THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

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Abstract

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been adopted by the majority of states in the United States. The adoption of these standards has greatly altered the landscape of American education. This study examined the implementation process of the Common Core States Standards in selected school districts in upstate New York, including a large suburban district, a small suburban district, a rural district, a large urban district, and a small urban district. The research focused on the influence of these new standards on professional development, curriculum, and assessment.

The data for this research study was gathered through interviews with educators at various levels within the participating school districts. Specifically, in each district, a teacher, building-level principal, administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, and a superintendent were interviewed.

The findings for the research revealed no difference regarding how the CCSS were implemented in school districts of varying size and demographic composition. In addition, this research found educators were generally supportive of these new educational standards. Additionally, the other aspects of the Regents Reform Agenda had an effect on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in New York State. Finally, the fiscal climate in New York State influenced how the CCSS were implemented in school districts.

Key words: Common Core State Standards, standards-based reform, professional development, curriculum, assessments, New York State

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2010, forty-five states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

As a result of the mass adoption of these standards throughout the country, the educational

environment for students, teachers, and administrators has been greatly altered. These new

standards have changed the landscape in American education in a variety of ways, including

requiring new professional development for administrators and teachers, new curriculum that is

based upon these standards being taught in classrooms, and new assessments being given to

monitor student learning.

The existing body of research (Gardner, 1983; Hamilton, 2008; 2008; Kern, 2011;

Mathis, 2010) provides information about the history of education reform efforts in the United

States, the history of the development of the Common Core State Standards, the Regents Reform

Agenda in New York State, preparation for the implementation of the CCSS, and how the

implementation of these standards has gone in other states/regions of the country.

Due to the fact that CCSS have only been recently adopted, there is not a significant

amount of research concerning the implementation of these national standards. In addition, New

York State has packaged the implementation of these standards within a larger, more extensive

agenda of reform. This agenda, which is known as the Regents Reform Agenda, was "aligned

with the effort to qualify for Race to the Top funds. New York State, among many other states,

is in need of federal funding" (Tagliaferri & Townsend, 2011, p. 6). Additionally, New York

State had large gaps in the graduation rates between minorities and White students, and college

instructors and employers were reporting that graduates were not prepared for college and work

(King, 2012). There is clearly a lack of research detailing the implementation of the CCSS in

New York State, especially as seen through the lens of the larger agenda by the New York State Board of Regents.

Statement of the Problem

Interestingly, because states have just begun to implement the Common Core, there is not a significant amount of existing research about how the CCSS have been implemented. For example, the Southern Regional Education Board is in the process of releasing reports on the progress of the implementation of the CCSS in 15 states. According to their Summary Report,

> Implementation of college- and career-readiness standards is some of the most important work currently underway in states to improve public education and student achievement. This report provides a summary of findings from SREB's research into the efforts of 15 states — 12 in the SREB region — to support implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The goal of the research was to document the steps states have taken and to highlight exemplary efforts in order to provide feedback to states to inform their drive for continuous improvement. (Anderson & Mira, 2014, p. 1)

Consequently, this study reviewed the existing research, including the history of reform efforts, the development of the CCSS, the Regents Reform Agenda in New York State, and preparation for and implementation of these standards throughout the country.

As states undergo this transformation in how they educate their students, more research is needed to gain an understanding of implementation efforts that have already taken place across the country. To that end, this study will analyze implementation efforts that are currently underway.

Research Questions

The basic questions for this research were:

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

2. As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

3. How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

These questions focus on three specific areas that are directly influenced by the adoption of new academic standards in New York State. The implementation of the CCSS in New York has coincided with additional initiatives that, taken together, are all part of a larger reform agenda with the state's educational arena. These questions, however, purposely focus solely on the effect of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards on professional development, curriculum, and assessment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze how the Common Core State Standards have been implemented in selected school districts in upstate New York. The districts were chosen based on their size and demographic composition and included a large suburban district, a small suburban district, a rural district, a large urban district, and a small urban district.

The study explored what factors aided or hindered the implementation of the new standards in each district. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards were

generally defined as what the selected school districts have done to prepare their administrators, teachers, and students as a result of New York State's adoption of the CCSS, including the professional development provided to teachers and administrators, modifications to the curriculum being taught in classrooms, and the manner in which students have been assessed. In an effort to understand how these new curriculum standards have been implemented in each district, superintendents, administrators with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, principals, and teachers were interviewed.

Significance

The research presented in this qualitative study was aimed at benefitting both policymakers and practitioners in the field. From both perspectives, this research provides real-world examples and lessons learned regarding the implementation of these new standards. Given that the implementation of the Common Core State Standards has grown into a passionately debated topic throughout the United States, including in New York State (Ravitch, 2014; Urbanski, 2014), this research is timely and relevant.

This study allows policy-makers the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of educators in the field who were directly involved in the implementation of the CCSS in their districts. Educators, parents, and politicians have questioned how the State Education Department has managed the roll-out of these standards, including the financial commitment to the private sector for their involvement in the CCSS implementation (Lucas, 2014) . This study, therefore, will serve to inform policy makers as they make decisions regarding the future of the Common Core in New York, including whether New York State should decide to continue to implement a curriculum based on these standards, how Common

Core assessments are used in student placement determinations, and how Common Core assessments should effect teacher APPR scores.

For practitioners, this research provides a detailed account of the experiences of educators at different levels and with different responsibilities for the implementation of the CCSS in five school districts of differing size and demographics. Taken as a whole, the research informs practitioners of the influence of the adoption of the new standards on professional development, curriculum, and assessments in participating school districts in New York State. This research provides school district leaders the unique opportunity to gain knowledge regarding how the implementation of the Common Core has occurred in other districts. Furthermore, because the research incorporated districts of varying size and demographic composition, this study is able to be utilized by a diverse range of stakeholders

Conceptual Framework

The interview questions were developed using the work of Creswell (2009) as a guide. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

This study was influenced by the work of Sabatier and Mazmanian (2005), who stated, "Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually made in a statute" (p. 540). From their perspective,

> the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify the factors which affect the achievement of statutory objectives throughout this entire process. These can be divided into three broad categories: (1) the tractability of the problem(s) being addressed by the statute; (2) the ability of the statute to favorably structure the implementation process;

and (3) the net effect of a variety of "political" variables on the balance of support for

statutory objectives. (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 2005, p. 541)

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards was influenced by federal and state

policies, financial incentives, and regulations. The combination of all these variables ultimately

determined how the curriculum based on these new standards was rolled out in classrooms across

New York State.

Definition of Terms

Common Core State Standards – The set of standards which has been adopted by forty-five

states throughout the United States. These standards were co-authored by the Council of Chief

State School Officers and the National Governors Association.

Rural District – "districts not located within Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas or cities"

(*A report to the governor and the legislature on the educational status of the state's schools*,

1999)

Urban District – "districts that are located within city boundaries" (*A report to the governor and*

the legislature on the educational status of the state's schools, 1999)

Suburban District – "districts located within Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas but not

within cities" (*A report to the governor and the legislature on the educational status of the*

state's schools, 1999)

Limitations

The scope of the study focused on the implementation of the CCSS by various districts in

upstate New York. As a result, interviews were conducted with faculty and administrators from

multiple districts of differing size and demographic composition. Specifically, teachers, principals, administrators with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, and superintendents were interviewed.

This study was limited by two factors. First, one of the interviewees did not have a tremendous amount of experience working directly with the Common Core State Standards. This led to an interview that was short in length and that did not provide in-depth, detailed responses. Consequently, the perspective and experience of one of the interviewees was a limitation of this study.

The second limitation of this study was that it simply represents a moment in time in the long history of educational reform, in general, and the history of the implementation of the Common Core, specifically. The landscape in education, especially in terms of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, is constantly changing due to a myriad of factors, including the financial climate, the political climate, and the experiences of educators and families. Consequently, this study was truly a snapshot in time. Without question, the responses from the educators interviewed for this study may have been much different if this study was conducted a few months earlier or later.

Organization

The research presented in this study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and review of the purpose of the study. Chapter two focuses on the literature that was reviewed. The third chapter of this dissertation covers the methodology used in this study. Chapter four is the analysis of data and chapter five presents the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The environment in American education changed significantly with the creation and adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. The decision by states to adopt these standards has led, by default, to a national set of academic standards for mathematics and English Language Arts in the United States for the first time in the nation's history.

The federal government has encouraged states to adopt the new standards through the use of financial incentives. During the administration of President Obama, the United States Department of Education developed the Race to the Top grant program which awarded money to states and prescribed the adoption of the new standards as one of the key criteria grant applications would be judged upon. There were numerous reasons for the federal government, as well as individual states, to adopt the common academic standards, including improved "global competitiveness" and "increasing equity and streamlining the reform process" (Mathis, 2010, executive summary, para. 2).

As part of the Regents Reform Agenda, New York State adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2011. This agenda has brought sweeping change to education in New York as, in addition to the adoption of new standards, the Regents also included a new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) plan, new more challenging student assessments, and a focus on data-driven instruction (DDI).

This review of the literature study is divided into the following sections:

- History of Educational Reform Efforts

- History of the Common Core State Standards

- Regents Reform Agenda in New York State

- Preparation for the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

- Implementation Efforts in Other States

- Summary

History of Educational Reform Efforts

  A Nation at Risk. In 1981, the National Commission on Excellence in Education was created with the mission of reporting to the American public regarding the quality of education in the United States by 1983 (Gardner, 1983). In 1983, the release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* declared that the American education system was weakening the standing of the United States as a world leader in such areas as commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation (Gardner, 1983). Furthermore, the report went on to question whether American educational institutions had forgotten their purpose, as well as lost the high expectations and discipline needed to achieve their mission (Gardner, 1983).

  Education Summit. The national standards movement began with President George H.W. Bush. In 1989, Bush met with leaders from the National Business Roundtable to discuss how to improve education in America, including standards, assessments, and accountability (Mathis, 2010). Later that year, Bush convened the first education summit. During this summit, the governors agreed to set national goals (Mathis, 2010).

  Goals 2000 and Improve America's Schools Act. In 1994, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was signed into law by the Clinton Administration (Kern, 2011; Mathis, 2010). This Act "required state education departments to use the national standards as blueprints to develop and to align state standards with state assessments" (Kern, 2011, p. 90). Furthermore, Goals 2000 used federal financial incentives through the use of grants to encourage states to

adopt content standards (Kern, 2011; Mathis, 2010). Next, Improving America's Schools Act

was passed in 1994 (Kern, 2011). The Improving America's Schools Act "required states to

develop content and performance standards for mathematics and reading by the 1997-1998

school year, and state assessments aligned to these standards by the 2000-2001 school year"

(Kern, 2011, p. 90).

No Child Left Behind. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted by

the administration of George W. Bush. NCLB "required states to regularly conduct standardized

measurements of students' achievement in mathematics and reading" (Kern, 2011, p. 90).

Specifically, the law required states to measure student progress each year for students in grades

three through eight in reading and mathematics, as well as administer science assessments

periodically (Watt, 2009). Furthermore, "each state was required to establish a definition of

adequate yearly progress, based on a set of criteria, to use each year to determine the

achievement of each school district and school" (Watt, 2009, p. 12).

