GETTING DOWN TO FACTS II

Technical Report

Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Support in the Common Core Era

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About: The *Getting Down to Facts* project seeks to create a common evidence base for understanding the current state of California school systems and lay the foundation for substantive conversations about what education policies should be sustained and what might be improved to ensure increased opportunity and success for all students in California in the decades ahead. *Getting Down to Facts II* follows approximately a decade after the first Getting Down to Facts effort in 2007. This technical report is one of 36 in the set of *Getting Down to Facts II* studies that cover four main areas related to state education policy: student success, governance, personnel, and funding.

Stanford University

PACE Policy Analysis for California Education

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
CASPP	California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress
CCSS/I	Common Core State Standards/Common Core State Standards Initiative
CDE	California Department of Education
CLAS	California Learning Assess System
CMP	California Mathematics Project
COE	County Office of Education
CSMP	California Subject Matter Project
CWP	California Writing Project
ELA	English Language Arts
ELD	English Language Development
EL	English Learner
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
IQC	Instructional Quality Commission
LCAP/LCFF	Local Control Accountability Plan/Local Control Funding Formula
LEA	Local Educational Agency
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NGSS	Next Generation Science Standards
SBE	(California) State Board of Education
STAR	California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program

Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Support in the Common Core Era

1.0 INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVES ON THE COMMON CORE

"This changes almost everything," State Board of Education (SBE) President Mike Kirst said of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). "The CCSS will impact almost all key state education policies in fundamental ways" (Kirst 2013, 1). California's move towards encouraging ambitious instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards goes to the heart of instructional practice.

> "We, like every district, are going through changes right now from a curriculum that was a little bit more structured and programmatic in terms of its approach to a curriculum that's aligned with Common Core State Standards. It requires teachers to change the way that they think about teaching and think about instruction and think about learning ... so there is a retraining that is happening, and we are engaged in that pretty deeply ... [we are working on] shifts in thinking in terms of what instruction is, what kids need to learn, and how we can achieve the greatest impact [upon] student learning and outcomes" (Superintendent Interview 148).

Prior studies portray support for the Common Core in California (Finkelstein et al. 2018; Jochim and Lavery 2015) as well as support for other significant reforms, like the change in California's school finance system (Koppich and Humphrey 2018). Along with enthusiasm for California's policy changes over the past decade have come calls to "stay the course" to enable the current changes to make their way into practice:

> "I hope we stay the course in California for a while. I feel like we have made strides in this very short time frame towards improvements. Is it a perfect system? No, but I think there's enough places where improvements have begun to happen, staying with them helps. We need the same assessments. We need the standards, we need the funding system and Dashboard to take hold in the best way so that we continue to improve" (State/Regional Leader Interview 006).

How are the frontlines of instructional practice experiencing the current terrain? Do the frontlines share this view that strides are being made?

Purpose of This Report. This report focuses on several key questions:

- What are California teachers' perceptions of the core elements of instructional practice—standards, curriculum, instructional materials, professional learning opportunities—in the Common Core Era?

- What are the resources that California teachers use in instruction and the sources of such resources?

- What are teachers' perceptions and experience of managing various manifestations of educational disparities as they engage with the Common Core initiative?

- What are opportunities to learn as California moves forward with state policy alignment?

We focus primarily on teachers' perspectives to address these questions, but we also include insights from California superintendents and state and regional leaders. As it addresses these questions, this report strives to build on but not repeat prior analyses. We encourage readers to consult other reviews and prior studies of Common Core in California and national studies of the Common Core.[1] This report also strives to focus on some of the key elements of instruction—standards, curriculum, frameworks, materials, and professional development. These are some of the components that comprise the infrastructure of instruction (Cohen and Moffitt 2009).[2]

The Common Core Era and the Spread of Ideas. Other papers in this series (Finkelstein et al. 2018) attend to elements of Common Core implementation. We complement this work by approaching the Common Core as a body of ideas that may spread, transform, and appear in practice. We approach the Common Core from the perspective of ideas rather than implementation for several reasons. For one, the Common Core is much broader than a specific, discrete policy. Instead, it began as "a type of 'intellectual property' intended to serve as a set of open standards intended to coordinate organizations and activities in the education sector as a whole" (Rowan et al. 2015). In this way, we situate our work in the tradition that portrays ideas as central to shaping organizational and political structures (Blyth 2002; Lieberman 2002).

For another, sources of ideas come not from one place—such as from government policy alone—but from a myriad of sources.[3] The ideas embodied in Common Core also bear on organizations beyond governments (state, county, and local): the Common Core's aspiration to induce alignment between standards, materials, and activities exceeds the scope and jurisdiction of conventional intergovernmental relationships. Common mechanisms that abet the spread of ideas include learning, imitation, coercion, and competition (Mintrom and Vergari 1998; Boushey 2010; Shipan and Volden 2012). We focus in this report on the *a priori* condition

[1] For a national perspective on teachers' familiarity with Common Core standards, perceptions of their own preparedness, professional development needs, and the distribution of these needs by socio-economic circumstances see Kaufman et al. (2016) and Kaufman, Thompson, and Opfer (2016). For more on how accountability policies and policy feedback influenced Common Core, see McDonnell (2012).

[2] Our work presumes that instruction is a multi-component social technology that gains in effectiveness when its various components (academic standards, assessments, instructional materials, and teacher education/professional development) are aligned among themselves so as to produce coherent—i.e., internally consistent—guidance for the academic work that students and teachers do (Cohen and Spillane 1992; Correnti and Rowan 2007; Cohen et al. 2013).

[3] As Kingdon succinctly reminds us, "ideas can come from anywhere" (Kingdon 2003, 71).

of access to Common Core ideas, the resources teachers use to learn about the Common Core, and their perceptions of key components of instruction in the Common Core era.

For yet another, even though the Common Core represents a bold new move, there have been common standards in various aspects U.S. education for nearly a century, and common academic content standards in recent decades. California, in particular, is no stranger to standards. The Common Core standards, however, are much more detailed and ambitious than earlier content standards. And the Common Core aim much more plainly to redress problems of inequity in public education than earlier standard-setting. The Common Core standards are both bold and new *and* cousins of previous standards that layer on top of prior and present efforts at instructional improvement. The lines thus blur between the Common Core and prior standards, just as they blur between the Common Core and concurrent instructional improvement efforts. For these reasons, we refer to the spread and uptake of ideas in the Common Core era, rather than the implementation of specific policies.

Methodological Approach. We offer a mixed method approach to address our core questions.

- What are California teachers' perceptions of the core elements of instructional practice—standards, curriculum, instructional materials, professional learning opportunities—in the Common Core Era?

- What are the resources that California teachers use in instruction and the sources of such resources?

- What are teachers' perceptions and experience of managing various manifestations of educational disparities as they engage with the CCSS Initiative?

- What are opportunities to learn as California moves forward with state policy alignment?

To do so, we draw on:

- A survey of 444 California teachers conducted through the RAND Corporation's America's Teacher Panel (ATP) in January of 2018
- A survey of 169 California teachers conducted through the RAND Corporation's ATP in March of 2018
- Interviews of 44 state-level and regional-level actors[4]
- Interviews of 91 district superintendents, selected from a stratified random sample.[5]

[4] Respondents, selected through snowball sampling, included a wide range of state and regional leaders from different levels of government and different sectors, including advocacy, research, and educational non-profit organizations. Interviews occurred between December 2016 and May 2018 and included 35 respondents based in California, and 9 based in other states or at the national level. Each semi-structured interview, lasted 45-120 minutes, and was subsequently analyzed using a coding architecture informed by our research questions and refined over the process of analysis.

2.0 COMPLEXITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT IN CALIFORNIA

Putting California's ambitious grade-level content standards into practice deeply and equitably, and aligning all parts of the system—curriculum, frameworks, instructional materials, professional development, and assessments—to support that instruction expects extraordinary learning about academic subjects from teachers and other educators and equally extraordinary learning about how to teach those academic subjects. The United States has historically exhibited a pervasive absence of capacity to offer strong and consistent support for such learning (Cohen and Spillane 1992; Cohen et al. 2013), though variation resides in California.

California's terrain includes deep commitment among leaders for the ideas embodied in the Common Core, a variety of governmental and nongovernmental efforts aimed at supporting instructional improvement, and a pervasive plea to "stay the course" so putting the standards into practice can take root. California's governmental and non-governmental structures to support instruction reflect deep commitments, considerable energy, and exemplary models of expertise. Yet, the capacity to support educators' learning is fundamentally relative to the task at hand. And, the enormity of the task and the scope of change in California loom large, in an era of ambitious standards.

Legacies, Opportunities, and Challenges from Prior and Concurrent California Reforms. Like the national portrait, standards-based reform is not new to California; and parts of structures to support the instructional core began to take shape decades prior.[6] California began laying the conceptual and policy foundation for greater coherence in California public education in the 1980s and continued these efforts through multiple standards and frameworks adoptions. Many state and regional leaders referenced these past efforts when reflecting on the Common Core in California, including references to the 1990s when the state invested in:

> "… teachers and administrators trained in the standards and trained in using the materials. There was the opportunity for different entities to submit trainings, which were basically 40-hour trainings that would focus on having people understand the framework, understand the standards, and know how to use their materials in terms of delivering the content of those standards to students in grades K through 12 … It was, I think, a massive undertaking on the state's part … whether you agree with the content of the training and the philosophy of the training … the idea of investing those kinds of resources into ensuring that teachers and administrators are better prepared to deliver the curriculum and on administrator's part to support the teachers in their delivery, is huge" (State/Regional Leader Interview 041).

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[5] This represents a 44.39% response rate of California district superintendents were drawn from a stratified random sample of 205 districts. All interviews occurred by telephone between June and October 2017, and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were analyzed based on a coding architecture derived from the interview protocol. Full detail appears in the Appendix.

[6] See McDonnell (2012) for a discussion on policy feedback and the Common Core.

State investment in professional development included the passage of SB 1882 (1988),[7] which provided funding for professional development, called for the creation of regional resource agencies and consortiums that would assist schools and districts in these efforts, and established a network of nine discipline-specific professional development projects called the California Subject Matter Project (CSMP). The CSMP was reauthorized in 2011 by Senate Bill 612.[8] California's professional development terrain, however, includes much more than the CSMP.

This history also includes California's curriculum frameworks, and the work of California's Instructional Quality Commission (IQC)[9] that advises the State Board of Education on curriculum frameworks, on instructional materials, and on criteria for evaluating instructional materials. The IQC has been integral in the process of translating California's grade-level content standards into frameworks.[10] While the standards themselves have changed, key state structures related to the development of state frameworks were in place before the Common Core.[11]

And, this history includes long-standing experience with assessments. California began aligning its assessments to its curricular frameworks in 1993 with the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS). The assessments generated considerable controversy after they produced high student failure rates, and they were discontinued in 1995.[12] California started using the California Standardized Testing and Reporting program (STAR) in 1997, then switched to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP) and Smarter Balanced assessments to assess student performance, aligned with state content standards.

