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The Voices of Educators: An Interview Study of the Implementation Process of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards Initiative

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English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards Initiative

by

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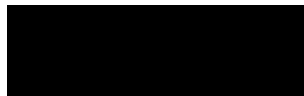
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Historically, disenfranchised students in the American education system have been promised opportunity through successful participation in the school system. These promises are voiced in legislation like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and by executive actions like President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative. Evidenced by the continuing education gap, the promises of success through education continue to evade many American children across the nation, especially students who are most in need of the support promised in these quixotic visions of opportunity.

This is a qualitative interview study that aimed to gather the voices of educators involved in the implementation of the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (ELA CCSS) to investigate the potential benefit of an information loop during the time period Bridges (2009) labeled the Neutral Zone, a period when change agents can reflect on and possibly enhance the

implementation of an initiative. The study aimed to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district-level administrators during the transition to the ELA CCSS in three public school districts in the greater Los Angeles area? The narratives constructed throughout the interview process with the study's participants point to the value of establishing an information loop during the Neutral Zone as an untapped vein of knowledge in the change process. This information can potentially be used to take inventory of the trajectory an implementation process has taken.

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INTRODUCTION

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results."— Unknown

Change agents in education would be wise to ponder these words as they navigate yet another transitional period in our collective efforts to improve America's schools. Change in education is not new. Darling-Hammond (1997), DuFour and Eaker (1987), DuFour and Marzano (2011), Fullan (2001, 2010), Muhammad (2009), Smith (2008), Sergiovanni (1992), Shea and Solomon (2013), and countless others discuss change in their writings, including the need to change and the manner in which change should be pursued. Yet, the motivation for each of them and for most stakeholders wanting to improve our educational system is echoed in the words of former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2015), as he reflected on President Johnson's motives when signing the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965:

> What moved Johnson also moves all of us here—real children, for whom educational opportunity must be their one chance at a better life, being denied that chance. That lack of opportunity is not just heartbreaking, it is educational malpractice, it is morally bankrupt, and it is economically self-destructive to our nation's self-interest. (para. 10)

The Change Underway

The United States is currently on a "race to the top" in its approach to improve the educational system. It has been running this race for more than half a century. In previous manifestations of the race, the goal was to leave no child behind, and it tried to establish goals

for the year 2000 in an effort to improve America's schools. At the core, however, the over-arching goals for improving the U.S. public education system for more than half a century have remained the same: to provide a quality education to all children in America to provide each of them with the opportunity to succeed and to ensure that America's students remain globally competitive in an ever-changing global economy. In the Declaration of Policy, the original ESEA of 1965 stated:

> In recognition of the special educational needs of children of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance (as set forth in this title) to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including where necessary the construction of school facilities) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children. (p. 1)

Almost 50 years later, President Obama voiced this same message as he announced the vision his administration had for the American education system. In the foreword to *ESEA Blueprint for Reform,* he stated, "Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). Since the passage of the ESEA 50 years ago, America continues to make changes to the education system with the hopeful thinking that the new changes will result in winning the race. But, will the US succeed if change leaders continue to implement change without enhancing the way change has been approached in the past? Kotter

(2008) estimated that 70% of change efforts fail to be launched, fail to be completed, or finish over budget, finish late, or finish with initial aspirations unmet. By better understanding the processes of change and exploiting the entire spectrum of veins of knowledge that are present during change, change agents may develop strategies to enhance the chances that a change initiative will attain its envisioned goals.

Whether the current metaphors of racing to the top or following a blueprint for reform find their way into the law of the land in the form of the reauthorization of ESEA is yet to be seen. Currently, the race in which the United States is competing is one that it is losing, according to the data that are regularly referenced when such arguments are made. The 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Report data placed the US in the below-average category in mathematics (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013). The US went from 23rd in the 2009 report to 26th in the 2012 PISA Report (OECD, 2013). The report also places the United States in the average category in reading (17th) and in science (21st). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013) reported that between the 2008 and 2012 administration of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) assessment, the only group to make significant gains was the 13-year-old group. The same report shared that the 2012 NAEP results showed that 11th-grade language arts and mathematics scores have been stagnant for decades. The report stated, "Average reading and mathematics scores in 2012 for 17-year-olds were not significantly different from scores in the first assessment year" (NCES, 2013, p. 1). Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2010), used the term *educational stagnation* when discussing the plateau represented by the results of the 2012 PISA Report. This interpretation of the results seemed to mirror the frustrated voice of a nation

heavily invested in its public education system, outspending most of the other countries referenced in the 2012 PISA Report but not seeing the gains expected by a culture always striving to be number one.

The changes currently underway in education are not new. In discussing the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, Anderson (2007) stated, "[NCLB] was not unprecedented… virtually everything in the bill had been seen before in other educational programs" (p. 59). The changes taking place today are part of a bigger movement that has seen the premier role of the U.S. change in the global economy, labeled the *knowledge-and-innovation* economy in the report *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* (Jerald, 2008). In this report, Jerald (2008) elaborated on the requisites of the new economy when he wrote, "The world's knowledge-and-innovation economy favors workers who have postsecondary education or training, strong fundamental skills in math and reading, and the ability to solve unfamiliar problems and communicate effectively" (p. 5). Whereas the US once held an "unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation" (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, & Campbell, 1983, p. 5), today that preeminence is in question.

In our nation's efforts to fix education, a major shift has taken place. According to Watt (2011), the National Governors Association (NGA), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), in conjunction with various advisory groups that included educators, content experts, state education agencies, and institutions of higher learning, released the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. These standards, a deviation from the individual state standards used under NCLB, and its predecessor, the Improving America's School Act (IASA), are the

product of countless hours of collaboration between both the 48 participating states and international efforts, reflecting the desire of the US to use international models as a platform for developing and improving its educational system. The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (2012) described the new standards as requiring "a deep conceptual understanding of the content in ELA and mathematics, and also for the ability to apply this content to other disciplines" (p. 1). This philosophy goes against the multiple-choice, single-answer-per-question approach of NCLB.

Once again, the US is in the throes of a major shift in the manner in which it educates children in public schools. This shift, started in earnest by the enactment of the Race to the Top Initiative, has solidified the CCSS as the new direction for public education. Like the movements that came before it, a huge bill for the tax paying public and great promises for the children in America's public school system accompany this one.

