Leadership for the Common Core:

More Than One Thousand School Principals Respond

naesp

National Association of
Elementary School
Principals

Foreword

Our nation has reached an urgent tipping point. If national, state and local systems do not take action to provide appropriate support and resources for school leadership and principals, our nation's schools will continue to struggle to meet the increasing demands of reforms. This phenomenon is more evident than ever before, as principals and teachers work to implement the instructional shifts and changes in classroom activities that accompany implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Over the past five years, a myriad of reform initiatives, increased student poverty and mobility, and diminishing resources have dramatically affected schools, putting enormous pressure on educators' abilities to meet students' learning needs. Amazingly, the role of the principal has been seriously overlooked in far too many national and state-level discussions related to college and career-ready state standards, particularly in the evolution, state adoption and implementation of the CCSS. This is a profound and disturbing oversight given the research substantiating the role of principals as the primary catalysts for change and improvement in schools.

To explore the impact of state adoption of CCSS on principals and the ability to lead school and student success, NAESP set out to understand how principals are leading the CCSS implementation and their preparation for dealing with the inherent challenges in doing so. A comprehensive survey of more than 1000 principals was conducted in 14 states. In this process, NAESP explored the gap between teacher and principal preparation and on-going support for implementation; beliefs, actions and attitudes held by school leaders; and the willingness of school leaders to continue to engage deeply in the implementation of CCSS.

Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of principals strongly agree that CCSS will provide more meaningful assessments of student learning, increase students' skill mastery across subjects, and provide a curriculum frame leading to deeper understanding of conceptual thinking. Most principals in states surveyed are familiar with the standards themselves, as well as the curricular changes that must accompany the standards, and most had received some level of professional development on CCSS.

However, despite the professional development, principals indicated they largely lack necessary preparation to lead and sustain the vision of CCSS over the long term. Principals said they need more adequate preparation and professional development to manage the change process in the schools; evaluate teachers' use of the new standards during instruction; align the school's instructional focus; make key decisions on the best types of professional development to support teachers; and develop extended learning opportunities to sufficiently address CCSS implementation. Further, they need sufficient allocation of financial resources to implement the array of school-based activities.

Principals are highly supportive of changes in practice that they believe will lead to improved instruction and learning. However, they believe that efficient and meaningful change will take more time, and they are most capable of impacting improvements in student achievement when they are prepared and sufficiently equipped with the tools needed to lead dramatic instructional shifts to meet school-wide learning goals. The roll-out and execution of online assessments related to CCSS further exacerbates the tipping point education systems are sure to face if critical gaps in principal and school readiness are not addressed as a highest priority.

As the initiative moves forward, it is imperative that state and local systems provide adequate professional development and resources for all educators and education stakeholders who support the CCSS implementation. This includes providing the technology and infrastructure schools need to administer and collect data related to new curricula to ensure that it is in fact leading to improved instruction and learning at deeper, more rigorous levels.

Building the capacity of principals through quality professional development, and providing supports for competent instructional leadership and evaluation systems that are used for the purpose of continual professional growth, are imperative for the vision of CCSS to be fully realized.

We urge educators and policymakers at all levels of government to use the findings and information contained from this survey to improve conditions for principals as they work to implement CCSS and provide a high quality education for every student.

Sincerely,

Gail Connelly
Executive Director, NAESP

More Than One Thousand School Principals Respond

AUTHORS
Matt Clifford
American Institutes for Research

Christine Mason
Center for Educational Improvement
at the NAESP Foundation

Introduction

Educators, parents, and other constituents are engaging in an important dialogue about Common Core State Standards that has ramifications for the future of K-12 academic content in critical subject areas. For many, the new standards represent a new way of teaching and learning that emphasizes deep conceptual understanding. Others view the Common Core as clarifying expectations for student learning, thereby improving equity of student access to learning opportunities.

Individual states coalesced in the initial effort to adopt a common set of state standards. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) have been instrumental in their roles in both spearheading this effort and garnering widespread support for the Common Core. Currently, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories have adopted the standards into law. According to information provided by CCSSO (2013), 27 states were expected to implement the Common Core by 2013-2014, and 14 more were expected to implement it by 2014-2015.

> "Common Core State Standards are making teachers teach differently, but it's making students think differently in terms of how they go about coming up with the answers. So, in my opinion, instruction is much deeper than it was in the past."
>
> **—NAESP principal leader**

Adopting the Common Core into law was a first step. If the Common Core are to affect the learning of the nation's 34 million public school students, they must be implemented in daily instructional interactions among teachers, students, and academic content. The scope of change cannot be understated. The Common Core set new expectations for teaching and learning in English language arts and mathematics, and they institute

significant changes to curriculum. Implementation of the new standards is an equally critical, if not more ambitious, step that requires local educators to rethink curriculum, instruction, and assessment; explain changes to parents and community members; and change instructional practices.

