

Getting Ready for the Common Core State Standards: A 2016 Update

September 2018

Julia A. Gwynne and Jennifer R. Cowhy
with R. Steven Quispe

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the many people who contributed to this brief. We thank Naureen Kheraj for her help creating the figures in this report. Our colleagues at the UChicago Consortium, including Elaine Allensworth, Holly Hart, and Kylie Klein, provided helpful feedback at all stages of this report, and the UChicago Consortium's communications team, including Bronwyn McDaniel, Jessica Tansey, Jessica Puller, and Alida Mitau were instrumental in the production of this brief.

This work was generously funded by the Chicago Community Trust and we thank them for their support. We also gratefully acknowledge the Spencer Foundation and the Lewis-Sebring Family Foundation, whose operating grants support the work of the UChicago Consortium. Finally, we greatly appreciate the support from the Consortium Investor Council that funds critical work beyond the initial research: putting the research to work, refreshing the data archive, seeding new studies, and replicating previous studies. Members include: Brinson Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, CME Group Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies, Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Lewis-Sebring Family Foundation, McDougal Family Foundation, Osa Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, Robert McCormick Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Steans Family Foundation, and The Chicago Public Education Fund.

Introduction

In 2010, Illinois voted to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/Language Arts (ELA) and for Mathematics in hopes that these new standards would provide a strong foundation for improving student achievement across the state. The CCSS were developed by a consortium of state policymakers and educators from across the country in response to ongoing concerns about U.S. students' chronic underperformance on international assessments and also growing awareness of the widespread differences between states in the skills that students were expected to demonstrate. They offer a set of guidelines about what students should know at each grade level to be ready for college and careers by the end of high school.¹

For many states, including Illinois, the new standards are considerably more challenging than the previous standards,² and ensuring that teachers and schools are prepared to teach them has brought substantial changes. Teachers have been asked to reconsider their instructional practices to ensure they are aligned with the goals of the new standards, they identify new instructional materials aligned with the standards, and they help students adjust to a more demanding set of expectations about what they need to learn. To support their teachers' transition to the CCSS, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched a multi-year strategy beginning in 2012-13. The district offered separate training for the two sets of standards, and teachers were expected to have fully implemented the new ELA standards by 2013-14 and the new math standards by 2014-15. See the inset box "Preparing for the CCSS in CPS" for additional details about the district's approach for supporting teachers in their transition to the new standards.

A 2017 report by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium), *Getting Ready for the Common Core State Standards: Experiences of Teachers and Administrators Preparing for the New Standards*, described CPS school staff's attitudes and experiences preparing for the new standards, using responses on the *My Voice, My School* survey from the spring of 2014 and spring 2015. The report examined four areas: teachers' and administrators' attitudes about the impact the new standards would have on teaching and learning; experiences with formal professional development on the new standards; opportunities outside of formal training to learn about the new standards; and how prepared teachers felt to teach the new standards. The report found that elementary teachers had very different attitudes and experiences preparing for the new standards compared to high school teachers. Overall, elementary teachers felt that the new standards would have a greater impact on teaching and learning than high school teachers; they reported more frequent standards-related professional development and they felt more prepared to teach the standards than their high school colleagues.

¹ Common Core State Standards Initiative (2018).

² Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson (2010).

This brief provides an update to the earlier report, using teacher responses from the *My Voice, My School* survey from spring 2016. It examines the same four areas as the earlier report, and it also describes teacher responses about the impact of standards-related professional learning on teacher practice. Despite similarities in the kinds of questions that were asked across all three surveys, the 2016 survey had a different format than the earlier surveys. On the 2014 and 2015 surveys, questions about the CCSS were only asked of teachers who indicated they taught either English or math, or teachers who taught in self-contained classrooms. Questions about the standards did not differentiate between the new ELA standards and the new math standards. Beginning in 2016, survey questions were tailored to teachers' particular subject area(s). Teachers were first asked if they were responsible for implementing the new ELA standards, the new math standards or both. Teachers who indicated they were only responsible for implementing the ELA standards were then asked questions that were tailored to the ELA standards and related professional development. Similarly, teacher who indicated they were only responsible for implementing the new math standards were then asked questions about those standards and related professional development. Teachers who said they were responsible for teaching both the ELA and math were randomly assigned to answer questions about either the ELA or math standards. A total of 4,286 elementary and high school teachers were included in the ELA standards response group and 3,546 elementary and high school teachers were in the math standards response group. Responses to survey questions are shown separately for each group throughout this report.

The sections in this report describe teacher responses on the 2016 survey about the impact of the new standards on teaching and learning, the frequency of standards-related professional development, opportunities for collaborating with colleagues on the CCSS outside of formal professional development, the impact of the new standards on teacher practice, perceived barriers to implementing the new standards, and feelings of preparedness to the teach the new standards. In each section, we briefly summarize findings from the 2014 and 2015 surveys (whenever available³) and then describe how teacher responses from the 2016 survey are similar or different. Overall, we find a great deal of similarity between teacher reports about the standards in 2016 and reports in 2014 and 2015. We find few differences in teacher reports about the ELA standards and the math standards.

³ Some questions on the 2016 survey were not included on the 2015 and/or 2014 surveys. Findings from the 2015 and 2014 surveys are included whenever available.

Teacher Beliefs about the Common Core State Standards

2014 and 2015 Survey Results

Responses on the 2014 and 2015 surveys showed that elementary teachers were much more likely than high school teachers to report that the CCSS would have a great deal of impact on teaching and learning.

- In 2014 and 2015, approximately 75 percent of elementary teachers reported that the CCSS would have a great deal of impact on what they teach, and around 65 percent reported they would have a great deal of impact on how they teach.
- Around 45 percent of high school teachers in 2014 and 2015 felt the new standards would have a great deal of impact on what they teach, and approximately 40 percent felt the new standards would have a great deal of impact on how they teach.
- Only around 50 percent of elementary teachers and 30 percent of high school teachers felt the new standards would have a great deal of impact on student achievement.

