COMMON CORE IS HERE – NOW WHAT?

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ABSTRACT

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The Common Core State Standards have been adopted by the state of California and the majority of the other states, so now what? This qualitative study examines the implementation process of the new standards by looking at how principals are leading their staffs through the process, what leadership strategies are the most effective during this change, what shifts in teaching practice are necessary to support the new standards, and what teachers are doing to prepare their students for the new Smarter Balanced standardized testing. Three principals from three different schools were interviewed and a six-person focus group of two teachers from each of the same three schools was conducted to identify lessons from the implementation process of the new standards.

Four categories and themes within these categories emerged from the data. These categories include the necessary shifts in teaching practice (the move from lecturer to facilitator of learning, incorporating technology in the classroom, and writing across the curriculum), the leadership needs during the implementation process (providing time for teachers to plan and collaborate, providing Common Core aligned professional development opportunities, and having open communication), the successes so far in the process (increased collaboration among staff and students, increase in students’ critical
thinking skills, and the trainings that have been offered), and the challenges that the educators are experiencing (lack of Common Core aligned materials, lack of time to plan and collaborate, and preparing students for the new standardized assessments – SBAC).
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

As some educators say, the pendulum has, once again, swung. With this pendulum swing, comes a set of new national standards for English language arts and mathematics for grades kindergarten through 12th grade known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Since the inception of the Common Core in 2010, the majority of U.S. states and territories have adopted the standards, including the state of California. The new standards were developed to prepare students to be college and career ready. With the adoption of the new standards, comes the process of making changes to current practice required to implement the Common Core. This change is something that will take time and planning by states, school districts, schools, principals, teachers, support staff, and parents. The task of implementing the major changes required by the Common Core can be a daunting one for schools. Getting stakeholders on board, making a plan for the change, and beginning the process are all things that the schools in states that have adopted the Common Core are currently confronted with.

Educators are faced with learning the content of the new standards at the varying grade levels, learning the ins and outs of new Common Core aligned materials (when they become available for adoption), learning the new standardized assessment system, shifting teaching practices to fit the new standards, incorporating technology in the classrooms, and many other tasks. The shift and the implementation process do not come
with extra time, so educators will be incorporating the shift as they move along through the school year.

The purpose of this study is to identify the major challenges and opportunities that stand out to educators as they work their way through the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. Now that the Common Core is here, what are educators doing in the field to implement these new standards in their schools?

Overview of Thesis

The research in this thesis investigates the implementation process of the new Common Core State Standards in schools. The remaining chapters in this thesis are as follows: Chapter two consists of a literature review presenting information from published research regarding the standards movement, the Common Core State Standards, California’s Implementation of the Common Core State Standards, the state of instructional materials, standardized assessment for the new standards, the process of changing to the Common Core, the role of professional development in the change, and leadership strategies during the change. Chapter three offers a description of the methods used in the study which included a scribe taking notes on a computer during one-to-one interviews with three principals and a focus group of six teachers, all of whom are in the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards at their schools. The results of the study are presented in Chapter four, which include categories and themes that emerged from the data along with supporting responses from the participants. Chapter five includes a discussion/analysis of the results and how those relate to the literature.
The thesis concludes with Chapter six, which describes the limitation of this study and implications for future research.

This study not only confirms earlier findings about the need for leadership and professional development when implementing major changes in schools, but also contributes to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of what rural schools are facing as they make the shift to the new Common Core State Standards.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The United States is on its way to implementing new national education standards known as the Common Core State Standards. At this time, the implementation process is in full swing across the country with more than ninety percent of the states and territories adopting the national standards and the new standardized assessment systems. The United States has come a long way in the standards movement. After adopting state-based standards that varied across the states, there is now one set of national standards for English language arts and mathematics. These common standards are designed to be more rigorous in asking students to engage in higher order thinking and apply their knowledge to new situations in order to boost student achievement and prepare students for college and careers.

Currently the state of California is in the process of implementing the new standards with full implementation scheduled for the 2014-2015 school year. Each school district has been given flexibility to plan their own implementation schedule, while using the state adopted plan as a guide. The ongoing implementation of the Common Core State Standards is creating a lot of questions about how successful the process will be. Schools are still waiting for instructional materials to be adopted by the state. Districts are also confronting the need for technology to administer the new standardized computer assessments that will be used to assess the Common Core State Standards.
It is evident that there is a need for effective leadership during this process for districts to make the change as smooth as possible for everyone involved. District and site level leadership will need to work closely with all stakeholders to guide the implementation process. Effective communication throughout the process among the stakeholders is also an important aspect when implementing this type of massive change within a school system.

**Standards Movement**

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) came about after then Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education and asked them to report on the state of education in America. Their study focused on four areas in the educational process: content, time, expectations, and teaching (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). Some of the commission’s findings included a diluted curriculum, lowered educational standards due to minimal demonstration of proficiency required to pass competency exams, the amount of time students were in school was inconsistent across the states and often much shorter than that of other countries, and teachers were not adequately prepared (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The findings spurred debates about raising expectations for teachers and students, while also emphasizing the need to monitor student performance through testing (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008).

Inequities in American public education and the perceived need to develop more cognitively challenging instruction for all students helped, in part, to spark the standards movement (Hamilton et al., 2008; McClure, 2005). These inequities had to do with how
schools were funded; schools in poor neighborhoods had less money than schools in wealthier neighborhoods (McClure, 2005). The difference in the standards, achievement, and curricula for students in the two types of schools were clear (McClure, 2005). Gradually school funding shifted from local property taxes to state revenue in an attempt to address inequities, but there was still a need for all students to have the same educational opportunities (McClure, 2005). Consistent standards with high expectations for all students emerged as one way to ensure these equal educational opportunities (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Since the beginning of the American public school system, there have been standards for almost everything, including time, segments of curriculum, textbooks, and working conditions for teachers (McClure, 2005). However, there were no standards about what students were expected to learn by the end of each school year (McClure, 2005). In the early 1990s, several states joined together to create content standards for students (McClure, 2005). Under the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1993, state education departments received federal grants for writing state standards (Educate America Act of 1993). Education standards were created to allow every student to reach a high level of achievement by defining the skills, knowledge, and concepts that students need to possess at the end of each grade level from kindergarten through high school (California Department of Education, 2012). Content and performance standards were the building blocks of the standards movement, with content standards detailing what students should know and performance standards describing what meets, exceeds, or falls short of meeting the standard (McClure, 2005).
The content standards became the focal point of what students needed to learn, while the performance standards were developed to define the various levels of competency in regards to the content standards (Hamilton et al., 2008). Since there were no mandated national standards, content standards varied from state to state and performance standards defining proficiency were different among the states as well (Hamilton et al., 2008). This made it very difficult to compare achievement across the country because of the variations among the states (Hamilton, et al., 2008).

Along with standards, assessment systems were also required (Hamilton, et al., 2008). By the early 2000s all states had their own standards assessment plans in place (Hamilton et al., 2008). At this time, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) legislation was signed into law mandating a system of standards, assessments, and yearly-defined targets for each state (Hamilton et al., 2008; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Similar to the inconsistent state performance standards described above, NCLB required districts to set their own Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to determine the achievement gains needed for each school or district (Kern, 2011). Adequate Yearly Progress is the measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable for student achievement and performance under the No Child Left Behind Act (Education Week, 2004).

The assessment requirements detailed in NCLB had high-stakes attached to them, which included financial consequences for not meeting benchmarks (Hamilton et al., 2008; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Repercussions for inadequate test results added significant penalties if schools did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress, such as
funding being redirected for professional development or students being allowed the option to attend higher performing schools within the district, with district-paid transportation to these schools (Hamilton et al., 2008).

This implementation of high-stakes testing has raised many questions about whether standards are promoting high-quality instruction and improved achievement, or whether districts are spending the majority of their time and resources teaching to the tests to show improved achievement and avoid the penalties associated with not making adequate progress (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Following *A Nation at Risk* (1983), there have been two objectives in the reform movement: equity and increased levels of performance (McClure, 2005). According to reformers, all students in all schools should have the same opportunities, and performance levels of students should reflect the increasing demands of the workforce (McClure, 2005). With the additional demands from the No Child Left Behind act, such as incremental achievement gains to avoid penalties and the ongoing perception that students are not achieving at sufficiently high levels, there is still a need for continued reform (McClure, 2005). The most current step in the standards movement is the movement to nationalized standards known as Common Core. The next section describes the Common Core State Standards.

**Common Core State Standards**

The impetus for national standards came from the need for American students to be able to compete in the global marketplace (Kern, 2011) and data showing U.S.
students losing their competitive advantage to other nations. The Common Core State Standards Initiative, led jointly by the National Governors’ Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, developed the national standards as a state-led effort to agree on expectations, knowledge, and skills for K-12 students (Hwang, McMaken, Porter, & Yang, 2011). In 2010 the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics (Porter et al., 2011). At this time, more than 90% of the states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

The Common Core State Standards are designed to be clear and understandable, informed by data from top performing countries’ educational methods, and aligned with college and work expectations (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). The CCSS are designed to prepare students for college and the workplace by having them demonstrate independence, build content knowledge, respond to a variety of 21st century demands, comprehend as well as critique, value evidence, use technology competently, and understand the culture and perspectives of others (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). The CCSS are explicit in their expectations of what students are to learn, but they do not dictate pedagogy; school districts and teachers have the flexibility to deliver instruction to fit the needs of the students (Phillips & Wong, 2010; Hwang et al., 2011).

The benefits of a national curriculum include shared expectations, focus, efficiency, and quality of assessments (Hwang, et al., 2011). With these shared expectations, consistency across the states will improve (Hwang et al., 2011). With
greater focus, the Common Core State Standards require students to deepen their understanding and exploration of new skills and concepts (Hwang et al., 2011). The CCSS requires more depth of understanding, the ability to apply knowledge in a variety of novel situations and demonstrations of higher order problem solving skills.