After the passage of NCLB, standards-based reforms became more prevalent in the

United States (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). In fact, many standards-based reforms were

"adopted in response to the requirements of NCLB" and "had their origins in state and federal

initiatives from the 1980s and 1990s and in activities conducted by professional organizations"

(Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 2).

Race to the Top. President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

(ARRA) into law in February, 2009. This Act provided $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top

grant program. According to the United States Department of Education (2009), the ARRA

called for reform in four areas, including "adopting standards and assessments," "building data

systems," "recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals," and "turning around our lowest-achieving schools" (Race to the top program: Executive summary, p. 2).

With this legislation, the Obama administration made higher academic standards a fundamental part of its educational agenda. Moreover, the administration sought higher standards for all children. However, "since the federal government's legal and political authority to mandate common national standards is contested, the administration has instead applauded and encouraged the work of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in developing proposed "common core" standards" (Mathis, 2010, p. 1).

The Obama administration clearly believed in the importance and value of the Race to the Top program. According to the United States Department of Education website, "Race to the Top winners will help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for States and local school districts throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come" (Program description, para. 2).

The individual or cumulative success or failure of these implementation efforts depends on the perspectives and beliefs of each individual. The Standards Based Reform (SBR) movement has, however, undoubtedly led to changes in the educational landscape in this country. According to Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan (2008), "The SBR movement reflects a confluence of policy trends—in particular, a growing emphasis on using tests to monitor progress and hold schools accountable and a belief that school reforms are most likely to be effective when all components of the education system are designed to work in alignment toward a common set of goals" (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 2).

History of the Common Core State Standards

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative website (2012), the Common Core State Standards have been adopted in 45 states, as well as the District of Columbia, four American territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (Standards in your state, para.1). "The pendulum swing toward national standards is grounded, at least in part, on the desire for American students to compete in a global marketplace and to help the United States to continue its place as a foremost world leader" (Kern, 2011, p.90).

The CCSS were co-authored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association with support from such groups as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Phillips & Wong, 2010). The final written product offered a set of common standards that were very different than the standards being employed in states throughout the country. In fact, the "Common Core standards released in 2010 represent an unprecedented shift away from disparate content guidelines across individual states in the areas of English language arts and mathematics" (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011, p. 103).

Despite the challenges associated with developing the CCSS, they were adopted in a relatively short amount of time. In fact, the development process for the standards themselves took approximately one year (Mathis, 2010). This short-time frame for development had implications for the quality of the standards and limited any efforts to establish a two-way dialogue between the initiators and the practitioners who would execute the standards. For example, practitioners in the field had minimal input, the standards were not field tested, and the assessments that would be used to measure implementation outcomes may not have been properly developed (Mathis, 2010). Additionally, since the adoption of the CCSS, multiple

states have reported that a lack of resources and challenges with technology have hindered their implementation of the CCSS (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

The CCSS, it can also be argued, may provide numerous potential benefits for American education. According to Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang (2011), the benefits of core curriculum include shared expectations, focus, efficiency, and quality of assessments. Additionally, there is an advantage to a core curriculum if the curriculum increases rigor and expectations. For example:

> research has confirmed that students' learning can be improved by upgrading the content of the curriculum required for all students because students cannot learn what they are not offered and higher-order learning activities are likely to be more interesting and motivating to students. (McPartland & Schneider, 1996, p. 78)

According to the Obama administration, another benefit is the power of these standards to improve the quality of education being provided to all students, especially those in low-performing schools (Mathis, 2010).

The adoption of common standards addressed the issue of improving the focus, quality, and rigor of the textbooks used in schools across the country. "In a system without national standards, the diffuse nature of textbooks in the US perpetuates itself into one grand 'Catch-22'. Nothing can be done to mitigate the diffusion of content standards in mathematics and science" (Schmidt, Wang, & McKnight, 2005, p. 556).

The Obama administration aligned its financial incentives to its stated objectives making the Common Core an integral part of its Race to the Top grant program. In fact:

The federal government is putting considerable resources behind adoption and use of the standards. Although the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) was not directly involved in creating the standards, developing and adopting a common set of standards is included among the criteria in the scoring rubric used to grant awards in the Race to the Top competition. In addition, the USDE recently awarded $330 million in Race to the Top funds to two consortia, representing the majority of states, to help develop assessments aligned with the common standards. The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Coalition, representing 31 states, received $160 million, and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, representing 26 states, received $170 million. (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011, p. 103)

As a result of the financial incentives offered by the federal government to adopt the new standards, a natural and legitimate concern regarding undue federal influence was raised by critics of using federal incentives to influence state level decisions. This criticism appears to be unwarranted, however. In fact, "state decisions to adopt common standards were at least, in part, indicative of their respective self-determined values and reflective of the degree to which they purposefully engaged in the policy community among the states" (LaVenia, 2010, p. 81).

Other countries have established national standards. In research conducted by William Schmidt, Richard Houang, and Sharif Shakrani, ten countries with national standards were examined. This group of researchers developed six lessons from their study:

1. It's not true that national standards portend loss of local control.

2. An independent, quasi-governmental institution is needed to oversee the development of national standards and assessments and to produce trustworthy reports to the nation

3. The federal government should encourage and provide resources for the standards-setting process.

4. We should develop coherent, focused, rigorous standards, beginning with English, math, and science.

5. National assessments should be administered at grades 4, 8, and 12 every two years.

6. Hold students, teachers, and schools accountable for performance (W. Schmidt, Houang, & Shakrani, 2009, p.9).

The Common Core State Standards, which were developed by groups outside of New York State, were adopted by the New York Board of Regents and would play an instrumental role in the Regents Reform Agenda (King, 2012).

Regents Reform Agenda in New York State

The New York State Board of Regents has developed an agenda aimed at reforming education in New York State. With a goal of all of New York's students graduating college and career ready from high school, this agenda was both specific and ambitious. Citing data from college instructors and employers, the State Education Department clearly believed that New York State was not adequately preparing its students for life after high school (King, 2012).

The Regents Reform Agenda also was developed with practical reasons in mind. New York, like other states, was struggling to find ways to fund education during an economic

decline. Consequently, the Agenda developed included many reforms that were aligned with New York's Race to the Top grant application (Tagliaferri & Townsend, 2011).

This multi-layer agenda included the implementation of the Common Core and development of curriculum and assessments based on the new standards, creation of data systems to allow for improved data-driven instruction, development of a comprehensive plan to ensure effective teachers and principals, and turning-around the state's lowest performing school (King, 2012).

The decision to move forward with such an aggressive Agenda had political implications and considerations as well. "In the era of Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind, and the adoption and implementation of Common Core State Standards, schools and districts cannot implement reform in a vacuum. State policy context impacts new classroom-based initiatives to a degree never seen before" (Levin, Duffy, & Dever, 2012, p. 10).

Common Core State Standards. A focus of the Regents Reform Agenda was the adoption and implementation of the CCSS. The State Education Department pointed to data regarding graduation rates as part of the decision to adopt the Common Core. Specifically, while in 73.4% percent of students graduated in June 2010, only 36.7% were college and career ready (King, 2012). Furthermore, the gap was more concerning when these numbers were disaggregated by ethnicity. The State Education Department also referred to data from college instructors and employers regarding New York's high school graduates not being prepared for college and work (King, 2012).

One of the results of the adoption of the CCSS was instructional shifts in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. In ELA, the six shifts were balancing informational and

literary text, building knowledge in the disciplines, staircase of complexity, text-based answers, writing from sources, and academic vocabulary (King, 2012). In mathematics, the six shifts were focus, coherence, fluency, deep understanding, applications, and dual intensity (King, 2012).

When adopting the CCSS, states had the option of modifying the original Common Core State Standards by adding up to 15% more content (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). In comparison to other states that adopted the CCSS, New York State chose to add a significant amount of content (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Specifically, New York "included its pre-K standards" and "added "Responding to Literature" as an additional anchor standard in the K-12 reading and writing" standards (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012, p. 154).

Annual Professional Performance Review. The Board of Regents targeted having effective teachers and principals in schools and aimed to develop an APPR plan that would help accomplish this goal. Specifically, the Commissioner stated that the Regents Reform Agenda would include "recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals" (King, 2012).

The APPR plan was a crucial factor in the Agenda as it is intended to directly impact the quality of the instructor in the classroom, as well as the quality of the school leader. In addition, a district's APPR plan may affect the culture of the schools in the district, which is relevant because research has shown that school culture affects student achievement (O'Shea, 2006).

As the State Education Department rolled out the Commissioner's regulations governing the changes to the state's APPR plan, numerous controversial points were discovered. Among the most contentious issue was the inclusion of the student growth scores to the new assessments.

Furthermore, these student growth scores were used in the APPR plan for both teachers and principals.

New York State, unlike many other states, decided to link the student assessments to the new Common Core based curriculum in grades 3-8 in their initial year, and agreed to add the upper grades in the succeeding year. This decision had a direct effect on the APPR plans for educators throughout the state. This decision was highly controversial as teachers were still receiving updated curriculum and professional development while simultaneously preparing students for these assessments. The State Education Department needed to align the new standards, new curriculum, and new assessments. "Teacher evaluation systems that are not based on assessments aligned with the CCSS may dampen teachers' willingness to use the tools" (Levin, Duffy, & Dever, 2012, p. 11).

Data-Driven Instruction. The third aspect of the Regents Reform Agenda was the use of data to drive instruction. The State Education Department has encouraged schools to develop a data-driven culture incorporating a continuous cycle of assessments, analysis, and action (King, 2012).

Developing a culture that relies on data to drive instruction incorporates multiple steps, including gathering data in an effective manner, having assessments that are outcome based, monitoring and providing feedback regarding the effectiveness of programs, ownership by individuals for outcomes, and creating a learning organization in which the district's goals and resources are compatible (Panettieri, 2006).

There are multiple tools that can be used for assisting schools and districts in becoming more successful at using data to drive instruction. One framework, entitled the Data Analysis

Framework for Instructional Decision Making, is an example. This framework utilizes

professional development data, classroom data, and student data (Mokhtari, Rosemary, &

Edwards, 2007).

Preparation for the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

The implementation of the CCSS has the potential to effect multiple areas of education,

including curriculum, assessments, and professional development, in districts throughout the

state (Duffy & Park, 2012). Confrey (2010) suggested five strategies for implementing the

CCSS, including phasing the implementation in a "planned, purposeful, and coordinated way,"

"articulating and expanding the underlying trajectories in the CCSS to guide instruction," "re-

visioning the relationship" among the standards, curriculum, and assessment, using the portion of

the state's standards that do not have to follow the Common Core to "define and deploy a

broader college and career STEM agenda," and utilizing "longitudinal data systems" to evaluate

the effectiveness of curriculum (p. 5).

The lessons learned from previous implementation of standards are valuable and may be

utilized in the implementation of the Common Core Standards. In fact, Goertz argued that "The

planning must draw on lessons already learned in the process of standards-based school

improvement from the last two rounds of NCTM Standards in 1989 and 2000" (as cited in

Confrey, 2010, p. 2).

This research focuses on three areas: curriculum, assessments, and professional

development.