2016 Results

Responses on the 2016 survey about the impact of the new standards on teaching were similar to responses from 2014 and 2015, with elementary teachers much more likely than high school teachers to say that the CCSS would have a great deal of impact on teaching and learning. Responses in 2016 were similar for teachers in the ELA and math response groups (Figure 1).

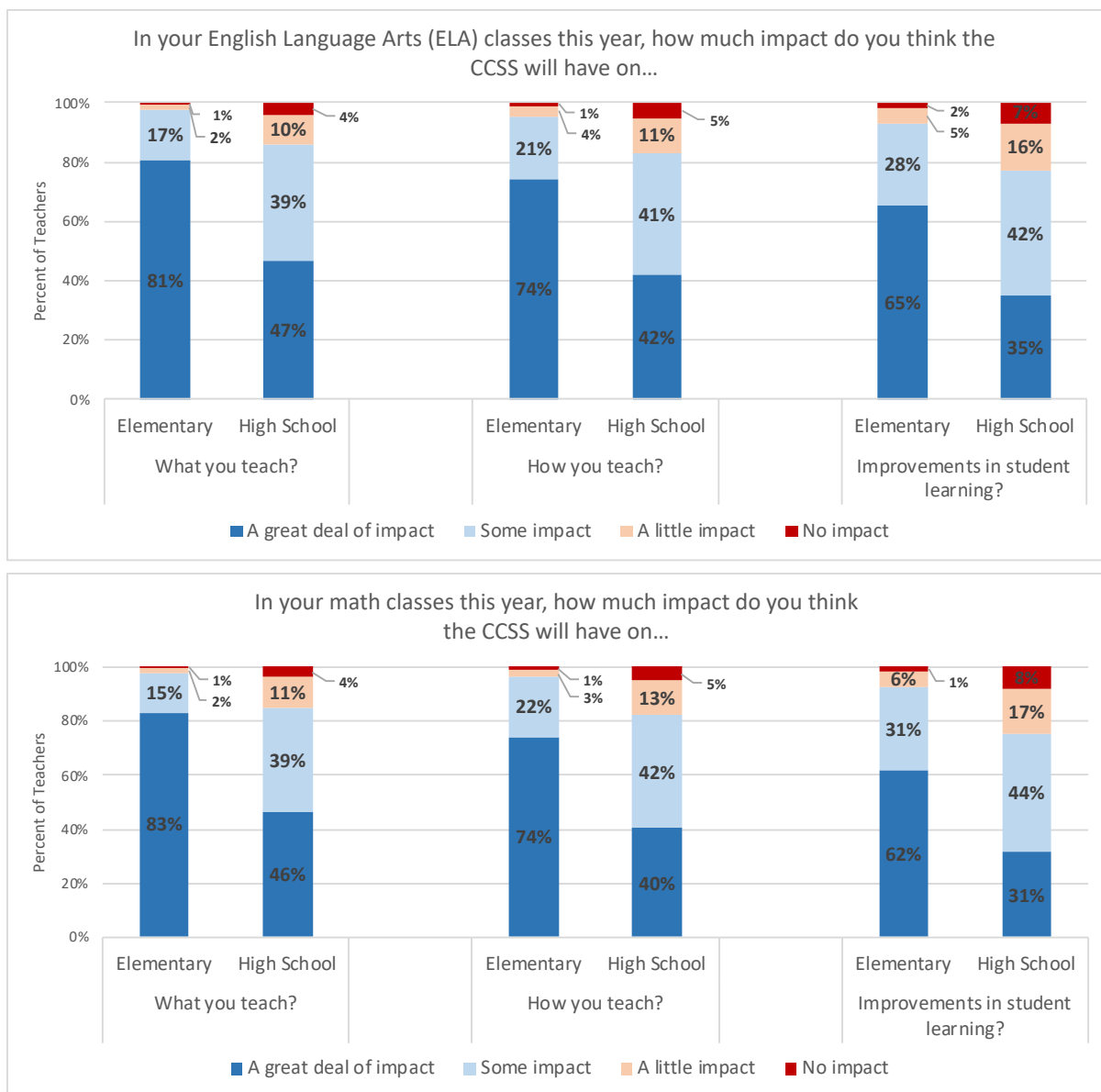
- In 2016, just over 80 percent of elementary teachers in both the ELA and math response groups felt that the CCSS would have a great deal of impact on what they teach, and nearly 75 percent reported that the standards would have a great deal of impact on how they teach, small increases in the percent of elementary teachers who felt this way in 2014 and 2015.

Preparing for the CCSS in CPS

Illinois adopted the CCSS in 2010, and CPS began gearing up for the transition to the new standards soon thereafter. In 2012-13 the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Literacy each launched multi-year initiatives to ensure teachers were prepared to teach the new standards, but their strategies for doing so differed. The Department of Literacy relied on early-adopter schools—CPS schools that had already shown evidence of using instructional practices aligned with the goals of the new ELA standards—to help design professional learning and develop curriculum and materials. Teachers were expected to begin teaching the new ELA standards in 2013-14. The Department of Mathematics opted to partner with two local universities to co-develop and provide professional learning on the standards to network leaders, administrators, and teachers. It also created an online repository of standards-aligned instructional materials and resources. Teachers were expected to have incorporated the new mathematics standards by 2014-15. See the 2017 Consortium report, *Getting Ready for the Common Core State Standards: Experiences of Teachers and Administrators Preparing for the New Standards*, for additional details about the district's plan for supporting teachers in their transition to the new standards.

- Similar to previous years, around 45 percent of high school teachers in 2016 reported feeling that the standards would have a great deal of impact on what they teach, and around 40 percent reported feeling that the new standards would have a great deal of impact on how they teach.
- Just over 60 percent of the elementary teachers in both the ELA and math groups reported that the new standards would have a great deal of impact on student achievement (vs. 50 percent in 2014–15); around 30 percent of high school teachers reported feeling this way, about the same as previous surveys.

