How State Education Agencies Can Support College and Career Ready Standards

Introduction

As states continue to implement college and career ready standards, state education agencies (SEAs) are providing professional development and curricular resources to help districts and teachers understand the standards. Because all states have adopted college and career ready standards, and most states continue to implement some version of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), many SEAs can now share resources with each other and draw on materials from the numerous organizations providing CCSS resources. However, little is known about the resources SEAs endorse, the states and/or organizations sponsoring these resources, and how states and organizations are connected. For example, SEAs may provide resources created within the state, or by other SEAs, literacy organizations, CCSS organizations, or some combination of these approaches. Understanding the landscape of possible approaches to supporting state standards allows SEAs to make intentional choices about how to best select and disseminate resources to districts and teachers.

To understand the approaches that SEAs are taking to standards implementation, this study created a database of the 2,023 secondary English/language arts (ELA) resources provided on the websites of all 50 SEAs and Washington, DC. Resources were downloaded between August 2015 and March 2016. Resources were coded for their purpose, type, content-area emphasis, and sponsoring SEAs or organization(s). Social network analysis was used to visualize the relationships between SEAs and resource sponsors, and descriptive analysis was used to understand the nature of the resources SEAs are providing.

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Table 1: Organizations most commonly named as resource sponsors

Organization	Number of States Linking to Org	Percent of States Linking to Org
Council of Chief State School Officers	30	58.8%
National Governors Association	25	49.0%
Student Achievement Partners	24	47.1%
International Literacy Association	17	33.3%
Achieve	16	31.4%
National Council of Teachers of English	16	31.4%
Council of the Great City Schools	15	29.4%
Public Broadcasting Service	14	27.5%
Teaching Channel	14	27.5%
National Association of State Boards of Education	13	23.5%

The results of this study demonstrate that SEAs are offering a variety of types of resources, including professional development, curriculum guidelines, articles, and instructional aids. Social network analysis of states and sponsoring organizations revealed that states have linked to resources from all 51 SEAs, including Washington, D.C., as well as 262 organizations. While certain states and organizations were frequently named as resource sponsors, other organizations were named as resource sponsors by only one state. This study offers insight into the most influential actors providing ELA resources at the state level, the influence of CCSS adoption and Race to the Top (RTTT) on states' resource networks, and the varied ways that SEAs are supporting instructional capacity through the resources they provide for teachers.


Key Findings

Types of Resources

Resources were first coded according to their purpose: were they conceptual resources that provided information about standards, or were they practical resources that could be used directly in classroom instruction? More than half of the resources in our database were conceptual resources providing information about new standards, like curriculum guidelines, articles, and professional development. A smaller portion, 17.5%, of resources were lesson plans and unit plans that could be directly used in classroom instruction.

We also coded resources for their type, such as articles, lesson plans, professional development, student work, collections, etc. Professional development resources were one common type of resource, representing 15% of all state-provided ELA resources nationwide. Surprisingly, about a quarter of all SEA-provided resources were links to collections of materials rather than links to individual resources. A resource coded as "Collection" might be a link to database of lesson plans, a webpage with multiple professional development modules, or a set of materials on text complexity, for example. When SEAs provide links to collections of materials rather than to individual materials, this means that teachers