The system’s efficiency is expected to improve with the development of common curriculum materials, professional development programs, and teacher education across the country (Hwang et al., 2011). Additionally, with just one or two electronically delivered assessments that are used across the country rather than the myriad of state developed assessments, the consistency of assessments will improve with fewer variations (Hwang et al., 2011). The current standardized assessments most often rely only on multiple-choice questions, which do not typically assess complex abilities at the heart of global competitiveness (Calkins et al., 2012). The quality of standardized assessments will improve with the inclusion of a variety of approaches in testing, including multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and projects (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). The use of common assessments will also provide a valid basis for comparing state scores, with fewer variations among results across the country (Calkins et al., 2012). In addition, because the majority of the states will be working from the same core, a collaborative, broad-based sharing of best practices can more readily occur (Phillips & Wong, 2010).

One noted difference between the current state standards and the new CCSS is the fact that the current standards are very broad with little time devoted to deeply exploring concepts or skills (Hwang et al., 2011). The CCSS address this issue by allowing time
for students to explore concepts much more deeply, allowing for greater mastery of skills and concepts (Hwang et al., 2011).

When comparing the alignment of state standards and the CCSS, a considerable difference was found between the CCSS and both the current math and English language arts state standards (Hwang et al., 2011). In math, the CCSS put less emphasis on memorization and performing procedures, instead emphasizing demonstrations of cognitive understanding much more than previous standards (Hwang et al., 2011). Common Core State Standards also represent modest shifts towards higher-level cognitive demand in mathematics than the old state standards (Hwang et al., 2011). For example, the Common Core puts a greater emphasis on number sense and operations with much less emphasis on geometric concepts, data displays, and probability than the state standards (Hwang et al., 2011). In English language arts, the CCSS put a greater emphasis on language study, while the state standards focused more on comprehension (Hwang et al., 2011).

A few similarities were also found between state standards and the CCSS (Hwang et al., 2011). It was found that both standards put a similar emphasis on conjecture (Hwang et al., 2011). Neither set of standards put much emphasis on solving routine problems, but the CCSS emphasizes this standard twice as much as the old state standards (Hwang et al., 2011). Standards vary amongst the states, so these similarities and differences would also vary in comparison to the CCSS from state to state (Hwang et al., 2011). Overall, it was found that the CCSS will increase the cognitive demand to a
higher level much more in English language arts than in mathematics (Hwang et al., 2011).

One of the reasons behind the Common Core State Standards initiative was the perceived need for more focus on skills and a deeper engagement with a narrower range of content than the current state standards allow, although, as noted above, large variations from state-to-state prevent a clear comparison (Hwang et al., 2011). Overall it was found that state standards have more focus for English language arts, but the CCSS is more focused in mathematics (Hwang et al., 2011).

The Common Core State Standards will require a shift for teachers after years of teaching the old standards (Sawchuk, 2012). There is a fear that the new CCSS will fail if implementation is done poorly (Sawchuk, 2012). Teachers will need to shift their practice to put less emphasis on memorizing for both English language arts and mathematics, instead putting more emphasis on analyzing (Hwang et al., 2011). In order for the new standards to succeed, teachers will need intensive professional development (Sawchuk, 2012).

There are those who voice arguments against national standards due to the perceived loss of educational control from the states to the federal government (Canton & Tienken, 2009). One argument has to do with funding (Canton & Tienken, 2009). The federal government contributes 7% of school funding while the state governments contribute 93%, which spurs questions of why states would give up control by adopting nationalized standards when the majority of funding is coming from the states (Canton & Tienken, 2009). Also, it is argued that there is no sound evidence to show that a national
curriculum is needed for America to be globally competitive (Canton & Tienken, 2009). This assertion is based on the decade-old argument against standardized testing, citing the lack of empirical evidence showing a correlation between high-stakes tests, economic vitality, and competitiveness in high performing countries (Canton & Tienken, 2009). Similarly, researchers argue that, on such an important topic as education, it is unethical to support a massive social experiment like CCSS based on data-less decisions (Canton & Tienken, 2011).

The standards movement was sparked in the 1980s, state standards were developed in the 1990s, federal legislation (No Child Left Behind) mandating a system of standards, high-stakes testing, and yearly defined targets for each state was signed in the 2000s, and national standards (Common Core State Standards) were developed, adopted, in the 2010s. The next section describes the status of California’s implementation process for Common Core, the ways in which the instructional materials adoption process has changed with the adoption of the new standards, and expands upon issues related to the new standardized assessments being developed to measure student achievement with the CCSS.

California and the Common Core State Standards

California adopted the Common Core State Standards on August 2, 2010 (California Department of Education [CDE], 2010). The Academic Content Standards Commission made the recommendation to the California State Boards of Education to approve the CCSS with an allowable addition of fifteen percent of California-specific
standards to the adoption (CDE, 2010). Along with the adoption decision, California developed a guide for implementing the CCSS, while making each of the individual school districts, also known as Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), responsible for rolling out their own plans for implementation that meet local needs and resources (CDE, 2010). California has prepared “crosswalk” documents between the current state standards and the CCSS to help educators make the transition (CDE, 2010). The state has also given over a billion dollars to the school districts to help support the local implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which can include professional development for teachers and materials (CDE, 2010).

Instructional materials designed to teach the CCSS are in the process of being developed (CDE, 2010). The State Board of Education had a deadline to adopt new K-8 aligned instructional materials for math by March of 2014 (CDE, 2010). One key issue with the implementation of the CCSS is the fact that it will take years to fully develop a framework and instructional materials in accordance with the CCSS (CDE, 2010). In the interim, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction invited publishers to create materials that will bridge the gap between current instructional programs and the new standards (CDE, 2010) leaving many teachers and schools to improvise in the meantime.

**The importance of quality instructional materials**

Instructional materials are an essential tool for teachers, and their impact on student learning can be significant (CDE, 2012). Students learn primarily through their teacher and the instructional materials that are used (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). The
materials provide the primary access to the state content standards (CDE, 2012). High quality instructional materials are essential to raising student achievement in the Common Core era (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). There is strong evidence that shows instructional materials affect student learning and influence pedagogy (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). Evidence suggests that instructional materials can have an even larger impact on student learning than teacher quality, which makes the selection of high quality instructional materials essential (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012).

**Adoption of instructional materials in the State of California**

The Instructional Quality Commission, formerly known as the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Material Commission, is an advisory body to the State Board of Education that was established in 1927 (CDE, 2012). The Instructional Quality Commission is responsible for the development of the framework and criteria for instructional materials and then recommending them to the State Board of Education (CDE, 2012). The framework is a comprehensive document that uses the content standards as a foundation for appropriate curriculum and instruction, providing a scope and sequence of the knowledge and skills students need to master through each grade level from kindergarten through high school (CDE, 2012). Public meetings are held by the Commission to receive input on the draft framework and the public is allowed to review and comment on the draft for sixty days before the adoption decision is made by the State Board of Education (CDE, 2012). The State Board of Education also holds a minimum of one public meeting before adoption (CDE, 2012).
In addition to the authority to determine the appropriate framework, the State Board of Education has the constitutional authority to adopt materials for 1st through 8th grades, a statutory authority to adopt for kindergarten, and no authority to make adoption decisions for grades 9th through 12th (CDE, 2012). The instructional materials adoption process is very similar to that of the framework adoption providing ample opportunity for public input (CDE, 2012). The three steps in the adoption process are an educational content review, social content review, and public review and comment (CDE, 2012). The review process is overseen by the Instructional Quality Commission, which makes recommendations to the State Board of Education for adoption (CDE, 2012).

The State Board of Education appoints Instructional Materials Reviewers and Content Review Experts to review and research all of the potential programs (CDE, 2012). These committees are comprised of expert educators from each subject, administrators, parents, and school board members (CDE, 2012). The reviewers and experts prepare findings reports and make recommendations to (1) adopt, (2) adopt with minor changes or edits, (3) adopt a narrower range of grade levels than requested by the publisher, or (4) do not adopt (CDE, 2012). The findings are presented to the Instructional Quality Commission, who then takes this information into consideration along with each commissioner’s review, publishers’ responses, and written and oral comment from the public before making a recommendation to the State Board of Education (CDE, 2012). The State Board of Education then conducts its own independent review and holds public meetings before making final decisions on which instructional materials options to adopt (CDE, 2012). It is then up to each Local
Educational Agency to conduct their own research and make a decision about which state adopted program would best meet the needs of their students (CDE, 2012).

**Challenges and revisions to the adoption process**

Since the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, there have been some revisions to the instructional materials adoption process (Giganti, 2013). A new law, AB1246, made the changes permanent (Giganti, 2013). The adoption cycle for all subjects is now once every eight years (Giganti, 2013). With the new law, the list of adopted materials from the State Board of Education are now advisory, so Local Educational Agencies can use any materials that are aligned to the standards (Giganti, 2013). This new law will allow for creative thinking in adopting optimal instructional materials at the district level (Giganti, 2013). The law allows for flexibility, but also requires districts to conduct their own reviews to ensure that the materials are aligned to the standards (Giganti, 2013). Until aligned materials are fully developed and adopted, districts are adapting their own materials to meet the Common Core, or they are relying on bridge materials to do the work until all of the adoptions are unveiled (CDE, 2012).

