Fall 10-2017

Principals as Partners in Change: Insights on Common Core State Standards Implementation

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by

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A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2017

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Insights on Common Core State Standards Implementation

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October 3, 2017
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my dissertation committee members for their insights, gentle corrections, patience, and help. I would like to give a particular mention to Dr. Shane Martin for heading my committee, making himself available to me amidst a very busy schedule, listening to my personal goals with the program and dissertation, and helping my dissertation topic and structure match them.

I must also acknowledge Dr. Drew Furedi for encouraging my application to and participation in the doctoral program. It is not an exaggeration to say that I would not have done any of this without his encouragement and/or pleasant insistence. During those "rough spots" along the way throughout the entire process, Dr. Furedi kept me moving forward and kept the end goal in sight, for which I am extremely grateful.

I also must thank Ignacio Enriquez. He, too, provided gentle insistence and encouragement throughout the process, and he patiently listened to my frustrations and successes, and supported me with the time to study and write at the sacrifice of time together. My family, friends, and colleagues deserve appreciation for their consistent support, as well.

Lastly, I give my deepest amount of gratitude to my mother for all she has done for me and the profound love she has shown me and my siblings and my extended family. Her love, understanding, encouragement, and acceptance has made me a stronger person and has helped me achieve this important milestone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Principals as Partners in Change:

Insights on Common Core State Standards Implementation

by

Brian Lucas

Since the introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, the education world has experienced a paradigm shift in the pedagogical expectations of educators, and there have been a decidedly mixed results on the implementation of the new standards. This qualitative study explored the experiences of several school administrators across urban and suburban school settings in their implementation of the CCSS. Set within a practitioner-based framework of Dr. Michael Fullan's drivers of change, this study examined the common large-scale change implementation strategies that were successful and those that provided the most obstacles to administrators, and identifies specific actions on the part of administrators that led to a successful change. This study used semistructured interviews to gather the experiences of five school administrators, and the data were analyzed using a general inductive analysis to determine common themes that emerged from the interview data.

The findings revealed that administrators worked through the resistance of staff, the bureaucratic difficulties, and their own steep learning curves to lead the charge. They reported success in leading the work through taking on ownership of the change, diving into the learning

right alongside their teachers, chunking the roll-out into more manageable parts, and admitting their own status as learners. Administrators took risks in plain view of their teachers, encouraged teacher leadership, and appreciated incremental progress in their adult learners. This study found specific actions that school leaders can employ to aid their endeavors to lead as inevitable change comes their way.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the Common Core State Standards in 2010, the education world has experienced a decidedly mixed result on implementation of the standards. Putting the political issues aside for a moment, in states that are still fully committed to an implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), teachers, principals, districts, and state departments of education struggle through the launch of a highly complex instructional initiative. This shift is not simply a change in learning objectives, but rather a deep revision of teacher practices, teacher content knowledge, assessment, and professional development, and student-and-teacher interaction.

The Problem

This change in practice is dramatic. As teachers move to implement new standards, means of assessment, and the instructional techniques required to successfully realize the shift, it is clear that the implementation has had difficulties along the way. In a survey administered by the Center on Education Policy (2014), more than half of the 211 districts surveyed felt they would be prepared for important implementation milestones, and over 90% reported concerns with having enough time to implement prior to the use of CCSS-based assessments.

Additionally, teachers have self-reported their own concern regarding their readiness. In a survey of teacher preparedness involving 41 states implementing the CCSS, between 30% and 40% of teachers self-reported that they were “well prepared” to teach the new CCSS in math (Cogan, Schmidt, & Houang, 2013). Teachers also reported a decided lack of professional

development opportunities to address their efforts at curricular change (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Clearly, teachers and school administrators are the lynchpin of CCSS implementation success. Teachers and principals undergo a complex process in which they try to make sense of a new policy and understand what it requires of them. School personnel then attempt to fit these policies into their preexisting, everyday school contexts, but in doing so, may modify these policies. Thus, policies transform teaching practice, and teachers transform policies throughout the implementation process, ultimately affecting the capacity of new policy to successfully achieve its original goals (Honig, 2006; Orrill & Anthony, 2003; Porter & Fusarelli, 2015). Equally as important, school administrators have been identified as a key lever in school and curriculum reform, and their preparedness and effectiveness in leading change is paramount to its success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2010). However, little research has been conducted that examines the implementation strategies of principals in working with their teachers on complex educational reform. Additionally, given my own professional responsibilities in working with principals, I have a vested interest in examining this phenomenon so that I may best know how to support others on my team.

This research endeavored to analyze the implementation of Common Core in two distinctly settings: an inner-city charter network with a high-poverty and high-minority population contrasted with a suburban, public K–12 public district of high-wealth and low-minority population.

The Research Questions

Given the apparent lack of narrative research on the topic, this research intends to answer the following key questions at three school sites:

1. How do principals serving two disparate student populations describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?
2. What are the challenges and successes these principals encounter as they initiate, implement, and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?
3. What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this research encompassed three main areas. First, it was to describe three principals' experience in the implementation of complex instructional change such as the CCSS. Secondly, this study examined how those principals experienced the CCSS implementation. Last, this work endeavored to identify and analyze similarities and differences between principals working in schools that served vastly disparate student populations.

The significance of this project touches a variety of levels of the system. By understanding CCSS implementation strategies, pitfalls, and successes more deeply, the study will inform other teachers or school administrators of effective methods for realizing complex instructional change. Additionally, the research findings will help inform both teacher education and administrator education programs. Potential insights gained from this research may be applied to the content or the instruction of such educator preparation programs in creating the next generation of teachers and leaders. And perhaps most broadly—and most importantly—this

research may provide a means of enabling increased student outcomes; when curricular change is implemented well and teachers and principals feel effective and empowered, students are bound to succeed.

Theoretical Framework as Michael Fullan's Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action

This dissertation used a highly practical and newly created theoretical framework in approaching the work: Michael Fullan's *right drivers* to school reform as discussed in his recent works *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (2008) and *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact* (2014), and culminating in the professor's recently released text *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action* (2016). The right drivers for school reform Dr. Fullan proposed are:

- Capacity-building: Rather than focus on assessment, reform is stronger through building the skills and expertise of teacher and principals
- Focus on instruction: The use of technology must not interfere with the true issue demanding focus: instruction. Once skilled, motivated teachers are in the lead, instruction (not technology) will be the driving force.
- Group quality: Schools must focus on the quality of groups as a whole, not on individuals. Teamwork, peer reflection, and a commitment to support and mutual growth lead to sustained reform.
- Systems-thinking: When educators see connections and interrelatedness among the individual parts, change simply "makes more sense."

This model provides a strong framework for approaching educational reform. The center of this framework focuses on people, their development, and their impact on organizational

change. Given that education is an entirely human endeavor, it is essential that any educational reform effort focus on people as the agents of change. It also provides some clear guidelines, or "lenses," though which I can review the case study.

Social Justice Connection

Understandably, the implementation of the CCSS has faced controversy across the nation. This dissertation did not aim to address that controversy in detail or to defend or attack the CCSS movement overall. Rather, currently the CCSS is indeed the planned curricular implementation for the State of California, so this dissertation sought to identify the practices that lead to a successful implementation that hopefully acknowledges teacher need, teacher voice, and teacher empowerment.

Additionally, I would argue that the intent of the CCSS is rooted in social justice ideas of equity and access. While the CCSS's sponsorship, development, and initial implementation may be in question, I believe that, at its heart, CCSS strives to create more robust, engaging, and meaningful teaching for all youth. And the simple, foundational element of the CCSS is rooted in its title: *The Common* Core. These are *common* learning expectations for all students in achieving college and career readiness—wealthy and poor students, White and minority students, English speaker and non-English speaking students. The CCSS encourages instruction that is connected to students' lives and experiences, promotes deep conversation and understanding of alternate viewpoints, and prompts students to think more deeply than today's curricula paradigms encourage. This level of instruction is often absent in classrooms teaching our country's minority or poor students due to the decades-long focus on standardized test scores and scripted curricula. The CCSS endeavors to remove this low level of instruction from all classrooms and surround all

students in instruction geared for the 21st century. Interviewees in Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler's research (2014) echoed these beliefs. One participant stated that the CCSS was about equal opportunity "Basically you're giving students an equal opportunity to be exposed, you know, to the content they need to develop knowledge and skills" (Kornhaber et al., 2014, p. 14). Other participants reflected on the CCSS as being about equal expectations.

> The Common Core provided the same high, rigorous, challenging expectations for all kids. Since one of the things that has historically depressed the performance of low income and minority students was low expectations we had for them, having the same expectations for everybody is really an equity issue. (Kornhaber et al, 2014, p. 14)

This study's intentional use of participants from distinctly different school environments endeavored to illuminate the different experiences of educators in achieving this overarching goal of equity as embodied in the CCSS.

Assumptions and Limitations

This research study was conceived with the following assumptions:

- The participants are the principal actors in implementing the CCSS within their schools
- The participants have been involved in the implementation of the CCSS for a long enough time to be able to comment on the CCSS from implementation to sustaining to current state of the CCSS effort.
- The participants are expected to provide honest responses.

- The reliability and validity of the interview protocol were expected to be sufficient to provide accurate data. And that the validity of the interview is limited to how complete the participants answer.

I recognize the limitations of this proposal include generalizability. The small sample size of three principals in a particular educational urban setting may not allow the results of this research to be generalized to larger settings, or rural environments. Additionally, this research focused on charter school educators, so the findings may not be generalizable to the noncharter sector.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on six school leaders within urban and suburban school districts. These principals were selected as a convenience sample given the researcher's proximity to the participants and the flexibility in arranging mutual schedules for interviewing. While the scope of the principal experience was limited, the participants had varied educational and professional backgrounds that the researcher believes added to the richness of the findings. Lastly, a final delimitation on the study was that interviews were the only data collection methods. Creswell (2013) has discussed the benefits of data triangulation in order to gain a better understanding of the problem. However, in-depth and robust interviews provided ample data to accurately reflect these principals' experiences.

Summary

This study was a timely investigation of instructional leadership in the context of standards-based reform. In particular, I explored how instructional leaders, posited as having a strong influence on teachers and student achievement (Lezootte, 2001), perceived the CCSS and

their experiences implementing this mandated change. Themes identified from this study formed a recommendation for illustrating principal practices that may potentially assist school leaders in managing any future large-scale industrial change initiatives.

In this chapter, I have outlined the development of my interests in the role of instructional leadership in the implementation of CCSS as standards-based reform. I reviewed the relative newness of the CCSS implementation and hence provided a discussion about the lack of research in this area in the educational research sector that this study addressed. I have indicated the purpose for this research was to contribute to our collective knowledge of how instructional leaders understand their role and how they enact these understandings in practice. The significance of the study was also discussed in that these findings may support school leaders in future instructional change work, and may inform administrator training programs. I introduced this study's conceptual framework, Fullan's right drivers, and shared my thoughts on the social justice connection embodied in the CCSS in that the CCSS is raising expectations for all student groups, when prior standards efforts seemed to foster rote learning in many minority populations. Also, I reviewed my belief that assisting educators to be their most effective is in itself a form of social justice in that all students need our educators feeling and acting effective; and effective administrators equals student learning. Lastly, I introduced the study's scope and limitations.

The remaining chapters are organized as follows. The second chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the research. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology and accounts for methods used within the study. Chapters 4 presents findings of the study based upon themes that emerged during analysis of interview data. Finally, in Chapter 5, I consider implications for research and practice.

This research contributes to a body of literature that informs the blueprint for preparing and guiding instructional leaders in practices necessary to the development of school improvement and academic achievement (Seashore-Lewis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Exploring principals' self-reported effective practices provides instructional leaders with additional guidance in the process of implementing mandated change via the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a contextual and historical background on the issues fundamental to this study's topic. The following review of literature is used to frame the discussion about principal behaviors and best practices that enable effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to answer the research questions posed in this dissertation:

1. How do principals in two distinct settings describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?
2. What are the challenges and successes that principals encounter as they initiate, implement, and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?
3. What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

To provide focus for this discussion, this chapter is organized into six broad areas. First, a review of the origin, content, and intent of the CCSS is provided. Following will be context around the current state of the CCSS implementation, most notably the significant challenges facing the roll-out of the standards that systems are experiencing today. Third, a review of historical research on the link between instructional leader behaviors, followed by a discussion of the impact on student achievement seeks to establish the importance of the instructional leader in this curriculum reform. Next, a discussion of the specific school leader practices that have been effective in leading curriculum reform will be presented. In order to provide more context for the setting in which this research project is grounded, the findings of instructional leadership and student achievement outcomes of leaders in high-poverty, urban schools will be explored. A

presentation of Fullan's "Right Drivers," the theoretical framework through which this research project was reviewed, concludes this chapter.

Overview of the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent a major change in the education environment across our country (Conley, 2012). At the onset of the initiative, 47 states planned to implement the standards and replace their state-developed ones with the CCSS. While past national efforts around educational shifts or reform have happened mostly through changes at the resources or organizational structures (e.g., Title I funding, Race to the Top grants, etc.), the CCSS initiative marks a concerted national effort (led by a coalition of state governments) to improve the content of instruction (Schmidt & Burroughs, 2013).

The call for "higher" standards has been a central tenet of school reform for three decades. In 1983, the blue-ribbon commission report, "A Nation at Risk," urged that "schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards." In 1989, President George H. W. Bush hosted a national governors' summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, in which the governors embraced a series of dramatic goals, including national standards. In 1994, the National Endowment for the Humanities and UCLA drafted voluntary National History Standards. Such efforts were stymied by resistance to extending the national government's reach. Notably, in 1995 the National History Standards were rejected 99 to 1 by the U.S. Senate.

In 1996, the National Governors Association and several prominent CEOs founded Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit devoted to promoting higher state standards. The National Alliance of Business, Business Roundtable, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce all joined the effort to "set tough academic standards that apply to every student in every school" (Achieve.org, 1996, p. 7).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act marked a dramatic win for standards-based reform, but at the price of abandoning the push for "national" standards. NCLB required states to adopt standards in reading and math, administer annual tests geared to those standards, use tests to determine which students were proficient, and analyze the outcomes to determine which schools and systems were making "adequate yearly progress," including the absurd requirement that 100% of students be proficient by 2014. Schools and systems that did not perform adequately were subject to federally mandated sanctions. The crucial compromise was that states could set their own standards and tests. In fact, NCLB specifically prohibited national testing or a federally controlled curriculum.

The possibility of sanctions gave more than a few state leaders reason to adopt easy tests and lower the scores required for proficiency. A "race to the bottom" was soon underway, prompting an effort to combat the gamesmanship.

In December 2008, Achieve, Inc., the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Governors Association issued "Benchmarking for Success," a report that urged states to develop and adopt common standards; called for federal incentives to promote that effort; and advocated aligning textbooks, curricula, and tests to those standards. Encouraged by bipartisan interest in the initiative, the CCSSO and NGA launched the Common Core effort.

Early in 2009, a coalition of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers released a press release stating that 49 of the states had voluntarily agreed to the CCSS initiative and that all states would adopt the same set of standards and either administer a yearly test based on these standards or a test directly aligned to the new standards (Tienken, 2010).

The new CCSS represented a significant shift away from the content guidelines that were created by individual states in years past and—according to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.) website—made an effort to combat student achievement losses due to a "patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level" (para. 3). The content standards are:

1. Research and evidence-based
2. Clear, understandable, and consistent
3. Aligned with college and career expectations
4. Based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills
5. Built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards
6. Informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society

Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) explained that the CCSS for content areas of language arts and math were indeed specifically focused on what students needed to learn and achieve at each grade level. Importantly, it should be noted that the CCSS is not a curriculum, but simply end goals for student learning. How individual states and teachers reached these goals was not prescribed and is left to the local school districts and community to decide or design (Porter et al., 2011).

Common Core and English Language Arts

The expectation of the Common Core in English Language Arts is that students learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language in various content areas; thus, the standards delineate

the literary achievement levels necessary for college and career readiness. The English language arts standards are organized into four key ideas, as described in the Table 1.

Table 1

Ten English Language Arts Standards in the Common Core State Standards

Four areas	10 English Language Arts standards
Key ideas and details	1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
	2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
	3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Craft and structure	4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
	5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
	6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Integration of knowledge and ideas	7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
	8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
	9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Range reading and level of text complexity	10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently

Source: Common Core State Standards, 2012, p. 10

In English language arts, the new standards demonstrate a shift to nonfiction texts away from literary fiction. The standards also emphasize the close reading of texts and a teacher awareness of text complexity. Students will need to work with a series of complex texts across genres to determine meaning, connections, and author's purpose (Common Core State Standards [CCSS], 2012).