Figure 1. Most Elementary Teachers in 2016 Felt that the New Standards Would Have a Great Deal of Impact on Teaching and Student Learning in ELA and Math Classes; Just Under Half of High School Teachers Felt This Way



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Strategies and Supports for Implementing the CCSS: Formal Professional Development on the CCSS

2014 and 2015 Survey Results

In both 2014 and 2015, teachers reported considerable variation in the frequency of their standards-related professional learning experiences, but overall, elementary teachers reported more professional development than high school teachers in both years.

- Around 15 percent of elementary teachers and 25 percent of high school teachers reported no standards-related professional development in 2014 and 2015.
- Approximately 40 percent of elementary teachers and 35 percent of high school teachers reported participating in standard-related professional development once or twice a semester.
- Around 20 percent of elementary teachers and 15 percent of high school teachers reported receiving formal training or professional development, participating in standards related workshop at least monthly.

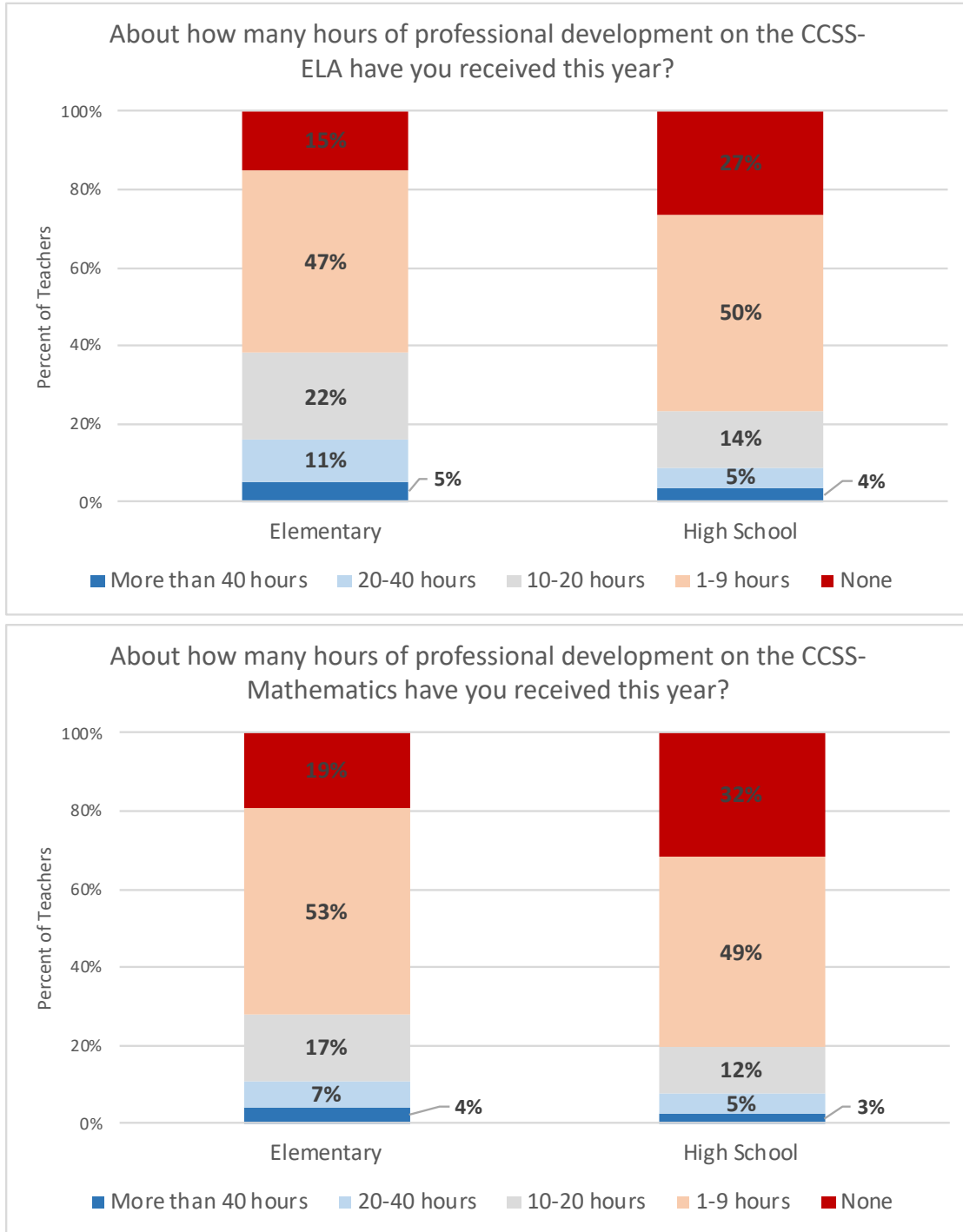
2016 Survey Results

In 2016, questions about standards-related professional development were asked in a different format than on the previous surveys. Teachers were asked how many hours of professional development they had received thus far during the school year. Overall, teachers in the math response group reported less frequent standards-related professional development than teachers in the ELA response group, but the differences were small (Figure 2).

- Despite the new question format, the percent of teachers in the ELA response group who reported no participation in standards-related professional development was similar to 2015: 15 percent of elementary teachers and 27 percent of high school teachers.
- Slightly higher proportions of teachers in the mathematics response group—19 percent of elementary teachers and 32 percent of high school teachers—reported no standards-related professional development.
- Around 50 percent of elementary and high school teachers in both the ELA and math response groups reported participating in 1-9 hours of standards-related professional development.
- In the ELA response group, nearly 40 percent of elementary teachers and just over 20 percent of high school teachers reported participating in 10 or more hours of standards-related professional

development. In the math response group, only 28 percent of elementary teachers and 20 percent of high school reported comparable amounts of standards-related professional development.

