



4-1-2018

Overview of C-SAIL's Years 1 and 2 Implementation Study Findings

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C-SAIL, C-SAIL, "Overview of C-SAIL's Years 1 and 2 Implementation Study Findings" (2018). *C-SAIL Publications*. 10.

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The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL), funded from July 2015 through 2020 by the Institute of Education Sciences, examined how college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards were implemented, if they improved student learning, and what instructional tools measured and supported their implementation.

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Overview of C-SAIL's Years 1 and 2 Implementation Study Findings

Abstract

The brief presents themes from C-SAIL's Implementation Study (Years 1 and 2), organized by general, cross-state findings that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data with regards to the policy attributes. We expand upon these themes by providing state- and district-specific examples of illuminating practices. We prioritize examples derived from Year 2 interview data.

Keywords

college and career-ready standards, implementation, curriculum, professional development, assessment, students with disabilities, english learners

Disciplines

Education | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research

Comments

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APRIL 2018

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Data Collection Period: June 2015 to December 2017

	California	Kentucky	Massachusetts	Ohio	Texas
State Interviews	Year 1: N = 4 Year 2: N = 3	Year 1: N = 5 Year 2: N = 9	Year 1: N = 5 Year 2: N = 5	Year 1: N = 6 Year 2: N = 9	Year 1: N = 6 Year 2: N = 4
District Interviews	Year 1: N = 0 Year 2: N = 9	Year 1: N = 12 Year 2: N = 11	Year 1: N = 0 Year 2: N = 5	Year 1: N = 12 Year 2: N = 8	Year 1: N = 7 Year 2: N = 9
Surveys	Surveys were administered in Year 2, and results are forthcoming	Year 1: 89 district administrators 170 principals 740 teachers	Surveys were administered in Year 2, and results are forthcoming	Year 1: 42 district administrators 111 principals 417 teachers	Year 1: 42 district administrators 149 principals 603 teachers

OUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our analysis of college- and career- ready standards implementation is grounded in the policy attributes framework, which states that the more specific, consistent, authoritative, powerful, and stable a policy is, the better implementation will be (Porter, 1994). **Specificity** refers to how extensive, detailed, or prescriptive a policy is (i.e., specific curriculum). **Authority** reflects how policies gain legitimacy, buy-in and status through persuasion. **Consistency** captures the extent to which policies are aligned and how policies relate to and support each other. **Power** reflects how policies are reinforced and enacted through systems of rewards and sanctions (i.e., accountability). **Stability** refers to the extent to which policies change or remain constant over time.

THEMES FROM STATE AND DISTRICT INTERVIEWS

The following themes are organized by general, cross-state findings that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data with regards to the policy attributes. We expand upon these themes by providing state- and district-specific examples of illuminating practices. We prioritize examples derived from Year 2 interview data.

THEME #1: IN THE SPIRIT OF DEFERRING TO LOCAL CONTROL, CALIFORNIA, KENTUCKY, OHIO, AND TEXAS ARE EXERCISING LESS SPECIFICITY AND POWER IN THEIR STANDARDS POLICIES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS STANDARDS-BASED REFORM EFFORTS.

However, Texas demonstrates significantly higher teacher specificity (3.14) than Ohio (2.38), and this may be due to Texas' unique circumstances: in addition to having a wide breadth of ELA and math content standards, they also have a separate set of standards for college- and career- readiness. Our Year 1 survey data across the three states average teacher "power" scores between 2.50 and 2.68, which are moderate. On questions related to state rewards and sanctions, districts reported significantly lower power between 1.96 and 2.34, whereas principals fell between 1.96 and 2.35. Teachers perceive significantly higher power than districts and principals in Texas and Ohio.