Common Core and Mathematics

The primary goal of the CCSS in mathematics is a move toward focus and coherence and a redesign from previous standards that were considered a "mile wide and an inch deep" (CCSS, 2012, p. 3). With fewer standards, the intent is for teachers to go deeper into areas by stressing conceptual understanding of key mathematical ideas, and continually returning to underlying structures at the foundation of mathematical understanding, like place value or operations. Eight mathematical practices are delineated in the CCSS and are evident throughout the individual standards for each grade. They are as follows:

1. Make sense of problems and preserve in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others
4. Model with mathematics
5. Use appropriate tools strategically
6. Attend to precision
7. Look for and make use of structure
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning. (CCSS Mathematics, 2017, pp. 6–8)

National Implementation of the Common Core

The implementation of the CCSS is at various stages across the nation. The Center on Education Policy initiated a survey in which the results indicated that a majority of the 40 states that responded had already initiated an instructional curriculum aligned with the CCSS in at least some of their districts, and almost all of the 40 states were providing professional learning to educators (Rentner, 2013). Also many organizations are developing tools to assist educators in the implementation of the CCSS, including rubrics, guidelines, templates and checklists (e.g., National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013, engageNY.com, achievethecore.com, National Association of Elementary School Principals).

California Implementation of Common Core

In California, the CCSS implementation plan was developed by the California Department of Education (CDE) under the direction of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakeson. The full implementation of the CCSS was planned take place over several years beginning in 2011 and has been placed by the state in a context of continuous learning. As such, the plan exists within the paradigm of change processes and has three distinct phases: the awareness phase, the transitional phase, and the implementation phase. The awareness phase represents an introduction to the CCSS, the initial planning of systems implementation and the establishment of collaborations. The transitional phase is a concentration on building foundational resources, implementing needs assessment, establishing new professional learning opportunities, and expanding collaborations between all stakeholders. The implementation phase expands the new professional learning support, a fully aligned curriculum,

instruction, and assessment, and effectively integrates these elements across the field (California Department of Education, 2014).

The plan is grounded in seven guiding strategies for implementation. As listed in the "Common Core State Standards Systems Implementation Plan for California" (2014), the seven guiding strategies for California implementation are:

1. Facilitate high quality professional learning opportunities for educators to ensure that every student has access to teachers who are prepared to teach to the levels of rigor and depth required by the CCSS.
2. Provide CCSS-aligned instructional resources designed to meet the diverse needs of all students.
3. Develop and transition to CCSS-aligned assessment systems to inform instruction, establish priorities for professional learning, and provide tools for accountability.
4. Collaborate with parents, guardians, and the early childhood and expanded learning communities to integrate the CCSS into programs and activities beyond the K–12 school setting.
5. Collaborate with the postsecondary and business communities and additional stakeholders to ensure that all students are prepared for success in career and college.
6. Seek, create, and disseminate resources to support stakeholders as CCSS systems implementation moves forward.
7. Design and establish systems of effective communication among stakeholders to continuously identify areas of need and disseminate information.

Challenges in Implementation of the CCSS

As mentioned above, states across the United States are in a variety of stages of implementation of the CCSS. It could be argued that there are substantial complications in the roll-out and implementation of the CCSS.

Inadequate Funding

Not unique to the Common Core initiative in education today, the lack of funds to access high-quality materials is a major hurdle for many school districts across the nation, and access to resources is key to the successful implementation of the CCSS. Over half of the states that have adopted the CCSS indicated that inadequate resources are a challenge to the full implementation of the CCSS, and 97% of school districts in those states viewed inadequate funding as a significant challenge (Rentner & Kober, 2012).

School-Based Instructional Change

Another issue complicating the implementation of the CCSS is that of effecting school-based instructional change. One of the major shifts demanded by the CCSS is a new focus on being college- and career-ready, and not just on graduation from high school. Now, teachers and instructional leaders will need to be more aware and driven toward preparing students for the rigor of college work. Outdated teaching techniques will need to be discarded or revised in order to create learning environments in which students are critical thinkers dealing with complex tasks that are based in real-life scenarios. Although the standards currently exist for English Language Arts and mathematics, the complex literacy demands and increased use of the language of mathematics that are present in the CCSS require all teachers of all subject areas to be involved in this transition. So, history, economics, biology, physical education, and computer teachers (to name a few) are

now expected to present instruction that incorporates literacy skills and understandings necessary for college and career readiness—in addition to their specific content standards or curricula. This expectation presents a major shift for many content area teachers previously unassociated directly with English or math instruction.

Equitable Access to College Readiness Instruction

While the CCSS demands increased attention to instruction preparing students for college, historically, this concept has not been equally applied to all learners in a school, which presents another challenge for educators moving toward implementation. Instructional leaders are now required to review programs for all students and ensure there are sufficient accommodations to allow students, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, recent immigrants, and others considered academically at risk, the same level of access to the rigor and goals of the CCSS as mainstream students have set for them. For example, one teacher in Murphy and Haller's (2015) study stated:

> With the idea of going deeper and wider in our teaching, time is a true concern—[because there is] so much to accomplish in our curriculum that pacing is a true issue. [For example,] informational texts are more complex in language, format and vocabulary, which makes [them] more difficult for our ELLs and SWDs [to process]. (p. 523)

CCSS's increased complexity is felt deeply by the teachers, and adds to the burden of providing adequate instruction for all students.

Adequate Teacher Planning and Preparation Time

The large shifts in instruction and practice demanded by the CCSS simply require large amounts of time for teachers and administrators to plan and adjust instruction. For example, teachers will have to thoroughly understand the fundamental reasons behind the development of the CCSS, how to assess work involving the new standards, how to create text-based questions and more rigorous and interactive learning situations, and how to monitor progress in meeting the new requirements of the CCSS (Farbman, Goldberg, & Miller, 2014).

Political Backlash Regarding the CCSS

The implementation of the CCSS has been far from smooth. Opposition from a variety of fronts has affected the implementation across a range of populations and sectors. While opposition to the CCSS as indicated in an annual poll has weakened slightly from 60% to 54% or become less organized from 2014 to 2015, the large number of opposing voices remains strong (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014; Testing doesn't measure up for Americans, 2015). As detailed in Table 2, Black Americans show more support for the CCSS than Whites and Latinos, and Democrats favoring the CCSS more than Republicans.

Table 2

Poll Responses: Percent of Americans' Support of CCSS

	% Favor	% Oppose	% Don't know/ refused answer
National Totals 2014	33	60	7
National Totals 2015	24	54	22
Public School Parents 2014	32	62	6
Public School Parents 2015	25	54	21
Republicans 2014	17	76	7
Republicans 2015	14	69	17
Democrats 2014	53	38	9
Democrats 2015	35	38	26
Blacks 2015	41	35	25
Hispanics 2015	29	50	22
Whites 2015	21	57	22

Note. Ethnicity data unavailable for 2014
Source: Bushaw and Calderon, 2014; Testing doesn't measure up for Americans, 2015

Opposition to the standards—which was once primarily made up of conservative critics—now appears to cross multiple political lines. Libertarian opponents fear federal intrusion, while typically left-leaning teachers' unions are critiquing the implementation of the standards and the CCSS's link to corporate funders and often-controversial education reform foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, while others decry a seeming lack of public input into the development of the standards (Bidwell, 2014; Harris, 2015; Ravitch, 2013). Some educators appear to lump the CCSS in with other national educational reform movements that are unpopular or other noninstructional issues facing our schools today. One teacher-blogger wrote:

> People who advocate for the CCSS miss the bigger picture that people on the ground don't: The CCSS came as a package deal with the new teacher evaluations, higher stakes testing, and austerity measures, including mass school closings. Often, it seems like the leaders are talking out of both sides of their mouths when they say they want to improve education but need to defund our schools. . . . It makes no sense for us to have high expectations of our students when we don't have high expectations for our school system. (Karp, 2013, p. 2)

Parents are also a part of the opposition movement, with many protesting and others refusing to allow their children to take tests aligned to the CCSS (Bidwell, 2013).

Several states have also revised their allegiances to the CCSS and the CCSS testing mechanisms in the face of opposition. States leaving the testing consortia or either not adopting or repealing the CCSS altogether most commonly cite the desire for more local control (and a distaste for federal intrusion) and insurmountable costs associated with implementing the CCSS as their primary reasons for the change (Chieppo & Gass, 2013; Zernike, 2015). While opposition appears strong, of the 45 states and the District of Columbia that originally adopted the CCSS, only Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have reversed their initial adoption of the CCSS (but Missouri, Tennessee, and North Carolina are currently considering legislation to alter their relationships with CCSS). Opposition to the CCSS test consortia is more dramatic, in that only 30 states that have adopted will now use one the of CCSS-aligned tests from the consortia (Brown, 2015; Ujifusa, 2015).

Principals as Key to School and Curriculum Reform

Undoubtedly, the transition to the CCSS is a monumental instructional and curricular reform for schools across the country. There was general agreement among researchers that the principal was the one person who could impact school reform the most, and that he or she was the key change-agent for impacting schools change and success and thus was the key to the success of the CCSS implementation (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Ouchi, 2003). Yet despite this current belief in principals' roles, school principals have steadily lost power and control since the 1960s (Pellicer et al., 1988; Wooster, 1994). Until the 1960s, principals had a great deal of freedom in shaping their schools. That changed with the rise of the teachers' unions, which ensured that many decisions were made by union contract, not by the principal. Principals also had to deal with the rise of federally funded positions and the strings that were attached (such as special education positions), which left them with even less power and influence.

In his book *Angry Classrooms, Vacant Minds: What's Happened to Our High Schools?* Wooster (1994) referenced a key study of principals conducted in 1980 by Van Cleve Morris from the University of Illinois (Chicago). Morris and his associates reported that, over time, principals had adopted a low-profile, paper-shuffling, keep-the-lid-on-and-the-boss-happy style of caretaker management (Wooster, 1994). Chubb and Moe (1990) reached similar conclusions with a collection of surveys from 1987 that were conducted by Pellicer and his colleagues at the National Association of Secondary School Principals. In those surveys, 33% of principals said they had little or no authority to hire teachers, 42% had little control over staffing practices, and 39% had no say over the budget. In 1977, only 8% of the principals were limited in hiring

teachers, 32% couldn't tell teachers how to teach, and 33% were blocked from budget decisions (Pellicer et al., 1988).

Findings such as these fueled the movement toward site-based management in the 1980s and 1990s. Coleman and Hoffer's *Public and Private High Schools* (1987) and Chubb and Moe's *Politics, Markets, and American Schools* (1990) showed that public high schools where principals had more freedom to shape the school's culture had students who achieved more than schools where principals were left in their roles as middle managers. Ouchi (2003) made similar claims from his research on 223 schools in nine different school systems. He said that without full authority provided to the principal, schools would never be free to be creative and entrepreneurial in solving their own problems. Wooster (1994) made this point: without some devolution of power—either via school-based management, charter schools, or school choice—principals are not likely to regain the power they have steadily lost.

Studies conducted on the affective dimensions of school leaders (as well as leadership styles) showed that this newer type of principal must be multidimensional: an initiator, a researcher, a learner, and a communicator (Clarke, 2000) and many saw their role as teachers of teachers. The principals generally espoused an egalitarian approach to leadership in which they viewed decisions as collaborative in nature (Loder & Spillane, 2005).

From the 1900s to the 1950s, researchers focused on the characteristics of leaders and followers in the hope of finding the single trait (or combination of traits) that could explain why some leaders were successful (see traits model in Table 3). That research was met with much frustration because of the combination of factors and situations associated with leaders. Subsequent leadership studies attempted to distinguish effective leaders from ineffective ones

Table 3

Five Common Leadership Theories

Model	Focus	Related theories
Traits model	Focus is on an individual's inherited traits such as personality, intelligence, self-confidence. Some traits are suited to leadership.	The great man theory: leaders are born, not made. Leaders will rise to the forefront as needed.
Behavioral model	Focus is on what leaders do and attempts to define and describe the actions of successful leaders. Leaders can be made, rather than born. Leadership is learnable, teachable.	---
Contingency model	Focus is on the situation, the task at hand, the abilities of the followers and the leader's preferred style. Leaders may be effective in one place and time and less so at other times.	Situational leadership: there is no one best way to lead. Effective leaders do not have a preferred leadership style.
Transactional model	Focus on external rewards and punishment to motivate others. A clear chain of command is paramount. People are motivated by their own self interests.	---
Transform-ational model	Focus is internal motivation of others. Leader works to inspire followers toward a common vision. Collaboration and empowerment are key.	Advocacy leadership: leading others to a common cause by raising their levels of morality and motivation; focus is on social justice and supporting marginalized subgroups.

Though no one style of leadership has proved sound in all cases and for all persons, the most modern interpretations support more collaborative (transformational) and activist (social justice) models. Smith and Piele (1997) defined five dimensions of leadership that shape the style and role of the leader in any organization: (a) decision-making, (b) perceptions of employees, (c) tasks and human relations, (d) innovation and risk-taking, and (e) psychological types. The researchers drew heavily on McGregor's (1960) characterization of leaders as leaning more heavily toward theory X or theory Y. Those who believed in theory X viewed employees as

needing close monitoring, consequences, and extrinsic rewards. Those who supported theory Y saw employees as self-motivated, collaborative, and seeking intrinsic rewards.

Much of the research around school leadership grew out of the flap caused by the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, a document that painted a disturbing portrait of American schools and called on school superintendents (and principals) to be saviors—reformers, visionaries and chief executive officers. In the earliest days of school leadership (beginning in about 1800), superintendents and principals performed functions that were largely clerical in nature and sometimes operational. The onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 1900s brought about a greater need for school leaders to increase efficiency and become more expert in the areas of budgeting and facilities.

Sparked by new research in the 1970s and 1980s, schools and school districts began to differentiate between leaders and managers and pushed for leaders who could articulate a vision and lead others to a higher calling. Though leadership is clearly a complex enterprise, vision and collaboration were seen as key factors in successful leadership practice (Fullan & Watson, 2000). This manifested in the current research around distributed leadership, transformational leadership, and social justice theory. This thrust toward a model of transformational leadership is required in today's schools and in today's complex environment regarding instructional change.

Principals' Role in CCSS Implementation

The State of California has argued that the guiding strategies of the CCSS plan require strong instructional leadership in every school (CDE, 2014). And, as outlined in the previous section, the knowledge, skills, and leadership of principals and instructional leaders are essential to the success of the CCSS (Achieve, 2012). Eilers and D'Amico (2012) further stated:

> school leaders have the responsibility of deciding how best to meet these Standards by moving faculty and staff to uncharted territory. Because of the immediacy and requirements from state departments of education, many may find themselves dictating instructional changes that have not been carefully thought out in an effort to implement these Standards. Without guidance from a skilled leader, teachers and students are likely to experience frustration and failure. (p. 46)

Successful implementation requires the principal to provide instructional leadership through continual, ongoing conversations, collaboration with teachers, developing themselves and others, and participation in all professional development that is provided to the teachers (Reed, 2013). The school leader provides structure, support, and monitors progress.

Principals as Instructional Leaders

Given the need for strong principals who have instructional prowess, a recent definition of principals as instructional leaders has emerged. Instructional leadership differs from that of a school administrator or manager in a number of ways. But the definition of instructional leadership is varied and evolving. Elmore (2000) defined instructional leadership as "the equivalent of the holy grail in educational administration" (p. 7). And King (2002) furthered the elusive nature of the definition of instructional leadership by stating, "there is no litmus test for its presence … [and it is] an integral, almost invisible, part of how a school community works, lives, and learns together" (p. 63). King does finish however with the definition that instructional leadership are actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning and that the instructional leader makes instructional quality the top priority of the school and attempts to bring that vision to realization. Other definitions include Findley and Findley (1992) describing an

instructional leader as recognizing the professionalism and expertise of teaching, giving teachers their wings, and allowing them to soar to new heights they never imagined. Buell (1992) described instructional leadership as the ability to articulate and lead others toward a vision. Williamson (1995) stated "the instructional leader sets the tone and direction for change, and acts as a facilitator and a resource person" (p. 18). Lashway (1996) defined instructional leaders as principals who exercise firm control by setting goals, maintaining discipline, and evaluating results.