Our current instructional approaches were developed to fit expectations for public schooling and our conception of good teaching as it appeared to be during a time of teacher-centered education (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). However, education is evolving, and the future appears to hold a dramatically different mission for schools as they incorporate technologies and other educational innovations and move from preparing students for traditional, Industrial-age jobs to a rapidly changing workforce. The Common Core, historically significant in and of themselves, are being implemented in the midst of dramatic changes in expectations for schools. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) stated, "The new mission of schools is to prepare students to work at jobs that do not yet exist, creating ideas and solutions for products and problems that have not yet been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented" (p. 2).

> "Common Core implementation is going to come down to the principal. We're the ones that are going to be implementing Common Core with our teachers, not the superintendent and not the state legislature."
>
> **—NAESP principal**

As local change facilitators, school principals are essential in Common Core implementation. By virtue of their position, principals are responsible for setting instructional improvement priorities; channeling resources toward initiatives; engaging staff members in curriculum revision; providing or supporting educator professional development; assessing teacher performance; and coordinating change processes with districts, staff, and community members (Clifford, Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principals are playing critical roles as they lead schools where students are making significant academic advances (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Research indicates that principals' knowledge, understanding, and experience influence how curriculum policies are enacted in programs and classrooms (Halverson & Clifford, forthcoming; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Some principals, for example, may understand the Common Core to be a perfect fit with what their schools are currently doing, while others view their schools as in need of change.

Given the potential influence of principals on Common Core implementation, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) sought to learn more about principals' understanding, beliefs, and actions with respect to the Common Core. With support from multiple partners (see Box 1), NAESP created and administered the *Leadership for the Common Core* survey to K-12 public school principals in 14 states that are implementing the Common Core. More than 1,000 principals responded to the survey, and their responses provide a snapshot of principals' perspectives and experience in these states. NAESP also conducted two focus groups with principals to explore principals' understanding and experiences with the Common Core. The quotes throughout this brief are from focus group members.

Box 1. **Survey Methods**

NAESP conducted the *Leadership for the Common Core* survey in collaboration with an advisory committee composed of representatives from the NGA, CCSSO, American Association of School Administrators, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Teachers College at Columbia University, and the Wallace Foundation. American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted the survey using an email-to-online survey method.

The survey focused on principals in 14 states selected for their geographic distribution and the inclusion of some of the largest urban centers, as well as suburban and rural representation. The states included the six districts from the Wallace Principal Pipeline Initiative, which provides significant support to build academic achievement and school leadership (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Among the 14 states were several that had strong reputations for their work in leading Common Core implementation. NAESP personnel, in consultation with the advisory committee, applied these criteria and selected California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington. The list of eligible principals was sourced from Market Data Retrieval's database, which allowed NAESP to gather respondent and school demographic data. A total of 32,458 principals were eligible to complete the survey.

The survey opened in December 2012 and closed in February 2013. Respondents were provided opportunities to participate in a raffle of funding for technology and supplies for the school. Principals in the 14 states received a minimum of three email reminders during the course of three waves of notifications. The survey yielded 1,100 responses, or 3.4 percent of the total. In addition, Collaborative Communications, a contracted communications and public relations firm, conducted two focus groups with 20 principals at the NAESP National Leaders Conference in February 2013.

AIR conducted a descriptive survey analysis. Although data were analyzed multiple ways, the brief displays data disaggregated by school locale. For the purposes of this report, an *urban principal* is a principal who works in a school located in or within 5 miles of an urban center and has more than 50,000 people in the community. A *suburban principal* is one who works in a school located between 5 and 100 miles from an urban center and has between 15,000 and 50,000 people in the community. A *rural principal* is a principal who works in a school located more than 100 miles from an urban center and has less than 15,000 people in the community.

Because of low response rates to the survey, we recommend that readers avoid generalizing to the entire principal workforce. The data in this report are useful in providing perspectives of 1,100 principals, a group that has not been surveyed about Common Core implementation previously.

Principals Value and Prioritize the Common Core

The *Leadership for the Common Core* survey asked principals about their priorities with respect to the Common Core because of the importance of understanding how principals were responding to this initiative when faced with multiple competing priorities. Questions were based on our knowledge that principals' understanding of policy, perspective on school priorities, and experience all impact the priority decisions they make in determining their actions. The 1,100 principals who responded to the survey set the Common Core as a top priority for their schools, and they reported being familiar with the state Common Core law and implementation timeline. Further, the principals valued the goals of Common Core legislation.

Two survey items asked principals to rate the level of priority given to the Common Core in their schools and in their own professional learning plans. Principals rated their level of priority regarding the Common Core and their schools and their own professional learning plans on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (*not a priority*) to 4 (*high priority*). The 1,100 survey respondents viewed the Common Core as a high priority for their organization (see Figure 1), and more than 80 percent of the respondents viewed the Common Core as a moderate or high priority.

