make recommendations to the SBE on the alignment of academic standards, curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, professional development programs, pupil assessments, and academic accountability systems. The IQC is headed by former State Superintendent Bill Honig.

The Commission will recommend a revised Mathematics Framework to the SBE in June 2014 with a 60-day public review in July and August of 2013, and a final Mathematics Framework recommendation to the SBE in November 2013. The revision of the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* will follow a similar adoption process as mathematics.

Instructional Materials: California Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) Tom Torlakson invited publishers of mathematics and English language arts instructional materials to submit supplemental instructional materials that bridge the gap between programs currently used by local educational agencies and the Common Core State Standards. Teachers and content experts recruited by SPI Torlakson and the State Board reviewed the supplemental materials

for alignment with the CCSS, and the SBE adopted them in November 2012. The result is a list of approved supplemental materials that are aligned to the CCSS and may be considered by districts for purchase to support the local implementation of the CCSS.

Local districts will then determine curricular priorities, adopt supplemental and core materials for kindergarten through grade eight, and adopt high school materials according to their local needs for supporting student success. Future state materials activities will focus upon endorsing instructional materials rather than on adopting textbooks on a seven-year cycle.

Assessment Programs

California's assessment system currently measures student performance using the California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 2-12, in history/social studies in grades 8-11 and science in grades 5, 8, and 10-12. The state's assessment system also includes a variety of other student tests. The vast majority of these assessments are included in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, which is scheduled to lapse in 2014.

In anticipation of the reauthorization of the assessment program, Assembly Bill 250 required the state superintendent to consult with a broad range of stakeholders on assessment issues and provide recommendations to the Legislature by January 2013. Among many key considerations addressed in the recommendations are the following:

- The extent to which California will develop assessments for grades and subjects not required by ESEA²
- The future of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) requirement
- The relationship between secondary pupil assessments and college/career readiness
- The role of the state in developing diagnostic, interim, and/or formative assessments
- The use, if any, of matrix testing to minimize individual pupil testing time

- The use of technology to enhance assessments and provide more rapid feedback to teachers, parents, and students
- The assurance that assessments are fair, reliable, and valid for all pupils, including English learners, students with disabilities, and pupils who may have limited access to technology

For the past two years, two assessment consortia funded with over \$375 million by the United States Department of Education, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), have been developing new assessments that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. These assessments will provide information about students' readiness for college and careers at several grade levels. State participation in the two consortia is voluntary. In June 2011, California joined SBAC as a governing state, giving California an active role in the development of the assessments. SBAC will provide assessments for grades 3-8 and 11 that are scheduled for full implementation in the 2014-15 school year. The new assessments will meet ESEA testing requirements, and will be fully aligned to the CCSS.

Because the extension or revision of the statewide assessment program will occur through future legislation, many details regarding the number and types of assessments have yet to be determined. Once the statewide assessments are in place and details are released regarding the use of Smarter Balanced interim and formative assessments, local districts will determine which, if any, additional assessments to implement locally.

Accountability Systems

The primary statewide accountability system for schools in California is the Academic Performance Index (API), established by the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. To date, the API has been calculated based on pupil performance on the California Standards Tests assessments and the California High School Exit Examination,

²ESEA requires states to assess all pupils each year in grades three through eight and at least once in high school in the subjects of ELA and Mathematics. In addition, ESEA requires that the state assess the English language proficiency of all English learner pupils in kindergarten through grade twelve. The results of these assessments are used for state and federal accountability purposes.

both of which rely almost exclusively on multiple choice items.

Senate Bill 1458, signed by Governor Brown in 2012, revises the Academic Performance Index, and requires that—commencing in 2016—achievement tests shall constitute no more than 60 percent of the API for high schools. SB 1458 also authorizes the SBE to expand the API to include college and career readiness indices, middle and high school promotion rates, and middle school matriculation rates, along with high school graduation and dropout rates. Contingent on budget appropriations, the bill also authorizes the state board to develop a system for school review featuring locally convened panels and site visits. Lastly, the bill requires the state superintendent to recommend to the State Board of Education methods of increasing student achievement in science and history-social studies, as well

as alternatives to the current practice of ranking schools by API decile ranking. Further legislative changes to align the API with the new or revised assessments based on CCSS will be required as the assessment system is reauthorized.