**Assessment for the Common Core State Standards**

With the new standards, come new assessments. There are two consortia in the United States that were formed to assess the CCSS: The Smarter Balanced Consortium (SBC) and The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (Bellah et al., 2013). California will use the Smarter Balanced computer adaptive standardized assessment testing to assess the Common Core State Standards.
(California Department of Education [CDE], 2010). The test is adaptive, meaning that if a student answers a particular question correctly, they will then be channeled to a more challenging portion of the test; if the student answers a question incorrectly, they will be channeled to a less demanding portion of the test (Calkins et al., 2012). This allows the assessment to define the student’s performance range with fewer test items. The adaptive assessment individualizes each student’s testing, giving a more efficient measure of the students’ abilities and individual skills (Bellah et al., 2013). This assessment is being piloted during the 2012-2013 school year, field tested during the 2013-2014 school year, and will be fully implemented during the 2014-2015 school year (CDE, 2010).

As mentioned above, California did exercise the option of adding an additional fifteen percent of standards to the new CCSS in order to maintain the rigor set forth by California’s adopted standards from 1997 (CDE, 2010). At this time, the Smarter Balanced testing will not include the fifteen percent of additional standards; the assessment will be solely based on the shared national standards (CDE, 2010).

The California Department of Education will ensure that postsecondary education institutions and career experts have an advisory role in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium in determining assessments for college and career readiness (CDE, 2010). The effective use of technology in teaching and learning is now necessary to be college and career ready, but it is also needed to conduct the Smarter Balanced computer adaptive standardized assessments (CDE, 2010). The compulsory assessments will be taken on computers by students in grades 3-8 and 11 during the last twelve weeks of the
school year for English language arts and mathematics (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2013).

There are questions about whether or not states can afford the new testing because the cost will be considerably more than the previous standardized tests (Calkins et al., 2012). The technology demands for the new tests are costly, with the administration and scoring of the tests estimated to cost as much as thirty dollars per student as compared to the cost of eight dollars for the previous assessments (Calkins et al., 2012).

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in California including the allowable fifteen percent addition of California-specific standards, increases the need for new instructional materials to aide students in accessing the new standards. The new assessment system (Smarter Balanced) also demands an increase of technology in the schools. The next section describes the implementation process for the Common Core State Standards established for California.

**The Change to the Common Core State Standards**

On March 19, 2012 the *Common Core State Standards Systems Implementation Plan for California* was presented to the legislature, governor, and people of the State of California as a living document after being adopted by the California Board of Education (CDE, 2013). The plan was created to identify major phases and activities in the implementation of the CCSS (CDE, 2013). Full implementation of the CCSS will take several years with three main phases. The Awareness Phase will introduce the CCSS, coordinate the planning of systems to implement the standards, and establish
collaboration among the stakeholders (CDE, 2013). The Transition Phase includes building resources, implementing needs assessments, establishing new professional development opportunities, and expanding collaboration (CDE, 2013). Finally, the Implementation Phase will expand professional development support, fully align curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and effectively integrate all of these elements across the field (CDE, 2013).

Along with the three main phases, the guide provides seven strategies for the implementation of the Common Core (CDE, 2013). The strategies encompass all areas of the education system, while providing focus to the integrated work (CDE, 2013). The seven guided strategies are (1) facilitating high quality professional development opportunities, (2) providing CCSS aligned instructional resources that meet the needs of all students, (3) develop and transition to the CCSS aligned assessment system, (4) collaborate with parents, guardians, and the early childhood and expanded learning communities to integrate the CCSS beyond the K-12 school setting, (5) collaborate with postsecondary and business communities to ensure students are college and career ready, (6) seek, create, and disseminate resources to support all stakeholders as the CCSS implementation moves forward, and (7) design and establish effective communication systems among stakeholders to address areas of need and disseminate information (CDE, 2013). For each of the guiding strategies, the plan provides information aligning them with the three phases and a pacing guide for each of the school years from 2011-2012 through the 2014-2015 school year, when the Common Core State Standards are supposed to be fully implemented (CDE, 2013).
Communication

Quality leaders require exceptional communication skills, which are a key component to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Maunsell, 2014; Reed, 2013; Reese, 2004). Communicating the outcomes that need to be attained and the behaviors to be implemented are paramount in the change to the CCSS (Westover, 2013). All members of the school system must be knowledgeable about the new standards in order to communicate effectively to parents and the community regarding the rationale behind the new standards and assessments (Maunsell, 2014). It is important to involve all stakeholders in the communication process while delivering clear and consistent messages tailored to each specific audience (Maunsell, 2014). Effective communication to support the implementation process should include a shared vision, a sense of mission and purpose, the valuing of every individual involved in the process, and actions required to fulfill the vision (Reed, 2013).

The role of professional development

Today’s leaders participate with teachers in regular, collaborative, professional learning experiences to improve teaching and learning (King, 2002). The Common Core State Standards’ implementation will require substantial changes to curriculum and instruction, so professional development for educators is an integral piece to successfully implementing the changes required by the CCSS (Marrongelle, Sztajn, & Smith, 2013; Mellander, 2014). Both principals and teachers must have access to the essential professional development necessary to transition to the new rigorous standards to
strengthen teaching and learning (Implementing the Common Core State Standards, 2013). To be successful, teachers need access to a myriad of professional development opportunities at the district, state, and regional levels along with a Common Core implementation plan that includes timelines for professional development and tasks as well as clear guidelines of responsibilities (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Four research-based general principles state that professional development needs to be (1) intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice, (2) focused on student learning and address the teaching of specific content, (3) aligned with school improvement priorities and goals, and (4) designed to facilitate strong working relationships among teachers (Marrongelle et al., 2013; Zimmerman & May, 2003). In addition to these general principles, teachers will need well organized, carefully structured, and purposefully-directed time for planning, access to instructional resources, and the necessary funding for implementation (Guskey, 2003; McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Research has demonstrated that innovations implemented with a low to medium degree of fidelity have no effect on achievement, but those implemented with 90% fidelity have an extremely high effect on achievement (Calkins et al., 2012). This makes effective and comprehensive professional development essential in reaching the potential of the Common Core.

Teachers and other assessment administrators will also need professional development specifically geared towards how the new CCSS assessments system works (Levin & Fletcher, 2014). In addition to providing training specific to the assessment system, school leadership has the task of ensuring that teachers employ the varying pedagogies, which the CCSS demand (Levin & Fletcher, 2014). A key element of these
pedagogies is incorporating technology throughout instruction to solve problems and demonstrate mastery in ways similar to the new assessment system (Levin & Fletcher, 2014).

Once teachers and administrators have the necessary, ongoing professional development and work together as a learning community to implement key innovations with high degrees of fidelity, they will be in a position to continue on the path of implementing the CCSS (Calkins et al., 2012).

**Leadership Strategies to Help Support Teachers with Implementation of the New Standards**

Overall, leadership influences teachers’ perceptions of progress when implementing new initiatives (Hallinger, 2003). Effective school leadership is a collaborative effort between the state, district, schools, and classrooms creating a leadership community, not just relying on those with authority (King, 2002; Reese, 2004). At the center of school capacity are leaders focused on developing the knowledge, skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources needed to shift instructional practice and a systems approach to refine instructional design and delivery, which are key to program implementation (Dove & Freeley 2011; Fullan, 2002; Westover, 2013).

School leaders charged with the responsibility of guiding implementation of curricular change such as the CCSS face many tasks (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). There are six essential elements that enable school leaders to approach, support, and implement any new changes such as the Common Core State Standards (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012).
These include establishing a clear purpose, setting priorities, alignment of personnel with curricular needs, practicing professional discourse, encouraging risk taking, and providing feedback (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). A major impediment to effective school leadership is trying to carry the burden alone (especially during the time of major change), so leadership needs to be the professional work not only of the principal but of everyone in the school (Hallinger, 2003; Lambert, 2002).

When it comes to establishing a clear focus for the implementation of CCSS, school leaders must develop an informed, shared vision with the school community to implement the standards fully and successfully (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). Leaders should identify, value, and use the professional strengths of those on staff in order to maximize contributions and promote shifts in pedagogy (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Reese, 2004). Change is a continuous process, so leaders must build a climate for change and establish the sequence of change by charting the course (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Dove & Freeley, 2011). Effective leaders create and share knowledge, so they must promote professional discourse among teachers by building professional communities and arranging schedules to allow for common planning time, opportunities for peer observation, and focused alignment across the grade levels (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Fullan, 2002). School leaders must empower school personnel to take risks involved with moving forward with the implementation of the CCSS, thus building confidence and trust during the process (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). The final essential piece of strong leadership during the implementation of the CCSS is to communicate corrective and
specific feedback to school personnel to assist with the necessary changes needed during the implementation of the CCSS (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012).

Shared leadership and the collaboration between administrators and teachers are instrumental in building best practices and essential to the success of these changes (Implementing the Common Core State Standards, 2013; Dove & Freeley, 2011). There is no doubt that it will take a concerted effort and focused leadership to ensure that all K-12 students are provided the opportunity to learn and develop 21st century skills to be college and career ready (Levin & Fletcher, 2014).

Conclusion

* A Nation at Risk’s* findings of inadequacies in American’s education system from 1983 sparked the standards movement. Education standards were created to help improve the equality and consistency of the expectations of education in America. Over time the results of the No Child Left Behind legislation and high-stakes, standards-based assessments, which included increased benchmarks of achievement, showed students to be underachieving compared to that of other countries. These findings, along with the desire for students to be college and career ready, ignited the desire for national standards.

In response, the new Common Core State Standards have been adopted by more than ninety percent of the states and territories. The CCSS allow students to delve deeper into the mastery of skills and content while incorporating technology to ready them for college and the work force. Despite some opposition to national standards, the majority
of states are moving forward with the implementation process. The implementation process will take time as states continue to plan their procedures. State adopted materials are still in the works, so districts are adapting materials to the Common Core as they see fit. This is essential for districts to be ready for the new computer based assessments that are now being field-tested before their full application in the 2014-2015 school year. The state of California has initiated a plan for the implementation along with guidelines and pacing calendars for school districts to engage in the process. School leaders can support teachers and school personnel by providing plenty of professional development opportunities along with solid leadership in making the change to the new standards.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction
As an administrator in an elementary school setting, I am in the midst of leading my staff through the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. Since the Common Core State Standards have been introduced, I have had an interest in how other schools are implementing the new standards. I am curious about how principals are leading their staffs through the process, what leadership strategies are the most effective during this change, what shifts in teaching practice are necessary to support the new standards, and what teachers are doing to prepare their students for the new Smarter Balanced standardized testing. In this chapter, I will outline the development of my questions used for both my interviews with administrators and the questions used for a focus group with teachers to probe the thoughts and experiences of educators in the field on the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards.