Figure 2. Elementary Teachers Reported Receiving a Greater Number of Hours of Professional Development than High School Teachers in 2016



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Collaboration with Colleagues around the CCSS

2015 Survey Results

In 2015, the administrator survey asked principals and assistant principals how often teachers in their school collaborated with one another to support implementation of the CCSS outside of formal professional development, and their responses indicated fairly regular collaboration.

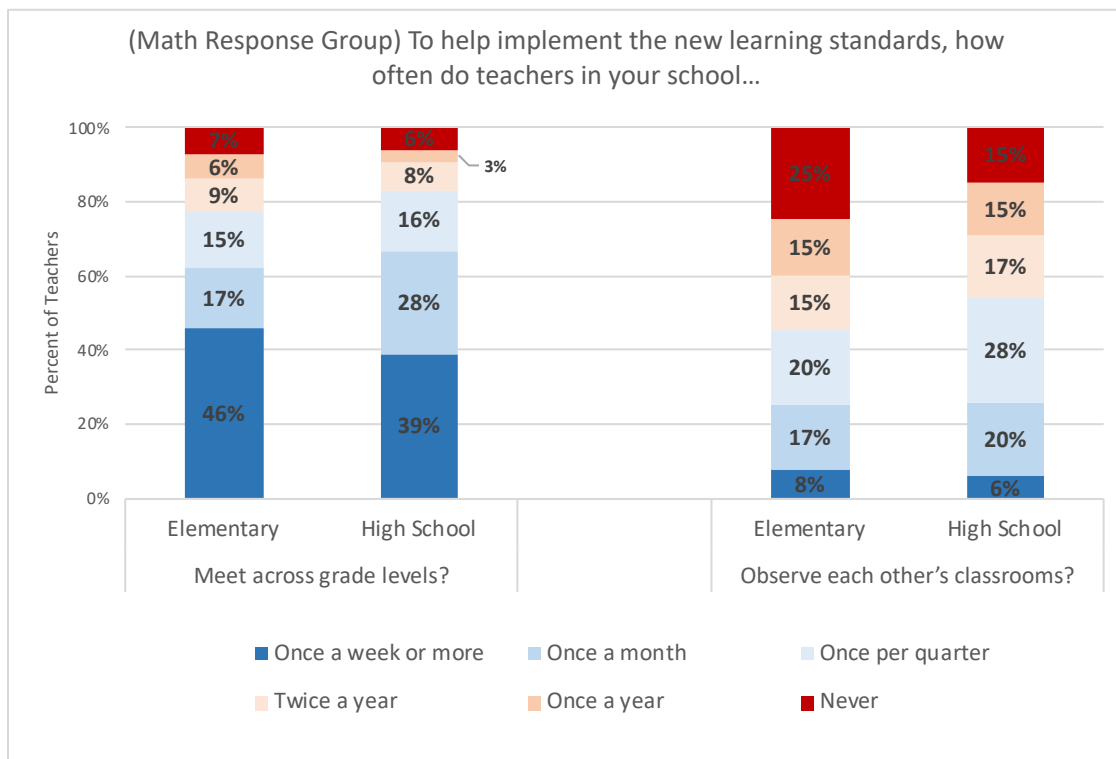
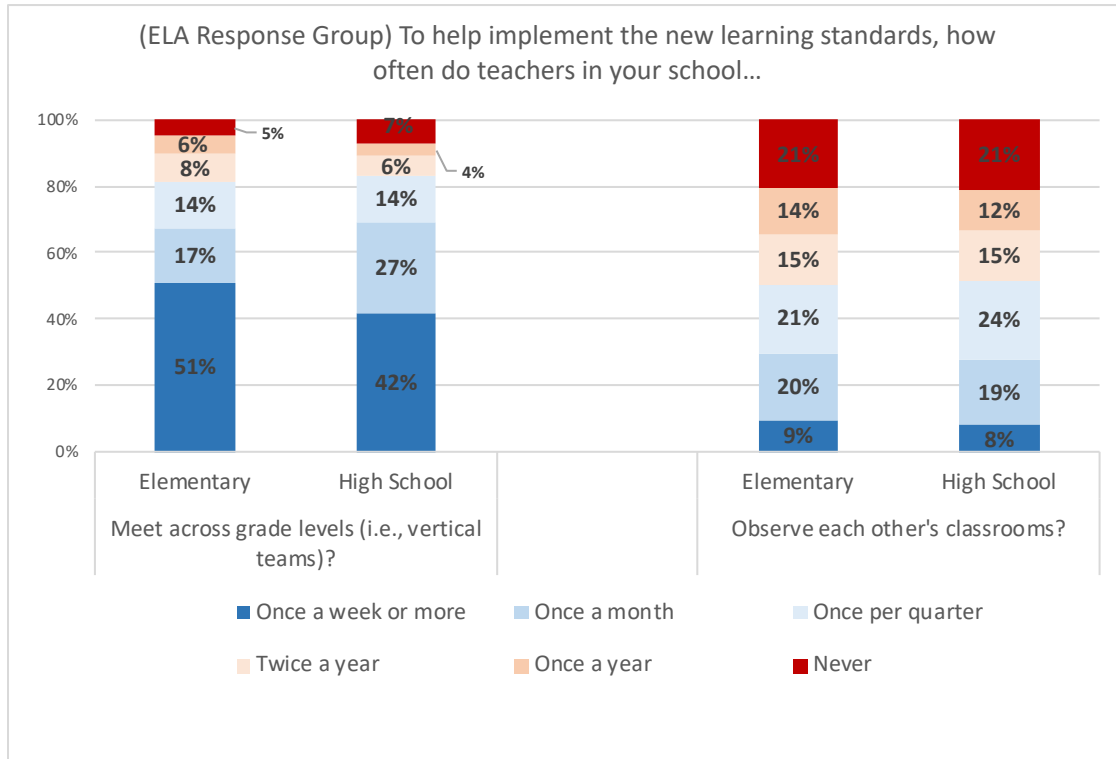
- Nearly 60 percent of elementary administrators and just over 50 percent of high school administrators reported teachers met in teams across grade levels at least weekly to help implement the CCSS.
- Around 50 percent of elementary and high school administrators reported teachers observing each other's classrooms at least once per quarter to help implement the new standards.