In addition to the Academic Performance Index, every California school is required by 1998’s Proposition 98 to produce an annual School Accountability Report Card (SARC) to guarantee accountability for dollars spent. Since 1988, SARC requirements have been revised more than ten times. Current school report cards include a long list of detailed information related to school climate and staffing, academic achievement, and college and career preparation. The California Department of Education and the state board are in the process of considering how the SARC could be improved to be made

more accessible and useful as an accountability tool for parents and other constituencies.

The process for developing and adopting these three sets of policy changes is presented in Figure 2. As the Figure makes clear, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will require coordinated action by key policy actors to prepare California’s education system for the major changes that are in store between now and 2014.

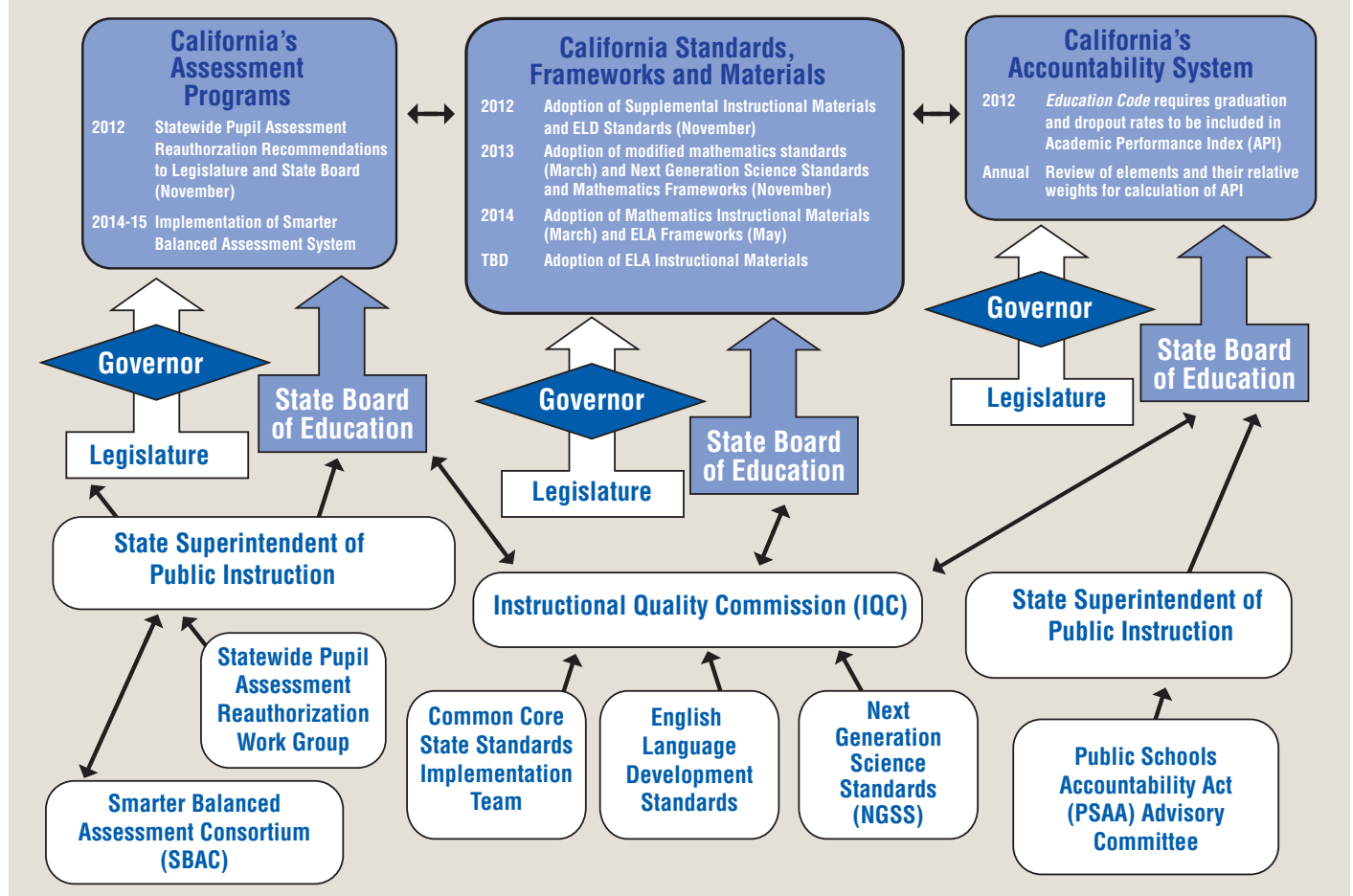
A Variety of Other State Policies That Need to be Aligned

