



School Leadership Groups Urge “Adequate Time” to Implement Common Core Standards

The undersigned groups, representing AASA, NAESP, NASSP, and NSBA, release the following statement

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have started to move our nation’s schools in a more positive direction as it relates to ensuring all students are striving toward high, rigorous learning goals. Overall, local school board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers believe in the CCSS and their ability to lead to deeper levels of learning for our nation’s students. In fact, the majority of respondents of a recent NAESP survey of 916 elementary and middle-level principals from 14 early adopter states—states that both adopted CCSS into policy before other states and also enacted ambitious efforts to heighten awareness and implementation of the standards—believe that the CCSS will increase students’ skill mastery across subjects, and provide a curriculum frame for deeper conceptual understanding of math and English language arts. Undoubtedly, the corresponding online assessments, currently under construction, stand to play a very important role in the education arena, but only if we get it right. With more federal involvement and less state leadership, we are concerned that the momentum of the online assessments could derail the good work already in place through the CCSS and deny the assessments the opportunity to provide the same academic benefits. It is imperative that all educators and education stakeholders who support the new standards initiative have the time necessary to get it right and make it work in schools. We should move with all deliberate speed; in this case, “deliberate” is more important than “speed.”

While assessment has an important role to play as one of multiple measures for evaluating student learning and achievement, the continued reliance on one-time testing diverts attention away from content and the substance of what is being taught. This is especially problematic when the one-time tests are brand-new, recently aligned with new standards, and schools have had insufficient time to prepare teachers to meaningfully incorporate the standards and aligned assessments into their teaching. Principals report that, despite having received some related professional development over the past two years, they largely lack preparation to lead and sustain the CCSS. School district leaders and principals need more time and adequate professional development to manage the change process in schools; evaluate teachers’ use of the new standards during instruction; align schools’ instructional focus; make key decisions on the best types of professional development to support teachers; and develop extended learning opportunities to sufficiently address CCSS implementation. Further, they need sufficient allocation of financial resources to implement this array of school-based activities.

The momentum toward online assessments and the pressure to meet another arbitrary target (implementation in the 2014-2015 school year) should not get ahead of the very real obstacles states and districts face in aligning the curriculum with the new standards and implementing the tests. It is imperative that we all consider the implications for bandwidth, infrastructure, and professional development as it relates to online assessment. We must make adequate time for a thoughtful conversation about how assessments can be used to provide instructionally useful information to schools in a timely manner. This conversation must address the additional time that is needed to allow states and districts to properly address data collection issues, which have dogged states since the inception of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) more than a decade ago. Educators also need time to adjust to the seismic shift in practices and expectations of CCSS and the related assessments. And the conversation must address granting our schools and districts the time to identify, acquire, and implement the essential technology infrastructure and equipment that is sorely needed, especially at the elementary level, to support the delivery of new online assessments. Finally, school districts need time to educate the community, including media, about the reasons CCSS are important; to inform them about the changes in content and instruction the CCSS will bring about; and to manage expectations when early results on new assessments will likely be lower because of higher standards, new instruction and curriculum for teachers and students. Getting this transition right can mean the difference between getting and keeping public and educator support for the Common Core or a loss in confidence in the standards and even the public schools, especially if as expected the first-year scores will disappoint.

If we have learned anything from NCLB, it's that while assessments and the related data have the potential to be powerful tools in an educator's toolkit, they easily can be reduced to a simple mechanism of punishment that bears no meaningful impact on student learning. The research tells us that true accountability of student learning is more complex and cannot be reduced to a test score alone. Test scores are but one indicator in robust accountability systems that should be used to inform instruction—not serve as a punitive instrument that serves as the sole driver of state, school district, and schools' efforts to improve student learning. If the momentum of the testing consortia is to stay on track, federal policy should use tests for information for parents, educators, and policy makers. Further, the tests are necessary but not sufficient for use in teacher and principal evaluation and sanctions for students, schools, or school systems; state and local evaluation systems will never function to build the capacity of educators without sufficient, accurate, and timely data in addition to test scores. The prudent course is to avoid over-reliance on the assessments for federal accountability purposes until the CCSS are fully implemented, instructional materials and professional supports have been offered, schools have the technical capacity to implement the assessments, and communities are informed. Failure to consider this reality will result in the test-and-punish cycle being repeated, with the same disappointing results of NCLB-era accountability.

These philosophical considerations are compounded by real-world obstacles to implementing both the Common Core Standards and the related online assessment. AASA's latest economic impact survey included items related to the standards and assessments, and the respondents delivered a clear message: State support for the Common Core Standards is holding steady at best, if not declining, and states and districts are woefully lacking as it relates to infrastructure and connectivity capacity to support the online assessments:

- 74% of respondents indicate that the level of funding/fiscal support provided by the state for implementing the Common Core Learning standards is "inadequate."
- 57% of respondents indicate that the level of professional development provided by the state for implementing the Common Core Learning standards is "inadequate."
- With many states more than a year in to the work of implementing Common Core, school-based practitioners reported a very clear trend in DECLINING state support for Common Core implementation:
 - 33% indicated *State funding support has decreased.*
 - 23% indicated *State professional development support has decreased.*
 - 31% indicated *State leadership support has decreased.*
 - 23% indicated *My state has considered legislative proposals that would decrease state policy/funding support for Common Core learning standards.*
- In detailing their state, district and school capacity to implement the online assessments, respondents indicated:

Schools in my state are, on average, not ready to implement the online assessment.	58.4%
Schools in my state, on average, lack the infrastructure to support the online assessments.	50.5%
My school requires additional infrastructure to fully support the online assessments.	46.5%
Schools in my state, on average, lack the bandwidth/connectivity to support the online assessments.	44.3%
My school requires additional bandwidth/connectivity to fully support the online assessments.	35.0%
My school is fully prepared, in terms of funding and bandwidth capacity, to implement the online assessments.	17.7%
My state has adequate bandwidth capacity/the ability to support adequate school connectivity but lacks the funding to fully implement the online tests.	13.7%
My state is fiscally prepared to implement the assessments, but lacks adequate bandwidth capacity/the ability to support adequate school connectivity.	9.1%
Schools in my state are, on average, fully ready to implement the online assessments.	9.1%
My state is fully prepared, in terms of funding and bandwidth capacity, to implement the fully-online assessment.	3.6%

* This analysis reflects 497 responses from 46 states.

About AASA

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. For more information, visit www.aasa.org. Follow AASA on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AASAHQ or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AASApage. Information on AASA Children's Programs on Twitter @AASATotalChild.

About NAESP

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

About NASSP

[The National Association of Secondary School Principals \(NASSP\)](http://www.nassp.org) is the leading organization of and national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and all school leaders from across the United States and 36 countries around the world. The association provides research-based professional development and resources, networking, and advocacy to build the capacity of middle level and high school leaders to continually improve student performance. Reflecting its longstanding commitment to student leadership development as well, NASSP administers the [National Honor Society](http://www.nassp.org/national-honor-society), [National Junior Honor Society](http://www.nassp.org/national-junior-honor-society), [National Elementary Honor Society](http://www.nassp.org/national-elementary-honor-society), and [National Association of Student Councils](http://www.nassp.org/national-association-of-student-councils).

About NSBA

Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit organization representing state associations of school boards and their more than 90,000 local school board members throughout the U.S. Working with and through our state associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. www.nsba.org