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Year 1 State Report: Ohio

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Year 1 State Report: Ohio

Abstract

This report examines how the state of Ohio approached college- and career-ready standards implementation during a time of transition, as they revised the Ohio Learning Standards in 2015–2016. The approval process will take place in 2016–2017, with new materials and revised standards ready for the 2017–2018 school year. For the purposes of this report and in keeping with C-SAIL's focus, the authors concentrate on implementation of Ohio's English language arts (ELA) and math standards.

Keywords

college and career-ready standards, implementation, curriculum, professional development, assessment, students with disabilities, english learners

Disciplines

Education | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research

Comments

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RR-02

YEAR 1 STATE REPORT: **OHIO**



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FEBRUARY 2017

Suggested Citation:

Stornaiuolo, A., with Flores, N., Nichols, T. P., Pak, K., Plummer, E., & Desimone, L. M. (2017). *Year 1 State Report: Ohio*. Philadelphia: The Center for Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning.

About the Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL)

The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) examines how college- and career-ready standards are implemented, if they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation. C-SAIL is led by Andy Porter, with a team of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, University of Southern California Rossier School of Education, American Institutes for Research, and Vanderbilt Peabody College. The Center is funded through a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education.

C-SAIL research is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305C150007 to the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.



Introduction

The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) examines how college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards are implemented, whether they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation. Established in July 2015 and funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, C-SAIL has partnered with California, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas (and soon, California) to explore their experiences with CCR standards-based reform, particularly regarding students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs).

This report examines how the state of Ohio is approaching CCR standards implementation during a time of transition, as they revised the Ohio Learning Standards in 2015–2016. The approval process will take place in 2016–2017, with new materials and revised standards ready for the 2017–2018 school year. For the purposes of this report and in keeping with C-SAIL’s focus, we concentrate on implementation of Ohio’s English language arts (ELA) and math standards.

Ohio Academic Standards Timeline | At-A-Glance

The adoption, implementation, and revision of Ohio’s CCR standards and assessments are part of an ongoing process spanning several years. Below is an overview of Ohio’s timeline for this process, beginning with the year that CCR standards were first adopted:

Year CCR standards were adopted	Ohio adopted new learning standards based on the Common Core State Standards in 2010.
Year(s) the CCR standards were fully implemented (all schools in the state were required to use the CCR standards.)	Ohio fully implemented CCR standards in 2013–2014.
Year(s) CCR standards were/will be revised	The Ohio Department of Education is revising the ELA and math standards in 2015–2016, with proposed changes submitted to the Ohio Board of Education for approval in 2016–2017.
Year(s) CCR-aligned assessments were fully administered across the state	The Ohio Achievement Assessment (PARCC test) for grades 3–8 in ELA and math and end-of-course tests in high school were fully administered in 2014–2015.
Year(s) CCR-aligned assessments were/will be revised	The state assessment is currently under revision, to be field tested in 2015–2016 and further developed in 2016–2017.
Major policy developments relevant to standards-based reform in the state	Gov. John Kasich signed a bill in June 2015 prohibiting the state from spending money on tests from the 12-state consortium (PARCC). The state contracted with AIR to develop new Ohio assessments, which were first used in 2015–2016 and will be developed and refined.

Data Analysis | Our Framework

Drawing on interviews with seven key state officials across various offices of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the report synthesizes and analyzes those responses using the *policy attributes theory* (Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1988), a theoretical framework positing five attributes related to successful policy implementation. The following descriptions of each policy attribute guided this analysis:

- **SPECIFICITY:** How extensive, detailed, and prescriptive a policy is. The explicitness of the goals, guidelines, and resources may help schools implement policies with a greater degree of fidelity.
- **AUTHORITY:** How policies gain legitimacy and status through persuasion (e.g., rules or law, historical practice, or charismatic leaders). Policies have authority when state and district leaders, parents, community members, and other stakeholders devote time and resources to the reform initiative, which sends the clear signal that the endeavor is an institutional priority. Policies are also deemed authoritative when stakeholders participate in the decision-making processes, when they demonstrate their investment in the reform, or when they believe that the reform sets high standards for norms related to race, ethnicity, or income.
- **CONSISTENCY:** The extent to which various policies are aligned and how policies relate to each other or support each other.
- **POWER:** How policies are reinforced and enacted through systems of rewards and/or sanctions.
- **STABILITY:** The extent to which policies change or remain constant over time.

The report focuses on five focal areas—standards and curriculum, assessment, professional development (PD), English language learners (ELLs), and students with disabilities (SWDs). We report on each focal area through the lens of the policy attributes to help readers see how state officials identified areas of strengths and challenges related to standards implementation in Ohio. Given the limited nature of our data, however, we do not purport to provide the full depth and breadth of the department’s work toward standards-based reform. This report is therefore a snapshot of the state’s efforts in implementing CCR-aligned curriculum, assessments, PD, SWDs, and ELLs.

We will integrate these findings with interview data from three districts in Ohio, which we conducted in the summer and fall of 2016. Further, we plan to conduct state and district interviews for the next 4 years, ending in the spring/summer of 2020; data from these interviews will be continually integrated into our analyses.



Executive Summary

SPECIFICITY

One of the primary ways *specificity* has factored into Ohio’s approach to standards implementation is in the state’s development of specific supports to guide districts and teachers in aligning curriculum and instruction to the standards. With an emphasis on the importance of local control over curriculum and instruction, the state has seen its primary role as supporting standards implementation through the development of resources. These sample curricula, alignment materials, and PD resources can then be tailored to the needs of districts and schools, such as when the Educational Service Centers customize and adapt those materials for specific audiences. One of the goals in Ohio’s current revision to the ELA and math standards is to make standards and assessments more Ohio-specific, primarily by involving key stakeholders, most notably Ohio educators, in the revision process. A central challenge for the state has been to determine what kinds of general resources and materials are most useful to local stakeholders in aligning curriculum and instruction, particularly given the diversity of needs of students and teachers across the state.