Statement of the Problem and Social Justice

Ensuring that all children have the opportunity to attain social and economic mobility in American society is a matter of social justice, and the continuing efforts to address the problems of inequality have to be studied if there is to be progress. In her book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Lareau (2011) discussed the difficulties of being raised in poverty in American society. Lareau discussed the divergence of development between social classes and the impact these differences make in the "ways children view themselves in relation to the rest of the world" ("Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth," para. 7). As a solution to the deficiencies of NCLB, and as a continued desire by the American populace to improve their schools, 48 states joined to create the CCSS initiative. These internationally

benchmarked standards promise to improve the learning of all students, including disadvantaged students, who will compete in the knowledge-and-innovation economy of the 21st century as adults.

In a March 19, 2014, interview with George Stephanopoulos, Bill Gates (2014) stated, "America is the land of equal opportunity, and the reality is that we are not delivering on that promise when low-income households end up in public schools that don't educate their kids well." Historically, disenfranchised students in the American education system have been promised opportunity through successful participation in the school system. These promises are echoed in legislation like the ESEA of 1965 and by executive actions like President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative; however, attainment of these promises continues to evade many American children across the nation—students who are most in need of the support promised in these utopian visions of what American society can be.

In the report entitled *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*, Jerald (2008) wrote, "Research shows that education systems in the United States tend to give disadvantaged and low-achieving students a watered down curriculum and place them in larger classes taught by less qualified teachers—exactly the opposite of the educational practices of high-performing countries" (p. 6). The disconnect between the goals set forth in America's education system and the continuing performance gap experienced by students continues to be a problem that is expected to be fixed with the next round of legal mandates and altruistic promises lauded by politicians.

The disproportional underperforming of students by race, socioeconomic status, and language learner status became more evident under NCLB. NCLB mandated the tracking of

achievement by significant subgroups, groups of students that make up 15% of a school's population. Historically, these students have not had equitable educational experiences in the US, and given the continued gap that exists between these groups, the argument that the problem persists is readily made. Table 1 synthesizes California's academic achievement data, information the NCLB requires of local education agencies (LEAs). None of the student groups in the 2013 NAEP Report obtained the desired target of academic achievement. Furthermore, the data validated previous assertions that socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students are even less likely to attain those targets of academic excellence. Across the nation, the achievement gap remains, even after the intense scrutinizing and punitive consequences of not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals under NCLB. Kowalski and Lasley (2009) explain the difficulty of closing the achievement gap when they stated, "One of the problems with NCLB is that it ignores realities about the nature of gaps and what is required to close gaps of various kinds (p. 77). NCLB was certain to fail at closing the achievement gap between the various subgroups being monitored and those of mainstream American children because it was not designed to address those gaps. Kowalski and Lasley (2009) state, "The failure of NCLB to recognize realities regarding all of the various gaps in distributions of achievement scores is a fatal flaw" (p. 77). Not surprisingly, after more than a decade under the NCLB Act, all states, including California, failed to meet the goal of having all children proficient or advanced by the end of the 2014–2015 school year. Whether further improvements could be made is not known as the NCLB mandates for testing in language arts and mathematics were suspended after that year. However, the likelihood of California hitting the 100% proficiency mark was not likely.

Table 1

California ELA AYP Data for 2012/2013 School Year

	% Proficient or Advanced	Met 2013 AYP Criteria
Statewide	56.6	No
Black or African American	43.4	No
American Indian or Alaska Native	47.9	No
Asian	79.4	No
Filipino	73.8	No
Hispanic or Latino	45.4	No
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	52.3	No
White	72.3	No
Two or More Races	70.1	No
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	45.1	No
English Learners	38.9	No
Students with Disabilities	34.9	No

Note: 2013 Statewide AYP Target for ELA = 89% Proficient or Advanced (California Department of Education)

The implementation of the CCSS and the discarding of the state standards used throughout the NCLB era are not in and of themselves solutions for young Americans in K–12 schools today. Ideas like those found in President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative or the *ESEA Blueprint for Reform* are couched in those of previous administrations and movements. This interview study aimed to investigate whether the roll out of the CCSS initiative, which aims to have all students ready for college or a career by the time they leave high school, was being implemented in a manner consistent with the characteristics of successful change found in the literature. This will be explored by listening to the experiences of ELA teachers, school principals, and district administrators during the CCSS implementation.

During periods of change, there are opportunities to reflect, assess, and, if necessary, improve upon the implementation approach taken by an organization. Bridges (2009) described the Neutral Zone as "an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully

operational" ("It Isn't Changes That Do You In," para.7), a concept fitting for the current transitional state of America's public school system. It can be said that this between time has been taking place since California adopted the new standards in 2010, or at various other points of the implementation, such as when the State of California passed legislation that allowed schools to opt out of the administration of its standardized testing and reporting (STAR) requirements for English and mathematics. This was done, in part, to allow LEAs to participate in pilot testing the new Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) testing system and to better prepare their students for the assessments scheduled to measure learning under the CCSS in the 2014–2015 school year. Or, it could have taken place during the 2015–2016 school year, the year LEAs were expected to fully implement the ELA CCSS within every ELA classroom. The legislation opened up a rare window of time in which LEAs were not tied down either to the mandates of NCLB or the mandates-to-come from its derivative, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In other words, the states and LEAs were entering a period of time that Bridges (2009) argued "is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves" ("It Isn't Changes That Do You In," para. 24). If done right, navigating this period of transition could have resulted in our attaining the vision set forth by the Race to the Top Initiative, the *ESEA Blueprint for Reform*, and ESEA legislation—to provide opportunity for all students in America.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reflect on the current approach that three districts were taking in their efforts to transition into the CCSS by listening to the voices of those who were intimately involved in the implementation of the initiative—district administrators,

school principals, and classroom teachers. The work of Bridges (2009) and Hall and Hord (2011) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Bridges (2009) posited that attention to transitions during the Neutral Zone allows changes to be made in the implementation process of the change initiative. These changes, he surmised, can enhance the likelihood that the initiative will have the impact the organization sought when deciding to implement the change. Hall and Hord's 10 principles for successful change were used to provide common and accepted terminology for the characteristics being observed during the change process. These terms include ideas such as *Principle One*, successful change requires learning, or *Principle Nine*, mandates can work.