1. **Kentucky:** While the state provides a Model Curriculum Framework, districts and schools have the decision-making authority to determine their specific curricula. State administrators note an even greater shift toward local control in Year 2, as their newly elected state legislature passed a bill affording districts more autonomy over major components of standards-based reform, including their teacher evaluation systems, rolling back the state's centralized power to push out a statewide framework.
2. **Ohio:** While ODE has revised their model curriculum based on recent revisions to the ELA and math standards to guide districts and schools, they do not prescribe what districts actually utilize. In terms of reducing perceptions of power, ODE staff and their state support teams go into districts to help a wide range of stakeholders understand their data produced by the state accountability system, as well as local data, and how they can use the data to "make good decisions about improvement strategies" based on Ohio's Decision Framework and Ohio Improvement Process, even for high-performing districts.
3. **Massachusetts,** an exception to theme #1: Though state officials are careful to not encroach upon districts' local control over their curricular decisions, they offer specificity in many other aspects of reform. For example, one district official noted that state officials do not "let you do a lot of things without injecting how you should do it," particularly in the areas of school turnaround, 21st century learning, and other areas where there is undoubtedly a "working group at the state level." This official goes onto to say that "you aren't forced to do a lot of it" but you do receive training from the state and then ultimately "you're forced to track your data." The data feeds into a report that shows how districts are spending their money and the results they are getting as a form of public accountability. Given the state's record of high performance, the state is continuing to use traditional forms of power (i.e., school and district takeovers; educator evaluation systems) that have more or less been accepted as credible practices.

THEME #2: DISTRICTS ARE DEVELOPING THEIR OWN MECHANISMS FOR BUILDING SPECIFICITY AND CONSISTENCY OF THE STANDARDS AND ALIGNED RESOURCES

(e.g., curriculum, professional development [PD]). In our Year 1 surveys, district officials asserted that they have provided specific guidance on how much time to spend on content and the order in which it should be taught, but teachers perceived significantly less specificity. All respondent groups across the 3 states reported similar levels of consistency between 2.50 and 3.00.

1. **California:** In one district, district staff rolled out modules and trained Common Core fellows to schools in order to specify the instructional expectations of the standards and to ensure that the school-based PD is aligned to the district's interpretation of the standards. The modules were developed at the central office level, and they became prescribed PD workshops that explained the shifts in the ELA and math that school leaders implemented in their buildings. Supporting these shifts were voluntary Common Core fellows, who underwent extensive training in the standards at the central office so they could become "experts" in the schools.
2. **Kentucky:** In one district, central office administrators realized the importance of focusing on specificity and consistency given that their particular population of teachers were not all exposed to college- and career-ready expectations in their own schooling experiences. In other words, "we were asking teachers to teach the kids, but they didn't know the end game." Therefore, district officials picked out texts about teaching reading, and facilitated a lesson using an ELA anchor standard to both highlight the rigor of the standard and develop teachers' understanding of reading pedagogy. They then asked teachers to locate their own grade level in the standards and see how their grade level is vertically aligned to other grade levels, so they note the importance of tackling "craft and structure" in the 2nd grade, for example. Finally, they engaged in close readings of the standards and discussed how this translated to teachers' pedagogy and curriculum.
3. **Texas:** In one district, the instructional coaches realized that when they asked teachers—"What is our curriculum?"—their responses included the names of various textbooks rather than the state's standards and how they influenced the curriculum. The coaches therefore realized they needed to increase the specificity and consistency of teachers' understanding and enactment of the standards, and they decided to focus on student engagement as the mechanism for supporting this goal. In other words, they started working with teachers in moving them away from assigning worksheets from textbooks to engaging students by delivering instructional content that rigorously attended to the standards. Because of this paradigm shift, they created the five E's around the idea of engagement, and showed they connected to the TEKs, Texas' content standards.

THEME #3: DISTRICTS ARE USING “SOFTER” POWER IN CONTRAST TO THE EMPHASIS ON REWARDS AND SANCTIONS PRESENT IN EARLIER WAVES OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORM.

Assessment data are instead used to nurture discussions about how data can best be used to drive growth for students, teachers, and schools. This softer power is also used as incentives to encourage teacher participation in PD on their own time. However, districts perceive significantly lower rewards and sanctions than teachers actually experienced across all surveyed states (Texas, Ohio, and Kentucky).