AUTHORITY

The Ohio Learning Standards have garnered *authority* in the state through a deliberate effort to engage key stakeholders—particularly Ohio’s educators—in their collaborative development. Such an effort to promote buy in for Ohio-specific standards and assessments attempts to recognize local authority over standards implementation after the state’s withdrawal from the Common Core multistate consortium. Several challenges related to the authority of the standards have emerged in light of increased scrutiny of the role of the state and federal governments in education, as the state seeks to balance competing priorities in a shifting policy landscape (e.g., recent reauthorization of ESEA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, in the form of ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act). One such challenge involves developing robust communication and outreach mechanisms that can make resources available to those who need them while being clear about the current changes to the standards and assessments at the state and federal levels. One goal for the state is to use new technologies to reach stakeholders, which would ideally invest those stakeholders in participating in the process (e.g., by leaving comments for ELA and math revisions via online survey) and make visible the state’s priorities (e.g., focusing on the needs of diverse learners).

CONSISTENCY

In creating *consistency (alignment)* in standards implementation, Ohio engages in an elaborate process for aligning standards with materials and assessments, a process that strategically brings together stakeholder groups with different expertise. The process for developing standards-aligned materials and assessments for ELLs and SWDs is also clearly articulated, with the English-language proficiency and extended standards undergoing significant stakeholder vetting. However, the alignment process may not always be completely legible to all stakeholder audiences, and even the state does not necessarily collect systemic information about the ways the alignment process develops in practice. Indeed, as a state that asserts the importance of

local control, one of the challenges has been to determine how districts, schools, and classrooms engage in such alignment processes on the ground. Without a clear feedback structure in place, the state officials develop materials they anticipate will be broadly useful in aligning instruction and curriculum but does not collect data about how those materials are being taken up and the uses to which they are put. State leaders do rely on feedback from Educational Service Centers and Networks of Regional Leaders in a more informal capacity, and one of the goals moving forward is to build on and extend those networks in developing consistent messages and materials, particularly during a time of rapid change.

POWER

In Ohio, *power* in the state implementation process appears to be linked to explicit rewards and sanctions that are legislatively driven. Officials emphasized that the central role of the state was to support districts, schools, and teachers, particularly by using accountability measures to recognize progress or to identify districts that need additional support. One of the challenges facing state officials is in navigating this supporting role while still fulfilling obligations to the federal government, to ensure that districts and schools comply with the law. While it is not always clear what districts or schools need from the state, ODE must walk a careful line between mandating and guiding districts. In addition to explicit, legislatively driven rewards and sanctions, the state uses indirect means to further encourage districts and schools to develop and deliver high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum and instruction, such as by recognizing Schools of Promise. One of the goals for the future is to help districts, schools, and teachers improve in their development of high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum and instruction by modeling how to use assessment data to drive changes programmatically and systematically.

STABILITY

Given shifting legislative priorities and the ongoing revisions to Ohio's standards and assessments, *stability* was a salient theme that emerged repeatedly. There was a broad sense by state officials that the current revisions were a positive step in making the standards and assessments more responsive to Ohio's needs and to local schools and districts, accompanied by a sense of optimism that a periodic revision process would contribute to the stability of Ohio's CCR standards in the future. State representatives seemed confident that the contributions that Ohio's CCR standards offered to students—especially the focus on 21st-century learning that progressed across grade levels to promote deeper learning—would be preserved and enhanced in the current revisions. However, despite this optimism, the state recognized a number of challenges that have arisen from rapid legislative shifts and a changing political climate at state and federal levels. For example, the uncertainty around how assessment data would be delivered and used, particularly for ELLs, has created some perceived instability at local levels. Another challenge has been to communicate clearly and transparently about changes to the standards and assessments, particularly in light of broader concerns about local control over standards implementation and the prevalence of over-testing. One of the near-term goals for the state is an increased focus



on diverse learners, particularly in preparing all teachers and districts to educate students with diverse needs. Another goal revolves around helping districts use assessment data constructively, by focusing less on test preparation and more on developing high-quality instruction and making changes at a programmatic level.

Standards & Curriculum

SPECIFICITY

ODE officials described their state as “local controlled,” stressing that districts and schools exercise local control over the specifics of curriculum and instruction. They found that the standards offer helpful detail about the content that should be taught and how that content learning should progress across grade levels. Yet while the standards provide specific direction about what students should know and be able to do in the 21st century (e.g., developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills), it is up to local schools and districts to determine curriculum. ODE staff saw the state’s central role as offering “materials and supports” that would help districts, schools, and teachers “crosswalk” standards and instruction. In other words, while the standards offer a blueprint for *what* students need to learn, local stakeholders should determine the *how*—with the state offering guidance and support in aligning curriculum and instruction to the standards but not directing or mandating curricular activities.

One important area of specificity in the new CCR standards, according to ODE staff, involves the careful progression of learning that builds on previous knowledge and is mapped across grade levels. This “deep, meaningful content-specific education” that unfolds across multiple years involves “a narrowing of the standards ... to allow for going in-depth and doing projects and doing things aligned to the standards.” State officials found that this “narrowing” or “focusing” of instruction facilitates “deeper learning” across grade levels, affording increased flexibility while promoting coherence and rigor. State representatives found that the progression of learning skills detailed in the standards offers curricular specificity across different grade levels, ensuring that skills are not taught in isolation but as part of a coherent framework over time (e.g., using evidence in writing, reading informative texts, applying problem-solving skills). While acknowledging the critique that sometimes these progressions involved too big of a jump between grade levels or pushed advanced work too soon, ODE staff thought the specificity of grade-level curricular progression represented a significant development of CCR standards in the state: “What we saw—and I’ll say Ohio really pushed for with the Common Core with our involvement—was this idea of progression and coherence across both English language arts and mathematics. And I think they did a good job at doing that.”