Curriculum. The CCSS are simply standards and not curriculum. The adoption of these new standards, however, has directly led to changes in the curriculum being taught in schools throughout New York and the rest of the country. In fact:

> The adoption of these standards has brought about the most sweeping nationalization of the K–12 curriculum in US history. In raw terms of what gets taught in American schools, no single national policy event has ever had as much significance as the adoption of these standards. (Bomer & Maloch, 2011, p. 38)

From an English Language Arts perspective, the single biggest impact of the CCSS "is the emphasis on textual argument as a value in both reading and writing across all the grades" (Bomer & Maloch, 2011, p. 40). From a mathematics point of view, the new Common Core Standards are an improvement upon the standards that existed at the state level (Cobb & Jackson, 2011, p. 184). Regardless of the content area, it is important that the focus of the CCSS-based curriculum is an emphasis on depth, as opposed to breadth (Confrey & Krupa, 2010).

The literature suggests that curricular exemplars are needed in order to improve the implementation of the CCSS. "For teachers to successfully enact curricula consistent with the CCSS, they need exemplars of successful mathematical practices" (Confrey & Krupa, 2010, p. 13). In addition, a specific recommendation from a conference sponsored by the Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum was to "support and build new models and exemplars of CCSS - compatible curriculum materials/resources using meaningful organizations that are problem-based, informed by international models, connected, consistent, coherent, and focused on both content and mathematical practices" (Confrey & Krupa, 2010, p. 14).

Consistent with this suggestion, the New York State Education Department has utilized a website to publish modules that teachers can use in their classrooms. Modules exist both in mathematics and English Language Arts.

Since the standards movement and the subsequent emphasis on English Language Arts and mathematics began, parents have identified a narrowing of the curriculum as a concern. The Common Core State Standards have the potential to lead to further narrowing (Heil, 2012).

Assessments. One of the focuses of the United States Department of Education was ensuring that the assessments for Common Core made "progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students" (Confrey & Krupa, 2010, p. 6).

A key element in assuring that the CCSS assessments made progress toward this objective was to emphasize the role of formative assessments. In fact, any new curriculum developed based on these standards should include formative assessments throughout the lesson (Confrey & Krupa, 2010). The assessments then become the final piece in the curriculum-instruction-assessment cycle (Crawford, 2012).

The Common Core provided states an opportunity to re-design, as opposed to just modify, their assessments (Phillips & Wong, 2010, p. 39). "Having a set of common standards also lays the groundwork for developing assessments aligned with those college-ready standards and for developing teaching tools that are aligned with both the standards and the assessments" (Phillips & Wong, 2010, p. 37).

In order to implement useful assessments, administrators and faculty need Common Core focused professional development.

Professional Development. As with any initiative in education, professional development is an important component in determining the long-term success of the initiative. The research suggests that professional development in education is not adequate. In fact, "the organizational structures needed to support and sustain change in teacher practice do not exist to the extent one would hope as evidenced by sporadic ongoing professional development, little to no follow-up opportunities, and lack of collaboration opportunities" (Rimbey, 2013, p. 14).

Many proven professional development strategies are known. Specific to the Common Core, professional development needs to address the new techniques that teachers must employ to teach the new standards (Heil, 2012). In addition, collaboration among colleagues, including evaluating student work together and planning time, as well as observing colleagues has been proven to be successful professional development strategies (Levin et al., 2012; O'Shea, 2006). Rimbey (2013) argues that effective professional development includes "elements of content focus, activity-based learning opportunities, coherence, duration, and collective impact" (p. 60).

The research suggests that this training must be focused on more than alignment. "If principals provide standards-aligned curriculum resources, they will likely see some immediate gains, but continuous improvement in student achievement is not sustainable by mere installation of alignment strategies" (O'Shea, 2006, p. 29).

The New York State Education Department has invested a great deal of time in creating and publishing modules for teacher use in the classroom. The "research indicates that learning to use and develop modules is a developmental process that gets easier as teachers gain experience and develop strategies" (Reumann-Moore & Sanders, 2012, p. 34).

High quality professional development is vital to the success of the CCSS. Teachers need to receive the necessary training and support if they are to successfully implement the new standards (Rimbey, 2013). A Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum conference recommended, in fact, that "curriculum-connected, concept-focused professional development in support of the CCSS across the professional continuum" should be implemented (Confrey & Krupa, 2010, p. 17).

Implementation Efforts in Other States

One state that has been repeatedly mentioned as a leader in implementing the CCSS is Kentucky. One particular area of strength in Kentucky's implementation effort has been their professional development, which has been planned in a statewide, systemic manner (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). An example of this approach was the monthly regional meetings conducted in Kentucky that consisted of teachers, administrators, and university professors. These meetings were aimed at reviewing the Common Core State Standards, as well as developing assessments and planning for lessons (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

The Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast prepared a report in January 2012. This report aimed to "describe state processes for adopting the Common Core State Standards" and "plans for implementing the common standards and aligning state assessment systems to them" (Anderson, Harrison, & Lewis, 2012, p. iii). This report concluded, among other findings, the following:

1. Teachers would begin teaching to the new standards in various years. Some states started as early as 2011-2012, while others did not start using them until 2013-2014.

2. Some states chose to implement the standards at all one time, while other states chose to phase in the implementation over time.

3. All the states had a similar implementation process that started with developing curriculum and resources, then progressed to professional development, and then concluded with teaching the new standards in schools.

4. All the states planned on teaching the new standards before developing Common Core aligned assessments (Kim Anderson et al., 2012).

Summary

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards by almost all of the states in the United States "has brought about the most sweeping nationalization of K-12 curriculum in US history" (Bomer & Maloch, 2011, p. 38).

In New York State, the Regents Reform Agenda not only included the adoption and implementation of the Common Core, but also the simultaneous reforming of teacher and principal evaluation and the use of data to guide instruction. This Agenda was complex and presented numerous challenges that must be understood and successfully managed. According to Duffy and Park (2012):

In order for the reform to be successful, it needs to be in alignment with other policies and initiatives taking place in the state, districts and schools where the reform is being implemented. If initiatives and policies are at cross-purposes, it becomes difficult to progress in any one direction. (p. 6)

The implementation of the CCSS has influenced professional development, assessment, and curriculum.

Robust implementation includes changes in both teacher beliefs and knowledge, and changes in the classroom. As these changes take hold and deepen, teachers will exhibit significant changes in their pedagogy that will extend beyond the confines of the initiative, and into their general classroom practices. (Duffy & Park, 2012, p. 6)

At this time, there is relatively limited research regarding how the implementation of the Common Core State Standards has been implemented in schools districts, especially with a focus on the effect of this implementation on a district's curriculum, assessments, and professional development. "There exists no research on the actual impact of common national standards in the United States. The reason is simple: there have never been such standards" (Mathis, 2010, p. 3). To that end, this research will address the following questions:

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

2. As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

3. How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

The next section of this paper will detail the methodology utilized in the research that was conducted. Specifically, chapter three provides information regarding the why a qualitative approach was used in this study and discusses key topics such as the data sources, population, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

  This chapter is organized into the following sections: Introduction, Context of the Study, Research Questions, Data Sources, Research Design, Population, Sample, and Sampling Method, Instrumentation, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Researcher Bias, Ethical Safeguards, and Summary.

  The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the effect of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards on professional development, curriculum, and assessments in selected school districts in upstate New York. The districts were chosen based on their size and demographic composition and included a large suburban district, a small suburban district, a rural district, a large urban district, and a small urban district. The study explored what factors aided or hindered the implementation of the new standards in each district. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards was generally defined as what the selected school districts have done to prepare their administrators, teachers, and students as a result of New York State's adoption of the CCSS, including the professional development provided to teachers, modifications to the curriculum being taught in the classroom, and the manner in which students have been assessed. In an effort to understand how these new curriculum standards were implemented in each district, superintendents, administrators with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, principals, and teachers were interviewed.

  A qualitative approach was used for a variety of reasons. Creswell (2009) states the following:

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. (p. 4)

Context of the Study

This study utilized interviews of participants in districts of varying size and demographic composition in upstate New York. In each district that participated in the study, four people with similar titles and responsibilities were interviewed. Specifically, in each district, the superintendent, an administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, a building level administrator, and a teacher were interviewed. The information from these interviews provided a first-hand account of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards from multiple perspectives.

Research Questions

The basic questions for this research were as follows:

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

2. As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

3. How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

Data Sources

      The source of data for this research project was interviews of administrators and faculty members in the districts that were included in the study.

Research Design

      This research was conducted as a qualitative study. A qualitative approach was taken because the researcher believed there was an inherent value in meeting face-to-face with the participants in the study. Furthermore, the researcher believed there was an advantage to asking the participants open-ended questions during an interview.

Population, Sample and Sampling Method

      The population for this study was public school districts, charter schools, and some private schools in New York State.

      Specifically, while this study focused on how the Common Core was implemented, it can be used to inform policymakers and practitioners regarding the implementation of any new academic standards.

      This study utilized purposeful sampling. The sample for this study included districts of differing size and composition. To that end, a large suburban school district, a small suburban school district, a large urban school district, a small urban school district, and a rural school district were purposefully selected to participate in this study.

      Within the participating school districts, twenty educators from throughout the system were purposefully selected to be interviewed. Specifically, the sample that was targeted in this study was one superintendent, one administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, one principal, and one teacher from each participating district. This sample group provided

direct access to staff members at varying levels of the educational system. This cross-section of school employees enhanced the study by providing the experiences of people as they began to implement these new standards.

A sample size of five school districts was included in this study. The districts themselves were selected in an effort to ensure districts of differing size and demographic composition were included in the study. Specifically, a large urban school district, a large suburban school district, a small suburban school district, a small urban school district, and a rural school district were chosen to be included in this research.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation that was used for this study was interviews based on questions developed by the researcher. Qualitative researchers usually gather their data on their own and without the use of questionnaires or surveys from other researchers (Creswell, 2009, p. 175).

Specifically, interviewees were asked thirteen questions (see Appendix A). The interviews took between approximately 20 and 45 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted in person and were audio recorded.

By interviewing teachers and administrators in districts of differing size and demographics, this study established to what degree these factors influenced the implementation of the uniformed academic standards.

Data Collection

The protocol was for the researcher to contact the system level administration of the districts that were selected for participation in this study to gauge their interest in having their district participate in this research. This step was crucial from an ethical standpoint. "Other

ethical procedures during data collection involve gaining the agreement of individuals in authority (e.g., gatekeeper) to provide access to study participants as research sites" (Creswell, 2009, p. 90). Once initial interest was established, the researcher worked with the system leader of each of the districts in an effort to determine the remainder of the participants from that district. In most cases, the specific interviewees were then contacted in an attempt to gauge their level of interest in participating. Once the interest of each individual participant was confirmed, a letter of informed consent, as well as the interview questions, were provided in advance to each participant. Additionally, an interview date and time were scheduled. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted in the district of the participants. This was be done in order to be consistent with the belief that "Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). The interviews were audio recorded in order to capture the data. Once the interviews were complete, the information was transcribed by an independent person. Specifically, the transcriber took the audio recordings and typed them into Microsoft Word documents. The hard copy of the transcriptions allowed the content of the interviews to more easily be coded in an effort to find emergent themes.

