Implementing the Common Core State Standards:

Year Three Progress Report from the Great City Schools

Council of the Great City Schools

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Results from 2013-14 School Year

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its board of directors is composed of the superintendent of schools and one school board member from each member city. An executive committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between superintendents and school board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in their improvement. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in such areas as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, DC.

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Part I. Implementing the Common Core State Standards

- Three-fourths of respondents rated central office curriculum staff as "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS, but only about 40 percent of all respondents rated teachers and principals as "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS. Still, this represents an increase over 2013.
- Approximately 59 percent of respondents rated school principals as "somewhat prepared" or "not very prepared" to implement the CCSS – a 15 percentage point decrease from 2013.
- The majority of all respondents indicated that their district's progress in implementing the CCSS was either "good" or "excellent."

Part II. Professional Development and the Common Core State Standards

- The majority of curriculum directors indicated that the rationale for adopting the CCSS was "often evident" or "sometimes evident" in professional development sessions.
- Over 80 percent of curriculum directors indicated that building a shared understanding of the instructional shifts required by the CCSS in math and ELA was "often evident" in professional development activities.
- Building an understanding of next generation assessments and analyzing student work samples based on grade-level expectations in the CCSS were among the least evident topics in professional development in both ELA and math.
- Over two-thirds of respondents indicated that differentiating instruction for ELLs and students with special needs was "often evident" or "sometimes evident" in their ELA professional development. In comparison, 60 percent indicated that differentiating instruction for ELLs and students with special needs was "often evident" or "sometimes evident" in math professional development.
- When aligning their instructional materials to the CCSS, curriculum directors indicated using PARCC/ SBAC sample items, CCSS math progressions, and resources from the Council's Basal Alignment Project most frequently.
- Over 70 percent of curriculum directors indicated that results from state summative assessments were "often" used to differentiate professional development for teachers in elementary, middle, and high school.
- Results on state summative and interim/benchmark assessments were the most used resources to identify struggling students in elementary, middle, and high school. Furthermore, approximately half of curriculum directors reported using early warning indicators to a "large extent" to identify struggling students at all grade levels.

- Respondents reported that quarterly monitoring of student growth and the creation of scope and sequence documents to help teachers align instruction to the CCSS were common strategies for addressing the needs of struggling students.

Part III. Ensuring Access to the Common Core State Standards for ELLs

- Approximately half of responding ELL directors "agree" that their districts' English language proficiency *assessments* are aligned with the CCSS – an increase of 24 percentage points from responses in 2013. However, only a third "agree" or "strongly agree" that their districts' English language proficiency *standards* are aligned with the CCSS.

- Only a quarter of responding ELL directors "agree" that their district highly prioritizes ELLs being able to meet the rigor of the CCSS – a decrease of 7 percentage points from survey responses in 2013. Furthermore, only 17 percent "agree" that ESL teachers are prepared to ensure that ELLs are able to meet the rigor of the CCSS, while no respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that general education teachers are prepared to ensure that ELLs meet the rigor of the CCSS.

- Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of ELL directors who rated their instructional materials for ELLs as "good" or "excellent" increased.

Part IV. Ensuring Access to the Common Core State Standards for Students with Special Needs

- In 2014, over half of responding special education directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district prioritizes students with special needs being able to meet the rigor of the CCSS (55 percent). Only 18 percent agreed that general education teachers are prepared to help these students meet the rigor of the CCSS. However, a majority of responding special education directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district is successful at identifying students with special needs (82 percent).

- In responses to open-ended questions, special education directors noted the need to raise expectations for students with disabilities and build general education teachers' ability to help students with special needs.

Part V. Measuring Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

- There were fewer research directors in 2014 than there were in 2013 who "agree" or "strongly agree" that tracking implementation of the CCSS is a high priority for their district.

- The majority of responding research directors rate their district's progress as "excellent" in providing timely access to data for school leaders and creating data systems to store information from multiple

departments, but their responses indicate the need to work harder in gathering data to monitor implementation of the CCSS, developing measurable implementation goals, and creating a formal feedback loop on implementation efforts.

- In responses to open-ended questions, responding research directors reported the need to develop metrics and strategies for collecting implementation data.

Part VI. Communicating with Stakeholders

- The majority of responding communication directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district is actively engaged in informing stakeholders about the CCSS and building public support for the CCSS.
- Certified teachers, teacher unions, and school boards are among the most *involved in* and/or *informed of* district implementation strategies.
- Some common challenges to communicating with stakeholders about the CCSS included communicating the complexity of the CCSS and coordinating a consistent message throughout the school district.

Introduction

Three years ago, the Council of the Great City Schools embarked on a multi-year initiative to help its member school districts implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Part of this initiative involve annual surveys of progress urban public school districts were making in implementing the CCSS. With the support of The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, this report presents the results from the third year of the project.

Using the same approach as last year's report, the Council's CCSS implementation survey was administered to key curriculum, research, and communications leaders from the 67 Council member districts. Of the 67 Council districts, 56 are in states that have adopted the CCSS. The survey covered a wide range of implementation topics, including professional development activities in English language arts and math; strategies for measuring and collecting data on implementation; and communication strategies to inform stakeholders about the CCSS. Furthermore, the survey asked respondents about the inclusion of English language learners, students with special needs, and struggling students in CCSS implementation efforts.

The survey was sent to curriculum directors, research directors, ELL directors, special education directors, and communication directors in June 2014 and was closed in August 2014. In total, we received 59 responses from 39 districts for a response rate of about 70 percent of CCSS districts. Although this year's response rate was lower than 2013, the report's findings are consistent with previous years. The survey results indicate that over the past three years, districts continue to make progress implementing the new standards but challenges remain.

Interpreting the Data

The reader should note that the findings presented in this study are based on self-reports by survey respondents, so the data are inherently subjective. Moreover, in our effort to capture the perspectives of staff in different positions within each district's central office, we often received varying numbers of survey responses from each city. Therefore, in those sections that present data for all respondents, the analysis may reflect the fact that a large number of respondents were based in the same district or group of districts. In addition, the survey was not administered directly to teachers, but one will find that district estimates of teacher readiness to implement the CCSS are similar to what one sees in results from surveys of teachers conducted by other organizations.

Finally, we saw circumstances where people in the same district answered similar questions much differently. This could reflect either differing perspectives or some uncertainty about where implementation stands. This is not surprising, as we are catching school-district personnel in the middle of a very complicated implementation process. Still, readers should find this report one of the most detailed summaries to date of where common core implementation stands in the nation's major urban school systems, according to senior staff in those systems.

Part I. Implementing the Common Core State Standards

- Survey responses suggest that key curriculum and research staff are "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS. For instance, approximately 75 percent of all respondents rated central office curriculum staff as "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS. In addition, over half of respondents rated both central office ELL staff and central office research staff as "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS (Figure 1).

- About 40 percent of respondents rated certified instructional personnel (i.e., teachers) as "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the CCSS. This represents an increase from the 2013 level of 30.2 percent. Similarly, approximately 41 percent of respondents indicated that principals are "prepared" or "very prepared" to implement the new standards (Figure 1).

- The percentage of respondents who rated their district's progress in implementing the CCSS as "excellent" or "good" remained relatively consistent with responses in 2013. Over three-fourths of respondents rated their district's progress as "excellent" or "good" in providing professional development in ELA (80 percent) and Math (76 percent), aligning instructional materials to the CCSS (81 percent), and implementing the CCSS in classrooms for ELA (80 percent) and math (81 percent) (Figure 2).

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents rated their districts' progress as "good" or "excellent" in adopting computer-based/adaptive assessments (63 percent), addressing the needs of special populations (62 percent), and integrating technology into classroom instruction (69 percent) (Figure 2).

- About 25 percent of respondents reported being "very familiar" with the Next Generation Science Standards. Furthermore, 53 percent of respondents indicated that their district plans to adopt the new science standards (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents indicating central office and school-level staff preparation to implement the CCSS, 2014 (n=59)

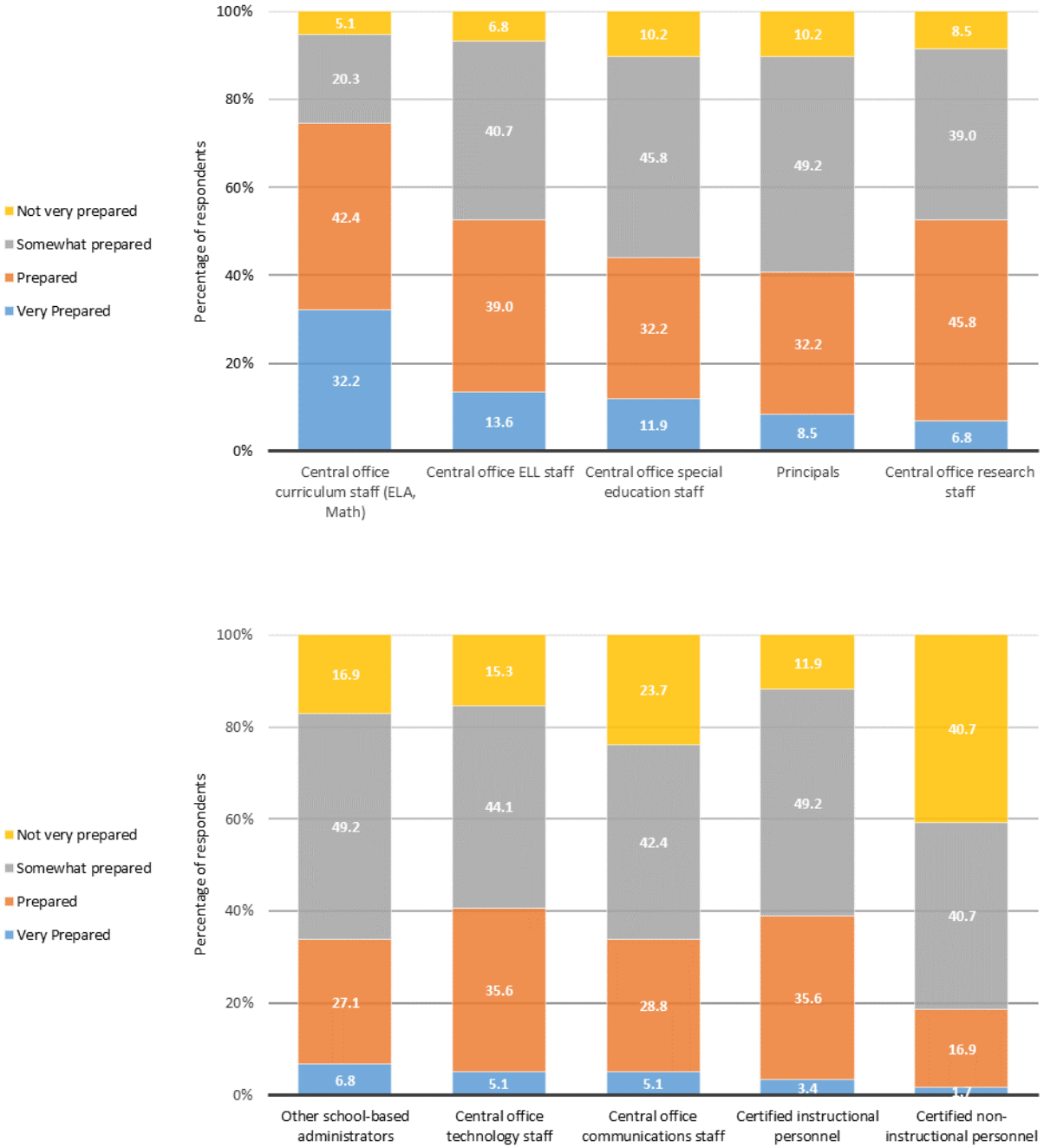


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents rating the strength of CCSS implementation progress in specified areas, 2013 (n=111) and 2014 (n=59)

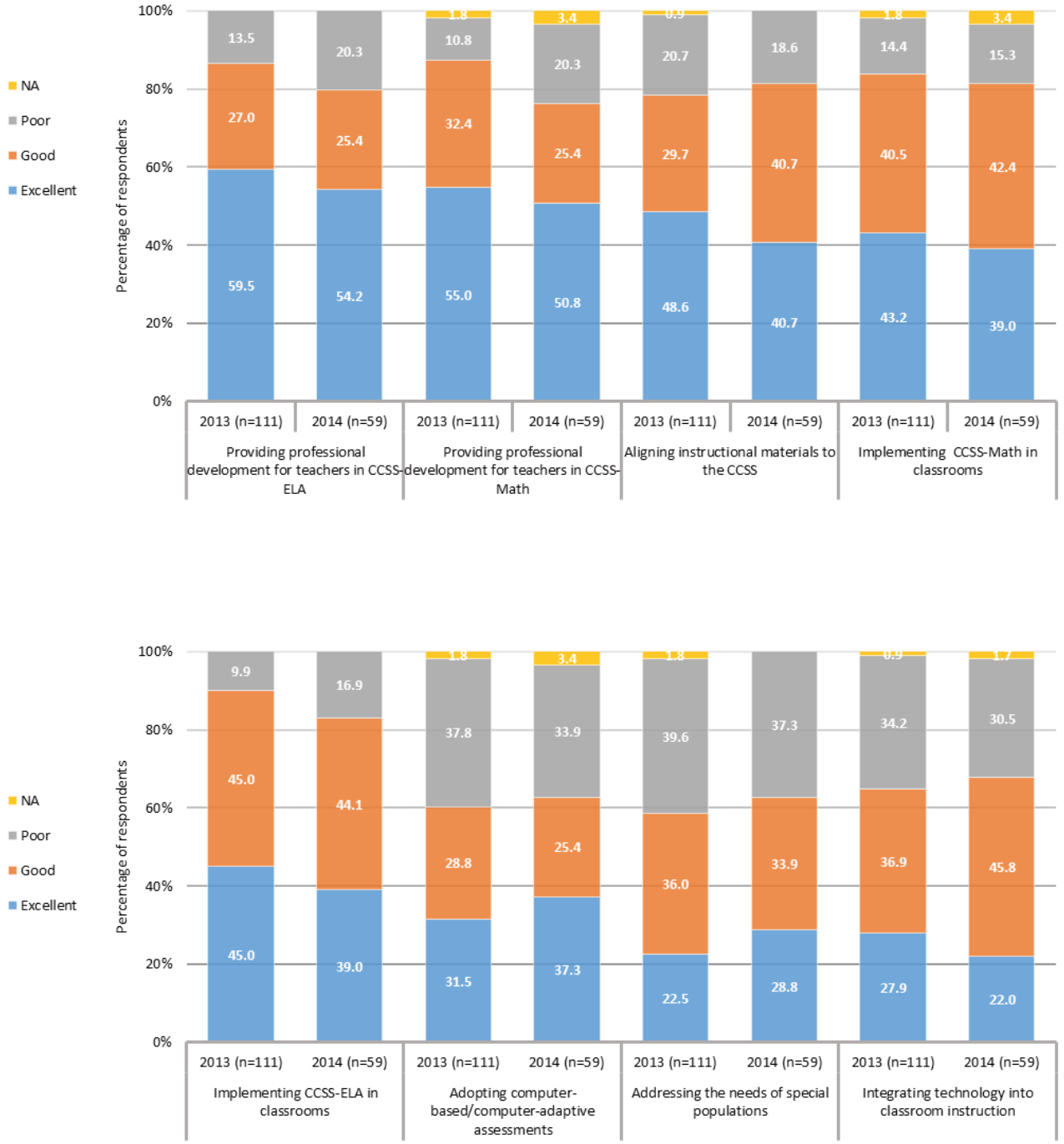


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents reporting familiarity with the Next Generation Science Standards, 2014 (n=59)

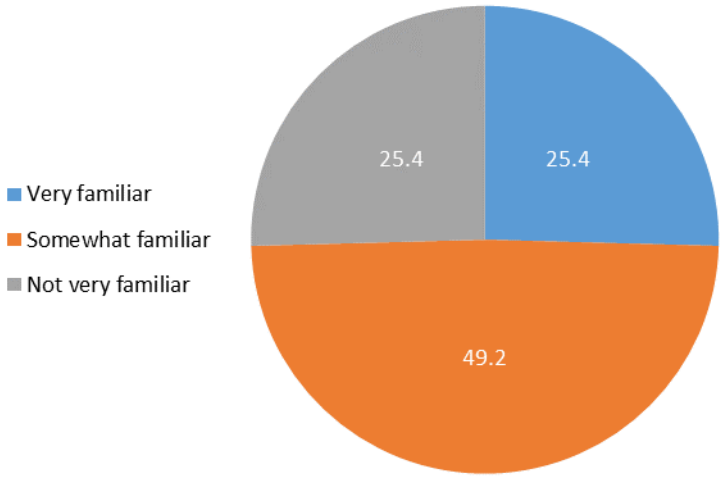
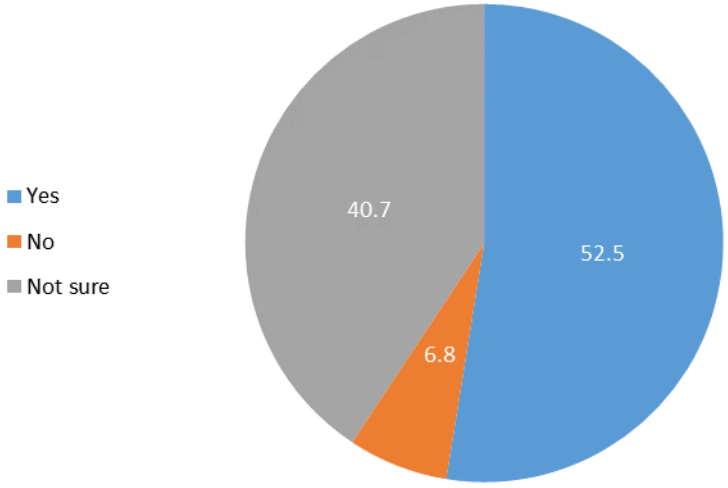


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents planning to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards, 2014 (n=59)



- Over 80 percent of responding curriculum directors indicated the rationale for the CCSS was "sometimes evident" or "often evident" in their district's professional development sessions. For example, all respondents reported that the importance of using instructional resources aligned with the new standards, the importance of integrating common assessments aligned with the new standards, and the importance of using standards aligned to expectations in college were "sometimes evident" or "often evident" in district professional development (Figure 5).