State interviewees felt that while the standards offer broad guidance as to the kind, quality, and nature of learning that should take place and the skills needed to engage in that learning, they do not specify in detail what instruction should look like. Since the standards are not highly specific in terms of curriculum or instruction on the ground, a central challenge for the state has been learning how best to support teachers in designing curriculum and instruction to address the content standards. As one official stated: “It [current standards] doesn’t specify like the old standards. ... I mean, maybe those [details, like teaching prefixes] belong more appropriately with the district or with the curriculum. But teachers are left with... how do I get to them? That’s always the question, I think. How do I get to them?” State staff members recognized that while the CCR standards afford teachers a measure of professional autonomy about how to “get to” the learning and knowledge represented in the standards—an openness that in turn might generate buy-in for the adoption of the standards—the less specific nature of the standards for



instruction also creates a challenge for the state in determining the level and kinds of materials and supports stakeholders need.

AUTHORITY

The ODE has tried to involve multiple stakeholders in the development of standards, especially in their current revisions to the ELA and math standards. Through a public survey, working groups, a public comment period, and advisory committees, ODE seeks to involve community members, parents, teachers, and district and school officials in the revision process. Such a bottom-up approach can support the buy-in for the Ohio standards by making people feel included in creating Ohio-focused CCR standards. One big area of focus involves including Ohio educators in these revisions, particularly through the 16 NRLs and the math and ELA advisory committees, comprising educators, content-area experts, and representatives from 18 statewide educational organizations.

One of the challenges identified through the interviews is the national backlash to standards more generally, which has played out in Ohio in pockets of resistance to standards-based instruction. Officials recognized that some skepticism may be rooted in more traditional ideas about what should be taught, while other areas of concern are “connected to the Common Core and perception of what that means.” The state is responding to those critiques of CCR standards by working on their communication and outreach, using new technologies to interact with concerned stakeholders and inform them about efforts to revise the standards according to Ohio’s specific needs.

CONSISTENCY

The state offers a variety of resources to help teachers, principals, and districts align instruction to the standards. For example, the state offers **model curricula**, created in 2010 by Ohio teachers, on its website. In addition to model curricula, the state offers alignment guides as well as a number of professional development resources (e.g., webinars, voice-over PowerPoints, etc.). These materials are often released when revisions or changes in policy or practice necessitate shifts in instructional practice. As one official noted:

Whenever we do a kind of a standards update or anything like that one of the things that we always do is [work] with teachers on district tools they can use within the district to compare current practice and [identify] where there are gaps, where there are things that need to be done. Do some alignment between resources as well as [use] a quality review rubric that ... helps teachers or districts look at their lessons and units and [whether] it is a high quality lesson or unit that addressed the standards.

This process of aligning materials to the current standards will be in place for the current revisions to the ELA and math Ohio Learning Standards, as the state works to adapt these materials to address changes to standards. The state’s role in assisting teachers and districts with alignment involves the state pushing out information to their partners or districts in a unidirectional manner. There does not appear to be routine feedback mechanisms for the state to hear how these materials are aligned in practice or their usefulness to stakeholders, though

the **Educational Service Centers** (ESCs)¹, on the front lines in working with teachers, do offer general feedback about how materials are being received and used by teachers.

POWER

As a state that emphasizes the importance of local control over curriculum and instruction, Ohio works to encourage the implementation of standards-based curricula but does not include explicit rewards or sanctions for doing so. The state encourages districts to participate in standards-based curriculum and instruction by creating materials to help districts and schools do ongoing needs assessments and alignment with standards. As one state official explained:

While we don't necessarily have state accountability on that from the school improvement side, we're looking at a scenario where we encourage them to have those conversations, schools, especially. We're a ESEA flexibility state right now but as part of the improvement planning and needs assessment work that happens at a local level, we do encourage [districts] to look at issues of curriculum alignment and understanding, and understanding needs assessment and building towards improvement goals for academic achievement.

The systems that more directly influence district and school participation in standards-based instruction revolve around performance on the state assessments, which are discussed in the following section.

STABILITY

Ohio's 2001 standards underwent initial revisions in 2009, guided by a desire to increase rigor and coherence across the standards and to develop a system of learning progressions that would push toward deeper learning of concepts. In 2010, the state adopted the Common Core State Standards, which seemed to address these goals by helping to shift away from “teach[ing material] and re-teach[ing] it and teach[ing] it again, and keep just going back over it until either you have somebody either get it or they get tired of it and stop trying to learn it.” The 2010 standards instead developed a progression of topics, with a “greater emphasis” on developing “an understanding of why you're doing” and working toward a “balance of understanding and procedure.” At that time, the state also developed extended standards, designed to further specify and articulate scaffolds for students who need extra support.

In 2014–2015, after the state legislature pulled out of the Common Core multistate consortium, the state adopted the Ohio Learning Standards. A major impetus for this shift was to make the standards more “Ohio-specific,” which interviewees indicated was something important to legislators and stakeholders who wanted to move away from the Common Core and sought

1 In 2015–2016, Ohio had 52 ESCs, which are described on their website as “large-scale service providers offering administrative, academic, fiscal and operational support services to Ohio's school districts, chartered nonpublic schools, community schools, and STEM schools.” Every district with fewer than 16,000 students is required to be aligned with an ESC of their choice (and may purchase services from any ESC). Established in 1914 by the Ohio General Assembly, ESCs have undergone multiple iterations over the decades in their efforts “to serve as the conduit and delivery system for Ohio's statewide school improvement and education reform efforts.”



more state focus and control over Ohio educational practices. This shift to the Ohio Learning Standards involved “looking at standards from the Ohio perspective.”

In 2015–2016, Ohio began revisions to their ELA and math standards, a process that has involved multiple steps. ODE conducted an online survey for feedback and developed a [website](#) dedicated to standards revisions. The state sought feedback from people who nominated themselves for working groups and consulted professional organizations to put together an advisory committee to work with those groups. In 2016, the revisions to the ELA and math standards will be open to public review and additional feedback before being presented to legislators and the State Board. ODE will then examine how the revisions impact their model curriculum, assessments, and alignment documents. The state will support educators in transitioning to the revised Ohio standards in the 2017–2018 school year.