1. **Massachusetts:** In one district, the instructional leadership team of teachers, counselors, and the principal of the elementary school created a turnaround plan based on a root cause analysis of why they received their low accountability rating. They collected input from all stakeholders involved in the schools (e.g., paraprofessionals, nurses), and examined other data indicators compiled by the state. They used these data to accelerate school climate and culture through Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports implementation and reorganized their discipline procedures based on this change. Data, in this case, are positioned as levers for improvement rather than the impetus for school sanctions.
2. **Ohio:** The lowest performing schools in Ohio, according to the state accountability system, are required to implement the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), which several officials describe as a supportive, rather than a punitive, process for improving their standards-based reform efforts. The 5-step continuous improvement process include district leadership teams, building leadership teams, and teacher-based teams that assess student proficiency levels based on the standards, determine students’ needs, design lessons and interventions, and see how students improve based on their interventions. In one Ohio district, they are not required to implement OIP but they do so anyway because their teachers have noticed improvements in student learning and engagement in their classes because of this process.
3. **Texas:** In one district, the superintendent prioritizes student achievement as the main goal, but she does not believe in the need for action plans and punitive approaches to meet that goal. Rather, she believes in having a set of “plays,” one of which is being data driven and asking teachers what their needs are as the basis of their district’s priorities areas of support. They seek to use this data creatively and be innovative at the forefront so their teaching and learning department are not producing the same lesson guidelines, training, and activities each year.

THEME #4: PD IS OFTEN THE VEHICLE USED TO STRENGTHEN THE SPECIFICITY, CONSISTENCY, AND AUTHORITY OF THE CCR STANDARDS AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL—

and the survey data shows statistically significant relationships between the usefulness and the amount of PD and the strength of the policy system. Common mechanisms include employing instructional coaches, encouraging professional learning communities (PLCs) to form in schools, and building up school and teacher leadership. Yet while the majority of teachers receive PD on the content of the standards and instructional shifts, fewer than half receive PD on how to help SWDs and ELLs achieve the standards. Despite these efforts, we have not yet found relationships between PD and standards-emphasized instruction.

1. **California:** In one district, administrators recognized the need to pool their PD resources for special education and general education teachers in order to ensure that everyone has the same, specific level of familiarity with the content standards, and that they are employing consistent instructional practices. This district reported that “our Special Ed. teachers are not that fluent in math, you know, the mathematics itself, and so, one of our goals is to close that gap, and we have done that by partnering with our General Ed. experts.” The opportunity for special education and general education teachers to collaborate together in PD also builds the authority of the standards, as they learn strategies that can make the CCR rigor appropriate for all learners.
2. **Kentucky:** One district showcases how their district-wide PLC mechanism for PD can address these three attributes. In one example, an administrator described how they gather the 60-100 elementary teachers in the districts who volunteer to participate in the PLC once every two months. In this PLC, they collaboratively design a detailed lesson from start to finish (specificity) that align to a standard (consistency). Someone volunteers to be observed teaching that lesson, and teachers who are able to will ask for coverage and go observe that lesson. Immediately after the lesson, the teachers will debrief the experience of both delivering that lesson themselves in their own classes and watching their peer deliver the same lesson. Because they are able to collaboratively plan, deliver, observe, and debrief the same lesson, they have powerful conversations that teachers say they benefit from (authority).
3. **Massachusetts:** In one district, teachers participate in a month-long, conference-style PD opportunity appropriately dubbed “March Madness.” In this approach, teachers “lead the learning” by showing their peers how they implement the district’s standards in various concrete ways. Teachers sign up to teach certain topics, which is a way of building the authority of the PD. This same district received a grant to host PD over the summer, in which teacher teams devoted several weeks to unpacking the revised MA content standards, creating instructional resources that helped teachers understand the academic vocabulary and student discourse that should be occurring at each grade level (specificity), and using rubrics to make sure their interim assessments are aligned to the revised standards (consistency). They then rolled out this work themselves to the peers at the start of the 2017-18 school year.