- Differentiating instruction for specific student groups was among the least evident topics in professional development, according to curriculum directors. In English language arts, differentiating instruction for students with special needs (33 percent) and ELLs (27 percent) was "rarely evident" in district professional development. In mathematics, approximately 40 percent of respondents indicated that differentiating instruction for struggling students, ELLs, and students with special needs was "rarely evident" in district professional development (Figure 6).

- At least 80 percent of responding curriculum directors indicated that building a shared understanding of the instructional shifts in ELA (87 percent), building content knowledge in ELA to teach the CCSS (80 percent), teaching reading and writing across content areas (80 percent), and selecting materials conducive to teaching the CCSS (80 percent) were "often evident" in their professional development. Conversely, understanding language progressions across grade levels (33 percent), analyzing student work samples based on the grade-level expectations of the CCSS (27 percent), and building an understanding of next generation assessments in ELA (27 percent) were the most likely to be "rarely evident" or "never evident" in district professional development (Figure 7).

- In math, 80 percent of respondents indicated that building a shared understanding of the instructional shifts required by the CCSS was "often evident" in professional development. Analyzing student work based on grade-level expectations and building an understanding of next generation assessments were least evident in district professional development (Figure 8).

- Over 60 percent of curriculum directors reported that results from annual summative assessments and interim assessments were "often" used at the elementary, middle, and high school level to differentiate professional development for teachers (Figure 9).

- Integrating technology into classroom instruction was emphasized to a "small extent" or "not at all" in professional development. For instance, about half of curriculum directors (53 percent) reported that using technology to enable students to produce and publish writing was "not at all" provided in professional development activities. However, about two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) indicated that integrating computer-based assessments in the classroom and using computer adaptive assessments to monitor student growth was "often evident" or "moderately evident" in professional development (Figure 10).

- Of the districts who responded to this survey in both 2013 and 2014, over three-fourths have used PARCC/SBAC sample items and progressions in math to align instructional materials to the CCSS. Another 67 percent of districts report using resources from the Council's Basal Alignment Project – an

increase of 9 percentage points from 2013. A larger percentage of these districts also report using internal district rubrics to align instructional materials to the CCSS (Figure 11).

Identifying and Addressing the Academic Needs of Struggling Students

- Approximately 80 percent of curriculum directors indicate that their school districts use results from annual state assessments to identify struggling students in elementary, middle and high school. All respondents reported using results from interim assessments to at least a "moderate extent" in elementary and middle school to identify struggling students, while 93 percent do so in high school. Approximately half of respondents indicated using early warning indicators such as attendance and disciplinary referrals to a "large extent" throughout elementary (47 percent), middle (47 percent), and high school (53 percent) to identify struggling students (Figure 12).

- School districts were relatively consistent in their approaches to addressing the needs of struggling students in elementary, middle, and high school. In elementary school, 80 percent of respondents indicated that quarterly monitoring of student growth was a "very common" strategy used in the district. Slightly fewer respondents indicated that it was a "very common" practice in middle (60 percent) and high school (53 percent) (Figure 13).

- The majority of respondents indicated that curriculum strategies for addressing the needs of struggling students were either "very common" or "somewhat common." For example, approximately two-thirds of respondents indicated that they are developing transitional curriculum that addresses gaps between previous standards and the CCSS in elementary (67 percent), middle (67 percent), and high school (60 percent). Furthermore, the creation of scope and sequence documents to help teachers align instruction to the CCSS was "very common" or "somewhat common" in elementary school (93 percent), middle school (79 percent), and high school (79 percent) (Figure 13).

School-level Support for Teachers

- Among districts that responded in both 2013 and 2014, the percentage of curriculum directors who indicated that shifts in teacher practice were reflected in *formal* teacher observation protocols to a "moderate extent" or "large extent" fell from approximately 58 percent to 42 percent over the period. Similarly, a third of respondents in 2014 (33 percent) indicated that shifts in teacher content knowledge are reflected in formal observation protocols to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" – a decrease from 58 percent in 2013 (Figure 14).

- In comparison, *informal* teacher observations reflected the expectations of the CCSS to a larger extent. For instance, 83 percent of respondents indicated that shifts in teacher practice are reflected in informal teacher observation protocols to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" – an increase from 67 percent in 2013. Between 2013 and 2014, three-fourths (75 percent) of respondents reported that shifts in the type and quality of student work was reflected in informal observation protocols to a "large extent" or a "moderate extent" – an increase from 50 percent in 2013 (Figure 14).

- In terms of differentiating instruction for ELLs, fewer than half of respondents indicated that formal (33 percent) and informal (42 percent) observation protocols were aligned with the CCSS to a "large extent" or "moderate extent." Only a third of respondents (33 percent) indicated that formal and informal teacher observations were aligned to the CCSS to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" for students with special needs (Figure 14).

- In 2013 and 2014, approximately 60 percent of respondents reported that principals are scheduling common planning time for teachers on a daily basis. Another 40 percent of respondents reported that principals are conducting faculty meetings exclusively focused on the CCSS on a monthly basis (Table 1).

- In responses to open-ended questions, curriculum directors expressed continuing challenges in implementing the CCSS amid competing priorities at the district and school-level and the lack of consistent messaging from district leadership about the district's implementation goals (Appendix A).

- Several responses to open-ended questions highlighted the misalignment between current assessments and the CCSS as a challenge to measuring the implementation of the CCSS (Appendix A).

Figure 5. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development, 2014 (n=15)

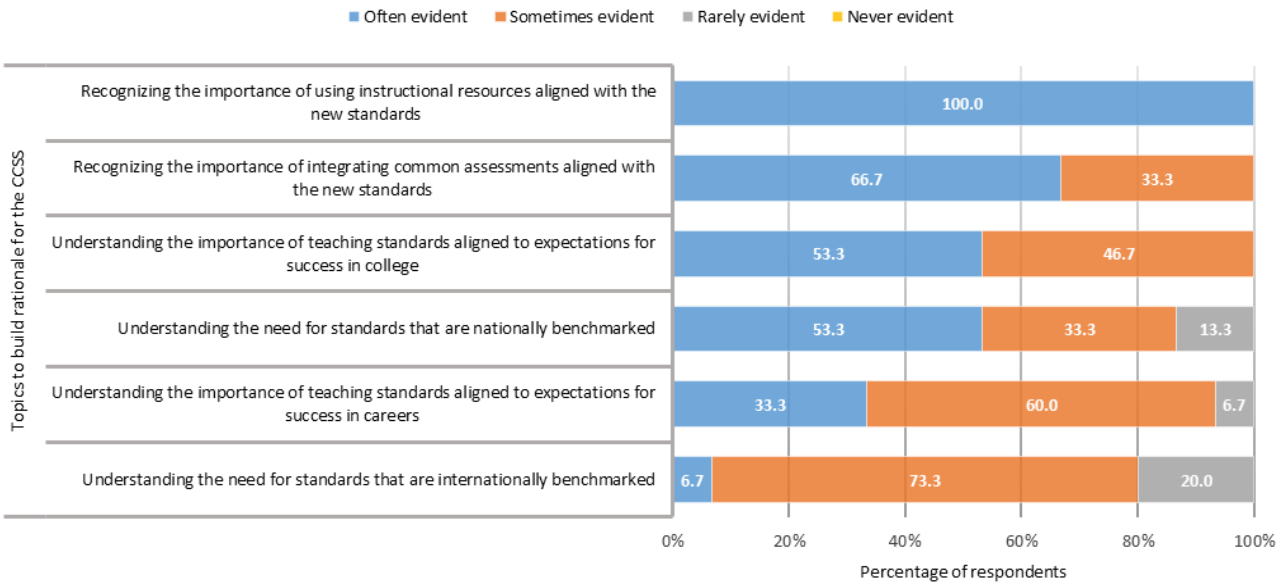


Figure 6. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting that specified topics related to special populations are evident in CCSS professional development in ELA and math, 2014 (n=15)

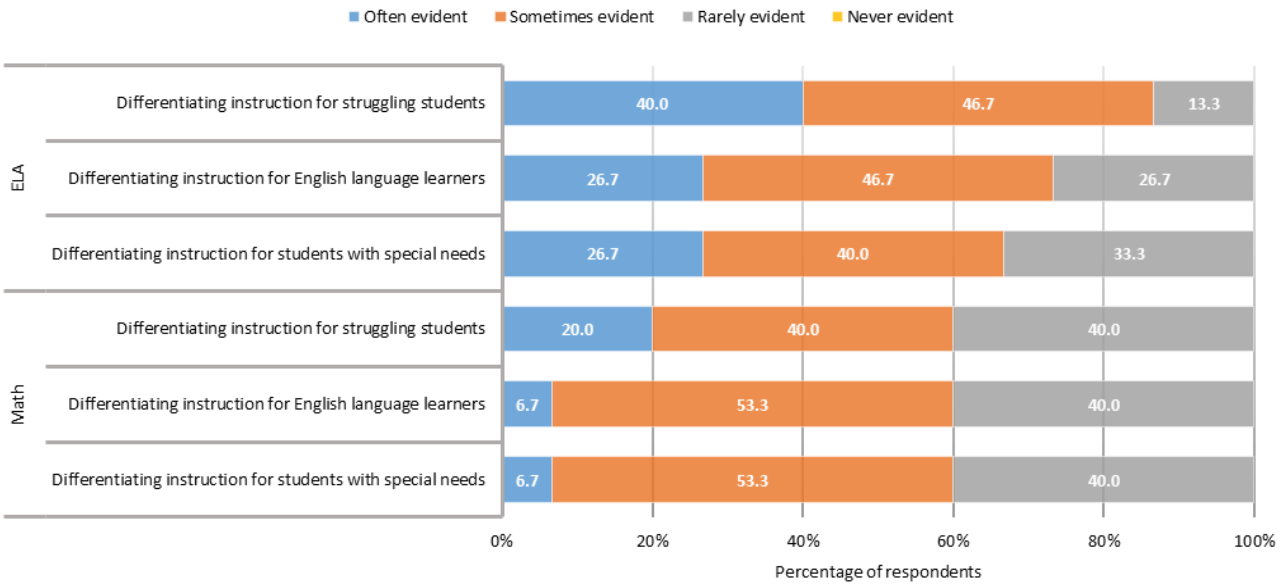


Figure 7. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for ELA, 2014 (n=15)

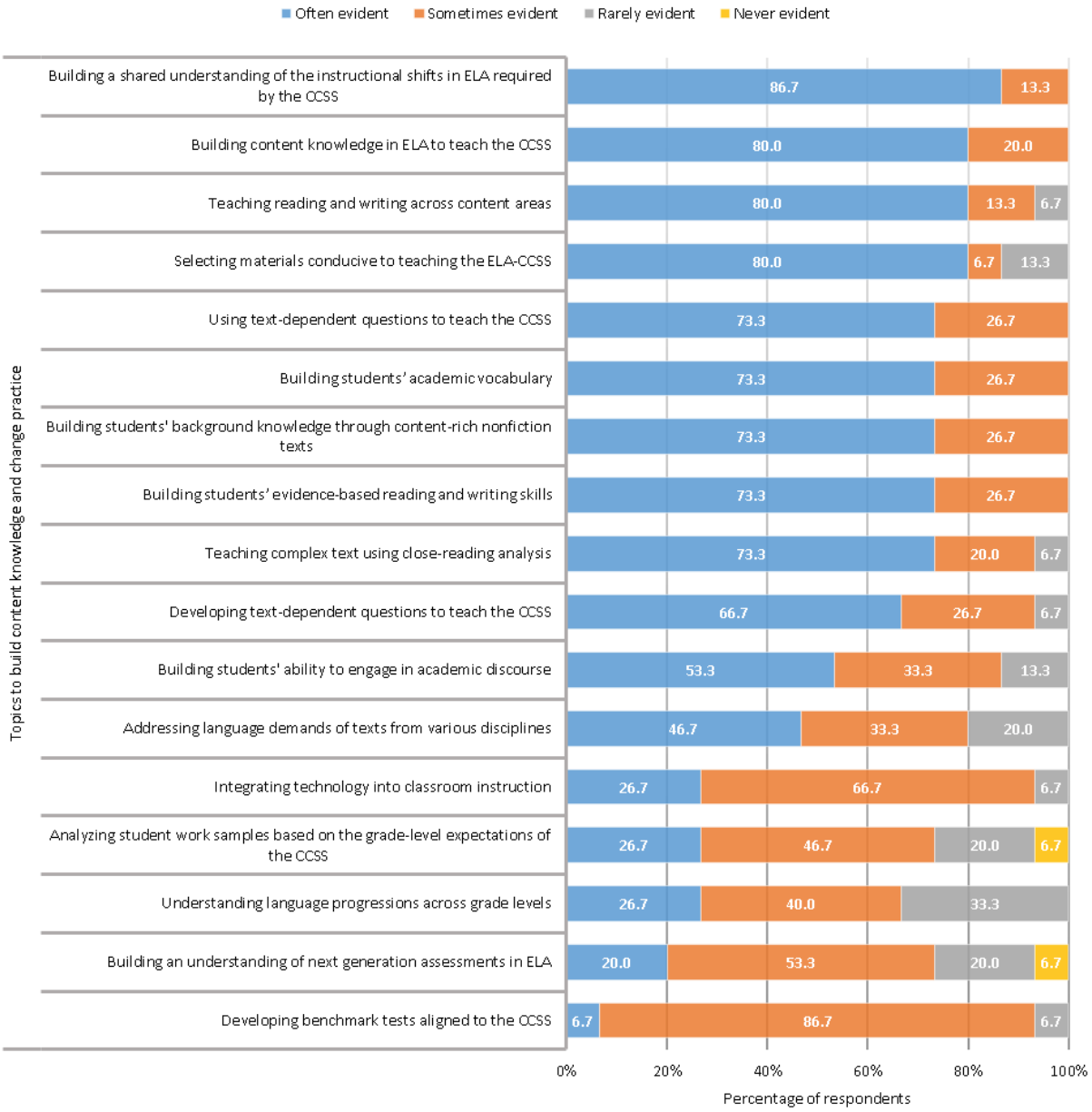


Figure 8. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for math, 2014 (n=15)

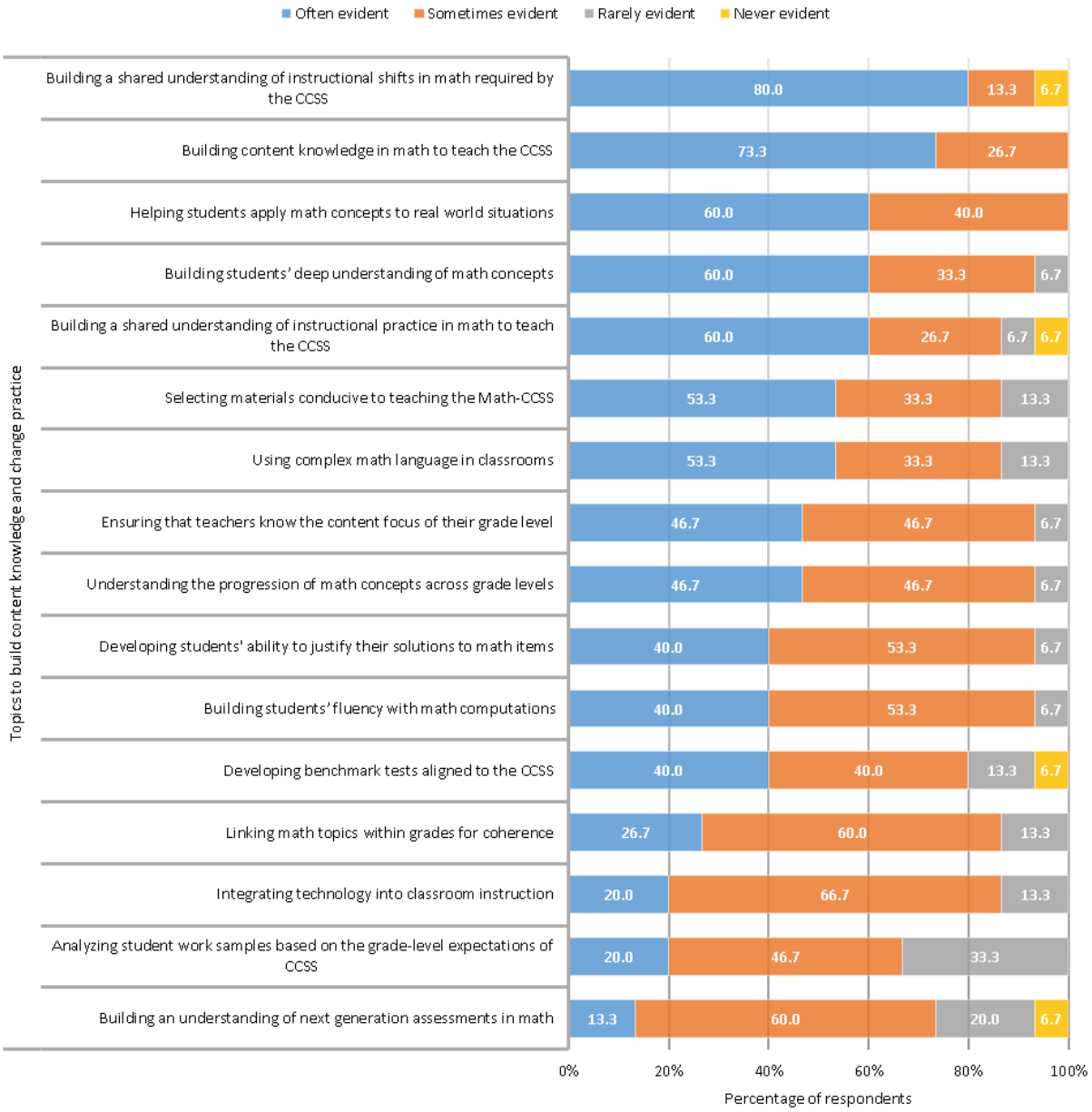


Figure 9. Percentage of curriculum directors using specified resources to differentiate professional development for teachers in elementary, middle, and high school, 2014 (n=15)