Despite this long history of standards-based reform in California and the state's prior efforts to define what standards looked like in practice and connect that with different leverage points in the system, these past efforts met with challenges and were by no means uniformly successful. California's professional development terrain is vast and varied, and with that terrain has come

[7] This bill arose in response to the findings and recommendations of the California Staff Development Policy Study (Little et al. 1987) that was initiated by the legislature and governor and called out the California Writing Project (CWP) and the California Mathematics Project (CMP) as examples of promising models in the state.
[8] Despite "changes in funding sources and significant declines in overall funding availability" (Bier and Gallagher 2012, 6), the CSMP still exists today and operates in roughly 90 regional sites across California. In addition, a ten-year evaluation of CSMP conducted by SRI International concluded that the CSMP "puts California in a unique position among the states of having a professional development infrastructure that can respond quickly and flexibly as needs change" (Bier and Gallagher 2012, 7). The CSMP stands as an important, structural approach to providing professional learning opportunities through networks connected to higher education.
[9] The Instructional Quality Commission was previously named the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission. It was established in 1927 (California State Board of Education Website: Instructional Quality Commission, https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/cc/cd/, accessed on December 7, 2017).
[10] State/Regional Leader Interview 011
[11] State/Regional Leader Interview 037
[12] On lessons from CLAS see Knudson et al. (2015).

a history of inconsistent teacher exposure to quality professional development and inconsistent opportunities to engage deeply with teaching rigorous content (Cohen 1990; Cohen and Hill 2001; Wilson 2003). Similarly, the critique that previous California standards and frameworks were overly rigid and scripted emerged in our interviews of state and regional leaders. While prior efforts can provide a foundation on which to build, they can also yield challenges of unlearning past practices as well as learning new ones:

> "We've had … 10 years or more of No Child Left Behind … that was so focused on the assessment, and the assessment was very much skills driven … as opposed to problem solving and critical thinking. You've had teachers that have been used to teaching in one particular way, and now the assessments are asking for different types of skills, and we haven't really given teachers the kind of training and support that they need to implement the Common Core standards in the way that they were written" (State/Regional Leader Interview 043).

New ideas and practices never replace old ones in one great swoop. Instead new ideas and practices are added onto existing ideas and practices, and the new hybridize with the old (Cohen 1990, Cuban 1984). Concurrent policies contribute to this hybridization. For the Common Core in California, for instance, the shift away from state categorical funding to district flexibility and to new formula for calculating the distribution of state aid—expressed in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)—intersect with and interact powerfully with the rollout and uptake of the Common Core.[13]

Several aspects of the new financing system have the potential to bear on the spread and uptake of Common Core in instructional practice.[14] For one, as Koppich and Humphrey (2018) highlight, "LCFF is built on an equity foundation" with a goal "to bring more equity to resource allocation" (3). This equity focus is consistent with the Common Core standards, which much more plainly aim to correct problems of inequity in public education than earlier standard-setting efforts. For another, Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), which accompany this shift to local control in financing, are intended to enable local stakeholders to systematically tailor and prioritize allocation decisions. Along with this shift have come significant new and time consuming administrative requirements for district leaders as they learn how to operate in this new funding and accountability terrain.[15] The LCFF also opens

[13] State/Regional Leader Interview 010; 017. LCFF is California's "hallmark legislation that fundamentally changed how all local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state are funded, how they are measured for results, and the services and supports they receive to allow all students to succeed to their greatest potential." California Department of Education, "Local Control Funding Formula," https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/, accessed July 31, 2018.

[14] Other reports in this series examine LCFF in significant detail. For example: on the early implementation of LCFF, see Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; on LCFF's impact on per-pupil spending and student outcomes, see Johnson & Tanner, 2018; on LCFF's place in the recent historical context of California school finances, see Bruno, 2018.

[15] Superintendent interviews attested to an array of challenges associated with negotiating the LCAP/LCFF terrain including the difficulty and perceived burden of meeting the administrative requirements for small districts, basic-aid districts, and those with low administrative capacity (e.g. Superintendent Interviews 43, 66, 71, 87, 105, 157),

room to reduce central and common influence on how the new ideas are understood and to potentially augment the diverse local influences on how the new ideas are understood. For yet another, LCAP can also intersect with Common Core's instructional improvement expectations by identifying particular groups or areas that are underperforming. Identifying underperformance can trigger various forms of assistance. However, California's System of Support, which aims to provide assistance to underperforming schools, is "still-developing," as Koppich and Humphrey discuss (2018, 8). The substantial changes represented by LCFF underscore ways in which Common Core is not a stand-alone, self-contained policy, but instead inhabits a complex terrain of myriad intersecting policies and interventions.

Task Ambition Relative to Capacity. "So that we continue to improve" putting ambitious content standards into instructional practice deeply and equitably depends on coordinating the elements that have a strong influence on the key components of guidance for instruction, namely academic standards, assessments, instructional materials, and teacher education/professional development; the knowledge to coordinate those elements; and the political will to do so. "So that we continue to improve …" our respondent continued:

> "that's going to involve coaching ... and intentional technical assistance and real, in-depth examination of the instructional core around the teachers, the students, and the content. This examination needs to involve preparation programs as well so that they are built on similar assumptions" (State/Regional Leader Interview 006).

As SBE President Mike Kirst observed, a standards-aligned approach to instructional improvement "changes almost everything" (Kirst 2013, 1). As our respondent observed, standards come with significant and serious implications for the instructional core, so that content, technical assistance, and teacher preparation are both "in-depth" and "built on similar assumptions."

Even if California is not new to standards-based reform, this latest installment embodied in the Common Core is more ambitious and coincides with a challenging landscape for the reforms to "take root." One source of greater ambition comes from the standards themselves and what they expect of teachers.[16] Part of difference between the latest installment of standards and prior versions includes the importance of both content and pedagogical approaches in the Common Core.

> "When the Common Core came along, the major shift was the need to focus on both content and pedagogy" (State/Regional Leader Interview 001).

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challenges of complying with a perceived one-size-fits-all structure and in keeping pace with rapid updates to the LCAP template (e.g. Superintendent Interviews 12, 13, 49, 108), and staffing pressures generated by navigate the system's mandates and reports (e.g. Superintendent Interview 33).

[16] State/Regional Leader Interview 018

More ambitious content coupled with more ambitious pedagogy has underscored the importance of professional learning.

> "The thing is, those [prior] standards did not call for huge shifts in instructional practice in the way that the Common Core standards are calling for, yet we haven't made that same kind of investment in professional development that we did back in the early 2000s" (State/Regional Interview 043).

Thus, another source of greater ambition comes from the challenges of constructing coherent structures of instructional support. These challenges include:

- How to coordinate the actions and products of many independent private sector curriculum designers, publishers, and materials providers so that they deal with the same knowledge and skills?

- How to coordinate the actions and products of many independent private and public sector teacher education and professional development agencies so that they instruct teachers in the same knowledge and skills?

- How to develop the means to monitor instructional quality, and the means to use the knowledge that results to improve instruction?

- How to coordinate these functions, and the agencies that perform them, so that they attend to the same knowledge and skills?

- How to coordinate these functions, and the agencies that perform them, when the school systems that offer instruction are so unequally resourced, and when those systems reside in varied racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts?

Teachers and students are the ultimate frontline coordinators of nearly all of the things noted above, and they need education, materials, and opportunities to learn that are designed to support this coordination (of ideas within curriculum topics, of skills and ideas, and of how what is taught in October is connected to what was taught in September, for instance). California presents additional challenges to coherence, given its size, diversity, and governing structure. It bears remembering that California has over 1,000 school districts. While a majority of CA school districts are small and/or located in rural areas, a majority of CA school students attend schools in urban and suburban districts.[17] The spirit of standards-based reform aspires for rigorous, quality instruction for all students, in all schools. Supporting that aspiration collides with significant material differences. In California, geography matters:

[17] National Center for Charitable Statistics (2015), Common Core of Data (CCD) School District Universe Survey, https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/ccddata.asp, accessed: July 1, 2017.

> "Implementation is not always as easy in a smaller school. With only 8 certificated staff, 7 are full time teachers, it is tough to hit all the buttons in a high school but still comply with sometimes unrealistic necessities or levels of achievement that are expected at, say a school of four thousand with 75 staff. There's diversity in how that educational process is dispensed" (Superintendent Interview 043).

Capacity to translate new ideas into complex classroom practice is relative: it depends on the size of the task relative to the expertise and resources available to those charged with doing the learning and translation to enact the policy. Sufficient time *and* sufficient expertise matter.

> "… we hear this so often up and down the state. The schools and districts often don't have the time to drill deeper into actually helping teachers make sense of all the information they just got and how that's going to change or improve their practices" (State/Regional Leader Interview 044).

This leader continued:

> "There's so much going on right now … what teachers say over and over and over and over again, in addition to the support they feel they want, they just want the time to be able to do it … A 45 minute late-start day does not take you very far … Especially now, with all these new standards and frameworks and new adoptions, how do you give them the time just to sit and work with each other on making sense of it for their kids?" (State/Regional Leader Interview 044)

Time and staff burdens associated with administrative and accountability requirements loomed large in rural superintendents' concerns, especially in the context of LCFF and LCAP.

> "As a superintendent of a small district, really [understand] the number of demands upon us, the number of roles we play … At the end of the day, you are one or two people trying to fulfill every role ... We have over 10 districts in our county with less than 300 students, but we are accountable for everything. Our LCAP is the same number of pages, our budget, you name it, everything is the same, and you're asking 1-2 people to do that with quality" (Superintendent Interview 066).

And the challenges facing particular populations of students, such as English Learners (ELs) and students with special needs, amplify the enormity of the task of putting ambitious learning standards into practice deeply and equitably. The percentage of public school students who are English Learners is higher in California than in any other state in the U.S.[18]

[18] The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 21 percent of CA school students are English Learners. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp, last updated April 2018; accessed on 8/9/18.

> "How do we meet the needs of English Learners? Because, as a state, we have struggled with that ... if we can't get our brightest minds on a subject matter [as a state] to figure it out, how do we expect your average LEA [Local Education Agency] to figure it out?" (State/Regional Leader Interview 015)

Compounding the geographic challenges facing California, the combination of the 2008 Great Recession and scarce financial resources pose additional impediments to deeply and equitably putting ambitious academic standards into instructional practice.

> "We are pretty much faced with financial turmoil … Curriculum is not even on our radar when it comes to a sense of priority, it's the budget" (Superintendent Interview 027).

As Figure 1 suggests, our interviews of a stratified random sample of district superintendents revealed that fiscal and personnel matters dominated superintendents' list of priorities. Indeed, professional learning opportunities rarely appeared on superintendents' "radars."

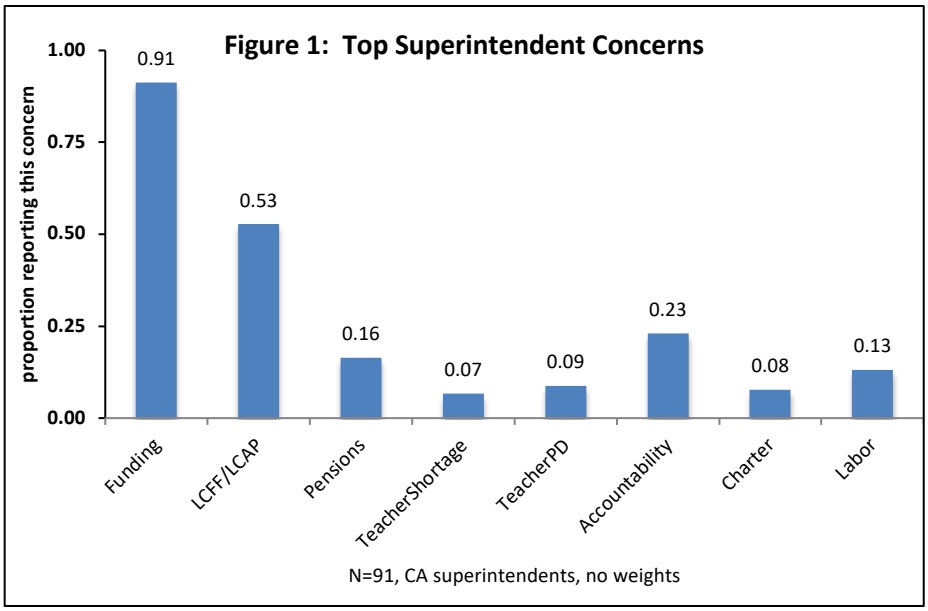

Figure 1 Source: structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents, conducted between June and October 2017. See Appendix for more information.