Figure 1 (on front cover) provided an overview of major state policies that must be revised to align with Common Core. The Figure shows that many other policies will have to change in addition to those related to standards, assessment, and accountability.

For example, California’s system of K-12 school finance has been a complex fifty-year

Figure 2

Statewide Implementation System for Assessment, Standards, and Accountability Programs



accretion of various laws and amendments, including 56 separate categorical programs. It does not adjust adequately for pupil needs. Governor Brown has proposed a large-scale deregulation and local-control funding formula that will change the way state funds are distributed to provide additional support for students from low-income households and for English learners.

Classroom implementation of the CCSS will require massive professional development aligned to the new aspects of Common Core. California teacher preparation programs and teacher professional standards need to be overhauled to accommodate the new standards. California's fiscal woes will require that new professional development delivery models including on-line programs be devised. The Common Core State Standards dramatically raise expectations for student learning. Simply adopting the CCSS standards without significantly changing instructional practices puts the more ambitious learning outcomes that CCSS promises at serious risk.

Under a 1971 state statute the process for evaluating teachers and principals is determined at the local level. As California moves to align state assessments with the Common Core, local teacher and principal evaluation systems will have to be revamped. A bill to require multiple measures of student attainment for teacher evaluation did not pass in the 2012 legislature.

Some California leaders are concerned that career and technical education (CTE) is not well represented in the Common Core State Standards. Consequently, the state department of education is redesigning CTE occupation clusters to meet Common Core standards. The State Board will act on CTE standards and policies in 2013.

California's K-12 data system (CALPADS) has been upgraded and is adequate for its current purpose. But implementation of the CCSS will require new types of data that were not anticipated when CALPADS was designed. SB 1458 initiates a process to identify additional indicators of school performance that will have to be integrated into the state's data system.

Early childhood education must be better integrated with K-12 education. California created a statewide prekindergarten program and funded it in 2012. A better instruction progression from pre-K to grade 1 could be an important boost for meeting Common Core standards in primary grades.

Aligned Policies Between K-12 and Post-Secondary Institutions

The Common Core State Standards were designed in part to close the gap between K-12 and post-secondary education. For example, the new assessments now being developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will send students and parents reliable signals about college readiness in the primary grades. Grade 11 assessments will provide clear cut-points for college readiness. California K-12 and post-secondary leaders and teachers have been meeting together to help make new policies to use the Common Core for revamping the transition to college. California State University and California Community College leaders are part of California's Smarter Balanced delegation.

Completion rates for students in California's broad access post-secondary education systems are shockingly low. Less than 25 percent of California Community College (CCC) students who begin at ages 17-20 transfer to a four-year institution or attain an associate's degree or vocational certificate (Moore et al., 2007). About half of the students who enroll in the California State University (CSU) obtain a degree within 9 years (Adelman, 2006). The rates for students entering California's community colleges who require remediation are over 70 percent, and near 55 percent for students entering four-year programs in the CSU system.