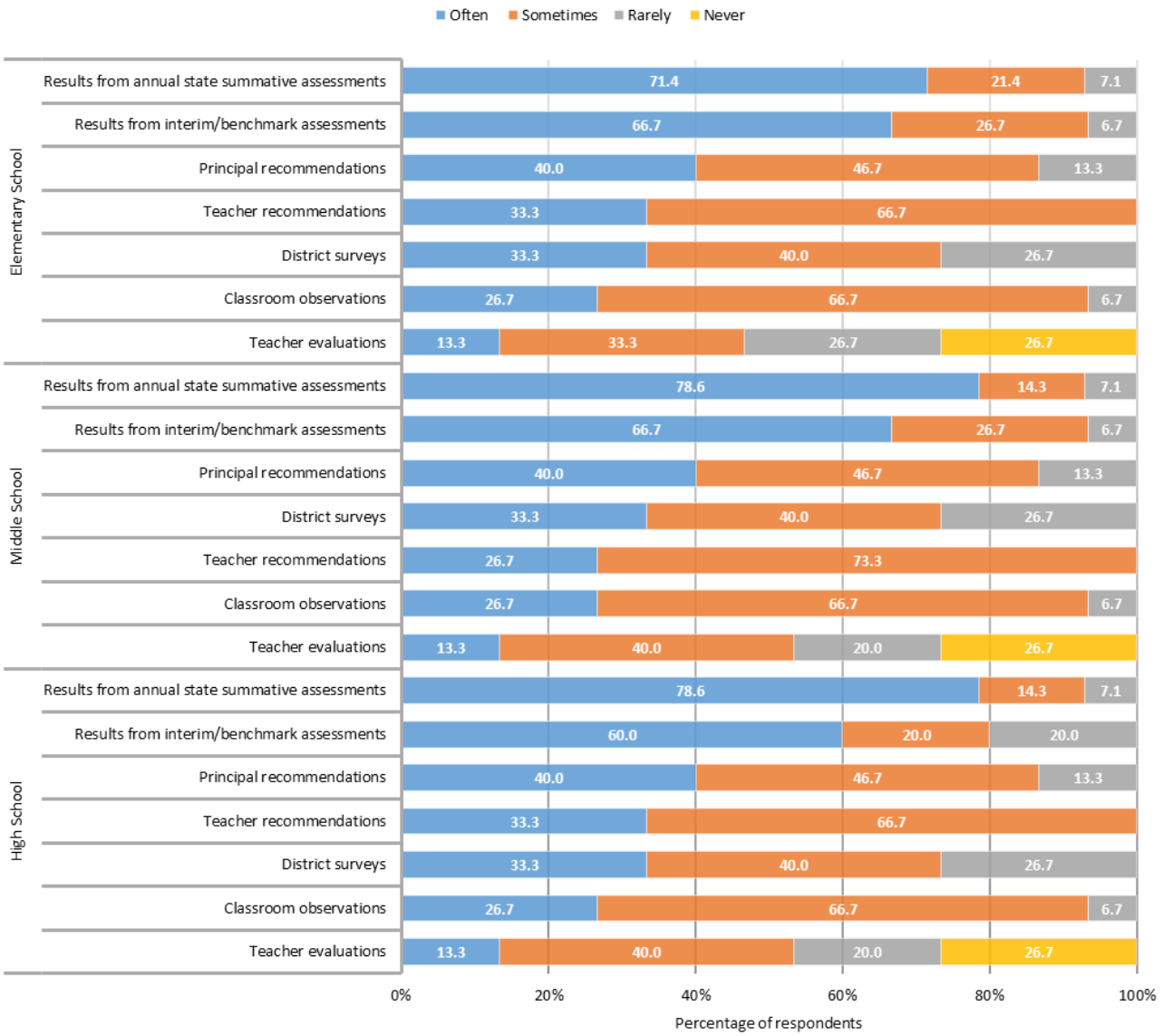


Figure 10. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting that specified topics related to technology are evident in professional development, 2014 (n=15)

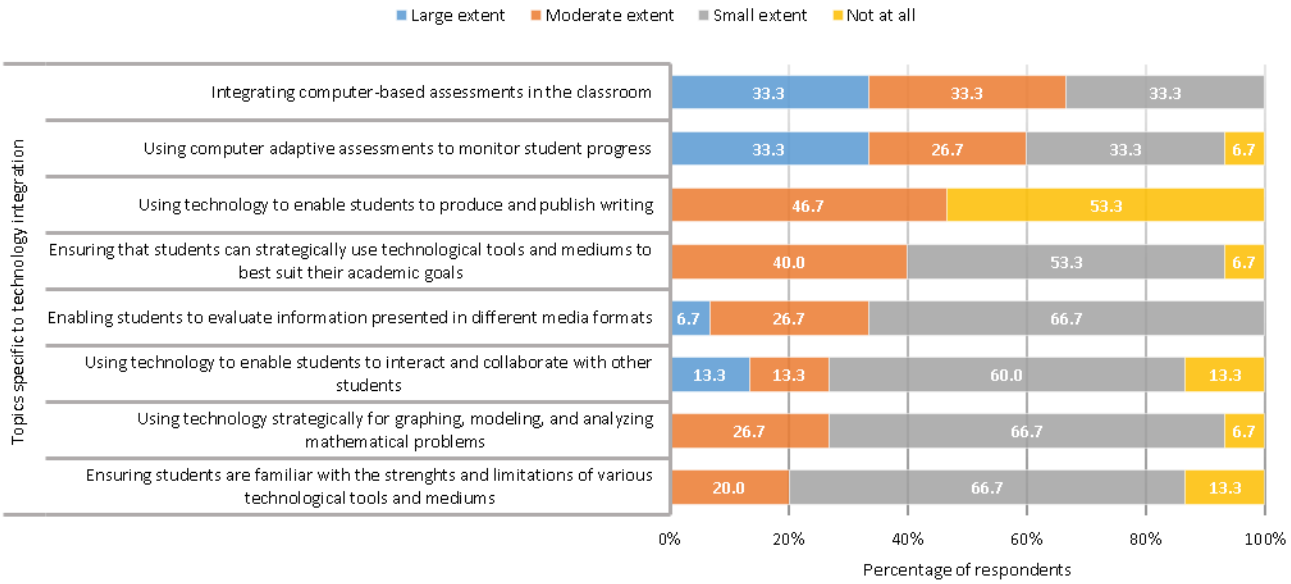


Figure 11. Percentage of curriculum directors using specified resources to align instructional materials to the CCSS, 2013 and 2014 (n=12)

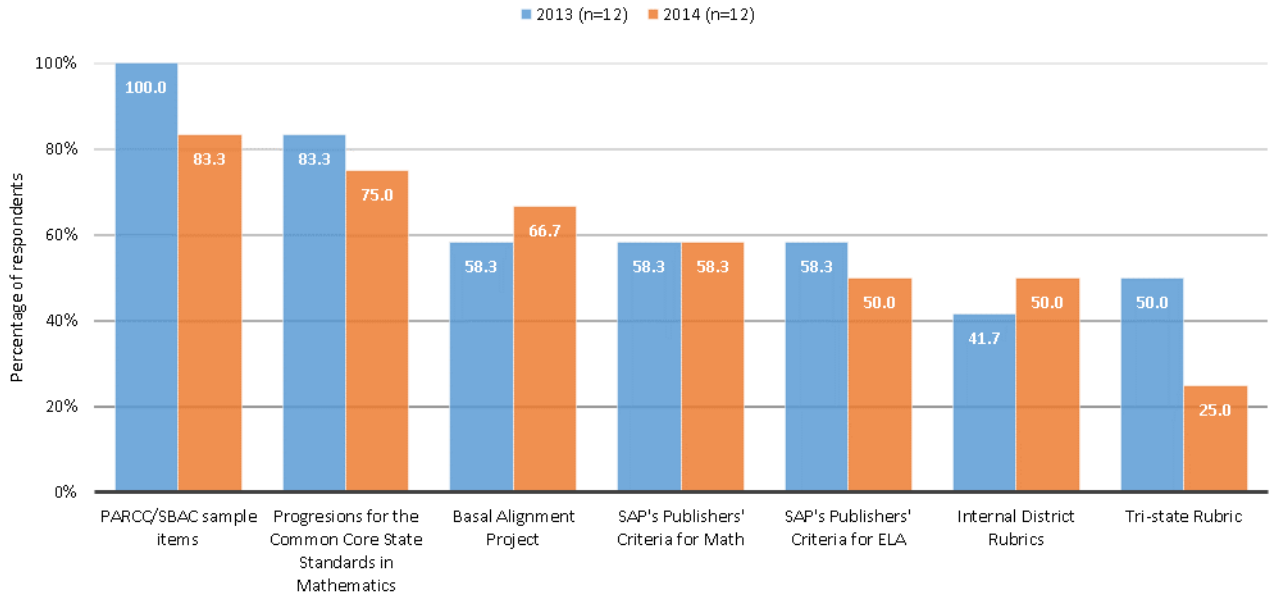


Figure 12. Percentage of curriculum directors using specified resources to identify struggling students in elementary, middle, and high school, 2014 (n=15)

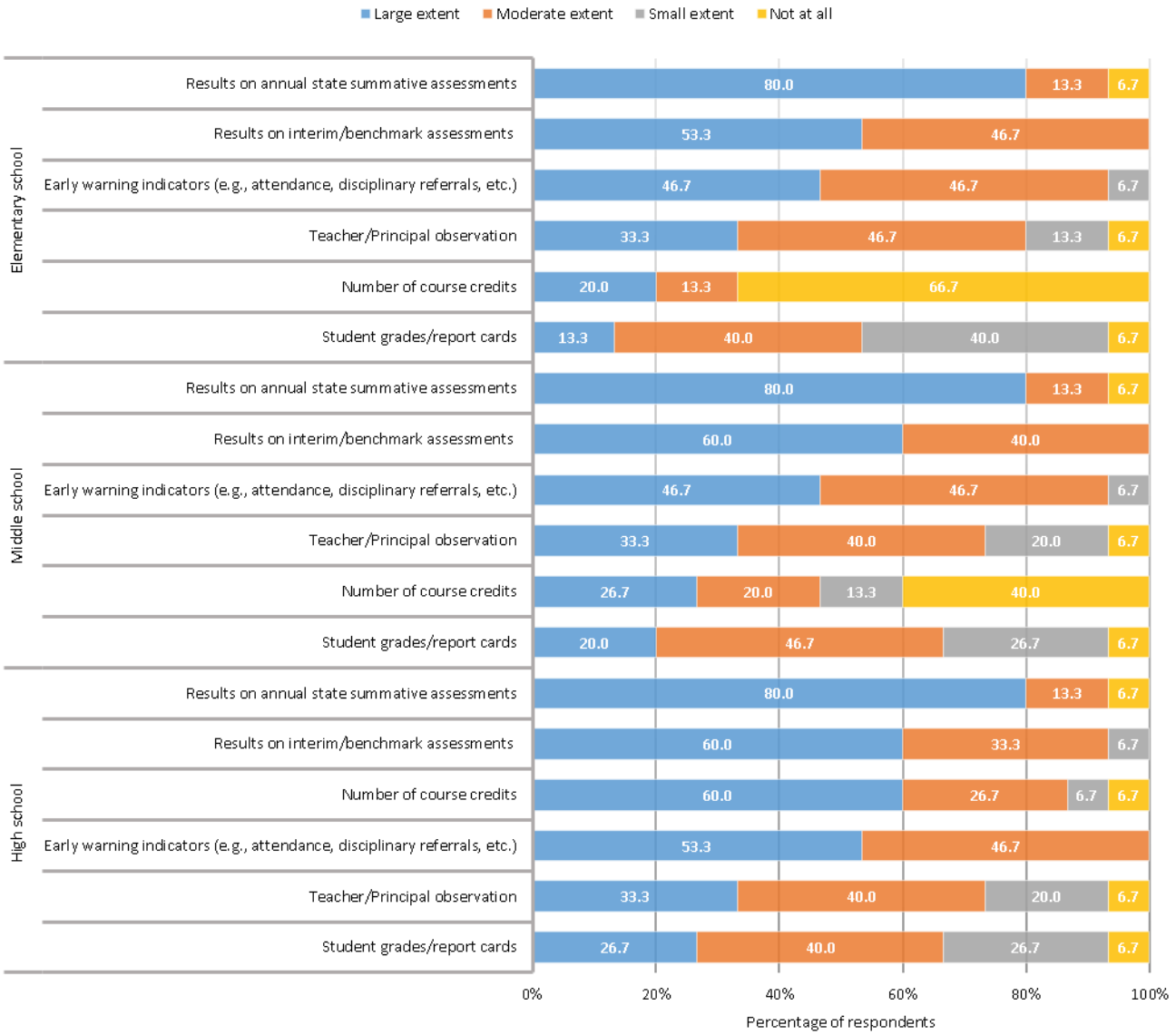


Figure 13. Percentage of curriculum directors using specified strategies to address the needs of struggling students in elementary, middle, and high school, 2014 (n=15)