Data Analysis

The data collected was in the form of transcribed interviews. These interviews were analyzed by the researcher. The purpose of this analysis was to code the interviews. After the coding, the researcher analyzed the transcriptions again. The focus of this analysis was to identify emergent themes. In addition to emergent themes, specific quotes that summed up the perspectives of the interviewees were identified.

Reliability. As with any research, reliability of the study needed to be ensured. Yin argues that "qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many steps of the procedures as possible" (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 190).

Reliability in this study was addressed in a variety of ways. The interviewees received a letter explaining the purpose of the research, as well as the questions in advance. Prior to being used, practitioners in the field reviewed the questions themselves. Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the participants were given the opportunity to review them to ensure accuracy.

Validity. The validity of the data was ensured through a variety of measures. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative studies should incorporate multiple strategies to increase the validity of the study. For example, the researcher can "triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). This strategy was employed for this study.

Creswell (2009) also cites member checking as another strategy to ensure accuracy. Member checking is defined as "taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate (p. 191). In this study, the transcription of each individual interview was provided to each interviewee. This ensured that the transcription was an accurate representation of what the interviewee intended to state during the interviews. Interviewees were not given a deadline regarding when the transcriptions needed to be returned to the researcher. Despite the lack of a deadline, all the transcriptions were returned in a timely fashion. The transcriptions were then coded. After

coding was complete, categories and sub-categories were developed. From these categories,

emergent themes were deduced.

The researcher employed a third strategy to ensure validity. Specifically, a peer debriefer

was used by the researcher. Creswell (2009) defines a peer debriefer as someone "who reviews

and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other

than the researcher" (p. 192).

The questions and transcriptions were also reviewed by the researcher to ensure that they

accurately reflected what the researcher intended.

Finally, the questions in the study were pilot tested in a thorough, systematic manner.

Namely, the interview questions were reviewed by a sample of professionals that represented

each group that was sampled in the research. Specifically, a superintendent, an individual with

district-wide curriculum responsibilities, a building level administrator, and a teacher reviewed

the questions prior to the full gathering of the data. The researcher elicited feedback from each

person involved in the pilot testing of the questions. The goal was to gain feedback regarding the

clarity, as well as the comprehensiveness, of the questions utilized in the interview. The

information gleamed from this pilot testing was used in the development of the final versions of

the questions used in the various districts that agreed to participate in the survey.

Researcher Bias

The researcher is currently serving as a middle school principal in a small, suburban

district. Prior to his current position, he served as a principal and assistant principal in a large,

suburban district. In addition, he has worked as an administrator and teacher in urban education,

including in a public school district and two charter schools.

As a result of his current role, he has had direct experience with Common Core implementation as a building level administrator. His experience has included analyzing curriculum, participating in professional development, and reviewing assessments as a result of the new standards.

The effect of this bias was minimized through a variety of ways. First, the same questions were used for each school district. Additionally, the people interviewed in each district held comparable positions within the organization. Furthermore, the same person transcribed all the interviews. Finally, the transcriber did not have a vested interest in the results of the survey, nor did this person have the same biases as the researcher.

Ethical Safeguards

The Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects at the Sage Colleges reviewed and approved the human subject interaction of this study. Consequently, human subjects were treated with the highest ethical standard.

Additionally, it was communicated to the human subjects who were interviewed that their participation was voluntary and that they could end their interview at any point without a threat or consequence or retaliation from the researcher or their school district.

Summary

This study was based on interviews of employees in school districts of varying size and demographic characteristics. In each district, the superintendent, an administrator with district wide curriculum responsibilities, a principal, and a teacher were interviewed. An independent party transcribed the results of the interviews, in which the same questions were asked of each participant. The transcribed interviews were coded and the information was categorized in an

effort to identify emergent themes. Once emergent themes were identified, the researcher was

able to present the findings of the research, which are in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings

This study sought to examine the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in selected districts in upstate New York. In particular, the study focused on the effect of these new standards on professional development, assessments, and curriculum within the five participating districts.

This chapter provides background information regarding the research, including a table with information about the individual participants. In addition, this chapter presents and summarizes the findings of this research. The findings are organized by the corresponding research question. The three research questions for this study were:

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

2. As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

3. How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

Background of Research

Five school districts in upstate New York participated in this research study. The districts were chosen in an effort to ensure that districts of varying size and demographic composition were represented. Specifically, the five selected school districts included a large suburban district, a large urban district, a small suburban district, a small urban district, and a rural district.

Twenty interviews were conducted for this study. Within each of the five participating districts, one person representing four levels of the system were interviewed. Specifically, in each district, a teacher, a principal, an administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, and the superintendent were all separately interviewed. All of the interviews were conducted in person and the same interview protocol was used for each interview.

Table 1

Background of Interviewees

Position and Pseudonym	Years (Current Position)	Years (Current District)	Experience (District Demographics)	Experience (District Size)	Highest Level of Education
Superintendent A	2	2	Suburban, Rural, Urban	Small, Large	Doctorate
Superintendent B	6	6	Suburban, Rural	Small, Large	Doctorate
Superintendent C	6	22	Suburban, Rural, Urban	Small, Large	Masters
Superintendent D	11	8	Rural	Small	Doctorate
Superintendent E	2	2	Urban	Large	Doctorate
Administrator A	6	6	Suburban, Rural, Urban	Small, Large	Masters
Administrator B	12	19	Urban, Suburban	Small, Large	Masters
Administrator C	2	8	Suburban, Rural	Small, Large	Masters
Administrator D	1	1	Rural, Urban	Small, Large	Masters
Administrator E	8	18	Rural, Suburban	Small, Large	Masters
Principal A	5	8	Urban	Small	Masters
Principal B	10	10	Rural, Urban	Small	Masters
Principal C	4	13	Suburban, Urban	Large	Masters
Principal D	3	11	Suburban	Large	Masters

Principal E	5	5	Suburban	Small, Large	Doctorate
Teacher A	16	14	Suburban, Rural	Small, Large	Masters
Teacher B	5	8	Suburban, Urban	Large	Masters
Teacher C	7	7	Suburban	Small, Large	Masters
Teacher D	20	14	Suburban	Small, Large	Masters
Teacher E	11	14	Urban	Small	Masters

To ensure reliability, each interview was recorded. The researcher listened to the audio-recordings multiple times. The recordings were then transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions multiple times. Each interviewee was then given the opportunity to review the transcriptions. Of the twenty interviews that were conducted, member checking was successfully completed for all twenty of them. After member checking was completed, the transcriptions were read and analyzed by the researcher. During this round of readings, the researcher coded the interviews and analyzed them for emergent themes.

Findings Related to Research Question One

This research produced numerous findings related to the first research question. These findings are detailed in this section of the study.

Research Question 1: How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the CCSS?

Numerous responses from the interviewees indicated that the professional development that districts have been offering since New York State adopted the Common Core has been

driven by the Common Core. This finding was consistent at all levels of the system. For example, Superintendent D stated, "It now drives that PD. Most of what we do is related to the Common Core" (personal communication, February 25, 2014). Another system leader, Superintendent E, said, "We have designed professional development this year to ensure that all of our educators had an introduction to it" (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Furthermore, another system level leader, Superintendent A, believes that "What's happened in the last 2 to 3 years in every district is any additional funding you have left for professional development has to be regulated to working on the standards to get everybody up to speed" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

This pattern was also evident from the comments of people with district-wide curriculum responsibilities. One such person, Administrator D, stated, "We did a complete redesign of the professional development. I would say that the Common Core has become central to all of the professional development" (personal communication, March 11, 2014). One assistant superintendent, Administrator E, added, "It has dramatically impacted professional development for educators who are being assessed by new Common Core assessments…It is a seismic change in, or should be in, the way instruction is delivered" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

From the perspective of building level leadership, the newly adopted standards were a driving factor in the professional development. Specifically, according to Principal D:

It has definitely driven our priorities. We've tried to set aside faculty meeting time to talk about the Common Core, implementing it with the teachers, and especially trying to work

with the teachers from across the curriculum areas in that way. (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

A building level administrator, Principal E, in a different district observed that the adoption of the Common Core State Standards on professional development has influenced the conferences that teachers now attend. "I would say even at the building level, the conferences that people even would elect to go to now directly impact the Common Core Standards because they want to make sure that they are prepared to roll this out" (personal communication, March 18, 2014).

Not only have the standards influenced the professional development offered, but, as is evident from the below quotation, a direct effect of the CCSS is that districts have further narrowed the scope of their professional development almost exclusively toward English Language Arts and mathematics. In fact, one assistant superintendent, Administrator B, stated:

> We saw our professional development on technology decline because of the emphasis on the Common Core. We're starting to bring that back now. In the past, we had a lot of professional development around PBIS and student behaviors – that kind of got pushed to the side. (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

A system leader, Superintendent B, said, "We worked with our Math and ELA teachers. Actually, our other teachers as well, but mostly Math and ELA, was the focus" (personal communication, March 19, 2014).

This pattern was also visible at the building level. For example, Principal D stated, "the priorities really have been trying to help out the English and Math teachers, especially at the elementary level and the kindergarten as well" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

While the adoption of the Common Core State Standards led to professional development being focused on preparing educators for how to successfully implement the standards and an increased focus on English Language Arts and mathematics, this change was not necessarily viewed as a negative one by administrators.

For example, one administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, Administrator C, stated:

> Prior to having to implement the Common Core, professional development was more one-shot and teacher driven, like a menu of items. We would just have random offerings based on whatever flavor of the day, I guess is how I would describe it. But now, with Common Core and APPR, because I kind of see it all tied together, professional development is tied to one of those, which makes better sense. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

This same administrator went on to say:

> Prior to the Common Core, we had a PDP team, a curriculum team, an APPR team, and there was a different administrator in charge of each of those. The PDP team would just develop whatever they wanted with that group of teachers that was on that. Then it ended up being a different group of teachers on curriculum and they would develop a plan. But, now, we morphed all three of those together. So, you still have administrators leading those teams, but we've made sure that they are connected. So, what we're doing in curriculum needs to connect to what we're going to do PDP or recommend to PDP to bring that back to the team. So, I feel like they go together better than they did before.

They all used to be isolated plans that really didn't reflect each other. (personal

communication, February 25, 2014)

A building level leader, Principal E, agreed with this sentiment when he stated:

For the most part, with shrinking economic resources for conferences, I would say that a

positive impact is that it has streamlined looking at professional development

opportunities and deciding whether they are directly or indirectly related to the Common

Core and, in turn, using those. (personal communication, March 18, 2014)

The emphasis and focus on English Language Arts and mathematics that was expressed

by interviewees is not surprising given the existing research regarding the Common Core State

Standards. The new standards "represent an unprecedented shift away from disparate content

guidelines across individual states in the areas of English language arts and mathematics"

(Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011, p. 103).

The professional development that has been offered in districts has come from two main

sources. First, districts have hired outside consultants. Second, districts have used their local

Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which, in New York State, provide,

among other functions, professional development to districts within their region. Because Race

to the Top funding flowed from the federal government to the local school districts through

regional BOCES, many districts utilized BOCES for their CCSS-related professional

development needs. In addition, school districts did utilize outside consultants, but due to the

fiscal climate, the use of outside consultants has decreased. As Superintendent B stated,

"because of our budget crunch, we've had to limit our access to outside consultants quite a bit"

(personal communication, March 19, 2014).

