EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS
WITH COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION:
A STUDY OF ONE CALIFORNIAN HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Thesis

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MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

by

Sara Jaclyn Adan

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

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Department Chair

Edward P. Lascher, Jr., Ph.D.

Date: November 20, 2015

Department of Public Policy and Administration
Abstract

of

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Academic achievement in the United States is low, with students graduating high school unprepared for college and the workforce. To remedy this issue, 42 states fully adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS outlines what students should know in English Language Arts (ELA) and math at the end of each grade—kindergarten through 12th grade. The overall goal of the CCSS is to prepare students for colleges and careers by developing their critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. In 2013, California fully implemented the standards.

To understand the implementation activities in high schools, this exploratory thesis utilized data from a larger qualitative study conducted by the Education Insights Center. I used 24 high school educator interview transcripts from two different schools in one northern California school district. I focused on three themes I believed provided the best insights about implementation activities—teacher preparedness, schools' relationship with postsecondary institutions, and how the CCSS relates to college and career readiness.

Overall educators were optimistic about the CCSS. However, most educators stated they wanted more time and money to implement the CCSS and some wanted more direction from the
state as they were unsure if they were implementing it correctly. Even with wanting more time and money, teachers found being student-centered and “flipping” their classrooms helped students learn and engage more with the lessons. Educators were also concerned about what postsecondary institutions were expecting of incoming students and what admissions changes they were making in light of the CCSS, as they did not have that information. Lastly, educators were confident they could prepare students for college, but they were unsure about preparing them for the workforce.

I provided key implications from my findings to help improve the CCSS implementation, including needing more guidance from the state, having better coordination between high schools and postsecondary institutions, ensuring teachers have the content knowledge to teach subjects at a deeper level, receiving business input on schools’ CTE offerings, and reconsidering the public CCSS messaging. I concluded with suggestions for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my thesis advisors Andrea and Su Jin, thank you for your patience with all curveballs life threw me this past year. I did not finish this thesis on time, but without your guidance and words of encouragement, I know I would still be working on it.

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Lastly, I want to thank my little nephew Lexy who was on my case all summer about finishing this thesis. Buddy, we can finally go out and play.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Adam Smith once said, “The state derives no inconsiderable advantage from the education of the common people. If instructed they ... are less liable to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders” (1776). Many people share this idea that education is the means to combat primitive beliefs, as well as add to a society’s overall economic well-being. However, education provides more benefit than simply dispelling myths and adding coins to governing entities’ coffers. Education can increase social cohesion, such as voting and volunteering; decrease crime; and increase health, both physical and psychological (e.g. Behrman and Stacey, 1997; OECD, 2010). Given the individual and societal benefits of education, it is clear why many discussions and research focus on it.

In the United States, education is an important topic for local, state, and federal policymakers as we are no longer the world’s educational powerhouse. In 2012, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted a study comparing student performance between the 34 OECD countries. The United States ranked 27, 20, and 17 in math, science, and writing, respectively (OECD, 2014). Domestically, the test scores tell the same story. In 2013, only 26 percent and 38 percent of 12th graders were proficient in math and reading (NAEP, 2013). California’s 11th grade students performed nominally better with 33 and 27 percent being proficient in math and reading (CDE, 2013).
While the overall academic performance is alarming, education equity is another concern as there are huge achievement gaps between American students. Achievement gaps are present based on a variety of student characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and native language. For instance, African-American and Latino students tend to have lower levels of achievement than white students. In California, this is especially true with high school graduation rates (See Table 1). The graduation rate for white students’ was 88 percent in 2013, whereas, Latino and African-American students’ graduation rates were 76 and 68 percent, respectively (California Department of Education, 2014a). Of graduating African-American and Latino students, only 29 percent were California State University (CSU)/University of California (UC) eligible as compared to the 47 percent of white graduates (CDE, 2014b). This trend is present when examining other demographic variables. English languages learners and low-income students have lower graduation and CSU/UC eligibility rates than their wealthier and native speaking counterparts.

In total, the achievement and equity issues have painted an alarming picture of U.S. education and the future of its workforce, prompting an examination of the education system. Based on these and other data, the National Governor’s Association;

<table>
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<th>High School Graduation Rate</th>
<th>CSU/UC Eligibility Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>68%</td>
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Council of Chief State School Officers; and Achieve, Inc. proposed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), an education reform to support the development of college and career readiness for a large proportion of students upon graduating from high school.

This thesis examines high school educators’ experiences and perceptions on the CCCS and its implementation in one high school district. Before discussing more about my thesis, it is important to understand why public education is important.

**U.S. Public Education**

Historically, education in the U.S. has been a local issue where the authority resides with local government agencies. However, free high school education was not available to all children until the 20th century. During that time, the rationale for needing public education varied from it being morally right to Americanizing immigrant children (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Even today, there is not a clear consensus about the purpose of public education. Some educators believe public education should assist students in reaching their potential, while others note it should help students lead satisfying lives or be ready for the workforce (Peifer, 2014). The Center on Education Policy synthesized the various views of public education’s purpose into six categories:

1. Provide universal access to free education
2. Guarantee equal opportunities for all children
3. Unify a diverse population
4. Prepare people for citizenship in a democratic society

---

1 See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on CCSS
5. Prepare people to become economically self-sufficient

6. Improve social conditions

While the categories can also apply to private schools (except one and two), 90 percent of American children receive a public education as opposed to a private one (Jennings, 2013). Given the expensive tuitions normally associated with private schools and their ability to deny admission, the majority of American children attend public schools (Center on Educational Policy, 2007). Without public schools, it is conceivable that only the wealthy or high achieving students would receive an education (i.e. through scholarships) given many parents could not afford tuition and private institutions would not have incentives to provide scholarships to low-achieving students, students with disabilities, or even every high achieving student. It is for this reason that public education is necessary —to ensure all American children have access to a free education.

With the creation of a public system, the government became involved in allocating funds and ensuring schools are accountable to certain standards. Through federalism, the federal government had a limited role in public education and the responsibility was locally rooted with education being the purview of state and local entities (Faber, 1991). Through the local control, the U.S. has 50 unique education systems with states differing in various aspects, such as adopting a statewide curriculum or allowing districts to create their own (Gottfried, Stecher, Hoover, & Cross, 2011).

While having local control in education allows states and districts to provide the best education to their unique student populations, it can lead to great variation in student achievement and equity (Gottfried et al., 2011). Besides the differences in curricula, the
differences in available resources such as financial and professional resources (e.g. leadership, access to expertise, and overall educators' skills), contributes to the equity and achievement variations. The financial aspect is especially salient given the great disparities between states. For example, the New York City school district spent about $20,000 per student in 2012, whereas San Francisco Unified only spent $9,000 (Badger, 2014).

With the variation between states, it raises the question if students are receiving an equitable public education, which provides a role for the federal government. The federal government assists in ensuring parity and it achieves this through legislation and funding. The federal government has created programs that awards funding to states and schools to provide services for low-income and low-achieving students (Gottfried et al., 2011). The most notable program is Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that provides additional funding to help low-income students in the classroom and to close achievement gaps.\(^2\) In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was one of the largest national education reforms that required yearly standardized testing and increased accountability of schools and the states.\(^3\) However, these efforts were not successful in increasing student achievement as the National Assessment of Educational Progress high school math and reading scores have been stagnate since 1973 (NCES, 2013.). With NCLB being largely ineffective, education stakeholders looked for a new and better reform to address student achievement issues.

\(^2\) See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion
\(^3\) See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion
Brief Discussion of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Policymakers and educators were concerned about the state of education and student achievement. A taskforce comprised of the National Governor's Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and states created the CCSS in 2009. The premise of the CCSS is having universal education standards that will prepare students for college and careers. The CCSS proponents hope this reform will achieve this by having fewer standards that require deeper learning to make students think critically about the content, work collaboratively, and effectively communicate (Hewlett Foundation, N.D.). To make the standards a reality in the classroom, teachers will need to adjust their instruction and curriculum, which will hopefully result in a higher quality of both.

Since the release of the CCSS, 42 states have adopted the standards. California adopting them in August 2010. The standards are for grades K-12 and focus on English Language Arts (ELA) and math. While the primary focus is on math and ELA, the standards span all subject areas, as High school curricula will require more writing in all subjects. Students will need to cite evidence to support their analysis of non-fiction and technical texts as a means to demonstrate their understanding of the material. Overall, students will be required to think more critically about the material, and apply it to real world situations. The increased rigor of the standards, as well as the increased quality in instruction and curriculum is expected to help students become college and career ready. However, it will take many academic years before researchers can evaluate the CCSS to

\* See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on CCSS
determine if it is increasing student achievement and preparing students for college and careers.

**Purpose and Organization of This Study**

The 2013-2014 school year was the first year of full CCSS implementation in California. To understand the implementation activities in high schools, the Education Insights Center (EdInsights), a center focusing on student readiness and success research, conducted a qualitative study funded through The William and Hewlett Foundation, a philanthropic non-profit which funds research that will improve people’s lives. EdInsights and the Hewlett Foundation identified a number of topics they deemed pertinent in understanding high school CCSS implementation. EdInsights conducted a qualitative study where they interviewed state officials, county office of education administrators, as well as, high school educators and district administrators at four different schools, in two districts to understand the issues and successes of the CCSS implementation.

The purpose of this exploratory thesis is to understand one Californian high school district’s experiences and perceptions in implementing CCSS as there is a current gap in the research. Using data from the EdInsights’ project, I focused on one school district and examined three themes—teacher preparedness, the schools’ relationship with postsecondary institutions, and how the CCSS is related to college and career readiness. I focused on those themes, since I believed they would provide the best insight about implementation activities and educators’ perceptions of the CCSS’s ability to help students be college and career ready.
This chapter described low student achievement and provided a brief overview of the CCSS (a more detailed discussion will be provided in Chapter Two). In Chapter Two, I will present a limited overview of the U.S. public education history, the standards movement, and the rationale for focusing on teacher preparedness, schools' relationship with postsecondary institutions, and the CCSS' relationship with college and career readiness. Then in Chapter Three, I will discuss the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data, which was through interviews with high school educators and analyzing the transcripts utilizing my three themes as the analytical frame. In Chapter Four, I will present my findings from the interviews. Finally, in Chapter Five I will provide key implications.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will present a historical overview of the U.S. K-12 public education system to provide context and a roadmap for the creation of the CCSS. I also offer a literature review on the themes I investigated for this thesis. I will first discuss the literature on teacher preparedness, followed by college and career readiness, and then finally a brief discussion on high school-postsecondary relationships.

History and Context of Public K-12 Education

The Common School Movement

In the early 1800’s, the U.S. experienced westward expansion and an influx of non-Protestant immigrants. Many American citizens and government officials believed the U.S. expansion and arrival of immigrants were disintegrating the social thread holding America together. The remedy for repairing the societal thread was education, which birthed the common school movement in the 1830’s. This movement relocated schools from being solely in the private sector to the public sector, making schooling available to all children. Horace Mann, frequently referred to as the father of the common school, argued common schools would not only assuage the moral and social issues many believed America faced, but would also level the playing field between the rich and the poor—a common argument still used in education reform discussions today (Jeynes, 2007).