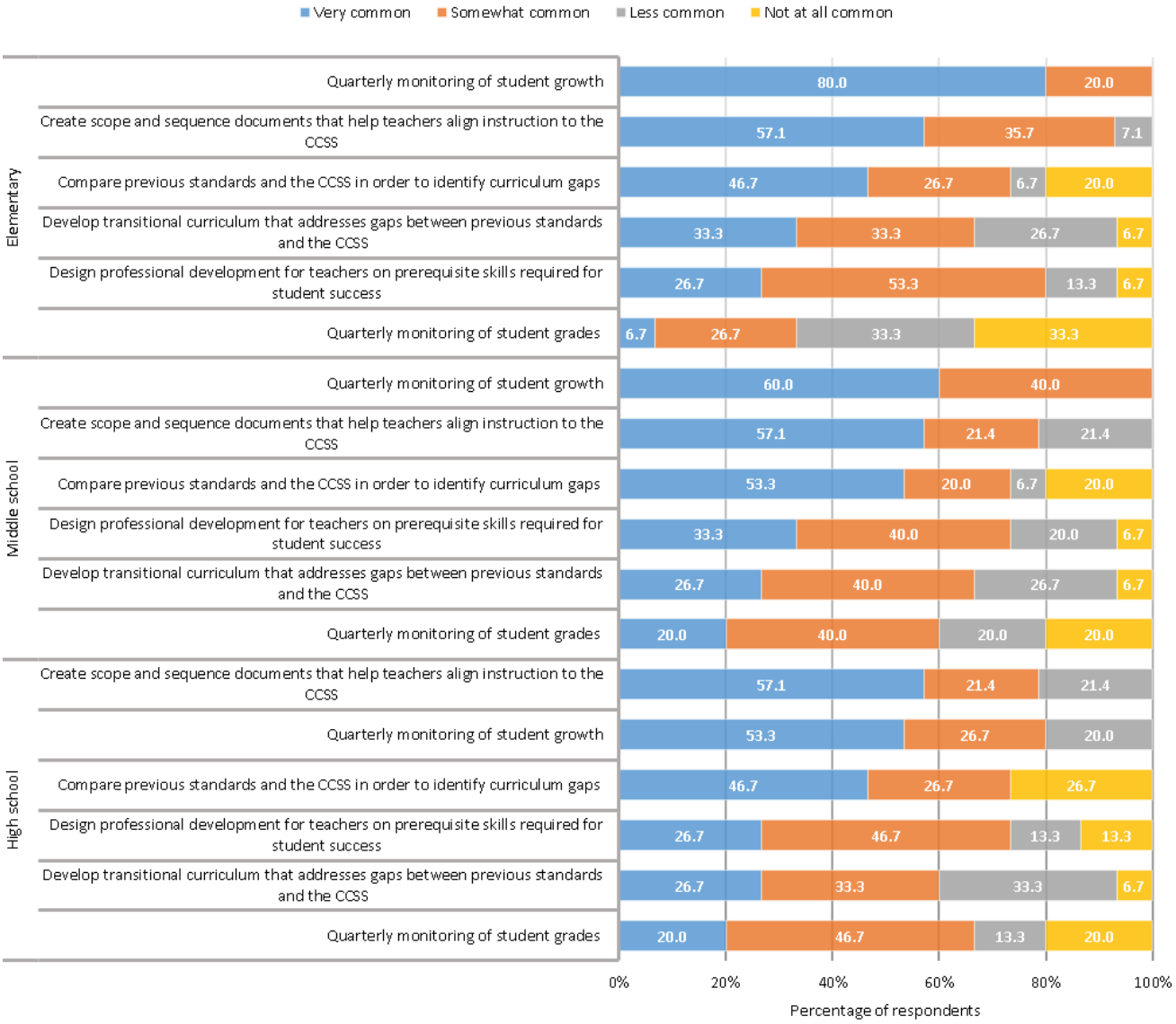
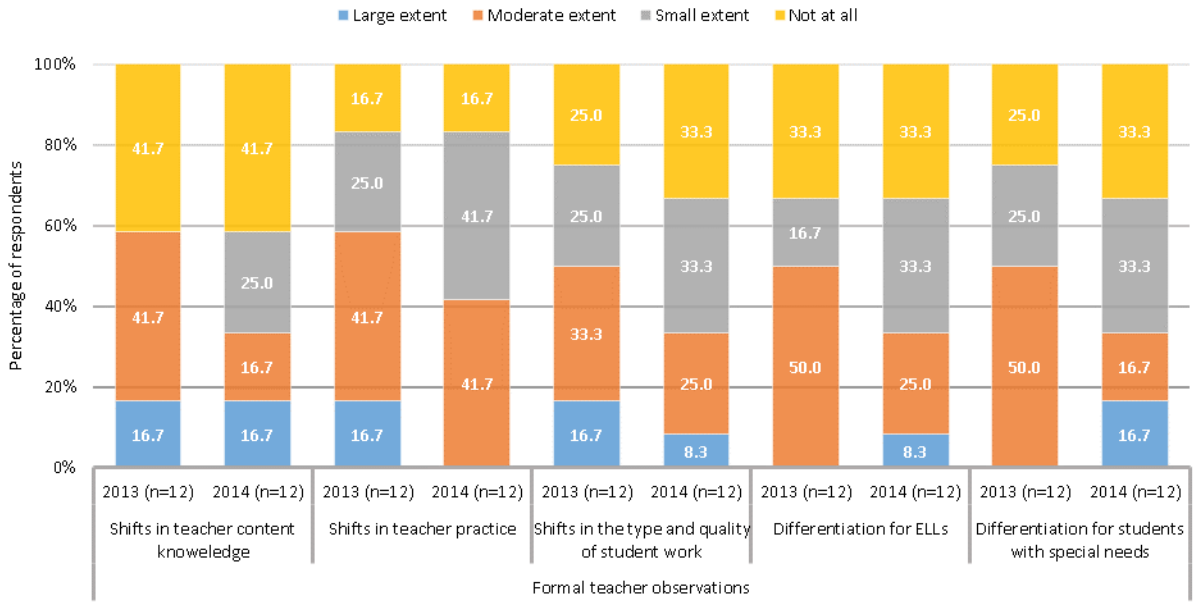
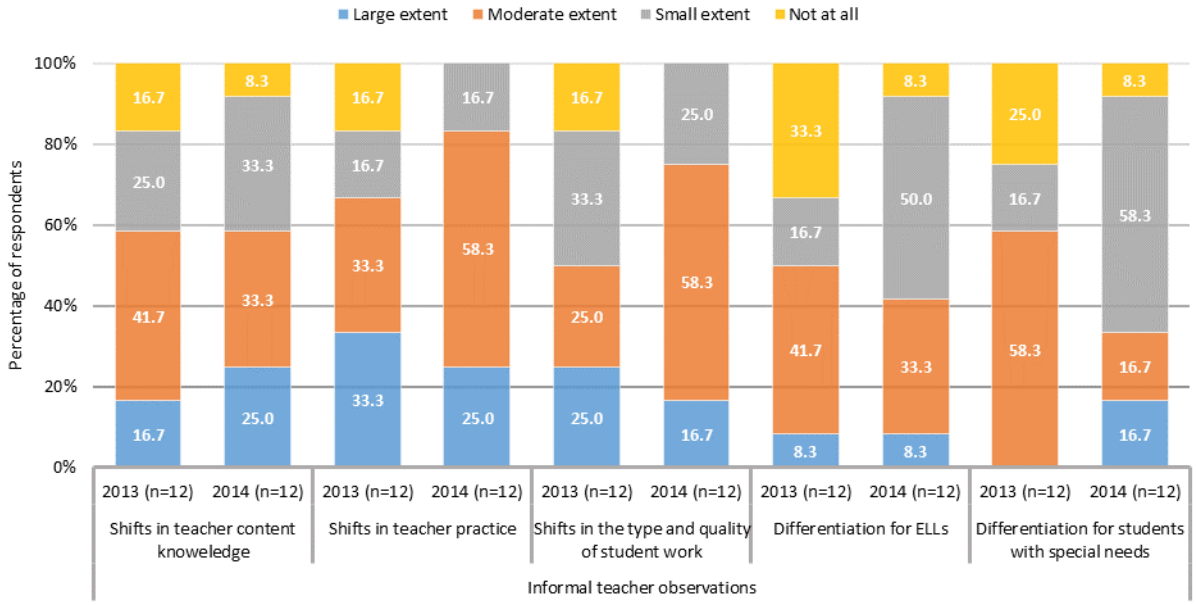


Figure 14. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting the extent to which formal and informal observation protocols in specified areas are aligned with the CCSS, 2013 and 2014 (n=12)





Part II. Professional Development and the Common Core State Standards

Table 1. Percentage of curriculum directors reporting how often district and school staff participate in specified CCSS implementation support activities, 2013 (n=43) and 2014 (n=15)

	Daily/Weekly		Monthly		Quarterly		Annually		Not at all	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Principals conducting faculty meetings exclusively focused on the CCSS		6.7%	39.5%	40.0%	39.5%	20.0%	7.0%	20.0%	14.0%	13.3%
Teachers using online professional development resources aligned to the CCSS	16.3%	13.3%	37.2%	46.7%	27.9%	20.0%	9.3%	6.7%	9.3%	13.3%
Teachers meeting in professional learning communities	41.9%		39.5%	40.0%	16.3%	46.7%			2.3%	13.3%
Principals scheduling common planning time for teachers	60.5%	60.0%	16.3%	20.0%	9.3%	6.7%	9.3%	6.7%	4.7%	6.7%
District leadership convening key stakeholder groups	4.7%		30.2%	13.3%	37.2%	46.7%	18.6%	33.3%	9.3%	6.7%
Teachers discussing the CCSS during parent meetings		6.7%	11.6%	6.7%	48.8%	46.7%	30.2%	33.3%	9.3%	6.7%

Part III. Ensuring Access to the Common Core State Standards for ELLs

- Only a quarter of responding ELL directors (25 percent) "agree" that their district places a high priority on ensuring that ELLs are able to meet the rigor of the CCSS. No respondents agreed that general education teachers are prepared to help ELLs meet the rigor of the CCSS while only 17 percent "agree" that ESL teachers are prepared (Figure 15).

- Approximately half of respondents "agree" that English language proficiency *assessments* are aligned to the CCSS – an increase of 24 percentage points over 2013 – but only a third of respondents (33 percent) "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district's English language proficiency *standards* are aligned to the CCSS (Figure 15).

- Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of respondents who rated the quality of their basal ESL programs as "good" or "excellent" increased from 26 percent to 75 percent. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who rated materials as "good" or "excellent" also increased for supplemental materials that are not affiliated with a particular basal program (68 percent to 75 percent) and supplemental materials that are packaged with core basal programs (42 percent to 58 percent) (Figure 16).

- Over 80 percent of respondents indicated that the importance of teaching standards aligned to expectations in college, the importance of using instructional resources aligned to the CCSS, the need for standards that are nationally benchmarked, and the importance of integrating common assessments aligned with the new standards were "often evident" or "sometimes evident" in district professional development (Figure 17).

- Approximately 42 percent of responding ELL directors indicated that using text-dependent questions to teach the CCSS and developing students' reading and writing skills were "often evident" in district professional development. Another third of respondents (33 percent) indicated that building students' academic vocabulary, teaching complex text using close reading strategies, and building students' background knowledge using rich non-fiction texts were "often evident" in professional development. In comparison, no one indicated that analyzing student work samples based on grade-level expectations in the CCSS and building an understanding of next generation assessments were "often evident" (Figure 18).

- In math, only a quarter of respondents (25 percent) indicated that selecting instructional materials conducive to teaching the CCSS was "often evident" in district professional development. At least 40 percent of respondents indicated that understanding the progression of math concepts across grade levels (42 percent), linking math topics within grades for coherence (42 percent), developing formative assessments aligned with the CCSS (50 percent), and analyzing student work samples based on the grade -level expectations of the CCSS (50 percent) were "rarely evident" in professional development (Figure 19).

Figure 15. Percentage of ELL directors responding to specified statements about readiness to implement the CCSS with ELLs, 2013 (n=19) and 2014 (n=12)

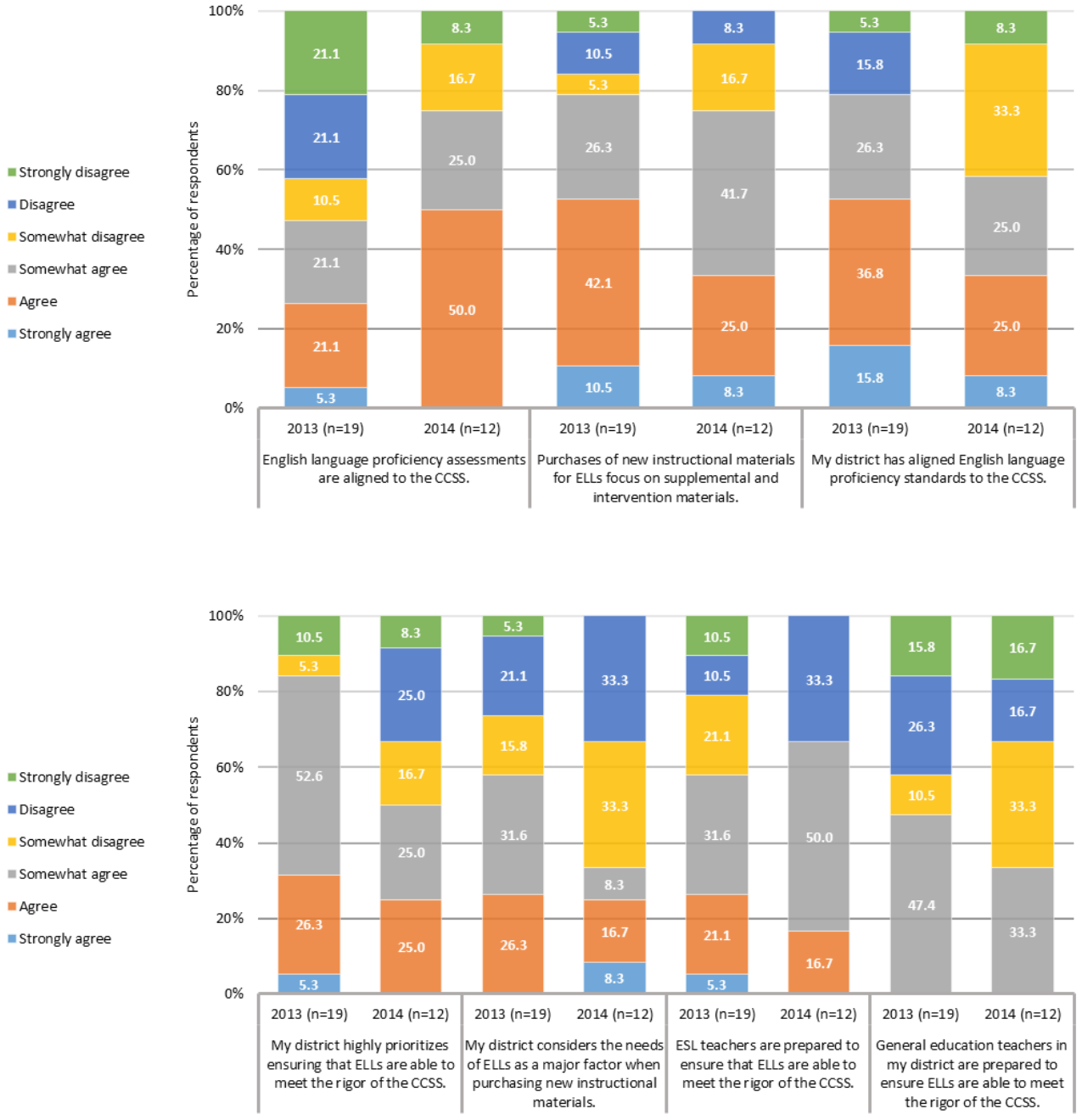


Figure 16. Percentage of ELL directors rating the alignment of district instructional materials for ELLs to the CCSS, 2013 (n=19) and 2014 (n=12)

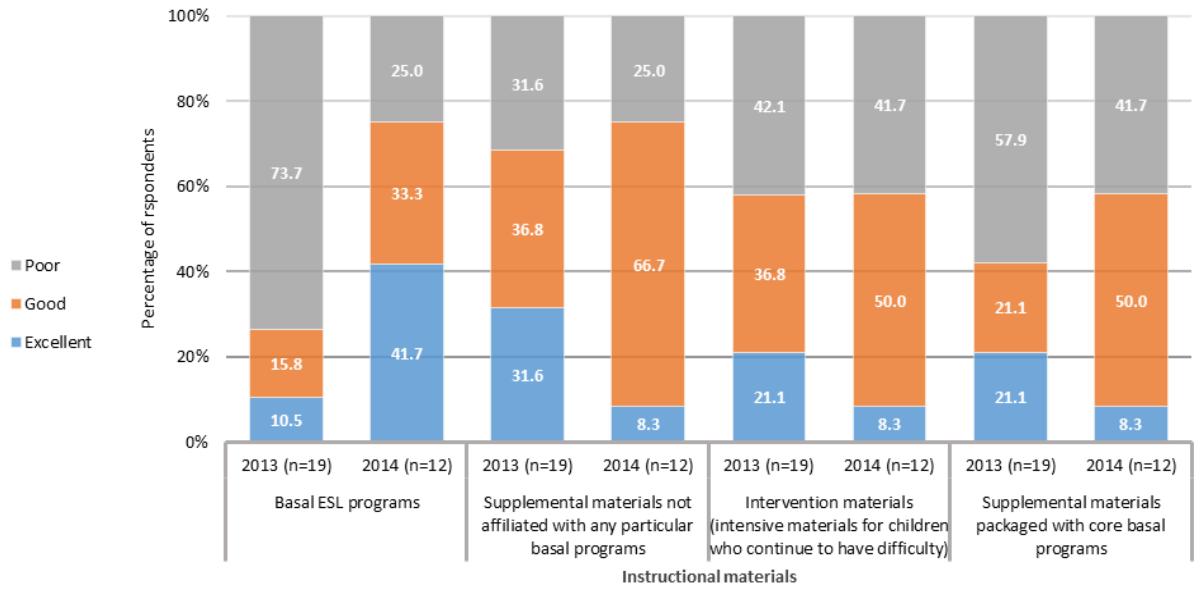


Figure 17. Percentage of ELL directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development, 2014 (n=12)

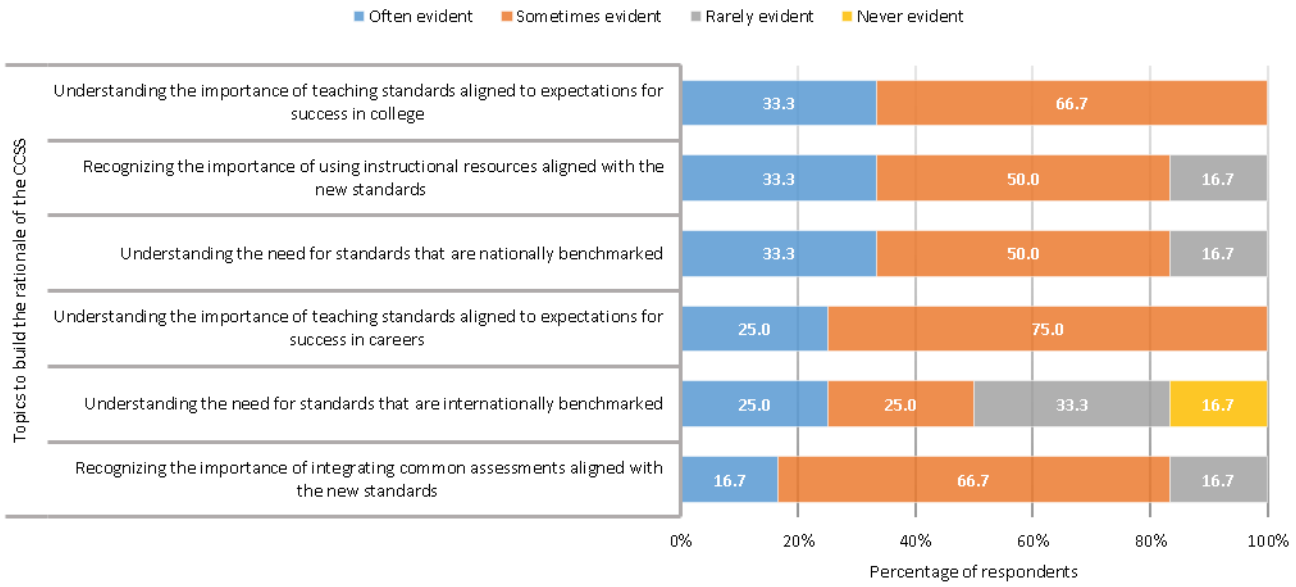


Figure 18. Percentage of ELL directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for ELA, 2014 (n=12)