By analyzing the reported experiences that key personnel have about the implementation of the CCSS, this interview study captured a picture of how the implementation took shape for each of the participating districts. Smith (2008) stated, "What we talk about tells much about ourselves, as do the frequency, intensity, and passion of those conversations" (p. 195). The implementation of an initiative as expansive as the CCSS includes key members of the organization (e.g., district and school administrators, teachers, and policy makers) who have to come together if the initiative is going to take root as planned. Fullan (2001) stated, "Deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the very few who are destined to be extraordinary" (p. 5). Now that LEAs are well into the implementation of the CCSS, acquiring the voices of the stakeholders who are closest to the educational process becomes paramount to garnering a picture that depicts whether the changes under way are the changes set out as the vision by California and the U.S. Department of Education. Bridges (2009) posited that the Neutral Zone is where an initiative succeeds or fails, to the benefit or detriment of the

organization and its members. This time period becomes an important checkpoint during which change agents take note of progress by listening to the individuals who are tasked with making the changes brought about by the initiative—in this case, the ELA CCSS.

Significance of the Study

This study was uniquely timed for the major transitions taking place in education throughout the US. In addition to taking on the nationwide adoption of the CCSS, states were rushing to transition into the new assessment systems; they were trying to find curriculum that aligns with the new standards; and they were working with various groups to develop professional training for teachers and new credentialing requirements for soon-to-be teachers. Taking a moment to reflect on the progress in the implementation of the CCSS during this time of transition was important because it presented an opportunity to reflect on the work that had been accomplished up to the time of this study in the organization's desires to reach the objectives of the initiative.

At the time of the study, there were many changes taking place in the American education system. The adoption of the CCSS by all but four states was just the tip of the iceberg of the larger change initiatives taking place. With the adoption of the CCSS, states also had to transition into a new system of student assessment, California opting to take part in the SBAC, to meet the demands of assessing students under the new requirements. Teachers had to move away from the old standards with which they were familiar and that were unique to each of the 50 states. They had to learn the substance of the new CCSS; how to best implement teaching strategies that would facilitate student mastery of the CCSS; and how to embed technology and collaboration skills not previously mandated by the standards into their daily routines. Teachers

and schools also had to walk away from the NCLB requirements that continued to be highly criticized by educators across the nation, but that had become so ingrained in all aspects of the profession. It was hard to do anything in a school without referring back to AYP data to justify doing it or spending money on it. Students' schooling experience was changing because of the adoption of the new CCSS. Parents and families had to do without the familiar progress reports that came to them every summer and explained the proficiency level of their child. City leaders had to find different ways to determine their positions on the need to improve schools within their jurisdiction. Realtors across the state had to look for something other than the treasured academic performance index (API) or Great School scores that often swayed buyers to invest in one community over another. If the academic performance outcomes of the CCSS have the same impact in the lives of Californians as did the academic performance outcomes of the California Content Standards, it behooves the American public to take steps to ensure the vision proposed by the adoption of the new CCSS becomes a reality.

Research Questions

This study is a qualitative interview study that answered the following question: What were the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district administrators during the transition to the ELA CCSS in three public school districts in the greater Los Angeles area?

The information generated by having conversations with teachers, school principals, and district administrators through the use of a semistructured interview painted a picture of the progress made toward the envisioned goal for the implementation of the CCSS at each of the districts that participated in this study. By taking this constructivist approach, the story or picture created was vetted in the experiences that each participant reported.

Theoretical Framework

The qualitative nature of this study lent itself to using the constructivist approach to create meaning out of what professionals in education were experiencing while transitioning to the CCSS. Utilizing the ideas from Bridges's (2009) change theory and Hall and Hord's (2011) 10 change principles, I utilized the reflection point or information loop during the Neutral Zone to create a picture or story of how the process of moving into the ELA CCSS was progressing for teachers, administrators, and LEAs. By focusing on the potential of Bridges's Neutral Zone to call attention to the importance and value of this time period as a checkpoint for the implementation of change, change agents might find another useful tool to utilize during times of change that are, according to Smith (2008), more likely to be superficial than substantive. Bridges (2009) argued that it is in this phase of transitioning that change agents have a key role in determining the future of the desired change initiative. For the rollout of the CCSS, it is here that educational leaders can have a drastic impact on whether the initiative moves forward in a productive manner—toward the envisioned goal of benefitting countless children across the nation—or fails to attain its potential, like so many other initiatives that have come before it. A qualitative interview study that gathers the narratives of key players in the change process is a useful tool to ascertain such information.

Research Design and Methodology

This research study was designed as a qualitative study to develop an understanding of what district administrators, school-site administrators, and teachers were experiencing as changes were taking place in their respective districts. It is through this type of research that a researcher "seeks to understand the world from the perspective of those living in it" (Hatch,

2002, p. 7). Qualitative research through a constructivist's approach allows for the participants of the study to become a part of the research, thus providing each with an opportunity to elaborate on experiences and perspectives that are not captured by other means.

Semistructured interviews, preceded by an online questionnaire, were the primary source of information for this study. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions related to the rollout of the CCSS initiative and asked about procedural information. An example of such a question was: *How long have you been aware of your district moving towards implementing the CCSS?* This part of the interview was emailed to the participants using a Google Form a week before the participant was scheduled to have the face-to-face interview with me. The face-to-face interview included questions that asked the participant to refine answers from the questionnaire and dive into the CCSS rollout experience at their district. An example of an interview question was: *At that point, was there a plan for how teachers at your school were going to implement the CCSS?* As participants expressed their experiences with the initiative's rollout, a picture began to emerge about the way the ELA CCSS rollout was taking shape in the district. Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) stated, "A good plan is nothing without effective implementation" (p. 263). LEAs were asked for documents that vocalized the vision the district had for the implementation of the LEA CCSS. The stated vision from the documents served as a blueprint for the implementation onto which the narratives were mapped.

The study focused on three school districts in the greater Los Angeles area. In each of the districts, I conducted semistructured interviews with a district-level administrator (DLA), a school principal (SP), and an ELA teacher. The 3x3 design allowed for multiple levels of comparison with survey and interview data. First, a comparison of the participants' responses

across the three districts by designated level (i.e., DLA, SP, or ELA teacher) was conducted to look for information that converged and diverged between the respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2
Research Design

District One Participants	District Two Participants	District Three Participants
D1 Administrator: 0101	D2 Administrator: 0201	D3 Administrator: 0301
D1 Principal: 0102	D2 Principal: 0202	D3 Principal: 0302
D1 Teacher: 0103	D2 Teacher: 0203	D3 Teacher: 0303

Then, a comparison of the interview data within the district was conducted, again looking into any convergence or divergence between the individuals within the district. This comparison provided insight into the participant's perspective of the change processes that had been taking shape at the different districts as well as at the different levels within a district. Furthermore, the inclusion of the three different districts, which were geographically within a 10 mile radius of each other, provided insight into how different districts, each serving different student populations, had taken on the challenge of rolling out the CCSS initiative to best suit their individual needs. See Table 3 for enrollment data at the three school districts.