Economic constraints can render professional development particularly vulnerable. As the leader observed below, "when the budget is cut, anything that's not personnel, just goes out the door," especially for districts that did not have instructional support already stitched into district culture and priorities.

> "[Common Core implementation] came on the heels of the big recession, so just implementing the first two subject areas, reading language arts and math, was a

real struggle for most of the districts because they didn't have the wherewithal to do…professional development if that was even in their culture in the first place. It's an interesting phenomenon because the high-functioning districts in this state, they would not even think of dropping professional development as a major focus because they realize that's their lifeblood of having their staff understand what they're supposed to be doing, but in the places, that don't have any of that culture, it's just—it's a throwaway. When the budget is cut, anything that's not personnel, just goes ... out the door" (State/Regional Leader Interview 010).

Even though only seven percent of interviewed superintendents listed personnel shortages as one of their top three concerns, a majority of superintendents reported experiencing teacher shortages.

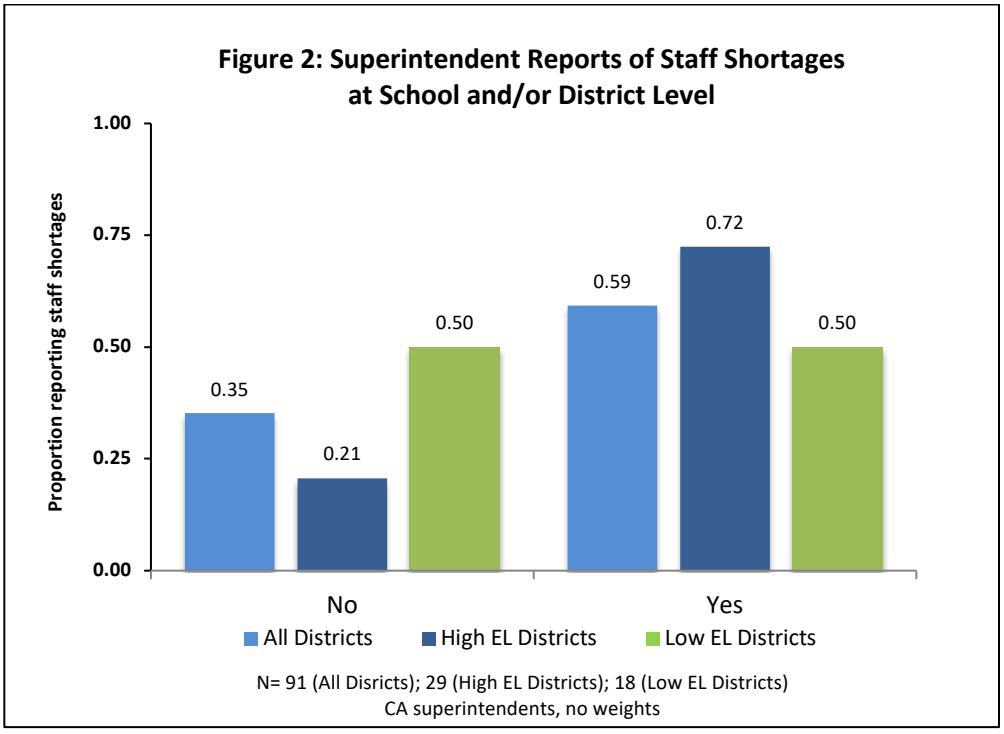

Figure 2 Source: structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents, conducted between June and October 2017.[19]

Moreover, 72 percent of superintendents in High EL districts reported teacher shortages. Mathematics, Science, and Special Education were the areas where most district superintendents reported shortages. Teacher and staff shortages can present an additional

[19] Participants were asked "in your district, are you experiencing shortages of staff at the school-level and/or at the district-level?" (Question 2.1 in the interview protocol). Participants were prompted to give a yes/no answer and invited to elaborate; the 'equivocal' category here refers to instances where respondents' answers to the question included an element of both 'yes' and 'no.' See the Appendix for selection information and interview protocol.

constraint on district capacity to build school systems with coherent instruction and instructional guidance.

Districts that strive to coordinate the elements of instruction undertake extraordinary efforts to do so. Consider the example below, in which the superintendent describes curating the vast terrain of instructional materials and assessing their effectiveness.

> "We just adopted the language arts program for next year. What we do is we utilize the expertise of our teachers. We brought a group together over the course of 24 months, researched all the materials that were available and aligned to standards. It was really driven by teachers, and they got feedback from their colleagues. So that was the process we utilized to ensure that the practitioners are getting the opportunity to preview and test drive materials that are out there to determine if they're effective ... They [the teachers] actually built a process whereby data was collected from teachers that were piloting materials, and they brought back and analyzed the results they got, quantitative and qualitative results from classroom teachers. Piloting went on for about 18 months, so it was very comprehensive" (Superintendent Interview 159).

One way to solve the puzzles of alignment that we posed involves building a school system with coherent instruction and instructional guidance, on the assumption that the school system is the chief unit of action, and that coherence can best and most durably be built at that level. Some LEAs have made significant progress on several of the puzzles by building such internally coherent systems of instruction and instructional guidance. Doing so, however, requires extraordinary effort and expertise on the part of the LEA and places the responsibility for navigating the expanded terrain of new materials on the shoulders of teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders. Given the enormity of the task, how have frontline practitioners experienced this terrain?

3.0 PERCEPTIONS OF IMPROVEMENT

Do the frontlines share the perspective of the state leader we noted at the beginning, that "we have made strides … towards improvement"? State and regional leaders pointed to several forms of perceived improvement. Some of the perceived improvement comes at the level of key structural components. One area of structural change has emerged in California's English Language Development (ELD) standards, which were adopted in November 2012 and align with the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy.[20]

> "From where I sit, I think we've gotten a lot of things right. We've adopted the right standards. We've developed and adopted curriculum frameworks that are a

[20] The California ELD Standards "describe the key knowledge, skills, and abilities that students who are learning English as a new language need in order to access, engage with, and achieve in grade-level academic content" (California Department of Education 2012).

> really great resource. Our state's linkage to the ELD standards and the ELD framework is tremendous. We have those policy pieces in place and we also have the resource pieces in place" (State/Regional Leader Interview 015).[21]

Some of the perceived improvement comes at the level of practice:

> "At the site level … I've seen movement in the direction of increased complexity, integration of standards. People really understanding what's different between the old and the new … Why content knowledge is important and that … the whole purpose of being able to read complex rigorous text is so you can learn from reading that text" (State/Regional Leader Interview 045).

Early studies of Common Core revealed frontline frustrations with the quality and availability of Common Core materials and insufficient availability of professional learning opportunities (McLaughlin et al. 2014). What are the frontlines' perspectives several years later? Results from the January 2018 RAND ATP of California suggest that teachers' modal response is "improved a little" to a series of questions about key components of instruction. While roughly a third of teachers reported that much has "stayed the same" over the past five years, a slightly larger proportion reported "a little" improvement in the alignment between instructional materials and California's grade-level standards, in the alignment between district professional development and teachers' needs, in the quality of district professional development, and in school-level professional learning communities. Few teachers report that the alignment or quality of these instructional components has worsened. Given the enormity of what alignment expects and entails, the perception that "a little improvement" has emerged lends credibility to and is consistent with the view that California is, indeed, making strides.

Specifically, in response to the question asking teachers' perceptions of alignment between instructional materials and California's grade -level standards over the past three years, 35 percent of teachers[22] perceive alignment has stayed the same, 35 percent perceive alignment has improved a little, 13 percent perceive that alignment has improved a lot. The remainder (15 percent) perceives worsening alignment.[23] Very similar results appear for teachers' reports on their perceptions of alignment between the professional development they receive from their districts and their needs as a teacher, with 31 percent perceiving no change, 33 percent perceiving a little improvement, 15 percent perceiving a lot of improvement. About 20 percent of teachers perceived worsening conditions.

"A little improvement" also appears as the modal response to questions about the quality of instructional materials, with 36 percent of teachers reporting a little improvement in materials'

[21] This leader continued, "I think as a state we still struggle with how we do instructional materials and the adoption of that" (State/Regional Leader Interview 015).
[22] Throughout, we report results adjusted in accordance with sampling weights generated by RAND.
[23] This combines the categories of "worsened a little" and "worsened a lot."

quality over the past three years, 15 percent reporting a lot of improvement, and a full 32 percent perceiving that the quality has remained the same. Perceptions of declining quality appeared for 16 percent of respondents.

Overall, a majority of teachers surveyed have perceived improvement in their school-level professional learning communities in the last three years of the Common Core era: 42 percent report a little improvement and 19 percent report a lot of improvement.[24] Perceptions of stability appear for 29 percent of teachers, and 8 percent of teachers report worse conditions.

Our interviews echoed the view we presented at the beginning, that California has "made strides in this very short time frame towards improvement" (State/Regional Leader Interview 006). Given the enormity of the change that the Common Core expects, leaders identified areas in their teachers' instructional practice that they perceived as needing improvement. Yet, leaders also perceived a marked improvement in instructional resources relative to prior state efforts to promote standards-based reform:

> "We have lots more resources and guidance even from the early standards movement, which wasn't in place when I first started teaching. I think we've provided a lot of resources at the state level, both standards and frameworks, to guide teacher practice. My other caveat would be I'm not sure they're all being used as strongly and as effectively as they could be, but I certainly think there's a wealth of resources that are very thoughtfully developed at the state level, as good now as ever" (State/Regional Leader Interview 038).

National studies of teachers suggest their general support and use of Common Core standards, or their close derivatives (Kane et al. 2016).[25] In California, majorities of teachers surveyed as part of the January RAND ATP agreed that they understand what California's standards expect of them as teachers, that the standards are appropriate for the children that they teach, that the curriculum frameworks help them teach, and that their instructional materials meet the needs of their students. Our interviews of 91 superintendents also underscored the importance of standards in the professional development choices districts make. In their words, "The standards play a key role– they have refocused us–they have been a game changer" (Superintendent Interview 148).

Modal responses and majorities, however, can mask important disparities that emerge across different populations. A central idea embodied in the Common Core is its intent to use standards and aligned instructional components to redress educational disparities. What are general perceptions of these instructional components in different settings? Results from the January RAND ATP survey suggest teachers from schools with high concentrations of ELs are *more* likely to report perceived improvement over the past three years than teachers from

[24] January 2018 ATP; reported with sampling weights; N=444.
[25] For analysis of variation in views of the Common Core among the public in California, see Polikoff et al. (2014).

schools with low concentrations of ELs for key aspects of instruction, at conventional levels of statistical significance.

In particular, teachers who teach in schools with high concentration of ELs are more likely than teachers in schools with low concentrations of ELs to report improvement in alignment between instructional materials and California standards over the past three years.

Teachers who teach in schools with high concentration of ELs are more likely than teachers in schools with low concentrations of ELs to report improvement in alignment between professional development opportunities and teachers' needs, improvement in the quality of professional development offered, improvement in the quality of instructional materials, and improvement in the professional learning community over the past three years.