THEME #5: RELATIVE TO PREVIOUS STANDARDS REFORM MOVEMENTS, OUR INTERVIEWS SUGGEST A SHIFT TOWARDS CENTRALIZED ELL PROCESSES LEAD BY STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION OR PARTNERSHIPS WITH CONSORTIA (i.e., WIDA and ELPA21). Kentucky and Ohio belong to nationwide consortia, WIDA and ELPA21 respectively, to assist with the development of state English language proficiency standards and related assessments. Massachusetts is also a part of WIDA but there is some tension around using WIDA resources while also wanting to follow through with state-specific supports for ELLs. California and Texas have developed their own, specific frameworks for supporting ELLs. Surveys did not indicate any statistically significant differences between ELLs and general educators (ELA & math) for instruction or among policies.

1. **California:** The ELA and ELL frameworks in CA are combined in one, “which is a big policy shift in terms of every teacher is expected to know how to teach English language development... and that framework provides guidance on how to do [integrated ELD].” This combination of frameworks is a continued reflection of efforts from the DOE to ensure that all teachers are trained to work with ELLs—as of 2014, all teachers who go through a California teacher education program must receive an English Language Development endorsement.
2. **Ohio:** Ohio has adopted some of the resources available through their partnership with ELPA21 including the Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA) and the Ohio English Language Proficiency Standards, which all districts are expected to use. Local districts maintain the autonomy to select and implement ELL programs that best suit their local needs. Though appreciative of this autonomy, many districts struggled with this flexibility. ESSA and the state’s partnership with ELPA21 have fueled what state officials have referred to as a “transition in terms of building capacity” for state ELL programs and supports.
3. **Texas:** Texas has developed a wide array of resources for districts and teachers as it pertains to ELLs. For example, they have systematized Language Proficiency Assessment Committees (LPACs), which are tasked with monitoring individual ELL student progress, and gone to great lengths to ensure that their Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment (TELPAS) is aligned to their content assessments (SMAART) and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards. The TEA has garnered authority for these programs by including ELL educators from all tiers in committees tasked with reviewing the consistency and rigor of ELL resources. One of these committees was recently asked to review the English and Spanish TEKS to ensure that language specific dimensions were taken into consideration and the standards were not simply a translation of each other.

THEME #6: SWD TEACHERS REPORT LOWER AUTHORITY AND SPECIFICITY OF THE CCR STANDARDS (COMPARED TO THOSE TEACHING GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS) AND SOME OFFICIALS QUESTION WHETHER IDEA AND STANDARDS-BASED REFORM POLICIES CAN BE ALIGNED.

In terms of specificity, there are limited specific, instructional guidelines for how to implement CCR content standards for SWDs in general education classrooms, though officials are making strides in designing and implementing more of these statewide supports as we demonstrate below:

1. **California:** CDE pairs low-achieving districts with low rates of Least Restrictive Environment with high-performing districts, and this “district partnering seems to be working much better than anything else” in providing professional supports for teachers of SWDs.
2. **Kentucky:** Co-Teaching for Gap Closure is a multi-tiered system of coaching support for a small number of districts, in which regional coaches support internal school-based coaches, who then support co-teaching teams around the tenets of continuous improvement, evidence-based co-teaching strategies, student support and student voice, and student engagement through Universal Design for Learning.
3. **Massachusetts:** In response to the changing demographics of students in the state and the increasing percentage of students living in poverty, the state is implementing their Low-Income Education Access Project. This PD model helps general and special education teachers understand the impact of poverty on learning and how to think about the intersection of race and poverty when referring students to special education or when designing culturally relevant pedagogy in standards-based classrooms.
4. **Ohio:** ODE’s Office for Exceptional Children is running an initiative in 15 districts around language and literacy, in which they are providing PD to teachers (including pre-K), intervention specialists, speech and language pathologists, and literacy specialists so that general educators, special educators, and their coaches can work together to provide “Just in Time” intervention and diminish the amount of referrals to special education.
5. **Texas:** In an effort to move away from solely focusing on compliance, TEA is reorganizing their infrastructure to be more student-centered and instructionally focused. They are finding ways “to have compliance be as automated and as basically idiot-proof as possible” so districts can worry less about compliance and work more with their newly improved state support teams on instruction. Their Education Service Centers will be hiring additional staff members to serve as the liaison between the districts, the region, and the state so that district needs can be more intentionally met.

REFERENCE

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