Table 3

LEA Demographic Information

	D1	D2	D3	Los Angeles County	California
Number of Schools	12	27	9	2,274	9,997
District Enrollment	8,809	13,469	6,757	1,539,260	6,235,520
African American	20.9%	40.4%	16.1%	8.1%	6.0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%
Asian	2.0%	0.3%	10.4%	7.6%	8.8%
Filipino	1.6%	0.3%	1.7%	2.2%	2.5%
Hispanic or Latino	71.0%	56.9%	39.6%	65.0%	53.6%
Pacific Islander	1.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%
White	2.2%	0.3%	26.1%	14.3%	24.6%
Two or More Races	0.4%	0.3%	5.3%	1.6%	2.8%
None Reported	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%	0.6%
English Learners	33.4%	27.0%	12.5%	22.7%	22.3%
FTE Administrators	27	45	23.3	7,053	24,816.20
FTE Teachers	416	581.1	305.5	71,734.80	286,703.20
Pupil Teacher Ratio	21.2	23.2	22.1	21.5	21.7
Average Class Size	26.2	23.8	25.8	24.8	24.3
Free or Reduced Lunch	86.7%	78.3%	34.4%	65.5%	58.6%
2015 ELA SBAC (Standard Not Met)	39.0%	40.6%	15.0%	32.0%	30.0%
2015 ELA SBAC (Standard Nearly Met)	30.0%	27.0%	22.0%	26.0%	25.0%
2015 ELA SBAC (Standard Met)	23.0%	20.0%	37.0%	27.0%	28.0%
2015 ELA SBAC (Standard Exceeded)	8.0%	5.0%	26.0%	14.0%	16.0%

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Qualitative studies, in their richness of detail and perspective, present researchers with unique challenges in completing a research study. Change is a subjective experience; whereas some individuals want it, others will fight it, and people experience change differently depending

on their positionality. Lipkin (2013) discussed the importance of understanding the social aspects of change, stating, "People see things the way they want to see things, not the way the boss tells them to see things" (p. 44). Although it would be of incredible value to have a much broader and deeper pool of participants, the limitations of this study included the dissertation process and the financial backing that such an inclusive approach would require. Because I focused on three school districts in the greater Los Angeles area, external validity was something to be aware of when I interpreted the findings of the interviews. Furthermore, the nature of a rollout, like that of the CCSS makes it so that the district administrators are typically more knowledgeable of the changes that the CCSS are introducing to education than the site administrators and the teachers, since they are and have been the point persons at the district for the implementation of the rollout itself far longer than anybody else in the district, in most cases. Thus, the lack of familiarity with the standards for teachers and possibly site administrators was a limitation to be aware of when reviewing the data. That point, however, was of special interest because the dissemination of information during a change process is a key element for successful change. Another limitation of the study included the lack of an established and validated series of questions to use during the interviews with the participants. To combat the limitations of the interview questions, I worked with teachers and school and district administrators from nonparticipating districts to test the questions prior to using them with the participants of this study. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) warned program evaluators of using superficial, self-reported data to judge the successful implementation of a program. However, during transitions this information is valuable because it can be used to reflect on progress. The lack of triangulating data (e.g., student work samples or student test scores) to further elaborate on the changes that are taking place within the districts

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because of the transition to the ELA CCSS was another limitation. Although the limitations of the study are significant, the study itself holds value by opening the conversation of creating information loops by capturing the voices of those closest to schools that can serve as landmarks for progress. These information loops hold the potential to save not only money, but also to save initiative, if change leaders use them and find that there is misalignment between the vision and the reported progress from those within the organization.

I established this study with some delimitations to ensure the feasibility of the study in terms of resources and the time available for the dissertation process. I engaged three different districts to gather the data necessary for the study in an effort to garner data to triangulate across the three identified groups in the study—district administrators, school administrators, and classrooms teachers. Although I anticipated that the information from each of the participant levels might overlap somewhat, I did not anticipate it being substantive enough to provide significant triangulation for the ideas being sought in this study. Further delimitations include the one-time approach in gathering the participants' experiences. Although a more comprehensive, longitudinal approach might have provided a deeper understanding of how an initiative as massive as that of the CCSS was taking shape, the picture created by this investigative study held value in providing a insight into the need for a more involved study, or lack thereof.

I also worked under some assumptions in developing this study, the most significant of which was the assumption that each of the districts with which I was working had been actively pursuing the implementation of the CCSS with all of its staff, and that the individuals responsible for the implementation of the new CCSS perceived the changes being brought about by the new standards, as necessary. Another assumption was that there would be differences between the

reported experiences of the transition to the ELA CCSS based on the positions of the participants. Furthermore, I presumed that the districts would have different experiences from one another in the transition to the same, final destination—the full implementation of the ELA CCSS. It was important for me to investigate the validity of these assumptions, and others that might have emerged from the constructivist approach of this study, to ensure that unnecessary variables were either controlled for or addressed in the discussion.

Definitions of Key Terms

Academic performance index (API): Under NCLB, this progressive state measure was used to assess progress of individual schools and LEAs. A scale from 200 to 1000 was used, and 800 became the benchmark for schools across California (California Department of Education, 2016).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): Under NCLB, the expected gains that a school and LEA were expected to make. The measure took into account gains in STAR testing, API, and participation rates (California Department of Education, 2016).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Developed by the NGA and the CCSSO, objectives that promise to make students college and career ready (Achieve the Core, 2016).

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards: The foundational framework for the Common Core State Standards (Achieve the Core, 2016).

International benchmarking: The use of international statistical comparisons to improve upon educational practices (Achieve the Core, 2016).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA by President G. W. Bush (California Department of Education, 2016).

Local education agency (LEA): Agencies such as local school districts responsible for the educational program provided to students (California Department of Education, 2016).

Race to the Top: An initiative by the Obama administration that provided funds to states that met the requirements under the initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC): One of the two assessment consortiums contracted by the various states to develop new assessments for the CCSS (California Department of Education, 2016).