Development of Research Instrument
Based on my research question and my review of the literature on this subject, I developed a qualitative instrument that was used to guide one-to-one interviews between school principals and myself and an instrument to facilitate a focus group of teachers currently involved in the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards.

After many revisions of the interview and focus group questions, a final draft of the questions was developed to use with the one-to-one interviews with the administrators
and the focus group with teachers. The final interview schedule for the administrators consisted of ten questions, and the final focus group guide consisted of eight questions.

Data collection began after I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and informed consent from the educators who were involved in this research project. A note taker took notes on a computer during the interviews with the principals and the focus group of teachers. The interviews and focus group were also audio recorded in case anything was missed by the note taker during the sessions. The notes were then analyzed using a constant comparative method in coding and identifying trends in the data.

Before beginning the interviews or the focus group, I began with an opening statement to make the participants comfortable with the process and to give them a time frame for the completion of the process. An ending statement was also read at the conclusion of the interviews and focus groups thanking the participants for being involved in the research. All ten interview questions and all eight focus group questions were considered to be open-ended to allow for thoughtful responses that reflected the individuals’ feelings and experiences regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Overall the themes that were probed through the interviews and focus group had to do with leadership strategies, professional development, shifts in teaching practice, preparing students for the new standardized testing, and successes and challenges all having to do with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (see Appendices D & E for the question schedules).
Participants

I first started out by speaking with Lori Breyer, Coordinator of School Support & Accountability, at Humboldt County Office of Education to seek recommendations of county schools that are actively implementing the shift to the Common Core State Standards. Once I had the recommendations, I contacted the three schools using an IRB approved recruiting script (see Appendix A) to request an interview with their principal. The principal’s participation included an interview with me and permission for me to speak with some of their teachers. Once the principal verbally agreed to participate, signed the informed consent (see Appendix C), and completed their interview with me, I asked each of the three principals for recommendations of three teachers (with the hopes of getting two) from each of their schools to potentially participate in my focus group. I contacted those teachers to seek participation from them in my study using a recruiting script (see Appendix B).

I informed all participants that their responses to my questions would be kept confidential and that there would be no identifying information gathered on individual respondents. The participants were made fully aware that their participation was completely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also informed them that they did not have to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable and that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions and all of their responses were welcomed.

Personal benefits for participation in the study included a chance for the administrators and teachers to reflect on their own implementation process of the
Common Core State Standards, being able to share with others what was working well and what were some areas of need in the process, the opportunity to learn from the completed thesis, and the knowledge that their participation may greatly help others in the education field with implementing the new standards. There were no glaring potential risks for the participants in this study. Some of the teachers may have felt somewhat hesitant to share certain feelings in the focus group of how they were shifting their teaching practice, what they felt was needed to make the shift, or exposing differing points of view or experiences with fear of being judged by others, although I didn’t detect any of these uncomfortable or hesitant feelings before, during, or after the interviews or focus group.

**Procedure**

Once I had my willing participants, I first made appointments with the three principals for the one-to-one interviews. I traveled to their schools to interview them in a place that was familiar and comfortable to them.

Once the principal and I were sitting across from each other and the informed consent was signed, the interview commenced with a short statement read by me thanking them for their participation and willingness to be a part of the study (see Appendix D for the opening statement). Once the opening statement was read, I asked the principal if they were ready to begin and if they would give permission for the note taker to take notes on a computer during the interview and for the interview to be audio recorded. Upon the receipt of verbal confirmation, the interview process began. Each
question was asked and time was given for the subsequent response from the principal. Using a semi-structured interview approach initial responses were used to generate further clarifying probes and elicit a more complete response.

At the conclusion of each of the three interviews, the principals were given the opportunity to ask questions, provide any feedback about their experience, and then thanked for their willingness to participate, for their time, and candidness during the interview questions. They were also thanked for contributing to something that may be helpful to fellow educators who are also going through the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards. Finally, each principal was asked for the names of three (with the hopes of getting two) potential focus group participants.

Of the total of nine possible participants, six were recruited for participation. Once I had identified six willing teacher participants, I scheduled an agreed upon time for the focus group. The focus group took place in a neutral location. Once everyone was comfortably seated around the table and the informed consent was signed by all participants, the focus group interview commenced with a short statement read by me thanking them for their participation and willingness to be a part of the study (see Appendix E for opening statement). Once the opening statement was read, I asked the focus group respondents if they would give permission for the note taker to take notes on a computer during the interview and for the interview to be audio recorded. Teachers were informed that pseudonyms would be used to record their responses. I also asked the group for agreement that the conversation in the room remain confidential, so that everyone could speak freely. Upon the receipt of verbal confirmation from all
participants regarding the note taking, audio recording, and confidentiality, the interview process began.

Each question was asked and time was given for the subsequent response from the various teachers. Answers were probed to explore areas of agreement and difference amongst the participants. At the conclusion of the focus group session with the six teachers, the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, provide any feedback about their experience, and the respondents were thanked for their willingness to participate, for their time, and candidness during the interview questions. They were also thanked for contributing to something that may be helpful to fellow educators who are also going through the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Upon completion of the interviews and focus group, the notes from the sessions were checked against the audio tapes and corrected as needed. The data was then analyzed to identify categories and themes among the responses. The names of the participants and their schools were not used in the work; confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The qualitative data was then sorted into the identified categories and themes. By making comparisons among the respondents’ answers to the various questions in the interviews and the focus group, I was able to identify core ideas/themes that were similar in the participants’ responses. Their responses began to shed light on common traits and characteristics of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and what is needed next in order to continue the process.
Conclusion

The verbal responses from the three principals and the six teachers did reveal common traits and themes regarding the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards in the three schools. The next chapter will provide an overview of the demographics of each of the three schools where the participants work, the overarching categories from the collective responses, the themes within these categories, and a description of the results of the interviews and focus group.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the participants and the demographics of the schools where they work in addition to descriptions and excerpts of responses from the principals and teachers who were interviewed regarding the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. The interviews with the three principals from three different schools were conducted individually face-to-face with the researcher, and the focus group consisting of six teachers (two from each of the three schools) was also conducted face-to-face with the researcher. Participants’ reactions and sharing of information varied throughout the process, but as a whole everyone seemed comfortable and willing to answer and discuss the questions without any reservations. Throughout the focus group, the teacher participants would often concur with what another teacher shared and then elaborate on that idea based on their own experiences. Excerpts cited from participant responses are stated exactly as spoken without correcting any grammar or syntactical errors.

Participants & School Demographics

The participants in this study varied in their experience in administration and teaching as well as their stage in the implementation process. All three schools are relatively small schools, located in rural Northern California servicing a variety of
students. Each school has a majority population of white/non-Hispanic students and service students with learning disabilities as well as second language learners. Each of the three schools has a relatively high percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students ranging from 65-87% eligible for free or reduced lunches.

Principal 1 is in her 6th year as an administrator with four years of previous teaching experience. She works at a 5th-8th grade middle school with a population of approximately 250 students with 65% identified as socio-economically disadvantaged. Teacher 2 from the same middle school is in his 5th year of teaching. Teacher 3 also works at this school and is in her 3rd year of teaching.

Principal 2 is in his 1st year as an administrator with eleven previous years of teaching experience. He works at a 5th-8th grade middle school with a population of approximately 260 students with 75% identified as socio-economically disadvantaged. Teacher 1 from the same middle school is in his 12th year of teaching. Teacher 6 also works at this school and is in her 20th year of teaching.

Principal 3 is in his 15th year as an administrator with seventeen previous years of teaching experience. He works at a TK-4th grade elementary school with a population of approximately 360 students with 87% identified as socio-economically disadvantaged. Teacher 4 from the same elementary school is in her 19th year of teaching. Teacher 5 also works at this school and is in her 19th year of teaching.
Categories & Themes Revealed in the Data

As stated previously, the participants in this study were open and honest throughout the data collection process. Most had a lot to add to each question, while others would sit back, listen, and then add on to what another participant shared. Each individual had a variety of experiences in the field along with a variety of experience with the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. The condensed data in the following section is divided into more generalized categories with supporting themes within each category explaining each of the participants’ perspective and experience regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Shift in Teaching Practice

All participants in the study were asked questions regarding the needed shift in teaching practice in order to implement the new standards. The three major themes that emerged from the data regarding a shift in teaching practice were the need to shift from a lecturer to a facilitator while increasing student collaboration, incorporating technology in the classroom, and incorporating writing across the curriculum.

Shift from Lecturer to Facilitator while Increasing Student Collaboration:

All three of the schools’ principals shared the need for teachers to change from delivering information to their classes in lecture form to now being the facilitator of learning while increasing the amount of student to student collaboration.

Principal 1 said:
I think the biggest change is teacher as facilitator, and I think that is really hard for some people. Overall in the classroom, I’m seeing a higher level of group collaboration - working together, talking it out, and not having one student doing all of the work.

Principal 2 said:

If a teacher used to have a lecture style, where it was a whole group, presenting the information to you, you take notes, study the notes, and take a test. That style is what needs to change and needs more interaction with small groups of students or pairs, so that the students are learning from each other and the teacher is guiding that.