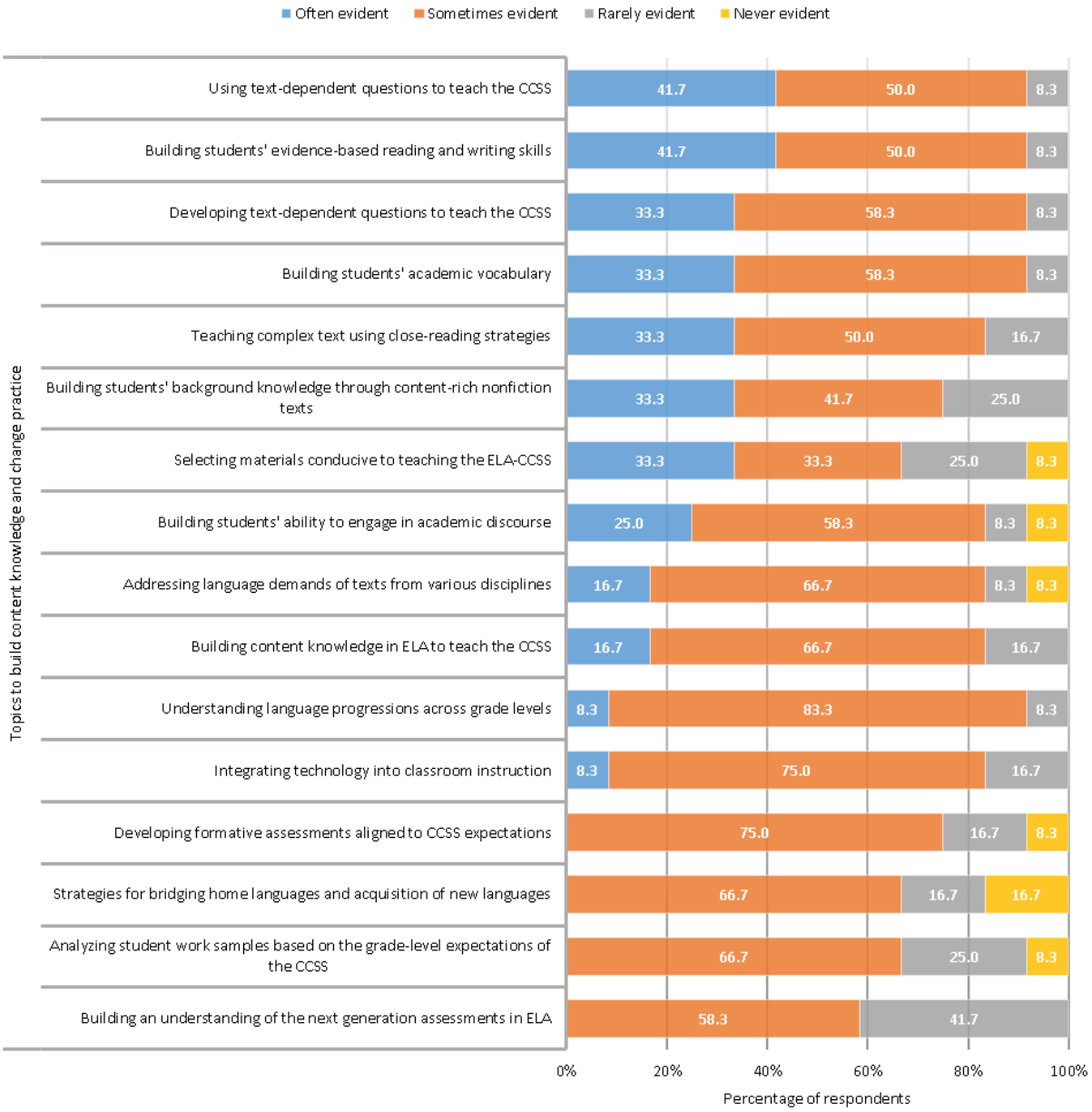
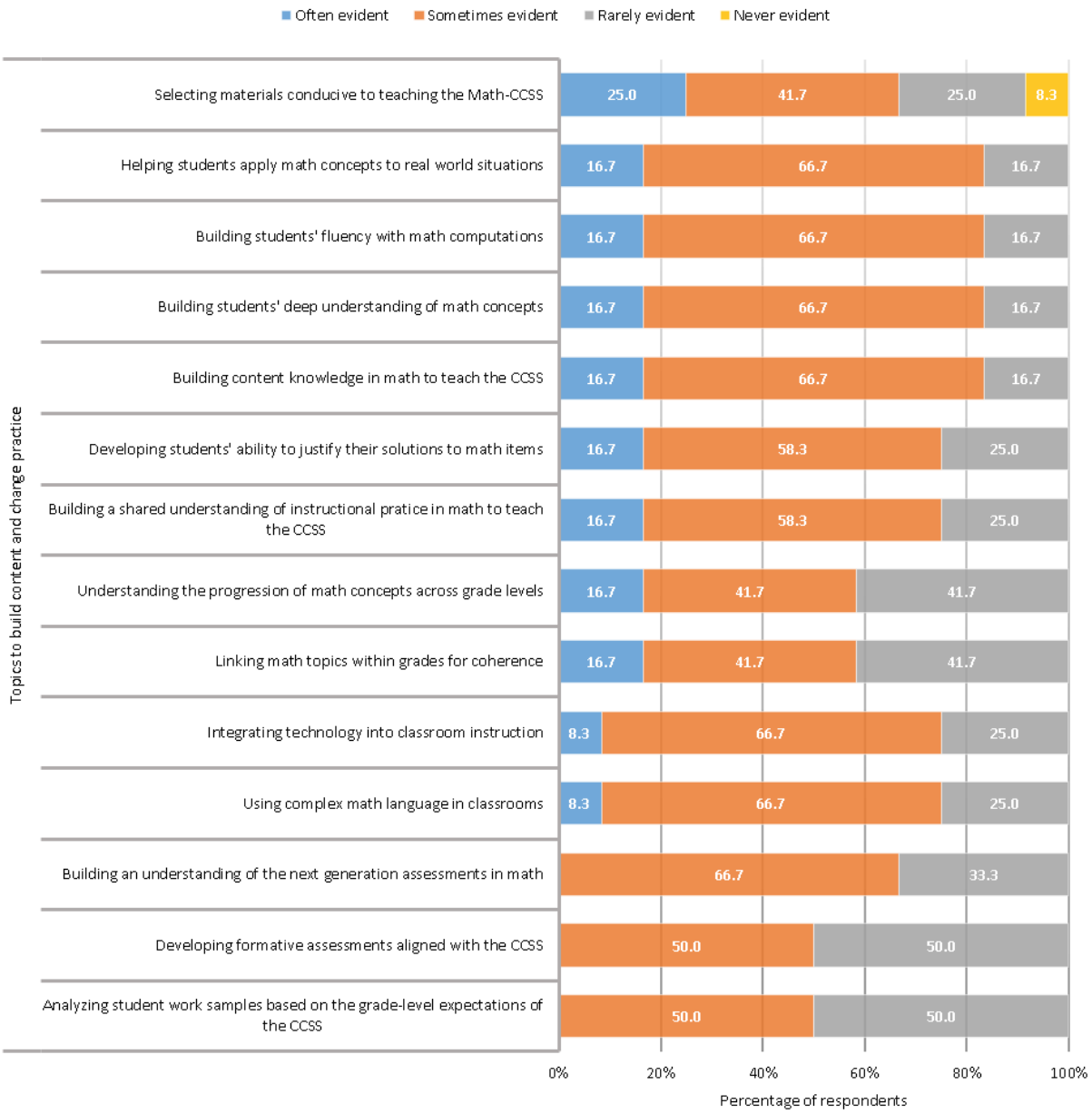


Figure 19. Percentage of ELL directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for math, 2014 (n=12)



Part IV. Ensuring Access to the Common Core State Standards for Students with Special Needs

- In 2014, approximately 55 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district highly prioritizes students with disabilities being able to meet the rigor of the CCSS – a decrease of 9 percentage points from 2013. Furthermore, approximately 82 percent of responding special education directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district is successful at identifying students with disabilities – an increase of 11 percentage points from 2013 (Figure 20).

- Roughly a third of responding special education directors indicated that topics meant to communicate the rationale for adopting the CCSS, such as recognizing the importance of using instructional resources aligned with the CCSS (36 percent) and recognizing the importance of integrating common assessments aligned with the new standards (36 percent) were "often evident" in district professional development (Figure 21).

- Approximately 36 percent of special education directors indicated that building students' evidence-based reading and writing skills was "often evident" in district professional development in ELA. An additional 64 percent of respondents reported that building an understanding of next generation assessments in ELA and building students' ability to engage in academic discourse were "rarely evident" or "never evident" in professional development activities (Figure 22).

- Less than 20 percent of responding special education directors indicated all topics were "often evident" in district professional development in math. Approximately 36 percent of respondents indicated that building a shared understanding of instructional practice in math to teach the CCSS was "rarely evident" or "never evident" in professional development (Figure 23).

- In responses to open-ended questions, special education directors noted the need to raise expectations for students with disabilities and to build general education teachers' ability to help students with special needs (Appendix A).

Figure 20. Percentage of special education directors responding to specified statements about readiness to implement the CCSS for students with special needs, 2013 (n=14) and 2014 (n=11)

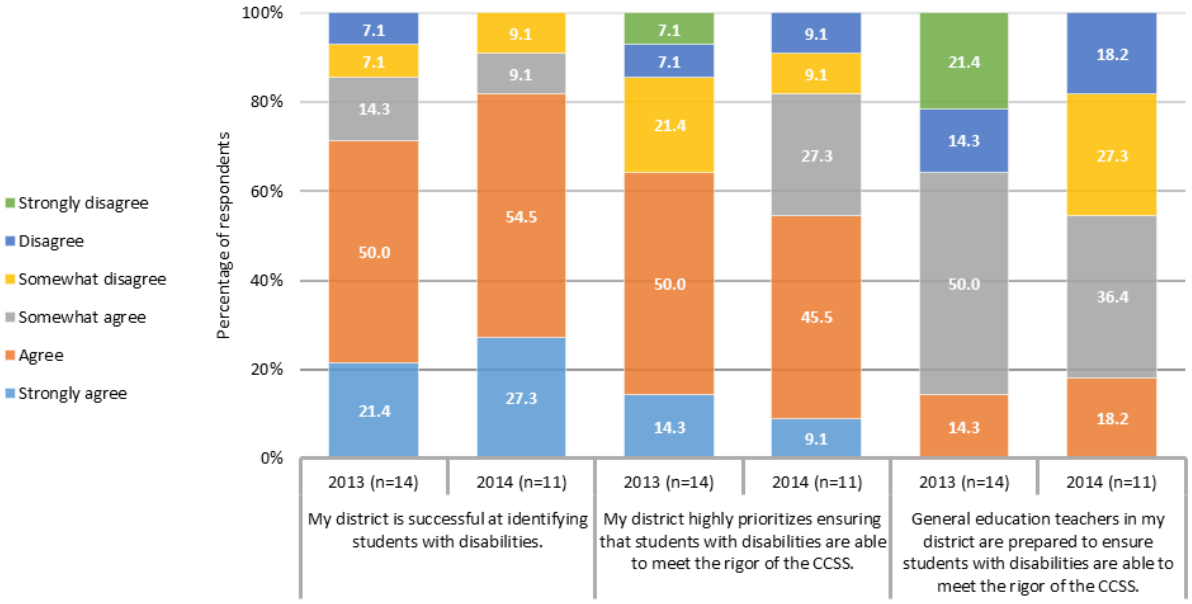


Figure 21. Percentage of special education directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development, 2014 (n=11)

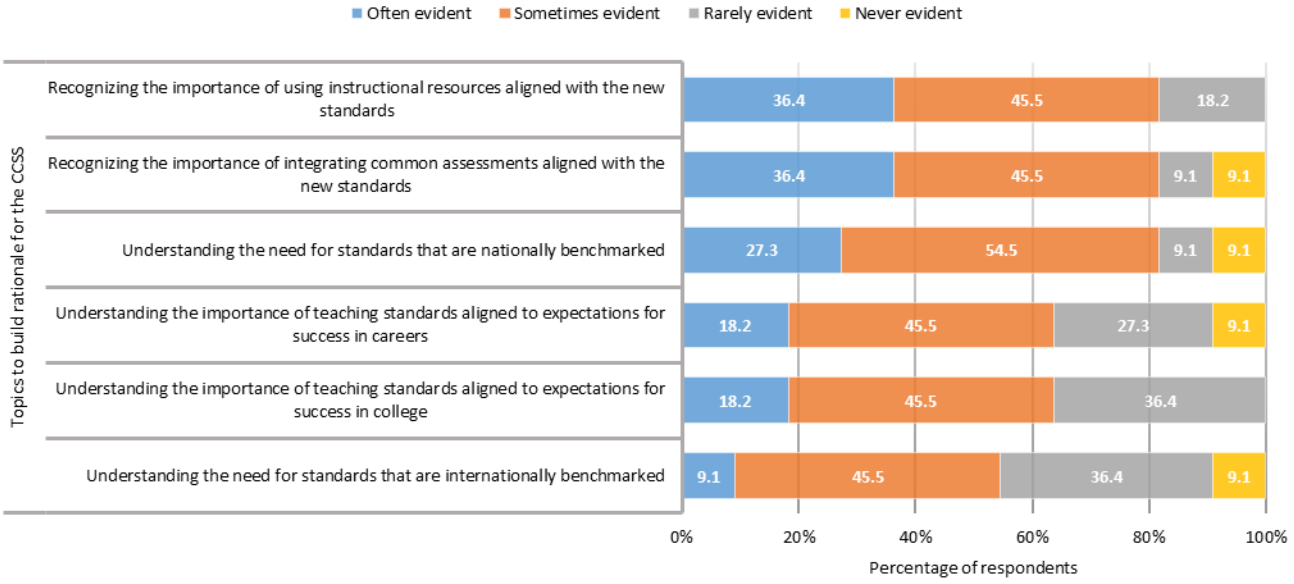


Figure 22. Percentage of special education directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for ELA, 2014 (n=11)