One of the biggest areas ODE plans to target in the current revision period is reaching diverse learners (defined in the state as ELLs, gifted students, and SWDs). It plans to use the Network of Regional Leaders (NRL), who are “leaders for each of the content areas that we meet with regularly,” to discuss how to meet the needs of students with diverse learning requirements, including how the state can “help guide districts and, and what resources need to be developed or created or identified to help with that.”

The revision process for the standards will ideally take place every 5 years or so, which ODE staff said will allow them to “keep the foundation” of the standards but also facilitate an evaluation of “where we need to make improvements and make minor edits and tweaks to the standards.” State officials reported confidence that the Ohio Learning Standards will continue to be in place for the foreseeable future. As one state staff member stated: “If we’re continually trying to look at them and based on current research or based on data or based on what we know is good practice—and writ[ing] appropriate content at different grades and getting the wording right—I think these standards could last a long time, with ... an updated revision type process that’s continually ongoing.” Despite this optimism, ODE officials saw the current “period of change” as likely continuing, given the national educational forecast that would likely ensure “a few more years of pretty significant change across the country.” Staff members expressed that the national state of flux resulted in less control at the state level: “There’s not a whole lot we can do here at the state to help a lot just because there is so much turmoil and change.”

Assessment

SPECIFICITY

There have been a number of changes to Ohio’s assessments since CCR standards were adopted, with the move to more state-specific assessments over time. The first year of using PARCC assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards in 2014–2015 resulted in considerable public outcry, with concerns that the tests were too long, not developmentally appropriate, and poorly executed. In response, the governor signed a bill removing Ohio from the PARCC consortium, and Ohio exercised the option to use the AIR-developed item bank to build new assessments aligned to Ohio standards in ELA and math for the 2015–2016 school year. The impetus was to make the assessments more Ohio-specific and to be more transparent about

the development process (using Ohio educators and stakeholders). As one ODE staff member noted: “Going forward, this will be an Ohio-developed test with the Ohio items, blueprint, and so forth.” Such a move toward Ohio-specific assessments parallels the move to Ohio-specific standards described above.

One of the central challenges identified by ODE officials is the test preparation focus of some teachers and district staff. ODE representatives suggested that teachers, principals, and districts should focus less on practicing for tests and spend more time developing high-quality curriculum and instruction aligned to the standards. One interviewee described how the state is encouraging practitioners to focus more fully on curricular matters: “My thought is—how do we get teachers to realize that if the kid knows the content and can address questions in multiple ways, they’ll do just fine on the test? You can say it and teachers agree, but then they turn around and say, ‘but, I have to do this. I have to get them ready for that test.’ The change that I would like to see would be that teachers really believe that good instruction is the best preparation for the assessments.” Much of the most recent professional development created by the state (described later in the report) has been crafted around this messaging.

In addition to the general assessment program, Ohio offers an alternative assessment that is based on the extended standards; it was developed in collaboration with other states to create task items along different levels of complexity. The alternative assessment is a set of performance-based tasks grouped by grade band and organized in a kit provided by the state. It comprises 12 tasks that use a variety of materials and manipulatives (sentence strips, an apple, etc.), with the teacher deciding (using pre-assessment materials) where to begin based on student capacity (e.g., Task 5). As one state official noted, there has been positive response to the use of the alternative assessment for students with special needs, especially in pushing teachers toward inclusion and rigor:

What we’re finding is that teachers like it first of all. It’s not as time intensive, it’s not as labor intensive [as the previous alternative assessment], but they’re also open and receiving, almost, professional development even in beginning to administer the assessment because they’re thinking ‘this might be a question I never would have thought as a student would know, let alone that I should be teaching them.’ And so it’s also allowed us to really challenge some teachers as well as some students on their pre-conceived notions of student competency and achievement.

Since a large number of students take the alternative assessment each year, the state engages in significant training in using the performance-based assessment.² One ODE specialist described the process: “We developed online modules that we require all past administrators to go through as well as teachers. We’ve done a lot of quadrant training, we’ve done a lot of district training, regional training, we’ve trained a lot of people in these new extended standards.” While local

² As the state describes on its [website](#), the 1% cap on students taking the alternative assessment does not restrict “the number of qualifying students who may participate in the alternate assessment” but rather restricts “the count of proficient or higher scores on the alternate assessment that can be used for accountability purposes.” Determination of who will take the alternative assessment rests with individual IEP teams.



Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams still determine which assessment to give, the state provides “a decision making framework and a flow chart that very clearly identifies which assessment the student should participate in.” As a result, ODE staff described a very “tight” process for preparing educators to use and interpret the alternative assessment.

In addition to the alternate assessment, the state offers the **Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment** (OELPA) in grade bands that match the Ohio English Language Proficiency Standards (K, 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–12). The interactive online assessment measures English language learners’ mastery of the communication demands of the academic standards in four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Ohio developed the OELPA as part of the 10-state consortium **ELPA21** (English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century).

AUTHORITY

Much of the authority of the assessments is derived from the role of federal and state mandates, with Ohio requiring that its assessments meet federal guidelines in grades 3–8 as well as end-of-course exams in high school. ODE attempts to build consensus around the testing by convening key stakeholders—including teachers, academics, and other community members—to develop and give feedback on assessments. Despite these efforts to include multiple stakeholders, there has been increased resistance to the amount of testing that is occurring in public schools across the state: “There’s concern about how much we’re testing and the types of tests that are going on across pockets of Ohio.” State officials connect this resistance to a broader national backlash against testing.

CONSISTENCY

One way that ODE attempts to align standards and assessments is to bring together stakeholders with multiple expertise. One facet of this stakeholder involvement includes connecting with professional organizations like the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics or the English language arts teacher organizations. ODE works with them as well as ESCs and NRLs to coordinate and create consistent messaging about the assessments. They have also sought out community members and Ohio educators to help with alignment that is Ohio focused. As one official described: “We brought educators in to help set cut scores. We had them review blueprints also. You know, we used Ohio educators. One of the big things that our legislature wanted was that we wanted this to be fully involved with the Ohio educators and Ohio test.”