Principal 3 said:

It is more how teachers interact as a facilitator facilitating the learning going on between students rather than being the disseminator of the great knowledge that you have standing in front of the classroom.

The teachers shared the same idea and all agreed that a necessary shift in practice is to be more of a facilitator in the classroom. Two of the six teachers specifically mentioned “facilitating the learning,” while all of them discussed the need to shift more of their teaching practice from “direct instruction” to allow for more collaboration among the students. The two primary grade teachers agreed that there needs to be an increase in collaboration among the students and a shift towards being more of a facilitator, but they both felt that there needs to be a balance between direct instruction and facilitating the learning, especially in the foundation years.
Teacher 1 said:

I’m not teaching in front of the classroom, instead I’m facilitating the learning.

Teacher 2 said:

Student collaboration is a big shift compared to when I got my credential.

Teacher 3 said:

The shift that happens with us as teachers is that we should be more of a spectator and not standing in front of the classroom teaching.

Teacher 4 said:

I feel like we need a balance. At the younger foundation age, you can’t go on to all those other problems if you can’t find out what 7 times 5 is, so I still do direct instruction because you still need the fundamentals.

**Incorporating Technology:**

Technology is a part of the Common Core State Standards. Students need to have keyboarding skills and basic computer usage knowledge in order to access the new computer-based state standard assessments, which begin in 3rd grade. All three of the schools in this study have a shared computer lab at each of their sites. The two middle schools have 1:1 tablets for all of their students, and the elementary school has five or more tablets for every classroom. Teachers from all three schools commented on how the increased need for incorporating technology in the classroom has been a shift in practice as well as a challenge.

Principal 2 said:
The technology that we have and are using is benefiting the students. We have
the capability of using the tablets as well as the computer lab. Students are able to
interact with each other through the tablets, so they are learning some of the
strategies that you see with the Common Core.

Principal 3 said:

Starting earlier on with our keyboarding. Getting our kindergarten and 1st graders
developing their keyboarding skills and how to work a mouse. That has not been
as much of a focus in the past.

Teacher 3 said:

As teachers it’s a big shift with the technology piece and incorporating it in
student learning.

Teacher 5 said:

I would feel more comfortable with more training on incorporating technology.

Teacher 6 said:

Using the technology and teaching kids to use the technology has been a big shift
for me. A lot of times the kids teach me more than I teach them as far as
technology goes.

Incorporating Writing Across the Curriculum:

With the new standards, writing is no longer the sole job of the English teacher.
Writing across the curriculum is now an integral piece of the Common Core State
Standards and a shift in teaching practice for most teachers.
Principal 1 said:

I’m seeing a lot more writing across the board.

Teacher 1 said:

Integrating. We have integrated more math and science together with writing.
Even writing in physical education, so integration is a big part of the shift.

Teacher 5 said:

We are implementing more writing across the curriculum. That’s a shift that I see that we are doing and that we probably need to be doing more of across the board.

**Leadership**

A second category emerged from the research regarding leadership and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The principals were asked specifically about the types of leadership strategies they were using with their staffs during the implementation process, and the teachers were asked what they needed from their leaders to help support them with the change to the new standards. The three major themes that emerged from the data regarding leadership during the Common Core implementation were the need to provide time for collaboration and planning, providing ample professional development opportunities, and maintaining effective modes of communication.

**Time for Collaboration and Planning:**

Overall, the need for leaders to provide sufficient time for teachers to plan and collaborate was at the core of most of the teachers’ needs in regards to the
implementation process. The teachers in the focus group feel like they aren’t given the
necessary time that is needed in order for them to make the shift from the state content
standards to the new Common Core. When the focus group was asked the questions,
“What are some of your biggest needs as teachers to make the shift from the state
standards to the new CCSS?” and “What do you want from your principal or other
administrators to help you with the implementation and to support you in the change?”
the word “time” was mentioned on twenty-one occasions with all six teachers mentioning
this as a need at some point during the discussion. Specifically the teachers mentioned
time for planning with their colleagues, time for meaningful conversations surrounding
Common Core, time to plan vertically as a larger school team in order for teachers to
understand where students are coming from and where they are going, and time to plan
where to go next with the implementation process. The principals shared the idea of
supporting the teachers through offering professional development opportunities and
providing them the time to look at the new standards, but they did not mention the idea of
giving them time specific to what the teachers mentioned as areas of need.
Teacher 1 said:

Time would be very useful. We used to have Wednesdays dedicated to
collaboration and now they are being taken up by other things. We are not getting
the needed time for Common Core.

Teacher 3 said:

I want my time not to be micromanaged. I want to be given the time to meet with
my colleagues at grade level with the focus on Common Core.
Teacher 4 said:

Time is what we need with our colleagues for both horizontal and vertical teaming regarding the Common Core implementation.

**Professional Development:**

The principals were asked questions regarding the types of professional development (PD) they are offering to the teachers and whether or not it is ongoing, and the teachers were asked about the types of professional development they have participated in or are currently engaged in the area of Common Core. All three principals supported providing their teachers professional development opportunities at their school, county, and even state level. They pointed out that it is up to individual teachers whether or not they take advantage of the PD opportunities outside of the scheduled, contracted days. All of the teachers reported engaging in some sort of Common Core training provided by their district at their own sites over the past three years, although most of these trainings have not been ongoing. Some of the teachers from the middle schools are involved in an ongoing, countywide HISI project (6th-12th grade initiative) funded by the California Department of Education. HISI is the Humboldt Interdisciplinary STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) Initiative. The teachers involved in this professional development project are working collaboratively to develop Common Core aligned lessons which engage their students to think critically. Most of the PD that teachers are currently engaged with revolves around the Common Core State Standards. The principals are using PD as a strategy to support teachers with the implementation.
Principal 1 said:

Professional development is happening at the district level as well as the site level, and I would like to say that it is kind of happening at the individual level. I always offer PD.

Principal 2 said:

We are trying this year as one of our goals on site for all teachers to be involved in some sort of PD. We are really focusing on math this year with the Common Core State Standards. The teachers that are not teaching math are focusing on literacy as their area of development. Everyone is getting some kind of professional development, but there is not enough right now considering what is being asked of teachers.

Principal 3 said:

I’m making sure that teachers have sufficient PD and those that are willing to go for more PD, above and beyond what is being offered, I am very happy to facilitate that for them and let them be part of that. That has been very positive having them come back and share what they have learned with other teachers.

Teacher 1 said:

Currently there is a group of teachers from our school attending the HISI grant, which is incorporating math, science, technology, and engineering. That is helping us incorporate all those standards into our teaching and project based learning.

Teacher 3 said:
There is never too much training. I would never turn away the opportunity to learn more.

Teacher 4 said:

I wish there was more PD like the HISI for our levels k-3 or k-4. There are so many of these projects, but they are more for the middle school levels. About six years ago I participated with a grant that was Wild Rivers Math Academy. They went from kindergarten through 10th grade. I spent three years with them with math, and then with Sonoma State University I spent two years with math and the Common Core from kindergarten through high school. That was the only benefit that I have had to rely on the whole time with the new Common Core curriculum. I don’t know how the other teachers have been able to do it without having that experience.

Teacher 6 said:

The best training that I ever had that helped me with Common Core was AVID because AVID really is Common Core based. I went to a few different AVID trainings that were really helpful.

**Communication:**

The principals and teachers feel that communication is a key component of leadership, especially during a change such as the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Principal 1 said:
Communicating and listening are important. People want to be heard.

Principal 2 said:

When questions come up, we talk about it as a group.

Principal 3 said:

A lot of communication between grade level PLCs and our staff meetings about the implementation process and what is working what is not. Just open communication.

Teacher 3 said:

For Common Core to be implemented well and be successful, we need that open line of communication between staff.

**Successes**

The third major category that emerged from the research was the overall successes that the principals and teachers have found with the implementation process of the Common Core so far. The principals and teachers were asked specifically about their biggest successes so far in the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. The three major themes that emerged from the data regarding the successes were the increased collaboration among staff and students, increase in students’ critical thinking skills, and the increased engagement in professional development.

**Collaboration Among Staff and Students:**

Both the principals and the teachers mentioned multiple times throughout the data collection process how they have experienced an increased level of collaboration among
the staff and have also seen an increase in the collaboration among students in the classroom.

Principal 1 said:

I really feel like the collaboration that is going on is our greatest success. There’s more collaboration across the subjects with teachers. Higher level of group collaboration in the classroom. Students working together, talking it out, and not having one student doing all of the work.

Principal 3 said:

What has worked well is really reestablishing the collaboration among our teachers, really getting them talking about where we are going, working in their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and data groups, and looking at student progress. It has helped our whole PLC concept by the implementation of the Common Core. There is a lot of collaboration going on. We are focusing on having not just teachers working collaboratively but also having students working more collaboratively. I see a lot of kids working together - working on projects.

Teacher 2 said:

The vertical and horizontal collaboration we have had across the grade levels, across school sites, as well as with the high school have been successful.

Teacher 6 said:

Students love working together. They feel smart using the academic vocabulary in their groups. I think that is a great part of the Common Core.
Increase in Students’ Critical Thinking Skills:

The Common Core State Standards emphasize the need for students to be able to think critically. Successfully seeing an increase in their students’ critical thinking abilities was brought up several times through the data collection process by both the principals and the teachers.

Principal 1 said:

I am impressed with what’s going on in regards to CCSS and the development of critical thinking. It’s been really neat to see how much more critical thinking is happening in the classrooms. Students are learning how to disagree with someone in an appropriate way and defend their opinions while still listening to others’ opinions and being open to that. That is a huge success.

Principal 3 said:

Kids are thinking through the work and not just rote answering the problems but being able to go through a real thinking process to try and defend their answers.

Teacher 2 said:

I use the phrase, “Explain how you got that to your team.” Seeing kids trying to work out how to explain their thinking to other students has been a big success this year.