Traditionally, the instructional leader has been seen as a master of instruction—the "all-knowing" principal or the master teacher in charge of a school. Under this paradigm, the instructional leader is mostly classroom focused paying deep attention to curriculum, having an eye for instructional techniques, making frequent observations of teachers and feedback, and modeling of instruction and co-teaching. Blase and Blase (2000) expressed instructional leadership in specific behaviors such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, and giving praise for effective teaching. This definition encompasses the master teacher who uses his or her instructional expertise to impact student learning (Horng & Loeb, 2010). While this model has its appeals, it is a difficult one to emulate in our schools today. For instance, for large, comprehensive high schools with a variety of subject areas and differentiation of programs, it would be difficult to find a school leader equally versed in trigonometry and British poetry. Even if this definition of instructional leader exists, such a leader would not be capable of providing observations and feedback to 250 teachers that make up the faculty of a large high school.

What the concept of instructional leadership means, however, remains somewhat vague and undefined. For example, one recent example of research about the link between the principal and teachers' professional development provided by the IFL (Institute for Learning) organization found that teachers' self-reporting of their use of certain instructional strategies promoted by their principals were not confirmed in classroom observations by researchers. Additionally, principals who were described by their teachers as providing instructional leadership were not seen giving direct feedback and frequent observations of classroom instruction during the researchers' visits to classrooms, which may typically be defined as instructional leadership (Quint, Akey, Rappaport, & Wilner, 2007).

More recently, attention has shifted from teaching to learning, and some have proposed the term *learning leader* over *instructional leader* when principals shift from helping individual teachers improve instruction to helping groups of teachers ensure that students achieve the needed outcomes (DuFour, 2002). In this model, strong principals develop the organizational structures for improved instruction more than they spend time in classrooms or coaching teachers. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) has defined instructional leadership as "leading learning communities." In learning communities, staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, work together to problem solve, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn. They operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies or in isolation. Per NAESP (2001), instructional leaders also make adult learning a priority; set high expectations for performance; create a culture of continuous learning for adults; focus on student achievement; use multiple data sources; and get

the community's support for school success. Creating a learning culture is a key element on instructional leadership and the principal as head learner is critical for instructional improvement.

> Principals are key to providing the support and learning opportunities teachers and staff need to improve instruction and boost student achievement. Principals recognize that staff members are learners, just as they are teachers, and must have the instructional and development tools they need to pursue their own learning and growth … Development opportunities are not just for teachers, however, and principals, leading by example, should identify professional development opportunities to improve their own craft. (NAESP, 2001, p. 41)

Principals' Impact on Student Achievement

"Effective principals are at the center of curricular and instructional improvements within their schools," wrote Steller (1988, p. 16). There is a strong research base that solidly supports this position, and these studies have shown that principals who are knowledgeable about and actively involved with their school's instructional program have higher achieving students than the principals who focus on the operational or noninstructional realm of their jobs (Bartell, 1990; Coyle & Witchet, 1992; Gullatt & Lofton, 1996; Krug, 1992; Mendez-Morse, 1991; Walberg & Lane, 1985).

However, historically, principals have been responsible for managing a well-run school. Managing staff, developing rules and procedures, and attending to the general operation of a building have always been part of the job. However, Wenglinsky (2004) noted that effective schools are now more recently characterized by a climate or culture oriented toward learning via high achievement standards and expectations of students, with an emphasis on basic skills, a high

level of involvement in decision making and professionalism among teachers, and cohesiveness, clear policies on matters such as homework and student behaviors. These standards and expectations have changed the principal's role and further shifted the principal's role, including creating the expectation that principals should provide instructional leadership. Sergiovanni (2005) suggested that this new requirement means that the principal's role has changed from management to instructional leadership.

Historically, principals were considered the primary source of knowledge in a school setting, and it follows from this argument that teachers do not have enough knowledge to provide instructional leadership for the school's instructional improvement efforts (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Hallinger, 2005). This principal managerial view is challenged by the changing educational schema with high expectations for teachers and students, close supervision of classroom instruction, coordination of the school's curriculum, and close monitoring of student progress—all leading to defining the principal as an instructional leader (Hallinger, 2005).

Stein and Nelson (2003) conducted a study questioning how school leaders might approach the new demand of understanding subject matter content. They argued that because instructional leaders are responsible for improving teaching and learning in their schools, they should be able to recognize strong instruction when they see it, to encourage it when they do not, and to set the conditions for continuous academic learning among their professional staff. The authors further argued that the generic definitions of leadership applied to a school setting are lacking and that the inclusion of content knowledge leadership is essential to connect thought on school leadership to the core functions of schooling, teaching, and learning.

As instructional leaders, it is important for principals to improve the instructional performance of their teachers. Marks and Printy (2003) argued that the role of the principal is similar to that of classroom teachers in that they are not the transmitters of knowledge but rather facilitators, the ones who take responsibility for understanding the learning needs of individuals; understanding how to design tasks that support and encourage learning; employ a strategic mix of incentives and sanctions, and ensure there are adequate resources to support learning.

Lezotte (2001) identified principals in effective schools as instructional leaders who developed a clear sense of mission, purpose, and values. Virgilio and Virligio (1984) noted the role of principals in curriculum change and the challenges faced at any level. The changes facing principals and schools were movements from familiar learning requirements to brand-new nationwide standards that demand even stronger principal leadership (Syed, 2013). Additionally, school leadership ranked second (only behind classroom instruction at the number one position) in all school-related relationships with student achievement (Seashore-Lewis et al., 2010). Fullan (2002) concluded that successful principals were the key to large-school sustainable educational reform and stated that "school improvement depends on principals who can foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society" (p. 20). Principals needed to be instructional leaders if they were to be effective leaders for change.

Leadership Practices Considered Helpful for Instruction by Principals and Teachers

In reviewing the question of which leadership practices have been identified by principals and teachers as helpful for instruction, a body of research identifies and establishes this area of study quite well. For example, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) studied 21 leadership "responsibilities" and calculated the average correlation between each responsibility and its

outcome on student performance. There was a 10% increase in student test scores for principals who improved their "demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by one standard deviation" (Waters et al, 2003, p. 3). Table 4 further describes the identified practices.

Table 4

Helpful Leadership Practices as Identified by Principals and Teachers

Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal …	Avg. *r*
Culture	fosters shared beliefs, a sense of community, and cooperation	.29
Order	establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines	.26
Discipline	protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.24
Resources	provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.26
Curriculum, instruction, assessment	is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.16
Focus	establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction assessment	is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.	.24
Visibility	has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	.16
Contingent rewards	recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments	.15
Communication	establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students	.23
Outreach	is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.28
Input	involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions and policies	.30
Affirmation	recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures	.25
Relationship	demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	.19

Change agent	is willing to and actively challenges the status quo	.30
Optimizer	inspires and leads new & challenging innovations	.20
Ideals/beliefs	communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	.25
Monitors/evaluates	monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	.28
Flexibility	adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent	.22
Situational awareness	is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	.33
Intellectual stimulation	ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.32

Additional meta-analyses have delineated a leader's effect on student performance to four key areas (Seashore-Lewis et al., 2010). Using these four areas, the researchers further confirmed the findings from the review of literature by conducting research in 12 schools with 65 teachers. In this supplemental research project, specific administrator practices that were cited by both teachers and administrators as helpful to instruction were identified. Following is a summary of the four key areas identified by the meta-analysis and the specific practices found in their follow-up study.

1. Setting directions: This includes building a shared vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations and communicating the direction. Fullan (2003) characterized this as "moral purpose," which serves as a focus on the collective work of the organization. Practices include: focusing the school on goals for student achievement, focusing teachers' attention on goals for student achievement, focusing

teachers' attention on expectations for student achievement, and administrators staying current on instructional trends.

2. Developing people: Providing individualized support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices comprise this category. Developing people focuses primarily on the work of capacity building that not only encompasses the skills and knowledge needed to accomplish goals but also fosters the positive personal dispositions that facilitate individual members to persist in applying new learning. Of critical importance to dispositions that lead to increased goal achievement is teacher efficacy and mastery experiences. Specific practices include: keeping track of teachers' PD needs, providing general support/open door, being easily accessible, and providing backup for teachers for student discipline and with parents.
3. Redesigning the organization: The practices in this category include building collaborative cultures, restructuring the organization to support collaboration, building productive relationships with families and communities, and connecting the school to a wider community. These all focus to make the conditions of the school environment as conducive as possible for members to make the most of their skills and capacities. The only identified practice among both teachers and principals in this area is creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate.
4. Managing the instructional program: These areas focus on teaching and learning and include staffing, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, buffering staff from distractions, and aligning resources. Specific practices found helpful were

monitoring teachers' work in the classroom and providing instructional resources and material.

In their description of balanced leadership in their text *School Leadership That Works,* Marzano et al. (2005) explained:

> Leadership means more than simply knowing what to do—it's knowing when, how, and why to do it. Effective leaders understand how to balance pushing for change while at the same time, protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving. They know which policies to align them with organizational priorities. They know how to gauge the magnitude of change they are calling for and how to tailor their leadership strategies accordingly. Finally, they understand and value the people in the organization. They know when, how, and why to create learning environments that support people, connect them with one another, and provide the knowledge and skills, and resources they need to succeed. (p. 2)

Instructional Leadership in High-Poverty Urban Schools

Lacour and Tisington (2011) described the relationship between students living in poverty and their academic results:

> Poverty, which forms a specific culture and way of life, is a growing issue in the United States. The number of Americans living in poverty is continually increasing. Poverty indicates the extent to which an individual does without resources. Resources can include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources as well as support systems, relationships, role models, and knowledge of hidden rules. Poverty directly affects academic achievement due to

> the lack of resources available for student success. Low student achievement is closely correlated with lack of resource, and numerous studies have documented the correlation between low socioeconomic status and low achievement. (p. 522)

However, research has told us that principals in schools with substantial numbers of children living in poverty are less likely to be instructional leaders than are principals in middle class or wealthy schools (Butler, 1997; Evans & Teddlie, 1995; Firestone & Wilson, 1989; Scheurich, 1998). A study conducted by Leitner (1994) found that principals in schools with students with higher socioeconomic status were not only more likely to manage instruction than their colleagues in schools with high poverty rates among students, but they also were more collaborative and less directive. Mendez-Morse's (1991) study made a distinction between "managers," who oversee operations and maintain status quo, and "leaders," who foster and direct change toward a vision for improvement. She found that schools with high poverty rates were more likely to have managers in the principalship than leaders.

Instructional leadership is essential to the success of high-poverty schools, and this has been researched by several studies that reinforce that instructional leadership is key to creating environments in which students achieve better than their like-demographic counterparts. Butler (1997) credited a group of instructional leadership behaviors such as setting ambitious goals, communicating high expectations for students and teachers, using student data to inform and plan instruction, maintain a focus on raising student achievement, and supporting teachers' professional development, and

creating a safe environment for teachers to experiment in their pedagogy as the reason for her high-poverty school's turnaround.

High-poverty urban schools have some examples of successful school leadership leading to instructional improvements that confirm the general research findings presented above. Jacobson (2011) claimed that school leadership made the primary difference in the instructional improvements of a high poverty school. Students were successful when principals in high-poverty schools set a clear plan of action with shared goals, developed people through professional development, and redesigned the organizations. The impact of principals as instructional leaders on high-poverty students is best stated by Scheurich (1998):

> These grassroots educators, particularly the principals, were simply unwilling to accept the widespread negative assumptions about the children in their schools, and they were unwilling to accept any other course of action than one that would lead to the highest levels of academic success. They knew that their children were just as capable as other children—they just had to create a school that would prove this. (pp. 453–454)

Similar findings were reported in a study of three school sites in New York that had shown improvement in their student achievement after the arrival of a new principal. Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, and Ylimaki (2007) found via interviews of administrators, staff, parents, and students at the three schools that the three principals had established a safe and nurturing environment, set high expectations, and held all

accountable. The principals set clear direction for their schools and motivated and influenced all stakeholders to move toward the goals.

Marrapodi and Beard (2013) studied a Detroit, Michigan public school that also experienced a turn-around from unacceptable student outcomes to more positive ones following a switch in its administration team. Five areas were identified that included clear identification of problem areas and creating action plans, focus-differentiated learning, analysis of student work, monitoring and measuring intervention efforts, and focusing on achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Dr. Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, is recognized as a worldwide authority on educational reform. In his work centering around "right drivers," he examined the drivers, change strategies, foci, that are typically chosen by leaders to accomplish system-wide reform (Fullan, 2011). Given that the implementation of the CCSS demands changes throughout the system in the way teachers teach, how the data is evaluated, and the structure of schooling required to best achieve these new curriculum guidelines, Dr. Fullan's framework provides a valuable lens for viewing the work of principals in this study.

Dr. Fullan suggested that the typical foci of reform change are incorrect and inadequate in that they rarely achieve the intended outcomes. In fact, Dr. Fullan argued that the drivers most systems choose—such as compliance and operational

accountability— not only fail to achieve the desired outcomes of the intended change, but actually make matters worse.

In Dr. Fullan's work, drivers are policy and strategy levers that have the least and the best chance at driving successful reform. Drivers that are effective generate a concerted and accelerating force for progress toward the goals of reform. An effective driver is one that achieves better measurable results with students. The key to success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force and align reform to the intrinsic motivation of the participants. Criteria for determining the effectiveness of a driver or set of drivers include:

- Does it foster intrinsic motivation of teachers and students?
- Does it inspire collective or team work?
- Does it engage educators and students in continuous improvement of instruction and learning?
- Does it affect all teachers and students (100%)? (Fullan, 2011, p. 3).

Dr. Fullan's (2011) work specifically looked to address the "moral imperative of raising the bar (for all students) and closing the gap (for lower performing groups) relative to higher order skills and competencies required to be successful world citizens" (p. 3). This assertion is directly correlated to the intended importance of the CCSS as stated by the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which states that CCSS must

> provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. The

> standards promote equity by ensuring all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.)

The right drivers focus on intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, and teamwork as crucial for whole system reform. Intrinsic motivation appeals to the self in doing something well that is important to you. As supported in the foundational work of Herzberg's *Work and the Nature of Man* (1966) or Maslow's *Motivation and Personality* (1970), Fullan argued that policies and strategies for successful change must generate the very conditions that make intrinsic motivation thrive. Most people are motivated by something that is personally meaningful, and makes a contribution to others as well as to society as a whole. In Fullan's framework, policies that do not appeal to such motivations will not lead to effective system reform. Fullan (2011) summarized this as

> the glue that binds the effective drivers together is the underlying attitude, philosophy, and theory of action. The mindset that works for whole system reform is the one the inevitably generates individual and collective motivation and corresponding skills to transform the system. (p. 5)

Dr. Fullan proposed four "right" drivers that lead to long-lasting, systematic change. These are: (a) capacity building, (b) group quality, (c) a focus on instruction, and (d) systemic thinking. These are laid out in contrast to the "wrong" drivers, which are school reformers' most frequent culprits leading to ineffective change. The wrong drivers include focusing on accountability, on individual teacher or school leader quality, on technology, and fragmented strategies. A summary of these points is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Michael Fullan's Four Right Drivers

Wrong drivers	Right drivers
• Compelling (at first) for people with urgent problems • Are not forever wrong, just badly placed as leading drivers • Alter structures and procedures without reaching the internal substance of reform	• Focus on motivation • Work directly on changing the culture of school (values, norms, skills, practices, relationships) • Are the anchors of whole system reform
Focusing on accountability • Using standards, assessment, rewards and punishment to prod schools and educators to make the necessary changes to instruction • Assuming that massive external pressure will generate intrinsic motivation	Focusing on capacity-building • Commitment comes from intrinsic motivation and improved technical competencies of groups of educators working together purposefully and relentlessly
Individual teacher and leadership quality • Promoting incentives, teacher evaluation and punishment as the means to improving individual practice • Focusing on teacher quality/evaluation rather than actual improvements in instructional practices	Group quality • Embed a staff culture of group learning and support through the promotion of social capital and group development • Values the willingness to seek negative evidence (seeking evidence where students are not doing well) to improve teaching • Keenness to see the effects on all students • Openness to new experiences that make differences for students • Collective ownership of educational practice • Peer power

Focus on technology • Investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will save the day instead of focusing on instruction	Focus on instruction • Teachers need to get grounded in instruction so that focus is on learning, instruction, and linked assessment to improve system-wide results
Fragmented strategies • breaking reforms into disconnected pieces • initiatives lack integration in practice	Systemic strategies • all elements of the system are interconnected and involved • require and support on-the-ground improvement efforts in every school and classroom • "It's a system thing, not a single thing" (Mourshed, Chinezi, and Barber, 2010, p. 37).