Figure 1. **Respondent Prioritization of the Common Core for School Development**

How high a priority are Common Core State Standards for Principals' School Improvement Agendas?

● Not a priority
● Somewhat of a priority
● Moderate priority
● High priority
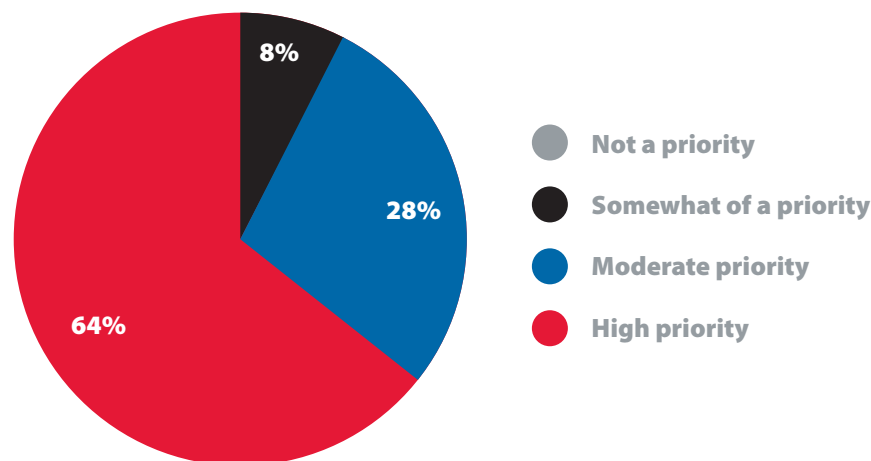
When asked how high a priority the Common Core were for principals' own professional development, 64 percent of the respondents indicated that the Common Core were a high priority, and when considering their own learning, there were no respondents rating the Common Core as "not a priority."

The priorities for their own learning and for their schools were common to all principals, regardless of school locale. As Table 1 indicates, the mean response for both questions and all locales was a 3.5 or 3.6.

Focus group member responses supported survey findings on Common Core priorities for school improvement and professional learning. Several focus group members explained that Common Core had to be a priority for their own professional development because they were responsible for initiating change processes. The focus group members noted that principals must be capable of doing the following:

- Monitoring Common Core implementation in instruction

- Explaining Common Core, its value, and the instructional implications across subjects at all grade levels

- Cultivating a supportive climate and teacher leadership to support the innovation

- Providing teachers rich examples of Common Core instruction to guide changes in practice

- Scheduling for and supporting change strategies such as the use of professional learning communities (PLCs)

- Understanding the scope, cost, and strategy for change and having some degree of budget authority to be a part of making critical decisions about budget allocations and expenditures

The focus group members sought professional learning opportunities addressing these knowledge domains.

Table 1. **Respondent Prioritization of the Common Core by School Locale**

Item	Rural		Suburban		Urban	
How high a priority is…	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your own professional development with respect to the Common Core?	**3.5**	**0.7**	**3.6**	**0.7**	**3.6**	**0.6**
The Common Core as a guiding factor in your school improvement plan?	**3.6**	**0.6**	**3.5**	**0.7**	**3.6**	**0.7**