Teacher 3 said:

I have felt success with finding new ways to get my students to critically think and getting them engaged.
Professional Development:

The importance of professional development is agreed upon by the principals and the teachers. The level of PD each individual has experienced varies, but overall everyone shared in some fashion that the trainings they have been involved with during the implementation process have been helpful and some would say successful.

Teacher 3 said:

We have had opportunities to go to different workshops and conferences to see what other schools, colleagues, and peers have been doing, to see what we are already doing and how we can change it, and to find out what is working and how to make things that are working more aligned to the Common Core. It has been very helpful to be able to go places and see things.

Teacher 5 said:

Having training on how to implement has helped.

Teacher 6 said:

The conferences are a really important part of successful implementation as well as reading good books with good examples has been helpful.

Challenges

The fourth and final major category that emerged from the research was the overall challenges that the principals and teachers have found with the implementation process of the Common Core so far. The principals and teachers were asked specifically about their biggest challenges so far in the implementation process of the Common Core
State Standards. The three major themes that emerged from the data regarding the challenges were lack of sufficient materials, lack of time for planning and collaboration, and preparing students for the new standardized assessments (SBAC).

**Lack of Sufficient Materials:**

The Common Core State Standards are scheduled to be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. Adopted math materials became available during the 2014-2015 school year, and the English language arts adoption will not be available until the 2015-2016 school year, which poses a challenge. Teachers were expected to create/gather their own Common Core aligned materials while also working on making the shift to the new standards. Lack of materials emerged as a definite theme throughout the data collection process by both the principals and the teachers.

Principal 1 said:

We don’t have materials that are aligned to the Common Core yet for English language arts. We as a district made that first mistake the first year we began implementing the CCSS. We were asking teachers to do things that they weren’t fully understanding, and we didn’t give them materials. For this 2nd year, we have math materials.

Teacher 5 said:

We have math but not language arts that is Common Core aligned, and that is more difficult. We have to kind of take what we are already doing and turn it into Common Core. We are lacking materials.
Teacher 6 said:

We need materials in upper grades for sure. We have not had any kind of adoption in English language arts in the fourteen years I have been teaching at this school. I am putting together the curriculum on my own.

**Lack of Time for Planning & Collaboration:**

Time, again, emerges as a theme and a significant challenge in the implementation process of the Common Core. The teachers feel a desperate need for more time to plan and align lessons to the new standards, and they also have a need for more time to collaborate with their peers. The lack of time is especially a challenge since the state adopted the standards, expected them to be fully implemented, and for the students to be assessed on them even before having adopted materials available to districts; this left schools (especially classroom teachers) scrambling to gather/create materials and lessons aligned to the new standards.

Principal 1 said:

Time is a challenge. This will always be a constant.

Teacher 3 said:

I agree with time being a challenge. Shifting from looking at the new standards to where are we at and where are we going, takes time.

Teacher 6 said:
Time for planning has been the biggest challenge for me. Planning and creating materials – I need time. Some of my units, I’ve had the time to plan, and you can tell the ones I haven’t had the time.

**Preparing Students for the New Standardized Testing (SBAC):**

The new standardized testing is being fully implemented during the 2014-2015 school year. The teachers are not feeling confident that their students are ready to take this test. With having a newly adopted math program and not having an English language arts adoption at all, they feel it will be a challenge. The teachers are still working on familiarizing themselves with the new standards and adjusting the pacing of the curriculum. Some are concerned that they will not get through all of the standards before it is time to test. The teachers are also concerned about the technology skills necessary in order for the students to access the test. While there is technology in the classrooms, some of the teachers feel like having the tablets has been a disservice to the students because they haven’t worked on keyboarding and mouse skills like they will need. The principals see this first year as a “baseline year” for the students and the schools.

Teacher 3 said:

I have a lot of lower level readers, and I feel like to be able to teach them to be successful on the test, I need to stop teaching what I am and start teaching them how to skim the materials. The test is blocks of tests, and then they have to write
paragraphs for some of the answers. It’s going to be overwhelming for them. I don’t know how to prepare them for that because that isn’t how my classroom is.

Teacher 4 said:

The test is written in a way that I don’t teach my students.

Teacher 5 said:

I’m really concerned because a lot of my students, the logistics of sitting at a computer and moving the mouse and dragging and all of that. We didn’t teach those skills. We don’t have a curriculum to teach those skills. I look back and wish I would have spent more time in the computer lab teaching those skills.

**Summary**

Through the one-to-one interviews with the principals and the focus group discussions, I was able to identify distinct categories and themes in regards to the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. Four common categories and themes within these categories emerged through the data collection process based on the experiences of the educators. First, participants shared their ideas regarding the needed shift in teaching practice. Participants stressed the need for teachers to shift from lecturers to facilitators of learning. They discussed the importance of incorporating technology in the classroom and writing across the curriculum as shifts in teaching practice. Second, leadership during the implementation process emerged as a crucial aspect. Leadership needs to provide ample time for teachers to plan and collaborate, providing as many professional development opportunities as possible, and having open
communication through the process. Next, the participants discussed their successes in the implementation so far. The principals and teachers felt like there had been an increase in collaboration of staff and students and in students’ ability to think critically. They also felt the trainings that have been offered have been successful. Finally, the participants shared the challenges that they are experiencing. Lack of sufficient Common Core aligned materials, lack of time for planning and collaboration, and preparing students for the new standardized assessments (SBAC) have all been challenges to the implementation process.

Although the participant responses varied, these stated categories and themes rose to the forefront when identifying common traits among the educators in the field working through the implementation process of the new Common Core State Standards. The following chapter presents a discussion of the data.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The question that guided this study was: Common Core is here – now what? The responses from my data collection through interviews and a focus group revealed common categories and identifiable themes within the categories to support what schools are doing to implement the Common Core State Standards.

Through the interviews with three principals from three different schools and a focus group with six teachers (two from each of the three schools), I was able to identify the following categories and themes within the categories regarding the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards: necessary shifts in teaching practice (moving from a lecturer to a facilitator of learning, incorporating technology in the classroom, and writing across the curriculum); needs of leadership during the process (providing time for teachers to plan and collaborate, providing Common Core aligned professional development opportunities, and having open communication); successes so far in the process (increased collaboration among staff and students, increase in students’ critical thinking skills, and the trainings that have been offered so far); and the challenges that the educators are experiencing (lack of Common Core aligned materials, lack of time to plan and collaborate, and preparing students for the new standardized assessments – SBAC). All participants in this study were specifically chosen because they are currently leading and teaching in schools that are implementing the Common Core State Standards.
Necessary Shifts in Teaching Practice

According to the empirical research, the Common Core State Standards were designed to prepare students for college and the workforce by having them demonstrate independence, build content knowledge, respond to a variety of 21st century demands, comprehend as well as critique, value evidence, and use technology competently (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). In order to accomplish this, there must be a shift in the way teachers teach.

The traditional teacher may be used to standing up in front of the classroom filling the minds of their students by lecturing about the content area, having the students take notes, and then pass an exam on the topic. The literature suggests that this type of teaching practice must change in order for educators to produce students who possess the skills noted above (Hwang et al., 2011). Teachers must think of themselves as a facilitator of learning, instead of a deliverer of knowledge. Teachers must find a way to engage their students in their own learning; find a way for the students to be an active participant in the classroom. Classroom teachers must provide the students the time they need to explore and concepts much deeper than they ever have before (Hwang et al., 2011).

All of the participants’ responses in the study supported this need to shift from a lecturer to a facilitator of learning when asked what shifts in teaching practice are necessary to implement the Common Core. The principals acknowledged this change as being one that “may be difficult for some.” There was also discussion that how the teacher as a facilitator needs to look different in the elementary school as compared to the
middle school. The teachers discussed needing to provide more direct instruction for students when they are at the foundational level of learning and also more direct instruction for certain students depending on their needs, but this is something that the teachers need to ascertain once they get to know their students and their needs.

Incorporating technology in education has become a crucial aspect of the Common Core. Teachers are expected to use technology in different forms in order for their students to access content areas. Also the new standardized assessments are administered on computers and include short answer and essays, not just fill-in the bubble multiple choice, so keyboarding skills, mouse skills, and basic computer knowledge is necessary for the students to take the new assessments which begin in 3rd grade.

The difficulty with this shift in teaching practice is that not all schools have access to the technology, which is now a necessary part of the CCSS. Many teachers also lack sufficient training in the area of technology, so teaching with it provides a challenge. The participants in this study even shared their need for more training and how often the students teach them how to use the technology they have available to them. Schools need to address the technology needs of the teachers with a plan, which provides specific training for the teachers.

In the past schools left the writing to the English teachers, or in self-contained classrooms, writing took place during “language arts time” and focused mostly around fictional writing. Those times have now changed with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Writing is now the job of every teacher in every subject area and needs to be integrated across the board in self-contained primary classrooms.
The physical education teachers are now finding ways to incorporate writing in their programs. The math and science teachers are spending more class time on having students write in the content area. The English teachers are having students explore more with writing across the content areas including doing more expository writing. As the research says, “students need to be able to comprehend as well as critique,” so writing across the curriculum is a way to build this skill. The CCSS has brought teachers together across the disciplines to collaborate and integrate content. Every teacher now needs to be a teacher of writing, technology, critical thinking - a facilitator of learning - no matter what subject they teach. The participants in this study supported this shift by sharing how they are currently having their students write much more in all areas and even acknowledging that they should be doing even more. Leaders should focus some PD in the area of writing integration to support the teachers in this shift.