Summary

The Common Core State Standards, established in 2010 by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief State and School Officers, provide guidelines for a high-quality education that prepares students for college and career. The standards increase rigor for students, accountability for teachers, and responsibilities for administrators. Instructional leaders in states where these standards have been adopted are now responsible for implementing strategic shifts within their schools and districts toward these standards for learning. Given their influential role with regard to student learning and school improvement (Bartell, 1990; Coyle & Witcher, 1992; Gullatt & Lofton, 1996; Krug, 1992; Mendez-Morse, 1991; Walberg & Lane, 1985), instructional leaders focused on CCSS implementation may be the key to achieving curricular shifts necessary for the implementation of the standards.

By exploring the experiences of leaders and analyzing their successes, obstacles, and self-identified best-practices in relation to implementing the Common Core, this study lends insight into large-scale curricular change-implementation strategies and how to enhance them.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

As discussed in Chapter 2, many factors contribute to the likelihood of successful implementation and sustainability of initiatives related to educational change, and more specifically the role of the principal as an agent for change within his or her school. Some of the common themes that evolved as the research progressed were:

- A clear vision for the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of change
- Coherent and ongoing communication of that vision to all stakeholders
- Acknowledgment of the impact of the culture of the school on the change process
- The need for a systematic plan for implementation
- A commitment to the change initiative despite difficulties
- The determination to see the process through until assimilated within the culture of the school

Furthermore, a common thread connecting much of the research showed the principal significantly influences the success change initiatives, and the principal plays a key role in increasing a school's capacity to implement change (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Ouchi, 2003). Implementation of change within schools is complex with a variety of factors simultaneously influencing the process. The initiation, implementation, and sustainability of change is not a linear process and requires a leader/principal who can multitask (Blase & Blase, 2000). The complex nature of implementing change requires a methodology that can seek a deep understanding despite all the different factors influencing the process. The qualitative design of

narrative inquiry is a method of telling the stories of principals and seeking to understand their experiences as they implemented change within their schools.

This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically generalized inductive analysis of semistructured interviews, to describe the views of principals regarding their role as an agent of curricular and instructional change in the implementation of the CCSS. The chapter provides an overview of the qualitative study design and the methodology used. It describes procedures associated with the study methods, including data collection and analysis. Finally, I discuss several limitation considerations of the study.

Research Questions

Hatch (2002) stated that well-focused research questions guide a study and provide a reference point for an entire study. Logically, the research questions are the beginning point of any research project. The researcher decides on a problem of interest and the desired outcomes and then builds a study around them. The following research questions helped me to explore and understand the experiences of principals as they implemented CCSS within their schools.

1. How do principals in two distinct settings describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?
2. What are the challenges and successes that principals encounter as they initiate, implement, and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?
3. What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

The nature of narrative inquiry lends itself to topics of study that are complex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narrative inquiry methods, researchers seek to understand human experiences (Hendry, 2010). By using narrative inquiry, I was able to go deep into the complex experiences that principals face in this work of instituting difficult and deep change that is required by the CCSS.

The term *narrative* refers to telling a story. The term *inquiry* suggests an attempt at gaining deeper understanding. So, *narrative inquiry* is conducting research and gaining deeper understandings through the telling of stories. Narrative inquiry has a long history as a form of research method within the education sector (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The main reason for the implementation of narrative as a form of educational research is that we are storytelling beings; and we have lives and experiences that stories can help explain. In studying these stories, a researcher is actually studying the way in which humans live and experience the world. While referring specifically to teachers, Shabani Varaki (2007) stated,

> These stories capture more than scores. And mathematical formulas can never uncover the richness and complexity of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understandings of what teaching is. Such a thing is the duty of researchers and storytellers. They need to discover the world of the classroom and pass it on to their readers and audiences. (p. 3)

This researcher believes that the same phenomenon happens within a school setting in the instructional interactions between school principals and teachers, especially around an issue that so deeply involves teaching such as the CCSS. Substituting “teacher/s” with “administrator” and

"classroom" with "school" in the above quotation even further illustrates the applicability of this narrative inquiry research method with this proposed research. The use of a qualitative research student for this research endeavor is an attempt to better understand the rich stories and experiences principals' experience, not to simply quantify their actions or effect. The basis for this study is the reality of the experiences of principals as they implement change and how to understand their experiences.

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Data Collection

The most common data collection method for narrative inquiry is the interview (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Interviews are often recorded and transcribed. An additional source of data includes field texts, also referred to as field notes, in which the researcher records his or her impressions and thoughts (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009). The process of co-constructing the narratives requires back-and-forth conversations and editing to ensure the accuracy of the narratives (Clandinin et al., 2009). It is important to remember that telling the stories and understanding the experiences of the participants is at the core of this methodology.

Data Sources

In order to best understand the development of the CCSS at the group of schools, the dataset was collected from interviews with school leaders. The study's research questions, which explored instructional leaders' perceptions of their role in the implementation of standards-based reform across two disparate school systems, determined the sample of participants. To explore leaders' decision-making and understanding regarding their practices, the study called for deep reflection from participants, and therefore a sample of reflective leaders from schools in both types of systems was recruited to achieve meaningful data. The participants, selected through convenience sampling, came from work experiences listed in the study's questions and were easily accessible to the researcher and able to schedule interview times and meetings with relative ease. The participants were formally recruited via an email communication, which explained the study's purpose and a request for the interview. Respondents were asked to reply to the email if they were interested and to begin the process of scheduling the face-to-face interview.

Data were collected in the form of semistructured interviews conducted with the instructional leaders and lasted for approximately 45 minutes each. The set of questions asked (see Appendix A) was consistently used in each interview. However, the researcher occasionally asked clarifying questions or for more details on a response. All interviews were digitally recorded using RevVoice technology and transcribed. All data were stored on a password-protected server behind a secure firewall and, at the conclusion of the study, all data including any identifying information were destroyed. Outlined in Table 6, below, the recruitment and the data collection process took place during the late winter of 2016 through the spring of 2017.

Table 6

Participant Recruitment and Data Analysis Plan

Invitations Sent	Interviews	Data Analysis
December 2016	January–May 2017	May–August 2017

Participants

The purposeful sample for this study was selected due to its recognition as leaders of schools who had experienced the transition to the CCSS and who had directly been responsible for the implementation. The participants were asked to describe their respective implementation processes and strategies and to reflect upon what it thought worked well and what did not. Selection of participants in this purposeful fashion proved critical to achieving meaningful data.

A group of school leaders with experience at the building level as principals at elementary levels of instruction were selected to participate in this study. School leaders specific to a unique population of both urban schools serving a high-poverty population and suburban schools serving a high-wealth population were included. School leaders involved with the implementation of the CCSS were invited to participate. In some cases, the school leader had moved on to a district-level position and, at the time of the interview, was now serving in a new role and/or district. A total of 10 school leaders of elementary schools from Los Angeles-area schools were invited to participate. Invitation letters were sent via email. Follow-up to all invitations was conducted by phone and in person when necessary.

Six school leaders from two school systems agreed to participate. This narrative inquiry focused on examining the differences of inner-city elementary schools and suburban elementary school Los Angeles area. The inner-city schools all served a minority population of mostly

Latino students whose parents were at a low socio-economic income level. Two of the three schools were considered "commuter schools," to which parents from across the city brought their children. Many of these parents worked in the garment district located in close proximity to the schools. One of the three schools had a unique agreement with the local district in that it was considered a neighborhood school (the school of attendance for families living at certain addresses) and it served the kindergarten and first grades. After completion of first grade, the students matriculated to the district school to complete their elementary education. All three schools had principals that started their positions in the 2015–2016 school year.

The suburban schools were all a part of one of California's highest-performing school districts and served a predominately White and affluent student population. These were neighborhood schools with students attending a location close to their homes, and students matriculate to the single middle school and high school in the district. The principals at the sites had school leadership experience ranging from three to 15 years.

Interestingly, all of the school leaders who participated in this study were no longer assigned to the school in which they oversaw the transition to the CCSS. Some had changed school districts, some had been promoted to district-level positions, and some were transferred internally. Table 7 provides an overview of the participant group's composition and includes information about the individual, which was current at the time of the interview. The school data included in Table 7 reflects the demographics of the schools at which the participants led the CCSS change. Also, it is reflective of the 2016 data available via the California Department of Education and is not reflective of the year that the participants were leading the changes at their respective schools. All participants indicated that the populations of the schools had not changed

dramatically over time and that the 2016 data are well-representative of the student populations while they were leading their school through the CCSS change.

To support confidentiality for all participants, in Table 7 and throughout the study, pseudonyms were used in all cases, and references to any identifiable information have been changed. Three out of six schools represented in this study were urban, as characterized as a Title I schools with a high percentage of students participating in the free or reduced federal lunch programs. The populations of the schools ranged from 435 (smallest) to 731 (largest). Not all schools served the same grade levels, however all served elementary levels of education.

Table 7

Characteristics of Participants and their Schools

Participant	Yrs*	Sex	Area*	Students	FR*	EL*	SE*
Kay	21	F	S	627	1%	3%	8%
Rachelle	43	F	S	731	1%	4%	8%
Bradley	16	M	U	435	78%	33%	18%
Suzanne	17	F	U	670	95%	64%	7%
Tracy	18	F	S	520	1%	6%	6%
Scott	30	M	U	581	83%	41%	13%

*Yrs = Years of Experience
*Area = S = Suburban; U = Urban
*FR = % of students on Free/Reduced Lunch Prog.
*EL = % of students classified as English Leaners
*SE = % of students with disabilities

Findings reported in some cases reflected perspectives of principals who had since moved on to discuss their practice from their current role at the district level or at different schools, and as such the data comprised opinions and experiences of school leaders at all levels of P–12

education. Free and reduced lunch percentages ranged from 1% to 95% of students. English learner populations ranged from 3% to 64%. Special education population of students ranged from 6% to 18% of students. No schools or locations were named in this study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using the general inductive method, which uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher (Thomas, 2006). This understanding of inductive analysis is consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) description: "The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12). Punch (1998) noted that "analytic induction" is a commonly used approach in qualitative analysis (p. 201).

According to Thomas (2006), the following are some of the purposes underlying the development of the general inductive analysis approach.

1. to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format;
2. to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research); and
3. to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the text data.

The inductive coding for this research began with close readings of text and consideration of the multiple meanings that are inherent in the text. Segments of text that

contain meaningful units were identified, and labels for new categories were created to which the text segment was then assigned. Additional text segments were added to the categories to which they were relevant. The following details the procedures that were used for the inductive analysis of this study's qualitative data:

1. Preparation of raw data files (data cleaning): The interviews of each participant were recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and placed into a text document. Unclear or inaudible transcriptions were noted in the text file and a review of the audio recording was conducted at those times in the interview to clarify the transcriptions. The raw data files were then formatted into a common format (e.g., font size, margins, speakers identified).
2. Close reading of text: Once the text data files were prepared, the raw text was read in detail until a familiarization with its content and an understanding of the themes and events covered in the text were gained.
3. Creation of categories: Categories or themes were identified. The general categories were derived from the evaluation aims of relaying school leaders' experiences with the CCSS implementation, identifying successes and obstacles along the path of implementation and identifying specific strategies that participants reported as aiding their implementation work. The more specific categories were derived from multiple readings of the raw data and were created from actual phrases or meanings in specific text segments.

The outcomes of my generalized inductive analysis were the development of categories into a model that summarized the raw data and conveyed key themes identified in the interviews.

An additional set of coding that I incorporated into the analysis was tying the voices and themes discovered in the interview data to this project's theoretical framework, Fullan's right drivers. This provided a level of analysis and discussion in connecting the participants' experiences to a major paradigm for school change current in today's educational sector.

Limitations on the Data Analysis

This research method and my study design allowed for producing results that were based on the participants' perceptions, not my own. I have shared their views in this study as they presented them to me in interviews. However, as an experienced educator and school leader responsible for curricular change at various points in my career, I acknowledge the possibility of my views being influenced by own experiences. To that end, I conducted these interviews professionally and without addition of my experiences into the interview protocols. I was a listener rather than a participant.

It is also important to acknowledge that I was professionally familiar with all of the participants, and that I had a relationship that appreciated their expertise and professionalism and connected with their leadership styles on many fronts. Nonetheless, as noted above, I presented their interview dialogue directly. Given the nature of some of the questions asking the participants to be highly reflective or critical of themselves, trust in the researcher was paramount. To that end, the relationships that I had with these participants prior to the interviews

may have created a more trusting environment, enabling more truthful responses on the part of the participants.

Summary

The Common Core State Standards require students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of math concepts and require in-depth analysis and discussion of texts in reading, which means that teachers will have to dramatically change how they teach those concepts. This instructional shift has been an immense change initiative throughout the United States. This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically generalized inductive analysis of semistructured interviews to explore how principals perceived their role as an instructional leader in the implementation of the CCSS. A generalized inductive analysis was used to identify themes in the data for reporting the successes, obstacles, and best practices experienced by the participants in leading their schools through the instructional changes.

Six participants from a mix of urban, high-poverty and suburban, high-wealth elementary schools participated in the interviews in the winter and spring of 2017 and reflected on their experiences in leading the CCSS. The data shared by the participants will be discussed in the following results chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This narrative inquiry study told the stories of educational administrators who were responsible for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in their school or organization. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do principals in two distinct settings describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?
2. What are the challenges and successes that principals encounter as they initiate, implement, and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?
3. What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

This study focused on six administrators across two distinct organizations, one urban and one suburban. I conducted the interviews from January 2017 to May 2017. Data analysis began in May 2017 and concluded in June 2017. Chapter 4 presents the summary of the interviews in painting a narrative of their experiences.

Participants and their Backgrounds

Kay: Middle School and Elementary School Principal

Kay was the principal of a suburban middle school of approximately 1,500 students. The school's population was predominately from families with high socioeconomic status, professional parents, and was majority White in ethnicity. She was new to the principal position at the middle school as of July 2017; however she was principal of a K–5 elementary school in the same district and with the same demographics of student population for eight years prior to

her current assignment at the middle school. Since this project was investigating principals and their initial implementation of the CCSS, Kay's responses were mainly in reference to her time at the elementary school level since that was where she had been assigned since the onset of the CCSS.

Education was Kay's second career. Kay started as a special education teacher outside of California. In California, she continued as a special education teacher within a school district with high socioeconomic status but a richer diversity in the ethnicity of the student population. She transitioned into general education teacher and taught several elementary grades and middle school math and science. Her teaching career spanned 10 years in total before she moved to assignments out of the classroom. She became a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) in math for the district, and she provided training, curriculum development, and support to teachers across the K–8 classrooms of the district. She became assistant principal of the middle school at which she now worked and then the principal of the elementary school mentioned above for eight years.

Rachelle: Suburban Elementary School Principal

Rachelle was the principal of a suburban elementary school of approximately 500 students. The school's population was predominately from families with high socioeconomic status, professional parents, and was majority White in ethnicity. She was new to the principal position at her current elementary school as of July 2017; however, she was principal of a K–5 elementary school in the same district and with the same demographics of student population for 11 years prior to her current assignment. Since this project was investigating principals and their initial implementation of the CCSS, Rachelle's responses were mainly in reference to her time at

her prior elementary school assignment since that was where she was assigned at the onset of the CCSS.

Rachelle was a life-long educator, beginning her career in another suburban district in Los Angeles County, where she taught first through fifth grades for 23 years. Her first administrative experience was as an elementary assistant principal in a neighboring school district, which she held for two years. She became an elementary principal in that district for seven years. She then moved to her current district where she had been an elementary principal for 11 years.

Bradley: Elementary School Principal

Bradley began his career in education as a teacher in a large urban school district where he had taught at both the elementary and secondary alternative school setting for five years. He then moved to an elementary assistant principal position in a small, suburban district for two years, and returned to a large, urban district for five years as a site principal for an elementary school. Bradley then moved to a small, suburban district where he served as the district's lead in human resources for a year and then in curriculum and instruction for three years. Bradley was the chief person responsible for the implementation of CCSS at the site level in his position as an elementary school principal and at the district-wide level as the curriculum and instructional lead for his district.

Suzanne: Middle School and Elementary School Principal

At the time of her interview, Suzanne had spent 17 years in education. She began her career at an elementary school in a small, urban school district that primarily served a Latino and English learner population. She taught at the same school for 13 years before moving to a middle

school teaching position for a year. She then moved into a middle school assistant principal position in the same district and served in that role for two years. She had recently left her district to assume her first principalship in a charter organization serving a similar population of students. She had been an elementary school principal for two years. Suzanne also spent several years as an adjunct professor at a local university focusing on teacher development and support for teachers learning instructional techniques for English Learner students.