The first theme to emerge from this research is that the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by New York State has driven the professional development that has been offered to educators in school districts. This finding is extremely relevant as high quality professional development is a critical component to the long-term success of the CCSS in New York State (Rimbey, 2013).

The second theme this study reveals is that regardless of the size or demographic composition of the district, the degree to which the CCSS have been implemented in districts has varied based on grade levels.   Essentially, because of the timeline set forth by the State Education Department for the implementation of assessments based on the new standards, elementary and middle schools are further ahead than their high school colleagues in regard to teaching a curriculum based on the Common Core. Because elementary and middle schools are ahead of high schools in terms of teaching the new standards, they are also ahead of the high schools in terms of the professional development being provided to teachers.

The trend is evident by the comments of the system leaders. For example, Superintendent B stated, "I think that is has been a very methodical and holistic kind of approach beginning with the littlest kids and moving up to the middle school kids and now to the high school kids" (personal communication, March 19, 2014). Superintendent A stated it differently, but with the same message, when he stated, "The impact that it has had on teachers varies based upon their level because as it reaches them all of a sudden it is of unbelievable importance. Before that, they didn't even care" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

This belief of the superintendents is supported by the observations of the individuals with district-wide curriculum duties. As one such person, Administrator E, stated, "The high school is

a completely different animal because they really don't see that this is impacting them yet" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). Administrator C agreed when she said, "We're still pretty building specific, at different points with implementing the Common Core" (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

The fact that elementary and middle schools are ahead of high schools in terms of Common Core implementation has had an overall influence on the professional development plans of districts as well. Because the timeline of adoption has effected specific levels at different times, it has been more challenging to develop district-wide plans. For example, Administrator A said, "Because that has started early, we're kind of at different levels with all of our buildings in the district, which is kind of why we don't have this K-12 plan developed exactly" (personal communication, March 19, 2014).

Another finding that resulted from this research question was that districts have altered the role of their professional development committees. For example, Administrator B reported that, "With the focus being much more on Common Core, that committee structure kind of fell away" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Superintendent D, who works in a different district, believes:

> Actually, the Common Core has lessened the strengths of that committee. It used to be a very powerful committee because, when I came here and introduced Professional Learning Communities, it was a matter of bringing people in and getting people on board. Now the work with the Common Core and with the APPR drives it. So, their status…the power of that committee is diminished. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

In another district, an administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, Administrator E, also commented on the effect of not only the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, but the changes to the APPR, on the professional development committee in their district. Specifically, this administrator said, "We continue to have a PDC, but for the last handful of years that committee has had all of its focus on developing an APPR plan. Our APPR plan came out of our PDC" (Administrator E, personal communication, February 12, 2014).

When asked the interview questions associated with this research question, especially the questions regarding to what extent the CCSS has influenced the professional development for educators and how has the district utilized outside consultants to train teachers on the CCSS, teachers and administrators expressed a degree of concern regarding the new role and responsibilities of the educators in the classroom in a post-CCSS educational arena.

One administrator with district-wide curriculum duties, Administrator E, stated, "I think our K-5 faculty feels completely overwhelmed and our certainly our Math and ELA folks at the middle school feel an extreme amount of stress over the changes that have sort of happened far too quickly" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

Teacher C also expressed some of the same frustration and anxiety that the aforementioned administrator had observed when he said:

I think what was happening was that everything was shifting. They were doing the Common Core. Someone had to come up with some resources for the teachers to help us, but everything was evolving simultaneously—the Common Core itself, I mean the resources available to us through engageNY that was changing, the district's thinking about how to support us was shifting and they were doing it all at the same time. It was

sort of like, you know, rebuilding the engine while the car was going down the highway. (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

A teacher in a different district, Teacher A, shared the frustration of his colleague when he stated:

> At this point, so far, slightly. I don't think we know enough about where the questioning goes to really implement the assessment training that we need. Professionally, we've seen a lot where we have gone and talked about the Core; we have an idea about where the Core is; we know what the standards are; we know where we are supposed to be— how to get there yet, we're not completely sure. So, what it should look like, how it should feel, how fast and quick things should be is the question so far. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

Teacher B said, "I think it has impacted us a lot because we are being pulled constantly to actually participate in professional development." As a result, this teacher added, "I think I've learned a lot more in the last couple of years learning about the Common Core than I had in college and my first few years of school, of teaching" (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Consequently, a finding of this study is that the new standards have forced districts to alter the role of their professional development committee.

In addition, at least one administrator in all five of the districts that participated in this study referenced their desire, as a result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, to have an effective coaching model in their schools. This finding is consistent with some of the proven professional development strategies that were discussed in chapter two (Heil, 2012;

Levin et al., 2012; Rimbey, 2013). This sentiment may have been best summed up when

Administrator C, who has district-wide curriculum responsibilities, said, "I would have someone

in there watching teachers, observing, and giving weekly feedback or lessons. I would. Helping

them create common assessments" (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

While participants of the study believe, as a result of the new standards, that they would

benefit from a coaching model, this collegial practice is not happening in the districts that

participated in this study.

Summary of Research Question One Findings

Based on the twenty interviews that were conducted, the first research question produced

numerous findings. It is relevant to note that these findings were independent of the size or

demographics of the district.

1. The professional development that districts have been offering since New York State
   adopted the Common Core has been driven by the Common Core.
2. Districts have narrowed the scope of their professional development almost exclusively
   toward English Language Arts and mathematics.
3. The professional development that has been offered in districts has come from two main
   sources: outside consultants and BOCES.
4. Within districts, the specific levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) are at
   different stages in their Common Core implementation.
5. Districts have altered the role of their professional development committee.

6. In the districts that participated in this study, teachers and administrators expressed a degree of concern regarding the new roles and responsibilities of the educators in the classroom in a post-CCSS educational arena.

7. Districts that participated in this study referenced their desire, as a result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, to have an effective coaching model in their schools.

It is clear that the decision by New York State to adopt the Common Core State Standards has had a direct effect on the professional development that has been recently offered in districts. The second research question explored the relationship between the adoption of the new standards and the curriculum being taught in New York's public schools.

Findings Related to Research Question Two

The second research question focused on how the new standards have influenced curriculum. The findings for the research question are detailed in this section of the study.

Research Question 2: As a result of the CCSS, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

Similar to the first research question, this research shows that, regardless of size or demographics, districts experienced many of the same issues in regard to how they modified the curriculum being taught in their classrooms as a result of New York State's adoption of the Common Core State Standards.

For example, the participants in this study, regardless of the size of the district, the demographic composition of the district, or the role the interviewee played in the district, all clearly stated that the Common Core is driving the curriculum that is being taught in their schools. This is significant because, as referred to in chapter two of this study, the adoption of

the Common Core State Standards by multiple states, including New York, is the "most sweeping nationalization of the K-12 curriculum in US history" (Bomer & Maloch, 2011, p. 38). As Superintendent A said, "It is the driver in almost everything we do at this point. It has become the primary mission of the district – is transferring information to the Common Core" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). Another system leader, Superintendent D, said:

> I think it has changed the curriculum in some overt ways, but mostly very subtle. It's forced people to shift away from some of their pet units that they all like to teach. Because everybody has them and they are not as important as they were. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

A third superintendent, Superintendent B, agreed that the Common Core has had an effect on the curriculum being taught in her district. Specifically, she stated, "Certainly has been an intentional determination that we will examine how the Common Core will affect the way we deliver curriculum" (personal communication, March 19, 2014).

The belief that the Common Core has altered the instruction being taught was commented on by building leaders as well. For example, Principal E said:

> If I'm doing a math lesson and its manipulative based, that's great, but does it align with the Common Core Standards… it's kind of become our driving force…It's not really about what do I want to see happen in 5th grade, the Common Core modules are driving what happens in 5th grade. (personal communication, March 18, 2014)

One teacher, Teacher C, summed up the effect that the Common Core has had on his instruction by saying, "A huge impact on curriculum. In fact, we just redid it. You know, we

just redid the whole curriculum based on the Common Core" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

It is clear from this research, therefore, that the adoption of CCSS has had a direct effect on the curriculum being taught in the schools of the districts that participated in this study.

Another finding from this research is that districts are utilizing the modules that the State Education Department has made available on the engageNY website. In general, a district's philosophy on their use of the modules can be characterized as adopt, adapt, or abandon. Given these three categories as choices, districts are largely adapting the modules. Furthermore, concerns regarding the developmental appropriateness of the modules have been one of the reasons districts have chosen to not adopt the modules. As Principal A said:

> We are absolutely not fully adopting the modules. I have a very strong view that the modules, while there are some great pieces to them, the skill sets required within the modules are high. Much higher than where the bulk, or most, of our kids are. In the Common Core, it doesn't really account for kids that are one or two years below in math, ELA and reading. (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

Superintendent B had even stronger thoughts regarding the developmental level of the modules, "I certainly haven't encouraged anybody to adopt the modules because I think they are totally developmentally inappropriate" (personal communication, March 19, 2014).

Based on the aforementioned quotes, a second emergent theme is that the districts that participated in this study are utilizing the modules that the state has produced. The finding that schools are utilizing the modules, especially in mathematics, is relevant and positive as it was presented in chapter two that the Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum recommended

high quality models and exemplars were needed during implementation (Confrey & Krupa, 2010). Furthermore, the continued use of the modules by the districts who participated in this study is relevant and positive as the research presented in chapter two stated that using the modules is a "developmental process that gets easier as teachers gain experience and develop strategies" (Reumann-Moore & Sanders, 2012, p. 34).

Another theme that came from this research question was that a lack of human resources have hampered the implementation efforts in districts. While the loss of administrators, faculty, and staff varied among the five districts that participated, all of the districts have experienced a reduction in positions. These reductions have made the implementation of the CCSS more challenging.

In fact, multiple people commented that in a better fiscal climate, the CCSS would have led to an increase in staff. For example, Administrator B said, "We should have increased staff in preparation for the implementation of the Common Core in an ideal world" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). One building level leader, Principal E, added:

> I think had Common Core been a part of that fruitful budget year you would have seen smaller class sizes coupled with we need people to coordinate this initiative. We need administrative staff to coordinate the Common Core Standards and then people in the classroom doing some of the groundwork for them. (personal communication, March 18, 2014)

In addition to a lack of human resources, interviewees expressed concerns about the lack of financial resources, and the effect the fiscal climate had on the implementation of the Common Core in their district. Superintendent B stated, "Any decision to maximize our capacity

to implement the Common Core has been discouraged and hampered by our capacity to pay for things" (personal communication, March 19, 2014). An administrator with district-wide curriculum duties, Administrator C, put it more bluntly, "We just cut, cut, cut. We don't have any money" (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

The concern expressed by participants in this research regarding the negative influence the lack of financial resources had on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards is consistent with the existing research presented in chapter two. Specifically, Kober and Rentner (2012) stated that numerous states reported that a lack of resources has hindered the implementation of the new standards.