The process of aligning assessments with standards begins with the test developer (currently AIR) writing items to identified standards. Then an internal review process checks the content, wording, and alignment and goes through a process of revision. Next the items are vetted in the content advisory committees, who go through a similar revision process, before being returned to ODE to check changes and revisions. Then items are field tested, and data is gathered to determine its efficacy and alignment.

POWER

ODE is required to report assessment data to the federal government for accountability purposes

and follow federal and state regulations about how to evaluate districts. It is required by state law to produce and publish report cards for districts and schools for academic accountability. Such ratings use standardized tests scores and graduation rates to illuminate student achievement and progress, postsecondary readiness, and initiatives focused on closing the achievement gap. Aggregate data is also used to inform teacher evaluation. There is a new teacher evaluation system that uses assessment data to generate value-added supports for teachers. In tested grades, there is a value-added metric that must be used. In the previous 2 years, safe-harbor provisions in the law dictate how the data may be used, but when new Ohio-specific assessments are fully developed, tested, and implemented, the state will use test scores to evaluate teachers with a value added metric. Since teacher evaluation is subject to ongoing legislation and is part of the national conversation, the state's approach will likely evolve. Currently, there are separate reporting procedures in place for the alternative assessment, but going forward ODE anticipates that data from this assessment will be reflected in the district and teacher evaluation systems more fully, subject to future legislation.

There are a number of rewards and sanctions tied to assessments, many of them driven by legislation and detailed in the ESEA flexibility waiver. ODE officials described how the report card system allows high-performing districts to receive forms of public recognition and publicize themselves, which is especially designed to encourage districts that have significantly improved over time. This state-level encouragement may involve a designation as a School of Promise, a title given to schools with high levels of economic disadvantage but that are performing well and exceeding expectations.

The state uses assessment data to identify low-performing districts. The law mandates that if a district is in academic distress for a certain amount of time that the state intervenes to help them. An academic distress commission is assigned to the district to do an evaluation and offer guidance and support. If there is no subsequent improvement, state law allows for state takeover of the district to make mandatory changes, though that is a relatively rare occurrence. Currently there seem to be tensions over whether to exempt students from assessments, especially regarding graduation requirements. Safe harbor provisions in place during this time of assessment development and testing allow districts and schools to opt out of some accountability measures, but state officials suggested that they want to make sure that all students are held to current standards. As one ODE staff member said, “We should expect students to participate—not only participate but be proficient.” These high expectations, ODE staff suggested, would ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from the standards and high-quality instruction. On the [state report card](#) in 2015, students' ELA and math proficiency scores declined, with the Interim Superintendent stating that the switch to “more challenging state achievement tests” meant that schools and students needed “to rise to the new expectations” as “Ohio gradually raises the bar for student learning.”

There are provisions for districts placed in continuous improvement status to help them improve. One official described this process: “We have a very strong accountability system that's based on that aligned system of assessment ... so schools and districts that are struggling on showing student growth and progress on aligned assessments, they're going to have requirements that are in place for school improvement.” State officials emphasized that while these are officially sanctions tied to state accountability measures, ODE is more concerned with supporting



and helping districts, schools, and teachers receive materials, guidance, and support to make improvement.

STABILITY

The assessment landscape in Ohio is currently in flux, as the state moves to an Ohio-specific set of assessments. When the legislature mandated that the state leave the PARCC consortium and develop state tests, the short timeline meant that the state used AIR Common Core item banks to build tests for ELA and math in 2015–2016. However, “to make sure that [the assessments] are Ohio-driven,” the state underwent a review process that involved review both internally in ODE as well as by content teacher review committees. Over 1,500 educators volunteered for these committees, resulting in 15–20 teachers per grade level coordinating with ODE to develop and review test items. These committees will continue to work with ODE “in the development of Ohio-specific, Ohio-developed items that will be field tested” in 2016 and further development in 2016–2017. A shift in the focus of this state-specific assessment is providing supporting evidence for ELA and supporting mathematical reasoning in math. While ODE is taking the lead in developing these new assessments, the stability of the state assessment program is in the hands of the state legislature and the state board of education.

One change that state officials foresee in the move to new state-developed assessment is a renewed focus on using assessment data to improve instruction at the programmatic level. As one ODE representative stated:

In a less formal way one of the things we have tried to do in the past, and we anticipate trying to do it again with the new assessments—and we encourage districts to do this as well—is looking from more of a programmatic aspect of things. And rather than looking at individual students and stuff, but looking across the students in the aggregate and saying, how’s the program doing? And also from the state perspective, looking at it saying, where do we see as a state, across the state, where is it we see students doing well and where do we see students having difficulty? Are there specific topics that maybe districts or schools or the state are not teaching as well as we may be teaching other things?

To help shift local districts to this more programmatic view, state officials describe a kind of modeling they engage in, as they share how the state looks programmatically at the big picture to guide their revisions. One way they do this is via online resources, such as voice-over PowerPoint slides that interpret the data and the resulting actions the state will take based on that programmatic analysis.

ODE is moving toward a completely online assessment system (with allowances made for any accommodations needed). For the previous 2 years, state law has mandated that districts can choose online or pen-pencil administration, with surveys indicating that about 80% of districts will move to the online system in 2016–2017 (about 65% chose online tests in 2015–2016). While the state would like to have a primarily online assessment in the future (their efficacy studies have shown no effect of testing mode on outcomes), they are subject to the mandates of the legislature regarding who can opt in or out of the assessments and the mode in which they are administered. As one official noted: “If we get additional legislation to continue the dual system, we’re going to have to relook at some of the things we do around the test development and so forth.”

Professional Development

SPECIFICITY

Professional development (PD) about the standards is generally left to schools and districts to determine and implement, but the state has employed a “train the trainers” model in which they work with partners to design standards-aligned PD, particularly in working with ELL teachers in the state. Two groups with which the state works directly are the ESCs, which one official described as “the arms of the state,” and the NRLs, composed of “district level, education service center people, [and] teacher leaders.” Most of the materials developed at the state level are more generally oriented, rather than specific to any one district, and the regional leaders or ESC representatives then take the lead in adapting these materials for specific audiences.