The survey included one question on principal familiarity with Common Core and one question about whether principals view Common Core as better than current policies and practices. The rationale for these questions was based on research regarding the relationship between principal knowledge, beliefs, and decision making. Specifically, the research indicates that when making decisions and setting priorities, principals apply their knowledge and previous experience of instructional standards (e.g., English language arts, mathematics) or other content to new policies (Spillane et al., 2002). They also consider the likelihood that the proposed policies, in comparison with current policies, improve conditions for achieving goals (Clifford, 2009). Although principals do not necessarily need a thorough or deep understanding of curriculum content to enact improvements, they must be knowledgeable about educational policies and the instructional implications of these policies (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007). The survey asked principals to rate their familiarity with the following key aspects of Common Core implementation:
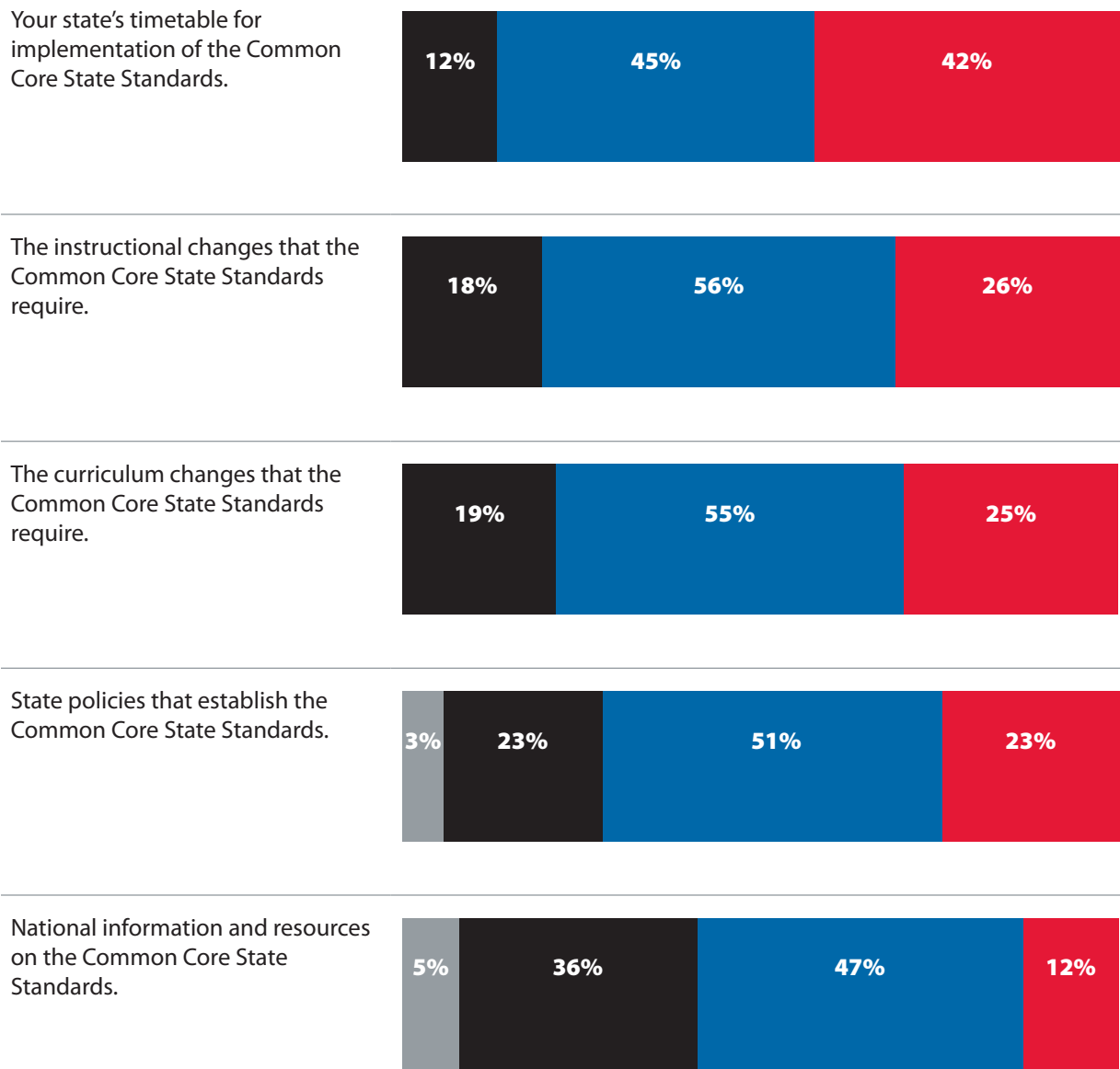
- Instructional changes entailed by the Common Core

- Curriculum changes required by the Common Core

- State policies that established the Common Core

- National information and resources for Common Core support

- The state timeline for Common Core implementation

As Figure 2 shows, more than 80 percent of the responding principals reported that they were "familiar" or "very familiar" with curriculum and instructional changes, state law, and implementation timelines associated with the Common Core. The principals had less knowledge about national information and resources that are available to support the Common Core, but more than 50 percent considered themselves familiar or very familiar with the national resources.

Suburban, urban, and rural principals differed in their responses to the items, but no rating pattern can be observed (Table 2). In some categories, the mean rating was higher for one type of principal or another. For nearly all items, however, suburban principals' ratings varied more that rural or urban principals, as represented by the higher standard deviation on all items but the first.

Figure 2. **The Principals' Familiarity With Key Aspects of the Common Core by Percent Response**

Your state's timetable for implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

| 12% | 45% | 42% |

The instructional changes that the Common Core State Standards require.

| 18% | 56% | 26% |

The curriculum changes that the Common Core State Standards require.

| 19% | 55% | 25% |

State policies that establish the Common Core State Standards.

| 3% | 23% | 51% | 23% |

National information and resources on the Common Core State Standards.