**Needs of Leadership During the Process**

As the literature states, effective leaders create and share knowledge, so they must promote professional discourse among teachers by building professional communities and arranging schedules to allow for common planning time, opportunities for peer observation, and focused alignment across the grade levels (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Fullan, 2002). It also states that leadership and the collaboration between administrators and teachers is instrumental in building best practices and are essential to the success of change (Implementing the Common Core State Standards, 2013; Dove & Freeley, 2011). The participants in this study echoed this sentiment. The principals shared that they
support their teachers in the implementation process by offering professional
development opportunities and time to collaborate with their peers, while communicating
with the staff and being flexible. The teachers were adamant in their desire and need for
their leaders to provide them with the time to plan and collaborate and also the need for
professional development opportunities focused on the Common Core State Standards.

Time for teachers to plan and collaborate appears to be an important part of the
implementation process. Time was brought up by both the principals and teachers as an
aspect of leadership that is needed to support the change, but the findings show that it
isn’t happening to a degree that is desired. As one principal shared, “Not having enough
time is a constant,” but is there a creative way to address this issue? The state of
California allocated funds to school districts for the implementation of the Common Core
State Standards. That money could be used for release days for teachers to spend the
time together working their way through the standards, planning CCSS aligned lessons,
collaborating with their peers, etc. In order for leaders to support their teachers, they
must find creative ways to give the staff the time they need.

There is the possibility that teachers will feel less overwhelmed by the time that
the state adopted English language arts materials are available for district adoption. Now,
many of the teachers are creating and gathering their own materials, which makes the
lack of time even more problematic creating a challenge in the process.

The literature states, in order for the new standards to succeed, teachers will need
intensive professional development (Sawchuk, 2012). It is imperative that the leaders of
schools ensure that there is a plethora of professional development opportunities
available to their staff in order to support the changes. All of the principals and the teachers in this study agreed that they need professional development support. There wasn’t agreement amongst everyone regarding whether or not enough is happening. The middle school teachers seem to have more opportunities for ongoing, intensive PD, while the elementary teachers are relying more on training they have had in the past or what they are searching out on their own. This research shows that leaders need to be working closely with their staff to monitor the types of professional development being offered and to search out additional opportunities based on the needs of the teachers.

Again, the study shows that everyone agrees that leaders need to provide these PD opportunities, but it isn’t something that is necessarily being done to fit the needs of everyone. As one teacher stated, “I would never turn away the opportunity to learn more.” Leaders need to see this as an opportunity to open the doors for their teachers to get the professional development to grow them as an educator.

The literature states, effective communication to support the implementation process should include a shared vision, a sense of mission and purpose, the value of every individual involved in the process, and actions required to fulfill the vision (Reed, 2013). Communication emerged as a theme in the study when it came to the needs of leadership. One principal in the study shared that he uses communication as the tool to get buy-in from all stakeholders. Communication spurs transparency, so everyone feels like they know what is happening and where they are headed.

Between the literature on the needs for communication and the participants’ responses regarding this as a need, it is clear that leaders need to be actively
communicating with all stakeholders during the process of the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. This communication can build trust within a school.

**Successes**

The themes that emerged from the study specific to these three schools’ perceived successes are the increase in staff and student-student collaboration, increase in students’ critical thinking skills, and the trainings that have been available to the teachers.

Not only was the need for time to collaborate a theme that emerged under leadership, but it also came up as a success for these schools. All participants shared that they are seeing and participating in more collaboration as a staff. Teachers are talking across grade levels and working more closely with their grade level teams. Some schools shared that they are working with other teachers from other school sites, sharing what is working and discussing what isn’t. This shows that the Common Core movement is bringing teachers together and will possibly decrease the past notion or reality of teachers teaching in isolation. However, it is evident that the teachers still have a need for more collaboration time, but they are seeing it as something that has increased and has been a success for them with the change.

Student-to-student collaboration is also something that is emerging as a success for these schools. Of course, this increased collaboration has to stem from the shift in teaching practice with teachers facilitating the learning and empowering students to become engaged in their own learning. All three principals in this study shared that they are seeing an increase in student collaboration when they are in the classroom. This
illustrates that once teachers make the shift in teaching practice, the shift in student engagement will take place as well. The shift in teaching practice seems to be facilitated by providing teachers the opportunity to have meaningful discussion and providing ample opportunity for teachers to be involved in professional development.

The Common Core State Standards reveal the need for students to be critical thinkers in order to be college and career ready in the 21st century. The participants in this study all shared their sense that they have seen an increase in their students’ ability to think critically since the implementation process began three years ago. Again, this success goes back to the shift in teaching practice. In order for this success to emerge, the teachers needed to change their approach to teaching. The participants shared in this study that they keep in mind a focus question for all lessons; they develop these questions in order to elicit critical thinking from students. Students are required to explain their thinking and to defend their answers both orally and in writing. One teacher shared that when a student shares an idea or an answer with the class, he will ask that student to “explain how you got that to your team.” He went on to share that students are able to think about their thinking, and they can share with others how they came to that conclusion.

Even though the trainings, which teachers in this study have had or are currently participating in, emerged as a success, concerns regarding professional development were also expressed. Teacher shared that they have been involved in some really beneficial Common Core aligned trainings over the past three years, but, again, those trainings haven’t been consistent for everyone. The overall PD of being able to collaborate with
peers about Common Core and attending countywide, ongoing training pertaining to the integration of science, technology, engineering, and math have all been positive aspects of the implementation of the new standards.

**Challenges**

According to the literature, teachers will need well-organized, carefully structured, and purposefully directed time for planning, access to instructional resources, and the necessary funding for implementation (Guskey, 2003; McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). These very issues came up as challenges in this study.

First of all, schools did not have access to state adopted math materials until the 2014-2015 school year, even though the standardized test was piloted and field-tested two years before the release of the math materials. Schools still do not have English language arts materials; they are scheduled to be available for adoption during the 2015-2016 school year, even though the students will be tested and schools will be held accountable for the new standardized test (SBAC) during the 2014-2015 school year. The California Department of Education even states that an issue with the implementation of the CCSS is the fact that it will take years to fully develop a framework and instructional materials in accordance with the CCSS (CDE, 2010). Knowing this, the state should have considered rolling out the new standards after the framework and materials were developed and available to schools.

The literature provides another example of the importance of having materials with evidence that suggests instructional materials can have a larger impact on student
learning that teacher quality, which makes the selection of high quality instructional materials essential (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). The participants in this study all concurred that the lack of materials has posed a significant challenge for them and has used up a lot of their time that could have been spend on other areas of the implementation process.

The lack of materials impacted the challenge of time. Teachers feel like they aren’t given the time they need to plan and collaborate. As stated above, the literature states that teachers must be given “well-organized, carefully structured, and purposefully directed time,” (Guskey, 2003; McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). The teachers shared that when they are given time by their leader it is often fragmented and micromanaged. The results from this study show that for implementation to be successful, time must be allocated for the teachers.

The new standardized assessment (SBAC) is also an aspect of the implementation process that has posed a challenge for the schools. Teachers do not feel like their students are prepared for the test because it is so different from what it used to be. The teachers in this study shared that their students don’t even have the necessary keyboarding and general computer usage skills they need to even access the test. Students will be asked to type short answers or even essays when they test in the spring of 2015. Again, this appears to be a flaw in the roll out process. Schools needed to be given more time by the state to prepare their students for the new standards and the new assessment. All three principals in this study shared that they aren’t as worried about this
initial test because it is a “baseline” year, but they feel like it will be a challenge for the students this first year.

Summary

Successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards begins with leadership. Leaders in schools need to support their teachers by giving them time to plan and collaborate, provide ample professional development opportunities geared towards the individual needs of teachers, and communicate effectively throughout the process. If teachers have the support they need from leadership, they will then be able to make the necessary shifts in their teaching practice to support the CCSS, incorporate technology in the education of their students, and integrate writing across the curriculum. The successes come from the principals and teachers working together to create a platform for students to succeed in the Common Core era. Every school will face challenges with this change, and they will vary from site to site. The majority of the challenges identified in this study appear to be caused by the roll out process established by the state of California. Having schools held accountable for a standardized test without even having the necessary materials available for adoption has been a frustrating and challenging experience for schools. It will take time for schools to overcome these challenges and have the Common Core State Standards fully implemented in their classrooms.

The final chapter will present some of the limitations of this study, share conclusions of this research, and propose areas of future research.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

There are three main stages in the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards: The Awareness Phase will introduce the CCSS, coordinate the planning of systems to implement the standards, and establish collaboration among the stakeholders; the Transition Phase includes building resources, implementing needs assessments, establishing new professional development opportunities, and expanding collaboration; and the Implementation Phase will expand professional development support, fully align curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and effectively integrate all of these elements across the field (CDE, 2013). All of the participants’ schools in this study appear to be in the Transition Phase of the implementation process.

This study revealed some important characteristics of what schools need to implement the new standards now that the Common Core is here. Common themes of were documented through the study and supported by the literature. Leaders need to provide time for their teachers to plan, professional development opportunities geared towards individual teachers’ needs, and they need to communicate effectively through the process. Teachers need to shift their teaching practice from being a lecturer to a facilitator of learning, incorporate technology in their classroom and instruction, and integrate writing across the disciplines. Successes in this study emerged as an increase in staff collaboration as well as student-to-student collaboration, an increase in students’ critical thinking skills, and success with some Common Core aligned trainings.
Challenges emerged as lack of sufficient materials, lack of time to plan and collaborate, and preparing students for the new standardized assessments (SBAC).

**Limitations of the Research**

It should be noted that there were several limitations to this research study. First, these results may not generalize for other schools in rural Northern California that are implementing the Common Core State Standards. These results were taken from schools within a relatively short distance of each other.

A second limitation to this study is the small number of participants. Three principals from three different schools and two teachers from each of these three schools (totaling six teachers) participated in the one-to-one interviews and the focus group. The teachers were selected by the principals to represent their schools potentially biasing the results in a positive direction. Another possible limitation in this area was that all of the participants knew and have had interactions with me due to us all being educators in a relatively small, rural area. Additionally, one of the principals is in his first year as an administrator, which may pose a limitation due to his limited leadership experience.