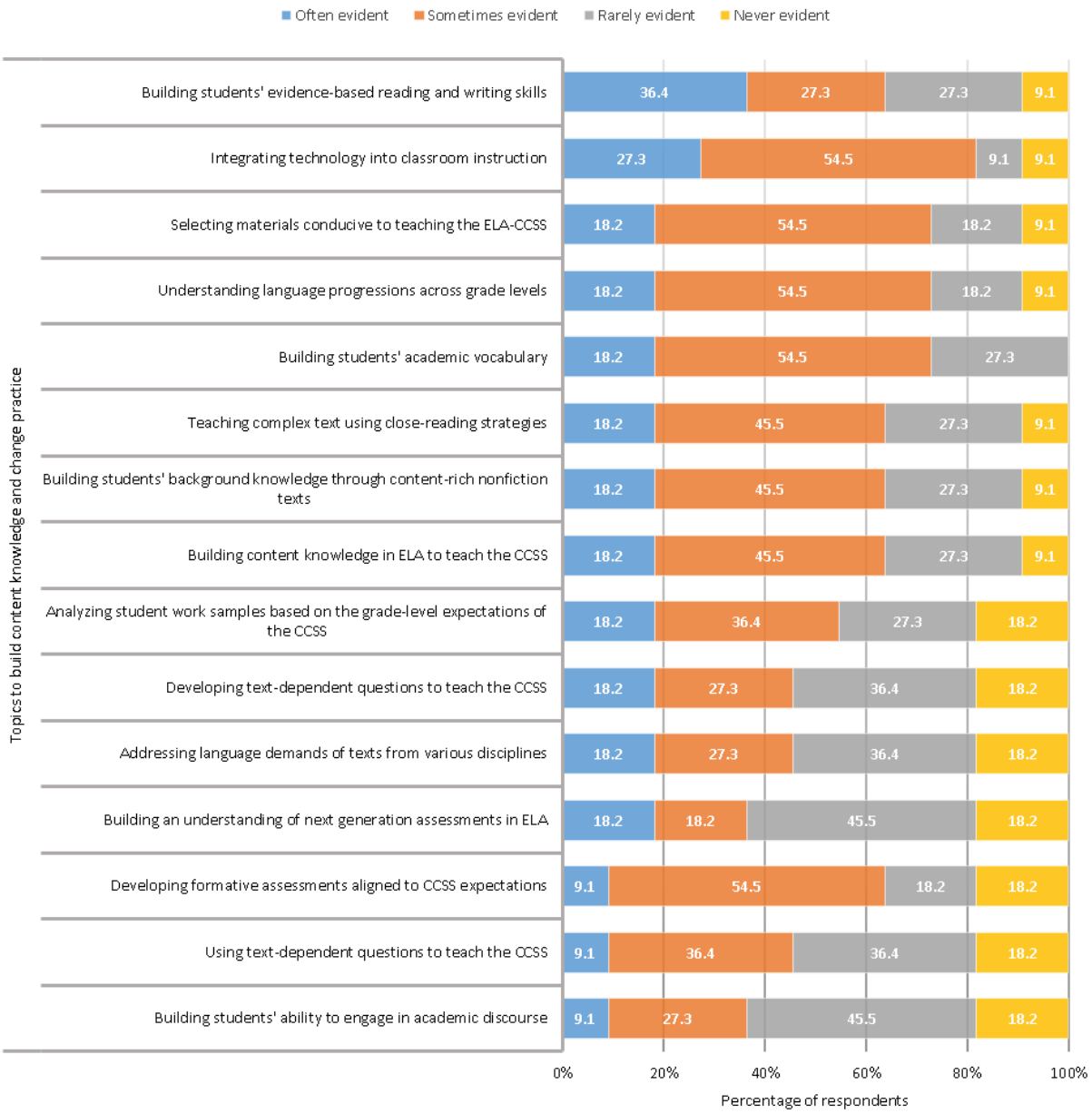
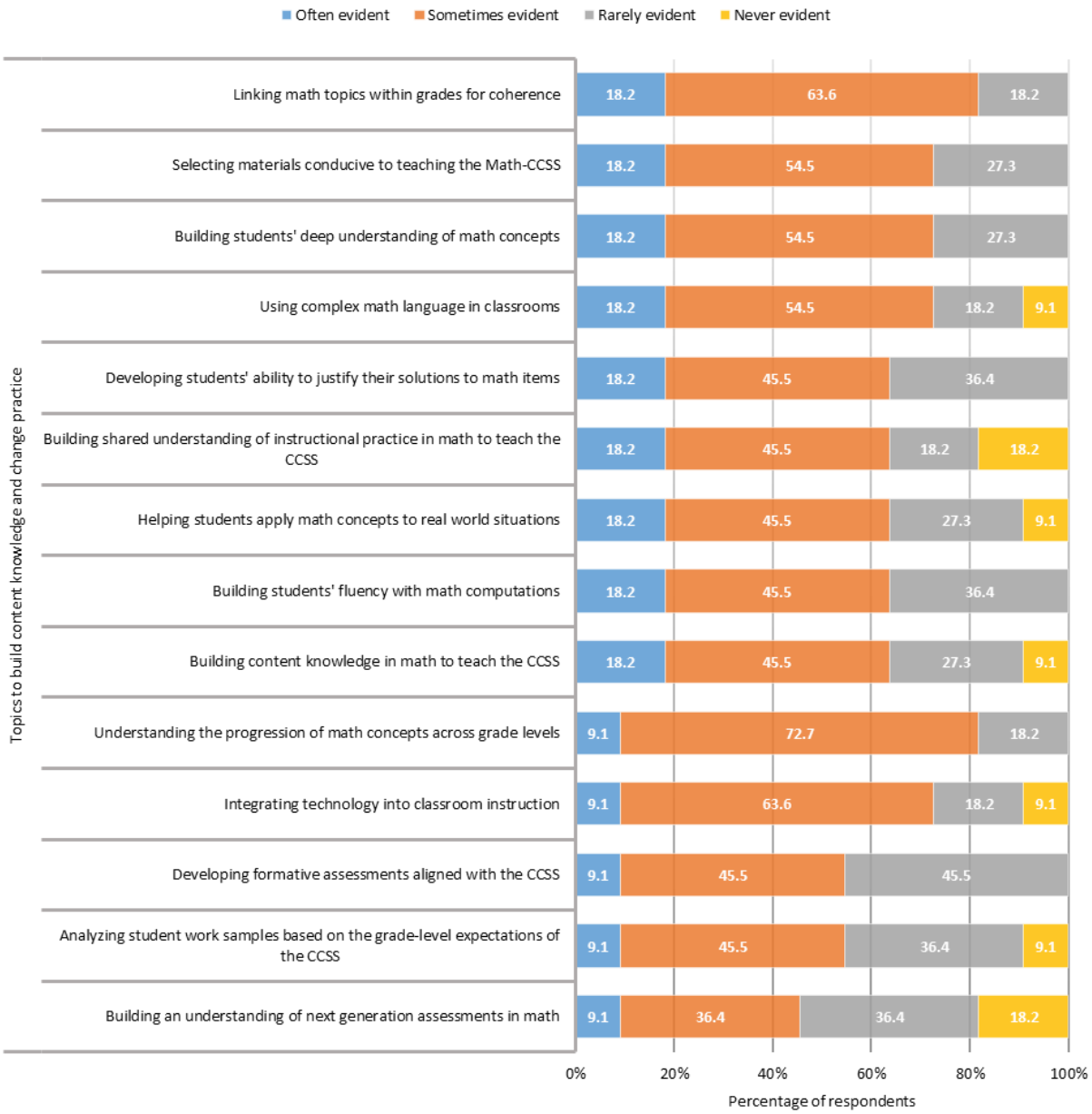


Figure 23. Percentage of special education directors reporting that specified CCSS topics are evident in professional development for math, 2014 (n=11)



Part V. Measuring Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

- The percentage of responding research directors who "agree" or "strongly agree" that tracking the implementation of the CCSS is a high priority for their district declined from 70 percent in 2013 to 63 percent in 2014. About 38 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district has a regular timetable for collecting implementation data, which is an increase of 8 percentage points over 2013 (Figure 24).

- About a third of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their districts' implementation goals are clearly understood by school-level staff (31 percent) and that their districts' use implementation data to tailor professional development for school-level staff (31 percent) (Figure 24).

- In 2013 and 2014, over 80 percent of respondents rated their district's progress as either "excellent" or "good" in terms of providing timely data for school leaders (80 percent and 88 percent, respectively) and creating data systems to store information from multiple departments (95 percent and 88 percent, respectively). Furthermore, approximately 80 percent of respondents rate their district's progress as "excellent" or "good" in providing professional development on the use of data to support classroom instruction (Figure 25).

- Between 2013 and 2014, there has been an increase in the percentage of respondents who "sometimes use" or "often use" student work samples (23 percentage point increase) and teacher observation instruments aligned to the CCSS (24 percentage point increase) to monitor classroom implementation of the CCSS. There has also been a 14 percentage point increase in respondents who indicate that districts "sometimes use" or "often use" technology surveys to assess progress toward meeting minimum requirements for next generation assessments (Figure 26).

- There has been an increase in the percentage of respondents who report that districts "sometimes use" or "often use" principal surveys to assess instructional leadership aligned to the CCSS (6 percentage point increase) and assess principal understanding of the CCSS (18 percentage point increase) (Figure 26).

- ELL directors report a 14 percentage point increase between 2013 and 2014 in the use of student work samples to monitor the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs to a "large extent" or "moderate extent." There was also an increase in the percentage of respondents who use classroom observations (9 percentage points), student performance on interim assessments (14 percentage points), and the movement of ELLs into higher English proficiency levels to assess CCSS implementation (4 percentage points) to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" (Figure 27).

- Between 2013 and 2014, special education directors report a decrease in the use of state-mandated modified assessments and results on interim assessments to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" (33 percentage points and 20 percentage points, respectively). The use of classroom observations, state-mandated alternative assessments, student work samples, and placement in advanced courses to a "large extent" or "moderate extent" also declined (Figure 28).

- Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of respondents who "sometimes use" or "often use" high school graduation rates (9 percentage points), end of year student achievement scores (9 percentage points), and enrollment and performance in advanced placement courses (14 percentage points, respectively) to assess CCSS implementation declined somewhat (Figures 29).

- In responses to open-ended answers, research directors reported the need for metrics and strategies for collecting implementation data. Some research directors highlighted the lack of information on what successful implementation looks like in practice (Appendix A).

Figure 24. Percentage of research directors responding to specified statements about readiness to implement the CCSS, 2013 (n=20) and 2014 (n=16)

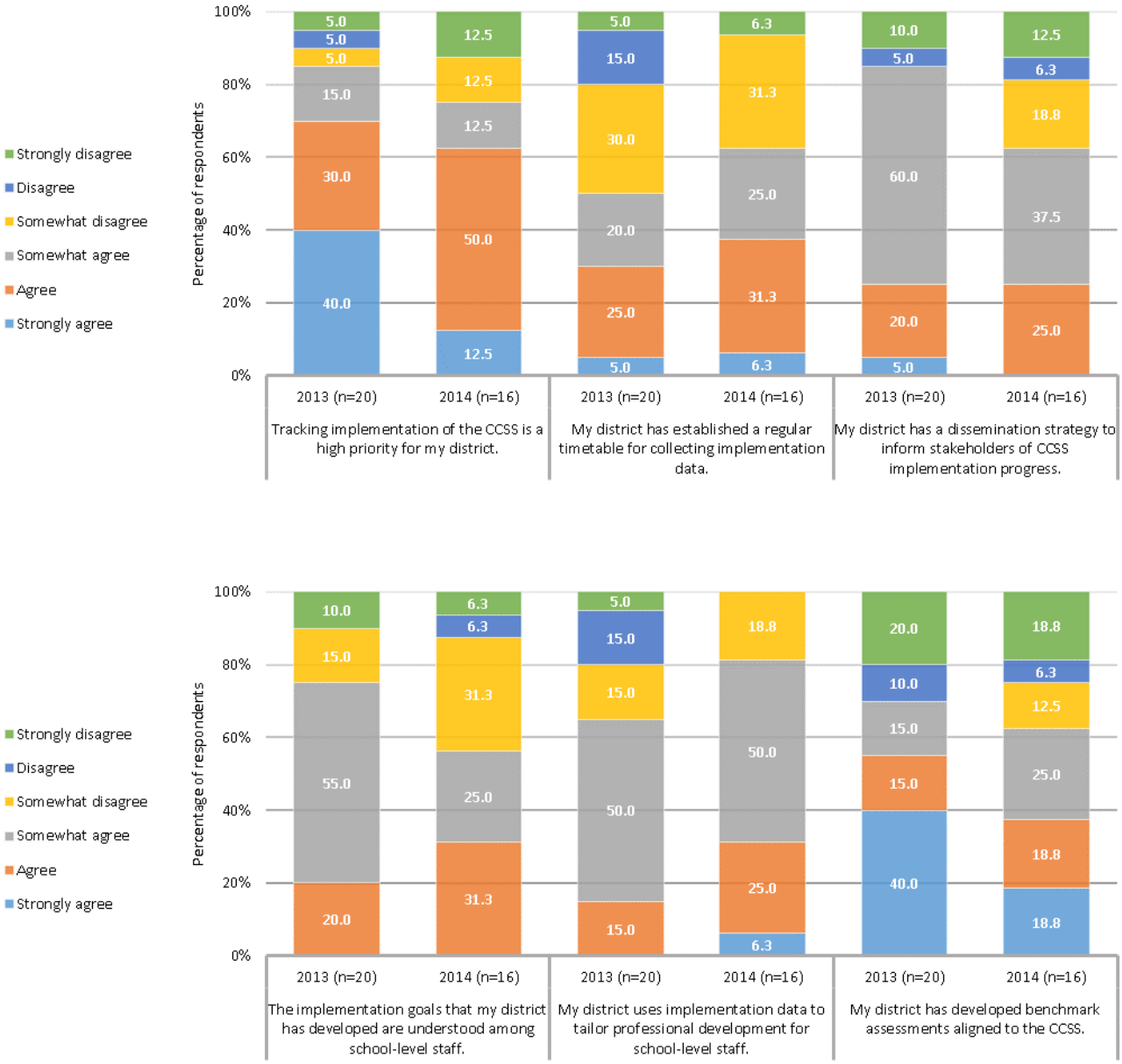
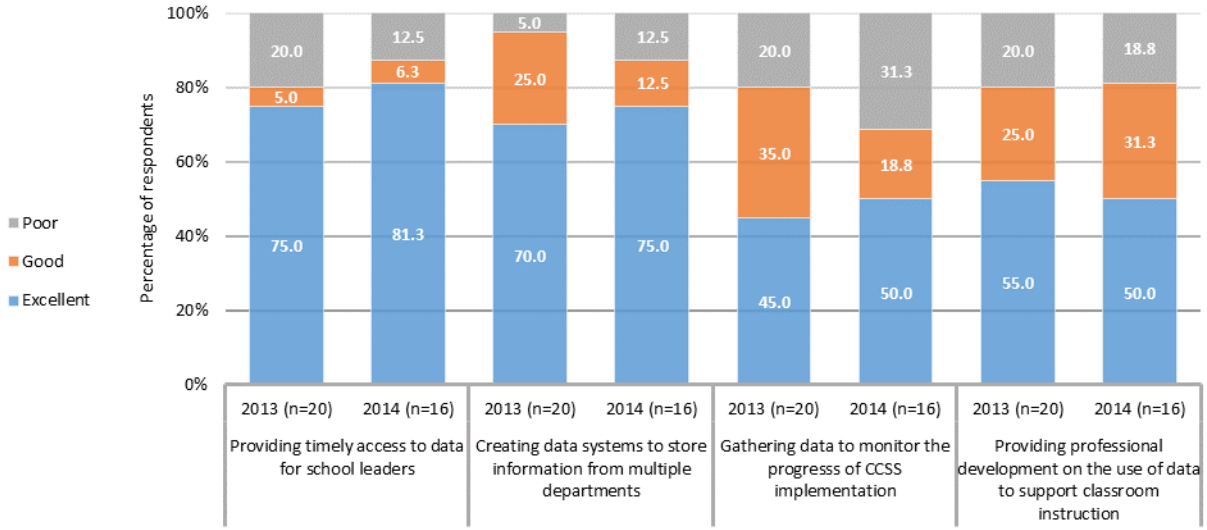


Figure 25. Percentage of research directors indicating the strength of progress in specified areas of CCSS implementation, 2013 (n=20) and 2014 (n=16)



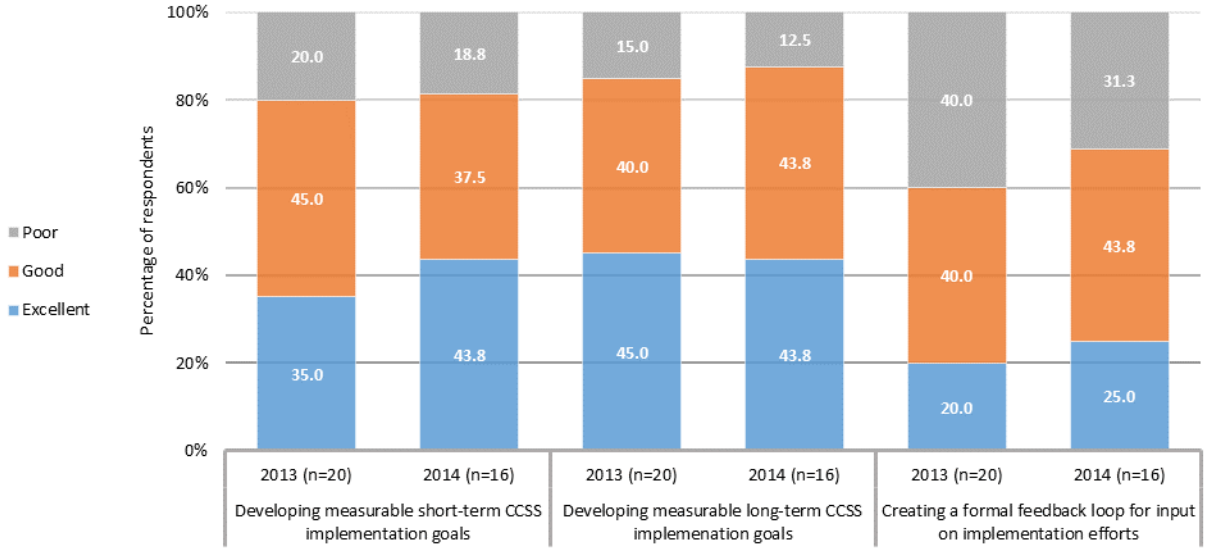


Figure 26. Percentage of research directors reporting use of specified data to measure implementation of the CCSS, 2013 (n=20) and 2014 (n=16)

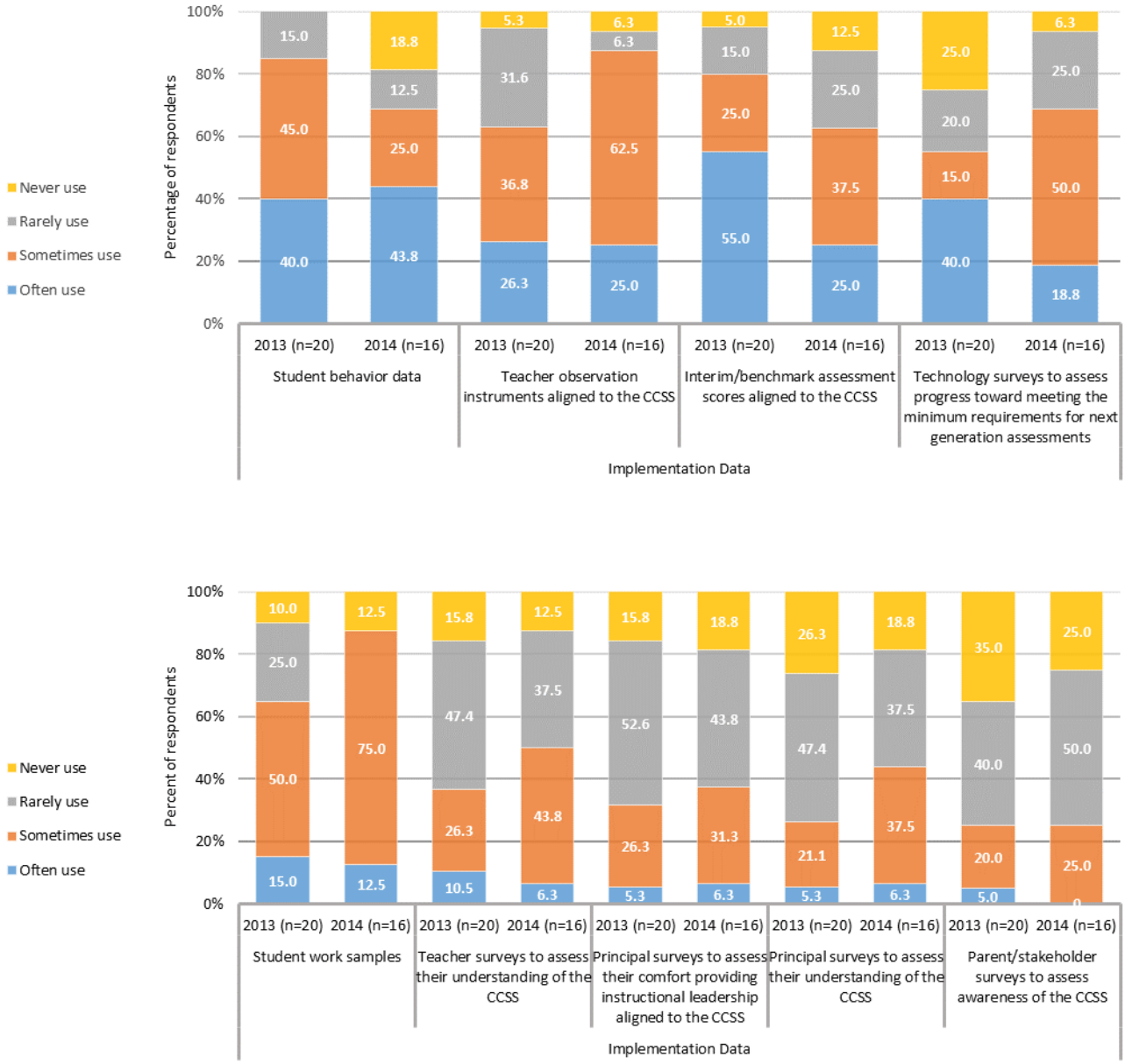


Figure 27. Percentage of ELL directors reporting use of specified data to measure implementation of the CCSS, 2013 (n=19) and 2014 (n=12)