Tracy: Middle School and Elementary School Principal

All told, Tracy had 18 years of experience in education. She was in her third year as principal of a suburban elementary school of approximately 450 students. The population of the school consisted of predominately White, wealthy families. Tracy had also served in leadership positions prior to becoming a principal as an assistant principal, middle school counselor, teacher on special assignment / curriculum expert, and an elementary teacher.

Scott: Inner-City Elementary Principal

Scott had just started his third decade in public education. He began his career as a bilingual elementary and middle school teacher in a suburban district for approximately six years. He then moved to an inner-city district and was a middle school teacher and assistant principal also for six years. Scott then moved into higher education and worked at a local university in teacher preparation and school reform programs. At the same time, Scott was a consultant for the California Department of Education. He returned to a school site as an elementary principal for another inner-city district and served in that position for 12 years. He held this position during the implementation of the CCSS, which formed the basis for much of

Scott's commentary. He had since left the principalship, and moved to director positions focusing on community relations and instruction.

Participants' Early Reaction to CCSS

Kay's Early Reaction to CCSS

Kay described her initial reaction to the implementation of the CCSS as a mixture of excitement and panic. Her excitement stemmed from her awareness of a variety of pedagogical techniques in her work as a math specialist and in her natural curiosity about instructional matters and how they matched what she was hearing first about the CCSS. Kay viewed the CCSS as an opportunity for positive change. Kay stated:

> I was really excited about it, because it was kind of the way I taught math as a math teacher. It was much less procedural, and much more about how do mathematicians think, and how do they figure things out.

Beyond feeling excited by her own connection to the pedagogical components of the CCSS, Kay felt enthused by the CCSS as a catalyst for the professional growth of her teachers:

> For me, I've always been positive about [the Common Core]. I think I heard about it early on when it was first coming out of the governor associations and being developed, just because I follow that kind of stuff. So I think I kind of saw the growth of it. I didn't particularly love the old standards, so for me it was really positive. I saw it as an opportunity in a district where there'd been very little professional development and very little push. I saw it as an opportunity to kind of move our teachers significantly in instructional practice because the standards were changing. That, to me, seemed like an opportunity.

Kay's panic, however, set in when, at the same educational association meetings and professional gatherings held outside of her district of employment that fueled her enthusiasm, she realized that many places were "way far ahead" where her district was when talking to colleagues from across the state.

> I was learning from other school districts and kind of asking a lot of questions, and I think that that kind of pushed things. Then all of the sudden, when we got into what the state would consider the year for implementation, there was sort of this, like, "Oh my God" moment. We've got to get moving.

Rachelle's Early Reaction to CCSS

Rachelle first remembers hearing about the CCSS approximately four years previously. She felt the initial introduction was actually on the quiet side, in that her district presented information to teachers solely as a sort of "listening" task first; in other words, no changes happening yet, but time to acclimate to the message of change was the first exposure.

Rachelle used the word "overwhelming" when first describing her own reaction to the changes involved in the CCSS. She related this to her own teaching experiences and the pedagogical styles in place for most of her teaching and administrative career. One example involved her own challenges in covering for an absent or late teacher in the CCSS era as compared to earlier times:

> It is not as easy to sub in a classroom that's doing common core math, or reading workshop, or writer's workshop. It's not as easy, it's not the old way like when I was teaching, opening the book, going chapter by chapter. A teacher leaves lesson plans and it says, "You're going to do page 72 and 73." It's harder, but if you go

with the mindset of conceptually, this is where I want to end today's lesson and I know different subjects then I can tell what they're learning.

While Rachelle felt much more confident now in the implementation of the CCSS and her own knowledge about the pedagogical implications of the CCSS, she still considered herself a learner in the process. For instance, her district started in CCSS implementation mostly in English and Language Arts and had only recently made instructional changes in math. So her learning continued in math while she felt more solidly grounded in English and Language Arts.

Bradley's Early Reaction to CCSS

Bradley's reaction to the onset of the CCSS was one of "relief and validation." He felt that finally the tides had turned and "someone was looking at research and making decisions about how to align research with practice." He admitted his reaction was due to the settings at which he had been practicing prior to start of the CCSS. The elementary school at which he was the principal had been practicing the same instructional tenets found in the Common Core for years. He explained that his school had needed to request a waiver from the district allowing his location to not adopt the reading instructional program the district had selected for all their schools. He described his earlier experiences in that there were "a lot of road blocks with the district. I begged and pleaded for additional time, and while there was an initial implementation gap, the next year, scores skyrocketed." With the onset of the CCSS, he felt:

> Oh my gosh, we don't have to be the black sheep anymore … it's like this is all the work that we've been doing and not it's finally going to be acknowledged. And maybe we'll even get some district support on it as well.

Suzanne's Early Reaction to CCSS

Suzanne first reaction to the CCSS was mixed. She felt that the CCSS shifts in Language Arts were in line with her own philosophical approach and pedagogy. And since she had spent most of her career in a district that encouraged a nonscripted, balanced literacy approach, she had spent many years already honing her craft. The CCSS felt like a "fit." On the other hand, math was somewhat more of a challenge. Contrary to the district's approach to English/Language Arts, math instruction was highly scripted and did not take a balanced approach and relied heavily on whole-group instruction and teaching through explanation of algorithms versus mathematical concepts. She stated:

> I felt the CCSS math work when first introduced also felt like a "fit" for me pedagogically, but I was much more apprehensive about it. It was just so new to me. And it didn't help me that the Big Ideas of the CCSS in math felt much more vague. For example, there was the CCSS shift of teaching "rigor" in math, which of course I supported. But I really had no idea—and it didn't seem anyone in our district did either—what that meant exactly.

This self-identified lack of familiarity and understanding of some of the concepts in the CCSS for math led her to feel somewhat uncomfortable with the math concepts as compared to English/Language Arts.

Tracy's Early Reaction to CCSS

Tracy felt the CCSS "made a lot of sense." She said the tenets behind the CCSS "connected with how she believed learning should take place." With that said, she indicated that she was somewhat taken aback by the depth of the change required. "When I first started

learning more about all that needed to be done, there was a moment of 'Wow, this is really different for us, especially in math.'" So, while in tune with the philosophy, Tracy had less of a sense about the change management involved. Tracy attributed that to

> At the time of the initial introduction of the CCSS, I was working at a middle school that had little introduction to the CCSS, hadn't been discussing it at all, and had no exposure to it. So it didn't even seem that real to me. It was one of those things I wondered if it would ever happen. But then I got the job as a principal at the elementary school and everything changed.

Tracy had started a new position and was principal of an elementary school that was much further along in the discussions and implementation on the CCSS. Her initial reaction to the CCSS turned from one of "not too sure if I need to worry about it yet" to "I had to catch up, and catch up quick."

Scott's Early Reaction to CCSS

> Scott's first reaction was that the CCSS was "commendable." He stated the following: The CCSS really provided depth to the previous standards that we had in the state of California. I enjoyed a broader look at performance. I'm enjoying a broader look at an emphasis on approaches like close reading, highlighting informational text as opposed to fictional text. Really learning from what we hadn't done in the previous standards to what we could be doing. The shift from more of a checklist approach to teaching to an emphasis on depth and rigor, I think is commendable and one that was needed.

While Scott appeared personally pleased with the CCSS, he did express some trepidation about what the CCSS would mean for teachers.

> The CCSS left teachers in a lurch because translating that into their instruction does require a process. Many of the teachers were not raised to even think in those terms…. I do feel that it created a huge gap for teachers to try to bridge when they were both working at providing foundational skills and changing their own learning and their own skill set to be able to understand those philosophical and paradigm shifts.

Scott continued that "such a change for teachers requires a plan" and that he was fortunate to have been working with a staff that was attuned to working more with "critical thinking skills" and questioning educational edicts that he felt would ease the way for his school's implementation.

Level of Personal, District, and School Preparedness

Kay's View of Preparedness

Overall, Kay felt prepared to lead the change due to her own pedagogical practices and experiences (mainly as a math TOSA) matching those of the CCSS. Her own advanced learning and networking outside of her district provided her with some tools and connections to even better understand the details of the CCSS and to better explain them to her faculty. She explained,

> We hadn't really done much in the district at that point at all, but I'd heard about other school districts who were doing other things. I actually started implementing my school in English language arts about a semester before the district started to.

> I basically took what they were doing in XX district and brought it into my school, but then I trained all the principals in the district, and we used it across the district as well….But it was late. It was probably 2 years into when the state would have said implementation started.

Kay's also expressed a readiness to lead the change through other methods beyond her external network and self-directed learning. She felt her prior teaching experience using strategies that were "CCSS-like," and the fact that she had led teachers through similar changes before prepared her well for working with the implementation of the CCSS.

> I think compared to other principals in the district [I was more prepared], because I had used everything we were heading towards ... I'd either led a change already, or used everything we were shifting to. I think my comfort level was better. I knew how to adapt writing workshop for people who weren't there, and I knew all the shortcuts and ways around and all that kind of stuff. I think, for my teachers, I can make it more palatable because I have that experience. If I hadn't been a math TOSA, no. If I hadn't been through people resisting a change and having to, as a peer, push a change, I wouldn't have been ready, because no one trains you to do that.

While Kay's understanding of the CCSS felt strong to her, and her district had not prepared much in the way of a plan to implement the CCSS, her largest concerns centered around the readiness of her faculty—namely due to years' worth of scripted or prescribed curriculum. She elaborated,

> It was such a shift in how they had to teach, because everything....They did Open Court and Saxon Math and Step Up To Writing, which again, are prescriptive programs. It was so foreign and uncomfortable for them that they hated it. There was this backlash, and it was just, "How do I get them to work through the difficult piece so that they actually see the results?"

Also, beyond the history of the curriculum programs used in the district, Kay had deeper concerns about the skill readiness of her staff and the culture of the school:

> When I first started to talk about the standards shifting, and reading groups, and just basic things that you would find in most elementary schools, those weren't there. I mean, they were ability grouping for math. There was [sic] a lot of practices that were entrenched in the culture of the school that I knew were going to have to be major changes. My concern was changing those traditions in a way that wasn't politically a disaster. But also, my teachers didn't know how to do what I needed them to do.

Rachelle's View of Preparedness

Rachelle explained feeling under-prepared for the CCSS. As mentioned above, her entire educational career was vested in other instructional techniques. Importantly, she expressed the shift in the principal's role as one for which, at first, she was admittedly under-prepared.

She related a story early in her school's implementation of the CCSS about how her lower level of confidence in, or awareness about, the CCSS, coupled with the other noninstructional demands of a large elementary school, led her to invite a guest speaker from the district office to present to her teachers about the instructional shifts involved in the CCSS. This idea

> backfired. In my overwhelmed state it initially helped me because I didn't have to prepare the information, but my teachers didn't have the same comfort level with that person. The delivery was too stern for them. I took it back and had to do more to get my teachers back to a place where they could listen.

Rachelle then needed to "backpedal" and take ownership of the CCSS transition herself. She said there were "tears along the way….Yet, the staff trusted and relied on me to be a person who they respected and wanted me to say it was going to be okay. This is not just about me, but principals have to have the trust of their staff."

Another method Rachelle discussed in turning her own knowledge about the CCSS around was observations at other schools.

> The district sent, I can't remember if all principals, but I know I went to a couple other—I'll call them demo schools—that were further along the journey that we were. Being in those classes, and we were just, this is 3 or 4 years ago, we were just scratching the surface and they were 100% implementing it. Seeing it in action and then talking to that principal privately and just saying, "My teachers are panicked. How did you get past this? What did you do for this?"
>
> I remember going away thinking, "Okay, I can do this. I just need to," ... It takes time. You need those teacher leaders. Then it's competitive. If you want to not be the low man on the totem pole or disrespected by the community, you need to get on board.

Bradley's View of Preparedness

Bradley and his teachers had been working through Common Core–like instruction for years, so he felt that his personal level of preparedness was high. His first district used his site as a model site for the implementation, since the district as a whole was just ramping up on the implementation pathway. Bradley also became a resource for groups throughout California as to the tenets of the CCSS and the intents behind the instructional shifts.

In the second district in which Bradley led the district's efforts on CCSS implementation, however, he found a situation of limited preparedness. He stated,

> We we're very behind the game. We needed to get moving. We had a big focus on technology, and we had a big focus on writing. Those two areas were well ahead of the game, but now we really needed to look at reading and we need to look at math. I met with everyone.

Bradley continued to explain that he had a summer to implement a professional development plan for the district. There was such a time crunch that partners were found for various departments. Bradley had to find different resources because we were "at ground zero," and needed help to get somewhere fast. Bradley referenced a statistic he found alarming: of teachers who responded to a survey question asking whether they had read the CCSS or knew about them, only 16% of responded "yes."

Suzanne's View of Preparedness

As mentioned above, Suzanne personally felt more prepared for the English/Language Arts changes in comparison to the math ones. She felt her district, teaching colleagues, and

school echoed the perceived level of preparedness that she, herself, was experiencing. The elementary school at which she had been working for many years had a "strong commitment to inquiry and an 'action research' sort of approach." She continued,

> The great thing about our school was we had always approached instructional matters through a lens of inquiry. So although we felt a little behind on the math work, we had the structures in place to quickly engage groups and to start the discussions about what we needed to do to "get up to speed." This sort of work was not foreign to us at all. The content was new for us, but not the way we had to work together to move forward in implementing this change in curriculum.

Suzanne further explained that their use of learning communities was the vehicle for addressing this change. "We got into grade-level groups, did our own research, identified our needs, and made plans for moving forward—all not with a lot of district support or interference."

When Suzanne moved to the middle school assistant principal position, she felt that the preparedness was really quite "different." She elaborated:

> perhaps it was because I was in an entirely new setting and a new role away from my community that I knew well and worked well with form some eleven-odd years, but even taking that into account, the level of preparedness felt somewhat more behind than my elementary setting.

At the middle school, she felt there was somewhat more of a need to "go back to basics" in familiarizing teachers with the philosophical tenets behind the CCSS, and there was—in her opinion—less of a culture of working together than she had enjoyed at her elementary experience. So, in comparing the two experiences for her, at the middle school there was a

slower pathway to preparation for the changes involved in the CCSS, and a more deliberate, controlled path for the middle school team as well. “When at the elementary school, as teachers, we just kind of took it and ran with it. At the middle school, administrators had to be much more intentional and organized in leading the professional development.”

Suzanne had a third experience in implementing the CCSS. As mentioned in her background, she had recently become principal of a charter elementary school. When she came on board to the charter school, she felt that the level of preparedness at the charter was “years behind” the district she had left. She pointed out that, interestingly enough, the pedagogical approaches of the two schools were actually quite similar. But the knowledge the charter school’s teachers had about the CCSS was minimal at best. She recalled:

> One of my first professional development sessions for the teachers at the charter elementary was to review the three instructional shifts in the CCSS as related to math instruction. I honestly had planned for it just to be a 10-minute refresher before we started looking at upcoming math units and using the instructional shifts as a lens for lesson planning. But it became quite clear at the onset of this particular meeting, that the shifts were entirely unknown by most of the staff. I had to scrap my original plans and change the PD to a session simply providing more general or introductory information on the CCSS shifts. I felt we had done that several years before in my other district.

She continued that since the charter school’s pedagogical practices were already in line with the CCSS, even though she felt she had to take a “step back,” the progress to becoming more

familiar with the CCSS was quick for her staff. In fact, "quicker than the middle school staff I worked with, even though it sure seemed like they were further behind."

Tracy's View of Preparedness

Tracy said that she felt her district and her at-the-time job in the middle school had not done much work around the CCSS, so she was—as mentioned above—not even sure what to expect. The elementary however, forced Tracy re-analyze her level of preparedness in a deeper way.

> Teachers were asking me questions, wanting input on the school's plans for implementation, discussing action steps and all that. My learning curve was steep, but fortunately, there were an increasing number of resources available from the district and even just from friends, colleagues, and the Internet that helped me tremendously.

Tracy described her elementary school's preparedness as "cautiously curious." The teachers were all interested in learning more, open to much of the new thought involved in the CCSS, but not too sure about how to get there, what exactly it meant for instruction or for their performance. "Me being new to the school probably heightened all this anxiety. They were already a little nervous about the CCSS, and then along comes a new principal."

Tracy said that at that time, there was a quick "ramping up" of services, trainings, and conversations about the CCSS and implementing it at the schools from her district. So, while there might have been an initial feeling of being somewhat unprepared, "support was available to help me out, even though that support was not fully defined or mature yet."