Through the common school movement, more structures and systems were implemented to run public schools. Local education boards, and state and national
groups, such as the National Education Association (currently the largest professional employee organization committed to education), were created to oversee and support public schools. In addition to the creation of those organizations, the common school movement brought education professionalism to the forefront. Professional journals disseminated teaching practices, and professional standards were created to help teachers develop curriculum and tests. Even with the national changes the common school movement brought, local governments had control in determining the best ways to deliver education in their communities (Kirst, N.D.).

While the common school movement supporters wanted education for all students, various laws forbade some groups of people from being educated. These groups were slaves in the South and even some free African Americans in the North (Duster, 2009). For example, in slave-holding southern states, white citizens received fines if they taught a slave to read or write. In northern states like Delaware and Ohio, it was illegal to offer free schooling or, in some instances, any schooling to non-white children. The result of these laws was a 10 percent literacy rate among the African American community in 1865 compared to about 88 percent of white citizens (Duster, 2009; NCES, 1993). This equity issue is one that is present throughout the history of education, which would prompt the standards movement and the CCSS.

Compulsory Schooling

Compulsory schooling first appeared in colonial Massachusetts during 1652, but did not become a legislative norm until 1890 (Katz, 1976). However, each state's law differed in regard to the minimum years of schooling required, the sanctions for truancy,
and who could be exempt from the law. Even though many states implemented a compulsory school law, some states did not uphold it due to a variety of reasons. The most common reason was the lack of facilities and other resources to adequately house and education students. Thus making low school attendance a benefit to the schools (Katz, 1976). It was not until the 1920s that state compulsory laws were strictly enforced and students regularly attended school. Additional funding, especially once states tied it to student daily attendance, helped enforce the laws.

While the common school movement had great intentions of education for all students, children of color either received a subpar education or were barred from receiving one at all. This resulted in inequalities in the system and prevented the common school movement from being fully realized (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009; Brown, 2009). Native-, Mexican-, and African-American children did not receive a traditional education. Vocational tracking was a common practice that often left these children without a proper education or any real skills as schools trained them in obsolete vocations (Brown, 2009). Some researchers believe the real motive of government officials and people in power for providing this inequitable education was to Americanize these children and give them Christian values as opposed to providing them with a real education (Brown, 2009).

African-American children also experienced an additional layer of inequalities during this movement. Plessey v. Ferguson passed in 1896, which upheld a law legalizing the creation of separate, but equal public facilities for white citizens and any citizens of color. This law also included schools; however, the African-American schools were not
equal and many of them received inadequate funding as compared to white schools. Many African-American schools were in dilapidated buildings with outdated textbooks and underprepared teachers, which led to African-American students achieving at lower levels than their white counterparts (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). The inequality between white and African-American schools would persist during the 21st century, and would eventually lead to the start of major education reforms, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

*The Great Society and the ESEA*

Minority children continued to have unequal access to the same quality schooling as white students. However, the Supreme Court overturned the exclusionary decision of Plessey v. Ferguson in 1954 with the Brown v. Board of Education class action lawsuit. This lawsuit argued that segregation in schools violated the 14th amendment of equal protection given that white and African-American schools were not and would never be equal. The Supreme Court agreed with Brown's argument and required all public schools to desegregate. It took almost 20 years for full compliance with this law; however, de facto segregation still occurs, thus keeping many schools segregated. Nonetheless, Brown v. Board of Education led to the desegregation of all schools and would be the catalyst for further education reforms (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014).

The next major education reform occurred in 1965 with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was part of President Johnson’s comprehensive program, the Great Society of 1964, which aimed to end poverty, promote equality, revitalize cities, and improve education (Tumulty, 2014).
Johnson was especially concerned about education as he was a former teacher, but he also believed, as many before him, that education was the key to solving social issues (Tumulty, 2014). To improve education, the ESEA (which still an active act today) is comprised of six sections that attends to various aspects of the education system. For example, Title II provides funding for textbooks, library resources, and other instructional materials, whereas Title V provides funding to state educational agencies to improve the quality of schools in their states.

The most well-known aspect of the ESEA is Title I, which offers additional funding to schools with large low-income student populations (Yell, 2013). Title I aims to assist these schools by providing additional funds to close achievement gaps. Schools utilize this funding for a variety of purposes such as hiring additional teachers, and providing professional development, supplementary materials, and technology. The two stipulations for Title I funding are that resources must be used to help close achievement gaps and must service low-income students. The literature is mixed on the ESEA’s effectiveness in increasing student achievement. However, the federal government has reauthorized it over the years and the ESEA moved education into a new era of the standards movement (Farkas et al., 2000; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Evolution of the Standards Movement

The standards movement started in the 1980’s. The basis for the movement is that standards would establish consistent student expectations and would provide measurable information about student achievement (Mathison, 2004). As mentioned earlier, equity in education has been an ongoing issue, and during this time it was a partial driver for the
standard's movement. A subset of policymakers and researchers believed the equity issue could be assuaged through high standards for all students regardless of their background. In this section, I will present an overview of the standards movement, with a discussion on *A Nation at Risk*, No Child Left Behind, and the CCSS to illustrate how the education system evolved to adopt the CCSS and what high schools are currently implementing in the classrooms.

*A Nation at Risk*

During the 1970's, many schools were more liberal, allowing students to choose their classes. Many schools employed the "cafeteria style" that provided more non-academic options and less focus on college preparation. This was an attempt to make schools more equitable and friendly, especially for at-risk students (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). Many policymakers and researchers were concerned that this cafeteria style watered down the curricula. That coupled with the economic downturn and high unemployment rates, caused great concern about the education system. The release of *A Nation at Risk*, a blue ribbon report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), highlighted these issues and others, along with the failures of the U.S. education system. This report would start the education standards movement in the U.S. with student achievement increasing as a result (Schmidt et al. 2001; Teitelbaum, 2003).

*A Nation at Risk* stated almost 13 percent of 17-year-olds American were functionally illiterate, 40 percent could not make inferences from readings, and only one-third could solve multistep math problems (The National Commission on Excellence in
Education, 1983). The report documented a 72 percent increase in enrollment for remedial college classes, and businesses and the military noted their workers lacked the basic reading, writing, and math skills needed for the workforce. In sum, this report found American schools were leaning more towards mediocrity than scholastic excellence. This was especially salient for historically at-risk students as it moved the conversation away from access to one about quality (Birman, 2003). The argument employed is that having access to an education did not necessarily follow that children had access to quality education. The education system needed to change to ensure students were receiving a quality education.

_A Nation at Risk_ made recommendations to resolve the education system’s issues. One was raising expectations and standards for student learning, with a focus on content (Birman, 2003). Another recommendation was to expand high school graduation requirements by increasing the numbers of years students needed in English and math, as well adding more hours to the school days and more days to the academic school year (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). However, reform did not happen overnight. Over the next few years, states and various subject matter expert groups, like The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, created new curricula and standards (Mathison, 2004). Then in 1994, President Clinton passed Goals 2000: Education America Act, which aimed for measureable world-class academic standards for student progress, as well as providing supports to students to meet the standards (Paris, 1994).
Over the next two decades, schools implemented education standards that focused on content, performance, and accountability with the last two measured through assessments. For example, California implemented the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test in 1998 to assess student performance. Interestingly, when the accountability portion was implemented achievement started to decline again, which prompted the need for new reform. However, research conducted years later would posit the decrease in achievement was a coincidence and that the accountability reform did not cause the decline in achievement (e.g. Harris & Herrington, 2006). Nonetheless, given the information policymakers had in the late 1990’s, the nation implemented a new reform to increase achievement.

No Child Left Behind Act

President George W. Bush reauthorized the ESEA with bipartisan support. When he signed the bill into law, he renamed it No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB aimed to enhance and expand upon standards-based education to improve overall education and have all students, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or ability, be proficient in math and reading by 2014. The four pillars of NCLB were more freedom for states and communities (how they can spend federal funds); research-based curriculum and instruction (federal funds available for research-based programs); more choices for parents (parents can transfer their student out of a low performing school); and increased accountability (annual report cards) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The most prominent pillar is the accountability portion, which was measured through yearly standardized tests. States had control in how they prepared their students
for the tests and how they would use their federal dollars. However, these tests also gave the federal government more power because if schools were not making adequate progress the federal government could intervene and impose sanctions on schools.

Some policymakers and educators criticized the accountability portion of NCLB as they believed the goals and timelines were not feasible or fair — schools could not reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014 (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Their concerns were validated as 38 percent of schools were unable to meet the 2010 benchmarks. Given the pressure from the federal government for schools to test well, some researchers have claimed states watered down their curricula to ensure students would pass the tests (Birman, 2003). Some believe the decrease in curricula quality occurred because state leaders did not want to risk political backlash for low-test scores that could undermine their work in other areas or their re-election chances (Birman, 2003; Kolodziej, 2011). Furthermore, since NCLB allowed states to create their own standards, it was impossible to determine the true level of student achievement in the U.S. For example, 90 percent of Oklahoma schools reached their Adequate Yearly Progress metric as opposed to only 50 percent of Massachusetts schools; however, Massachusetts’ students actually outperformed Oklahoma’s and attained more knowledge given their state standards were more rigorous than Oklahoma’s (Michelman, 2012).

Subsets of teachers and policymakers were not the only groups that disliked NCLB; the general public did not hold a very favorable view of it as well. The Pew Center’s public opinion poll found 26 percent of Americans believed NCLB had a negative effect on schools (Pew Center, 2007). Overtime other opinion polls would show
similar public dismay. One of the largest complaints is that schools were teaching to test, which focused on rote memorization. The public and some researchers believed it was decreasing student achievement and students were not truly learning—they were simply regurgitating facts.

However, some research has indicated student achievement increased after the implementation of NCLB, but it is unclear that NCLB was the underlying factor for the increase. During that timeframe, states and districts were implementing new instructional strategies that were not part of NCLB. Thus, the causation for the increased student achievement cannot be determined (Center for Education, 2007; Jennings and Rentner, 2006). Still, the public perception, especially concerning the increased standardized testing, was so damaging that an education overhaul was inevitable. In the presidential race, then candidate Barack Obama vowed to fix NCLB.

Common Core State Standards

Education reform research conducted in the early 2000’s aimed to understand the current state of the system and student performance under NCLB. In 2004, the American Diploma Project released a report stating many high school graduates needed remedial interventions in college because they were not adequately prepared in high school (Achieve, 2004). The report’s findings prompted the National Governor’s Association; Council of Chief State School Officers; and Achieve, Inc., to examine this issue further. This investigation resulted in a task force report in 2008, and would be the birth of the CCSS. The report highlights the decline of education in the U.S. and details how other countries are outperforming U.S. students, as well as the need for improving the
educational system as a whole (NGO, CCSSO, & Achieve, 2008). The report outlines four areas needing attention to correct the education issues plaguing the U.S.:

1. Improve the education standards
2. States working cooperatively to ensure curricula, materials, and assessments are aligned to the internationally benchmarked standards
3. Revise state standards to improve teacher preparedness, drawing upon international best practices for school and systems accountability
4. Measure individual state performance within the international frame to ensure students can compete in the new global economy.