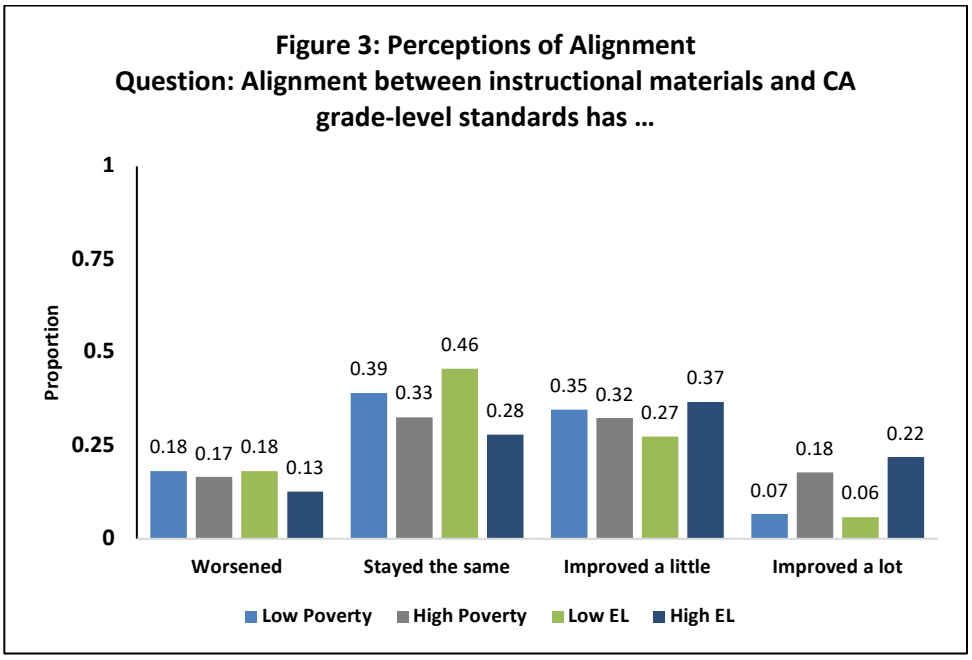

Figure 3 Source: January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. High and Low Poverty N=147; Low EL N=145; High EL= 146

Estimates suggest the differences in perceptions between teachers working in high and low poverty schools are also distinguishable, at conventional levels of statistical significance, in many respects, as Table 1 indicates. Teachers from high poverty schools, for instance, were more likely than teachers from low poverty schools to report improvement in the alignment between their district-sponsored professional development and their needs as a teacher.

Table 1: Perceptions of Past 3 Years, Difference in Means, High-Low Poverty, High-Low EL Schools

	High Poverty and Low Poverty Schools					High EL and Low EL Schools				
Respondents rank each statement on a scale of 1-5 (1=disagree, 5=agree)	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean in Low Poverty*	*Mean in High Poverty*	*N*	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean in Low EL*	*Mean in High EL*	*N*
Alignment between instructional materials and CA grade-level standards	-0.22	0.00	3.23	3.45	291	-0.51	0.00	3.15	3.66	287
Alignment between prof development in my district and my needs as teacher	-0.35	0.00	3.17	3.52	291	-0.40	0.00	3.22	2.62	287
Quality of prof development that my district offered me	-0.04	0.07	3.34	3.38	291	-0.27	0.00	3.29	3.56	287
Quality of instructional materials available to me	-0.26	0.00	3.30	3.56	291	-0.41	0.00	3.24	3.65	287
Professional learning community in my school has improved	-0.12	0.00	3.66	3.68	291	-0.16	0.00	3.67	3.83	287

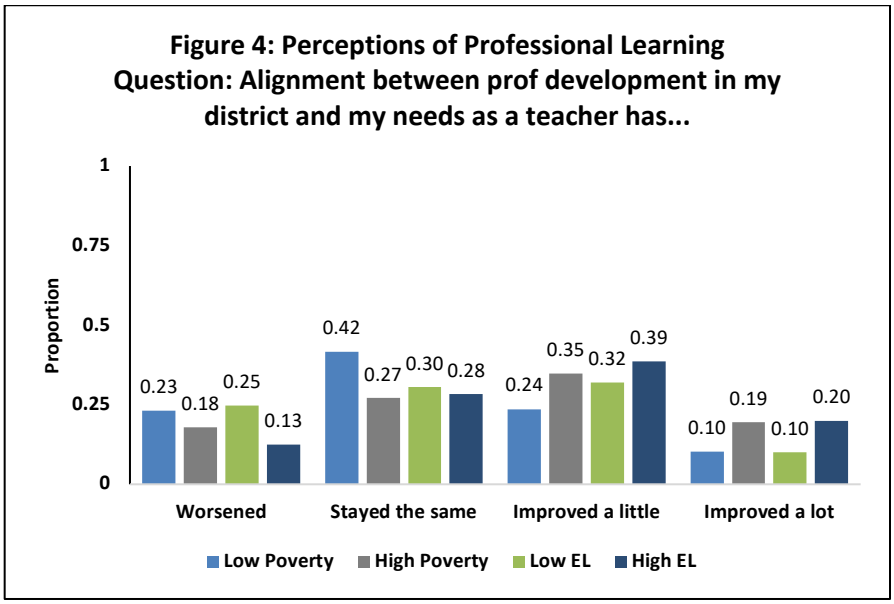

Figure 4 Source: January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. High and Low Poverty N=147; Low EL N=145; High EL= 146

Results from Table 2 also suggest that teachers from schools with high concentrations of ELs or from schools with high rates of poverty were more likely to report that their professional development experiences have helped them improve how they teach specific standards.

Table 2: Perceptions of Instructional Components, Difference in Means

	High Poverty and Low Poverty Schools					High EL and Low EL Schools				
Respondents rank each statement on a scale of 1-5 (1=disagree, 5=agree)	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean in Low Poverty*	*Mean in High Poverty*	*N*	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean in Low EL*	*Mean in High EL*	*N*
CA grade-level standards are appropriate for the needs of students in my class	0.11	0.00	3.43	3.32	291	0.04	0.02	3.41	3.37	287
CA curriculum frameworks helps me meet the learning needs of my students	-0.27	0.00	3.43	3.70	291	-0.39	0.00	3.35	3.74	287
Instructional materials in my class are well-suited to needs of my students	0.29	0.00	3.99	3.70	291	0.33	0.00	3.98	3.65	287
My prof development experiences helped me improve how I teach specific standards	-0.31	0.00	3.53	3.88	290	-0.35	0.00	3.50	3.85	286

While, on balance, these results suggest that teachers in schools with high concentrations of English Learners perceive improvement over the past three years, important disparities remain.

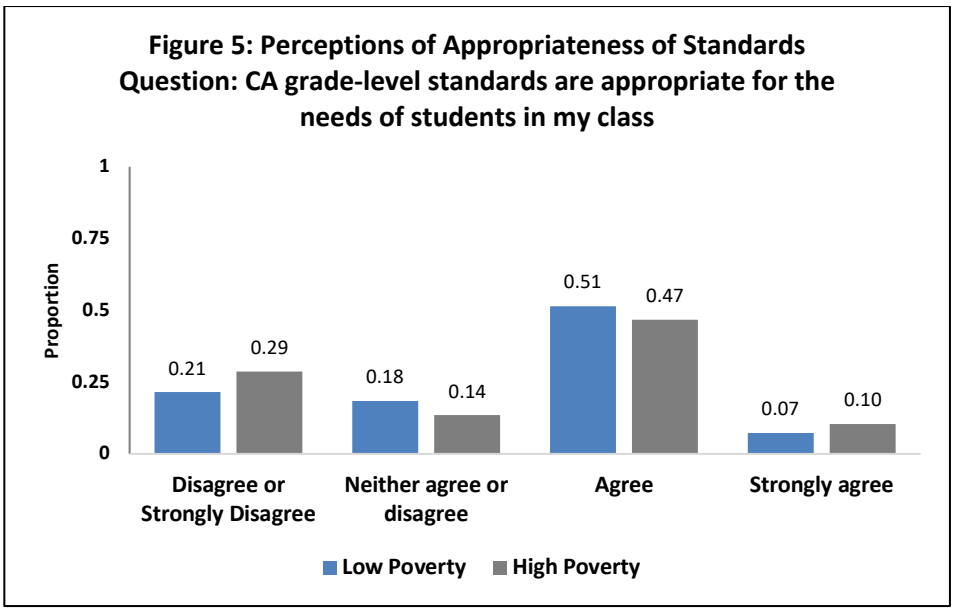

Figure 5 Source: January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. High and Low Poverty N=147

For instance, according to the difference in means test in Table 2, teachers who teach in schools with higher concentrations of poverty are less likely to perceive that California's standards "are appropriate for the needs of students in my class." Our interviews underscored the challenges of putting ambitious learning standards into practice deeply and equitably for ELs and other student populations with special needs.

> "How do we meet the needs of English Learners? Because, as a state, we have struggled with that ... if we can't get our brightest minds on a subject matter [as a state] to figure it out, how do we expect your average LEA to figure it out?" (State/Regional Leader Interview 015)

Respondents noted that the state has made progress integrating ELA and ELD standards, and that instructional materials have begun to become more available for ELs or students who have special needs. But, much work remains.

> "[At first], there wasn't a lot of good materials for the struggling learner or English Learner ... if you fast forward to now, we're doing better. I don't know if we've perfected, or we've got it right yet" (State/Regional Leader Interview 035).

Providing further support for the idea that "I don't know if … we've got it right yet," Table 2 suggests that California teachers who teach in schools with higher concentrations of poverty or higher concentrations of ELs were ***less*** likely to perceive that their instructional materials are well suited to the needs of their students. This is consistent with earlier studies of Common Core in California that underscored teachers' perceived challenges receiving quality instructional materials and professional learning opportunities to meet the needs of all student populations (Perry et al. 2015).

On balance, these results offer confirming support for the view that California has "made strides … towards improvement." But, a recurring theme that emerged in our interviews noted:

> "There's still a lot of work to be done … Everybody embraces Common Core, but defining what it looks like in action and then duplicating that, replicating that, it's a tremendous heavy lift" (State/Regional Leader Interview 029).

Moreover, our superintendent interviews underscored this can be a heavy lift in small, rural, under-resourced communities.[26]

> "The Common Core rolled out and the district went to Common Core, they think they're done, they did it, now they know how to do it. That transformation hasn't happened here. It's indicative of small districts who don't have the

[26] For more on Common Core implementation in rural districts, see Timar and Carter (2017).

> resources for professional development providers and things like that. I think we are struggling in that area" (Superintendent Interview 121).

One part of the struggle comes from the logistics of support:

> "It's hard to get maybe all the teachers fully trained, or the number of teachers, or to have that collaboration, because so many of our school districts are small. If we try to do something—for instance, we have a training, where we can have 75-100 people. Where are all those substitutes gonna come from? Trying to get teachers trained—substitutes are always an issue that we face. That's a huge challenge. We can offer something, but we might have to offer it multiple times, which is a different challenge" (State/Regional Leader Interview 040).

Returning to the observation that "we have lots more resources and guidance even from the early standards movement" (State/Regional Leader Interview 038), where are teachers receiving those resources and how does that vary by school condition?

4.0 SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND ACCESS TO COMMON CORE IDEAS

We focus in this report on frontlines access to Common Core ideas, the resources teachers use to learn about the Common Core, and their perceptions of key components of instruction in the Common Core era. What are the resources that California teachers use in instruction (materials, assessments, lesson plans), and the sources of such resources? We draw here on the results of two surveys, both administered by RAND through its ATP: one in January 2018 that focused exclusively on California; and one in March that drew a national sample from which we extract some California-specific results.

Standards documents and professional learning opportunities comprise two important formal ways to convey Common Core ideas. From the March 2018, national survey, results suggest that majorities of California respondents look to California's standards documents in their decisions about curriculum objectives, instructional materials, and teaching activities. These results are noteworthy, in part, because they go beyond reflecting teachers' abstract support for standards to suggest how many teachers are using them in practice.

Studies of instructional improvement highlight the importance of teachers having sustained learning opportunities connected explicitly with instructional materials and teaching activities. The March 2018 RAND national survey suggests variation in California teachers' sustained professional learning opportunities to put Common Core ideas into instructional practice. Slightly more than half of California ELA teacher respondents and less than half of California math teacher respondents reported receiving professional learning opportunities on how to align materials or instructional activities to standards. On the one hand, these results provide further evidence to suggest movement toward instructional support aligned with the Common Core. On the other hand, they also suggest much more room for growth. Given the enormity of the task of instructional improvement, this is not surprising.