Figure 1. Sociogram of ELA Resource Providers
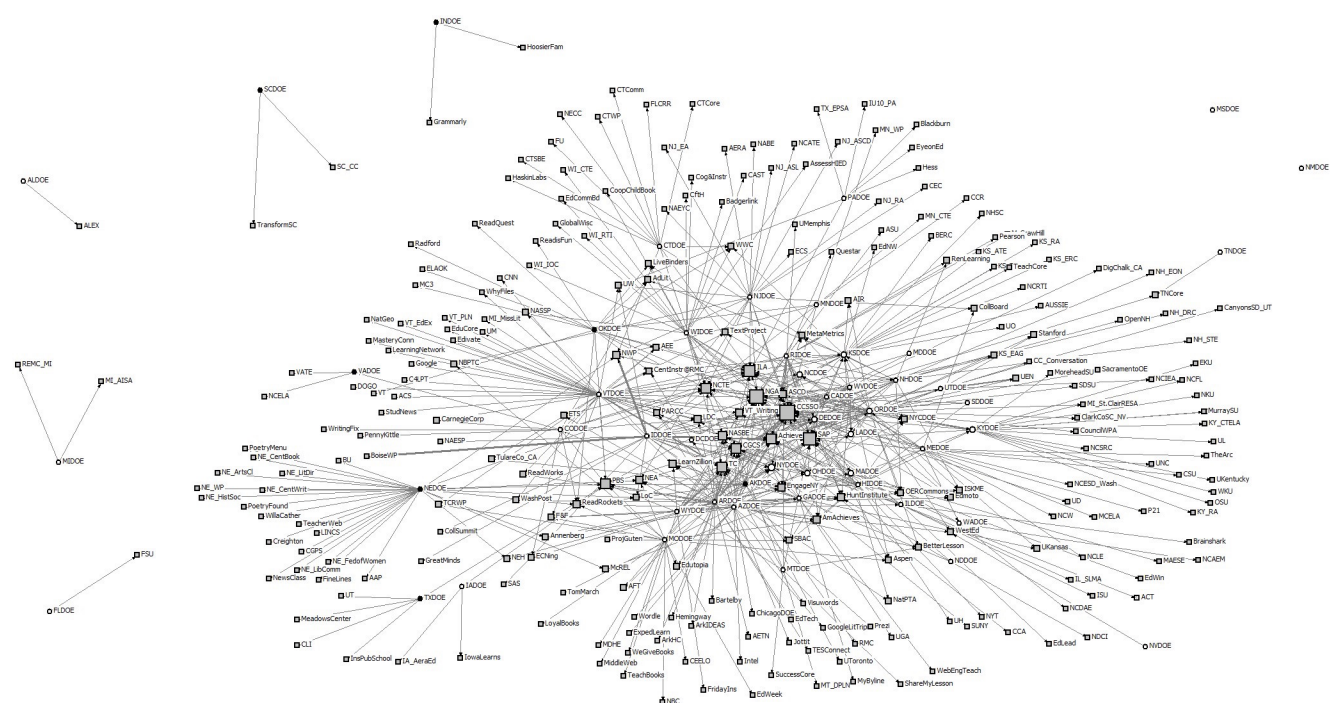
Note: Circles represent SEAs; white circles indicate SEAs that have adopted CCSS, black circles indicate SEAs that have not. Gray squares represent organizations. Node size denotes the number of states linking to an SEA/organization. Line thickness denotes strength of tie, and arrows indicate directionality.

are directed to a broad set of materials that they must continue to look through to find individual resources.

Finally, we coded each resource according to its content-area emphasis within ELA. Few resources focused on one strand within ELA, however. Almost half (44%) of resources were coded as "General ELA" because they focused on some combination of reading, writing, and speaking/listening. In addition, over a third of resources located on pages specifically marked as providing ELA standards resources were coded as "Non-ELA" because they provided general information that could be applied to any content area rather than ELA specifically. Resources coded as "Non-ELA" might be resources focusing on literacy across the content areas (rather than ELA only), or a general resource like a link to a lesson planning template or an organizational homepage with resources for multiple content areas.

There were some differences in the types of resources provided by states that adopted the CCSS versus states that did not. CCSS-adopting states, on average, provided more professional development resources and more unit plans than states that did not adopt the CCSS. There were also several differences in the type of resources provided by states that won the RTTT competition in comparison to states that did not. Like CCSS-adopting states, RTTT-winning states provided more links to unit plans and curriculum guidelines than

states that did not win RTTT. States that did not adopt the CCSS, as well as states that did not win RTTT, provided a higher proportion of links to collections of resources.

Resource Providers

Figure 1 shows the diversity of organizations and other SEAs to which SEAs linked, as well as the different approaches SEAs have taken to support standards through the resources they provide on their websites. In Figure 1, circles represent SEAs; white circles indicate SEAs that have adopted the CCSS, and black circles indicate SEAs that have not. Gray squares represent organizations. The size of the circles and squares indicates the number of SEAs linking to resources from that organization/SEA, with larger shapes meaning that more SEAs have linked to a resource sponsored by that organization/SEA. Line thickness indicates how many times SEAs have linked to particular organizations and other SEAs, and arrows indicate that the connections move from SEAs to resource-sponsoring organizations/SEAs.

Figure 1 illustrates that there are over 300 entities involved in providing state-level standards resources for ELA: 262 organizations and 51 SEAs. However, more than 70% of these organizations/SEAs were linked to by just

one state; these organizations are represented by the small gray squares on the periphery of the network.

Figure 1 also shows the range of approaches SEAs have taken in their resource selection. For example, circles representing Mississippi and New Mexico are on the top right of Figure 1. These two states provided ELA resources that were generated internally, by the SEA itself. Other SEAs, like Florida and Alabama, linked to state-sponsored databases of instructional materials. Michigan, South Carolina, and Indiana provided some materials from external organizations, but no other SEAs had linked to materials from those organizations, leaving these SEAs disconnected from the main network in the middle of Figure 1.