| 5% | 36% | 47% | 12% |

- ● Not at all familiar
- ● Somewhat familiar
- ● Familiar
- ● Very familiar

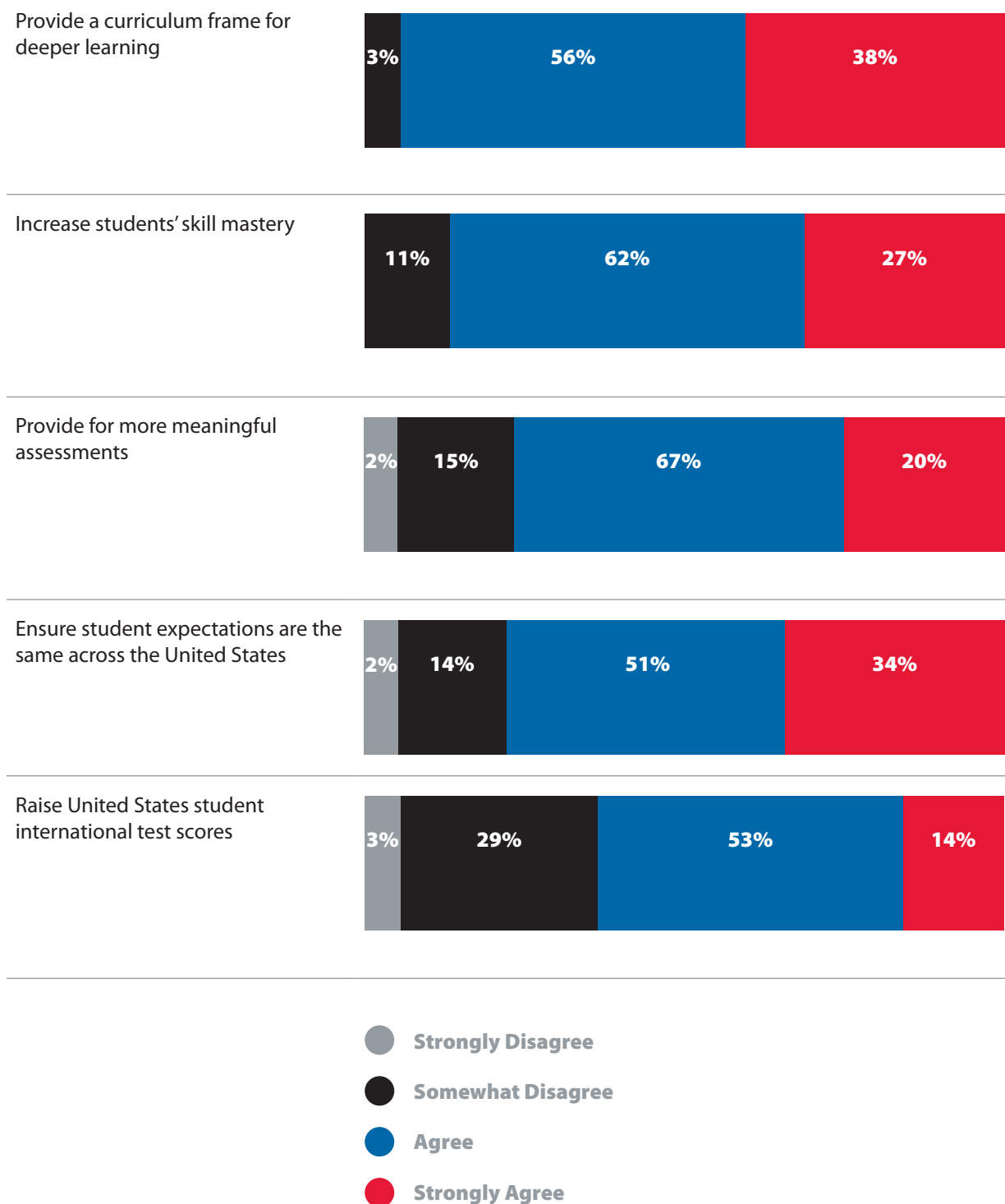Table 2. **Mean and Standard Deviation Differences by Principals' School Urbanity**

Item	Rural		Suburban		Urban	
What is your level of familiarity with…	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your state's timetable for implementation of the Common Core?	**3.27**	**0.73**	**3.31**	**0.67**	**3.26**	**0.71**
The instructional changes that the Common Core require?	**3.05**	**0.64**	**3.08**	**0.71**	**3.10**	**0.64**
The curriculum changes that the Common Core require?	**3.05**	**0.64**	**3.09**	**0.72**	**3.01**	**0.68**
State policies that established the Common Core as the new focus for K-12 public education?	**3.03**	**0.72**	**2.90**	**0.82**	**2.86**	**0.74**
National information and resources on the Common Core?	**2.60**	**0.72**	**2.71**	**0.80**	**2.63**	**0.73**

Another survey question solicited principal perspectives on the advantages of Common Core implementation. Like most people, principals are more likely to work for change when they believe something new will achieve ends that current practices cannot achieve. Common Core State Standards are considered by the CCSSO as a way to do the following:

● Make assessments more meaningful

● Increase student skill mastery

● Provide a curriculum frame for deep conceptual learning

● Raise U.S. student international test scores

● Ensure student expectations are the same across the United States

More than 80 percent of the responding principals believed that the Common Core would achieve each of these goals (see Figure 3). More than 80 percent of the principals also viewed the Common Core as providing a framework for deeper learning, leading to increases in student skills mastery, making assessments more meaningful, and ensuring all students meet the same, high expectations. Fewer, but still two thirds (67 percent), of the principals believed the Common Core would raise U.S. student international test scores. The finding suggests that the principals agreed with the premises that underlie the Common Core and also believed in the potential of the Common Core to achieve important gains for student academic learning.