2016 Survey Results

In 2016, teachers, rather than administrators, were asked how often they met in grade-level teams and observed one another's classes to help implement the new standards. Overall, teachers reported slightly less frequent grade-level team meetings in 2016, but comparable rates of classroom observations, compared to administrators in 2015 (Figure 3). Responses were similar for teachers in the ELA and math response groups.

- Around 50 percent of elementary and 40 percent of high school teachers in both the ELA and math response groups reported meeting at least weekly in grade-level team meetings.
- Around 50 percent of elementary and high school teachers in both the ELA and math response groups reported that they observed colleagues' classrooms at least quarterly to help implement the new learning standards.

Figure 3. Around Half of all Teachers met in Grade-Level Teams at Least Monthly and Observed Each Other’s Classrooms at Least Once per Quarter



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Changes in Teacher Practices

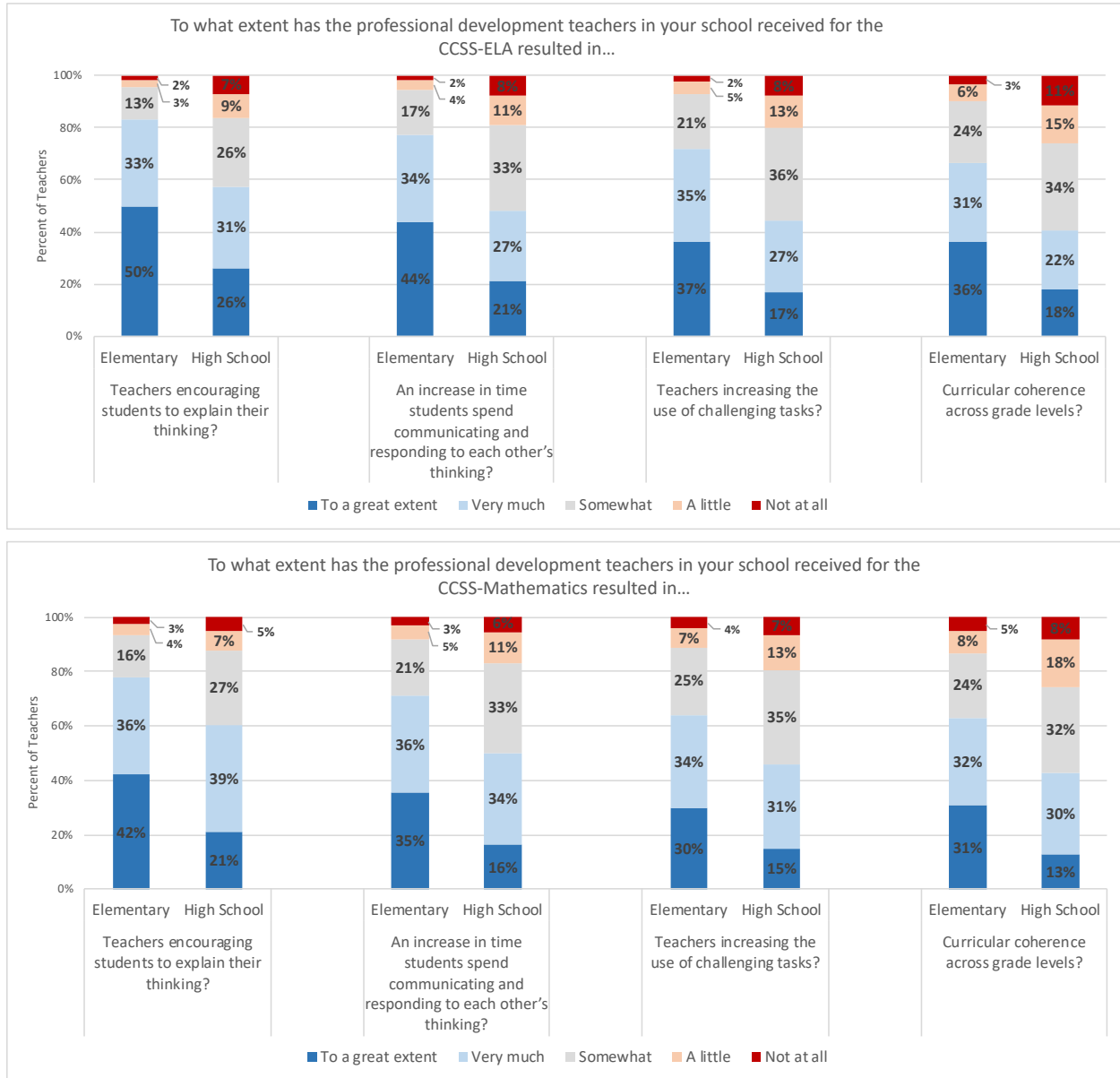
2016 Survey Results

In 2016, teachers were asked for the first time about the extent to which standards-related professional development influenced teaching practices. Overall, elementary teachers were more likely than high school teachers to describe this professional development as having extensive impact on teaching practice.

Responses were similar for teachers in the ELA and math response groups (Figure 4).

- Between 70 and 80 percent of elementary teachers in the ELA and math response groups described the impact that their standards-related professional development had on teachers' encouraging students to explain their thinking and students spending time communicating their ideas to one another as "very much" or "to a great extent."
- Between 60 and 70 percent of elementary teachers in the ELA and math response groups answered similarly when asked about impact on teachers' increased use of challenging tasks and the impact on curricular coherence across the grade level.
- High school teachers were less likely than elementary teachers to report as strong an impact of standards-related professional development on teaching practice: Around 60 percent of teachers in the ELA and math groups responded "very much" or "to a great extent" when asked about the extent to which standards-related professional development had resulted in teachers' encouraging students to explain their thinking.
- Between 40 to 60 percent of high school teachers in the ELA and math sample responded in similar terms when asked about the impact of professional development on the time students spend communicating with one another, teachers increasing the use of challenging tasks, and curricular coherence across grade levels.