Figure 2 better illustrates the organizations to which the highest number of states linked by providing a "zoomed-in" version of Figure 1. As in Figure 1, squares represent organizations, and circles represent SEAs. The organizations to which the most SEAs have linked, located in the center of the network, are a mixture of policy/advocacy organizations, membership and professional organizations, literacy organizations, and organizations whose primary purpose is to create and disseminate resources. Only three organizations were linked to by more than 20 states: the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association (the two official sponsors of the CCSS), and Student Achievement Partners (an organization founded by CCSS lead authors to support implementation of the standards). Seventeen states linked to resources sponsored by the International Literacy Association, and 16 states linked to resources from the National Council of Teachers of English.

Race to the Top, Common Core, and State Connections

Whether or not a state adopted the CCSS is not necessarily related to its position within the network: five of seven states that did not adopt the CCSS provided resources from organizations to which CCSS states also linked.

On average, CCSS-adopting states do have more external ties than non-CCSS-adopting states, meaning that CCSS-adopting states are linking to a higher number of resources from outside their own states.

Figure 3 shows how states are linking to each other's resources, incorporating both CCSS and RTTT status. Circles represent SEAs that did not win RTTT; squares represent RTTT winners. SEAs that adopted the CCSS are represented with white icons; SEAs that did not adopt the CCSS are represented with black icons. Node size denotes the number of states that have linked to that SEA. Line thickness denotes the number of times an

SEA has linked to another SEA's materials, and arrows indicate directionality.

Figure 3 demonstrates that a higher proportion of both CCSS-adopting and RTTT-winning states are connected to other states and organizations than non-CCSS-adopting and non-RTTT-winning states, suggesting that adopting the CCSS does encourage states to look externally for instructional and curricular resources.

A handful of states generated resources to which five or more SEAs linked: New York, Kansas, Delaware, North Carolina, and Louisiana. These states all adopted the CCSS, and all of these states except Kansas also won at least one round of RTTT funding. This indicates that at least some states with additional resources to support CCSS implementation have created materials that are sought out by other states.

Implications for SEA Officials

Based on these findings, we recommend that SEA officials…

- Choose a variety of resource types from a variety of authors/organizations, including other SEAs. This guards against a narrow interpretation of the CCSS that might be overly focused on complex text and text-dependent questions and allows states to benefit from the many new resources being created by both states and organizations.

- Link to collections of materials in moderation, as collections provide teachers with choices but also make teachers do more work to find helpful materials. Instead, consider highlighting a rotating selection of materials from the collection so teachers can easily download individual resources.

- Consider the proportion of general and subject-specific resources provided on SEA websites, as over a third of the resources on SEA webpages for ELA teachers were not specific to ELA.

- Connect to literacy organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Literacy Association, as these groups are committed to research and best practices, rather than one particular policy reform. Currently only 16 and 17 states, respectively, point teachers to materials from the two flagship literacy organizations.

- Provide a balance of informational and instructional resources, so that teachers have the opportunity to learn about standards through articles and professional development modules, but also have access to unit plans and materials that can be used in classroom practice.