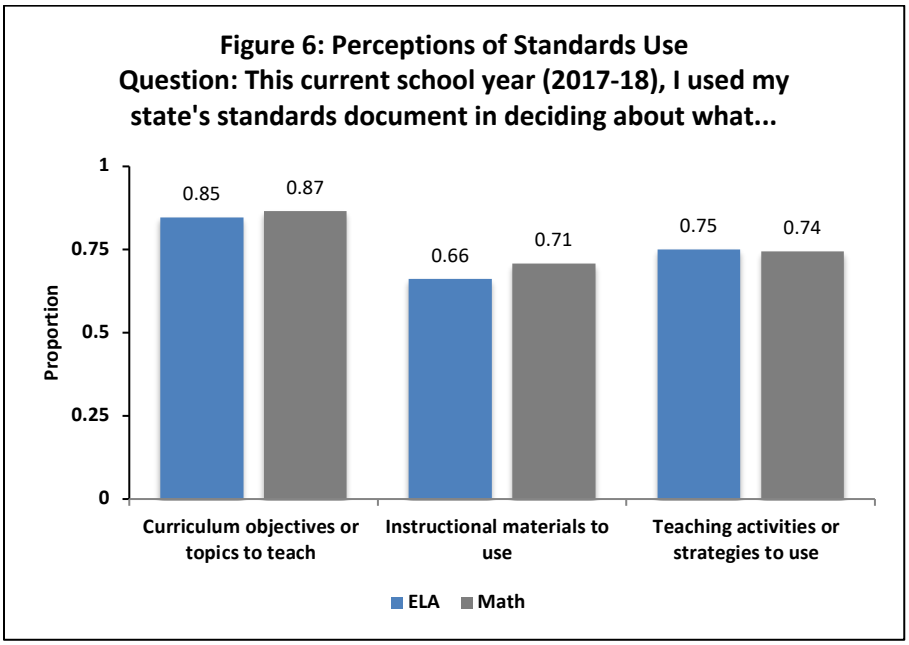

Figure 6 Source: March 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. ELA N=137, Math N=135

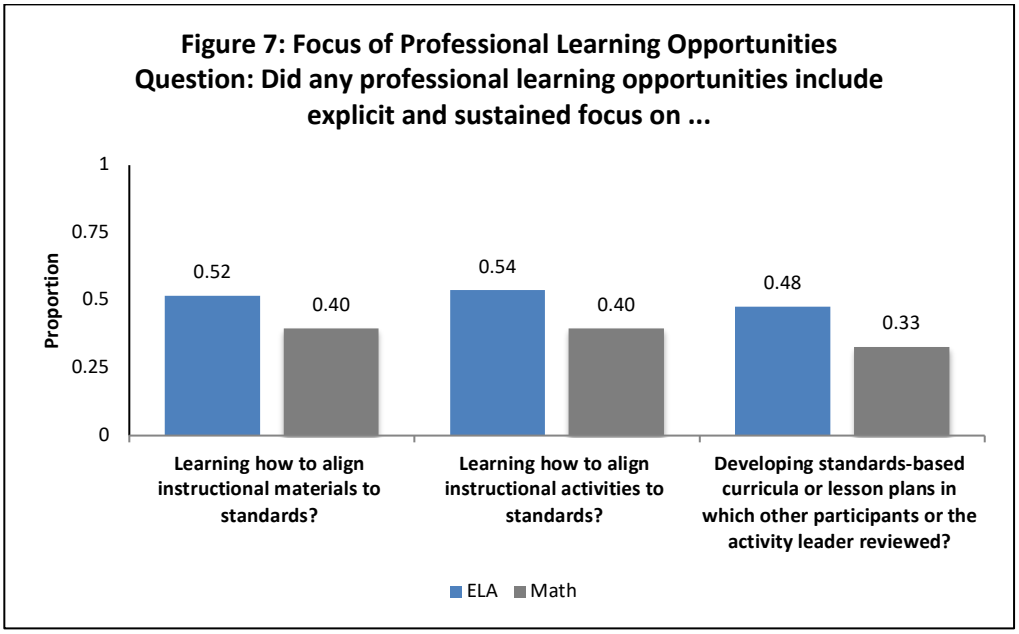

Figure 7 Source: March 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. ELA N=137, Math N=135

One way to manage the alignment puzzles we posed[27] involves building a school system with coherent instruction and instructional guidance, on the assumption that the school system is the chief unit of action, and that coherence can best and most durably be built at that level. Some LEAs have made significant progress on several of the puzzles by building such internally coherent systems of instruction and instructional guidance. Doing so, however, requires extraordinary effort and expertise on the part of the LEA, as indicated in our earlier discussion of intensive processes used by districts to screen and select materials.[28]

These districts' ambitious efforts to encourage teachers' deep engagement with ambitious standards and aligned elements of instructional support underscore the overarching problem of curating the current terrain. This places the responsibility for navigating the expanded terrain of new materials on the shoulders of teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders. One way that teachers navigate the new terrain is through online communities, which can also be overwhelming, by offering vast quantities of materials without curating them for content or quality.

> "A big area that is missing is curation: trying to figure out how to teach mathematics curriculum, where do we go for good information? People shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel … People go to Pinterest and get overwhelmed" (State/Regional Leader Interview 011).

Some states, like Louisiana, curate the terrain of materials more than California.[29] In California's vast and varied terrain, some LEAs are creating coherent systems themselves. Recall that for others, as we observed earlier, "curriculum is not even on our radar," because of overarching financial pressures (Superintendent Interview 027).

Results from the January RAND ATP confirm the perception that majorities of teachers are looking to online networks for their instructional resources. Results suggest that 62 percent of

[27] We identify a broader set of puzzles inherent to coordinating parts of California's system of structures for instructional support in another paper in this series (Moffitt et al. 2018, 13-14)

[28] See our prior discussion featuring remarks from Superintendent Interview 159. Prior WestEd studies have revealed teacher reports of needed support for instructional materials. The May 2017 ATP, for instance, asked "California teachers … to select the five things they need to most effectively advance implementation of the California Academic Standards at their school. The most popular response, reported by 64% of responding teachers, was higher-quality textbooks, curricula, and/or instructional materials aligned with state standards. The second highest reported need was for digital tools (online textbooks, webinars, online communities, applications/apps, etc.), cited by 52% of California ATP teachers" (4-5). Reino Makkonen and Sheffield, R. "California Standards Implementation: What Educators Are Saying." WestEd Knowledge Brief, October 2017, https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/resource-california-standards-implementation-what-educators-are-saying-1.pdf, accessed on June 13, 2018.

[29] Louisiana is a local-control state. However, teacher leaders helped develop a process of designating curriculum and materials as Tier 1 that "exemplify quality," as Tier 2 that are "approaching quality" and Tier 3 as "not representing quality." While decisions are locally-controlled, the state has given Tier 1 vendors contracts, which allow districts to purchase those materials at a discount (Pondiscio 2017).

teachers use information from online teaching networks in their instructional materials decisions and 68 percent of teachers used information from online teaching networks in their teaching activity decisions. A third of teachers reported using online materials on the California Department of Education (CDE) website for their instructional material decisions (32 percent) and teaching activity decisions (34 percent), and nearly half (49 percent) reported using CDE website resources for their curriculum decisions. Slightly lower percentages reported relying on County Office of Education (COE) online materials for curriculum decisions (27 percent), and teaching activity decisions (31 percent).[30]

These results appear consistent with current conditions in the CDE that constrain the agency's ability to support frontline practice. Recent reductions in CDE staff have occurred disproportionately in portions of the agency devoted to instructional support. State-level staff reductions over time have been significantly higher in California than in other states. One challenge to attracting and retaining subject-matter experts arises from lower average salaries in the CDE than in high enrollment county and district offices (Moffitt et al. 2018).

Similarly, relatively low percentages of teachers report turning to Smarter Balanced to inform their instructional choices. Overall, 40 percent of teachers reported using Smarter Balanced for their curriculum decisions, 31 percent reported using Smarter Balanced for their materials decisions, and 40 percent reported using Smarter Balanced for their teaching activity decisions. In contrast, results from the January 2018 ATP suggest large majorities of teachers look to other teachers and look to their districts as they make instructional decisions:[31] 80 percent reported using resources from other teachers in their curriculum decisions; 92 percent reported using resources from other teachers in instructional material decisions; and 95 percent reported using resources from other teachers in their teaching activity decisions.[32]

[30] One study suggests principals were unaware of the resources on the CDE website and had difficulty navigating that website (Finkelstein et al. 2018). Finkelstein et al. (2018) also note that "However, once state resources were located (or provided to them), and professional development was delivered around how to use them, principals saw the resources as helpful examples of standard-aligned instruction and pedagogy" (12). A minority of superintendents also note a lack of use of the CDE's Dashboard due to incompleteness or lack of timeliness in the data (Polikoff, Korn, and McFall 2018).

[31] This result is consistent with national studies of Common Core implementation, which highlight the importance of districts in curricular and professional development choices and resources (Rentner et al. 2014).

[32] January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted; N=440

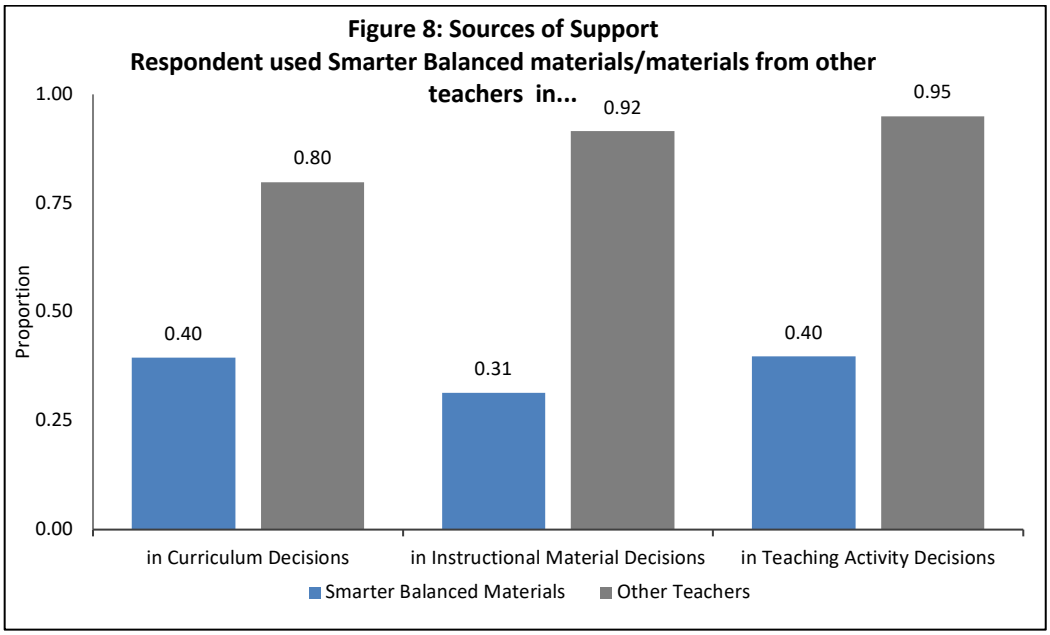

Figure 8 Source: March 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. N=169

A national study of teachers found that teachers working with higher concentrations of students who receive free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) were more likely to use online support for instructional materials, suggesting they "may not have as many in-school/district resources on which to draw" (Opfer et al. 2017, xv). The portrait from California suggests that teachers from higher poverty schools or schools with higher concentration of ELs are more likely to report using district online materials or links from the district website to online materials from other sources.