Figure 3. **Principal Relative Agreement With Statements About Common Core Goals**

Provide a curriculum frame for deeper learning

| 3% | 56% | 38% |

Increase students' skill mastery

| 11% | 62% | 27% |

Provide for more meaningful assessments

| 2% | 15% | 67% | 20% |

Ensure student expectations are the same across the United States

| 2% | 14% | 51% | 34% |

Raise United States student international test scores

| 3% | 29% | 53% | 14% |

Strongly Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

As Table 3 shows, principal responses to the items varied somewhat by school locale, but the differences were small. Suburban principal responses varied more than urban or rural principals, as represented by higher standard deviation scores.

Table 3. **Principals Views of Common Core Goals, by School Locale**

Item	Rural		Suburban		Urban	
To what extent do you agree that the Common Core will….	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Raise U.S. student international test scores?	**3.27**	**0.73**	**3.31**	**0.67**	**3.26**	**0.71**
Provide more meaningful assessments?	**3.05**	**0.64**	**3.08**	**0.71**	**3.10**	**0.64**
Increase students' skill mastery?	**3.05**	**0.64**	**3.09**	**0.72**	**3.01**	**0.68**
Provide a curriculum frame for deeper learning?	**3.03**	**0.72**	**2.90**	**0.82**	**2.86**	**0.74**
Ensure student expectations are the same across the United States?	**2.60**	**0.72**	**2.71**	**0.80**	**2.63**	**0.73**

The data from respondents to the leadership survey show that these principals agree that the Common Core will result in improved educational practices and student achievement gains. Data from the focus group members support survey findings and focus group members pointed to the quality of standards implementation as critical to achieving important goals. However, the focus group members were concerned that the Common Core would not achieve desired ends unless the standards resulted in school-level actions.

Principals Engage in Professional Development but Seek Professional Learning Tailored to Leadership Tasks

Survey responses indicate that principals support the Common Core and view standards adoption as a focus for organizational learning and personal professional development (see Table 1, page 6). Principals are following through on their priorities. All (100 percent) of the responding principals reported that they had engaged in professional development focused on the Common Core in the past two years. As Table 4 shows, 42 percent of respondents reported that they had completed five or more trainings on the Common Core, and 37 percent had completed between three to four professional development activities during the past two years. Urban principals reported participating in a higher number of Common Core professional development activities than suburban or rural principals.

Table 4. **Principal Participation in Common Core–Focused Professional Learning Activities in the Past 24 Months**

	None	1 to 2 Activities	3 to 4 Activities	5 or More Activities
All principals in all locales	0%	21%	37%	42%
Rural principals	0%	24%	35%	41%
Urban principals	0%	17%	37%	46%
Suburban principals	0%	21%	39%	40%

Although principals attended professional development, they report that professional learning experiences are not specifically tailored to leadership tasks and therefore do not provide guidance about *how* to bring about the needed instructional and assessment changes in their buildings to obtain the desired results.

As Table 5 shows, about one third of respondents participated in no Common Core professional development designed for principals. Rural principals reported participating in fewer principal-oriented professional development sessions on the Common Core than principals from urban or suburban settings. Suburban principals, in comparison with other principals, more frequently attended professional development on leadership tasks than principals from other locales.

Table 5. **Respondent Participation in Common Core Professional Development for Principals**

	None	1 to 2 Activities	3 to 4 Activities	5 or More Activities
All principals in all locales	24%	43%	26%	7%
Rural principals	30%	44%	23%	3%
Urban principals	24%	45%	22%	9%
Suburban principals	17%	40%	34%	9%

Principals Take Action but Feel Underprepared for the Common Core

The survey asked principals about the actions they had taken to lead standards adoption processes. Researchers note that any organizational change involves a series of stages. The *Leadership for the Common Core* survey asked principals about their preparation to lead three broad stages of the change process: (1) communicating the need, (2) supporting individual change, and (3) integrating practices into the organization (see Table 6, left column). These stages are reflected in items created for the *Leadership for the Common Core* survey and posed to principals on the survey (see Table 6, center column).

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they were prepared to complete stages of the change process by selecting the appropriate statement on the Likert scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a great extent*) of preparation. Table 6 displays the average scores for each item for all 1,100 principals, organized from highest to lowest score on each stage.