The report garnered much attention from states and many policymakers supported this new direction for education. Researchers, state representatives, and state leaders collaborated in 2009 to produce the CCSS. The creation of the standards was an iterative process with much involvement from teachers (CCSS, N.D.a). Teachers participated in national working groups to construct the English language arts (ELA) and math standards, as well as provided ongoing feedback in their state teams.

During this same timeframe, President Obama instituted Race to the Top Fund (RTTT) as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, an Act that aimed to stimulate the economy and invest to various areas, including education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). RTTT is a competitive federal grant for innovative K-12 reform. The four areas it focuses on are:

1. Creation of rigorous standards and better assessments
2. Adoption of better data systems on student progress
3. Support to help teachers and school leaders be more effective

4. Increased support for the rigorous interventions for low-performing schools

One of the conditions for RTTT required states to implement reforms that improve student preparation for college and career success, such as the CCSS (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Due to this requirement, states quickly adopted the CCSS when it was released in 2010.

The premise of the CCSS is to ensure all states have the same standards, so when students graduated high school their diplomas hold the same meaning and they obtained the same baseline of proficiencies. The standards are divided in two sections—college and career readiness, and K-12 (CCSS, N.D.b). The college and career readiness standards detail what students should know upon graduation and the K-12 standards detail what students should know during the entirety of their primary and secondary academic careers. Still, the ultimate goal for the standards is to make all students college and career ready upon high school graduation (CCSS, N.D.b). The CCSS hopes to achieve this goal by having fewer standards, but those standards require deeper learning. The standards would require students to obtain a solid understanding of the core content, but also gain the ability to apply learning to the real world, think critically about the content, work collaboratively, and be effective communicators (Hewlett Foundation, N.D.).

Much controversy has surrounded the standards with some educators, policymakers, and the general public believing the standards will dictate how educators should teach in the classroom (e.g. Ravitch, 2014; Tuttle, 2013). However, the intention
of the CCSS is to outline what students should know by the end of each grade. For example, one ELA standard states 11th and 12th graders should be able to “integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem” (CCSS, 2010). This standard does not state how educators should meet this standard or how they should teach. In its current form, the CCSS provides teachers the freedom in how their students will meet each standard.

Another concern with CCSS is the assessment component. Similar to NCLB, some educators are afraid the assessments will not actually measure achievement and may force teachers to teach to the test (Chiaramonte, 2013; Greene, 2014). However, the CCSS assessments are different from the NCLB assessments. The NCLB assessments are mostly multiple choice asking the students to select an answer, whereas the CCSS assessments require students to provide the answer. Still much ambiguity surrounds the CCSS assessments, something that in time will be resolved.

The 45 states that have adopted the standards are in one of two consortia for the assessment portion of the CCSS—the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). However, states are not required to participate in either and can create their own tests. California switched from PARCC to SBAC, and students are required to take tests in grades 3 through 8, and 11. California schools have the option to provide formative assessments throughout the year, but they must administer a performance task and an end of year test within the last twelve weeks of school. The performance task test attends to real world
activities whereas the end of year tests measures reading comprehension and mathematical conceptual understanding. During the 2013-2014 school year, Californian schools piloted the SBAC. The state did not hold schools accountable for those test scores, which will continue through the 2015-2016 school year allowing schools more time to work with and understand the CCSS.

The CCSS has learned from the mistakes of past reforms (e.g. watered down standards, increased rote memorization), and it has the potential to engage students in their education and make them critical thinkers. The 2014-2015 school year marks the second year of full CCSS implementation in California schools and there is much to be learned about perceived successes, failures, roadblocks, and opportunities. Unfortunately, little is known on the implementation process for high schools and how high schools are handling this transition. This thesis investigates the experiences and perceptions of one Californian high school district as it implements the CCSS. The next section of this chapter, I will present a review of the literature on the themes I examined for this thesis.

Themes of Interest

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this thesis is part of a large qualitative study that already defined the themes I could use for my study. The themes I used for my thesis were teacher preparedness, postsecondary-high school relationship, and college and career readiness, all through the lens of grades 9-13. I choose those three themes as I felt they provided the best insight on how teachers felt about their implementation efforts and the CCSS’ ability to help students be college and career ready. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the literature on each theme.
Teacher Preparedness

What makes a teacher a good teacher? A considerable body of research exists on the characteristics of a good teacher (Hamachek, 1969; Kulinna & Cothran, 2003; Opdenakker & Van Dammea, 2006). This theme is important to my research since teachers deliver the new standards. They are arguably the most important aspect of the CCSS implementation. If teachers do not understand the standards or have the resources to implement them, the CCSS cannot be successful.

Pre-service Teacher Programs

Pre-service teacher programs are important to my thesis because these programs will be training future teachers in the CCSS era and current teachers may have insights on how and if pre-service programs need to change to better prepare teachers. Furthermore, numerous studies discovered pre-service education is important for a teacher’s success in the classroom (Ashton & Crocker, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Koehler et al., 2013; O’Neill & Stephenson, 2012). This is a salient finding given some policies exist to attract professionals with more real-world content knowledge into high schools. These reforms provided alternative routes for these professionals to become teachers, which normally allowed them to bypass any teacher preparation program. Research has indicated teacher education increases teachers’ knowledge of teaching and student learning (Ashton & Crocker, 1986; Koehler et al., 2013; Monk, 1994). Knowledge of teaching and student learning are more important than a teacher’s content knowledge as it enables a teacher to have more strategies to employ in the classroom, confidence in creating lesson plans, and
skills in classroom management. In sum, what teachers learn in their pre-service programs helps their students' academic achievement.

Additionally, teacher programs can help combat preconceived notions about what makes an effective teacher (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Many student teachers use their own high school experiences as a frame of reference for what teaching and schooling looks like. However, this results in the perpetuation of archaic teaching strategies that are no longer effective (Parjares, 1992). For instance, being student centered is more effective than teacher centered. This approach to teaching moves the focus of the classroom from the teacher to the students (Opdenakker & Van Dammea, 2006). Teachers who engage in student centered teaching are not standing in front of the classroom lecturing at students who are passive receptors of knowledge. Instead, they have students collaborating with one another, with the teacher acting as a facilitator. This type of teaching increases learning opportunities, students' critical thinking, and overall student achievement, especially for low achieving students (Alper, Fendel, Fraser, & Resek, 1996; Bullard, Felder, & Raubenheimer, 2008; Opdenakker & Van Dammea, 2006).

**In-service support and Professional Development**

Teacher learning does not stop after a teacher graduates from a teaching program; it is a continual process (Barr, Watts-Taft, & Yokota, 2000). In-service learning is an interest for my thesis because teachers will need additional support to implement the CCSS. The most common means in which teachers receive support is through professional development (PD). Schools provide ongoing learning or PD for their
teachers that range from one-day workshops, attending conferences, working in professional learning communities, participating in longer in-house programs, and much more (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin; 1995; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Piwowar, Thiel, & Ophardt, 2013). Unfortunately, much PD research is not empirical making it difficult to determine the effectiveness of a PD activity on teacher and student learning (Elmore, 2002; Guskey, 2003). Further, given the complexities involved with PD concerning the content covered, the context for the PD, and the nature of the PD, it is difficult for genuine best practices to exist (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). While a clear gap is present in the literature regarding the effects on various types of PD on teacher performance and student outcomes, some evidence is present on some promising practices.

The literature provides principles for good PD, which includes being connected to practice, intensive, and ongoing; building strong teacher relationships; aligning with school priorities; and being student centered and content driven (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Interestingly one of the most common forms of PD used, workshops, is mostly ineffective as they rarely include any of the PD principles (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Workshops are normally short and do not allow enough time for teachers to absorb the information (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). They rarely provide any follow-up or additional support, which is the main reason workshops are found to be ineffective (Garet et al., 2001). However, if a workshop is teaching new research-based instructional strategy or has teachers being active participants, then the workshop is useful for teacher learning (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).
The literature indicates PD that uses teachers and other staff members as the PD instructor is the most desirable (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Keeping the PD “hyper local” at the district and school level allows teachers to work through issues specific to their schools, students, and teaching style through teachers discussing and sharing their knowledge and experiences (Holloway 2000; Latham 1998). This kind of PD is realized through professional learning communities (PLCs) and peer coaching or mentoring (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001). Schools create the PLCs and form them around shared beliefs, values, or vision, which tends to be subject areas. PLCs work on a variety items such as creating curriculum, learning new instructional strategies, and discussing issues specific to their schools (Bausmith & Barry, 2011).

Peer coaching and mentoring tends to pair an experienced teacher with a less experienced one or has a highly trained staff member help a teacher or groups of teachers with teaching strategies among other teaching aspects. What PLCs and peer coaching and mentoring both share is the follow-up portion, where teachers receive ongoing assistance and can ask questions (Bausmith & Barry, 2011).

Time is always issue, but schools could support teachers by providing them more time for PD. Having more time to collaborate (i.e. PLCs) with other teachers in a meaningful way will help teachers perform better in the classroom, which leads to better student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet et al., 2001). Teachers have stated they would like more release time, meaning they have a period off during the school day, or extra days in the summer to conduct more collaborative work and process
what they have learned in the PD. If they are able to have more time they believe it will improve their curriculum and instruction (Garet et al., 2001).

Teacher preparedness is a theme I believe is important to the success of the CCSS implementation. Having the adequate training and resources, as well as the ability to collaborate with other teachers may help teachers be successful. Through training, teachers may be able to better prepare students for college and the workforce.

**College and Career Readiness**

College and career readiness (CCR) is commonly defined as the ability to take college-level, credit bearing courses without remediation; earn a postsecondary credential; or complete additional training post high school to obtain a position to support a family with advancement opportunities. Debate exists on the exact meaning of CCR and if college and career readiness is one concept (Conley, 2010; Maruyama; 2012). Some view college and career readiness as two separate tracks, but some offer another perspective—that college is postsecondary readiness, which broadens the purview from four-year college to community college and certifications. They also suggest that being college ready will help with career readiness. While some jobs do not require a college degree, the skills necessary to succeed in college are the same needed to be successful in the workforce, such as critical thinking and communication skills (e.g. Achieve, 2004).

CCR is a great concern in the U.S. and California as students are taking longer to graduate college with 50 percent of first time freshmen in the CSU system taking at least six years to graduate (CSU, N.D.). Further, about 40 percent of college students need at least one remedial class, which means they are not coming to college prepared for college
level, credit bearing courses. Some researchers believe that students not being college and career ready may have an adverse effect on the workforce. In 2018 over 63 percent of U.S. jobs will require postsecondary training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Almost 41 percent of Californian jobs will also require postsecondary training. However, only 33 percent of Californians will have a college degree, creating a shortage in the workforce (Reed, 2008). A recent report states California will be short 1.1 million college educated workers in 2030 (Johnson, Cuellar Mejia, and Bohn, 2015).