PD is the central way the state offers guidance to districts about ELLs, primarily through their networks that work synergistically: the NRL of content-area leaders and core teachers, ESCs, the Diverse Learners network, and content area groups. Central challenges related to developing useful PD for addressing the needs of ELLs involve preparing teachers to support language development through standards-aligned instruction, especially in math.

AUTHORITY

Ohio professional development gains authority through its local practice, with most PD controlled by the district. ESCs and NRLs coordinate with districts and teachers on standards-aligned PD, with the state developing general materials that get adapted by trainers involved in these affiliated networks. An ODE staff member described this tension between the general and the local nature of PD development: “So that’s always a challenge of any professional development—when you’re trying to develop something that can be used statewide is how maybe an urban district might choose to use it compared to a suburban district would be very different as well as high school compared to a K-2 group.”

In addition to the complexities of designing PD for a diversity of students, schools, and districts, the state must design PD for a diversity of teachers, who all bring different levels of knowledge and expertise about the standards. One ODE official described the effort of getting PD in the hands of those who need or want it:

One of the biggest challenges is you have the level that teachers come into professional development is so diverse that you have some teachers at some points who have very little understanding of the standards to those who know them by heart for their grade level. So it is very challenging to try to hit, so a lot of times you try to create different levels of professional development within things. But it’s not mandatory, and we put them out as resources, for others to use and to get us feedback on, and on how they’re used and the fidelity in which they’ve been used.

Since participation in PD is distributed across and mandated differently in districts, ODE uses the information at their disposal to create and distribute PD that they think will be useful to the broadest number of teachers and make it available and accessible via affiliated networks.



CONSISTENCY

There is a concerted effort by the state to involve key stakeholders in aligning materials and resources used in PD with the standards. Often this alignment process involves groups of state officials working with the ESCs and NRLs to develop the initial materials and get feedback on them. One of the current tasks, for example, is to look back to materials created 5 years ago when the CCR standards were first adopted to examine their current usefulness and relevance. Such revision processes can help districts identify where “they still see some gaps that they need to address based upon classroom analysis as well as assessment and other analysis that they can do within the district.” Also involved in such an alignment process will be both practicing teachers in ELA and math as well as professionals involved in higher education. One goal is to work with other professional organizations to align materials and resources used in PD.

POWER

The ODE is not authorized to provide sanctions for failure to participate in professional development and in fact does not have any formal procedures in place to assess who participates in PD or the effectiveness of PD. While ODE works closely with regional partners, one official noted that ascertaining this information continues to be difficult: “Collecting information on the fidelity of how it’s implemented is very challenging to do even with our network regional leaders.” One of the challenges to the distributed nature of PD at the state level is that the farther away from the state/center, the less clear people at the state are about what is being communicated. One official noted: “We’re always concerned how many places is the telephone game, how far did you get away from the trainer.” Without a reliable system of tracking what PD is available, who is accessing it, and how trainers are adapting it, the state relies on their networks to report back issues, concerns, and ideas.

ODE expressly leaves issues of accountability for PD to districts. Rewards and sanctions are often tied to legislation that requires teachers to keep current with their training. One official emphasized the voluntary nature of PD at the state level:

It [PD] is voluntary to a point that you need some for renewal of licenses and stuff like that, you had to have certain either classroom instruction that you’ve taken through a college class or gotten a certain amount of professional development. So it is voluntary to that point.

STABILITY

State representatives described how PD is tied to changes in the standards, as ODE works to develop materials based on changes and updates to standards. In 2015, the Ohio Standards for Professional Development were updated to reflect revisions that incorporated nonprofit association Learning Forward’s standards into Ohio’s benchmarks to define the elements of a strong professional learning system.

One of the changes on the horizon involves developing digital tools and online distribution mechanisms to reach audiences more directly. Officials were looking forward to using a new learning management system for PD that they just adopted, which will make state-developed

resources and programs available and free for all Ohio teachers. One of the first areas of focus for PD materials developed and shared on this platform involves teaching to diverse learners and meeting the needs of all students.

As described earlier, a current area of focus for Ohio PD from the state perspective has involved not teaching to the test: “I think our biggest message recently and what we’ve been trying to with some of our PD is what’s the best way, the best mechanism, for preparing kids for the test that’s aligned to the standards is to teach the standards with high quality instruction.”

English Language Learners (ELLs)

SPECIFICITY

To help teachers work with ELLs, Ohio has developed Ohio English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards, comprising 10 standards directly linked to the Ohio Learning Standards. The ELP standards specify the progression of language competence needed by students in grades K, 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12. Like the Ohio Learning Standards themselves, these ELP standards are rather broad and flexible, designed to support educators in working with limited English proficient (LEP) students on Ohio’s academic content standards. While the flexibility of the ELP standards offers practitioners and programs leeway in how they are implemented in practice, that flexibility can be a “double-edged sword” in that program quality can vary dramatically. While some programs, for example, excel by specifying the number of students to be assigned to each ELL teacher or the kinds of licensures or endorsements teachers must have, others “can be very mediocre.” One official contrasted ELL with special education, noting that special education, which has “a lot of checks and balances,” allows those “processes to be taken seriously” because federal and state regulations specify what programs must do for high-quality implementation.

AUTHORITY

The authority of the standards for ELLs is often derived from federal legislation, even though “it’s local decisions for most of the implementation of ELL services.” This tension between local control and federal mandate is one that the state navigates as it seeks to guide districts and teachers in complying with federal policy. While federal policies describe programs for English identification programs and assistance for English language learners, even offering a tool kit in the past year, there is “no state law for things like how you identify English language learners specifically.” Because standards implementation for districts and teachers is situated at the federal level, the “state’s role has been providing guidance for the federal policy.” As a result, the normative authority for the standards is derived from the broader regulatory context.

