

Getting to the Core: How Early Implementers are Approaching the Common Core in CA

Regional Leadership Sessions on Common Core State Standards Implementation

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How Early Implementers
are Approaching the
Common Core in California

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Report Purpose

- Inform practitioners and policymakers about the wide range of choices with regard to both the technical and change strategies districts are making
- Surface implementation barriers and early lessons
- Inform a strategy guidebook for leaders

Methodology

- Based on interviews with Executive Leaders
- Sample was intentionally focused on early implementers
- Not trying to paint a picture of the average district or evaluate effectiveness of strategies
- Aiming for strategy, demographic and geographic diversification
- Interview protocol in Appendix B

11 District Profiles

1. Baldwin Park Unified
2. Corcoran Joint Unified
3. Corona Norco Unified
4. Coronado Unified
5. Elk Grove Unified
6. Lindsay Unified
7. Long Beach Unified
8. Milpitas Unified
9. Richland Union Elementary
10. Sacramento City Unified
11. Whittier Union High School

Key Finding #1: Districts Focusing on Five Technical Strategies

- 1. Instruction:** Building capacity of teachers to implement student-centered instructional strategies
- 2. Curriculum:** Enrolling teachers to design curriculum, while providing standardized support
- 3. Assessment:** Designing CCSS-aligned assessments
- 4. Project Based Learning:** Especially popular at middle and high school level.
- 5. Personalizing Learning:** Two districts focusing on personalized instruction.

Additional Areas of Focus

- 21st Century Skills
- Technology
- Integration with new ELD Standards and NGSS
- Middle school and high school math integration

Key Finding #2: Districts Are Placing Significant Emphasis on Rollout Strategies

- Goal: To ensure that technical changes reach every school, classroom and student
- Common rollout strategies:
 - Roles and structures
 - “Train the Trainer Model” using teacher leaders
 - Instructional coaching
 - Observational protocols like Instructional Rounds
 - Principal PLCs

Key Finding #3:

Districts Are Employing Eight Common
Change Management Strategies

1. Connect the CCSS to a Local Vision of Improved Teaching and Learning

Key Message:

CCSS is a tool to help us achieve our local goals for improved teaching and learning

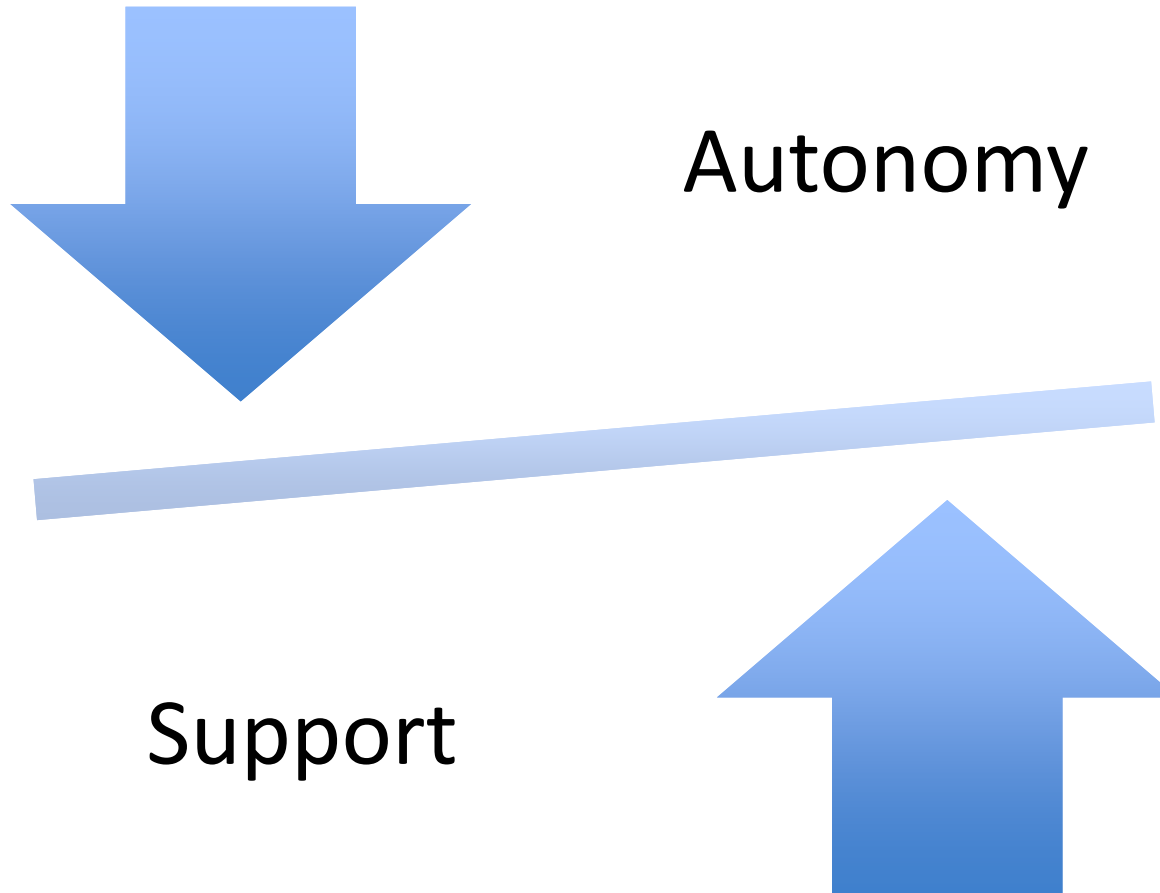


2. Carefully Manage the Pace of Change



GO SLOW TO GO FAST!

3. Balance Increased Autonomy with Enhanced Support



4. Enroll Teachers in the Design Process



Why?

