

EMBARGOED UNTIL:
12:01 a.m., Wednesday, March 1, 2017

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New UChicago Consortium Report: Teachers in schools with strong organizational capacity feel more prepared to teach Common Core standards

Elementary teachers report more professional development, feel more prepared than high school teachers to implement Common Core standards

CHICAGO – As schools across the country begin implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), one of the most significant education initiatives of the last decade, a new study shows that teachers in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) with high levels of organizational capacity, such as teacher collaboration, instructional leadership, and teacher influence, are more likely to report feeling prepared to teach the new standards. Elementary teachers also feel more prepared than high school teachers. In 2015, 56 percent of elementary school teachers and 41 percent of high school teachers in CPS reported feeling “very” prepared to teach the new standards. Only 1 percent of elementary and 5 percent of high school teachers reported feeling “not at all” prepared to teach the new standards. CPS began implementing the CCSS in K-12 classrooms in 2013-2014 for English Language Arts (ELA) and 2014-2015 for math.

The study used teacher and administrator responses to the annual *My Voice, My School* survey from the spring of 2014 and the spring of 2015 to explore teacher and administrator experiences preparing for the CCSS and their perceptions of the extent to which the new standards would affect teaching and learning. The two years of data included in this study occurred during the implementation of CPS’ multi-year professional development strategy to prepare teachers and administrators to implement the new standards. The CCSS represent a considerable change in the expectations for teaching and learning across all grades.

“Common Core is a state-led, nationwide effort to define clear expectations for student learning and mastery. The standards establish guidelines for what students should learn each year in math and English language arts in order to be college and career ready, although the standards do not dictate how these expectations should be met,” says report co-author Jennifer R. Cowhy, Research Analyst at the UChicago

Consortium. “So two questions that matter for whether or not CPS can successfully implement the Common Core standards are: Have there been adequate professional development opportunities to equip CPS schools with the skills and resources to be successful in the first years of implementation and how do teachers and administrators view the new standards - to what extent do they believe the standards will affect teaching and learning?”

Key Findings:

- **In 2015, more than two-thirds of elementary school teachers** felt that the CCSS would have a great deal of impact on what they would teach and on how they would teach it. Less than half of high school teachers felt this way.
 - Teachers at all levels felt the new standards would impact their teaching more than they would impact student achievement.
- **Some teachers reported receiving much more CCSS-related professional development than others.**
 - On average, elementary teachers reported participating in more sessions than high school teachers.
 - Many teachers reported participating in 2-4 sessions of professional development in both 2014 and 2015.
 - One-quarter of high school teachers, and around 15 percent of elementary teachers, reported having no formal professional development focused on the CCSS in either year.
- **Many teachers met regularly outside of formal professional development to talk with their colleagues about the CCSS.**
 - Two-thirds of elementary teachers and just over 40 percent of high school teachers reported meeting at least monthly with their colleagues to discuss the standards.
- **Administrators did not report feeling as prepared as teachers** in their ability to support implementation of the new standards, particularly in their ability to evaluate teachers’ implementation of the CCSS.
- **Teachers in schools with high levels of organizational capacity reported receiving more extensive CCSS professional development.**
 - Even after taking into account more extensive professional development, teachers in these schools reported feeling more prepared to teach the standards, suggesting that schools with high levels of teacher collaboration, instructional leadership, and teacher influence may have employed additional strategies to ensure teachers were prepared.

“It stands to reason that teachers in schools with stronger organizational capacity feel more prepared for a new initiative. What we can learn from this is the critical role organizational capacity can play in school success,” says study co-author, Julia A. Gwynne, Managing Director and Senior Research Scientist at the UChicago Consortium.

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