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation conforms to the traditional five-chapter dissertation format. It includes an introduction to the topic being researched in Chapter 1. That is followed by an extensive literature review in Chapter 2, which provides readers with a picture of what substantive change initiatives (i.e., the implementation of the CCSS) present to a system. The chapter provides a history of the ESEA of 1965 to establish a touchstone for the national vision of public education, a discussion of the evolution of the federal government's role in influencing public education, an overview of current U.S. academic performance as presented in international comparisons like PISA, a section that quantifies the financial investment that is public education in the US, and a discussion of organizational change that outlines the principles that can support the successful implementation of an initiative. A discussion on the methodology is presented in Chapter 3, followed by an explanation of the results of the study in Chapter 4. A discussion of the study and its findings are in Chapter 5 to bring the dissertation to a close.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heath and Heath (2007) provided their readers with insightful words when they stated, "Good ideas often have a hard time succeeding in the world" ("What Sticks?" para.18). This idea holds true for many initiatives in education that have failed to create the change they set out to make. Not many people would oppose the idea of not leaving a child behind or setting a national goal to improve America's schools by the year 2000. Sarason (1990) made similar assertions when she asked, "Have you heard anyone say it is *not* the goal of education to enable every child 'to realize his or her potential'?" (p. 2). Nonetheless, the two prior reauthorizations of the ESEA—the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act and the 2001 NCLB Act—failed to attain all of the goals that were envisioned when they were signed into law. By the turn of the century, America's schools were still being reformed, and by the 2013–2014 school year, no state in the nation met the goal of having 100% of its students achieving proficiency on state assessments. Zhao (2009) stated, "The warning that American education is broken is not new. Neither are the proposed fixes" (Chapter 2, para.1). Each of the previous iterations of the ESEA brought costly, but many would argue necessary, changes to education. Currently, the nation is again in the throes of overhauling its educational system with the adoption of the CCSS and the reauthorization of ESEA to replace NCLB, or the ESSA. But will the new CCSS and the new law fare any better than their predecessors? The answer to that question may lay in the implementation process that LEAs use, and whether they exploit untapped veins of knowledge that enhance the chances of attaining the vision set forth by change agents across the nation.

Because the nature of change is complex, the literature review for this study does two things. First, it examines organizational change theory. The literature review discusses Bridges's (2009) transition model, as it provides a comprehensive, yet malleable approach to change. Bridges's Neutral Zone represents an ideal opportunity for an organization to propel its vision forward. Bridges (2009) asserted:

> The Neutral Zone is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves. The gap between the old and the new is the time when innovation is most possible and when the organization can most easily be revitalized. ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 24)

The Neutral Zone, as described by Bridges (2009), was used to determine whether an information loop that includes those closest to the students and that occurs during the implementation of a change initiative has any potential value for change agents. To organize the participants' experiences through the change process in their respective LEA, Hall and Hord's (2011) work was used. Hall and Hord's 10 principles of change could be observed in all organizations.

Second, the literature review provides a historical snapshot of change in American schools using the ESEA as the touchstone for many of the change initiatives that have taken place in the American education system during the last 50 years. ESEA was selected as the touchstone for this study because it is heavily funded and affects the vast majority of learning institutions across the United States. This section will delve into the evolution of the federal government's involvement in public education, then discuss the cost of K–12 education, and

conclude with current results of that investment as reported by academic achievement reports, such as the 2012 PISA Report, the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the 2013 NAEP Report.

Although there are countless change initiatives that a study like this could target, the immense cost and reach of ESEA accentuates the importance of navigating the change process more constructively, especially since its enforcement is on the horizon and some key components that ESSA will require have already been put into place with President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative and the adoption of the CCSS.

Where Change Happens

America is currently in a state that William Bridges (2009) would refer to as the Neutral Zone, or "the time when the old way of doing things is gone but the new way doesn't feel comfortable yet" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 20). It is the second phase in his three-phase model of managing transitions. Bridges stated, "Getting people through the transition is essential if the change is actually to work as planned" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 2). In his book, he posited the importance of allowing people to move through the different stages of transition to ensure that the desired change takes root as planned. Hall and Hord (2011) expressed similar thoughts when they stated, "The press to make change quickly means that there is neither time to learn about and come to understand the new way nor time to grieve the loss of the old way" (p. 8). Not taking the time to navigate change properly results in a loss of fiscal and human capital. According to Bridges, "It's what has gone wrong when some highly touted change ends up costing a lot of money and producing disappointing results" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 2).

Bridges's (2009) model of transition works well for education because it does not

represent a step-by-step approach to implementing change. In its relatively simple and malleable

approach to a very complicated, psychologically taxing human experience, this model may

provide the fluidity necessary to addressing the countless human variables in an equation that

changes from state to state, district to district, and even school to school. First, Bridges

established that there is a difference between change and transition. Bridges delineated change

from transition when he describes change as "situational." On the other hand, he describes

transition as being psychological, requiring people to go through a three-phase process "as they

internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about"

("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 1). Change is an event that organizations go

through while transitions are the readjustment to the new way of doing things within the

organization, such as the everyday implementation of the strategies required to effectively utilize

the ELA CCSS, a process that is more taxing on the individual because day-to-day practices have

to change. Bridges's three-phase process includes: (a) Ending, Losing, Letting Go; (b) The

Neutral Zone; and (c) The New Beginning. In the first phase, Bridges discussed the importance

of providing members of an organization the opportunity to let go of the old. He has reminded

his readers that, for many members of the organization, the old way provided them with success.

Bridges described the third phase in his model as representing a state in which the members of an

organization have accepted the new ways of doing things and have reinvented themselves. For

this research study, the focus was on the second phase of his model. The Neutral Zone

encapsulates what the American public education system is currently experiencing in its

transition into the ELA CCSS and the reauthorized ESEA, ESSA. It is in this phase that

Bridges's theory provides educational leaders the opportunity to experiment with the change process, allowing the organization to be creative and innovative during tumultuous times.