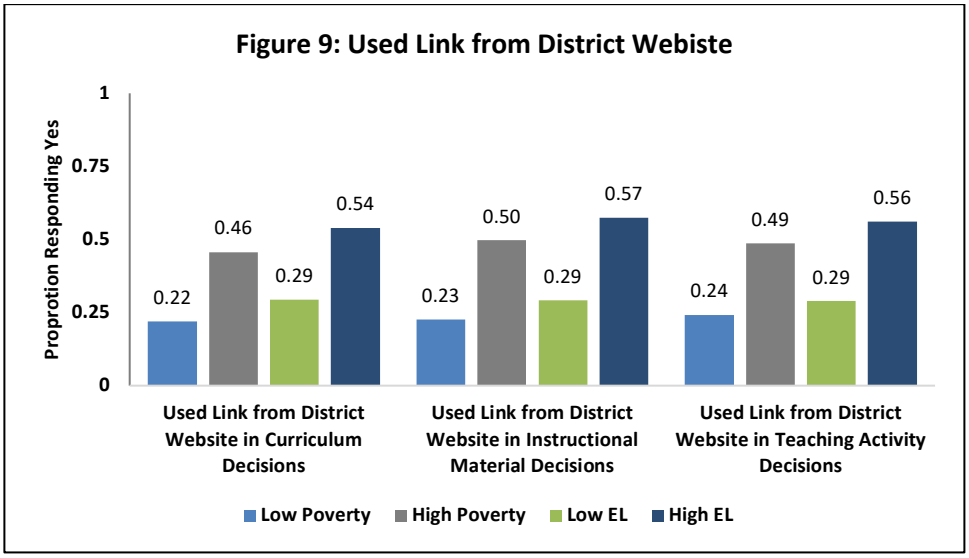

Figure 9 Source: January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. Low and Poverty N=146; Low EL N=144; High EL N=145

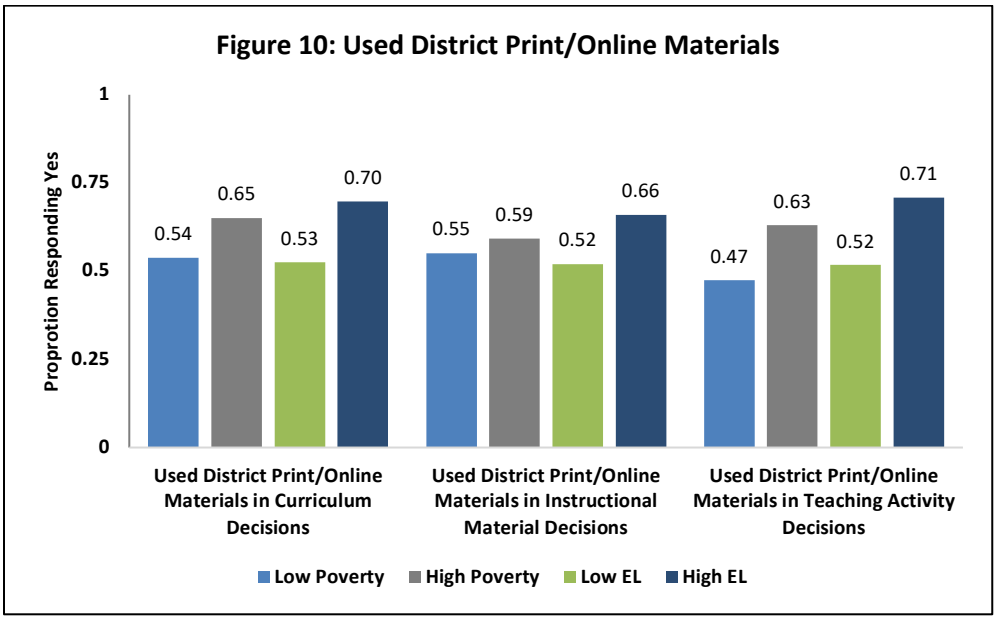

Figure 10 Source: January 2018 ATP; sample is weighted. Low Poverty N= 145; High Poverty N=146; Low EL N=144[33]; High EL N=145

Overall, however, the results suggest that teachers with high-need student populations are using any available resources for guidance, compared to their peers in low-poverty, low-EL schools. As Tables 3 and 4 suggest, teachers in schools with high percentages of EL and low-income students were more likely to rely on district level information for curriculum, instructional materials, and teaching activity decisions. This pattern follows for Smarter Balanced, guidance from teacher edition textbook, and County Education office consultant.

On the one hand, these results suggest that teachers from schools with high needs are seeking and using resources from a wide range of sources. This can suggest a vibrant terrain of instructional support options. As noted above, however, "people get overwhelmed," which was a concern raised by earlier studies of the Common Core in California (McLaughlin et al. 2014). Thus, on the other hand, these results suggest potentially more overwhelming conditions for teachers in schools with higher concentrations of ELs and higher concentrations of poverty.

> "There are so many resources out there around any given topic. And they are not curated. They are not organized. They are not bundled and pulled together … put yourself in the place of a site principal. So where do you go to get your cliff notes and have it all pulled together? That doesn't exist" (State/Regional Leader Interview 029).

[33] Please note that the N was 143 for "Used District Print/Online Materials in Curriculum Decisions ..."

Table 3: Sources of Materials, Difference in Means, High-Low Poverty Schools, High-Low EL Schools

	High Poverty and Low Poverty School					High EL and Low EL Schools				
	Mean Difference	*P-Value*	*Mean: Low Pov*	*Mean: High Pov*	*N*	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean: Low EL*	*Mean: High EL*	*N*
Used Smarter Balanced Materials in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.22	0.00	0.27	0.49	293	-0.18	0.00	0.34	0.52	290
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.23	0.00	0.23	0.46	293	-0.20	0.00	0.20	0.40	290
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.14	0.00	0.36	0.50	293	-0.24	0.00	0.30	0.54	290
Used guidance from teacher edition textbook in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.14	0.00	0.60	0.74	294	-0.27	0.00	0.50	0.77	291
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.13	0.00	0.62	0.75	294	-0.15	0.00	0.61	0.76	291
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.11	0.00	0.65	0.75	294	-0.19	0.00	0.59	0.78	291
Used County Education office consultant interaction in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.22	0.00	0.08	0.30	292	-0.16	0.00	0.12	0.28	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.20	0.00	0.10	0.30	292	-0.08	0.00	0.16	0.24	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.21	0.00	0.14	0.34	292	-0.14	0.00	0.18	0.32	289

Superintendents noted the amount of time they spend curating the new terrain of materials and their frustrations with the quality that they encounter.[34]

> "There is so much out there that there needs to be more vetting in the sense of what is state approved" (Superintendent Interview 25).

> "There's a lot out there but it's not all good. We're looking at links into lesson plans … that take a teacher directly to the resource that they need that's been vetted and approved for use" (Superintendent Interview 187).

[34] These frustrations are consistent with earlier reports of materials-related challenges to Common Core implementation in California (McLaughlin et al. 2014). They also parallel findings by Gao et al. in a survey conducted in 2017, examining districts' implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) framework (Gao et al. 2018, 12).

Table 4: Use of District Support, Difference in Means, High-Low Poverty Schools, High-Low EL Schools

	Mean Difference	*P-Value*	*Mean: Low Pov*	*Mean: High Pov*	*N*	*Mean Difference*	*P-Value*	*Mean: Low EL*	*Mean: High EL*	*N*
Used district print/online materials in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.11	0.00	0.54	0.65	291	-0.17	0.00	0.53	0.70	288
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.04	0.00	0.55	0.59	291	-0.14	0.00	0.52	0.66	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.16	0.00	0.47	0.63	292	-0.19	0.00	0.52	0.71	289
Used district written policy in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.09	0.00	0.67	0.76	292	-0.11	0.00	0.66	0.77	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.21	0.00	0.54	0.75	292	-0.23	0.00	0.53	0.76	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.21	0.00	0.51	0.72	292	-0.18	0.00	0.54	0.72	289
Used district curriculum document in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.16	0.00	0.71	0.87	292	-0.19	0.00	0.70	0.89	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.11	0.00	0.68	0.79	292	-0.16	0.00	0.66	0.82	289
Teaching Activity decisions	0.20	0.00	0.53	0.73	291	-0.18	0.00	0.56	0.74	289
Used district workshops, seminars in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.13	0.00	0.61	0.74	292	-0.23	0.00	0.55	0.78	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.09	0.00	0.66	0.75	292	-0.20	0.00	0.60	0.80	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.07	0.00	0.73	0.80	292	-0.14	0.00	0.68	0.82	289
Used district-level staff resources/advice in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.15	0.00	0.61	0.76	292	-0.21	0.00	0.58	0.79	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.13	0.00	0.62	0.75	292	-0.14	0.00	0.61	0.75	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.17	0.00	0.63	0.80	292	-0.19	0.00	0.62	0.81	289
Used link from district website in										
Curriculum Decisions	-0.24	0.00	0.22	0.46	292	-0.25	0.00	0.29	0.54	289
Instructional Materials Decisions	-0.27	0.00	0.23	0.50	292	-0.28	0.00	0.29	0.57	289
Teaching Activity decisions	-0.24	0.00	0.24	0.48	292	-0.27	0.00	0.29	0.56	289

We noted at the outset that we understand the Common Core in California in terms of the spread and uptake of its ideas: that it is broader than a specific, discrete policy, that sources of its ideas arise from myriad places, and that the standards are both bold and new *and* cousins of previous standards that layer on top of prior and present efforts at instructional improvement. The portrait of frontlines perspectives on instructional support in the Common Core era that emerges from surveys and interviews reveals ways in which Common Core ideas have penetrated instructional practice, suggested by high rates of standards use in curriculum decisions. The portrait also suggests that only between a third and a half of ELA and Math

teachers report receiving professional learning opportunities targeted toward helping them learn how to align materials and teaching activities with the standards. The portrait also suggests heavy reliance on fellow teachers and on districts for instructional support. While consistent with local control, this creates opportunities to augment diverse local influences on how Common Core ideas are understood and whether/how they are used and translated in practice.

5.0 OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

What are opportunities to learn as California moves forward with putting the ambitious policies of the past decade into practice? The major policy shifts embodied in the Common Core signal great ambition as well as great need to support bringing those policies into instructional and administrative practice.[35]

Stay the Course. The Common Core State Standards in California do not reflect a discrete moment or even a singular policy. They embody instead decades of accumulating efforts at instructional improvement in the state, juxtaposed with national policy shifts in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now the Every Student Succeeds Act, and national discourse on standards, combined with new education finance and accountability systems in the state, occurring concurrently with the Great Recession, shortages in the teacher pipeline, and looming pension debt. While California has a long history of standards-based efforts at instructional improvement, the current era is distinguished by its ambition and by the pace of desired change. This pace has been heady and hair-raising for the frontlines:

> "As a California teacher and administrator for over 40 years, the number and pace of the changes in the last few years is more than I've experienced at any other time. First the adoption of Common Core literacy and mathematics standards in 2010, next the implementation of Smarter Balanced Assessments, and then the extensive governance and funding expectations of LCFF. These changes challenged educators to rethink the fundamentals of schooling all at once. It's tough to get your head around how to move forward and still teach and run schools everyday" (State/Regional Leader Interview 006).

Our discrete findings coalesce into a portrait of opportunities for California to learn as it moves forward with its ambitious agenda. Chief among these is that improvement takes time to allow learning to occur. The plea to "stay the course"—in terms of general policy approach—emerged frequently in both superintendent and state leader interviews.[36]

[35] Not only is the content of ambitious instruction and learning hard, so is the process of local control and engagement (Humphrey et al. 2017, 24). In addition to content being important, there are still knowledge and skills to be gained in the state about what is meant by continuous improvement (Nayfack et al. 2017; Humphrey et al. 2017).

[36] Frontline calls for "more time" appears in other studies of the Common Core in California (Brown and Vargo 2014, 9).