Scott's View of Preparedness

Scott felt very prepared for the shift to the CCSS. "From a leadership standpoint, I was comfortable and actually felt armed with going into that conversation." Scott attributed this to much of his career spent on working with issues regarding the education of high-needs populations. He said that he had spent much time delving into the access and equity issues of educating poor students and questioning the instructional techniques that had been in play for many years. So, in short, he felt his mind and beliefs were already in line with what was needed for CCSS shift.

Scott's comments on his school's preparation echoed his own personal readiness. Scott's faculty had already moved to instructional strategies and a curriculum that was based on the shifts present in the CCSS and because of that, he felt that his school was very prepared for the change.

> But in the culture that I worked with, I didn't have [an] issue. We knew it was coming. People had a good work ethic. People cared about being successful themselves, making sure that their kids were successful. Building on that, I think the greatest thing that I could have done and which I did was give teachers a chance, to engage with it and be able to be conversant to some degree with it and have time to process what those changes may mean.

Implementation Planning and Strategies

Kay's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

Kay indicated that, at the onset of the district's implementation plan for the CCSS, she was already a semester ahead with her staff. The district had identified starting with writing

curriculum first, then reading, and finally math as an incremental approach to instructional change. But, according to Kay, even those "chunks" identified by the district was overwhelming to her staff. "There was just so much to learn and change."

When asked about specific strategies she used to help her faculty, she credited her Special Education background as key in that she broke down the tasks required for this change to smaller substeps "just like we do for IEP goals." To further illustrate, Kay elaborated:

> The district had set very high bars, and I would meet with my staff and say, "All right, what's our December goal? Everybody commit to this goal." I always knew they could surpass the goal. I always set it just slightly lower than what I knew they could make, because then the more they met those goals the more competent they got.

She continued these "right-sized" goals throughout the implementation. When it was time to move to the reading curriculum, she asked for small commitments on the part of the teachers such as trying a single new instructional practice or implement a single new way of conducting classrooms conversations. In small chunks of time, she would ask to teachers, "Let's all commit to trying one in the next month, including me."

She attributed the school's success in implementation to her "kind of being right there in the trenches with them." She modeled lessons in classes and sometimes "flopped miserably, sometimes on purpose and sometimes not."

Lastly, Kay expressed that, along with the bite-sized goals, and the modeling, that celebrating any movement (even small) was key as well as her own recognition that not every teacher was going to start at the same place or move at the same pace and that that

was fine with her. This was an overt, explicit message that she would give to her staff. To summarize Kay stated,

> I think that has worked well here…because there wasn't that pressure of, like, you have to be fully implementing and doing.... It was more like, "Just do what you can." You know? Going in and saying, like, "Hey, this works. Have you tried this?" And just making it really bite-sized.

Rachelle's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

Rachelle's shift in ownership of the CCSS implementation mentioned above illustrates one strategy she used that encouraged the process to advance. Rachelle's implementation plan for her school mainly mirrored that of her district's plan, but with a "personalized touch." Rachelle and her teachers would attend professional development sessions arranged by the district, but she wouldn't leave it at that. She illustrated,

> Sometimes we would have a professional development, I would attend with my teachers, and I assumed they all heard the same message. Then they would come back and there were differences .. You hear what you want to hear. I would tell my grade level leads that, I wanted to know any of the questions or angst or whatever it is and you find out from your grade level, bring it back to me, and I'll get answers before the next staff meeting.

Rachelle felt this helped her teachers make the learning more "their own" and provided her a means to learn the content of the work side-by-side with teachers, but then have her own touch (and the increased trust or her staff) in tailoring the work specifically to their school and their needs. She attributed turning-around her reluctant staff to that approach.

According to Rachelle, the personalization of training and planning also was supported by her own work to understand and help teachers through the change process. She felt that such efforts helped the implementation. Rachelle stated, "You have to stay positive and you have to stay in tune and you can't discount teachers' feelings and fears and everything. I think it was a lot more handholding than in the past. Change is hard for everybody." She felt that really trying to understand that the change was difficult and communicating that understanding to teachers helped make the transition easier for teachers.

Another strategy Rachelle commented on as being successful in creating a space for teachers to be open to the change was a systematic review of instruction under the then-current system in comparison to what was required in the CCSS. "We started with, 'This is where we're headed. We're not saying change, we're saying listen.' We had many meetings … where they looked at common core standards versus California state standards." We made charts to show so that they wouldn't stress out, to say:

> We're not throwing out the baby with the bath water. It used to say this and now it says this. This used to be a 3rd grade standard and now it's a 4th grade standard. Some of it is less, but deeper, not more, so don't panic.

It was a lot of handholding three or four years ago to get the teachers comfortable, so that when they heard the words "common core," it wasn't like one more thing [added to their plates]. Although Rachelle mentioned the incremental approach to delivering the content of the CCSS-required instructional shifts, she also stated that, at several times throughout the implementation, it felt like "too much, too soon."

When asked about the obstacles she experienced in her school's implementation of the CCSS, she again mentioned time, or the lack thereof. She also mentioned that she often felt there was a challenge in getting timely responses to questions about the CCSS or the implementation. Her district was small, and she felt that perhaps there was not enough dedicated support to the CCSS implementation and much of it fell on one or two people. She further illustrated,

> When you're a teacher or a principal, in order to go to Friday, you need your answers from Thursday. Glitches would happen whether it was with Smarter Balance testing [California's name for its computerized standardized testing program], or whether it was with report cards, or whether it was with parents asking me this or that about the Common Core and I don't know, that there was a kind of a delay in follow through on questions. A structure that enabled quick follow-through was possibly an obstacle I experienced.

The final obstacle mentioned by Rachelle was that while professional development was provided, at times it felt overwhelming and unspecific. At points, Rachelle expressed that her teachers sometimes wanted the "Reader's Digest version" of professional development. "Like, tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." But she recognized that the pedagogical shifts required by the CCSS do not always lend themselves to "quick fixes," but that perhaps some more tangible, concrete outcomes for teachers might have helped teachers feel more grounded and secure in their performance through the transition.

Bradley's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

Bradley's implementation strategies differed depending on the location in which he was working. In his first school, which had many of the pedagogical and curricular strategies already

in place, his approach was to make bridges or connections between the work he and his staff had already been doing and the Common Core. He stated:

> Those were our first initial steps, because our routine was every spring we revised curriculum apps based the learning we had that year. They were constantly working documents. So that first year was well now let's look at the new standards, and let's see how we can start to get those in.

Bradley's approach differed in the second, less-prepared setting. His primary approach was intensive professional development. The district has not dedicated any substantial funding to professional development, and that was his first step to get board-approval for guaranteeing 1% of the budget toward professional development.

Prior to this time, Bradley explained that the district's teachers had not had much exposure to professional development. It was a high-performing district so everyone was used to hearing about the success of the district; but, upon closer examination, there were gaps in student performance, and the instructional techniques teachers had to rely on might not be the best match for the CCSS. Bradley said he felt friction begin when he was implementing change that others saw no need for. In essence, he felt there was a feeling of "if what we're doing now is great and we're getting good results, why would we need to change?"

Bradley explained that, in his opinion, the tide began to change when he supported teachers incrementally through change, and let them choose the type of professional development they were interested in.

> I think it first started, or at least there's different pockets where I could remember, that okay, now it's taking hold. It's becoming more and more. There was one

> teacher after year one where I went and said, "Okay, who do you want to be with? What do you want to support your professional development?" And she said, "You actually did what you said you would do." I said, "Yeah, that's the point of the meeting, right?" They made a recommendation about a particular expert they were interested in. We researched it more and felt that it definitely aligns with Common Core, so let's do it. We ended up finding them, creating contracts with them, and designed the professional development around what the teachers had asked for.

Bradley indicated he would occasionally have to put up "guardrails" to keep the teachers' requests within reason. Sometimes, he stated, there would be budgetary, timeline, or out-of-scope concerns, but for the most part, he was able to make the teachers' requests happen. He further illustrated,

> Multiple departments said they wanted Socratic Seminars, and they want it from this one guy who lives in Washington. So I thought, "Okay. Well let's fly him down." If you want it so badly from this guy that's going to serve three different departments, we're going to have over 50 people there each day, it's totally cost-effective. Let's do it. It really addressed what they wanted. I think it's taking hold that way.

Tracy's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

As mentioned, Tracy said her staff was "cautiously curious." When probed on strategies she used to help her school move off of the "cautious" feeling, she explained that her school didn't have a written plan necessarily, but she described two main strategies that she attributed to

the school moving toward a strong implementation of the CCSS: taking one step at a time and rolling up her sleeves.

In conversations with her staff, she said they spent time discussing the new standards and thinking about their implications on their current instruction. "The pace wasn't exactly break-neck, but it was a good conversation that needed to happen." She described her approach as "encouraging learning on the parts of teachers, and then encouraging them to try things out. Once they got a few successes under their belt, then things really seemed to take off."

Tracy indicated she felt her strongest contribution to the school's successful implementation of the CCSS was her "rolling up her sleeves" and learning right alongside her teachers. She indicated that she modeled lessons, co-taught, but most importantly, she

> failed right along with them. I was a complete learner in all of this too. I for sure wasn't the expert at first, but was anyone? While I agreed with the shifts in instruction the CCSS has, we were all kinda on the same plate as it went to implementation, resources, and instructional strategies. Because all of this was so new to everyone, I was able to not know everything, and experience right along with my teachers was actually a very powerful and organic way for me to personally grow and for us all to grow together.

Tracy did feel the biggest obstacles were time and "bandwidth."

> There's just so much already going on in a school and a classroom. We went through major instructional change for several years in a row. It just felt like a lot

> and we all – although I think as a staff we're happy with the change—feel a little fatigued. More time would have been great because we only have the 'bandwidth' to do so much.

Tracy continued, stating that "there's still work to do as we continue to refine our practices and gather more resources, but we are definitely on the way and I think I am stronger educator because of this experience."

Suzanne's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

As indicated throughout Suzanne's interview, she had actually had three experiences with the implementation of the CCSS: one as an elementary teacher, one as a middle school assistant principal, and one as an elementary principal. Since this research focused on the implementation of the CCSS via the lens of a principal, the implementation planning and strategies discussed here reflect Suzanne's time as a site administrator.

While at the middle school as an assistant principal, Suzanne noted that the implementation strategies used started with CCSS introduction and familiarization. Over the better part of a year, she said that department leads would meet with their colleagues and review information they had received in leadership team meetings. "We wanted to information to come from colleagues in smaller settings, so we approached it like a 'train-the-trainers' approach." Suzanne felt this approach moved along too slowly and there were few mechanisms in place for quality control of the sessions that leads were having with their teachers. To elaborate, she said,

> So much depended on the skill and interest level of the lead. If there was a particularly interested lead who was comfortable with the content and the

> discussions, then things went well. Of course, the opposite happened too when a disinterested or insecure lead brought the information back to their teams, it was undetailed and often became a bit of a time to just complain.

Suzanne shared that the admin team at the school would rotate between the department meetings and notes would be compared. Near the end of their first year of implementation, she said that it became clear that a different approach was needed for the staff to move deeper or beyond the initial phases of information gathering/knowledge, and actually work to apply the CCSS to their instruction. "We decided it was time to set some goals for each area. And the goals were derived from us in admin."

Suzanne said that she believed the goals—although directed from the top of the organization—were actually well-received by the faculty. "The teachers finally felt like there was something they could work towards. While they weren't sure how to get there quite yet, at least they knew what the expected outcome was going to be." An example she used was the administrative team working with the Physical Education Department. They gave them a goal of identifying what resources or texts they could use for one unit in the second semester that would encourage deep reading and student use of textual evidence. She further explained,

> This helped teachers focus and actually made them feel more secure in their implementation of the CCSS because it provided a direct product that they were expected to create. They were no longer wondering quite as much if they were "getting it right," because they knew exactly what we considered to the "right" thing.

She stated that similar goals were identified for all the departments and that she believed that it helped get some of the instructional design changes moving along somewhat.

Suzanne explained that these "goal setting" practices, while encouraging movement toward the CCSS implementation, they were lacking in a key area.

> We kinda skipped the professional development phase. We spent a year on introduction, "getting to know" the standards, and then we spent a year tinkering with some short-term goals that would help teachers design instruction that was more CCSS-ready. But we skipped the part in which we worked with teachers in how to redesign their teaching, how to learn new questioning skills, how to become facilitators of learning, and how to design lessons that moved away from the 7-step lessons that had been in use for so long.

So, while she felt the faculty was indeed closer to a fuller implementation of the CCSS and actually feeling better about what the CCSS was about, there was little done in the course of those two years to change the "capacity of the teacher to design lessons and instruct in a true alignment with the CCSS." We spent time "around the edges," and it felt like a "shallow implementation" at best.

She did not remain at the school for the next phases of the implementation, and accepted another job. She did remain hopeful, however, and stated,

> While I just described our implementation as 'shallow,' I do think it might have been the best route for that staff. They needed to get comfortable with the CCSS, see some small gains or wins, so the resistance to the change was lowered. So now, perhaps they're more open to really diving deep into all their instructional

practices. Perhaps now they know the right questions to ask, when before I am not sure if they would have even known what help to ask for. And now they can really work on that. I'll be eager to see what happens—do they get there, or so they stay at this surface level?

At the time of this interview, Suzanne had been just over a year at her most recent position as the elementary school principal for a charter school. She said that in her first year, the implementation strategies she used were simply presenting information, sharing resources, and allowing teachers to "feel their way" around the CCSS. She admitted in her comments that she "didn't do nearly enough" with regard to the CCSS in her first year of principal at the site. She explained the school and the organization had been through a series of substantial changes, high teacher, staff, and administrative turnover, and that there were "many logistical, fundamental items that the school needed to work on." She said that she felt like the first year was "spent taking care of everyone's basic needs: is the school running well, are discipline problems being handled, are there teachers in place for the many vacancies and leaves of absence the school experienced." And she said that while she was "relatively secure" in her own ability to lead the instructional change of transitioning to the CCSS, she was "overwhelmed with what needed to be done at the school, and – since it was [her] first principalship, [she] had lots of learning to do about many things administration and site leadership-related." She did feel more confident that her second year would bring about a focus on the instructional needs of the schools, "while the first year seemed to focus almost exclusively on the operational or logistical."

Scott's View of Implementation Planning and Strategies

Scott explained his plan for the CCSS and laid out the main parts as administrator preparation, effective design of professional development, and lastly, creating a "safe environment for teachers to begin to engage with Common Core without the pressure of having to implement it."

He also believed that the strong starting point he felt his staff was already at was instrumental to a successful implementation of the CCSS.

> I knew what the teachers were already doing so I wanted to link it to something they were already doing so they can see the progression. This is not a new thing maybe you haven't done or even thought about. You're fully prepared for this. In fact, as I told them, you've already been doing Common Core. Now, we just structure it a little bit differently but this is no different from what we've already been doing. Phase one was the conversation. Then phase two was beginning to take lessons that we already had and begin to say, how can we make sure that we're covering Common Core? What are we missing? What do we have in there? Start to do a gap analysis with that. Then phase three was taking things we were already working on, and working through what those standards are in smaller chunks.

Scott further attributed his school's success in the implementation to its focus on students that had existed as part of the school's culture for many years.

> At my school site and as a principal, for years, I didn't say, okay teachers, you need to do this. I always said, okay, based on looking at our student work and our performance, our students are going to need the following. Everything was driven by student need.

Student need was also a key element of Scott's use of a moral imperative in the successful completion of the CCSS transition that both fueled his own initiative and that of his staff. To illustrate, Scott said,

> We can't defend to our parents or defend to these children who we look at 15 years from now, not providing them with the best possible education, not providing them with second language learners access to language to make the usage of language more easily or to give them access to academic language. You can't defend not doing that.

Scott approached much of this work as a social justice issue. He felt that, for many years, the instruction afforded high poverty populations was lackluster at best and harmful at worst.

> Many of the kids have been categorized and as a result of being placed in those categories or a result of having an outdated approach to instruction and curriculum imposed upon them, they've been out of some of the processes that would enable them to have access to higher level thinking, the challenging thinking rigor, college prep education, et cetera.

Scott and his staff's firm belief in the CCSS allowing better access for all students to a deeper, richer, more thoughtful curriculum enabled a commitment on the part of all staff to make this transition successful.