In 2008, Smith talked about why organizations pursue change. "There is no question change can be rewarding, even joyous. Frequently we seek change and fight hard for it. We celebrate change. We mark achievements. We are in awe of progress" (p. 13). At its core, change represents the potential for improvement. It is that potential that can be lost during the Neutral Zone because it is there that leaders can "capitalize on the break in normal routines that the Neutral Zone provides to do things differently and better" (Bridges, 2009, "Using the Neutral Zone Creatively," para. 1). According to Bridges's model, a change leader can do this by establishing the need for innovation, providing members of the organization opportunities to reflect upon and improve what they do, providing professional growth in key areas, encouraging experimentation, accepting that there will be unsuccessful efforts for innovation, looking for new answers to old problems, and fighting the urge to exit this state of ambiguity prematurely. The current state of public education, in which NCLB has been left behind and the CCSS is not yet common, represents a unique opportunity in educational history to tinker with what we do in individual classrooms, schools, districts, and states to find solutions that were not possibilities under NCLB but could be possible under the CCSS if education practitioners are allowed to discover them.

Managing the Neutral Zone "is the only way to ensure that the organization comes through the change intact and that the necessary changes actually work the way that they are supposed to" (Bridges, 2009, "A Very Difficult Time," para. 5). Smith (2008) stated, "The

concept of change is intimately and inevitably linked to the idea of learning. We need to learn new ideas. We need to see things in a different way. We need to understand new perspectives" (p. 191). The Neutral Zone is where these two ideas come together. As individuals learn their new roles or become adjusted to the organization's new direction, they again become part of it and find themselves reinvented; they have reached the New Beginning—that is, of course, assuming that individuals have been permitted to "Let Go" of the old and have been led through the Neutral Zone.

Vital Elements for Change

The literature on successful change is robust. By nature, change is dynamic; it does not follow a neat and predictable linear path. It is a chaotic, tumultuous, and difficult to orchestrate (Burke, 2002; Fullan, 2001, 2010; Smith, 2008). But in that chaos, there are themes that arise as contributors to implementing change successfully. Leadership, culture, and communication are just some of the elements necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative. In education, we have ideas—sometimes really good ones. Fullan (2001) stated, "In schools, for example, the main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic piecemeal, superficially adorned projects" (p. 109). We also have an idea, sometimes too many, on how to bring about change in education, which might be why Fullan (2010) presents the case of "uncluttering" change to make it work. We have also learned that communicating during the process of change is valuable. The importance of having a strong leader during times of change, creating open lines of communication, and developing a culture within the school focused on student learning is vital to the change process.

Leadership

Fullan (2001) stated, "The single most important factor ensuring that all students meet performance goals at the site level is the leadership of the principal—leadership being defined as the 'guidance and direction of instructional improvement'" (p. 126). There are too many moving pieces in education to have successful change just happen. The literature on implementing change is unanimous in echoing the need for strong leadership to bring about the changes necessary to get to the desired goal (Hall & Hord, 2011). Heath and Heath (2010) clarified this need when they stated that change leaders have to "understand how to script the critical moves, to translate aspirations into actions" (p. 62). Furthermore, the characteristics that a successful leader embodies have many common threads. In his book *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy*, Fullan (2010) discussed nine characteristics that leaders must embody. A leader has to (a) nurture relationships, (b) understand the "implementation dip," (c) avoid "fat plans," (d) address behaviors, (e) stress communication during implementation, (f) reflect on change during the change process, (g) understand the nature of change as a journey that waxes and wanes, (h) take risks, and (i) be okay with being assertive. Heath and Heath pointed to three actions a leader must implement to have an organization make a successful "switch." They used the analogy of having an elephant that represents the emotional side of an organization's members, a rider who represents the logical side of an organization's membership, and the path that both the elephant and the rider are on. Heath and Heath argued that addressing these three key elements in the change process will result in the successful implementation of the desired initiative. Smith (2008) asserted that, in order for a leader to produce change in a school, five things must be considered: (a) instruction, (b) organization, (c) governance, (d) accountability,

and (e) culture. Shea and Solomon (2013) discussed the two aspects of change that a leader must be able to address: (a) vocalizing clear objectives and (b) understanding the culture of the organization. In all of these examples of school leadership that results in successful change, the leader has the ability to see the bigger picture, determine the future of the organization, map the course to get the organization to that destination, and manage the people of the organization so that there is progress toward meeting that desired goal. Leadership entails vision and the motivation of people to move toward a common goal.

Culture

According to DuFour and Faker (1987), "Perhaps the most essential ingredient in the creation of an excellent school is the desire of those within it to make the school excellent" (p. xxv). Leadership is not enough to get the job done. It is an important piece of bringing about change, but it is not a standalone tool. Heath and Heath (2010) made this clear when they stated, "You can cajole, influence, inspire, and motivate, but sometimes an employee would rather lose his job than move out of his comfortable routines" (p. 18). Rarely is a leader starting with a clean slate when it comes to leading an organization. Muhammad (2009) described four different types of individuals a change leader is going to encounter when he joins a new organization. He divided a school into (a) *believers,* or professionals who want to be a part of the change; (b) *tweeners,* or individuals relatively new to the profession who can be influenced by those around them; (c) *survivors,* or professionals who have been in the system for a while and "survive on a day-to-day" basis; and (d) *fundamentalists,* or those who will fight any change movement. It is important to remember that these types of individuals, labeled in a variety of ways by different researchers, make up the culture of schools. Understanding how to manage them is not only a

leadership quality—it is also an acceptance of the need to manage the system that is in place. Bridges (2009) reminded his readers, "It isn't enough to change the situation. You also have to help people make the psychological reorientation that they must make if the change is to work" ("Tell Them to Stop Dragging Their Feet," para. 2).

Communication

Heath and Heath (2007) stated, "Good ideas often have a hard time succeeding in the world" ("What Sticks," para. 18). The vision set forth by ESEA, Goals 2000, NCLB, and the Race to the Top Initiative are simply reiterations of this foundational vision for the American public school system—to promote access and opportunity for all. From mandating that all children be in school, to pushing for all children to demonstrate proficiency on standards, to the current idea of having national and internationally benchmarked standards to ensure that our youth are ready to compete in a global economy, our education system has had the right idea in mind for a long time. It was created and continues to be perpetuated as a means for our youth to attain a brighter future.

Heath and Heath (2010) stated, "What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity" (p. 15). Crystal clear directions, they posited, are the key to having individuals in the organization working together to bring about the desired changes or meet the desired goal. In the current adoption of the CCSS by states, LEAs, and teaching staff across the nation, we have started to see shifts in support of the CCSS. An EducationNext survey revealed a drop in the support for the CCSS between 2013 and 2014 (Henderson, Peterson, & West, 2015). Among the general public surveyed, support for the new CCSS went from 65% to 53%. The change in support was also visible within Republican participants, showing 57% approval in 2013 to 43% approval in

2014. Teachers lost favor with the CCSS at a jaw-dropping rate, going from 76% approval to 46% in that same year span (Henderson et al., 2015).