Even if a student does have a degree or a postsecondary education, employers state they have difficulty finding qualified employees, which they believe is caused by students not having the 21st century skills the workforce demands (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2006). Learning, life and career, and technology skills are the three broad skill sets that commonly comprise the 21st century skills as outlined in Table 2 (Pittman, 2010). Unfortunately, many students leave high school without having these skills. Some researchers and employers believe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Critical thinking, collaboration, communication, problem solving, precision, and accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and Career</td>
<td>Soft skills like time management, organization, taking ownership of learning, persistence, flexibility, and initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Technology literacy, and the ability to keep pace with rapid technological changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

this makes these high school graduates undesirable in the workforce. Furthermore, they also believe it contributes to students needing more time to graduate college because
these skills would also make them successful in college (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

Extant research has uncovered a variety of factors that predict CCR. High school GPA and test scores from the ACT, SAT, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) can predict college success in regard to performance and retention (Adelman, 1999; Allen et al., 2008; Lee, 2012). However, GPAs and test scores only show part of the story. Non-cognitive skills such as study habits, class attendance, following instructions, being a good communicator, working collaboratively, and managing time, are factors for college readiness and success (Kappe, & van der Flier, 2010; Komarraju, Ramsey & Rinella, 2013; Le et al., 2005). Some research suggests these traits influence GPA and test scores in high school, which means non-cognitive skills may play a larger role in student success than GPA and test scores (Sawyer, 2007).

Interestingly, research briefly mentions career readiness, but primarily focus on college readiness as the indicator of readiness (An, 2013; Hooker & Brand, 2010; Maruyama; 2012). There is a gap in the literature on how effective career readiness standards and curricula are in preparing students to be career ready (e.g. Bozick & Dalton, 2013). This gap exists because creating accurate measurements for a vast array of careers is extremely difficult. However, research has found balancing high school career technical education (CTE) courses with traditional academic courses is necessary, as students will not meet academic benchmarks if they take too many CTE courses. While engineering and other applied math and science courses have been beneficial for some students struggling in the academic versions of these classes, students still need
traditional academic courses like English to have success in education and careers (Bozick & Dalton, 2013).

Even though the empirical literature does not address the career component of readiness as thoroughly, many policy briefs and program evaluations on some facets of CCR exist. For example, researchers studied dual enrollment and middle college programs extensively through program evaluation and briefs. In these programs, high school students are taking college credit courses while still in high school with the end result having students are more prepared for college (An, 2013; Edmunds, 2012; Hooker & Brand, 2010). These programs are often viewed as useful tools to support CCR because they save students time and money in college. Furthermore, students in those programs tend to perform better in college in regard to academic success and persistence (Chatman & Smith, 1998; Swanson, 2008). These students tend to have higher GPAs their first year of college (0.16 to 0.23 GPA increase), are five percent more likely to enroll into a third year of college, and are less likely to need remediation compared to non-participants (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2013; Kim & Bragg, 2008). It is important to note that research suggests the best interventions and preparations occur before students enter high school as achievement gaps only widen over students’ academic careers (Heckman & Lochner, 2000; “Quality Counts 2007,” 2007).

Ensuring students are CCR will be paramount to the success of the CCSS implementation, given it is a main tenet of the standards. Furthermore, California needs students to be CCR to fill the workforce gaps. However, I believe in order for teachers to
prepare students for college and the workforce, high school educators’ need to be working with postsecondary educators.

**Postsecondary-High School Relationships**

The CCSS aims to prepare students for college. Given the task bestowed on high school educators, I believe it will be important for high school and postsecondary educators to form relationships to ensure high school curricula and instruction align to postsecondary institutions’. If the educators are collaborating, then it may help students be ready for college and make the transition to postsecondary seamless.

A long history of mistrust between high schools and postsecondary institutions exists. Historically these institutions do not work together or have little collaboration (Greenberg, 1991a). This is an issue because the systems are poorly connected, which has led to inefficiencies in terms of what is taught to students (Greenberg, 1991b). However, this has slowly changed over the past 20 years. Postsecondary institutions and high schools have partnered to create programs to prepare students for college (Khan et al., 2009; R. S. Moore et al., 2007). From these partnerships, dual enrollment and middle colleges were created and have created better outcomes for students as mentioned in the previous section (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2013).

While these partnerships between both entities exist, colleges and high schools are still operating in isolation as evident by their disconnected data systems, accountability mechanisms, academic standards, and governance (Kazis, 2006). This isolation has led to little vertical alignment or articulation between institutions. Through the lack of articulation, students are repeating courses in college that they took in high school. Some
studies argue students did not learn the material in high school and need to retake the class, while other studies believe it is due to institutions not communicating and they are offering duplicative courses (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Lange & Prior, 1992). Regardless of why students are retaking courses, research has indicated the lack of articulation and communication occurs because of the difficulty teachers have in creating or sustaining meaningful partnerships (Azinger, 2000; Nunley & Gemberling, 1999).

Educators have an opportunity to collaborate to increase students' postsecondary success. Through articulation and vertical alignment, students will be better prepared for college. This theme is important to my thesis as I want to understand how and if this collaboration is occurring at the schools I interviewed.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I presented an overview on the history of public education. Equity is a persisting issue in education, which was a driving factor for the standards movement that eventually led to the CCSS. I also discussed the relevant themes for my thesis—teacher preparedness, college and career readiness, and postsecondary-high school relationship. While gaps exist in the literature, the literature review has provided me a frame to understand what is happening in the high schools I researched. Namely, teacher preparedness is paramount for teacher success and student success; helping students be college and career ready will help them be successful post high school, and postsecondary and high school relationships are important in helping students transition to their postsecondary education. In the following chapter, I will discuss the methods for this thesis, as well as how I operationalized the themes.
Chapter 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The 2014-2015 school year was the first year of full CCSS implementation in California. It is unclear how high schools are faring with implementation, especially since the state did not release the SBAC test scores. These scores could have informed teachers on the areas they needed to improve on and provided an overall snapshot on student achievement for policymakers and researchers. Policymakers and researchers have many questions about the first year of implementation ranging from: do teachers have resources (textbooks, curricula, and other materials), do they understand the standards, what roadblocks have they encountered, what are promising implementation practices, among many other questions.

Given the lack of information on what is occurring at the school level, this qualitative exploratory study was designed to provide insights on the first year of full CCSS implementation. The research question driving this thesis was —what are the experiences and perceptions of educators on the CCSS implementation in one high school district? Based from the literature review discussed in the previous chapter, I focused specifically on three themes I believe could give the most insight on teacher’s implementation activities and their perceptions on how the CCSS will help increase student success post high school. The three themes were teacher preparedness, schools’ relationship with postsecondary institutions, and how the CCSS is related to college and career readiness.
In this chapter, I will present the methodology used for my thesis. I will first provide the limitations, followed by information on the criteria for selecting schools. Then I will discuss the background information on the school district, schools, and the student demographics used in this study. Then I will provide an explanation of how I operationalized the three themes and how I collected the data. Finally, I will discuss the data analysis procedures.

**Limitations**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I used data from a larger study conducted by the Education Insights Center. In that study we targeted districts that were actively implementing the CCSS as the research team wanted to find promising practices and information—something that most likely would not be present in districts only in the nascent phases of implementing the CCSS. Given the targeted recruitment, the findings from my thesis cannot be generalized to all Californian districts or schools.

Additionally, the results may not be representative of both schools interviewed or even the district as a whole because we did not randomly select the participants. The district administrators selected the schools to participate in our study, and the principals at each school site choose the educators we interviewed. There is a potential for selection bias, such that the administrators only selected the schools who were the highest performing and the teachers who were the biggest supporters of the CCSS. A potential consequence is that we may not have captured a true representation of the perceptions and activities around implementation, with our findings being skewed towards the more
positive perception. Even with these limitations, the findings from this study still shed light on what is occurring and can help improve the CCSS implementation.

**School District and School Sites Background**

My thesis only focuses on one school district. This district is in northern California, is medium sized, and contains five comprehensive high schools (a continuation school, adult school, and an independent study school). It is also in close proximity to a large city and encompasses two suburbs and a city. To ensure the district and schools remain anonymous, all demographic information is presented in ranges. This locality is economically diverse with household incomes ranging from $40,000 - $100,000. However, the vast majority of incomes are between $40,000 - $80,000 and the poverty rate ranges from 10 and 20 percent. The two schools interviewed have different student populations in this regard, as 39 - 45 percent of students from School A receive free or reduced lunch, whereas only 24 - 30 percent of students from School B receive it.

The district’s student population is around 10,000, with school A and B having enrollment numbers around 1,800 students. The majority of the students in the district and both schools are white (over 50 percent), with Hispanic students representing the second largest group of students (between 15 - 21 percent). The majority of students are native English speakers or are fluent; fewer than 4 percent of students are English language learners.

In general, the district is performing above the state average in terms of the California Standardized Tests (CSTs) and graduation rates. Over 90 percent of students in
the district graduated high school, with about 70 percent being UC/CSU eligible. This is a great difference from the state as the state graduation rate is only 80 percent with 40

Table 3: 2012-2013 Student Characteristics, in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficient or Advanced on CSTS</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>Districtwide</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-Language Arts</td>
<td>53–59</td>
<td>64–70</td>
<td>59–65</td>
<td>65–71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>54–60</td>
<td>67–73</td>
<td>60–66</td>
<td>66–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History-Social Science</td>
<td>46–52</td>
<td>57–63</td>
<td>55–61</td>
<td>57–63</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Statistics</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>Districtwide</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
<td>77–83</td>
<td>89–95</td>
<td>94–100</td>
<td>93–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC/CSU Eligible Graduates</td>
<td>36–42</td>
<td>67–73</td>
<td>70–76</td>
<td>67–73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>Districtwide</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22–28</td>
<td>58–64</td>
<td>47–53</td>
<td>60–66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>49–55</td>
<td>14–20</td>
<td>16–22</td>
<td>14–20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8–14</td>
<td>9–15</td>
<td>11–17</td>
<td>9–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>0–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>3–9</td>
<td>3–9</td>
<td>1–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Programs</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>Districtwide</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>55–61</td>
<td>21–27</td>
<td>39–45</td>
<td>24–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learners</td>
<td>19–25</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>0–6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

percent being UC/CSU eligible. While the district is achieving at higher rates than the state, little variation is present between the two school sites. However, School A students scored significantly lower on the CST math test. Still, the students at both schools, and the district overall, are moderate to high academic achievers, with the exception in math.

Themes of Interest

For this thesis, I studied the following themes: teacher preparedness, schools’ relationship with postsecondary institutions, and how the CCSS is related to college and career readiness because I believe they provide the best insight about implementation
activities and educators’ perceptions of the CCSS’s ability to help students be college and career ready. This section will describe how I operationalized each theme in the terms in the interview protocols.