Interestingly, one side-effect of being a "staff ahead of its time" was that, as Scott reported, over the years, they had enjoyed a somewhat maverick reputation within their school district. They prided themselves in being somewhat adversarial and innovative when faced with directives from the district office that they felt were not in line with their expectations of students and beliefs about the pedagogical approaches they felt to be the most appropriate. Scott said that with the CCSS, all of the sudden the staff's pride in being an "iconoclastic staff" was shaken by the fact that the new "edict from the central organization" actually fit quite well with the staff's strong beliefs. He said there was purposeful commentary on his part to dissuade the staff's habitual negative reaction to any district initiative and actually support the movement.

> I had to deal with what was a potential philosophical conflict with my staff and figure out how I was going to go from a detractor to a [district] supporter and yet not be seen as just drinking the Kool-Aid.

While Scott felt the CCSS implementation at his school for which he was directly responsible was successful, he did share some thoughts on obstacles to implementation of the CCSS that he had experienced in other situations. He shared that he had seen some organizations approach the CCSS change as "one more thing to do," and that the implementation suffered as a result.

> Recognition by the organization that it's important to do and not just imperative, not just required to do is essential. There needs to be a philosophical position that there's value to this, that it's not just one more thing. When you have that cultural implementation, then you approach it from a deeper level.

Scott also identified the effect of sufficient time on the impact on an implementation. "Having key time set aside, having enough time to do it parallel to the other work that you're doing so that it's not interfering but it's actually contributing, those things allow for successful implementation."

Finally, Scott noted an issue with history that he saw as an obstacle to large instructional change initiatives such as the CCSS. Namely, teachers had been operating in an instructional paradigm for years that was antithetical to the pedagogy required for the CCSS. The approaches taken to pedagogy, in most cases ran counter to what they were being asked to do in Common Core. He also added that new teachers—while perhaps not as deeply entrenched in the "superficial instruction of the last two decades"—were often in need of additional support through more scripted sorts of programs and lesson plans. They "simply don't have their solid teaching feet" quite yet, and the resources to support them were not yet available.

Reflections by Participants

Kay's Reflection

Kay expressed that, overall, she felt the initial implementation of the CCSS went "well." At the time she left the elementary assignment, CCSS was fully underway in reading and writing, and math was at about a "50% to 60% implementation." When asked about reflections on the implementation and what, in hindsight, she might have done differently or what further supports she would have needed, she identified time and budget, and collaboration as her three largest concerns.

Her concern about time centered around having more time to prepare:

> I wish I would have known it was coming 2 years earlier. Yeah, I wish I had known I just wish we had the full 5 years. I just wish that we had started sooner, and I wish that we had known it was coming.

It also centered on the time to collaborate with fellow principals. While she felt prepared based on her past experiences, she felt sharing ideas, practices, and strategies together would have been beneficial.

Her reflection on budget focused on personnel. She felt that this large instructional change could have been supported more at both the school and district level. Although the CCSS hit at a time of budget issues across California, her reflection included a wish for more school-based personnel to assist in the CCSS and a more coordinated effort at the district level.

> TOSAs would have been an amazing support but I also think having an administrator that could have overseen that rollout, because so much of it fell back on the sites. And without the central coordination, then you had seven different ways of implementing, and some not implementing at all.

Rachelle's Reflection

Reflecting back on her experience with the CCSS, Rachelle felt that while there were "bumps and fits-and-starts along the way," her school had successfully implemented the CCSS. While thinking about her own professional development, she stated that more on-going professional development for principals would have been an area that could lead to an even more successful implementation. She explained that, in her district, prior

to the CCSS, there was little to no professional development for principals in the area of instruction. Since the onset of the CCSS, she now said that there were at least monthly activities in which principals learned, problem-solved, and shared experiences relating to instructional practices and that these activities had proven "invaluable" to her growth as an instructional leader.

Rachelle felt the work toward implementation of the CCSS "is not done yet," especially when it came to math, assessments, and report cards. She stated that the largest change due to the CCSS to date in her experience was in the instructional practices of her teachers and revised curricula demanded by the new standards. However, how to assess and report progress was still somewhat of an unanswered question for her. She elaborated,

> because it's not as cut and dry anymore. We're not memorizing multiplication tables. The actual assessment, evaluation of what the students . . . know and what they show you and what they've learned, I think that it was the biggest outstanding question that we are still working on.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The U.S. public education sector is experiencing monumental shifts on the curriculum and pedagogical fronts through the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. This dissertation endeavored to develop a portrait of this major instructional change in education via the lens of school administrators. I interviewed six site and district leaders of public schools who had first-hand experiences in implementing the CCSS in order to gain insights into their personal fears, learning, struggles, and successes. My sampling of study participants was split between two organizations that presented substantial differences in the student populations they worked with and differing organization types (charter versus traditional public schools). These participants were chosen to help illuminate my presenting research questions:

1. How do principals serving two disparate student populations describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?
2. What are the challenges and successes these principals encounter as they initiate, implement, and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?
3. What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

This chapter discusses my findings relative to the questions, offers an analysis of the findings vis-à-vis this dissertation's theoretical framework of Michael Fullan's "Right Drivers" levers, provides several implications of practice and, lastly, offers suggestions for continued research in this area.

Summary of Findings

Question 1: How do principals serving two disparate student populations describe their experiences in the early implementation of the Common Core?

In addition to gaining insight into site leaders' experiences, the first question in this study was interested in narrating any possible differences in the experiences of participants who served different types of student populations as they worked through the instructional change initiative of the CCSS. Based on the narratives provided in this study, there were few identifiable differences between the participants who worked in high-poverty schools and those working in high-wealth schools. Interestingly, while I do not believe this research was able to identify a clear difference in practice between schools in rich and poor neighborhoods or charter versus traditional K–12 systems, the fact that the participants expressed such varied experiences in each setting did help define—within the context of this study—that the type of organization appeared less correlated to the experiences of the school leader whereas the personal characteristics, depth of understanding, history, and ease with change management of the individual had a greater influence.

Summary Development

To understand the varied experiences of this study's participants, refer to Table 7, which summarizes my analysis of the participants' interviews. This summary was developed through the analysis of interview responses of the participants. To illustrate my process for this summary, the following subsections describe the methods I used in developing and categorizing the information.

School population. Using data obtained from the California Department of Education website, DataQuest, the percent of students participating in free and reduced lunch program of the respective schools of the participants were obtained. The results are listed below in Table 7. The data used were from 2015 California census data, and all participants indicated that their school population had not changed dramatically since the initial CCSS implementation. Schools with free/reduced lunch program participation under 10% were identified as high-wealth schools. Schools with free/reduced lunch program participation above 70% were identified as high-poverty schools.

Table 7

Free or Reduced Lunch Participation by Participant Site

Participant	% of students participating in Free/Reduced Lunch Program
Kay	1
Rachelle	1
Bradley	78
Suzanne	95
Tracy	1
Scott	83

Level of self-preparedness. Using key words and statements from interview transcripts, the level of each participant's self-reported preparation was categorized into 3 levels: *high, medium,* and *low*. High self-preparation was reserved for participants who expressed either strong familiarity with the CCSS or the instructional practices included in the CCSS—such as

Bradley reporting that his school was used as a pilot site for other schools in his district and Scott sharing that he had spent most of his career studying pedagogy and instructional change. *Low* was reserved for Rachelle and Tracy. As presented in Chapter 4, Rachelle shared her own unfamiliarity with the CCSS and that her career had almost exclusively been spent on instructional techniques that were quite different in pedagogy than the style in the CCSS. Tracy was categorized as *low* due to her switch in job positions from a school that had not begun much (if any) work on the CCSS to one that had already embarked on some change. Tracy reported that her change in environment meant there was lots of "catching up" to do. The other participants were categorized at *medium.* Suzette, for instance, seemed to have had a strong sense of the pedagogical shifts needed from her own work as a teacher, but lacked a strong foundation in how to lead a school through a vast change. Kay, alternatively expressed "knowing how to approach the situation," but needed extra support through her personal networks on some of the content of the CCSS.

Level of engagement. Similar to the category of "self-preparedness," interview data were used to develop categories for the "level of engagement" summary. These were also identified as *high, medium,* and *low*, and were defined as the extent to which the participant self-reported this or her own engagement with the work. With the exception of Rachelle, all participants reported high engagement through the development of "action plans," "diving into the work with my team," "actively searching out methods of implementation," and "participating in as many professional development sessions as possible." Rachelle was categorized as *medium* because her initial engagement was low ("I asked a district representative to come in and

present"). However, as noted in Chapter 4, she realized the need for her own ownership of the work and began in to engage in the activities as her colleagues categorized as *high.*

Level of planning. In this category, interview notes were again used to meta-assess each participants' self-reported amount of planning in his or her implementation of the CCSS. Again, these were categorized into *low, medium,* and *high.* Participants categorized into *high* indicated a strong sense of action planning for CCSS implementation on their part. Scott, for instance, shared that he "had a pathway" laid out for the work. Similarly, Bradley indicated that his school had many structures in place that he could leverage to make the changes needed for the CCSS, and that he and his staff "purposefully planned" for such an implementation. Conversely, Rachelle was categorized as having *low* planning. In her interview data, she indicated that—along with the many other demands of being a school principal—the CCSS seemed to come onto the educational scene somewhat abruptly. Her initial planning, for instance, involved setting up a professional development session for her staff. But, as indicated in Chapter 4, Rachelle quickly realized the extent of the work required and shifted gears to a more planned approach for the implementation. The other participants who were categorized as *medium* simply had a mix of approaches to planning and planned and shifted gears as the implementation work progressed, or simply relied on the planning structures already securely in place in the school's culture. While there was evidence of planning in their interview data, it appeared segmented or reactionary while the *high* planners appeared to "map out" a larger plan from start to finish. To illustrate, Tracy seemed to plan in increments "we went from step-to-step and what was the next small step we needed to take," while Kay appeared to plan somewhat in reaction to her staff's engagement

"we had to regroup after not seeing any expected implementation," and Suzette used the planning structures in place through her teachers' professional learning community protocols.

Most impactful obstacles. These data were pulled directly from the interview transcripts in reviewing participant responses to the question of what they felt were their largest obstacles to implementation. While the characteristics of the individual participants themselves present a variety of differences, none appears to be directly related to school population.

Table 8

Summary of Analysis of Participants' Interviews

Participant	School population(s)	Level of self-preparedness	Level of engagement	Level of planning	Most impactful obstacles reported
Kay	High-wealth	Medium	High	Medium	Speed of implementation, teacher buy-in
Suzanne	High-poverty	Medium	High	Medium	Speed of implementation, teacher buy-in
Rachelle	High-wealth	Low	Medium	Low	District support, speed of implementation, own learning curve
Bradley	High-wealth and high-poverty*	High	High	High	Speed of implementation
Tracy	High-wealth	Low	High	Medium	Own learning curve
Scott	High-poverty	High	High	High	Speed of implementation, overcoming historical issues

* Due to a change in positions, Bradley was involved in CCSS implementation for both a high-poverty school setting and a high-wealth one.

What is clearer from the participants' responses is that each leader and the history and staff make-up of the individual sites at which they led the change had a deeper impact than the type of organization or school for which they worked. For instance, it appeared that Scott's level of preparedness in comparison to Rachelle's had a greater impact on the depth of the implementation than the type of organization. Scott felt fully prepared due to his own beliefs and pedagogy, while Rachelle self-reported that many of the ideas behind the CCSS were unknown to her and that she had a steep learning curve to get up-to-speed on the initiative.

This study's results do however paint a clear picture of the variety of experiences site leaders had in the implementation of the CCSS: from confident and strategic to uncertain and unclear to many places in between. Participants' initial reactions to the first "news" of the CCSS perfectly illustrated these differences. Bradley felt vindicated; Kay felt curiously optimistic; Rachelle felt overwhelmed; and Suzanne felt unsure. As indicated in their interviews, the participants moved from their initial reactions to the CCSS to other places along an implementation continuum at different rates and with different levels and types of support. For example, Kay reached out to her network of colleagues; Rachelle relied at first on her district and then on her teachers; and Tracy appeared to rely on growing with teachers. All, interestingly, felt that the schools and faculties they had worked with—with time—got to a place of even implementation of the CCSS and were now working on refinements to the process, further developing their curricular materials or adding in additional content areas. Their pathways to this result appeared quite varied, however.

A trend seemingly revealed in this study's responses that bears discussing was that both Bradley and Scott, who indicated the highest levels of preparedness for the implementation of

the CCSS, also indicated that they were working with staffs and locations that were considered somewhat on the "outside" of the pedagogical environment in place at the onset of the CCSS in 2010. They both reported that their schools did not follow district mandates fully, constantly questioned their instruction vis-à-vis student needs, and seemed to exhibit an attitude of experimentation in comparison to their counterparts in the study. While this, of course, begs the question of whether their style of leadership fostered that innovation or they were assigned to schools that had similar philosophical bents. The salient result is that in this study, school faculties and leaders who did not necessarily follow state or district edicts or who remained skeptical of them appeared better prepared for the changes that came with the CCSS.

Another point to note is that all participants, while starting the implementation process at varying states of readiness and mindset, all found their way to what they characterized as a successful result. These pathways were as individual as the people themselves. Scott—arguably the most self-assured of the participants—developed a plan and appeared to stick with it. Bradley had varying responses based on the two different locations he worked in, but seemed to rely on his setting the long-term goal and his teachers then directing them to it. Tracy, somewhat needing to catch up to the elementary version of the shifts, dove right in alongside her teachers and modeled and cotaught lessons. Kay similarly took a partner approach to learning with her teachers, but also reached out to a network of colleagues outside of her school and district to beef-up her understanding. Rachelle, who appeared to be the most taken aback by the changes in the CCSS, first relied on her district supports, and then quickly changed tact to learning with her teachers and taking advantage of the increased professional development opportunities that became available to school leaders as the CCSS initiative matured.

Finally, the participants in this study all seemed to rely on resources outside of their immediate supervisor's or their district's instructional support teams to round out their expertise in the CCSS. In fact, it is notable that not one participant said they utilized their supervisors in the course of their implementation. Rather, some relied on prior experience, others used external resources, others sought out their own professional development, and most worked right alongside teachers in deciphering and gaining an understanding of the process.

In this study, I believe there were few similarities to the experiences site administrators went through as they implemented the CCSS. There were different starting points, pathways, and utilization of resources during this process, and the site leaders' experiences with the implementation of the CCSS was decidedly diverse, and almost exclusively based on their individual backgrounds and exposures.

Question 2: What are the challenges and successes do these principals encounter as they initiate, implement and sustain successful curricular change initiatives within their schools?

While the first research question appears to be answered with a variety of administrator experiences, there were more similarities in the challenges and successes the participants experienced compared to their own individual and personal pathways through the implementation. What appeared to be common areas that supported their implementation efforts were as follows:

- Staff mindset about the CCSS,
- Leader "ownership" of the implementation,
- Teacher "ownership" of the implementation,

- Developing a culture of risk-taking and a safe environment to learn, and
- Incremental implementation.

Areas of common obstacles included the following:

- Staff mindset about the CCSS,
- Resource availability, and
- Lack of time for deep implementation or a more incremental approach.

Factors Contributing to Success

The following are factors that led to successful implementation of the CCSS as viewed by the participants.

Staff mindset. The results of this study indicated that the history and mindset of a staff played a key role in the ease with which the participant felt the implementation took place. Scott's and Bradley's staff appeared to be fully "primed" for this work due to their history of implementing critical thinking pedagogies and a history of questioning the policies and practices that were edicts from prior pedagogical movements. Staffs that were already consistently reviewing student work, analyzing their practices, and reaching for differentiation on a daily basis appeared more prepared for the CCSS. Bradley's and Scott's teams seemed to exemplify this experience. It is important to note that Bradley's and Scott's teams' preparedness is not—in and of itself—a value judgment on the worth of the group. Rather, it simply implies for this researcher that there were different mindsets that led to what appears to be a more conflict-free experience for their leaders. The staffs of the others participants, while equally concerned educators, did require their leaders to develop more skill around change management and spend

more time laying the groundwork for change compared to staffs that were already on the pathway to instruction that was Common Core-like.

Leader and teacher ownership of the change. Participants who expressed their staffs taking ownership of the change appeared to have experienced a fuller implementation. Bradley's explanation of his setting of the goals for the work and the teachers planning their own learning to get there exemplified this approach. Rachelle, who first claimed low ownership of the initiative, experienced a "turning of the tide" so to speak once she retook the helm of the initiative and made it more of hers and her school. Suzanne was able to provide evidence of two experiences that exhibited the difference between two staffs having different investments in the initiative: her elementary staff that fully took the reins and dove in and her middle school staff that approached it from a much further, less engaged approach. Some expressed a feeling of a change in the ownership such as Kay's staff. What was a bit of a challenging start for her staff resulted in somewhat of a conversion to increased ownership at the initiative developed at her school.