If the ideas are benign, for the sake of argument, why has the American education system failed to deliver on its promises? The answer could be as simple as what Heath and Heath (2007) described when they defined what they mean when they use the word "stick": "By 'stick,' we mean that your ideas are understood and remembered, and have a lasting impact—they change their audience's opinions and behavior" ("On Stickiness," para. 4). Changing these opinions and behaviors, for organizations such as schools then, might hold the promise of delivering on the evasive goals set forth in ESEA. It then becomes the responsibility of policymakers and change agents to better understand how communication unfolds during periods of change to enhance the potential of the initiatives set forth to improve the system.

Change in Organizations

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), "Change is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain" (p. 1). A Rand study wanting to investigate the impact of seed money for the long-term adoption of federally-funded programs, concluded that "the net return to the federal investment was an adoption of many innovations, the successful implementation of a few, and the long-run continuation of still fewer" (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978, p. 10). Such a finding is not unique to studies of the 1970s or American schools. Sin (2012) analyzed the adoption of the Bologna Process in Europe and found similar, diverging implementation results in the three countries in the study: England, Portugal, and Denmark. Despite vast amounts of money and a desire to implement change in education, the fact that it happens slowly, if at all, might be rooted in the notion that "an entire organization does not

change until each member has changed" (Hall & Hord, 2011, p. 9). Thus, it becomes necessary for change agents to understand the process of organizational change in order to better plan and implement initiatives that are expected to bring about a desired goal.

In addressing how to approach change in school settings, Sarason (1990) posited, "Schools are distinctive but by no means unique as complicated organizations. Insofar as changing them is concerned, they are no different in their response to change than other complicated settings" (p. 5). As unique as they can be, schools are much like any other complex organization. Heath and Heath (2010) discussed the idea of "bright spots," or small successes during tumultuous times, to celebrate the small victories that are necessary during times of uncertainty and change. The fact that schools can be studied and acted upon like other complex organizations could be considered a bright spot in that it gives educational leaders a starting point in their efforts to better understand and improve the organizations under their stewardship.

Presently, in California and across the nation, the CCSS have been adopted, instructional materials are being developed, professional development is being created and presented, and new assessments are being used to measure student learning. Any one of these changes on its own has a big impact on a school. The combination of all of these occurring at one time can be overwhelming if the process of transitioning into the new way is haphazardly approached. Educational theorists are in agreement that changing schools is a complicated endeavor (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Muhammad, 2009; Smith, 2008). Each has provided its own theory as to the best approach or its own conceptualization of implementing change. Muhammad concluded that changing schools for the better has to be rooted in managing people more effectively. Collins (2001) also voiced this when he called for leaders to get "the right people on

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the bus." Other theorists provided a more comprehensive approach to managing change. Smith (2008), for example, provided his readers with nine characteristics essential to a leader seeking to change an organization. Others saw a need for a bigger, more liquid approach to change. Systems theorists like Senge (2006) concluded that one cannot change an organization without addressing the interdependency of the various systems that affect the organization. Thus, the manner in which one organization navigates change can be completely different than that of another entity, both resulting in success, failure, or any combination of possible results. The conclusion to draw from all of these theorists was voiced best by Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) when they stated, "Anyone who tries to change something in the world, their colleagues, or themselves has a theory of how to bring about that change" (p. 1). In simply trying to determine what the best approach to initiating change is, educational leaders have their work cut out for them. On the one hand, there is the problem of having too many cooks in the kitchen. Abrahamson (2004) used the phrase *initiative overload* to discuss having too many initiatives carried out at the same time. Heath and Heath (2010) used the phrase *decision paralysis* to describe situations in which too much information leads to an individual making no decision. The phrase *this too shall pass* has been linked to teachers who have seen so many initiatives come and go at their school sites or districts that they find it difficult to become invested in new change initiatives. On the other hand, because our educational system is still seen as needing improvement, more and more ideas of how to improve it continue to flood schools and school districts.

Change theorists call for change leaders to better understand the processes that take place during times of change to then be able to utilize the process to enhance the likelihood of an initiative taking root (Bridges, 2009; Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006; Heath & Heath, 2010). This

literature review focuses on planned change, the type of change that best describes America's shift to the CCSS.

Origin of Change Initiatives

Brinkhurst, Rose, Maurice, and Ackerman (2011) stated, "Many organizations including businesses, governments, and public institutions are grappling with how to improve the sustainability of their activities, but the dynamics of how this change is achieved are not well understood" (p. 338). The literature of educational change points to what is essentially two places from which change initiatives originate: from outside of the organization and from within the organization. They can stem from top-down driven forces or bottom-up efforts. The "us versus them" dichotomy is pronounced in the literature (Blonder, Kipnis, Mamlok-Naaman, & Hofstein, 2008; Reichman & Artzi, 2012; Van Tassell, 2014). Ingram (1978) stated, "The orientation towards introducing change is the main influence on what strategies and tactics are adopted to develop and implement policy" (p. 20). Change leaders would be wise to keep in mind the origin of the change initiative that they are driving since the source of the initiative brings about specific implications to the change process for members of the organization. Owens and Valesky (2011) referenced three distinct approaches to bringing about planned organizational change. Two of the approaches are imposed from outside of the organization or are coming from the top-down: *empirical-rational strategies* and *power-coercive strategies*. The third—*normative re-educative strategies*—is an approach stemming from within or can be considered bottom-up.

An empirical-rational strategy of planned change "sees the scientific production of new knowledge and its use in daily activities as the key to planned change in education" (Owens &

Valesky, 2008, p. 174). During the 1950s, concern about Russian advances in aerospace capabilities after the successful launch of Sputnik and Sputnik 2 resulted in the development of the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC), led by Professor Jerald Zacharias of MIT (SIFEPP 2009). The program called for improving the educational outcomes of the nation's high schools by providing science teachers with a comprehensive and innovative approach to teaching physics. Zacharias's program "sought to improve instructional outcomes by creating and disseminating a carefully planned, coordinated package of curriculum, teacher training, and teaching materials for use in classrooms" (as cited in Owens & Valesky, 2008, p. 178). Rudolph (2006) noted that the PSSC would not have had the outcomes that it did if it were not for the "scientists themselves, dedicated individuals who possessed 'first-class intellect'" (p. 2). Thus, although the PSSC is an example of the potential of empirical-rational strategies for successful change, the fact that so much depended on the scientists who orchestrated the movement brings about challenges such as continuing the program after key individuals leave or move on.