Inadequate K-12 preparation is one major cause of dismal college completion results, but college system programs and policies also play a role. Students' lack of money, long work hours, and social/family obligations also are important contributors. Neither K-12 nor post-secondary education can solve the lack of student success working alone. They must work together to accomplish their mutual goal of increasing rates of student college completion.

Many of the problems with college preparation emanate from the growing disconnect between K-12 and higher education on issues of policy, finance, academic standards, and communication. The distance between K-12 and post-secondary education was not always as wide as it is now, but it has been expanding over time. It is now a deep fissure that will be very difficult to overcome.

History also reveals that California's post-secondary education system has expanded through the gradual addition of public and private post-secondary program tiers below the traditional university course of study. Each added program tier had lower admission standards and fewer dollars per pupil. Placement exams administered in these lower tiers after pupils enroll have become more important standards than admissions criteria.

However, each lower tier followed the University of California in moving away from linkages with K-12 schools. Many CSU campuses were once two-year teacher training institutions, but now are four-year comprehensive universities. Community colleges were once part of K-12 school districts in California, but now operate independently from local K-12 schools. Consequently, secondary school students and teachers receive fewer and weaker signals about what academic preparation students need to succeed in broad access colleges.

With the exception of the Advanced Placement program and the voluntary grade 11 assessment that is part of the Early Assessment Program, there are few major efforts to provide California with curricular coherence and sequencing between the senior year of secondary school and post-secondary education. The role of the senior year in high school as a platform for post-secondary general education is rarely discussed. Nor has anyone proposed a conception of post-secondary general education that tightly links the academic content of high schools to the first two years of college. Instead, many students face an eclectic academic muddle in Grades 10-14 until they select a college major.

In sum, prior to the Common Core the high school curriculum was largely unmoored from the freshman and sopho-

more college curriculum, and from any continuous vision of general education. Policymakers for the secondary and post-secondary schools worked in separate orbits that rarely interacted. Access, rather than preparation, is the major emphasis of many of the professionals who mediate between the high schools and the colleges: high school counselors, college recruiters, and college admissions and financial aid officers. The implementation of CCSS provides a unique opportunity to strengthen alignment across the divide between K-12 and post-secondary education in California.

Concluding Comments

It is much easier and cheaper to change state policy than to change what happens in classrooms. Human and organizational capacity building at the local level is expensive and difficult to carry out. Moreover, California needs to spend more on assessment than the current level of 10 dollars per pupil, and local districts must have the teaching capacity to prepare students for the new state assessments. Technology and digital platforms must be designed to lower the capacity building costs in such areas as intensive professional development.

Essentially, California is trying to implement a 21st century vision of K-12 education using 20th century local school structures, resources, and culture. The integrated research and development to build more effective teaching practice, tools, and resources is only now under way (Polikoff, 2012). In the previous era of standards-based reform California often spent less on local capacity building than was necessary to meet new accountability requirements. The Smarter Balanced assessments begin in 2014-15, so the phase-in of all these new aligned policies is urgent, complex, and yet to be specified.

California tried to implement a new assessment system called the California Learning Assessment in 1993. There was inadequate public understanding of the large change, and the new system was aborted (Kirst and Mazzeo, 1996). If it is not to suffer the same fate, the Common Core State Standards will require a major communications

campaign to garner public understanding and support.

The Common Core standards provide a great opportunity for improving student attainment, and a great challenge for California to implement. Common Core is much more than just a new array of standards. It provides a new vision for teaching and learning that builds upon what the state began in the 1990s. Also, it is better aligned to the changing economy and demography of California. California implemented an earlier version of systemic standards-based reform in the past 15 years, so state and local educators know much of what is necessary for Common Core's bolder vision. The size of California, however, exacerbates the challenges ahead of us: over 6 million students, nearly 300,000 teachers, 1.6 million English Language Learners, and 1,000 school districts. Implementation will require sustained political will, and educators to persist and change.

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