Table 6. **All Principals' Self-Ratings on Preparedness to Enact the Common Core**

Stage	Item	Mean Score
Communicating the need	**Convey what the Common Core is about to your teachers and school staff.**	**3.3**
	Influence teachers' motivation to implement the Common Core.	**3.2**
	Clearly communicate to teachers the types of changes required by implementation of the Common Core.	**3.1**
	Prioritize the Common Core implementation, given other pressing needs.	**3.0**
Support individual change	**Plan effective professional development to facilitate Common Core implementation.**	**3.0**
	Provide effective instructional models for teachers to help support implementation of the Common Core in the classroom.	**2.9**
	Access practical how-to guidance to support the changes necessary to implement the Common Core.	**2.9**
	Make high-quality professional development available to teachers.	**2.8**
	Budget for effective Common Core implementation.	**2.5**
Integrating practices into the organization	**Align the school's curriculum and instructional focus with the Common Core.**	**3.0**
	Evaluate teachers on implementation of the Common Core.	**2.9**
	Incorporate the Common Core with new teacher evaluations or other state/national initiatives.	**2.9**
	Assure Common Core–aligned programs are in place to positively affect students who struggle academically.	**2.7**
	Integrate the Common Core with programs that serve English-language learners, special education students, or students in other subgroups.	**2.6**
	Use expanded learning opportunities (e.g., extended-day, afterschool programs) to support the Common Core.	**2.4**

A pattern emerges in Table 6 that applies to principals from rural, suburban, and urban schools. As Table 6 indicates, principals felt prepared to implement the first stage of the change process—communicating the need and the vision—but considered themselves less prepared for the second or third phases of change. The responses indicate four areas where principals report the lowest levels of readiness: (1) integrating the Common Core into expanded learning opportunities, (2) supporting struggling learners, (3) implementing the Common Core with struggling learners, and (4) budgeting for Common Core implementation in their schools. Use of expanded learning opportunities to support Common Core had the lowest average score, and the highest percentage of all respondents stating that they were "not at all" prepared to take this action.

Focus group data further emphasized principals' questions about their opportunities to budget for the Common Core and sustain Common Core implementation with professional learning, curriculum, and technology. Focus group members consistently viewed the Common Core as a mandate that does not include sufficient funding for implementation at the building level. Further, they were concerned that they were expected to facilitate implementation at a time when they were experiencing reductions in their school budgets. Although Common Core implementation requires teacher professional development and curriculum development, principals in the *Leadership for the Common Core* focus groups were not provided additional funding for local design activities. The principals, for example, commented that school budgets and acquisition cycles did not correspond with Common Core implementation, which hampered textbook and technology purchases.

"Implementation has been difficult in our state, as it probably has been in a lot of other states, because we have seen financial cuts in teacher assistance and other resources. [For example,] the textbooks are out of date, but we're not getting new ones because we do not have the funding to do so."

—NAESP principal

According to our focus group participants, Common Core implementation has either begun or plans are in place for full implementation within the next academic year in their states, and student testing will follow immediately for the majority of schools in these states. Yet the principals believed themselves underprepared for full implementation of the Common Core, particularly in programs for special population students and expanded learning opportunities.

Despite principals' sense that they are underprepared, they are moving forward to enact the Common Core. When asked to identify key actions in each stage, principals reported that they had taken actions in each stage (Table 7). With some variation, the data represent principals from urban, rural, and suburban schools.

Table 7. **Steps Taken by Principals to Implement the Common Core**

Stage	Item	Percent of Respondents
Communicating the need	Created a leadership plan, objectives, and a timeline for implementation of the Common Core.	67%
	Adjusted our school improvement priorities to accommodate Common Core–related activities.	56%
Support individual change	Convened teacher grade-level groups, PLCs, or other teacher teams to learn about the Common Core.	95%
	Sent school staff members to professional development sessions on the Common Core.	89%
Integrated practices	Modified our mathematics curriculum to align with the Common Core.	76%
	Modified student assessments to include activities such as use of informational texts, integrating literacy across the curriculum, higher-order thinking skills, real-world application, etc.	73%
	Modified the English language arts curriculum to align with the Common Core.	69%
	Gathered evidence through lesson plans, walkthroughs, and classroom observations to assess the effects of the Common Core on teaching.	62%
	Upgraded technology to prepare for implementation of the Common Core and the new assessments, which will be released in 2013-2014.	48%
	Identified or purchased new textbooks and curriculum materials that were aligned with the Common Core.	47%
	Connected the Common Core work with expanded learning opportunities (e.g., extended-day, afterschool, or summer programs) in your school.	27%
	Used expanded learning opportunities (e.g., extended school day, afterschool, summer programs) to support Common Core implementation.	26%

As Table 7 shows, nearly all principals had convened teacher teams, sent school staff members to professional development, and adjusted school improvement priorities to address the Common Core. One third or less of the principals had integrated the Common Core into expanded learning opportunities or into programs for supporting English-language learners, special education students, or other groups. To gauge the full significance of the degree of readiness for the Common Core, more information is needed.

Conclusion

Common Core State Standards have been adopted by 45 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories. This legislation ushers in a change process that aims to affect teaching and learning at all grade levels and for all students. As early as 1996, Fullan and Hargreaves identified the prime importance of principals in leading schools: effective schools are operated by effective leaders. Since that time, the Wallace Foundation (2013) and many others have continued to identify ways that principals demonstrate effective leadership. Research tells us principals' priorities, knowledge, and actions affect school policy implementation. They set the change agenda in schools. They monitor implementation, and they target resources to support a change process that will likely take years to come to fruition.