A third limitation to this study may be that I didn’t enlist the participation of other stakeholders in this study, such as, district leaders, support staff, parents, and students to get their perspective on what is happening in their schools now that the Common Core is here.

Finally, this study includes the use of participants from schools that appear to all be in the same phase of the implementation process. A better understanding may have
resulted from enlisting participants who were currently involved in all three stages of the process.

**Implications for Future Research**

Because the Common Core State Standards are in the beginning stages of the implementation process, the possibilities for future research are abundant. This particular study focused more on what is happening with schools in the second phase of the implementation process; the research could be furthered by looking at what schools are doing in the 3rd and final stage of the process. Research pertaining to the final stage of the process could help schools that are looking to transition from the second to the third stage.

Another implication for future study pertaining to this topic would be to look at the new standardized assessments (SBAC) and how schools are preparing students to be successful on the test. Research on how these initial test results from the 2014-2015 year will affect schools in the future may be of benefit to educators as well. It would be interesting to see whether the new English language arts adoptions that are getting ready to come out are aligned to the test and help prepare students to be successful on the SBAC. Seeing data from the test over time and comparing it to results from old standardized testing may be interesting to research as well. Is this new assessment really beneficial to students?

Further implications may include looking at additional teacher perspectives on the Common Core State Standards and whether or not they also are seeing students who are
more prepared for college and the workforce. There is a lot of media attention regarding parents’ take on the Common Core as well, so it would be interesting to research how that is impacting the success of the new standards.

A final topic for future study pertaining to the Common Core could be about whether or not states are deciding to back out of their adoption of the new standards. Are any states deciding that this isn’t working, so they are moving back to their old state content standards or going back to the old standards to revise them?
REFERENCES


Retrieved from http://www.nwaea.k12.ia.us/documents/filelibrary/word/iowa_core_curriculum/module_1/Change_Article.pdf


“Hi, my name is Amy Betts. I am a principal of an elementary school in Fortuna and am currently in the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards with my staff. I am also a graduate student at Humboldt State University working on my Master’s in Education. Do you have some time to talk with me? I’m currently working on my thesis and have decided to combine my research with what I’m currently struggling with in my job as a principal. I have decided to conduct a research study on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in our schools in hopes of gaining knowledge on how best to move forward with the implementation process. I was given your name from Lori Breyer, Coordinator of School Support and Accountability, at Humboldt County Office of Education. She suggested that you may be interested in participating in my study, since you are currently involved in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards at your school. Your participation would include sitting down with me for an interview. The interview will take approximately forty minutes to one hour and will consist of ten questions. I will have a scribe with me who will be typing notes and recording the discussion. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to skip any questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering. Are you interested in participating? If so, let’s schedule a time for the interview. I will bring a copy of the Informed Consent
letter for you to read over and sign before the interview begins. I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.”
APPENDIX B: RECRUITING SCRIPT FOR FOCUS GROUP

“Hi, my name is Amy Betts. I am a principal of an elementary school in Fortuna and am currently in the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards with my staff. I am a graduate student at Humboldt State University working on my Master’s in Education. Do you have some time to talk with me? I’m currently working on my thesis and have decided to combine my research with what I’m currently struggling with in my job as a principal. I have decided to conduct a research study on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in our schools in hopes of gaining knowledge on how best to move forward with the implementation process. I was given your school’s name from Lori Breyer, Coordinator of School Support and Accountability, at Humboldt County Office of Education as a school who may be interested in participating in my study, since you are currently involved in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Your principal sat down with me for an interview already. I received your name from your principal as a teacher who may be interested in participating in this study. Your participation would include sitting down with me and five other teachers in a focus group. The focus group will take approximately one to two hours and will consist of eight questions. I will have a scribe with me who will be typing notes and recording the discussion. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to skip any questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering. Are you interested in participating? If so,
we will schedule a date and time for the focus group. I will bring a copy of the
Informed Consent letter for you to read over and sign before the focus group begins.
I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.”
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

March 12, 2015

Dear Participant:

In pursuing my Master’s Degree in Education from Humboldt State University I am investigating commonalities and differences in the implementation process of the new Common Core State Standards in schools.

I am asking you to participate in the study because you have been identified as currently implementing the Common Core State Standards in your school and are in a position to provide valuable information that can help others in this process.

The interview will take forty minutes to an hour, notes will be typed by a scribe during the interview, the interview will be audio recorded, and the questions will focus on the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. You do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

A potential risk for you may include some hesitation about exposing differing points of view or experiences due to fear of being judged by your peers. The use of pseudonyms will address this issue as well as a clear understanding at the beginning of the focus group that the conversation is to be kept confidential. The possible benefits include the opportunity to reflect on the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards, learning more about what others are doing, and sharing knowledge with others in the education field to help them with implementing the new standards.

I will collect no identifying information about you, and in reporting any comments you make, I will use a pseudonym in order to protect your identity. All information will be kept confidential, and notes of the interviews will be shredded upon completion of the study. Direct quotations from the interviews may be used but will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms in the actual report. All participation is voluntary.

If you are a principal being interviewed, with your written permission, the interview will take place at your school. If you are a teacher participant in the focus group, the focus group will take place in a neutral location.
If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me, Amy Betts, at arb30@humboldt.edu or (707)407-8500 or my university advisor, Eric VanDuzer, at evv1@humboldt.edu or (707)826-3726.

The investigator will answer any questions you have about this study. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan, Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707)826-4545.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707)826-5169.

I would really appreciate your help in participating in this study. In order for you to participate, I must have your written consent. Please sign below and return to me by March 20, 2015.

Sincerely,

Amy Betts, HSU MA in Education Student
Office location:
3850 Rohnerville Rd.
Fortuna, CA
95540
(707)407-8500
arb30@humboldt.edu
Please indicate whether or not you consent to participate in the research study discussed above. Thank you.

___ Yes, I, ________________________________, agree to participate in the study.

___ No, I, ________________________________, do not agree to participate in the study.

______________________________________________ ___________________
Signature       Date
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

OPENING STATEMENT:

“Thank you for taking the time to help me better understand your experiences in implementing the Common Core Standards. Your views and experience are really important and I appreciate you help and input. I have ten questions for you today. If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about answering any question, please do not hesitate to skip the question. At the end of my interview questions today, you will be give the opportunity to ask any questions you may have or to give feedback on your experience today. “

“Are you ready to begin?”

“Do you give your permission for the interview to be audio recorded and for the scribe to type notes during the interview for the purpose of this research?”

QUESTIONS:

1. Can you tell me a little about your school and the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards?
2. What is working? What is not? What do you see as the biggest factor in successful implementation of the CCSS? What are the biggest barriers?

3. What leadership strategies are you using to lead your staff through the implementation of the CCSS? Do they differ for different members of the staff?

4. How have you overcome teacher concerns with the Common Core implementation? Parent concerns? What are your best strategies to get buy-in?

5. Are you providing professional development opportunities for your teachers and staff? What types of opportunities have you been able to arrange? What would you like to see? Is it enough? If not, what are some of the key barriers? Are the professional development opportunities ongoing?

6. What key shifts in teaching practice do you feel are necessary for the new CCSS, and in what ways do you feel the Common Core State Standards align with past practice?

7. What differences in teaching practice are you observing in the classroom?

8. Is your school specifically preparing students to be successful with the new Smarter Balanced testing? If so, how? If not, why?
9. What would you say is your greatest success so far in the implementation process?

10. What are the biggest challenges your school is facing in implementing the new standards?

CLOSING STATEMENT:

“Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today! Your participation may help fellow educators with their own journey with the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. You now have the opportunity to ask me any questions you may have or to give me feedback based on your experience today.”
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

OPENING STATEMENT:

“Thank you for taking the time to help fulfill one of the requirements for me to earn my Master’s Degree in Education from Humboldt State University. I appreciate you help and input. I will facilitate the focus group discussion today. I have eight questions for the group today. If anyone feels uncomfortable or unsure about answering any question, please do not hesitate to skip the question. At the end of my focus group questions today, you will be give the opportunity to ask any questions you may have or to give feedback on your experience today. “

“Before beginning I would like to get your agreement to keep this conversation confidential so that everyone can feel free sharing honestly how they feel and what they have experienced. Do you agree? Are you ready to begin?”

“Do you give your permission for the focus group to be audio recorded and for the scribe to type notes during the focus group for the purpose of this research?”

QUESTIONS:
1. What do you think are some of the biggest factors in successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards? Is that what is happening here? If not, why? If so, what do you think is helping you with the implementation?

2. What are some of your biggest needs as teachers to make the shift from the state standards to the new CCSS? Are they being met? What more would be helpful? Is that possible, why or why not?

3. What do you want from your principal or other administrators to help you with the implementation and to support you in the change?

4. What shifts, if any, in teaching practice do you feel are necessary to teach the CCSS rather than the past State Standards? Do you feel you have the knowledge and skills to successfully make the shift, or would you feel more comfortable after taking some special training?

5. What types of professional development have you had to support the shift, and what other professional development would you benefit from in regards to Common Core implementation? If some are identified, can you explain further what would be a part of that type of training?
6. Are you preparing students to be successful with the new Smarter Balanced standardized testing? If so how? What are your concerns about this? How confident do you feel that students will be ready to succeed on this year’s tests?

7. What are your biggest successes in the implementation process so far?

8. What are your biggest challenges in the implementation process, and what more do you need to overcome them?

CLOSING STATEMENT:

“Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today! Your participation may help fellow educators with their own journey with the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards. You now have the opportunity to ask me any questions you may have or to give me feedback based on your experience today.”