Figure 4. Elementary Teachers Were More Likely to Report that Standards-related Professional Development Had an Impact on Teaching Practices



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Barriers to Implementing the CCSS

2015 Survey Results

In 2015, administrators were asked to what extent different factors were barriers to implementing the new standards—including being held accountable for standardized tests not aligned to the CCSS, insufficient time for teacher collaboration, inadequate professional development, or lack of content knowledge.

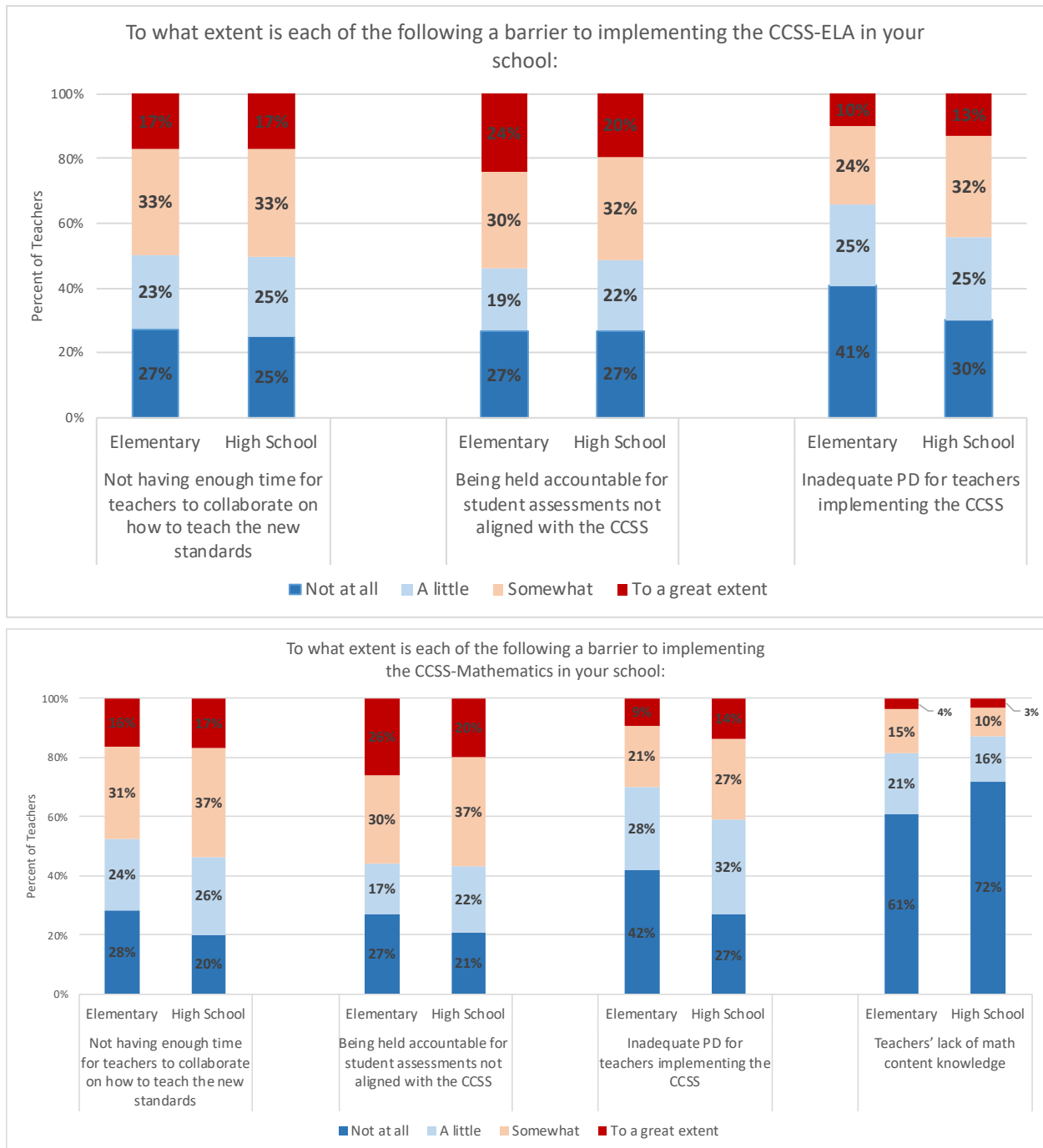
- Nearly 50 percent of elementary and high school administrators reported that being held accountable for student assessments that were not aligned with the CCSS was a barrier to implementing the standards “to a great extent.”
- Around 45 percent of elementary administrators reported that insufficient time for teachers to collaborate on teaching the CCSS was also a barrier to implementation, but only one-quarter of high school administrators felt this way.
- Few administrators felt that teachers’ lack of math content knowledge or inadequate professional development for teachers were barriers to implementing the standards.

2016 Survey Results

In 2016, teachers, rather than administrators, were asked to describe the extent to which the same set of factors—being accountable for non-CCSS aligned standardized tests, insufficient time for collaboration, lack of content knowledge, or inadequate professional development—were barriers to implementing the CCSS-ELA and CCSS-Mathematics. Compared to administrators in 2015, far fewer teachers in 2016 felt these issues were barriers to implementing the new standards (Figure 5).

- Only 20 to 25 percent of elementary and high school teachers in the ELA and math response groups felt that being accountable for unaligned tests was “to a great extent” a barrier to implementing the standards, whereas 40 to 50 percent felt that it was either not at all a barrier or only a little barrier.
- Fewer than 20 percent of teachers felt that not having enough time for teacher collaboration or inadequate professional development were barriers “to a great extent” to implementing the standards.
- Only teachers in the math response group were also asked to what extent teachers’ lack of math content knowledge was a barrier to implementing the CCSS-Mathematics in their schools. The majority of these teachers (61 percent of elementary teachers and 72 percent of high school teachers) said this was not a barrier to CCSS-Mathematics implementation.