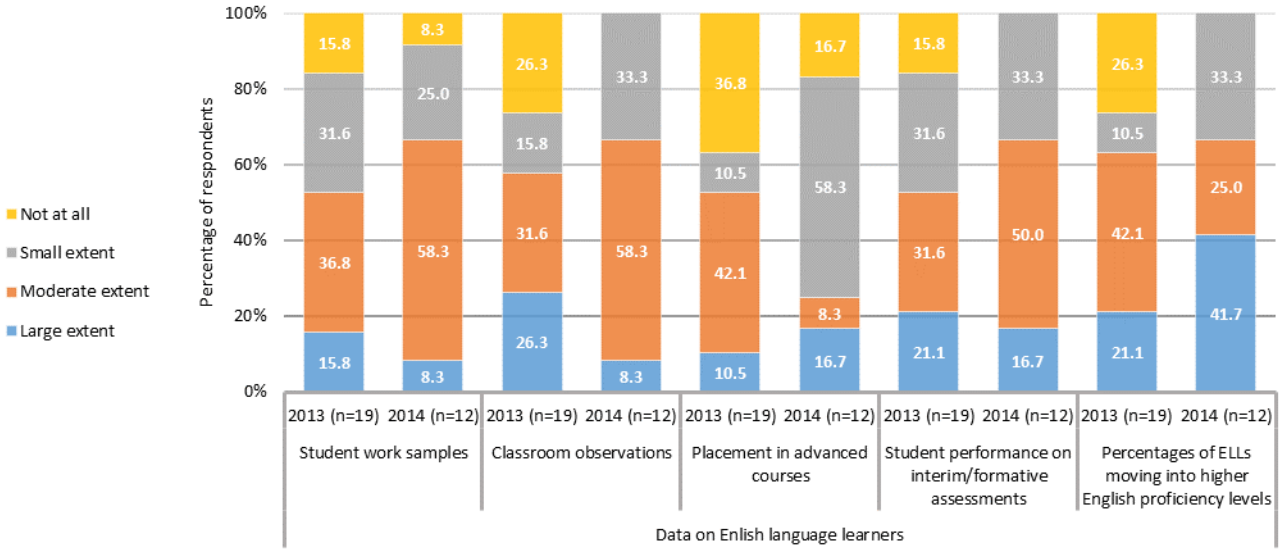


Figure 28. Percentage of special education directors reporting use of specified data to measure implementation of the CCSS, 2013(n=14) and 2014 (n=11)

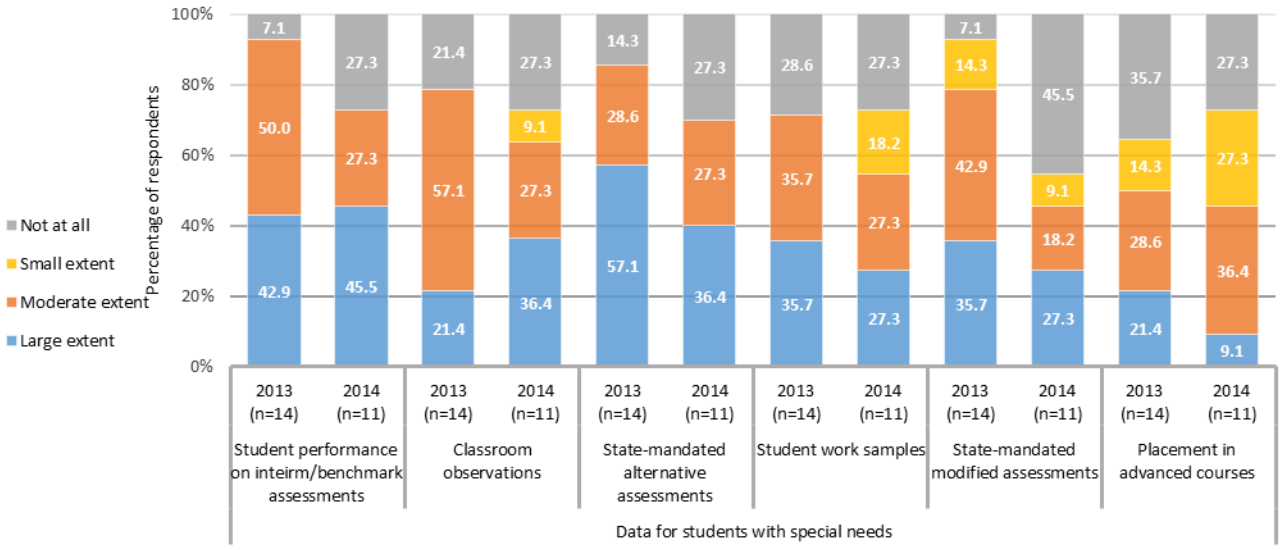
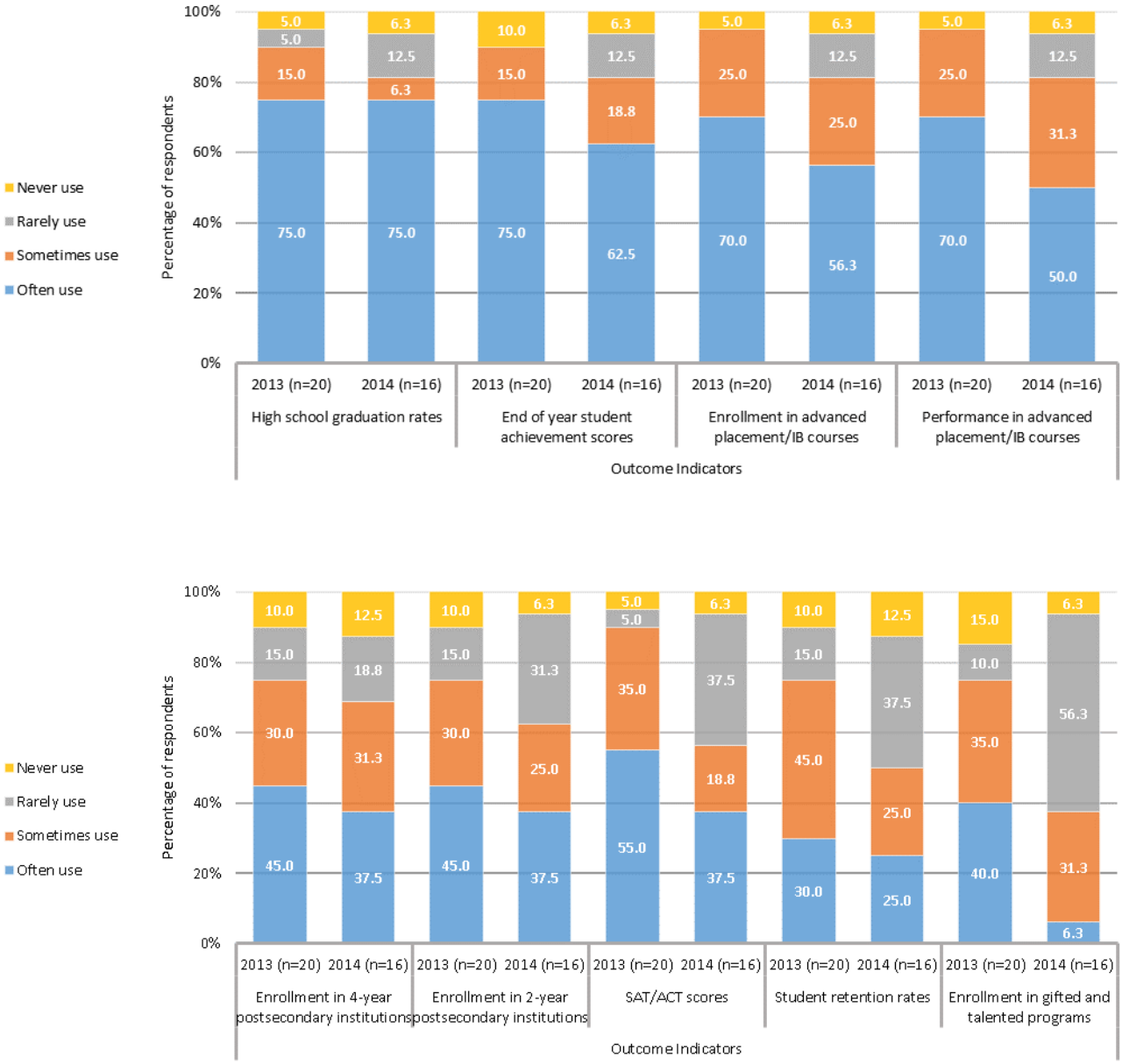


Figure 29. Percentage of research directors reporting use of specified outcome data to measure implementation of the CCSS, 2013 (n=20) and 2014 (n=16)



- Seventy-five percent of responding communications directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district is active in building public support for the CCSS. Another 88 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district is actively engaged in informing stakeholders of the CCSS and creating materials to inform stakeholders of the CCSS (Figure 30).

- Approximately 63 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district regularly provides stakeholders information about next generation assessments, that school-level staff are prepared to answer questions about the CCSS, and that their communications team has a strong understanding of the CCSS (Figure 30).

- Responses also suggest areas of needed improvement in district communications and messaging strategies. For instance, only 38 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that stakeholders understand that implementation of the CCSS is a lengthy process and that their district regularly provides information about the CCSS to families from different language backgrounds (Figure 30).

- According to *all respondents,* the stakeholder groups most likely to be *involved in* and/or *informed of* their school district's CCSS implementation strategy are certified teachers, teacher unions/organizations, local school boards, and state departments of education. Conversely, the stakeholder groups least likely to be *involved in* and/or *informed of* their district's CCSS implementation strategy are faith-based organizations, business leaders, elected city officials, and community-based organizations (Figure 31).

- The communication mediums used most frequently to interact with stakeholder groups are the school district's website, local newspapers, and Twitter. The mediums used most frequently to communicate with parents and community leaders are Facebook, Twitter, and informational brochures. For school-based staff, the most commonly used communication mediums are intranet staff sites and internal staff communications (Table 2).

- In responses to open-ended questions, communications directors indicated that common challenges to communicating with stakeholders about the CCSS include the complexity of the CCSS and coordinating consistent messages throughout the school district (Appendix A).

Figure 30. Percentage of communications directors responding to specified statements about readiness to implement the CCSS, 2014 (N=8)

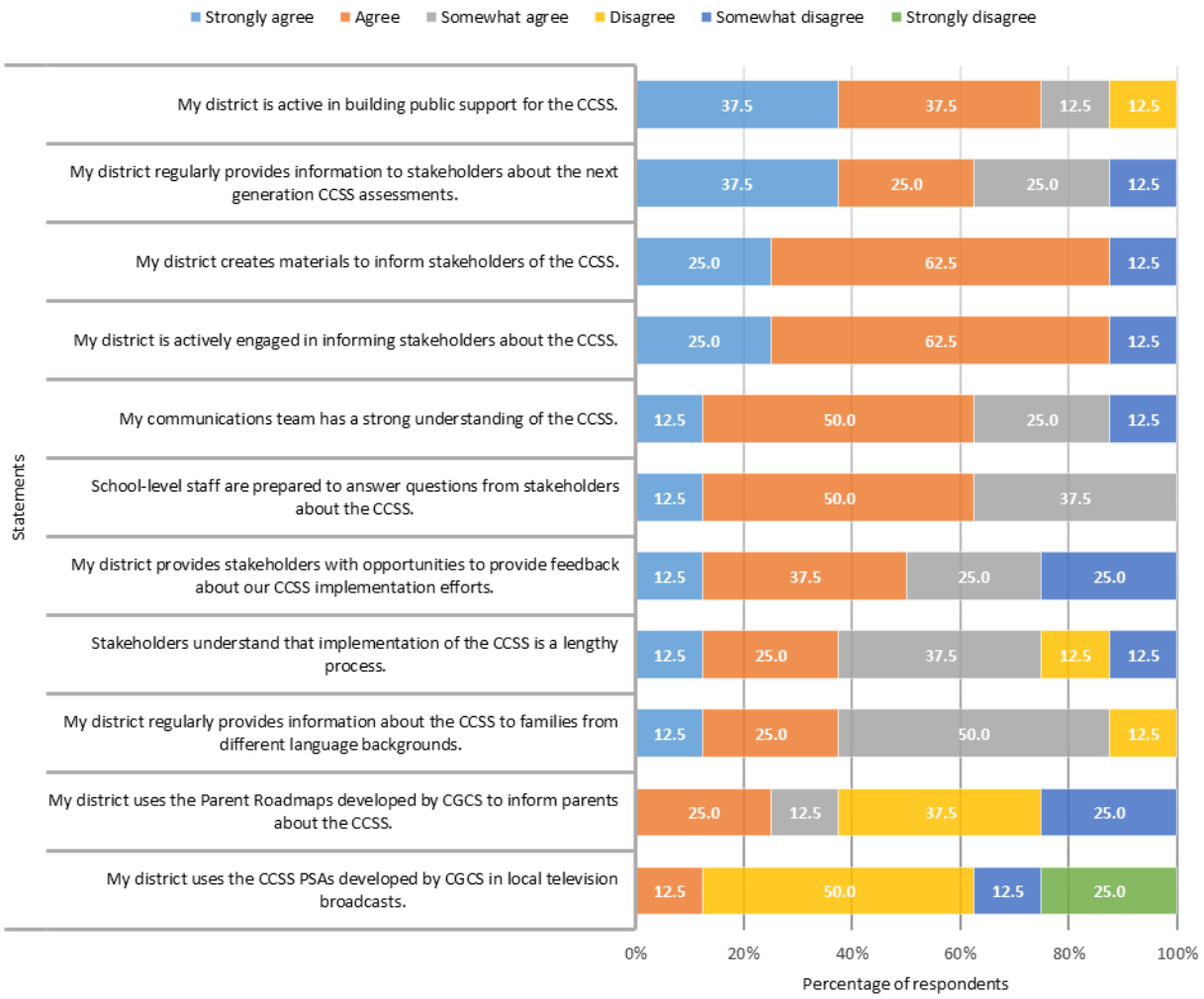


Figure 31. Extent to which respondents indicate specified stakeholders are involved in or informed of CCSS implementation strategies, 2014 (n=59)

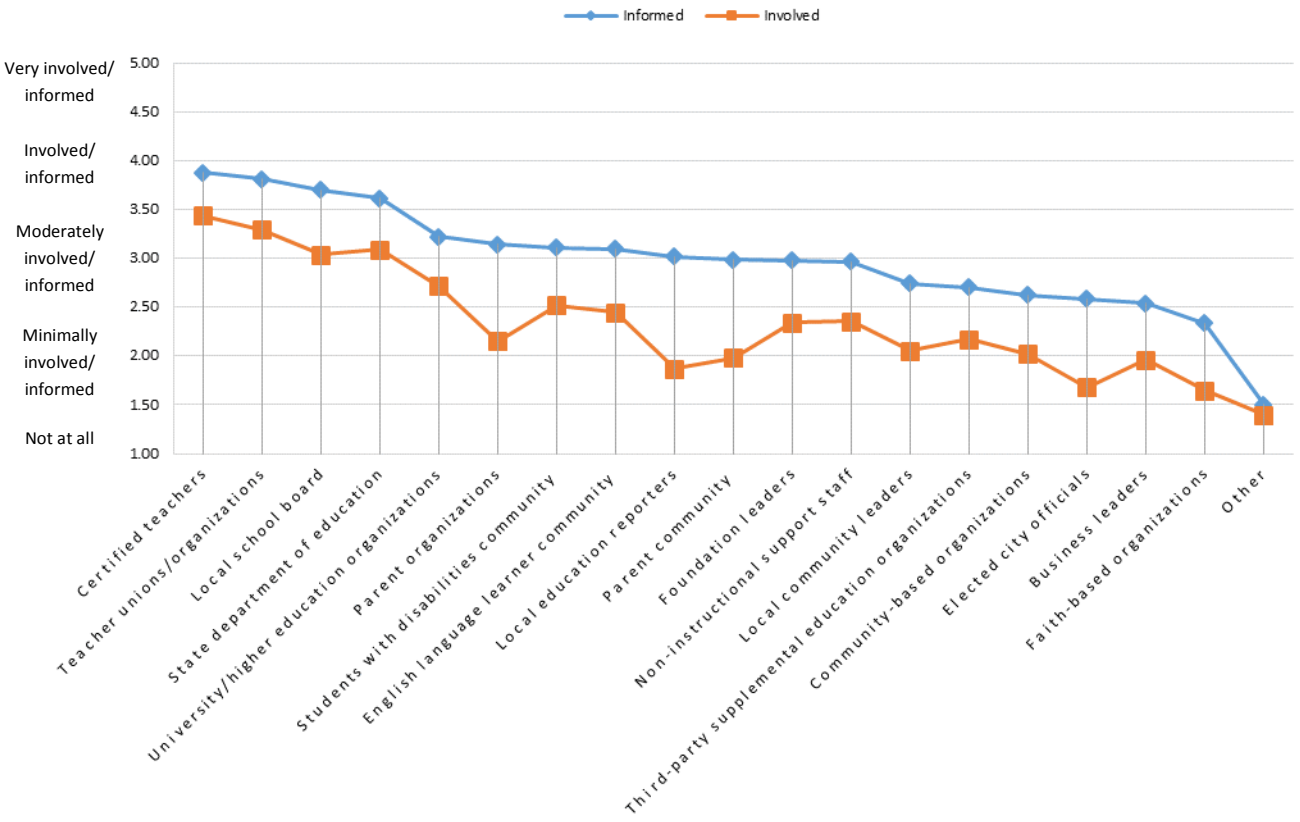


Table 2. Percentage of communication directors reporting the mediums used to communicate with specified stakeholder groups, 2014 (n=8)