- Hand tactics off to staff closer to students, families, etc.
- Creates buy in for the district's core strategy and for CCSS in general
- Promotes innovation
- Good way to build capacity
- Creates a cadre of site level "experts"

5. Build or Repurpose Feedback Loops



- Formal structures (surveys, steering committees, principal groups, etc.)
- Informal listening campaigns
- Look for leading indicators
- Refine tactics accordingly

6. Increase Focus on Leadership Development



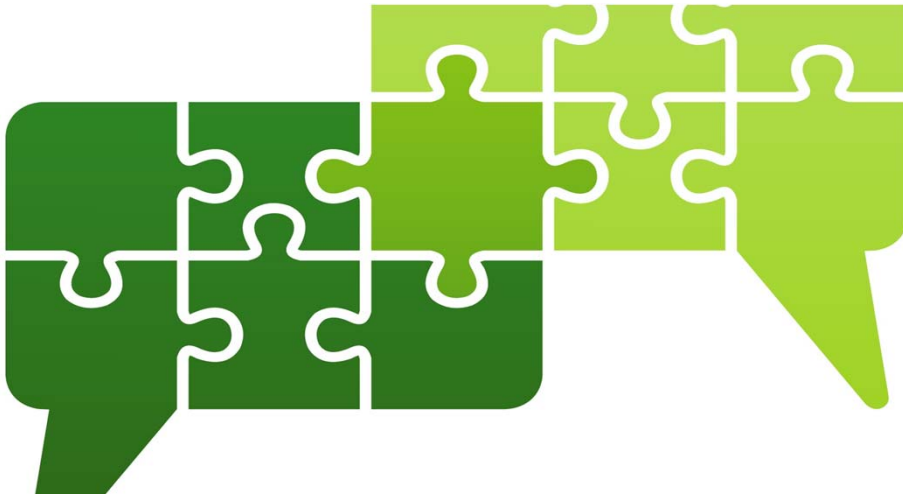
- Success hinges on strong instructional leadership at sites
- Districts are coaching, and providing professional learning for site leaders
- They are also aligning PD for teachers with PD for principals

7. Set Clear & Feasible Expectations for Implementation



- Balance bottom up strategies with clear expectations.
- It's especially important for PD
- Relevant for staff at all levels of the system
- Several districts have created school-wide CCSS goals

8. Engage Parents and Community



- Communication has focused on informing parents. This is changing with LCAP.

Two categories of engagement:

- Broad engagement (website, townhall meetings, newsletters, etc.)
- Grassroots engagement (e.g. parent-teacher conferences)

Key Finding #4:

Implementation Barriers

- Lack of time
- Teachers who entered field post *NCLB* need even more support
- Uncertain policy environment
- CCSS implementation coincided with a period of significant reductions in funding
- Lack of high-quality CCSS-aligned instructional materials
- Technology

The Strategy Guidebook

The Guidebook offers a structured, human-centered and research-based model to implement promising implementation practices that emerged from the research report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Common Core provides districts an opportunity to renew their focus on teaching and learning. But it also poses a number of design and implementation challenges for school districts, including how to:

- Build the capacity of teachers to equitably implement student-centered instructional strategies.
- Address gaps in curriculum in ways that foster creativity, address the local culture, scaffold achievement for diverse learners and increase motivation for teachers.
- Design formative and interim assessments that promote a new vision for 21st Century teaching and learning and target support for those that need interventions.
- Leverage technology to promote deeper and more personalized learning.
- Structure implementation activities in ways that reach every teacher, every classroom and every student.
- Engage and motivate site administrators, teachers and family and community members.

The Leadership and Design Cycles described in this guidebook offer an evidenced-based and structured process for leaders to design and implement Common Core change initiatives in ways that promote innovation, build reciprocal accountability, and effectively

address both the technical and human dimensions of change. Infusing “design thinking” into the change process allows leaders to share responsibility for tactics, while ensuring that what gets designed and implemented meets a locally defined vision and core strategy for 21st Century teaching and learning. It also is an essential tool for engaging a wide range of stakeholders.

The report also explores the essential questions or “design choices” that leaders must address to effectively navigate their districts through a complex and comprehensive journey. This includes essential change management practices, such as: (i) connecting the initiative to a broader vision for improved teaching and learning; (ii) managing the pace of change by narrowing focus; (iii) increasing site/classroom autonomy, while providing enhanced support; (iv) engaging teachers and site administrators in the design process; (v) building or repurposing feedback loops and refining strategies and tactics accordingly; (vi) increasing leadership development opportunities for site administrators; (vii) coupling bottom up change strategies with clear expectations and accountability; and (viii) informing, engaging and involving parent and community members.

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Pivot Learning Partners is a nonprofit organization of K-12 experts that provides strategic vision for reform along with the on-the-ground training and implementation support needed by schools and districts to address the biggest challenges they face in creating more equitable systems of schools. This report draws from the organization’s research-based Leadership and Design Cycles, our recent research with PACE on early implementers of Common Core in California, and our experience supporting Common Core implementation in dozens of school districts across the state.
<http://www.pivotlearningpartners.org>

Section 1: Design Thinking, A New Leadership Tool for Change

Policy change always looks different from the perspective of local implementers than it does to the architects of the policy. While policymakers are busy mapping new territory and advocates are helping to define both goals and milestones on the journey, implementers are at the steering wheel, navigating their particular organization along a new road. Local leaders, including superintendents, district office staff, principals and teachers, must make a myriad of choices along the way.

Both Reports are on PACE's Website

Research Report

<http://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/PACE%20Getting%20To%20The%20Core.pdf>

Strategy Guidebook

<http://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/CCSS%20Strategy%20Guidebook.pdf>

Questions?