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**Increasing Share of District Leaders Agree that Common Core is More Rigorous,
Will Improve Student Skills**

***Majority of Districts Still Working to Train Teachers, Implement Aligned
Curriculum and Assessments, Survey Finds***

Despite the political turmoil plaguing some states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), 90% of school district leaders agree that the new standards are more rigorous than their state's previous standards in math and English language arts, according to a new report by the Center on Education Policy at the George Washington University. In addition, about three-quarters of these leaders agree that the Common Core will lead to improved student skills. The percentages of district leaders who agree with these sentiments have increased considerably since 2011.

Nevertheless, district leaders are experiencing both minor and major challenges when implementing the CCSS in areas such as professional development, CCSS-aligned curriculum and instructional materials, and preparation for the new CCSS-aligned assessments. More than half of the districts indicated that they did not expect to complete important implementation milestones—such as adequately preparing teachers and implementing a CCSS-aligned curricula—until the 2014-15 school year or later. Nearly 90% of districts cited challenges with having enough time to implement the CCSS before consequences related to student performance on the CCSS-aligned assessments go into effect.

The report—the first in a series of new CEP reports on district implementation of the Common Core—is based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of school districts in states that had adopted the CCSS when the survey was administered in the spring of 2014.

Not surprisingly, the report also finds that more district leaders are being challenged by the need to overcome resistance to the CCSS from both outside and within the education system than in 2011. A large majority of districts report conducting outreach activities to

explain how the CCSS are more rigorous (84%) and why student performance on the new aligned assessments may be lower than on previous state tests (76%).

“It is clear that the political intensity that surrounds the Common Core has made an impact at the school district level,” said CEP Executive Director Maria Ferguson. “The fact that a growing number of district leaders—those on the front lines of implementing the standards—continue to view them as more rigorous than previous standards and more likely to improve student skills despite all the turmoil is an impressive show of support for the standards and what they mean for students.”

Districts are also seeking to collaborate as they implement different aspects of the CCSS. Nearly all districts have collaborated with at least one entity on different aspects of implementation, such as creating curricula and providing professional development. Districts are sticking close to home though when they collaborate, mostly working with other districts in their state and/or their state education agency (SEA).

Although districts are looking to their SEAs for assistance in areas like professional development, most districts view SEA support as only somewhat helpful. Most states participating in CEP’s 2013 survey on CCSS implementation reported a lack of one or more elements of capacity (staff expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources) in their efforts to support district implementation of the Common Core. Therefore the less than enthusiastic response from district leaders about SEA assistance in this survey may be a reflection of this admitted lack of capacity among most SEAs.

Finding adequate resources to support CCSS implementation, having adequate district staff expertise to implement the CCSS, providing high quality professional development, and identifying or developing curriculum materials were all challenges faced by over 80% of districts, according to CEP’s report. In addition, a vast majority of districts (92%) identified prepared to implement new CCSS-aligned assessments as a challenge.

“The survey results show that districts are clearly moving ahead with the Common Core, but are facing many challenges in implementing them, said CEP deputy director Diane Stark Rentner. “It is yet to be seen if districts can overcome these challenges, or, if as they indicate, more time is needed before the consequences tied to student performance on CCSS assessments take effect.”

The report, *Common Core State Standards in 2014: Districts’ Perceptions, Progress, and Challenges*, is available for download at www.cep-dc.org.

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University is a national advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.