Developing a culture of risk-taking and a safe environment to learn. It is this researcher's conclusion that this strategy in leading change was the most important influence across all the participants' experiences. Some participants (Scott and Bradley, namely, and, to some extent, Tracy) reported that this phenomenon was already in place at their sites and indicated this was the impetus for quick implementation. This was evidenced in the narratives by such comments that shared that teacher collaboration systems were established, administrators modeled lessons, and administrators sat side-by-side with teachers in professional development sessions.

Notably, it was also the factor that somewhat turned around some of the "rocky starts" that some of the participants explained. Suzanne's middle school staff was reportedly quite hesitant at first, but once there was safety and security built around the establishment of small goals, there appeared to be a turning point in the staff wrapping their arms around the initiative. While Tracy's staff seemed ahead of the game when she came in board as principal, the staff earnestly continued their work on the initiative, even with the potential unknown reactions of their new principal. This was accomplished through Tracy's model lessons, and purposeful failed attempts at implementing strategies. Most strikingly, this came into play with Rachelle's school. According to Rachelle's interview, her school was not highly engaged in the CCSS initiative, and neither was she. They had originally left it to the "outside" (district) experts to bring them through the work. However, once Rachelle took the work back, removed the external experts, and engaged in the initiative as a school-based project, she reported a much higher level of engagement and action than previously.

Most of the participants also modeled risk-taking by taking the learning they were receiving about the CCSS from external experts or the direction they were receiving from the district office, and making it their own to fit their school's level of readiness or capacity. These leaders exhibited risk-taking by potentially not being at the expected timeline or expected milestones that were set external to their individual school sites. This proved a powerful example for teachers in setting an environment where risk-taking and safety from sanction allowed the adult learners (the teachers) to more fully immerse themselves in their work and change efforts.

Incremental implementation. Five of the six participants indicated that an incremental implementation of the work was beneficial to the continued progress of the change imitative.

Perhaps the most notable example was Suzanne's comments about setting a singular goal for the teachers per semester. While Suzanne expressed concern that their incremental approach may have been at far too slow of a pace, she also expressed that her staff finally saw traction on the work, thus fueling a deeper engagement in the transition. Similarly, Bradley's explanation of teachers identifying a singular area of focus, requesting training on it and, focusing on the application of that work, appeared instrumental to the success of the implementation in his experience. Smaller, more manageable, more actionable, more reachable "chunks" of work appeared to be used successfully among most of this study's participants. The notable exception is Scott, whose interview did not necessarily provide evidence of such an approach.

Obstacles

The following are the obstacles most identified by the participants.

Staff mindset. Interestingly, staff mindset was both a success factor and an obstacle to the CCSS implementation. While the success of implementation for some participants was clearly due to a mindset that was ripe for a change, the opposite appeared true for staffs with a mindset not quite prepared for the reform. From the results of this study, the historical personality of a staff and its questioning status quo or having a healthy skepticism of the edicts of an organization seem to be a predictor of the staff readiness for the CCSS (e.g., Scott's and Bradley's staffs). Conversely, staffs that had not spent time together in learning communities or respectfully making the edicts of the system fit their school or student struggled at the onset of the CCSS. Their site leaders indicated a much higher need to lay the groundwork for the change, create new structures for delving into the work, and progress at a more incremental pace than the site leaders with staffs that seemed primed for the work.

Lack of time. The overwhelming obstacle presented by the participants was a lack of time to fully implement the change initiative. This appeared mainly due to the time needed to provide a deeper foundation for the work, for administrators and teachers to learn a new paradigm that was substantially different from prior pedagogical approaches, and for staffs to have time to reflect and respond to the work in progress to make it an even more meaningful approach. Several participants responded that there were external time pressures that they wish had not been present. The most striking example of this was Bradley commenting that he felt the district in which he was working was far behind, the change in standardized testing was right around the corner, and he only had a summer to basically plan for the implementation and to launch the initiative. He admitted a breakneck speed that, if he had had the opportunity to do everything again, he wished the implementation was more paced, more spread-out. He further expressed the challenge of moving from one curricular area to the next in ways that did not allow for much reflection or pause. Teacher fatigue was a concern of many with the feeling of continuous change taking place over the course of multiple school years.

Resource availability. Participants also indicated that the lack of resources aligned to the CCSS presented a challenge to their staffs initially, but that it may have proven a benefit in the long-run since teachers were more forced to engage in the creation of their own resources versus simply relying on an external one. More important was that personnel resources were a challenge. Several expressed the desire for more support at the site via added personnel to coach and plan with teachers. The site administrators—already stretched quite thin with their regular duties and responsibilities—were at a loss for time to fully support their teachers. Several expressed the desire for a site-based instructional coach or a professional developer as a "wish"

for the implementation. But since the CCSS was introduced at times of budget difficulties in California schools, those positions were not available to any of the participants in this study.

Question 3: What are the specific actions that principals report aided in the success of the curricular change initiative?

The specific actions that the study's participants identified represent a distillation of the results to research question number two regarding successes and obstacles discussed above. In reviewing the interviews, the specific actions identified by the study participants as contributing to the success of the curricular change initiative represented in this study by the transition to the CCSS were:

1. Partnering with teachers in the learning of content versus claiming expertise
2. Establishing small, realistic goals to propel the change initiative forward
3. Showing vulnerability through attempting new strategies alongside teachers
4. Encouraging teacher collaboration and decision-making
5. Encouraging and allowing risks, mistakes, reboots, and course corrections
6. Minimizing judgment or evaluation, especially in the early stages of implementation
7. Allowing self-directed learning on the part of teachers
8. Leveraging existing structures and practices to facilitate movement in a new initiative
9. Taking time to develop the value of proposed change
10. Identifying and harnessing resources outside of typical organizational relationships
11. Recognizing the challenge presented by change initiatives for those charged with implementation

12. Recognizing that adult learners will start at different points and will progress at different paces throughout the change initiative.

Findings Through the Lens of Fullan's Right Drivers

The foundation for my lens on this research and my interest in this topic was Fullan's (2011) recent work on "Right Drivers." Personally drawn to the capacity-building and intrinsic motivations of people in Dr. Fullan's work, this study represented for me a "real-life" way to support or criticize his propositions regarding successful change in school environments. In summary of the discussion of the review of Dr. Fullan's work, the reader may recall the four tenets for successful change Dr. Fullan proposed as:

1. Capacity-building: commitment comes from intrinsic motivation and improved technical competencies of groups of educators working together purposefully and relentlessly;
2. Group quality: Embed a staff culture of group learning and support through the promotion of social capital and group development;
3. Focus on instruction: teachers need to get grounded in instruction so that the focus is on learning, instruction, and linked assessment to improve system-wide results; and
4. Systemic thinking: all elements of the system are interconnected and involved.

Additionally, Dr. Fullan proposed four questions with regard to whether a particular strategy would fall into a "right" driver or lever for change or a "wrong" one. The questions he suggested were:

- Does it foster intrinsic motivation of teachers and students?
- Does it inspire collective or team work?

- Does it engage educators and students in continuous improvement of instruction and learning?
- Does it affect all teachers and students (100%)? (Fullan, 2011, p. 3).

In light of these questions and the scheme Dr. Fullan presented, I felt the specific strategies presented by this study's participants squarely fell into the categories of Dr. Fullan's research. To illustrate, Table 9 indicates the connections I identified.

Table 9

Connections Between Fullan's Right Drivers and This Study's Strategies for Success

Strategy for success	Fullan's right driver
Partnering with teachers in the learning of content versus claiming expertise	Group quality Capacity-building
Establishing small, realistic instructional goals to propel the change initiative forward	Systemic thinking Focus on instruction
Showing vulnerability through attempting new strategies alongside teachers	Group quality
Encouraging teacher collaboration and decision-making	Capacity-building
Encouraging and allowing risks, mistakes, reboots, and course corrections	Group quality
Minimizing judgment or evaluation, especially in the early stages of implementation	Group quality
Allowing self-directed learning on the part of teachers	Capacity-building
Leveraging existing structures and practices to facilitate movement in a new initiative	Systemic thinking
Taking time to develop the value of proposed change	Capacity-building
Identifying and harnessing resources outside of typical organizational relationships	No connection
Recognizing the challenge presented by change initiatives for those charged with implementation	Group quality

The "right driver" of "focus on instruction" is perhaps Fullan's one driver that did not appear to be fully represented in this study's results. It may be argued that the entire CCSS initiative lay deeply in that driver, so the very initiative itself squared with Fullan's theory of

educational change. Similarly, Fullan's systemic thinking was under-represented in the results. The reader may recall the lack of this driver in Suzanne's school's implementation. While she felt that breaking down the work into very small goals helped foster a staff's turnaround toward the CCSS change as manageable and productive, she did express concerns about how the school would continue moving on. Their approach appeared to support the right-drivers of group quality and capacity-building, but that came at the expense of systemic thinking that might have accelerated the pace of change at her location and provided the means for avoiding a stall in the work.

Capacity-Building

Several of the beneficial strategies names by the participants fell into Fullan's category of capacity-building. I saw teachers and principals learning together, principals searching for their own learning opportunities, and staffs organizing to increase capacity. Several participants reported situations in which an increased capacity fostered a more intrinsic motivation on the part of the teachers to continue or deepen the work. One example included Bradley's recounting of the teachers self-selecting a professional learning opportunity and then coming back and wanting more for their next steps. Another was Kay's example of, after having found her own increased capacity through identifying independent learning opportunities, being able to engage deeper in the work. Bottom-line for almost all of the participants was that when the capacity of the teachers and others involved in the CCSS increased, so did their motivation to continue in the work. Their learning created a belief of efficacy that translated into a catapult for continued efforts.

Group Quality

Most of this study's suggested successful actions on the part of leaders seemed to fall into Fullan's category of group quality. Fullan (2011) described *Group Quality* as embedding a staff culture of group learning and support through the promotion of social capital and group development. In this study, leaders organized for collaboration, modeled risk-taking, provided open feedback, and allowed periods of evaluation-free work, all of which contributed to the qualities of the group in initiating and sustaining major change. Notably, these strategies contributed to the improvement of the group as a whole, not only to individual teachers. Yes, professional development may add to the professional knowledge of an individual, but the collaborative structures set up by the leaders in this study broadened that individual knowledge to that of the group.

Implications for Practice

Based on this study's results, several implications to practice appear applicable to future large-scale change initiatives.

1. Leaders would be advised to identify and research their own professional learning opportunities to increase capacity. One valuable approach would be to undertake individual learning in collaboration with a colleague group or a group external to the organization to enable conversations about the work and an environment for shared learning.
2. Leaders should take the time and work with staffs to develop a foundational understanding of the value of a change initiative. Participating in the change movement

"because we have to" or "because it's the new law" may create less immediate friction to participation, but it will not create sustained change and motivation.

3. Leaders should express to their staffs that they are not the experts in a particular change. This fosters a partnership, a collegial, nonevaluative environment for the both the leaders and practitioners to act in leading to deeper engagement and increased personal motivation.
4. Leaders should paint a clear "picture" of an end-result, but also encourage teachers to identify their own pathway and professional development.
5. Leaders should foster an environment of experimentation and risk-taking. Allowing members to try-out activities, rework plans, and to generally fail and learn from that experience are beneficial to the quality of the overall change in the end. Leaders should, in fact, model this behavior in front of staffs, demonstrating their commitment to allowing others to practice and learn in the same environment.
6. Leaders should appreciate and encourage small steps along the path of reform. Breaking down a large effort into smaller pieces enables staff to feel effective and creates a space for continued efforts.
7. Leaders should leverage the existing collaborative structures already in place at their sites to process a new reform. These structures should be nourished and reinforced even in times involving fewer initiatives so that new items brought to a staff are supported through strong, intact, and productive structures.
8. Leaders should always foster conversations, analysis, and critique of any pedagogy or instructional initiative with their staffs. A constant cycle of reflecting and refining one's

practices engrains a mindset for a group that is primed for other major changes demanded of the group.

Recommendations for Research

Decidedly, this study focused on the self-reported experiences of a small group of educational leaders in two small settings. While the findings of the study are echoed in Dr. Fullan's work, an interesting continuation of the research would include a similar research question from the point-of-view of a teacher. Is there a correlation between what the educational leaders in this study and what teachers identify as actions successful to the large change movement?

This study also focused on the early stages of the implementation of the CCSS. Did the (admittedly self-reported) successes experienced by this study's participants stick in the later years? Did they use these same strategies in later iterations of the CCSS?

Additionally, this study only reviewed a minute segment of school leaders involved in the CCSS. Are this study's findings generalizable to a large population? If not, what are some key contributing factors to the different experiences? Similarly, this study only reviewed the CCSS instructional change initiative. Do the strategies and recommendations listed here apply to other change initiatives in the education sector? Do other change initiatives that are less instructionally focused and more operational in nature (e.g., change in discipline procedures, changes in school structures such as bell schedules, etc.) also benefit from the same leader moves identified in this study?

A third area for further research—also born out of this study's limited number of participants—is whether a leader's professional pathway alters or informs these practices. All of

the participants in this study had had job changes over the last several years. Would leaders with a more continuous career path or a deeper longevity at a particular school site identify the same successful actions as this study's participants did?

Lastly, one of the findings from this study that was particularly interesting to me was that three participants who indicated their staffs had fewer challenges with the CCSS initiative also said that their staffs were known for continually "bucking the trends" and engaging in consistent analysis of their work and their practices. On the surface, this makes sense and has been reported in this paper as a factor that contributed to the success of navigating change. These staffs were equipped to work in "areas of grey," had set collaborative protocols for discussions, and never seemed to take status quo as a set environment. This compelled me to know more about this "type" of school and their successes or struggles in other reform initiatives. And while it appears they may more easily navigate through change, what is such a staff's effect on student learning?

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry study told the stories of principals as they led one of the largest instructional change initiatives in recent history within their schools or districts, and revealed the successes and challenges they experienced, and the actions that they took to aid in the successful implementation of change. The purpose of this study was to identify common themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Additionally, it was to present the findings so that currently practicing principals could affect change within their schools well. The administrators worked through the resistance of staff, the bureaucratic difficulties, and their own steep learning curves to lead the change. They reported success in leading the work through taking on ownership of the change, "rolling up their sleeves," and diving into the learning right alongside

their teachers, chunking the roll-out into more manageable parts, and admitting they might not know all the answers. They took risks in plain view of their teachers, encouraged teacher leadership, and understood that evidence of the change would be incremental in their adult learners. This study will add to the research related to principals leading change by drawing on the experiences of the principals and presenting the successes and challenges they encountered and specific actions that aided in the success of change. Undoubtedly, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will not be the last large-scale change the schools, teachers, and administrators experience. This study found specific actions that school leaders can employ to aid their endeavors to lead as inevitable change comes their way in the future.

APPENDIX A
Interview Questions

Interview question number	Data for research question	Question
1	Introduction/ biographical	Please start by telling me a little about yourself, your current job, and your professional pathway?
2	Introduction/ biographical	When did your school first attempt implementation of the Common Core?
3	1	Can you describe your school's plan for implementation of CCSS?
4	1	Describe the extent to which you feel your teachers are implementing the CCSS.
5	2	How did you feel when CCSS was first discussed in your school/district? Has that feeling changed? If so, how?
6	1, 2 & 3	Can you talk about your own personal reactions to the CCSS implementation that you have been experiencing? To illustrate, I am interested in hearing about your own personal fears, successes, inhibitions, doubts, realizations, resistance, celebrations in completing the work. Anything that has been in or on your mind about the CCSS.
7	1	Describe some "success stories" you've seen with your teachers in Common Core implementation.
8	2	Now focusing a little less on your personal feelings, but more on some of the external issues, what challenges have you personally experienced in implementation efforts?
9	1	Can you describe any changes that needed to happen in your practice, your teachers' practice, school policies, or school vision?
10	3	What do you feel prepared you for implementing the CCSS at your school?
11	3	What do you think prepared your teachers and overall school community for implementing the CCSS?
12	3	Was there anything you wish you knew more about to best implement the CCSS?
13	3	Can you describe what hindered your implementing the CCSS?
14	3	Can you describe what contributed to your implementing the CCSS?
15	3	Now looking back on the last several years, is there anything you would have done differently?
16	Summary	Is there anything you would like to add?
17	Summary	Is there anything I didn't ask but you wish I had?

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