Given that the Regents Reform Agenda was at least partially developed to include reforms that were aligned with the federal Race to the Top program in an effort to secure more funding for the state from the federal government (Tagliaferri & Townsend, 2011), it is somewhat ironic that the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by New York State has led to a concern regarding a lack of funding to properly implement the new standards.

In order to minimize the effect of the fiscal climate, this research found that districts have chosen to reallocate funds to pay for resources, such as curriculum and textbooks. Superintendent C stated, "We sweep all of the funds used for curriculum materials and push them all towards Common Core materials" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Principal A commented, "So, have we reallocated some money to Common Core? Absolutely" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Another building level leader, Principal D, added, "We've decreased spending in all areas, but we've spent a lot of money on textbooks. So the commitment has been to purchasing Common Core aligned textbooks series and we've done that

for all of the math and ELA classes in our building" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

In addition to re-allocated monies to Common Core resources, districts have re-allocated human resources in an effort to improve their implementation of the Common Core. For example, Superintendent E said that she re-organized the mission and focus of the central office. This effort was aimed at improving the capacity of the district to assist in better teaching and improved student learning. Interestingly, this initiative was done without increasing staff (Superintendent E, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

This re-allocation of human resources was evident at the building level as well. Principal C stated, "We definitely have restructured our staffing and I think that it supports the work the teachers are doing around the Common Core" (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Additionally, Principal D believes, "We've definitely decreased staff but at the same time we've increased our commitment to literacy coaching. So we've kind of redeployed some of the people we had available" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

When viewed from a larger perspective, a theme clearly emerged. Specifically, the fiscal climate at the time of the adoption of the Common Core caused districts to reduce human and financial resources. This scarcity of resources has had a negative effect on the implementation of the CCSS. In response to this lack of resources, school districts re-allocated the financial and human resources that they had available.

Another finding is that, regardless of budgetary constraints, there is a lack of quality Common Core aligned resources available. In fact, Superintendent E said, "The problem is there are no curriculum materials. They are not out there. No matter how many vendors slap

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Common Core on their top, it really isn't out there" (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Superintendent A stated:

> There is not a lot out there that is really very good on the Common Core. You know, that's the new catchword. For someone to sell a book, it's right in line with the Common Core Standards. Then you look at it and say, "No, it isn't." (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

Principal D agreed with this sentiment, but went further by commenting on the effect of the modules from engageNY:

> We bought this new textbook series…fantastic resource, but it utilizes a lot of the same stories and materials that we've used in the past, not really a whole big change. Then, we get the Common Core modules that come out the next year. So, we spent, you know, upwards of $100,000 in textbook materials and now we get some more direction from the state. It's a real problem. (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

From a teacher perspective, this lack of Common Core resources has also included a lack of availability of resources from the state. As Teacher E stated, "We are doing a new novel for the end of the quarter and the state informed us that we were going to have resources available in December and there is still nothing on the website." This teacher went on to say that they were "informed not to expect anything until summer." As a result, they "have the book, but as far as any of the resources attached to it, they are not there" (personal communication, March 5, 2014).

Due to the newness of the Common Core, educators have experienced difficulty securing high quality, Common Core aligned resources. This lack of availability of appropriate resources, according to the participants of the study, has negatively influenced the roll-out of the CCSS.

The topic of training was also discussed in the interviews. Teachers and administrators agreed that more training would be beneficial. Specifically, the research found that educators would like more training in two areas: designing assessments that are aligned to the new standards and how to effectively use the modules.

Educators who participated in this study felt the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by New York State has resulted in a need to not only teach differently, but to assess their students in a different manner, which requires training. For example, Administrator C stated, "We've identified assessment design. We think we are getting to know the standards, but we don't think we're really good at developing assessments that are rigorous that reflect the level that the kids will see on state tests" (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

In terms of utilizing the modules from engageNY, Teacher A spoke for the teachers in his building when he said:

They would like to see more how to use the modules appropriately. How they look, how they feel. We can read these all we want, but as we start to look at them, right now, the timing of them seems so extensive that they wouldn't fit into a normal school year… I would love to see a module boot camp—where we go for a week straight and just do them. See what they should look like; how to use some more of the manipulatives - the hands on - all the things that we're supposed to that we've never been trained in. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

Superintendent A commented on the challenge of the quantity of information in the modules. Specifically, this system leader stated:

What will work best in helping the teachers put it together in a usable form because, it's funny, teachers always complain that they are not given enough information. Well, this

time they have been given so much that they don't know what to do with it all and it is

just overwhelming. So, now it's too much information. (personal communication,

February 12, 2014)

Teacher C agreed with the concern regarding how overwhelming the modules are. He said:

We have engageNY and we have that whole set of resources and modules that are

available. It's overwhelming. I mean for someone just looking at it. If you said to a

teacher, here are the modules, go teach engageNY, that's truly overwhelming because we

don't typically have the kind of planning time to absorb and process all of that

information. Certainly not during the school year. So, what we really need is somebody

to come in and say, "OK, this is how the modules are organized. These are the main, the

key standards that each module is hitting. And here is a suggestion as to how you can

approach it." (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

Because the implementation effort is already underway in New York State and,

consequently, districts are at different stages in their implementation, new training would have to

be sensitive to this fact. As Teacher C stated:

I think it really depends upon what step stage you are in, as an educator, in adopting the

Common Core. If you are just beginning, then the kind of things that would've been

helpful to me would be the kind of comprehensive overview of what resources are

available. (personal communication, February 12, 2014)

As discussed above, the research for this study lends credibility to the belief that there

was inadequate training, especially in the areas of assessment design and the effective use of the

modules.

As previously mentioned, there was a general concern regarding the developmental appropriateness of the modules from engageNY. In terms of the curriculum, a similar concern was expressed. This theme is consistent with the literature. Specifically, it was noted that the new standards emphasize depth, as opposed to breadth (Confrey & Krupa, 2010).

Some educators questioned the depth of knowledge that the standards require of students. Teacher D stated:

> One of the problem areas that I see is that the cohort of students that either because of maybe just developmentally, they are not there yet. Using an example in Math, maybe their sort of level of abstraction is just not there yet. (personal communication, March 19, 2014)

This level of depth has the potential to further the gap between students who excel academically and those that do not. Teacher D further added:

> It's really separated maybe say 85% that are reading with a tremendous amount of success, I would say with the Common Core, from the students that are really struggling. I see the gap between those two groups widening significantly since the implementation of the Common Core. So, I think, you know, for a majority of the kids that are meeting with an awful lot of success, I think that there is a lot to point to that we can say, "This is serving children better." I think the gap between the "gets it" and the "gets it nots" is bigger than it has ever been in my 20 years of teaching. (personal communication, March 19, 2014)

The last emergent theme from this research question, therefore, was the concern from educators regarding the developmental appropriateness of the modules published by the state.

Despite this concern, it is relevant to note that the literature stated that there is an advantage to a core curriculum if the curriculum increases rigor and expectations (Mathis, 2010; McPartland & Schneider, 1996; W. H. Schmidt et al., 2005).

Summary of Research Question Two Findings

The second research question produced numerous findings. Similar to the findings of the first research question, these findings were independent of the size or demographics of the district.

Research question two provided nine key findings.

1. The Common Core is driving the curriculum that is being taught in schools.

2. Districts are utilizing the modules on engageNY. Given the three categories of adopt, adapt, or abandon as choices, districts are largely adapting the modules.

3. A lack of human resources has hampered the implementation efforts in districts.

4. A lack of financial resources has hampered the implementation efforts in districts.

5. Districts have chosen to reallocate funds to pay for resources, such as curriculum and textbooks.

6. Districts have re-allocated human resources in an effort to improve their implementation of the Common Core.

7. There is lack of quality Common Core aligned resources available.

8. Educators would like more training in two areas: writing assessments that are aligned to the new standards and how to effectively use the modules.

9. The depth of knowledge that the curriculum, which is based on the Common Core State Standards, requires of students may be developmentally inappropriate.

Research question two clearly connected the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and the curriculum that is now being taught in public schools in New York State.

Findings Related to Research Question Three

The third research question in the study proved to be relevant and meaningful. Based on the interview questions associated with this research question, numerous findings became evident. These findings are detailed in this section of the study.

Research Question 3: How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the CCSS?

Participants in the selected districts believe that the assessments, both summative and formative, now being utilized in their district have recently changed. The extent the assessments have changed, however, has been driven by the changes in APPR. Interestingly, this belief was most strongly expressed by administrators with district-wide curriculum responsibilities and superintendents.

System leaders were clear in their statements. Superintendent C stated, "I don't think there are any real Common Core driven changes in assessments. There are APPR driven changes" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Another system leader, Superintendent A, said, "Changes are in the amount of assessments – not necessarily the type – and that is APPR driven" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). In addition, a different superintendent, Superintendent B, stated the changes have "less to do with Common Core than the expectation that we have teacher growth measures" and "I'm not so sure that it is the Common Core as much as it is the expectations for APPR purposes" (personal communication, March 19, 2014). Yet

another system leader, Superintendent E, added, "I don't think Common Core has impacted it as much as the performance based evaluation system for principals and teachers. I think that has had a greater influence" (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Superintendent E further stated:

> People are assuming that we are measuring Common Core on these assessments, which, theoretically, we are, but they have been tied to the performance based evaluation system with no opportunity for students to learn the content along the way. So, it has convoluted the whole conversation. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)

Administrators with district-wide curriculum duties agreed with this observation. One assistant superintendent, Administrator E, said, "I would like to say that the impact on assessments has been from Common Core, but it really hasn't been. The change in the assessments has really been due to APPR" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). A colleague, Administrator C, agreed when she stated, "I know it's tied to Common Core, but that's come more out of the APPR process" (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

A building level leader, Principal E, agreed that even the formative assessments being used in the classroom have been effected by APPR. Specifically, he stated, "the motivation is probably more the APPR piece…I don't think anyone would argue that informally assessing students isn't a great practice, but knowing that you are summatively scored, suddenly it is much more meaningful that you do formative assessments" (personal communication, March 18, 2014).

In essence, the first finding from this research question is that while assessments have changed in the post-CCSS era, the new APPR regulations were the driving factor in this change.

All in all, participants do not feel that they were properly trained to write assessments that were aligned to the Common Core State Standards. This finding is consistent with a prior finding associated with research question two in that writing assessments aligned to the new standards and curriculum were an area that educators expressed a desire for more training. According to the literature, it is crucial that the evaluations systems used to measure teachers are based on assessments that are aligned to the Common Core (Levin et al., 2012). In addition, the new standards provided New York State with an opportunity to re-design, as opposed to simply modify, their assessments (Phillips & Wong, 2010).

This sentiment was most strongly expressed by teachers and principals. For example, Teacher C stated, "Another thing that would be helpful would be how to design assessments that are closely aligned with the standards that we can use on sort of a daily basis" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

Another educator who works in the classroom, Teacher A, added:

We really need [to know] and what these questions should look like. And how we should even question the kids in the class. To me, that's the biggest assessment that we don't have is how to give that formative assessment to the class, verbally, on the fly, to find out are we're on the right track with these kids. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

Building level leaders also expressed this concern. Principal D said, "Not only do we need to understand what the curriculum is, but you have to understand how your kids are actually learning it and that is something we haven't tackled, quite honestly" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). Principal E added:

A lot of these products, whether it is an online resource or a textbook, provide summative assessments and, in some cases, some formative assessments. But in terms of a staff member being confident and competent enough, not any fault of their own, to develop an assessment, I don't think they have the training. (personal communication, March 18, 2014)

In sum, the second emergent theme from this research question is that educators are not comfortable writing assessments that accurately and appropriately measure student learning.