Signs of Perceived Improvement in High Needs Schools. Our discrete findings also form a portrait of improvement, albeit "a little" improvement over the past three years. "A little" improvement appeared as the most common teacher perception in terms of the alignment between instructional materials and California's grade-level standards, in the alignment between district professional development and teachers' needs, in the quality of district professional development, and in school-level professional learning communities. Given the enormity of the task, "a little improvement" represents a major accomplishment, especially since these perceptions of improvement appear more likely among teachers in high EL and high poverty schools.

Need for Instructional Materials to Support English Learners. Within the contours of that general policy approach came signals for needs that vary by school condition. Our results suggest that California teachers who teach in schools with higher concentrations of poverty or higher concentrations of ELs were *less* likely to perceive that their instructional materials are well suited to the needs of their students.

Need for Support Curating the Terrain. Many sources of support exist in California: California is home to a vibrant terrain of educational support providers and foundation giving. Yet, it bears recalling the enormity of the task that Common Core envisions, especially on the unequal terrain of California schools. Other papers in this series illustrate that the distribution of these many sources of support does not necessarily map onto need (Moffitt et al. 2018). Our analysis here reveals, however, that teachers in schools with high concentrations of ELs or high concentrations of poverty seek and use resources from a wide range of resources. While this can illustrate California's vibrant terrain of options, it can also signal conditions conducive to overwhelming teachers in an un-curated terrain and conditions conducive to impeding rather than supporting instructional coherence.

Other papers that appear in this collection point to local frustrations with the accessibility of state online materials (Finkelstein et al. 2018). National studies have highlighted the importance of clear messages, finding that, "key areas particularly ripe for district and state work to provide clear messages and to support teachers" including the "selection and development of high-quality instructional materials aligned with standards across grade levels" for both ELA and mathematics (Opfer et al. 2017, xviii).

Expanding the Scope of Professional Learning Opportunities with an Explicit and Sustained Focus on Alignment. Scholarship demonstrates the importance of *both* new curriculum materials *and* opportunities for teachers to study those materials in depth (Saxe et al. 2001; Roschelle et al. 2010; Lynch et al., 2018). It also demonstrates the importance of programs that improve teachers' knowledge of the content they teach, and how students learn that content.[37] Do teachers have access to professional development that is explicitly connected to the materials they use? Superintendents raised this as a challenge:

[37] For a review, see Hill and Moffitt (2017) and Lynch et al (2018).

> "Because of the nature of multiple subject teachers in a K-6 environment, it is very difficult to provide them with high quality staff development to teach across content areas" (Superintendent Interview 107).

Results from the March national RAND ATP provide further evidence that California has room to develop and provide all teachers with sustained and explicit learning opportunities on how to align material and teaching activities to standards.

Indeed, "we have made strides in this very short time frame towards improvements" (State/Regional Leader Interview 006). How to support instructional improvement across geographies and across students' learning needs will be important considerations for the next administration as it builds on the strides made over the past eight years.

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APPENDIX: METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

RAND's American Teacher Panel

The survey data used in this report was commissioned by Stanford University and fielded by RAND Corporation. The survey was sent to California teachers who are members of the RAND American Teacher Panel (ATP). The ATP is an internet-based panel survey that draws from a nationally representative sample of teachers in the United States.[38] Though the survey is designed to be nationally representative, 22 states, including California, are oversampled. There are 794 teachers from California in the ATP. All of these 794 teachers were invited to take the Stanford survey; of those, 444 participated, representing a response rate of 55.9%. The survey was fielded between January 8, 2018 and February 4, 2018, with reminder emails sent to prospective respondents on January 16, 23, 31, and February 2.

The results of the survey were weighted using survey weights designed to adjust for nonresponse rates and oversampling, to ensure the sample is representative of California teachers. The weights adjust for school-level characteristics, such as school size, location, and demographics, and individual-level teacher characteristics, such as teaching experience and gender. In addition to the survey weights, replication weights were used to calculate uncertainty using the jackknife method. Eighty replication weights were provided for these calculations.

To calculate differences between responses from high and low poverty schools and urban and rural schools, we merged data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),[39] based on the NCES school ID number that was provided with the survey results. In addition, we incorporated school level data on English Language Learners from the California Department of Education (CDE).[40] We were able to match 442 respondents to NCES and CDE data. Data comes from the 2015-2016 school year, the most recent figures available. Poverty is calculated using free and reduced price lunch eligibility. To classify "high" and "low" rates, we divided the weighted survey into thirds, comparing the top third to the bottom third. Statistical analysis was performed in STATA v.14.2.

[38] More information about the ATP is available here: https://www.rand.org/education/projects/atp-aslp.html (last accessed April 23, 2018).

[39] Demographic data was obtained from NCES here: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pubschuniv.asp (last accessed April 23, 2018). Location information was obtained from NCES here: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/CCDLocaleCode.asp (last accessed April 23, 2018).

[40] Data from the CDE is available here: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/fselsch.asp (last accessed April 23, 2018).

January 2018 California-Specific RAND ATP

INSTRUCTIONS BOX

The following questions ask about the resources that you used **during** ***the past summer (2017) through this point in the current school year*** as you planned for instruction in your class.

In deciding whether or not you *used* a particular resource in planning: check yes if you actively consulted, worked with, or used a resource during your planning. Check no otherwise.

1. I used California's standards documents

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

2. I used materials from Smarter Balanced

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

3. I used guidance from a teachers' edition of a core textbook

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

4. I used information from a publisher's workshop or webinar

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

Resources provided by the *California Department of Education*

5. I used workshops, seminars, or webinars delivered by the California Department of Education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

6. I used printed or online materials developed by the California Department of Education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

7. I used interactions with a consultant working for the California Department of Education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

8. I used an external link on the California Department of Education's website

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

Resources provided by your *county office of education*

9. I used workshops, seminars, or webinars delivered by my county office of education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

10. I used printed or online materials developed by my county office of education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

11. I used interactions with a consultant working for the county office of education

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

12. I used an external link on my county office of education's website

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

Resources provided by your *district*

13. I used a written district policy or mandate

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

14. I used a district curriculum document (e.g., curriculum framework, pacing guide, course syllabus)

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No

c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

15. I used workshops, seminars, or webinars offered by my district

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

16. I used printed or online materials developed by my district

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

17. I used resources/advice/coaching from district-level staff

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

18. I used an external link on my district's website

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

Resources provided by one or more *professional organizations* (e.g. NCTM, NCTE, ASCD), including my local/national teacher association (e.g. CTA)

19. I used resources from a workshop, seminar, or webinar offered by a professional organization

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

20. I used printed materials developed/published by a professional organization

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

21. I used online materials on a professional organization's website

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

22. I used information or resources from external links on a professional organization's website

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No

b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

Information or resources gained from *other teachers*

23. I used information or resources gained from informal discussions with teacher colleagues

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

24. I used information/resources from my grade-level team, department team, or other school/district committee meetings

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

25. I used information/resources from online teaching networks, blogs, or forums

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

26. I used information from in-person participation in a teacher network or support group outside my district

a. in deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach □ Yes / □No
b. in deciding about what instructional materials to use □ Yes / □No
c. in deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use □ Yes / □No

INSTRUCTIONS BOX

The following questions ask for your opinion about supports for teaching and student learning at your school.

27. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I understand what California's grade-level standards expect of me as a teacher.					
California's grade-level standards are appropriate for the learning needs of students in my class.					
California's curriculum frameworks help					

me meet the learning needs of my students.					
The instructional materials I use in my class are well-suited to the learning needs of my students.					
My professional development experiences this year helped me improve how I teach specific standards or curriculum topics in my class.					

28. To what extent has your access to instructional support changed <u>during the past three years</u> (or during the time you have been teaching in California if that is less than three years):

	Worsened a lot	Worsened a little	Stayed the same	Improved a little	Improved a lot
The alignment between the instructional materials available to me and California's grade-level standards has…					
The alignment between the professional development that my district has offered me and my needs as a teacher has…					
The quality of *professional development* that my district offered me has…					
The quality of *instructional materials* available to me has…					
The professional learning community in my school has…					

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

29. Which grades are you teaching this school year (2017-18)? Check all that apply.

- Kindergarten
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th
- 6th
- 7th
- 8th
- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th
- Ungraded

30. Including the current year (2017-18), how many years have you worked as a teacher? Please round to the nearest whole number and do not include student teaching.

31. Which of the following subjects do you teach this school year (2017-18)? Check all that apply.

- o Mathematics (including general mathematics, algebra, geometry, calculus, etc.)
- o English language arts (including English, language arts, reading, literature, writing, speech, etc.)
- o Natural science (including general science, biology, chemistry, physics, etc.)
- o Social science (including social studies, geography, history, etc.)
- o Arts and/or music
- o Health education
- o Computer science
- o Foreign languages
- o Career or technical education
- o Special education
- o Other (please specify):

32. With which of the following do you identify? Check all that apply.

- o Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- o White
- o Black
- o American Indian or Alaska Native
- o Asian
- o Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- o Other (please specify):

33. With which of the following do you identify?

- o Female
- o Male
- o Other

March 2018 National RAND ATP

In addition to the California-specific survey, this report uses survey data from second RAND American Teacher Panel in March 2018, commissioned by the University of Michigan. The ATP is an internet-based panel survey that draws from a nationally representative sample of teachers in the United States.[41] Though the survey is designed to be nationally representative, 2 states, including California, are oversampled. Of the 3,417 teachers sampled, 1.716 completed the survey and are weighted in the final data set, representing a response rate of 50.2%. The sample includes 169 teachers from California. The survey field start date was March 29, 2018, with reminder emails sent to prospective respondents on February 2, April 4, 10, 16, 24, May 1, and 4. On May 10, 2018 the field period closed.

The results of the survey were weighted using survey weights designed to adjust for nonresponse rates and oversampling, to ensure the sample is representative of California math and English Language Arts teachers. The weights were calculated by RAND, and include the inverse of the likelihood of a participant being in the recruited panel, the sample selection weight and the response weight. Statistical analysis was performed in STATA v.14.2.

Questions included in this report:
Q9. This current school year (2017-18), I used my state's standards document:

- In deciding about what curriculum objectives or topics to teach
- In deciding about what instructional materials to use
- In deciding about what teaching activities or strategies to use

Q32. Thinking back on all of the professional development activities you participated in during summer (2017) and to this point in the current school year (2017-18), did any activities include an explicit and sustained focus on:

- Learning how to align instructional materials to standards?
- Learning how to align instructional activities to standards?
- Developing standards-based curricula or lesson plans in which other participants or the activity leader reviewed?
- Understanding how students learn specific (reading/math/ELA) concepts, practices, or tasks embedded in particular [reading/ELA/mathematics] standards?
- Learning about teaching practices suited for instruction on specific [reading/ELA/mathematics] standards?

[41] More information about the ATP is available here: https://www.rand.org/education/projects/atp-aslp.html (last accessed April 23, 2018).

Elite Interviews Methodological Approach

Data collection. We conducted a total of 46 semi-structured interviews with 40 respondents. In some cases, respondents were interviewed more than once (this applies to six respondents), and in some cases more than one respondent participated in a single interview (four interviews were conducted with two respondents present). Of the 40 respondents, 31 were focused primarily or exclusively on California, while the other nine respondents provided more national perspectives or perspectives from other states. Respondents included a wide range of leaders, including leaders from advocacy, research, and educational non-profit organizations. We used a snowball technique to help identify potential respondents while also seeking out individuals and organizations that were not always identified in interviews. Where appropriate, we also tried to attend to regional differences and sought a range of perspectives from across the state. The interviews were conducted by the principal investigators for the study, Susan Moffitt and David Cohen, and by a postdoctoral research associate on the team, Michaela Krug O'Neill. For most of the interviewers, at least two of the interviewers were present. The interviews took place between December 2016 and April 2018. They occurred in-person and over the phone. Twenty-seven of the interviews were recorded, while the others were not. In the case of the interviews that were not recorded, notes were taken during and after the interviews by the interviewers that had been present. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. All respondents were assured that they would be informed of any quotes or excerpts that we wanted to use in published research, and that we would include quotes or excerpts only with their permission. Respondents were informed that they could participate in the study even if they did not want to be quoted and that they could refuse to answer any questions they preferred not to discuss.