Figure 5. Few Teachers Reported that Insufficient Time for Collaboration, Assessments Not Aligned to the CCSS, or Inadequate Professional Development Were Barriers to Implementation



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Teachers' Feelings of Preparedness to Teach the CCSS

2014 and 2015 Survey Results

Despite substantial changes brought about by the new standards, many teachers, particularly at the elementary level, reported feeling “very familiar” with and “very prepared” to teach the new standards in 2014, and even higher proportions of teachers reported feeling this way in 2015.

- Around one-half of elementary teachers reported feeling “very familiar” and “very prepared” to teach the new standards in 2014. By 2015, close to 60 percent of elementary teachers reported feeling this way.
- At the high school level, the percent of teachers who reported feeling “very familiar” with the standards increased from 42 percent in 2014 to 46 percent in 2015, and the percent of teachers who reported feeling “very prepared” to teach the standards increased from 38 percent in 2014 to 41 percent in 2015.
- Fewer teachers reported feeling “very prepared” on other dimensions related to the new standards, such as having sufficient curricular and instructional materials and also having adequate professional development. By 2015, just under 40 percent of elementary teachers and slightly less than 30 percent of high school teachers agreed to having sufficient materials and adequate professional development.

2016 Survey Results

Overall, teachers in 2016 reported feeling even more familiar with and more prepared to teach the standards than in 2015, although teachers in the math response group were somewhat less likely to feel this way than teachers in the ELA responses group (Figure 6).⁴

- Around 75 percent of elementary teachers and 65 percent of high school teachers in the ELA response group reported feeling “very familiar” and “very prepared” to teach the ELA standards.
- Slightly lower proportions of teachers in the math sample—nearly 70 percent of elementary teachers and around one-half of high school teachers—reported feeling “very familiar” and “very prepared” to teach the new math standards.

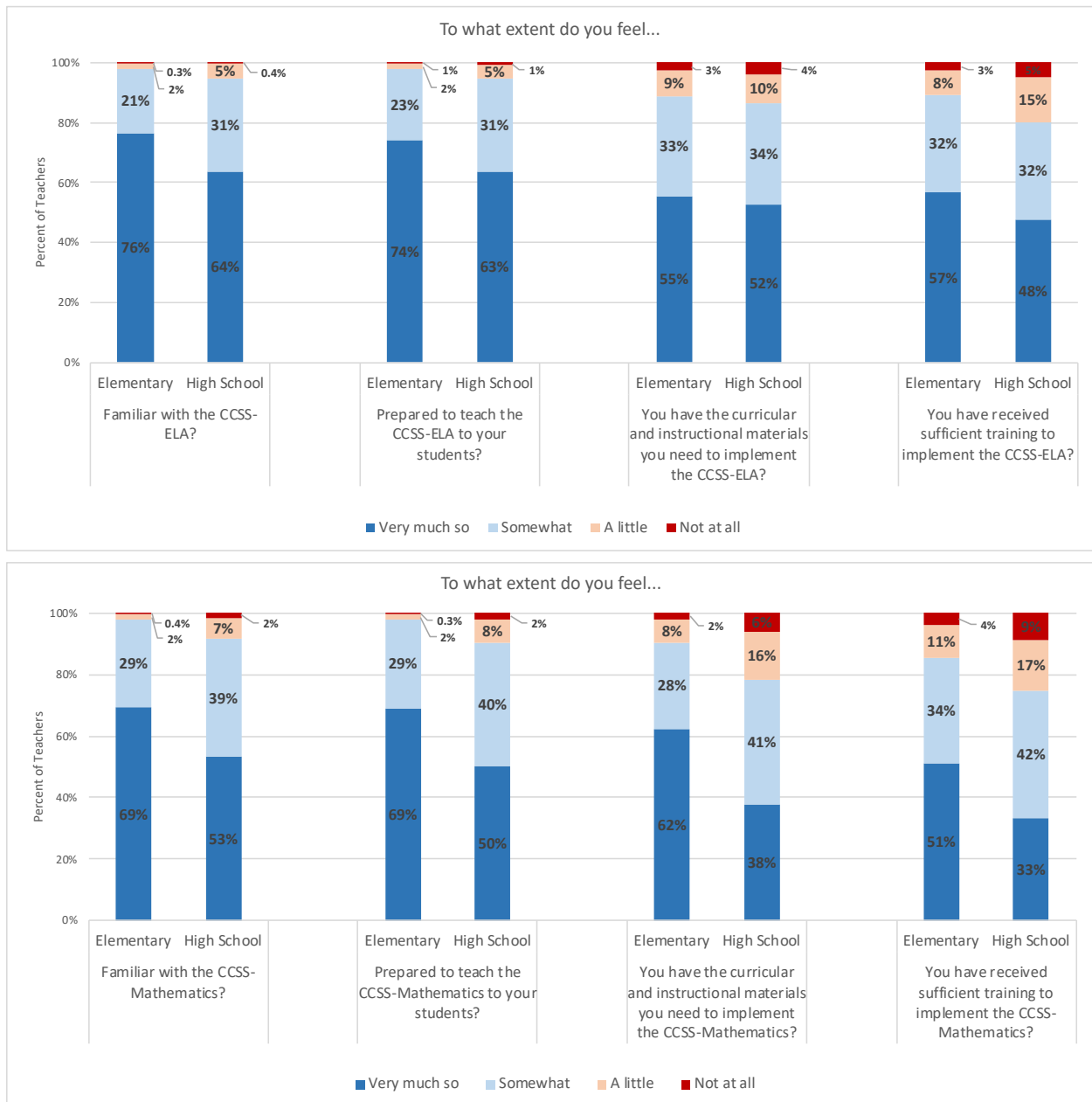
Reports about having the necessary curricular materials and sufficient professional development were also higher in 2016 compared to 2015.