One of the ways the state has worked to invest various stakeholders in standards-aligned instruction for ELLs is through increased visibility, most particularly through the creation of a NRL devoted to diverse learners. One official described how the Diverse Learners NRL has recently expanded its reach by developing an online learning module, in which “teachers can find out more about case studies, practical information for gifted English language learners and the students with exceptionalities.” State officials hope that the increased visibility of ELLs in the state will support all teachers in being attentive to issues of language development, thereby increasing buy-in for standards implementation for all students.



CONSISTENCY

There is a process of alignment between the ELP standards and the Ohio Learning Standards that involves multiple groups, though the process is not always completely transparent to all stakeholders, especially with the multistate consortium around the new assessment that requires alignment across states. Everything is aligned in that the OELPA assessment is based on the ELP standards, which are based on the Common Core Standards, and so there is a “common lineage.” But since revisions to the Ohio Learning Standards and assessments have been fast tracked in the past 2 years, “the alignment is not completely clear” to all state officials. The primary goal of the OELPA has been to get it working in the first year; however, in the future ODE staff “will have to go back and make connections” between Ohio Learning Standards, OELPA, and the ELP assessments. Therefore, while there is a clear process for alignment, whether the different assessments and materials are aligned in practice is less clear.

POWER

There are a number of rewards and sanctions linked to standards implementation with ELLs, often driven by legislation. While there are no formal incentives in place, such as financial compensation, the state does recognize districts that have improved, recognizing individuals or districts at Ohio’s TESOL conference, for example. If districts have not met their AMAOs several years in a row, the state will step in and focus on the program, which may include visits or offering more PD. The state also works with federal programs that examine compliance in spending funding. While the districts determine the majority of the standards implementation for ELLs, the state works “close to the ground” to support districts. One official described how districts may call the state if they have never had ELLs at a particular level of proficiency or need help with translators or resources. Then the state refers them to the ESCs, who provide the support teams for districts.

STABILITY

There have been a number of shifts in standards implementation related to ELLs because of recent changes in legislation. One of the most visible has been the shift in assessment of ELLs, from the **OTELA** [Ohio Test of English Language Acquisition] to the OELPA [Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment]. The OELPA was field tested as part of the ELPA21 consortium in 2015, and results will be ready in the 2016–2017 school year in time to make ELL student placement decisions. Another shift is about the ways data will be used to make determinations about how well districts and schools are serving the needs of ELLs. Previously, districts had to meet annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs), and if they did not make progress on all indicators (e.g., a certain percentage of students moving between ‘levels’ on the OTELA, number of students scoring as proficient on the OTELA, etc.) then districts were out of compliance. With the recent passage of the ESSA, ODE officials are uncertain what indicators they will be able to use to chart and monitor district progress.

In moving to CCR standards for ELLs, state officials have noted a shift in the degree and number of challenges facing ELLs. Whereas previously there was more concern with students’ “emotional well-being and integration of their home language,” now the focus is more particularly on students’ academic achievement. Also, state stakeholders identified a number of demands placed on ELL students regarding the pace at which they are expected to demonstrate

language proficiency. As one state representative noted: “I mean, the standards are very high. We’re pushing the students harder to achieve higher levels of language proficiency in English and to do more with it in a faster period of time.” Not only does the pace create particular challenges, but so too does the cognitive demand of learning content and language simultaneously. One staff member described this “double dose of challenges”:

With ELL students it’s not only a language transition for them it’s also they’re having to do double duty, especially with mathematics but with English language arts as well. I mean, they’re trying to learn the language of English at the same time trying to learn a complex language of a content area as well and understanding how to do that. So they kind of receive a double dose of challenges.

One area ODE hopes to address in the future is addressing the needs of students who are long-term English language learners, something other states have detailed.

Students with Disabilities (SWDs)

SPECIFICITY

In Ohio, students with disabilities (SWDs) are classified as “diverse learners,” along with English language learners (ELLs) and gifted students. The state uses the **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL) framework for guiding teachers on strategies and resources needed in working with students in these groups who have very specific needs. The three principles guiding UDL’s framework are multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement.

Special education services in Ohio are primarily shaped by federal legislation that details the rights of SWDs and the obligations of states and districts in providing support to these students. Ohio does not have a formalized Response-to-Intervention (RtI) model (a formalized, multi-tier process to identify and support students with diverse learning needs) at the state level, though some districts might have a process they would identify as RtI. Instead, they have developed the “Ohio improvement process,” which has five structured stages that bring together a “district leadership team, building leadership team, and then teacher-based team in order to look at data, review the needs of students, network amongst the grade-level teams, and then feed into building-level teams.” Officials expressed confidence in the specificity of this system for supporting students with multiple needs into the future. One staff member said, “I believe that we’re starting to look into much more a deliberate way about how to support those districts and those district teams and those teacher-based teams in order to adjust the needs not only of students with disabilities but of all their students. It’s feeling very concrete these days.”

The extended standards are very specific by detailing multiple complexity levels, which can help teachers reduce the complexity of a task but still address the standard. One state specialist described how this specificity assisted teachers in diagnosing and addressing multiple student needs:

So the teachers could actually look at where their student is, looking at their assessment data, understanding where their student is functioning and where their academic needs are



and then tailor, actually use the standards in the way all teachers should be using standards and pinpoint exactly where the complexity level is, where the challenge needs to be and then hopefully you think that summative assessment will be able to pinpoint where the next point is that they want to move forward.

The extended standards help teachers address students who struggle by seeing how to scaffold materials that are still aligned with the standards. Such specificity extends to students who may struggle but do not have any official diagnosis of disability. One state official described how ODE's outreach and training around complexity levels has helped teachers:

We don't expect all students with disabilities to be using the extended standards but we have seen fortunately that by having produced extended standards in, and almost marketing it in, the way that we have with the complexity levels, we have the opportunity to actually address students who don't have disabilities so that it helps the teachers look at where to scaffold lessons, where to scaffold learning, how to really get into the standards if they're not yet understanding exactly where the, where their student is struggling.