For each of the interviews, the researchers prepared tailored interview protocols informed by the respondent's role, organization, and professional experiences. Despite the personalized nature of these protocols, they covered many of the same topics and included many overlapping questions. These topics included 1) perceptions about the state of standards implementation, 2) changes in the "educational terrain" over time, 3) policies and programs related to instructional support, and 4) the spread of ideas. These protocols served as roadmaps for these conversations at the onset, but the interviews themselves unfolded in ways that were responsive to the respondents and the opportunities that arose in the conversation.

Data analysis. Data collection and analysis occurred in an integrated process, with frequent conversations amongst the research team that allowed us to develop and test hypotheses in response to our research questions (Miles and Huberman 1994). All recorded interviews were transcribed and all transcripts and interview notes were coded. Coding was conducted in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, and was carried out by a subset of the research team responsible for the qualitative data collection and analysis. Initial descriptive codes were informed by our research questions and attended, for example, to technical, organizational, and political sources of capacity to support instructional improvement. Refinement of these codes and the addition of categories grounded in the data emerged throughout the process of analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2007). These codes included stay the course and network isolation and hyperconnectivity. Quotes were selected to reflect common themes across the interviews.

Superintendent Interviews Methodological Approach

The research team at Brown conducted a set of structured interviews of a stratified random sample of 205 California superintendents to systematically retrieve their views on policies and conditions affecting their districts. Interview topics included: the implementation of educational standards, the implementation of the Local Control Accountability Plans, school finance, staffing needs, and data use.

District selection and respondent recruitment. California district superintendents were selected from a stratified random sample for participation in the study. The process for selecting districts and their superintendents occurred as follows. First, all California school districts were ranked by district enrollment. Second, the population of districts was divided in half, at the median. Third, 133 districts were randomly selected from the top half of the distribution (the high enrollment districts) and 67 districts were selected from the bottom half of the distribution (the low enrollment districts). Five further rural districts were selected based on the "Rural, Distant", "Rural, Fringe", and "Rural, Remote" National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorization. In addition, we replaced two districts from the original random sample because the Superintendent position was vacant (in one district, the website listed in one district and our inquiries with the district revealed there was no superintendent in post, and another had retired with no successor appointed). The replacement districts were randomly drawn from either the low enrollment or high enrollment districts; each selection was conducted with replacement.

The research team reached out to the superintendents' offices in the sample districts by email and telephone, explaining the nature of the study and requesting participation. Interview appointments were made with those superintendents who agreed to participate (here after respondents), at a time suitable for participants. Outreach began in mid-June of 2017 and continued during the interview period. Interviews took place during the period June 15 – October 15, 2017. A total of 91 superintendents agreed to participate and were successfully interviewed (a response-rate of 44.39%)

Of the districts that participated in the interviews:

- 34.07% are low poverty districts, 34.07% are medium poverty districts, and 31.87% are high poverty districts
- 19.78% have low rates of EL students, 45.05% have medium rates of EL students, 31.87% have high rates of EL students (for 3.30% information was not available)
- 29.67% are urban districts, 43.96% are suburban districts, 10.99% are town districts, 10.99% are rural districts, and 4.40% are "other" districts

Interview methods: interview procedure, accuracy checking and data handling processes. Interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interview team consisted of two faculty members, two postdoctoral research associates, and a number of note-taking graduate and undergraduate assistants, and a note-taking research assistant based at CEPA. Two members of the team participated on each interview phone call. The target duration for interviews was

thirty minutes; we exceeded this duration only in instances where the respondents desired to continue the call, or agreed to extend the call to cover key questions not yet addressed. The primary interviewer, a faculty member or postdoctoral research associate, led the interview and asked the respondent questions from a structured interview protocol (included below). The research assistant (graduate or undergraduate) on the call took notes to document the respondents' answers to each question. Interview reports containing these notes were saved using a unique respondent ID and did not identify respondents personally.

All respondents were assured that they would be informed of any quotes or excerpts that we wanted to use in published research, and that we would include quotes or excerpts only with their permission. Respondents were informed that they could participate in the study even if they did not want to be quoted and that they could refuse to answer any questions they preferred not to discuss. Respondents were asked (and given the option to decline) to have the interviews recorded to enable checking of our notes for accuracy, and were offered a copy of the external transcript if they wished to receive one. Of the 91 interviews successfully completed, 83 were recorded and externally transcribed (four of the remaining interviews took place before the recording protocol was established, and a further four were not recorded due to technical issues experienced either with the web-based recording platform, or with connecting that platform to district offices' telephone systems).

Data coding and qualitative analysis. Responses documented in the interview report for each unique interview participant were coded using an architecture created based on the interview question protocol and was reviewed by multiple members of the research team prior to coding. Coding and analysis of the superintendent interview data for this report occurred in an integrated process, with frequent conversations amongst the research team that allowed us to develop and test hypotheses in response to our research questions (Miles and Huberman 1994). Our analysis took place in two stages. First, the spreadsheet of coded responses was used to extract demographic information on school districts, and quantified answers to interview questions concerning respondents' key concerns about California and main sources of information on materials and professional development opportunities to support instructional improvement.

Second, the interview research notes were re-read using a coding architecture, developed in NVivo qualitative analysis software and based on the interview protocol, to identify key themes emergent from the collected interviews, and selected quotations illustrative of those themes. This stage of coding was carried out by a subset of the research team responsible for the qualitative data collection and analysis. Refinement of these codes and the addition of categories grounded in the data emerged throughout the process of analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2007. Themes particularly relevant to this report emerged within and across codes documenting: perceived weakness in current state capacity; perceived benefits from current state policy and activity; respondents' top three concerns regarding state policy; examples of respondents' own successful district and school processes for evaluating quality of materials and professional development opportunities; need for additional expertise in subject matter,

curation of materials, and in instructional improvement practices; perceptions of network hyperconnectivity and isolation.

Interview question protocol

Getting Down to Facts II:
Current Conditions and Paths Forward for California's Schools
Interview Protocol
Live version: amended June 18, 2017

Consent

- Superintendent X, did you receive and have time to read the consent form we emailed?
- Do you agree to participate in this study?
- Do you have any questions about the consent form or the study?
- With your permission, we would like to record our interview to have an accurate record of our conversation.
- In the course of the interview, you may ask us to stop recording at any time; and we will gladly stop recording the conversation.
- You may still participate in this study if you decline to have the conversation recorded.
- If you would like to receive a copy of the text of your transcribed interview, please let us know and we will gladly provide you with a copy.
- Do we have your permission to record our interview?

1.0 Opening

We would like to start by asking a couple of general questions about state policy.

1.1 We wondered, what do you see as the top three things state policymakers should do to support California's public education? (open ended)

1.1.1 Why?

2.0 Personnel

2.1 We wondered, in your district, are you experiencing shortages of staff at the school-level and/or at the district-level (Prompt: yes/no)

2.1.1 If yes, in what fields (Prompt: list – looking here for subject matter (ELA, Math) or grade levels (6th grade, etc.) or staff (facilities, mental health)

2.2 We wondered, if you could add a staff position for schools what would it be?

2.3 We wondered, if you could add a staff position at the district level what would it be?

2.4 We wondered, do you perceive a shortage of high quality mental health staff working in the schools in your district? (Prompt: yes/no)

2.5 Does your district work with mental health service providers outside of your schools to provide services to students? (Prompt: yes/no)

2.5.1 If yes, what services do they provide? (Prompt: list)

3.0 Instructional Practice and Support

3.1 District Needs: Are there areas where you would like to see improvement in instructional practice in your district? (open ended)

3.1.1 If so, what are those areas? (Prompt: subject matter, grade level, subgroup (EL, special needs), etc.)

3.2 Materials and Curriculum: We'd like to hear about how your district selects curriculum and instructional materials.

3.2.1 Where do you receive information about standards-aligned curriculum and instructional materials?

3.2.1.1 Do these sources of information help you assess the quality of curriculum and instructional materials?

3.2.1.2 If yes, how so?

3.2.2. We have a few questions about pacing guides. Which of the following best describes your district:

3.2.2.1 The district makes pacing guides available to teachers, but does not require their use

3.2.2.2 The district makes pacing guides available to teachers, and requires their use

3.2.2.3 The district does not make pacing guides available to teachers

3.3 Professional Development

Let's talk for a bit about professional development.

3.3.1 Are you involved with choices about professional development/professional learning for your district? (Prompt: yes/no)

3.3.1.1 If yes

3.3.1.1.1 how do you learn about which instructional areas need improvement?

3.3.1.1.2 what role, if any, does LCAP play in helping determine the areas in need of improvement?

3.3.1.1.3. how do you learn about providers of professional development and their quality?

3.3.1.1.4. what role, if any, has standards implementation played in your district's professional development choices?

3.3.2 Are there ways the state and/or county could be more helpful to you in supporting instructional improvement in your district?

4.0 Finance

4.1 What is your process for tracking how schools use funds? How do you learn about how resources are used in the district (open)

4.2 What do you see as 1 or more of the main purpose(s) of LCFF? (e.g., how money should be spent, what equity means) (Prompt: list)

4.3 Has LCFF changed funding in your school district, if so how? (open)

4.4 From the following list, where do you receive guidance and support on LCAP and LCFF

4.4.1.1 The State Department of Education? (Prompt: yes/no)

4.4.1.2 The County Office of Education? (Prompt: yes/no)

4.4.1.3 Other superintendents? (Prompt: yes/no)
4.4.1.4 Principals or teachers in your district? (Prompt: yes/no)
4.4.1.5 Who have we not mentioned?

4.5 What do you see as one or more of the main roles that board members play in the LCAP/LCFF process? (Prompt: list)

4.6 Let's talk about special education funding for a moment. In general, how does special education funding affect your other budgeting decisions (open)?

4.6.1 Are SELPA budgeting decisions made transparent to you? (Prompt: yes/no)
4.6.2 Are there ways that SELPAs could be more helpful to you? If so, what?

4.7 We hear a lot about pensions and unfunded liabilities. Are pensions a pressing issue in your district? (Prompt: yes/no)

4.7.1 Where are you getting information about pensions? (Prompt: list)
4.7.2 Do you think it would affect your ability to hire new workers if the pension system changed to a defined contributions plan? (Prompt: yes/no)

5.0 Accountability, Improvement and Data

<u>Dashboard and Metrics</u>

***Dashboard Use*:**

5.1 What do you see as 1 or more of the main purpose(s) of the Dashboard (e.g., how money should be spent, what equity means) (Prompt: list)

5.2 How have you used the new Dashboard?

5.2.1 What metrics have you used from the Dashboard? (Prompt: list)

5.3 Are there metrics that you think are missing? (Prompt: yes/no)

5.3.1 If so, which ones? (Prompt: list)
5.3.2 Why (open)

5.4 What metrics do you use (if any) to learn about schools in your district that you are concerned about? (Prompt: list)

5.5 Do feel pressure to improve the any one of the metrics in particular? (Prompt: yes/no).

5.5.1 If yes, where does this pressure come from? (open)

***Dashboard Staff Support*:**

5.6 Do you have any staff who can help you understand trends in the data you collect / use the data to inform programs or planning? (Prompt: yes/no)

5.6.1 If yes, how many FTEs? (Prompt: number)

Data Systems and Use at the School Level:

5.7 What kind of student information can school staff access directly from your district data systems? (Prompt: list)

6.0 Closing

6.1 We wondered, is there anything else you would like to convey to state policymakers about supporting CA public education?*

*This question was introduced as a minor revision to the interview protocol on 06/18/17. Six of the interviews took place before this addition and so will not have responses to question 6.1 in the dataset.