Teacher Preparedness

The teacher preparedness theme contains various aspects of preparedness (five themes in total), but the central idea is based on how prepared teachers believe they are and their thoughts on what skills teachers need to teach the CCSS. This theme includes professional development opportunities provided by the district and schools, other resources helping teachers understand the CCSS or helping them create materials, and finally, teacher collaboration (e.g. professional learning communities). Table 4 outlines the themes analyzed to understand teacher preparedness and to create the final Teacher Preparedness theme.

Table 4: Teacher Preparedness Operationalized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Protocol Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>Is pre-service programs aligned with CCSS? Do new teachers need new training?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service/professional development</td>
<td>What kind of training are they receiving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/professional learning communities (PLC)</td>
<td>Is that happening? Is it happening within/across disciplines or within/across schools? Is there enough time? Are there incentives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views about what is working best/optimism about PD</td>
<td>What are teachers’ views on the best or most effective PD?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to optimal PD</td>
<td>What are the barriers to optimal PD?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of training</td>
<td>Who is providing the training?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Teacher Preparedness Operationalized (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Protocol Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>What are the new instructional strategies? Are there strategies employed teaching across disciplines?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/guidance, curriculum, frameworks and/or tools</td>
<td>What are the materials and resources teachers are using to help them implement the CCSS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS and equity</td>
<td>What are teachers’ concerns with the CCSS as it pertains to ELLs and achievement gaps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns regarding CCSS implementation</td>
<td>What are teachers’ concerns with CCSS implementation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools’ Relationship with Postsecondary Institutions

One aim of the CCSS is making students ready for college. It is reasonable to assume high schools are in communication or have relationships with postsecondary institutions to ensure their students are prepared for the standards set by the colleges. This theme encompasses the types of communication or relationships (or lack thereof) the schools have with any postsecondary institute in regards to the CCSS or preparing students for college. Table 5 illustrates the themes analyzed to understand the schools’ relationship with postsecondary institutions and to create the Schools’ Relationship with Postsecondary Institutions theme.

Table 5: Schools’ Relationship with Postsecondary Institutions Operationalized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Protocol Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school and postsecondary relationships</td>
<td>What are the partnerships, communication, alignment of curricula between high schools and postsecondary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns regarding CCSS implementation</td>
<td>What are teachers’ concerns with CCSS implementation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How the CCSS is Related to College and Career Readiness

The final theme contains educators' perceptions on how the CCSS will help students be college and career ready. This theme also pertains to educators' beliefs on how the career and technical education (CTE) aligns with the CCSS to prepare students for careers. CTE, once referred to as vocational education, focuses on skilled trades, applied sciences, technology, and career preparation. Table 6 outlines the themes analyzed to understand the educators' perceptions of how the CCSS relates to college and career readiness and to create the final theme.

Table 6: CCSS Relation to College and Career Readiness Operationalized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Protocol Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College and career readiness</td>
<td>How is CCR being thought about and/or implemented as it pertains to the CCSS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between CCSS and other initiatives or standards at schools</td>
<td>Is there a relationship between the CCSS and initiatives at the school such as, Linked Learning, Career Pathways Trust, International Baccalaureate, Career Academies, Advanced Placement, CTE standards?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTE connected with CCSS</td>
<td>How is CTE being integrating into core academics because of the CCSS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/District/COE-workforce relationships</td>
<td>What are the partnerships, communication, alignment with CTE and workforce expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns regarding CCSS implementation</td>
<td>What are teachers’ concerns with CCSS implementation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between CCSS and Deeper Learning</td>
<td>Critical thinking and problem solving How is the CCSS promoting student to critical think and problem solve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn how to learn</td>
<td>How is the CCSS promoting students to learn how to learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students develop academic mindsets</td>
<td>How is the CCSS promoting students to develop academic mindsets?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

I used data from a qualitative research study by EdInsights, which the Hewlett Foundation funded. EdInsights and the Hewlett Foundation identified a number of topics they deemed pertinent in understanding high school CCSS implementation. EdInsights developed a 41-question interview protocol (see Appendix A) focusing on the CCSS implementation that included nine areas, such as technology, closing the achievement gap, curriculum and instruction, and professional development. My thesis only focuses on three collapsed themes (teacher preparedness, schools' relationship with postsecondary institutions, and the CCSS' relationship with college and career readiness) to understand educators' experiences and perceptions implementing the CCSS.

After finalizing the protocol through various reviews and edits with the research team, we interviewed 24 educators (see Table 7) from two high schools in one school district. We chose this school district based on advice from several state education experts about how the district is likely developing interesting and promising CCSS practices. Given we wanted to understand implementation activities, we did not want

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Administrators</td>
<td>2 Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Math teachers</td>
<td>2 Math teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 English teachers</td>
<td>2 English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Science teachers</td>
<td>2 Science teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Counselor</td>
<td>1 Counselor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To obtain an as complete view of the CCSS implementation as possible, we interviewed both administrators and teachers. The school administration selected the teachers we interviewed. We requested educators in math, English, and science because they experienced the most change in their classrooms because of the CCSS. We also requested interviews with 11th and 12th grade teachers for each subject to gain a greater perspective. The interviews averaged 45 minutes in length and we recorded them for transcription and analysis purposes. We gave participants five-dollar Starbucks gift certificates and the district a report on the findings from the interviews.

Given that this sample is not random, the results of this study cannot be generalizable. While the results can provide great insights and inform future research, it is not representative of all educators in California or even of that district or school.

**Procedure**

Before analyses could begin, we had all the interviews transcribed. Next we created a coding key that was adapted from the protocol questions. In the coding key, we collapsed some protocol questions into one theme. For example, the protocol contained four different questions regarding CCSS materials — where were educators finding them, were they creating their own, how do they know the materials aligned to the CCSS, and how they were selecting materials. Since those questions covered the same topic, we collapsed them into one theme — "information/guidance, curriculum, frameworks and/or tools." This theme contained six sub-themes to provide more detailed
information, such as, where educators obtained the information or tools (the state, their county office of education, the district, the school site, the internet, or somewhere else).

In other instances, some themes needed additional context to ensure it was clear what the theme meant. For example, “partnerships, communication, alignment of curricula, including ‘lack thereof’ statements” was the clarification provided for the high school-postsecondary relationships theme. This was necessary to ensure coding was consistent across transcripts and researchers, which would be the next step of our analysis—calibration.

Calibration is important as it tests for coding reliability. This helps minimize coding difference between researchers. During calibration, four researchers coded one transcript independently and then met to review our work to determine if we coded the transcript similarly. If any researcher coded differently, we discussed the rationale for or against the code and made new decision rules. However, we tended to code the transcript in a similar enough fashion that we decided we did not require a second round of calibration.

During that same meeting, we reviewed the coding key to determine if themes were missing or if we should remove, collapse, or expand any themes. The first coding key contained 27 themes with the final version reduced to 25 after deleting and combining a few themes. Table 8 (see next page) shows how we combined three themes into one as they all were about teacher learning and the research team felt the coding did not need the level of detail each theme provided.
Finally, we coded the transcripts. Coding is important as it allows us to sort and organize the data. Using the coding key, we read each transcript and whenever a passage pertained to a code, we would write the code next to that passage. We then put the evidence from our coding into a matrix that we organized by themes (see Table 9). For example, for all passages that had a 16c (i.e. teacher collaboration) next to it, we placed that passage into the 16c section of the matrix. Each school site had all their interviews combined into one matrix. The next step was to summarize all the evidence for each site.

Table 8: Example of Themes Combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Themes</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Teachers learning from each other</th>
<th>New teacher preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>Role of Professional</td>
<td>New preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Communities</td>
<td>and/or induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>aligned with CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variance by discipline</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Do teachers need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optimal PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>different skills in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers to optimal PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS-aligned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source of training</td>
<td></td>
<td>classrooms than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>standards or other state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guidelines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Theme</td>
<td>Teacher Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-service (aligned with CCSS? Do new teachers need new training?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-service/professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration/professional learning communities – is that happening?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within/across disciplines, within/across schools, is there time, are there incentives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views about what is working best/optimism about PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers to optimal PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source of training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-service (aligned with CCSS? Do new teachers need new training?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by each theme to create mini summaries. These mini summaries provided guidance to the
development of findings and the overall narrative about educators’ thoughts and
perception of the CCSS implementation.

Table 9: Excerpt of Coding Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 16c. Collaboration/professional learning communities (PLC) (is that happening? Within/across disciplines, within/across schools, is there time, are there incentives?) | - During staff meetings and PLC time, and they had us kind of look at the standards, unpack them, figure out what the students needed to do. So that kind ... that time was built into our staff meetings, so it wasn’t more extra time that we had to take. (CT2_Oct27_A_Eng)  
- I know my 11 PLC’s spent a lot of time in the summer trying to redo some of our curriculum to make it more Common Core-focused. But again, just time. Which is everybody’s problem. (CT2_Oct27_A_Eng)  
- Especially within our own PLC’s, we’re definitely on that collaborative model where we have to work together. So we try and come up with things that we need to do for the Common Core. (CT2_Oct27_A_Eng)  
- I would say this year, there’s definitely that collaboration between other teachers across schools. And in addition to that, last year, they started ... like there’s an English Common Core team, and they come up with our district common assessments. And so it’s one site rep from each school, they come together and they come up with their common assessment and we all have to administer it, and we also have a district |
In this chapter, I presented the methodology employed for my thesis. I provided information on the criteria used for selecting the school district, as well as the background information on the school district, schools, and the student demographics used in this study. I also explained how I operationalized the three themes and how we collated the data. Lastly, I discussed the data analysis procedures. In the following chapter will discuss the results from my analysis.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

This exploratory study aimed to understand educators' experiences and perceptions in one Californian high school district with regard to the implementation of the CCSS. In this chapter, I will discuss the results of my analyses on the three themes discussed in Chapter Three. First, I will discuss my findings about teacher preparedness, then the school’s relationship with postsecondary institutions, followed by teachers’ perceptions about the CCSS’ ability to improve college and career readiness. Lastly, I will conclude with a summary of findings.

Teacher Preparedness

The teacher preparedness theme was based on a sub-five themes, as discussed in Chapter Three, to understand how prepared teachers felt to implement the CCSS, as well as their thoughts about the skills teachers would need to teach in the CCSS era. Overall, teachers held positive views about their ability to change their instructional strategies to help students reach the new standards, but as with any new reform or policy, implementers need time to learn what is expected of them and how to execute the policy. A majority of teachers were certain that with time and the space to gain confidence without consequence, they would successfully implement the CCSS in their classrooms. The following sections discuss key findings about how prepared the interviewed teachers thought they were to support the CCSS implementation in their classrooms.
When any policy change occurs, it is helpful to understand where implementers are finding resources to assist in their efforts to not only share that information with other implementers, but also to determine if certain resources need improvement. The study's protocol asked respondents about five different resources — their County Office of Education (COE), their district, their school site, the state, and other sources. Respondents discussed this topic at length and stated their school sites and colleagues were the most helpful resources. This was surprising as I thought schools would not have an adequate understanding of the CCSS to be helping educators.