Figure 2. Main Components Sociogram of ELA Resource Providers
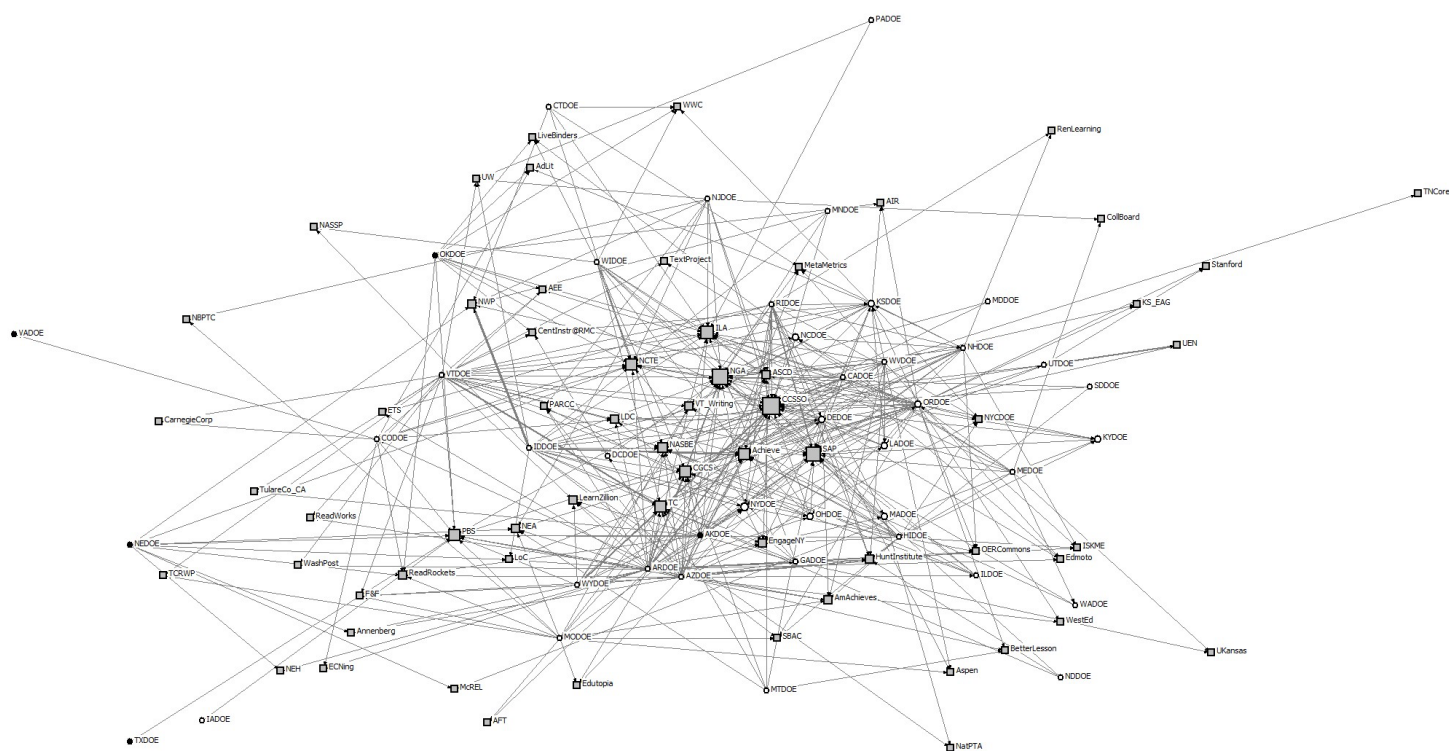
Note: Circles represent SEAs; white circles indicate SEAs that have adopted CCSS, black circles indicate SEAs that have not. Gray squares represent organizations. Node size denotes level of influence. Node size denotes the number of states linking to an SEA/organization. Line thickness denotes strength of tie, and arrows indicate directionality.

Figure 3. State Education Agencies Sociogram
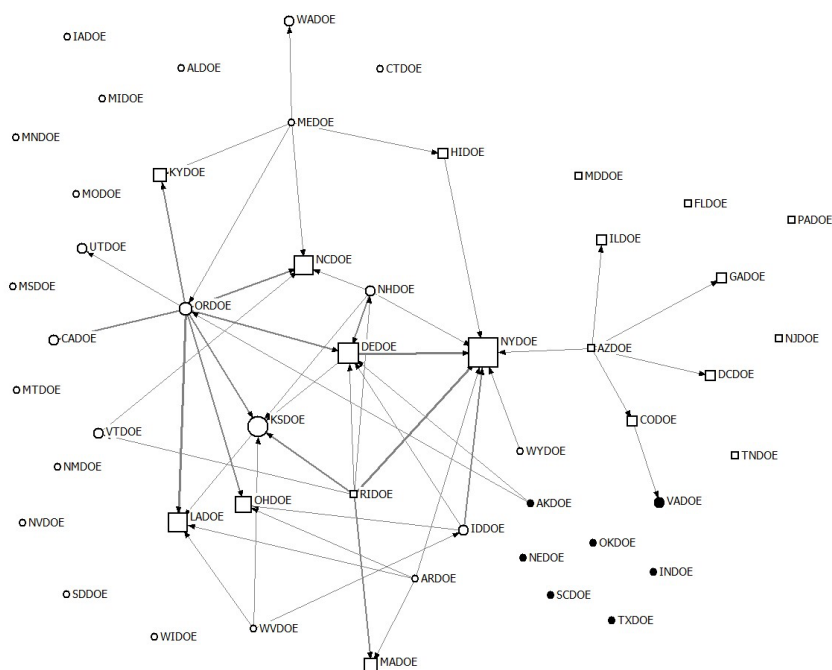
Note: Circles represent SEAs who have not won RTTT; squares represent RTTT winners. SEAs with white icons have adopted the CCSS; SEAs with black icons have not. Node size denotes the number of states linking to an SEA/organization. Line thickness denotes strength of tie, and arrows indicate directionality.

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