The *Leadership for the Common Core* survey polled principals from 14 states to describe their attitudes, knowledge, and actions with respect to the Common Core. The survey data were analyzed to probe for differences among principals in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Although principal responses to items varied somewhat, the analysis revealed few notable differences in principal responses based on school locale.

The survey data indicate that the principals are strong supporters of the Common Core and have the Common Core as a priority for their schools. All have pursued opportunities to learn about the Common Core, and they feel prepared to *initiate* change efforts by convening and motivating staff members. But the data also indicate that the principals are learning to lead standards improvement on their own and without access to professional development specifically targeted to their responsibilities for Common Core implementation. Although all principals participated in Common Core professional development, few had accessed professional development targeted to leadership tasks. Lacking specific training, principal focus group members expressed concern that they did not have vital information on implementation costs, change strategies, professional development, and instructional quality monitoring, which they considered essential for long-term planning and sustainability.

The survey data also indicated principals had "set the stage" for Common Core implementation by communicating with staff and motivating teachers, but they were less sure about how to proceed with incorporating changes in curriculum and instruction into day-to-day activities in schools. Also, they had not incorporated the Common Core into teacher evaluations, adapted Common Core and related instructional strategies for specific student populations, or used expanded learning opportunities (extended school day, afterschool, or summer programs) to support Common Core. Programs for special populations and expanded learning opportunities are particularly important for supporting students that may face challenges to attain the high academic standards represented by the Common Core.

Implications

Considering the context in which the Common Core are being implemented—in this era of rapid change and increased demands—principals may need to be particularly well versed in what might be termed "adaptive leadership" (Daly & Chrispeels, 2007). *To date, comparatively few resources have been set aside or provided specifically to prepare principals to adapt to the changes that are expected with the Common Core.*

Given the magnitude of the expected changes with the Common Core and the number of policy changes schools are facing, NAESP is concerned that principals are not being provided the supports and resources that are essential for them to be effective. Without additional resources and supports, and without additional involvement of principals in designing the rollout of the Common Core implementation, schools are likely to continue to struggle throughout next few years, and the stress on teachers, students, and administrators is likely to continue and perhaps even increase.

Many areas exist where additional knowledge would be helpful and additional research is needed. PLCs, for example, represent one of the foremost strategies that most principals are using in their schools to plan for and guide Common Core implementation. Certainly, taking action steps by developing PLCs and involving teachers in professional development are important steps that are supported by extensive research (Feger & Aruda, 2008). However, as Mindich and Lieberman (2012) pointed out, PLCs operate within the context of the school, and the effectiveness of PLCs varies from school to school. Mindich and Lieberman concluded that the most effective PLCs are often those where staff members have a feeling of autonomy, yet have assistance negotiating the tensions that sometimes arise as differing views are shared. Given that most principals in our sample report that they are using PLCs, it could be instructive to know more about how these Common Core PLCs are structured, how they vary, and the progress they are making in planning for the Common Core and making changes in curriculum and instruction.

Researchers point to consistent leadership as the lynchpin to educational change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013). For Common Core State Standards to succeed, principals must create conditions for integration of standards into practice, with fidelity. Results of the *Leadership for the Common Core* survey indicate principals are carrying out a delicate balancing act when initiating integration of the new standards. They are attempting to initiate change—which they enthusiastically support—without full knowledge of the costs, strategies, or monitoring approaches because few have professional development on leadership processes. They are motivating teachers to rethink curriculum and instruction while implementing other, significant policy shifts such as teacher evaluation. Survey results may be useful to national initiatives, state leaders, and district administrators as they plan strategies and programs to move the Common Core to scale.

NAESP is concerned about the stress that principals are experiencing today. These results confirm that principals, at least in the sample from 14 states, are expected to lead their organizations through major transitions without adequate resources or preparation for their new ventures. If the Common Core State Standards are going to bring about the intended changes, then the results from our sample suggest that principals need to be more involved—they need more guidance about their role, more input into this specific change process, and more resources available for direct implementation of the Common Core in their schools.

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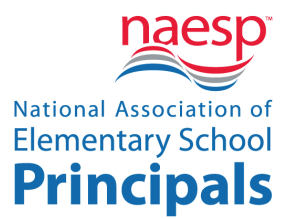
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Acknowledgments

National Association of Elementary School Principals

1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
1-800-386-2377
1-800-396-2377 (Fax)
www.naesp.org

Established in 1921, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) serves elementary and middle school principals in the United States, Canada, and overseas. NAESP supports principals as the primary catalysts for creating lasting foundations for learning through policy development, advocacy, and resources for effective instructional leadership. NAESP seeks to advance the principalship and address issues in pre-K-3 alignment, principal preparation and evaluation, and building the capacity of new principals.