ODE officials repeatedly emphasized that there is “one set of standards” and that any efforts to specify (or extend) the standards do not represent an effort to design new or different standards. Rather, the prevailing belief is that the state should develop materials that can help teachers adapt their instruction to address the standards while differentiating instruction and scaffolding material to address student needs. One official described this commitment to all students reaching the standards: “We continue to really focus on that it's still one standard, that we still expect and challenge students even if they have a significant cognitive disability, to meet a standard and we're very deliberate about that.” This deliberate effort to challenge students to meet the standards—while providing them the specific means to do so—informs the state's approach to SWDs.

AUTHORITY

ODE officials described how they carefully attempted to navigate the complexities of multiple, sometimes competing, federal and state regulations related to special education and CCR standards, particularly in terms of assessment. One official described persistent “conflict and tensions” between “ESEA, [which says] you must assess all students, and IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act], [which] says to provide access to a student so they can show what they know.” Despite what one official described as ODE's “more collaborative, more universal approach to all students,” the tensions around these competing policy regulations will likely persist across all the states: “I can't imagine any state feels much differently that it's a tension.” An example of how that tension played out in Ohio revolved around a change to the read-aloud policy last year. The policy concerning which parts of a test could be read aloud to students with accommodations shifted—whereas before students could have questions read aloud, the new policy allows the entire reading comprehension passage to be read aloud. The state learned through extensive negative backlash midway through the year that although they thought they had communicated clearly to all stakeholders, they had not communicated the importance of access. This year they described doing a better job in “trying to react to the concerns that districts had and parents had” so that providing accommodations “doesn't need to change the outcome.” In other words, students could still have their individual needs met while meeting the standards

and demonstrating comprehension skills. While the standards derive their authority in Ohio in part due to the federal and state regulations and accountability, federal regulations about access and meeting the needs of individual children create competing authority claims.

CONSISTENCY

Staff members at ODE strive to work collaboratively to address the needs of SWDs, especially in aligning materials they develop with broader messaging about the importance of reaching all students. With collaborative structures in place within ODE, officials work to share materials across divisions and with the regional support teams and the ESCs. One state official described the ways different state staff work together in developing and distributing materials: “We want to be sure that we’re not sending two different messages regarding audiences and the appropriateness of the audiences for training, and so we are as involved as we can be in the development of materials so that they talk across the subgroups.” The state makes a deliberate effort to align messaging about the role of standards in special education.

This effort to align materials and messaging extends especially to the alternative assessment, as ODE utilizes multiple networks to distribute and coordinate PD around special education and assessment (see PD section above for more details). One ODE official described the networked structure that allows for alignment with multiple stakeholders:

We have a pretty hardy group of trainers that have been with us for a while, and it seems to work actually very well because we can also push information down to them through a list serve, through some discussion boards, and then we meet regularly with them as well as with our assistive technology network. ... The different pieces and parts ensure that not just the assessment shows the students know, but that they have access to the materials and the tools that they need to teach students so that they can be assessed at the end of the year.

POWER

In efforts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners, the state must navigate a system of rewards and sanctions that is often legislatively driven. ODE staff must then walk a fine line between guiding districts, schools, and teachers while ensuring that these stakeholder groups are following current legislation. In the example described above in which the shift in the read aloud policy caused controversy, parents filed complaints with the Office of Civil Rights against the state, alleging that the state was “going above and beyond and telling IEP teams what to do, when we really believed that we were guiding them.” The conflict stemmed from competing tensions about the role of the state in ensuring that districts followed sometimes contradictory state and federal policies.

Another example a state representative shared illustrates these competing power dimensions, as the state tries to uphold local control while attempting to help districts follow the law. In this example, the legislature was focused on meeting the needs of SWDs and thus offered exemptions from the third-grade reading guarantee. But state officials found that the effort to provide an extension or exemption was “really disappointing” because of their current focus on early literacy and their efforts to ensure that all students could read by third grade. ODE representatives described the difficult position of working to ensure access while holding all students to high



standards when they are subject to legislative efforts that undercut their capacity to follow through with districts.

STABILITY

The state’s approach to working with SWDs has been largely driven by federal legislation, with the primary focus on developing the Ohio Improvement Process to support teachers in aligning instruction and assessments with standards. A central goal for ODE for the near future is to focus on helping students with special needs: “One of the biggest challenges is getting from where we are to where we want to be, not just for students in general but especially for special populations.” This focus on students with special needs will require more collaboration and coordination across all teachers, say state officials, so that special education does not remain a “silo” that some students get shifted into. One official offered an example of a pilot program on dyslexia that the state worked with a district to develop. In that pilot, which involved developing universal screening and evidence-based intervention processes for reading, the focus “really was about keeping students from being identified as special education.” In other words, the “intensity of the work we’re putting into our early literacy initiative” helped address the needs of all students, involving more partners and collaborators in supporting students’ needs, especially around early literacy and reading. As one official noted: “We’re finally getting maybe more collaboration across meeting the needs of all students including students with disabilities. It doesn’t feel like we’re just talking about two subgroups. If you had ELLs into that I would say the same that we’re talking across all subgroups in a much more meaningful way than we have in several years.”

Conclusion

State departments of education are charged with implementing numerous policy activities to facilitate standards-based reform. Using the policy attributes theory as an organizing framework helps states see how individual initiatives contribute to a system of standards-based reform. Understanding how each reform component impacts the specificity, authority, consistency, power, or stability attributes of the implementation of reform will uncover strengths, opportunities, patterns, and variations in each state’s strategic roll-out of CCR-aligned standards—though it is important to note that these policy attributes are intertwined in practice.

This report into the specific, consistent, authoritative, powerful, and stable aspects of Ohio’s standards-based reform initiatives from the perspective of state administrators reveals that while the state has made progress in focusing on the deeper learning required of students in the 21st century, significant challenges remain, particularly in meeting the needs of diverse students, as do uncertainties regarding impending legislative changes to the standards and accountability system. C-SAIL’s district, principal, and teacher surveys and interviews with key district administrators will provide further insights into both the successes and challenges that Ohio is experiencing in bringing rigorous standards to the classroom.

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