	Teachers	School administra-tors	Parents	Community leaders	Non-instructional support staff	School board
Local television stations	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
School district television station	50%	37.5%	50%	50%	37.5%	37.5%
Local newspapers	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%
Radio	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Editorials	50%	50%	62.5%	62.5%	50%	62.5%
Informational brochure	50%	37.5%	87.5%	62.5%	25%	37.5%
Parent guides	37.5%	37.5%	62.5%	25%	12.5%	12.5%
School district website	100%	100%	100%	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%
Internal staff communications	100%	100%	12.5%	12.5%	87.5%	87.5%
Intranet staff site	75%	75%			50%	25%
Public Service Announcements	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%
Twitter	50%	50%	87.5%	87.5%	50%	62.5%
Facebook	37.5%	37.5%	87.5%	87.5%	37.5%	50%
Edmodo	-	-	-	-	-	-

Discussion

The results of the third year of the Council of the Great City School's common core implementation survey reveal that progress is underway in our nation's urban school districts as many districts prepare to fully implement the common core standards and adopt assessments aligned to the new standards ahead of the 2014-15 school year. The majority of all respondents rated their district's implementation progress as "good" or "excellent," particularly in providing professional development and implementing the ELA and math standards – results which are similar to findings from 2013. Survey responses also reveal that districts have a lot of work to do in order to prepare certified instructional personnel, principals, and other school-based administrators to implement the CCSS.

In addition, survey responses generally indicate that districts' professional development in ELA and math has largely focused on building a shared understanding of the instructional shifts required by the new standards, as well as building teachers' content knowledge in English language arts and math. When deciding how to differentiate professional development for teachers, about two-thirds of curriculum directors use results from state summative assessments and interim/benchmark assessments in elementary, middle, and high school. Also, over 80 percent of respondents rate their districts' progress in aligning instructional materials to the CCSS as "good" or "excellent." In fact, a majority of respondents report using PARCC/ SBAC sample items, common core math progressions, and resources from the Council's Basal Alignment Project to align instructional materials to the CCSS. And teachers, principals, and central office staff across districts report participating in a variety of daily, weekly, and monthly activities to support implementation of the CCSS, including common planning time for teachers, participating in professional learning communities, making use of online professional development resources aligned to the common core, conducting faculty meetings focused on the common core, and convening key stakeholder groups.

However, survey responses suggest that there is a need for better alignment between districts' expectations of teachers and common core implementation. Curriculum directors report that *informal* teacher observation protocols were more likely than *formal* teacher observations protocols to reflect shifts in teacher practice, shifts in teacher content knowledge, and shifts in the type and quality of student work required by the new standards. Responses to open-ended questions further highlighted that accountability systems not aligned to the common core and competing priorities at the district and school-level often divert attention away from implementing the standards.

Districts also appear to be struggling with addressing the needs of special populations. Roughly 37 percent of respondents rated their districts' progress in this area as "poor" – similar to survey responses in 2013. In fact, only a quarter of ELL directors and about half of special education directors "agree" or "strongly agree" that their districts highly prioritize the needs of these students and fewer than 20 percent of either ELL or special education directors believed that general education teachers were prepared to serve these students. Open-ended responses also point to the need for support in developing implementation strategies to address the academic needs of diverse student populations. Yet only about a quarter of curriculum directors report

that differentiating instruction for ELLs and students with special needs are "often evident" in district professional development.

More broadly, respondents suggested the need for additional support for struggling students as districts transition to the common core. In open-ended responses, curriculum directors indicated major challenges involving students who are moving to higher standards without ever receiving common core aligned instruction in previous grades, and building students' prerequisite knowledge and skills. While these gaps in student learning would disproportionately affect struggling students, only about a third of respondents reported that professional development for teachers on prerequisite knowledge and skills for student success and on developing a curriculum that addresses the gaps between previous standards and the common core was a "very common" strategy for addressing the needs of struggling students. That said, the majority of respondents did report that differentiating instruction for struggling students was at least "sometimes evident" in district professional development.

Survey results also indicate that districts need more support in preparing for online common core assessments and integrating technology into the classroom. About a third of respondents rated their districts' progress in these areas as "poor" although that is a slight improvement from responses in 2013. In fact, integrating technology into classroom instruction remained among the least evident topics in district professional development. However, at least 60 percent of curriculum directors reported that using computer adaptive assessments to monitor student progress and integrating computer-based assessments in the classroom was evident to a "moderate extent" in professional development.

Furthermore, survey results underscore the need to reassess the ways that common core implementation is measured and communicated within school districts. Over 80 percent of research directors rated their district's progress as "good" or "excellent" in developing short- and long-term implementation goals, yet only a third of research directors "agree" that their district's implementation goals are clearly understood among school-level staff. Also, while over 80 percent of respondents "often use" teacher observation instruments aligned to the common core and student work samples to measure the implementation of the common core, less than 40 percent "agree" or "strongly agree" that their district regularly collects implementation data. Open-ended responses indicate that districts are still in the process of developing reliable indicators of what successful implementation should look like in practice.

Finally, survey responses highlight areas of needed improvement in districts' communication strategies around the common core. While the majority of respondents report actively building public support for the common core, survey results suggest that districts need to better communicate to stakeholders that implementing the common core is a long-term process, and need to better communicate with families from different language backgrounds. Moreover, since 2013, parents have remained among the least involved and/informed stakeholders of district common core implementation plans.

In sum, survey results over the last three years show that districts are making strides toward implementing the Common Core State Standards, but the dimensions of this challenge are great. To continue the momentum, districts will need to redouble their efforts in a number of key areas, including aligning their curriculum with the common core across all grade levels, addressing the learning requirements of students with special needs, helping schools integrate technology into classrooms and prepare for online assessments, measuring implementation success using classroom observations and student work, and more actively informing and engaging parents and the community. Over the next few years districts should also begin integrating other major reform initiatives into their implementation efforts. For example, the lack of alignment between teacher observation protocols and the common core suggests that more should be done to ensure that policies and practices aimed at recruiting and retaining teaching talent reflect the new college- and career-ready standards. In short, districts appear to be on the right path in their implementation of the common core, but they have much further to go before the promise of shared, rigorous academic standards is realized in our nation's big city schools.

Appendix A. Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Responses to open-ended questions to curriculum directors about their major challenges in implementing the CCSS and major challenges in measuring implementation

What are the major challenges in implementing the CCSS in your district? (Curriculum directors)	What are the major challenges in measuring the implementation of the CCSS in your district? - Open-Ended Response (Curriculum directors)
1) Time to work with teachers. 2) Finding student work that reflects higher levels of learning based on teaching to CCSS. 3) Funding to purchase materials that are adequately aligned to CCSS. 4) Tea Party. 5) How teachers will be assessed and consequences during transitions.	1) Funding. 2) Knowing which off-the-shelf products are adequately measuring CCSS. 3) Lack of test design and item specs in a State that is not using PARCC or Smarter Balance.
Competing demands for attention divert focus from CCSS implementation, both at the district office and in schools.	Again, competing demands for implementation monitoring in school sites interfere with robust implementation monitoring.
Developing implementation plan that addresses the need of diverse student population.	Assessments that effectively measure basic skills and critical thinking, integration of technology, finding the right balance in terms of tight and loose in terms of curriculum implementation guidance.
District leadership does not understand the steps needed to effectively implement the CCSS and does not want to provide the time to truly impact teachers' and leaders' learning about the shifts. Our leadership addresses the surface level, but does not dig deeply to truly support educators' understanding of the CCSS so that they can effectively teach and assess student learning. District leaders refused to make CCSS training mandatory for principals and instructional coaches, despite our efforts to demonstrate the importance of such.	Lack of open source, common tasks that are aligned to PARCC- like tasks. We try to create them, but it takes time away from other types of supports for schools.
Ensuring a consistent message that reaches all staff.	Need a tool that will support this.
Ensuring that all schools get the same messaging and understanding of the standards and resources that have been developed to support the implementation of the standards.	Our district leaders did not want the SAP tools introduced to principals. Our district leaders do not understand that the CCSSs are a huge shift in thinking, teaching, assessing and practice.
Insufficient staff at the district (central) office to provide professional development and ongoing support for all teachers. Successfully moving from theory to practice in the implementation of the instructional shifts across all classrooms. Transitioning to computer -based applications.	The current assessment is not aligned with CC; therefore, teachers feel they must teach the old standards due to their evaluation being tied to the students' performance on the misaligned test.

What are the major challenges in implementing the CCSS in your district? (Cont'd)	What are the major challenges in measuring the implementation of the CCSS in your district? - Open-Ended Response (Cont'd)
Our state went through a process of public comment this past school year, which resulted in a change in standards and summative assessments. That process and ultimate decision to adopt a new set of standards and assessment has created a sense of unease or lack of confidence that the state will be appropriately prepared to administer the new assessment during the 2014-15 school year. Providing clear messaging to all stakeholders about the commitment to the new standards and assessment along with strong instructional support teachers and students are receiving continues to be a challenge. Our core content areas (social studies and science) provide a challenge in integrating the content literacy standards into daily instruction as teachers are still wary of how that shift will impact their end-of-course or summative assessment scores which has a major impact on their annual evaluations. Finally, we continue to search and create supports for our teachers in how to differentiate on-grade-level instruction for ELL and students with special needs.	The fact that our district moved to the CCSS and the state did not makes measuring and comparing with national data problematic.
Shifting teacher practice.	The size of our district in terms of the number of schools and classrooms. Limitations on the number of district staff (central office) staff to follow-through with school site support. Engaging school curriculum leaders to take the leadership of monitoring the implementation of standards in all classrooms.
Supporting teacher understanding around the instructional shifts and aligning learning objectives to standards. Teachers still struggle with the differences between resources and curriculum.	Tools, manpower.
The gaps for students who have suddenly moved to higher standards without the prerequisite knowledge from past years have proven to be a challenge for both teachers and students.	We adopted a new assessment mid-year after focusing on the information from our previous consortium partner, PARCC, for the past two years. All stakeholders are concerned about what the outcome measures will measure and how they will be measured. As more information becomes available, the challenge is to get information into the hands of the stakeholders (site-based administrators, teachers, parents, and students) to best prepare for the spring 2015 assessment.
The shift from the old standards and the gaps. People fighting about the standards. Aligning the assessment with the standards is the biggest concern at this time.	We have used a survey to measure the implementation of the CCSS in our district, but it was sent primarily to ELA and mathematics teachers.

Appendix A. Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Responses to open-ended questions to directors of special education about how their districts communicate with families about the CCSS and their major challenges in ensuring that students with special needs meet the rigor of the CCSS

How is your district communicating with families of students with special needs about the CCSS?	What are the major challenges that your district faces in ensuring that students with special needs are able to meet the rigor of the CCSS?
Director of Schools held community meetings for all families across the district.	Ability of teachers to differentiate instruction and make necessary accommodations to ensure access.
In IEP meetings.	Changing the mind set of many teachers that students with disabilities are not able to achieve.
Parent support team, electronic communication, IEP meetings, website, school-based presentations, and parent organizations.	Getting student with disabilities into general education instruction in the common core. Giving access to the core through adoptions.
Parents are informed through principals at the building level based on what other students receive about the CCSS implementation.	Major challenges are changes a culture in which teachers believe students with disabilities CAN achieve and succeed. We are working towards building higher expectations within the classroom, along with providing a variety of resources to meet the individual needs of our students.
Parents receive newsletters and calls home along with encouraging attendance at Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings and Parent University Meetings in order to understand the shifts and demands of the new CCSS.	Planning time for teachers.
The special education department has provided information to parents regarding common core roll-out and implementation at meet-the-director town hall meetings. Information is also available on the department's website. The [State] Bureau of Exceptional Student and Student Services presented at the Districts ESE Family Forum on Common Core and SWDs.	Strengthening instruction practices, teacher comfort and expertise with content as well as the CCSS in special education, separate or pull-out classes to ensure students achieve and reduce the gap. Redefining how instruction is delivered in special education settings.
This year we reviewed understanding common core standards to our parents at one of our special education local advisory meetings. Also, we are aligning our IEP goals to common core and reviewing in IEP meetings.	Teacher's capacity to meet the needs of all students providing appropriate accommodations and collaboration between the general education and special education teachers.
Through IEP meetings and standards-based IEPs. Present Levels of Performance - at least annually and additionally at conferences and in progress reports.	The district has been focused on compliance with federal and state laws. Common Core PD is open to all teachers, but the special education department has never been asked to collaborate on these PDs.
	We need continued training for teachers on how to effectively deliver instruction to meet the needs of all students in the general education classroom. This is especially true for midlevel and high school teachers. Figuring out how to write effective IEP plans that meet the needs of students and address the CCSS is another issue. As a state that has continued to require both goals and objectives in the IEP, it is difficult to utilize what has already been created by other states. We are having to make our own adjustments and create our own system, including trainings, to support our teams.

What are the major challenges in measuring the implementation of the CCSS in your district? - Open-Ended Response
Availability of benchmark assessments.
Communication. I think our curriculum department has done a fantastic job of getting going with the implementation but it is probably focused on that area and not filtered to the rest of the district. We have a good understanding of standards, probably just not the meaning of the new standards.
Establishing metrics and strategies for collecting the data. It is difficult when there is not a common understanding of what "implementation looks like" to then establish metrics, so you end up using outcomes only.
Measuring classroom implementation of the CCSS via observations in a calibrated manner.
Monitoring day-to-day implementation in classrooms at scale. Is our work penetrating the instructional core in our classrooms?
Resources to measure the qualitative aspects of instruction and alignment with the CCSS. Getting agreement on instrumentation and then calibrating use.
Scoring of non-standard test items. Pacing/roll out of new interim assessments. Uncertainty about what Smarter Balanced will offer in terms of interim assessments. Uncertainty around the reporting ALDs by Smarter Balanced (i.e., categories, cut points, etc.).
The current lack of interim and summative assessments that are clearly aligned to CCSS/[State] Standards presents a challenge in measuring student performance and teacher effectiveness.
The training has been wide and shallow.
Varying leadership in 90+ schools.
We have a small program engaged in implementation of CCSS. We have not engaged in broad PD specific to CCSS. We are in the process of revamping our PD work to better address this issue.
We haven't had multiple years to compare results on the same measurements. This was first year of CCSS summative assessments and it is without results so baseline measurements won't be available until the end of next year.

Appendix A. Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Responses to open-ended questions to communications directors about their major challenges in communicating with stakeholders about the CCSS

In the space below, please describe the biggest challenges your district is facing in terms of communicating with stakeholders about the CCSS - Open-Ended Response (Communication directors)
Complicated issue that is hard to communicate easily. Lack of understanding about the standards -- how they are new and why they are needed -- among non-instructional staff. Lack of bandwidth/resources in Communications Office.
Consistency of message.
Explaining [Sate] Standards and why they are different from CCSS.
In [State], CCSS has been politically charged. Our state has made minor revisions, but changed the name. That has caused some confusion.
Information lives in various experts across the organization and coordination among various departments is limited based on lack of time and resources.
Misalignment with statewide assessments and recent legislation.
Stakeholders taking the time to read and understand information provided to them in a mix of so much content competing for their time.
Understanding how student learning should look like in a classroom, being provided guiding questions versus being told the answer.

Appendix B. Participating Districts

Albuquerque Public Schools

Anchorage School District

Atlanta Public Schools

Baltimore City Public Schools

Boston Public Schools

Buffalo City School District

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Chicago Public Schools

Clark County School District

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Dallas Independent School District

Dayton Public Schools

Des Moines Independent Community School District

Detroit Public Schools

District of Columbia Public Schools

Duval County Public Schools

Fresno Unified School District

Guilford County Schools

Hillsborough County Public Schools

Houston Independent School District

Long Beach Unified School District

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Milwaukee Public Schools

Minneapolis Public Schools

Oakland Unified School District

Omaha Public Schools

Orange County Public Schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools

Providence Public School District

San Diego Unified School District

San Francisco Unified School District

Shelby County Schools

St. Louis Public Schools

St. Paul Public Schools

The School District of Palm Beach County

The School District of Philadelphia

Toledo Public Schools

Wichita Public Schools

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