A third finding from this research question is that the use of formative assessments has not been greatly effected by the CCSS. The general belief was that formative assessments are a best practice and that districts have been emphasizing them recently irrespective of the adoption of the Common Core.

For example, Superintendent B stated, "I think that is just good formative assessment…I don't think it is Common Core, I just think it is thoughtful assessment" (personal communication, March 19, 2014). Additionally, an individual with district-wide curriculum duties, Administrator A, stated:

I think that is good practice that you would've brought in whether or not there was a Common Core. So, I don't know if those things are a result of the Common Core or just trying to catch up to some better practices. (personal communication, March 19, 2014)

This belief was echoed at the building level as well. Specifically, Principal D stated, "I think throughout the building they are using more formative assessments, but that's been a push for the past several years too" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). Principal E added:

Formative assessments are, by nature, a best practice. So, I think it kind of goes hand in hand where maybe that has pushed faculty to look at their instruction a little more closely because of the pressure of the standards. So, it's a best practice with or without Common Core. (personal communication, March 18, 2014)

Consistent with the statements from the aforementioned administrators, Teacher C said, "The district has always encouraged us to use formative assessments. I don't perceive any change in that" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

This research question also led to the finding that the modules from engageNY have led to an increased use of formative assessments in the classroom. The modules include formative assessments in them. When teachers, therefore, utilize the modules, they, by default, have found themselves incorporating more formative assessments.

The interviewee responses for the questions connected to research question three clearly establish a theme that the use of formative assessments has not been greatly influenced by the new standards. To the extent that the new standards have influenced the use of formative assessments, however, the increase in use can be attributed to the emphasis on formative assessments in the modules from engageNY. Furthermore, the inclusion of formative assessments within the modules is in agreement with what Confrey and Krupa (2010) suggest.

Research question three also led to a finding regarding data driven instruction (DDI). Generally, districts were utilizing data driven instruction prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, but the new APPR guidelines have led to a greater focus on DDI.

In terms of DDI being in place prior to the new standards, Superintendent C said his district "was already there" (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In a different district, the

administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, Administrator E, stated, "We felt

right from the beginning that we had the DDI piece knocked. Like, we knew what we were

doing at the beginning of this" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). This same

administrator added, "Our focus on DDI, thankfully, was well embedded before Common Core

came" (personal communication, February 12, 2014). In a third district, Administrator B said, "I

think that the district has had a history of data driven instruction well before the Common Core"

(personal communication, March 5, 2014). Finally, a teacher in a fourth district, Teacher B,

agreed when she said, "I feel like a couple of years ago when we first rolled out Common Core,

it was still all about data. So, I don't think that the Common Core has changed it that much"

(personal communication, March 11, 2014).

While districts were using data to drive the instruction occurring in classrooms prior to

New York State's adoption of the Common Core State Standards, there has been an increase in

the use of data after the adoption of the CCSS. This increased use, however, had very little to do

with the adoption of the new standards, but more the with new APPR guidelines. One

administrator with curriculum responsibilities across the K-12 spectrum, Administrator A, said:

> I think that the impact going back to the APPR question is that there is now this kind of
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> importance given to the data…There is a real reason why as a teacher I now really do
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> want to know and take that time to dive into that because this may be affecting my
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> growth score…I do think that the Common Core and the new expectations in APPR have
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> made it more important in teachers' minds. (personal communication, March 19, 2014)

Teacher A stated, "I think more APPR has driven that than Common Core again." He

later added, "So, it might've been more of an administrative push was because of Common Core,

but I think it's the implementation by teachers because of the APPR because it now affects them"
(personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Another finding from this research question is that while more student performance data
is being accumulated at the classroom level, the new APPR regulations have decreased the
proper use of that data to drive instruction.

In fact, Administrator E raised a concern that the new APPR process may have caused
more of an emphasis on DDI, but it has actually had a negative effect on how data is used in her
district. For example, she said:

> I think APPR took us, pushed us back. We went backward in terms of DDI because now
> the growth that people are trying to measure doesn't really have to do with the growth of
> their kids. It has to do with their score and the growth that they can document overall.
> So, they sort of lost the focus on focusing on individual students and they are not
> worrying about the trees. They are just worrying about the forest now. (Administrator E,
> personal communication, February 12, 2014)

This administrator added:

> I would say that most of the other assessments that people are using, they are not using
> them truly formatively. They are using them as a how can I, without a doubt, show
> growth? And how do I beat the system in terms of gaining the most points? The change
> in assessing kids has really not been driven by Common Core at this point.
> (Administrator E, personal communication, February 12, 2014)

Principal A expressed the same concern:

What I think you are really describing there is we've bastardized some exceptional data

sets because what is happening, whether people want to believe it or not, I would

personally not know. But what's happening now is, and I can prove it you, they take it in

the beginning, maybe the teachers don't try so hard. So, now let's call it the "Great

Manipulation." Whether it is intentional or not, I'm not saying teachers are cheating.

They are just not trying so hard at the benchmark; the middle, they are sort of giving up

on, even though that is wonderful data to get that mid-level piece, because they don't

care; and at the end. . . You'll even see it on the test times. The kids finish the tests in 40

minutes here and at the end of the year, all the kids take 60 minutes because the teacher

says, "Take your time." (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

In sum, according to the participants of the study, the new standards have not led to an

increase in the use of data-driven instruction. To the extent that educators are now using more

data-driven instruction, the increase can be attributed to the new APPR regulations.

Three of the themes that emerged from this research question were connected to the new

APPR regulations that were part of the Regents Reform Agenda. As discussed in the literature

review, this is especially relevant given the impact an evaluation system may have on school

culture, which in turn impacts student achievement (O'Shea, 2006).

Summary of Research Question Three Findings

The third research question produced many findings. Similar to the findings of the first

two research questions, these findings were independent of the size or demographics of the

district.

Research question three led to numerous findings.

1. To the extent that the formative and summative assessments being utilized have changed, the change has been driven by changes in the APPR guidelines, and not the Common Core State Standards.

2. There was a lack of training on how to write assessments that are aligned to the new standards.

3. The use of formative assessments has not been greatly influenced by the CCSS. Educators view formative assessment as a best practice that was being incorporated in classrooms irrespective of the Common Core.

4. The modules from engageNY have led to an increased use of formative assessments in classroom.

5. Districts were utilizing data driven instruction prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, but the new APPR guidelines have led to a greater focus on DDI.

6. While more student performance data is being accumulated at the classroom level, the new APPR regulations have decreased the proper use of that data to drive instruction.

In the next chapter, conclusions and recommendation based on the findings from the three research questions will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the major findings of this study. In addition, the chapter provides conclusions, recommendations, and recommendations for further study based on this research.

The research questions for this study were:

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

2. As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?

3. How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

Summary of Findings

This study focused on the implementation process of the Common Core State Standards in selected school districts in upstate New York. The districts chosen to participate in this study were of varying size and demographics, including one large suburban district, one large urban district, one small suburban district, one small urban district, and one rural district. Districts of various size and demographic composition were purposely chosen in an effort to analyze whether these factors effected the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, as well as to increase the generalizability of the study. In each participating district, a teacher, a principal, an administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, and the superintendent were interviewed.

It is important to note that this study represents a moment in time in the implementation of the Common Core. Due to the ever-changing landscape in education, especially in terms of the implementation of these standards, this study is truly a snapshot in time. The responses from the educators interviewed for this study may have been much different if this study was conducted a few months earlier or later.

There were numerous findings that resulted from research question one. First, based on the participating districts for this study, the professional development that districts have been offering since New York State adopted the Common Core has been driven by the Common Core State Standards. In addition, the scope of the professional development that has been offered has been limited almost exclusively to English Language Arts and mathematics. Furthermore, the source of the professional development has come from both outside consultants and BOCES trainers.

In terms of the professional development that has been provided within the districts that participated in the study, specific levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) have provided varying degrees of professional development opportunities to their faculty because the levels are at different stages in their Common Core implementation. Namely, elementary and middle schools have provided more professional development than high schools.

Another finding from research question one was that the districts that participated in this study have altered the role of their professional development committees. Furthermore, the educators from the participating districts expressed a degree of concern regarding the new roles and responsibilities of educators in the classroom in a post-CCSS world. Finally, districts that

participated in this study referenced their desire, as a result of the adoption of the Common Core

State Standards, to have an effective coaching model in their schools.

Numerous findings resulted from the second research question. Namely, in the

participating districts for this study, the Common Core has driven the curriculum that is being

taught in schools. Additionally, school districts have been utilizing the modules from engageNY

and, given the three categories of adapt, adopt, and abandon, districts have chosen to adapt the

modules. Furthermore, the interview questions for research question two found that a lack of

both financial and human resources have hampered the implementation efforts in the

participating school districts. Also, as a result of the new standards, districts that were included

in this study have re-allocated funds and human resources in an effort to successfully implement

the CCSS.

Research question two led to the finding that, in the opinion of the educators who were

part of this study, there was a lack of quality Common Core aligned resources available.

Furthermore, educators who were interviewed for this study would have liked training on how to

write assessments that are aligned to the new standards and how to effectively use the modules.

Finally, the depth of knowledge that the curriculum, which is based on the Common Core State

Standards, requires of students may be developmentally inappropriate.

The third research question led to important findings. Specifically, to the extent that the

formative and summative assessments being utilized have changed, the change has been driven

by changes in the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) guidelines, and not the

Common Core State Standards. In addition, the educators interviewed for this study believed

there was a lack of training on how to write assessments that are aligned to the new standards. In

terms of formative assessments, their use has not been greatly influenced by the CCSS. Educators who were interviewed for this study viewed formative assessment as a best practice that was being incorporated in classrooms irrespective of the Common Core adoption. The participants do believe, however, that the modules from engageNY have led to an increased use of formative assessments in classroom.

Research question three led to the finding that districts were utilizing data driven instruction (DDI) prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, but the new APPR guidelines have led to a greater focus on DDI. Finally, while more student performance data is being accumulated at the classroom level, the new APPR regulations have decreased the proper use of that data to drive instruction.

Conclusions

Based on the interviews with educators from the districts of varying size and demographics that participated in this study, it can be concluded that neither the size, nor the demographic composition of the school districts, influenced the implementation of the Common Core Standards. The aforementioned findings from this research were applicable to all of the participating school districts, regardless of their size or demographics.

It can also be concluded that, based on those who participated in this study, educators were generally supportive of the Common Core Standards themselves. Per the interviews for this research, which included educators at various levels within the participating school districts, this support was present at the system leader, administrator with district-wide curriculum responsibilities, principal, and classroom teacher levels. This support is extremely critical to recognize. Recently, there has been a great deal of controversy regarding the future of the

Common Core in New York. The media has added to this controversy by not always accurately reporting the subtle distinctions between standards, curriculum, assessments, and teacher performance scores. This general level of support should be taken into account as important policy decisions are made in the future.