- Around one-half of elementary and high school teachers in the ELA response group very much agreed they had the materials and professional development they needed.

⁴ In 2016 the top response category for these questions was “Very much so” whereas in previous years it had been “To a great extent.” The other three categories remained the same across all three years.

- In the math group, just over 60 percent of elementary teachers, but just under 40 percent of high school teachers, very much agreed they had the curricular materials they needed. Somewhat lower proportions of elementary and high school teachers—51 percent and 33 percent, respectively—very much agreed they had sufficient professional development.

Figure 6. Elementary Teachers Reported Feeling More Familiar with and More Prepared to Teach the New Standards than High School Teachers



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Data and methods used to calculate response rates are described in Appendix A.

Summary

Illinois voted to adopt the CCSS in 2010 in hopes that these new, more rigorous standards would contribute to higher levels of student achievement across the state. By the 2013-14 school year, teachers in CPS were expected to have fully implemented the new standards into instructional practice, first in ELA, and then in math one year later (2014-15). During this period, teachers' attitudes toward and experiences with the new standards were captured on three annual surveys administered in the spring of 2014, 2015, and 2016.

Overall, teachers' attitudes about and experiences with the standards in 2016 were remarkably similar to previous years. Elementary teachers were still overwhelmingly likely to say the new standards would have a great deal of impact on teaching and learning in 2016, while high school teachers continued to offer mixed reports about the impact of the standards. As in previous years, there was still considerable variation in the frequency of standards-related professional development reported by teachers, and elementary teachers still reported more frequent standards-related professional development in 2016 than high school teachers. Outside of formal professional development, teachers continued to collaborate with their colleagues on a frequent basis—through grade level meetings and classroom observations—in an effort to implement the new learning standards, and elementary teachers were still somewhat more likely to do so than high school teachers.

On two dimensions—preparedness to teach the standards and perceptions of barriers to implementation—survey responses in 2016 were notably different from previous years, perhaps signaling important changes over time. For example, the proportion of teachers who felt very familiar and very prepared to teach the new standards was substantially higher in 2016 than in previous years, with elementary teachers still more likely to feel this way than high school teachers. Additionally, teachers in 2016 were far less likely than administrators in 2015⁵ to report that insufficient time to collaborate with colleagues, being held responsible for assessments not aligned with the CCSS, or inadequate professional development, were major barriers to implementing the new standards. These findings, coupled with the fact that most teachers, especially at the elementary level, reported that standards-related professional development prompted them to adopt instructional practices that are aligned with the goals of new standards suggest that the district has made good strides in supporting their teachers' transition to the new standards. Moreover, despite very different implementation strategies, 2016 survey responses showed few differences in the attitudes and experiences of teachers who were responsible for implementing the math standards compared to teachers responsible for implementing the ELA standards.

⁵ In 2016, teachers, rather than administrators, were asked how often they met in grade-level teams and observed one another's classes to help implement the new standards.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the new standards may be taking root in classrooms throughout the district, although possibly more so at the elementary level than at the high school. Nevertheless, even among elementary teachers, and also among high school teachers, a non-trivial proportion of teachers (between 15 and 20 percent of elementary teachers and nearly 30 percent of high school teachers) reported no standards-related professional development in 2016, a trend that has been evident since 2014. Similarly, around one-quarter of teachers identify considerable barriers to implementation. This suggests that implementation of the new standards may be uneven across the district. As a result, some students may not be exposed to the kinds of rigorous and demanding instructional practices that the new standards aim to promote, making improvements in student achievement less likely for these students. These issues will be explored in a forthcoming brief, *Trends in Instruction and Student Outcomes*.

References

Carmichael, S.B., Martino, G., Porter-Magee, K., & Wilson, W.S. (2010). *The state of state standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2014). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/>

Appendix A:

Sample

This report uses survey responses to examine CPS teachers' perceptions of and experiences with the CCSS. Each year, the UChicago Consortium administers a districtwide survey, *My Voice, My School*, to students in grades 6-12 and all teachers and administrators in CPS. In the years 2014 through 2016, the annual teacher survey included a series of questions about the CCSS. In 2016, these questions were asked of teachers who indicated they were responsible for teaching the ELA or math standards. Teachers who indicated they were only responsible for teaching the ELA standards were only asked questions related to the ELA standards. Similarly, teachers who indicated they were only responsible for the math standards were only asked questions about the math standards. Teachers who indicated they were responsible for implementing both sets of standards were randomly assigned to answer questions either about ELA or math. In order to be as consistent as possible with previous analyses, only teachers who taught in self-contained classrooms or who were subject-specific teachers, for whom their primary subject was ELA or math, were included in the analyses in this report. In 2016, the overall teacher response rate for the survey was 83.2 percent for all teachers (not just those who were subject-specific or self-contained). There were 4,098 teachers included in our ELA sample and 3,477 teachers included in our math sample.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JULIA A. GWYNNE is a Managing Director and Senior Research Scientist at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. She has conducted a number of studies examining the skills and academic behaviors students need to be ready for high school and college. She has also conducted research looking at high school graduation rates, charter high schools school closings, student mobility, and preschool attendance. Gwynne received her PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago.

JENNIFER R. COWHY is a first-year PhD student in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. Cowhy is interested in researching how schools can better serve students who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and students with IEPs. Cowhy worked at the Consortium for six years prior to beginning her studies at Northwestern and received her MPP and AM in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and her AB in sociology from the University of Michigan.

R. STEVEN QUISPE is the Development Coordinator at Year Up in Chicago, and was formerly the Development and Communications Coordinator at the UChicago Consortium. He has a BA from the University of Chicago and has worked in the University's Development office, as well as at Embarc, Inc. Quispe's interests include social justice, urban planning, and public transit.