The school sites have been instrumental in supporting teachers to implement the CCSS, especially since finding materials (e.g. worksheets, examples of a CCSS lesson plan, textbooks) has been difficult for teachers. The lack of available resources forced schools and even some individual teachers to create their own materials, but educators viewed this as a positive outcome. One teacher stated, “It gives us a lot of ownership of the materials. We’re willing to change it, tweak it, make it better, and it’s not something we’re stuck with.” This sentiment was expressed at both schools and teachers also noted it was the best way for teachers to internalize the materials and effectively utilize them in their classrooms.

However, some teachers were having difficulty with materials in general. Of the teachers interviewed from the three different subject areas, science teachers were having the most difficulty in finding guidance to implement the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The NGSS is the science version of the CCSS, and it outlines the
scientific concepts and practices students should master and have a deeper understanding of by high school graduation. While the school district had not officially adopted the NGSS, many science teachers believed it will happen soon and they wanted to start preparing. One science teacher summarized shared views on this matter when he stated, “We’re just sort of in limbo. We’re just floating and waiting for more information and at this point...I think as an individual we need to just go out and start learning what’s out there, and finding what’s out there for ourselves and bringing it back because if we wait to be trained, wait to go to this PD, and wait to go to this conference, we can be waiting a long time.” Another science teacher stated she was taking the initiative to understand the NGSS practices and was helping her colleagues understand them so they can start developing lesson plans.

Math teachers were faring better than science teachers and heavily relied on their Integrated Math\(^5\) lead to help create materials. Their IM1 lead met with the leads from other schools and as a group, they created various resources for math teachers, such as quizzes and homework assignments. This form of collaboration and teacher led learning aligns with the literature on effective teaching practices as teachers can work on issues specific their students, which can lead to better student outcomes (e.g. Holloway 2000). I further discuss findings on collaboration in the next section.

While the school sites have been the most helpful resource for teachers, teachers stated the COE was the least helpful. Only a few respondents discussed the COE, but the

\(^5\) Integrated math changes the traditional math sequence of Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2 to IM1, 2, and 3, which integrates all the traditional math courses, including statistics.
Few educators who did discuss it shared the same view of it not being very helpful in implementation. They stated the COE provided one or two workshops two years ago that provided a high level summary of the CCSS, but since then have gone “AWOL”. Interestingly, it was difficult for me to find any information on the COE’s website about the CCSS, which may also be a reason why teachers may believe the COE is not a good resource. While this finding does not mean the COE is not providing any resources or assisting with the CCSS implementation, it does point to communication issues between the COE and teachers.

Similar to the COE, educators rarely discussed the state’s role in implementation. When discussing the state’s role, respondents referred to it broadly as “the state”, but some were specific in referencing the California Department of Education (CDE). When educators mentioned the state, they noted it was not a good resource to help understand and implement the CCSS as it left them wanting for more information. They wanted a state vision for what the CCSS should look like in the classroom, documents on how to map the old standards to the new, and sample tests and essay prompts. While the CCSS intentionally gives local control to schools, teachers would like more support from the state as they are unsure if they are implementing the CCSS correctly.

Overall, the educators believed their best resources to implement the CCSS were within their own school sites. While the educators found that creating their own materials was beneficial, teachers hoped the state and COE would provide more guidance and resources to help them implement the CCSS.
Professional Development and Collaboration

Professional development and collaboration in both schools were almost synonymous and the majority of teachers stated working with other teachers to either digest what they learned at a training, or create materials was an ideal way for them to learn and implement the CCSS. The district provided two paid professional development (PD) days when students were not at school and the teachers had a full day for PD. Most of the CCSS-focused PD focused on helping teachers understand the standards and learn strategies to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Educators at both schools noted their administrators and the district were open and generous in allowing teachers to attend additional trainings and even granted some teachers release time so they could focus on developing curriculum. Educators at both schools also believed the best PD was teacher led instead of bringing in an outside speaker. There was a small minority at School B who wanted to bring more experts in because they thought "it is time to call on the big guns," but that deviated from the majority of respondents and actually contradicts the literature. The literature notes teacher led PD is more effective than it being led by an outsider (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

The only noticeable difference between the schools was the administrators’ view about the usefulness of the PD provided. The administrators at School B were more positive about the PD they offered and noted the PD helped to prepare their teachers. However, the principal at School A believed the administration could provide better and more PD because he currently did not believe it was adequate. He was also in the minority camp for the need of more experts as he stated, "If it’s not facilitated by true
experts, people who have truly examined the Common Core standards and any assessment information that's been made available and understand what it's supposed to look like through the lens of student learning in a classroom, we're just kind of doing the same thing we've always done. Just now we're calling it something else." While other educators did not hold his view on the PD, he does raise a serious issue of whether or not school, PD providers, and publishing companies are simply adding the label of "Common Core" on old materials and ideas. This issue of calling trainings and materials "Common Core" without any clear indication they are in fact aligned to the CCSS was a concern for many educators.

Another way teachers were learning was through collaboration, which they believed could help them accomplish more in implementing the CCSS and improve as a teacher. One science teacher stated, "Very few teachers will say that they can take curriculum handed to them by somebody else and teach it well. We always put our own spin on it, so if we could be in a group of other people...that would be valuable." In working together, the majority of teachers found collaboration helped them improve their instructional practices. The literature supports their assertions on collaborations as teachers working together was found to increase their performance, namely through the having the follow-up portion where they can continual ask each other questions and for help (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Teachers and administrators alike see the value in collaboration. The district instituted Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that organized teachers into groups based on the subject they teach. Many teachers use their PLC time to work on curriculum
and instructional practices as a group. While English and science teachers viewed PLCs as a good use of time, math teachers had the most positive perceptions of the PLCs. Last year the district moved to integrated math (IM), which incorporates topics like algebra, geometry, and statistics into one class and spans three courses (i.e. IM1, IM2, and IM3). This change required math teachers to make the most changes in their curriculum. They stated their PLC time was critical in helping implement this change. Still, all three groups of teachers agree the current allotted time for collaboration (one hour) was not enough.

"That’s not development time. You don’t do development once a week, in a 50-minute window—you do a check-in. ‘How’d that test go? How’s pacing?’ I mean that’s the nature of the beast." Even though PLCs and collaboration time in general were helpful, teachers need more time. Previous research has documented this issue and it appears to be an ongoing problem in education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet et al., 2001). This is a potential area for future research to resolve this issue.

Not having enough time was one of the most common complaints amongst educators, with money being a close second. However, time and money were interrelated as the majority of teachers wanted more money so they could obtain release time. They would use that time to determine how to implement what they learned from the PD. One teacher stated, “If we could have release time to go and figure some of this stuff out because an hour after school on a given week is just not enough. If we had like even two, three pull-out days over the course of a year that would be huge.” Further, teachers would like more time to collaborate — “We need more time. Not professional development time, not time that we can go to another seminar, but time to work together.” The district
and schools have allocated additional funds to give more teachers release time, but it appears without additional funding from the state they will not be able to afford much more additional support for their teachers.

*Instructional Practices*

Numerous educators stated one of the biggest changes they experienced during implementation was how teachers delivered their lessons and having students take more ownership over the classroom discussions. Some teachers stated this was an issue, especially for “older, more seasoned teachers”. One teacher remarked this group did not have the “growth mindset,” the desire to collaborate with other teachers, the belief all students can learn, or the drive to improve their instructional practices. However, the majority of teachers stated they were changing their instructional practices and were doing so by being more student centered — letting students do more of the talking instead of the teacher. Extant research supports this practice and finds it creates more student learning opportunities and increase student achievement (e.g. Bullard, Felder, & Raubenheimer, 2008). While it is unclear if teachers were aware of this research, they were employing research-based strategies that can help their students be successful.

Part of the student centered approach is “flipping” the classroom where students pre-read the material for homework and then the next class focuses on applying what they learned and not on lecturing from the texts during class. A handful of teachers stated they implemented this in their classrooms and found it allowed for more group discussions given they no longer need to teach the facts, but facilitate discussions for students to synthesize the information. One science teacher stated she was “blown away by how
much it allowed me to accelerate what I was teaching in the classroom.” Through changing their instruction, teachers and administrators believed it would help students learn how to be better communicators and think more critically about the materials instead of being passive receivers of information.

While educators at School A saw the benefit of changing instruction, many teachers were at different stages in implementing new instructional practices. The principal noted the reason for this was because, “they’ve spent more time on standard curriculum, and not so much on instruction, and I think that’s kind of slowed it way down and been a huge challenge for us.” School B did not raise this issue, but both schools were concerned that there was the potential for teachers to easily revert to their old teaching methods. If students were not engaged in the material and actively talking, it may be easier for teachers to fall back on direct teaching with the teacher doing most of the talking. “Everyone wants to go back to what they know — very information based, very teacher directed instruction, and so it’s the challenge is getting teachers to feel that students should have that opportunity to take ownership of their learning.” It may be helpful for the district or even perhaps the CDE to provide teachers with strategies when students are not engaging in the class discussion.

Another concern at School A was that some teachers did not have enough content knowledge or the necessary teaching skills to breakdown concepts for students. This was a concern for math teachers as some of their colleagues who received a supplemental credential in math did not know key math concepts (i.e. what exponential means), so they
could not explain to students how to apply it in the real world or why they should learn it. This issue could be resolved at the pre-service, school, and state levels.

Another aspect of instruction teachers were concerned about was integrating literacy into their instruction. This was especially true for science teachers because their teaching has always been content driven and they did not know what to cut out of their lesson to accommodate it or even how to teach writing. “I’m not chock full of ideas in terms of how to implement literacy into science yet.” Science teachers and administrators acknowledged this was an issue and some teachers were taking the literacy component too far. For example, one science teacher believed the literacy component took over his whole lesson and he barely was able to discuss the content. One administrator stated he was trying to ease science teachers’ fears by telling them, “You don’t have to be the writing teacher. You just have to have a skill that kids are going to write about. They should be transferring some of those skills from their English language arts, and then you can help them with the specifics of your content area.” It is important administrators have more open dialogues about what they expect from science teachers and any non-English teacher with regard to the literacy component. It may help alleviate some stress and help the teachers figure out how to integrate it more effectively into their instruction.

Even with the instructional concerns mentioned above, the majority of teachers felt confident about changing their instructional practices. Some teachers were already adjusting their instruction and were seeing a difference with their students’ performance.
Schools’ Relationship with Postsecondary Institutions

As stated in Chapter Three, the high schools’ relationship with postsecondary institutions theme was created from two sub-themes — types of communication or relationships the schools have with any postsecondary institute in regard to the CCSS, and educators’ concerns about the CCSS with regard to students’ readiness for postsecondary education. Under the new standards, teachers were unsure if they were doing an adequate job or even what the colleges were expecting in the new CCSS era. Teachers appreciated the symbolic support the California community college, California State University, and University of California systems gave the CCSS through the joint letter they signed as one teacher stated it signaled they have “a willing partner on the other end of this stuff now.” This alleviated some of the teachers’ uneasiness and anxiety, but they still would like more explicit guidance from the colleges and universities on their expectations on instruction and college readiness. One way this can be achieved is through regular communication.