Another conclusion of this study is that the decision by the New York State Board of Regents to include the implementation of the Common Core as part of a larger, more complex agenda of reform hindered the successful implementation of the CCSS in New York. Specifically, in addition to the Common Core, the Regents Reform Agenda included an increased emphasis on data-driven instruction and new regulations governing the APPR process in New York State. As the previous research indicated, educational reforms, especially ones as massive as the adoption of new standards and a subsequent curriculum based on those standards, do not occur in a vacuum. The aspect of the Regents Reform Agenda that was most in contradiction and competition with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards was the new APPR requirements for school districts. If the Regents did not include the new APPR regulations, which included the results of assessments based on the new standards, the narrative of New York's CCSS implementation would have been much more positive and productive. In sum, it can be concluded from this research that the coupling of implementing these new standards with the roll out of a larger Regents Reform Agenda had a negative effect on the ability of districts to successfully prepare and support educators as they attempted to effectively implement the Common Core, especially in terms of professional development, curriculum, and assessment.

Finally, the fiscal climate during the period of implementation in New York State further hindered the ability of districts to implement the Common Core successfully. The adoption of the

Common Core State Standards by New York State came during a challenging fiscal period. Without question, state funding to school districts was in a downward trend, which caused fiscal strain for school districts throughout the state. Because the implementation of the CCSS occurred during this time of decreasing budgets, the fiscal climate had an adverse effect on the CCCS roll-out, as both human and curricular resources were less available than what would have been optimum.

Recommendations

Policy-makers should consider a phased in approach when implementing large-scale reforms. A more gradual approach would be consistent with the existing research (Confrey & Krupa, 2010). Specifically, a reform effort similar to the Common Core State Standards should begin with the development of standards followed by the writing of curriculum aligned to those standards. The next logical step would be to write assessments that measure student progress toward mastering the new standards. Once the standards, curriculum, and assessments are in place, states should focus on professional development for the educators charged with implementing the reform. Finally, the development of teacher and principal accountability measures would be the last step in this gradual approach.

The implementation of standards based reforms should not be coupled with other reform efforts. By combining the implementation of new standards with other reform movements, such as new evaluation requirements, necessary preparation, focus, and funds will be diverted from the new standards based reform. This will increase the likelihood that the standard based reform will not be successfully implemented.

State education departments should implement large-scale reforms that involve new standards and curriculum using a staggered approach. Specifically, the Common Core should have been implemented one grade at a time starting in kindergarten or in smaller groupings of grades, such as primary, elementary, middle, and high school. This staggered approach would allow students to learn the necessary material based on the new standards before moving on to a higher grade level. Without a staggered approach, inevitably gaps of knowledge will result as students move to the next grade before they have been exposed to the necessary content.

Recommendations for Further Study

It is too early to fully assess the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in school districts across New York State, including in terms of professional development, curriculum, and assessments. Consequently, more research is needed as districts continue to implement the Common Core. Specifically, additional research will be necessary to determine if student achievement levels increased as a result of the new standards. The research must also address whether the achievement gap was decreased and whether students are more college and career ready as a result of the Common Core State Standards.

In addition, if the fiscal climate improves in New York State, districts may be able to increase the number of administrators and teachers they employ. This would allow districts to increase staff in an effort to improve the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, including potentially moving toward a coaching model, which was a desire specifically referenced in the findings. If staffing levels increase, research should be done to study if the increase in staff led to higher student achievement levels. Furthermore, research will be needed to determine the most effective use of new staff.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the professional development for educators in your district?

2. In your district, who determines the professional development plan? Did that person/committee develop an updated professional development plan based on CCSS implementation?

3. How has your district utilized outside consultants to train teachers on the CCSS?

4. How has your district utilized BOCES to train teachers on the CCSS?

5. Has your district increased or decreased instructional staff and administrators in preparation for the implementation of the CCSS?

6. What additional training would you/your staff benefit from?

7. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the curriculum being utilized in your district?

8. Are you/your district implementing the curriculum modules from engageNY?

9. Has your district increased or decreased its funding for curriculum materials due to the CCSS?

10. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the assessments being used in your district?

11. Have you/your staff received training on how to develop assessments that are CCSS focused?

12. Has your district encouraged the use of more formative assessments as a result of the CCSS? If yes, please explain.

13. To what extent has the implementation of the CCSS increased the district's focus on Data Driven Instruction?

Appendix B

Research Questions and the Corresponding Interview Questions Chart

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?	1. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the professional development for educators in your district? 2. In your district, who determines the professional development plan? Did that person/committee develop an updated professional development plan based on CCSS implementation? 3. How has your district utilized outside consultants to train teachers on the CCSS? 4. How has your district utilized BOCES to train teachers on the CCSS? 5. Has your district increased or decreased instructional staff and administrators in preparation for the implementation of the CCSS? 6. What additional training would you/your staff benefit from?

As a result of the Common Core State Standards, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?	7. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the curriculum being utilized in your district? 8. Are you/your district implementing the curriculum modules from engageNY? 9. Has your district increased or decreased its funding for curriculum materials due to the CCSS?
How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?	10. To what extent has the CCSS impacted the assessments being used in your district? 11. Have you/your staff received training on how to develop assessments that are CCSS focused? 12. Has your district encouraged the use of more formative assessments as a result of the CCSS? If yes, please explain. 13. To what extent has the implementation of the CCSS increased the district's focus on Data Driven Instruction?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form Cover Letter

Dear Educator,

      I am a doctoral candidate at Sage College of Albany in the Educational Leadership Program. I am conducting research in order to analyze the impact of the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) on professional development, curriculum, and assessments in selected school districts in the Capital Region of New York State. Your participation involves being interviewed. The interview will consist of questions regarding your experience with your school district's implementation of these new standards.

      If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. There is minimal risk involved with this study based on the subject matter that is being investigated and your position in the school district. The researcher will take all precautions to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Participation in the interview will be voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime.

      The benefit of your participation results in adding to the literature in the area of the implementation of the CCLS.

      If you have any questions concerning the research study, please e-mail me at francj3@sage.edu. In addition, if you have any concerns about this research, please feel free to contact my doctoral chairperson. His name is Dr. John Johnson, Assistant Professor, Sage Colleges. His e-mail address is johnsj16@sage.edu.

      All results of the research will be made available in a summary format to the school leaders involved in the study and will be presented at the Sage College Doctoral Colloquium in the fall of 2014.

      Please sign the attached consent form, and return to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for your time.

James R. Franchini
Doctoral Student, Sage Graduate School

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

To: _____

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled: **The Implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards: A Qualitative Study of Districts of Differing Size and Demographic Composition.**

This research is being conducted by:

- Principal Investigator: Dr. John Johnson

- Student Investigator: James R. Franchini

The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze the impact of the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) on professional development, curriculum, and assessments in selected school districts in the Capital Region of New York State.
The methods of inquiry include data elicited from approximately twenty personal and/or telephone interviews with educators at various levels [superintendents, administrators with district level curriculum responsibilities, principals, and teachers] within the selected districts who have played a critical role in the implementation of the CCLS in their district.

Research Questions

1. How have districts prepared administrators and faculty for the implementation of the CCLS?
2. As a result of the CCLS, how have districts modified the curriculum they are using in their classrooms?
3. **How have formative and summative assessments in selected districts in the Capital Region of New York State changed since the implementation of the CCLS?**

As part of the research, through the process mentioned, the student investigator has selected you for a 45-minute interview so that he can investigate the impact of the implementation of the CCLS on you and your district. The interviews will be audio taped using a digital recorder to better help the researcher capture the essence of the interview. All digital recordings will be destroyed after the research is completed. The researcher will only share the recordings with an approved transcriber and your identity will be kept confidential. This interview is voluntary and you can opt out at anytime without penalty by the researcher or your school district.

The benefit of your participation is that your input for this project will add to the literature in the area of the implementation of the CCLS.

There is minimal risk involved with this study based upon the subject matter that is being investigated, and your position in the school district, should you agree to participate and if you are selected. The researcher will take all precautions to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Participation in the interview if you are selected will be voluntary.   The interview, and the information received from your school district, will be confidential. All interviews will be coded using pseudo names by the researcher. All interviews will be audio taped for the purpose of keeping an accurate account of the conversation, and will not be used in public. The researcher will be using an audio tape and create a file on his computer where your audio tape will be filed during data collection and other interviews. The file will be password protected. All audio files will be destroyed upon completion of the study and by no later than December 2014. Please place your initials here to indicate your permission.

_____

I understand that I may at any time during the course of this study revoke my consent and withdraw from the study without any penalty.

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this consent form and to ask questions concerning the study. Any such questions have been answered to my full and complete satisfaction.

I, _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby volunteer to participate in this research study.

Signed: _____

Research participant: This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human subjects. If you, as a participant, have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Esther Haskvitz, Dean
Sage Graduate Schools
School of Health Sciences
65 First Street
Troy, New York 12180
518-244-2264
haskve@sage.edu

Appendix E

Pre and Post-Interview Script

Pre-Script

"Hello, my name is James Franchini and I am doctoral candidate at the Sage Graduate Schools. Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview which is part of research for my dissertation. As you know, my research focuses on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in school districts of differing size and demographics. Specifically, I am investigating the impact of curriculum, professional development, and assessments as a result of these standards.

During this interview, I will be asking you approximately thirteen questions. The intent of the questions is to help me understand how the implementation of the Common Core State Standards have impacted the work you do in your school district.

Your interview will be recorded and transcribed. The tape will be destroyed and the files containing the transcription will be deleted upon the completion of my dissertation. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of the school districts and interviewees. You do not need to answer all of the questions and have the right to withdraw from the study at any point."

Post-Script

"Thank you for participating in my research by completing this interview. If you have any follow-up questions, please contact me at francj3@sage.edu."

Appendix F

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Agreement and acknowledgement between Patricia Franchini (transcriber) and James R. Franchini (client/student researcher).

The client has or shall furnish to the transcriber certain confidential information, all on the following conditions:

1. The transcriber agrees to hold all confidential or proprietary information in trust and confidence and agrees that it shall be used only for the contemplated purposes, and shall not be used for any other purpose or disclosed to any third party under any circumstances, whatsoever.
2. No copies may be made or retained of any digital audio or written information supplied.
3. At the conclusion of our discussions, or upon demand by the client, all information, including digital, audio, or written notes shall be returned to the client. Transcriber shall not retain copies or written documentation relating thereto.
4. This information shall not be disclosed to any employee, consultant, or third party unless party agrees to execute and be bound by the terms of this agreement, and disclosure by client is first approved.
5. The transcriber acknowledges the information disclosed herein is proprietary and in the event of any breach, the client shall be entitled to injunction relief as a cumulative and not necessarily successive or exclusive remedy to a claim for monetary damages.
6. This constitutes the entire agreement. Signed this ___ day of _____, 2013.

Signed:

_____   _____
Transcriber (Patricia A. Franchini)   Date

_____   _____
Client (James R. Franchini)   Date

Witnessed:

_____   _____
Witness (Signature)   Date

_____
Witness (Printed)