

## ***Education Week***

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# **Progress Is Slow on Common-Standards Implementation**

## **Study of districts cites budget woes and lack of state guidance**

By [Catherine Gewertz](#)

Barely half the school districts in states that have adopted the common standards are taking essential steps to implement them, and most cite inadequate state guidance as a major problem in moving forward, a new study finds.

Districts are also deeply divided about how rigorous the new standards are and how much they demand new curricula and instructional strategies, according to the [survey](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html) <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html> released last week by the [Center on Education Policy](#).

The portrait that emerges from the study suggests that too many districts are woefully unprepared for the challenge of the new standards, some experts say.

“What it says to me is that there is a large percentage that don’t seem to understand the train that is about to hit them,” said William H. Schmidt, a Michigan State University education professor who is conducting his own research on districts’ readiness for the new standards.

In a survey of 315 districts, the CEP asked superintendents to report on activities their districts were working on in 2010-11, or planned to undertake in 2011-12, to put the standards in mathematics and English/language arts into practice.

About half the districts reported that they would craft or buy new curriculum materials, and just under half planned to provide professional development for teachers, or devise local tests to gauge student mastery of the standards. Fewer than one-third reported plans to revise teacher-evaluation systems or change teacher-induction practices to reflect the new expectations.

The area of greatest progress was developing an implementation plan and timeline; two-thirds of the districts reported that such work is under way or planned.

Still, “a sizeable share” of districts—one-third to three-quarters—have no plans to move ahead in any of the areas the center probed, the study said.

## Budget Constraints

The district feedback is part of the Washington-based research and advocacy center's work to track progress of the common standards, which have now been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. Its [study of states](#), released in January, found that most changes were a year or two away. (["Full Standards-Based System Several Years Off,"](#) Jan. 12, 2011.)

Many districts are diving into work on the standards, including groups collaborating through the [Council of the Great City Schools](#)<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html> and the [Aspen Institute](#). New York City, for instance, has [piloted](#) several aspects of the new standards for more than a year, and it immersed all its teachers in the standards during a professional-development day earlier this month. But the study suggests that most districts are not heavily engaged in such work.

Large proportions of districts in the CEP survey might have reported no plans in key areas because of the timing of the study, which was conducted from February through April, less than a year after most states had adopted the standards, the study's co-authors note. Budget cuts and lack of state guidance could have been factors as well, they write.

## Teachers Left Behind?

Indeed, three-quarters of the districts cited funding as a "major problem" in implementing the common standards locally, and two-thirds reported that inadequate guidance from their states was a big problem.

Half said their states had distributed a comprehensive plan to implement the standards, but fewer than four in 10 reported getting state help with new curricular materials for the standards or creating local tests to track students' progress on the standards. Only three in 10 said their states had offered help with teacher evaluation or induction systems that reflect the standards.

Six in 10 districts reported sending staff to state or regional meetings about implementing the standards. But more often than not, central-office and administrative personnel, rather than teachers, were the ones participating in the state-sponsored meetings, the study says.

The survey reveals a mix of judgments about what the standards will require of students and teachers. Fewer than 60 percent of the districts said the new standards are more rigorous than their states' previous guidelines.

Two-thirds of the districts anticipate the need for new curriculum materials in math, and 56 percent anticipate a similar need for the literacy standards. About half the respondents said they thought the new standards would demand "fundamental changes" in instruction.

Since the CEP study drew responses from superintendents, it likely overstates districts' readiness for the common standards, Michigan State's Mr. Schmidt said. In his work surveying 700 districts, he said, he has found that teachers know less about the standards than do staff members at district headquarters.