More Regular and Ongoing Conversations

Teachers wanted more regular conversations with postsecondary institutions to know if their high school curriculum was preparing students for college under the CCSS. “Tell us what you want us to do,” one frustrated teacher stated. Teachers wanted to understand the expectations of their local colleges, especially with the CCSS. Some of the questions teachers wanted answered were if the following are changing at the college
level: admission criteria (including A-G requirements\textsuperscript{6}) for the CSUs and UCs, especially in regard to Integrated Math; if colleges and universities will be aligning their instruction (curricula and pedagogies) to the CCSS; and how high school teachers can best prepare their students for college.

School B had a prior relationship with its local community college that allowed students who received a minimum score on a high school placement test to bypass the community college’s placement testing. However, that partnership proved hard to maintain and it eventually ended. School A has been working with nearby colleges to help its science and math teachers with instruction. Still, educators at both schools would like more interaction and communication with the postsecondary institutions. The lack of a relationship the two high schools are experiencing is not uncommon as research has shown establishing and maintaining relationships between high school and postsecondary educators is difficult and rarely occurs (Azinger, 2000).

\textit{Alignment on Curricular Integration}

The math curriculum has begun to move toward integration with the launch of Integrated Math 1 (IM1). IM2 and IM3 will follow in the 2015-2016 school year. Some of the math teachers do not believe their new curriculum aligned with the colleges' although they did not have any hard evidence to support this claim. One math teacher stated, “We’re not aligned with the college and we each have to change. Who is the

\textsuperscript{6} These are high school courses students must take and receive a C or better as a minimum standard to be eligible for admission to a UC or CSU.
person to say ‘Yes! You do need to change and this is what the college’s doing and so this is how you have to change to be aligned with them.’ Or vice versa.’

Science teachers were in a similar situation in terms of integrating their curriculum, but they did not want their district to adopt an integrated science curriculum. The main reason science teachers did not want this was because they did not believe they had the content knowledge to teach biology, chemistry, and physics. However, they were waiting for college science teachers and administrators to weigh in on this matter. “We really need [the colleges] to weigh in. It give us some back-up. Right now, they’re this big silent partner, and if they want an integrated pathway because they’re the client we’re serving...we will do it and we will embrace it and we will figure it out. But right now we don’t think that’s what they want, so that’s why we’re fighting it.” This is important because even though science teachers did not want to integrate the curriculum, if it is something the colleges want or even recognize in A-G, then they were willing to comply. However, if colleges do not support integrated science they need to vocalize this to help high school science teachers fight against their district adopting the curriculum. Overall in science and math, communication from the colleges on the integrated programs has not occurred and it needs to.

**College and Career Readiness**

The final theme I analyzed was college and career readiness (CCR). This theme examined educators’ perceptions about how the CCSS will help students be college and career ready. This theme also included educators’ beliefs about how career and technical
education\(^7\) (CTE) and deeper learning\(^8\) aligns with the CCSS to prepare students for careers, and high schools’ relationship with the workforce. Overall, educators believed the CCSS will eventually prepare students to be CCR, but some educators were not sure that they, as educators, could prepare students for college \emph{and} career. Educators were unsure about preparing students for college because they do not know what colleges were expecting, as explained in the previous section. However, many were confident they could prepare students for the workforce. One administrator stated, “College I’m not so sure, but definitely career because career you’re going to get specific training to what you need to do to perform your job, but it’s those soft skills of figuring out.” Both schools discussed the importance of their CTE program, but interestingly neither school had created any relationships with local business groups to see if their curriculum was actually helping their students prepare for the workforce.

\emph{Career and Technical Education and CCR}

Even without a relationship with local businesses, some teachers found CTE to be valuable for students struggling in academic science and math classes as it can be the “ah ha” piece for those students who did not understand concepts in their traditional courses. One teacher stated that this kind of student “is probably the most productive kid on the engineering side. And so that part is kind of neat to see the kids get inspired and see: oh this is why I took this Algebra class. Now Geometry makes sense when I’m building a bridge truss, these angles and weight and pressure. Oh, now this makes sense.” This is a

\(^7\) Formerly known as vocational courses, CTE focuses on skilled trades, applied sciences and technologies, along with career training.

\(^8\) The skills and knowledge that students must possess to succeed in 21st century jobs and civic life
driving reason why the district’s goal is to integrate academic course with CTE during the CCSS shift. They want students to excel in science and math and provide them with practical training. School B has already paired academic classes with CTE. For example, students in a medical class alternate classes between that CTE course and an English course, so that they are learning practical skills in the medical field and the academic component of reading and writing in the English section. This was an effort that predates the CCSS because the educators believed “it’s just the right thing to do.” Still, teachers did not discuss in length about the relationship between CTE and the CCSS, though they do believe CTE and CCSS taken together could help students be ready for the workforce.

Falling under the CTE umbrella is a program called Project Lead the Way, which was a commonly referred to as a program that prepares students for the workforce. This program provides students with practical and applied science, technology, engineering, and mathematics experiences, and also exposes them to college level research. “Nothing Common Core-wise. We do see it with Project Lead the Way, which pretty much is all Common Core in terms of what those kids are doing, applying – they’re learning and it’s very independent, and they work in groups and stuff like that.” However, the discussion was more around how the program was already aligned to the CCSS rather than how it actually was aligned to it.
Modeling Classes after AP and IB

A few teachers mentioned the CCSS was very similar to Advanced Placement (AP)\(^9\) and International Baccalaureate (IB)\(^{10}\) classes. “Common Core is like AP or IB. Those teachers have already been rolling out Common Core in all of their classes. They know what the SBAC looks like, what the expectations are, so they’re having their kids practice things like that all the time.” Some non-AP/IB teachers were looking to the AP/IB models for instructional strategies as they believed it would help students to be better critical thinkers and make them engage more with the materials as they struggle and wrestle with the concepts. Most importantly, teachers believed it would help their students construct their own knowledge as oppose to them being passive receptors of knowledge who simply listen to the teacher’s lecture. Ultimately, teachers were employing these strategies because they not only believed it would help students learn more, but that it would prepare them for the realities of college. It was because of this reason the district targeted at-risk populations (e.g. low-income or English language learners) and enrolled them in AP and IB classes to help them be more college ready, even if they do not pass the AP or IB tests.

Perceptions of CCSS and College and Career Readiness

While educators tended to focus on what their schools were already doing to help students be college and career ready rather than how the CCSS is making them change to

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\(^9\) AP are college level courses offered in high school that focuses on specific subjects like English, foreign languages, and biology.

\(^{10}\) IB is a college prep, international, holistic framework for children 3 – 19 that is a focuses on critical thinking and intercultural understanding.
prepare students, they believed the CCSS would help students be ready for college and the workforce. They believed through the CCSS students would have to engage more with the material, and think more critically and deeply as it was moving away from rote memorization to synthesizing information and sources. Through this, they thought it would help students be ready for college and careers. However, teachers believed it would take time for this to occur. They need more time to effectively change their instructional practices and students need time to adjust to this shift to become better students under this new framework.

Furthermore, educators believed the CCSS would help students see what they can do with the material. With the focus moving away from students are not smart enough, but that perhaps they have not had the opportunity to show what they know “because there are so many opportunities for writing; students have more ways to demonstrate knowledge. Teachers are looking for synthesis, not rote memorization.” By engaging more deeply with the material and having different ways to demonstrate knowledge, educators believed students would perform better in the workforce and college.

**Conclusion**

Even with the challenges educators are facing, the interviewed teachers were optimistic about their ability to implement the CCSS. While teachers vocalized they needed more non-instructional time to integrate what they learned in their PD and to collaborate with other educators, they still believed they could be successful. Through the instructional changes they were making, namely giving students more control over the classroom and flipping it, they would be able to help their students be more engaged in
the classroom and have deeper levels of understanding. However, teachers were
cognizant it may be easy for them to revert to their old teaching methods, and many
science and math teachers were concerned about teaching literacy.

High school educators’ relationship with postsecondary institutions, as it pertains
to the CCSS, was very weak. Teachers did not know what colleges were expecting and
what changes colleges are making in light of the CCSS, leaving high school teachers
unsure if they were adequately preparing their students for college in the CCSS era. This
is an area that could be improved, especially since information on new UC/CSU
admission requirements (i.e. A-G requirements) was released and it appears teachers are
not aware of this information.

In regard to the relationship between college and career readiness with the CCSS,
there was not a consensus if educators believed they, as teachers, can make students both
college and career ready. While some teachers did not consider their CTE courses as
being 100 percent CCSS, they believed the CTE courses would prepare students for the
workforce. Still, they believed over time the CCSS will eventually prepare students for
college and careers.

There are still many unanswered questions about the CCSS, such as what the state
is envisioning, can teachers change their instructional practices given the time
constraints, and what changes are colleges making to their curriculum and instructional
practices? The interviewed educators generally believed that they were doing their best to
implement this reform with minimal help from the state or their COE. But given what
these two schools were able to achieve has created hope this reform will help improve
education in California. In the next chapter, I will use these findings to discuss the key implications and potential ideas for future research.
Academic achievement in the United States is low (CDE, 2013; NEAP, 2013). Policymakers hoped the standards movement, which started in the 1980's, would help resolve this issue. However 30 years later, the academic achievement problem still persists. One of the reasons past standards based reforms failed is they were too prescriptive, leaving educators little autonomy in how they taught. Learning from past reform failures, educators and policymakers are hopeful the CCSS can be successful. Given the CCSS allows for local control in the delivery of education, policymakers believe students will experience better educational outcomes.

To understand what occurred during the first year of the CCSS implementation, this exploratory project studied one California high school district. I specifically examined educators' experiences and perceptions in implementing the CCSS. I focused on three themes to provide the best insight about implementation activities and educators' perceptions of the CCSS's ability to help students be college and career ready. Those three themes were teacher preparedness, schools' relationship with postsecondary institutions, and how the CCSS' ability to improve college and career readiness. In this final chapter, I will discuss key implications and make suggestions for future research.

Key Implications

Guidance and Assistance from the State

Over the past four years, the State of California shifted more authority and control to County Offices of Education and school districts. Through both the Local Control
Funding Formula and the CCSS, schools have more flexibility to determine how they can best serve their unique student populations. While educators appreciated and wanted this flexibility, many were unsure if they were implementing the CCSS correctly and would like more guidance from state—namely guidelines of what the state expects the CCSS to look like in the classroom. By providing loose guidelines, educators could have a point of reference of what is expected of them and could help with the uniform success of the CCSS.

Other areas that could affect the uniform success of the CCSS are districts’ ability to vet curricula and textbooks labeled “Common Core”, to provide the best PD for instructional strategies, and to give educators enough time to digest what they learned in PD, develop their curricula, and collaborate with other teachers. The California Department of Education (CDE) may want to consider ways they can help districts and educators in these three areas because without state guidance there is the potential for equity issues to surface. Historically under resourced schools (including in human capital) may not have the ability to implement the CCSS effectively—they may not have the right materials and training as compared to better resourced schools. This has the possibility of increasing existing achievement gaps for low-income and minority students.

Another potential outcome for the lack of guidance provided by the state and CDE is the erosion of their relationship with educators. Some educators stated they were upset with both entities for not being more involved in the CCSS implementation. This
could not only affect the success of the CCSS, but it could also affect local buy-in for future state initiatives.

*Integrated Curricula Concerns*

Some districts have moved away from traditional pathways for math and science and switched to integrated ones. However, this switch can be a concern as some teachers do not have the content knowledge to teach all math or science courses. In my study, I discovered some math teachers believed their colleagues did not have enough in-depth knowledge to teach math at the level required under the CCSS. This was especially true for science teachers as they did not feel confident they could teach all three science classes—biology, chemistry, and physics. Given math and science teachers are required to have more content knowledge, policy implications exist for pre-service programs and teacher credentials. Changes to both may be needed to ensure math and science teachers are adequately prepared to teach in the CCSS era.

While concerns over teacher preparedness exist, controversy surrounds the existence of integrated pathways. Some educators and parents worry students will not be prepared for college-level science or math. They are also concerned that colleges will not accept integrated coursework for college admissions. However, the latter is not true given the UCs and CSUs do accept integrated courses, suggesting postsecondary institutions need to take a more active role in the CCSS implementation.

*Coordination between High Schools and Postsecondary Institutions*

Postsecondary institutions are the largest silent partner in the CCSS implementation. Many high school educators stated they were unsure if they were
adequately preparing their students for college and if their curricula aligned with the universities'. Further, some educators were unsure how the A-G requirements were changing due to the CSSS—this information is available, but it appears it has not been widely disseminated to high schools. Given all the questions high school educators raised, there is an opportunity for postsecondary institutions to play a larger role in the CCSS implementation. While better communication is clearly needed, what may be more helpful is better coordination between high school and postsecondary institutions to ensure students enter college prepared. Through coordination, high school educators would know what changes, if any, colleges are making in response to the CCSS in regard to their admissions requirements, expectations for incoming freshmen, and curricula. High schools and colleges may want to investigate various avenues to help increase coordination because it may help students enter college prepared.

Business Input on CTE Curriculum Design

As schools start to integrate CTE courses with academic core courses, input from various business groups may be needed to ensure those courses are relevant to current workforce needs. One educator stated his school had not reached out to any business groups to help them create their CTE course offerings. This can be problematic as schools could potentially offer outdated CTE courses that teach skills that will not help students in the workforce. Bringing in business groups could increase the likelihood of CTE courses being aligned with current workforce needs, thus providing students with the opportunity to graduate high school ready for the workforce.
CCSS Communication and Messaging

While it was not the focus of this thesis, educators repeatedly stated how they were constantly fighting against misconceptions about the CCSS. It is understandable that the general public may be misinformed as all they may hear are soundbites from the news and social media. However, if California is serious about making the CCSS a success, they may want to rethink their messaging and public outreach to dispel rumors and myths. It may be helpful to have the public understand it will take time for teachers and students to adjust to the new style of teaching and increased rigor before any gains in achievement can be realized. If public understanding and support can be increased, teachers can focus solely on teaching rather than conducting public relations for the CCSS.

Future Research

Given this study was exploratory, I have more questions than answers. There are many opportunities for future research on this topic ranging from identifying best practices for implementation, to increasing student outcomes, to enhancing teachers’ instructional strategies. Using the issues raised in my study, I recommend the following as potential research projects:

- Replicate this study to include more districts and schools in order to generalize finding.
- Determine the feasibility of providing more paid time (outside the classroom) to teachers and revising teachers’ contracts, so that teachers
have more time to digest what they learned in PD, develop their curricula, and collaborate with other teachers.

- Determine if trainings, materials, and textbooks are aligned to the CCSS.
- Create and evaluate different models for high school and postsecondary partnerships to help with the CCSS implementation, and more specifically with college readiness.

High school educators viewed the CCSS very positively as they believed it is what they should have been doing all along. Still, they were concerned about having enough time to adequately implement it and were unsure what postsecondary institutions were doing in regard to the CCSS, as well as colleges’ expectations for students and high school educators. Even with those concerns, the findings from this study show there is potential for the CCSS to be successful and help our students be better thinkers, college students, and workers. However, the public and educators alike need to give the CCSS more time to be implemented in the classroom before it is added to California’s graveyard of failed reforms.
APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL

General Questions

1. Could you please give us a general overview of the work you’re doing to implement the Common Core? We’ll have specific questions about it later, but it would help me to get a general understanding of the big issues at play – challenges, things you’re feeling really good about, etc. How do you think it’s going? What kind of support is there within your school for the Common Core (probe: teachers? Parents?)?

2. What other initiatives do you have going on in your school right now (probe: Linked Learning, Career Pathways Trust...)?

3. Where are you finding the most useful information to help you implement the Common Core? (probe: County Office of Education? State Board of Education website? California Department of Education website? Publishing companies and, if so, which ones? District office? Other schools/districts and, if so, which ones? Other?)

4. How do you select materials to use?

5. How do you know if the materials are well-aligned with the Common Core?

6. Are there materials that you can’t find that would be useful to have? If so, what kinds of materials?

7. Have you developed your own materials? If so, what did you develop? Who developed them?

8. Please describe your communication with parents regarding Common Core. Do you communicate about Common Core-related changes in your classroom? Do you answer parent questions regarding Common Core? Do you get a sense that parents know what’s changing?
9. What are you thinking about tracking the implementation of the Common Core? How will you know if we have it right?

10. Please characterize/describe the lines of communication between you and the following entities with regard to the implementation of the Common Core. Is there anything you would change about those lines of communication?

- Your school administrators
- Teachers at your own school
- Teachers at other high schools
- District office personnel
- County office
- Postsecondary institutions (community college, California State University and University of California) (Probe: are there cross-system efforts to support implementation?)

11. Do you have any concerns regarding implementation of the Common Core?

Professional Development

12. Please characterize the professional development available for teachers in your school to implement the Common Core (probe: English? Math? Science? Are they all getting the same?). Do you think teachers in all disciplines need the same amount and kind of professional development? If not, what are the differences between disciplines?

(If these questions weren't addressed in the response to the previous question, then continue with these):

13. What characteristics indicate quality in professional development?

14. Who provides the professional development? Can you characterize how much time is spent on professional development? Do you think the professional development offered is sufficient? If not, are there barriers to offering more professional development?

15. Is there time for teachers to learn from each other?
16. What do you think is the most optimal professional development for teachers at your school in terms of implementing the Common Core (probe: English teachers? Mathematics teachers? Science teachers)? What are the challenges or barriers to the kinds of optimal professional development that you just described?

- How prepared do you feel to teach the Common Core to the following groups of students:
  - Students as a whole
  - English Language Learners
  - Students with disabilities
  - Low-income students
  - Academically at-risk students

17. Do you think new teachers need to have different skills than they did prior to Common Core? Are you aware of efforts to prepare future teachers to teach in ways that are aligned with the Common Core? If so, please describe.

Curriculum and Practice

18. Can you describe curriculum adoption/curricular changes that are going on as a result of the adoption of the Common Core? (Probe: are the materials aligned to Common Core? How do you know? Do you have access to Common Core-aligned digital resources?)

19. How do you deal with students who haven’t “grown up with” Common Core in terms of coming into high school without much exposure to the Common Core?

20. Can you describe how or whether you think your classroom instruction will change as a result of the Common Core? What do you think are likely some high impact practices with regard to implementing the Common Core in classrooms?

21. Do you feel that the training, materials and professional development have adequately prepared you to implement Common Core in your classrooms? Do you think other teachers feel the same?

22. Do you have any specific concerns about the implementation of the Common Core and math for high schools? What choices have you and your math colleagues made about how to align math with the Common Core? Do you have integrated math?
23. Do you have any specific concerns about the implementation of the Common Core and English Language Arts for high schools?

24. Do you have any specific concerns about the implementation of the Common Core and Next Gen Science Standards?

Linked Learning, Career Pathways Trust, Career Technical Education standards

25. Please characterize how you view the relationship between college and career readiness in the Common Core.

26. Do you think the Common Core has the potential to integrate Career Technical Education and core academics? If so, what is your vision about how that will happen at your school?

27. What is the role of the Common Core in Career Pathways Trust? Of the Career Technical Education standards in the Career Pathways Trust?

28. What is the relationship(s) between the Common Core and Linked Learning? Between the Career Technical Education standards and Linked Learning?

29. What do you think are the optimal roles for business leaders (state, regional, and local) to play with regard to the adoption of the Common Core?

Technology

30. What kinds of technology has your school purchased because of the Common Core and Smarter Balanced assessments?

31. What kinds of tech training/professional development is your school experiencing as it implements Common Core?

32. What kinds of technology applications are you preparing for and/or using now (probe: keyboarding for Smarter Balanced assessments, using technology in the classroom (as opposed to just for assessment), iZone project)?
33. How is the work going for you and other teachers to use new forms of technology? For students to use new forms of technology? Any glitches or challenges?

*Smarter Balanced assessments*

34. Please describe your experiences with the recent field testing of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessments. Was the process smooth? Were there challenges? If so, please describe.

35. Are you using or planning to use formative assessments? (probe: Are you planning to use the assessments in the Smarter Balanced Digital Library?) If not, why not? If so, in which subject areas? Will you be developing/did you develop those assessments already? Do you think that information will be useful for postsecondary education in any way?

*Closing the achievement gap*

36. Do you have any specific concerns about the implementation of the Common Core for English Language Learners (in high school)?

37. Do you have concerns about achievement gaps at your school? If so, do you think the Common Core will help you close achievement gaps? (probe: how will Common Core change the way you serve traditionally underserved students?)

38. Do you have any plans to prepare students for new Common Core-aligned SAT tests?

*Developing seamless pathways between high school and postsecondary*

39. What is your understanding about what is happening to the Early Assessment Program, given the implementation of the Common Core?

40. Please characterize any conversations underway about the use of the Smarter Balanced 11th grade assessment for placement in college-level work in your local community college, California State University, and/or University of California.
41. If all 11th graders will be in the Early Assessment Program this year, do you have the capacity to offer them the Expository Reading and Writing Course if, for example, the vast majority need it? Do you have the capacity to offer other options in math? Do you have other thoughts about how you could provide transition courses in 12th grade?

Closing

42. Are there any materials, tools (such as templates), or other written or online materials that you would be willing to share with educators in California regarding the implementation of the Common Core? The materials would be “anonymized” so that any identifying information would be removed before the materials were circulated.

43. [If the respondent indicated that they communicate with postsecondary institutions, ask for names at institutions (assure respondent that you will not reveal their identity to the postsecondary contact).]

44. Is there anything you would like to mention that we did not already discuss?
REFERENCES


Center for Education Policy. (2007). Answering the question that matters the most. Has student achievement increased since no child left behind? Washington DC: Center for Education Policy.