The more recent NCLB Act of 2001 exemplified a power-coercive strategy model. Power-coercive strategies such as NCLB use "sanctions in order to obtain compliance from adopters" (Owens & Valesky, 2008, p. 177). These top-down approaches rarely have long-term success and, in the case of NCLB, do not provide the resources needed to implement the vision at the school level. Anderson (2007) stated, "Like P. L. 94-142 [Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975], NCLB imposes unfunded mandates on state and local education agencies" (p. 98). Schools were nevertheless required to demonstrate ever-increasing leaps in student academic performance, and the idea of tying sanctions to schools that did not meet AYP "sent shockwaves through the U.S. public school system" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 9). NCLB

changed the educational landscape nationwide. Its goal of having all students proficient by the 2013–2014 school year was not met by any state since the law was abandoned nationwide during that school year (NCLB, 2001). Power coercive strategies continued to be used because "America's economic and political systems are based on power-coercive strategies and are usually accepted without question" (Buchanan & Midgette, 1997, p. 18).

Normative re-educative strategies call for change initiatives to target the culture of an organization. Normative re-educative strategies for change can also be described as organizational self-renewal or organizational development. Ingram (1978) stated, "Therefore, change will occur only if those involved change their normative orientations to the old practices and become committed to new ones" (p. 21). The need to change an individual's actions and the culture of an organization to enhance the possibility of successful change is well established in the literature (Bridges, 2009; Fullan, 2010; Heath & Heath, 2007). It presents very unique problems that change leaders must overcome. Literature on implementing change calls for the use of normative re-educative strategies as a beneficial approach to bringing about successful change because it "emphasizes changes in a target's values, skills, and relationships" (Cummings, 2008, p. 70). This strategy is fitting of the current changes in education that require educators to change what they have been doing in classrooms under NCLB.

The 10 Principles of Change

The manner in which change is approached can vary wildly. Heath and Heath (2007) voiced a need to focus on the message that is conveyed to the organization, while Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) included a number of theorists in their book, each of whom posited the need for a number of finite characteristics to be in place to bring about successful change. This

literature review utilized the work of Hall and Hord (2011), which posited 10 universally

observable principles of change. The 10 principles that Hall and Hord presented are: (a) change

is learning; (b) change is a process, not an event; (c) the school is the principal unit of change;

(d) organizations adopt change, individuals implement change; (e) interventions are key to the

success of the change process; (f) appropriate interventions reduce resistance to change; (g)

administrator leadership is essential to long-term success; (h) facilitating change is a team effort;

(i) mandates can work; and (j) the context influences the process of learning and change.

Change is Learning

According to Smith (2008), "The concept of change is intimately and inevitably linked to

the idea of learning. We need to learn new ideas. We need to see things in a different way. We

need to understand new perspectives" (p. 191). A key component of change is the need to do

something different. In the case of school systems, that shift usually requires changing something

that was learned and practiced on the job for some time. Bridges (2009) talked about the

importance of giving members of an organization the time to "Let Go." He discussed a fact that

many change leaders overlook: that of people defining themselves through what they do, because

what they do has made them successful and has given them an identity. He further posited that

the fact that there is a shift in the direction the school or organization is going to move in does

not, in and of itself, engender a desire to embrace the change. Hargreaves and Fullan (2010)

stated, "There are no policies that can improve schools if the people in them are not armed with

the knowledge and skills they need" (p. 63). Thus, simply announcing that things will be

different is not enough for members of an organization to start acting differently. Members of a

school must be given the opportunity to learn the new way of doing things. Teachers, in

particular, are vulnerable to wanting to maintain the status quo because they are at times overwhelmed with the way things are currently done. Muhammad (2009) stated, "Expecting people with very little professional development and growth opportunities to make critical decisions on important issues while simply trying to survive is not a good way to encourage change" (p. 94). Fullan (2010) has expressed a belief that a change leader improves an organization through capacity building—the act of improving the organization's capabilities through the hiring process and through continuous learning for members of the organization. Fullan et al. (2006) stated, "In the past decade, it has become a given that any major reform initiative must be accompanied by investments in professional development" (p. 22). The investment required in developing the professionals who will ultimately drive the change initiative is only part of what is necessary. Change leaders also need to understand the learning curve that is present when members of an organization adopt a new skillset. To alleviate the stress associated with a learning curve that can sometimes begin with promising gains followed by dramatic slow-down, it is important to make the members of the organization aware that the stress is normal and expected. Fullan (2010) stated, "New skills and understandings require a learning curve. Once we brought this out in the open, a lot of people immediately felt better to know that it is normal and everyone goes through it" (p. 21). Kezar (2013) highlighted this point when she described the process by which teachers in her study gained a deeper understanding of the use of interdisciplinary (ID) approaches. She stated, "As faculty began to offer ID courses, they often encountered challenges such as students not being open to a new way of teaching and through discussion of strategies and challenges in *brainstorming groups,* they began to understand ID work more deeply" (Kezar, 2013, p. 771). Ingram (1978) stated, "Change will

occur only if those involved change their normative orientations to the old practices and become committed to the new ones" (p. 21). Thus, during change, learning and acceptance is key to successful transition.

Change is a Process, Not an Event

Buchanan and Midgette (1997) stressed, "Change is a long and ongoing process" (p. 22). Fullan (2001) stated, "Change cannot be managed. It can be understood and perhaps led, but it cannot be controlled" (p. 33). Educational researchers have provided their interpretation of how to understand change. Heath and Heath (2010) called for change leaders to direct the rider (a person's intellectual side), to motivate the elephant (a person's emotional side), and to shape the path (have a clear plan to get to the desired goal). Muhammad (2009) stressed the importance of shaping the culture of school cultures through an understanding of the four different types of professionals on a site—believers, tweeners, survivors, and fundamentalists. Each of these four types of individuals requires a different approach and varying amounts of time invested in them to embrace the new direction of the organization. Bridges (2009) distinguished between change and transition by describing the latter as a process that takes time and should be navigated carefully. He posited that most organizations

> pay no attention to endings, don't acknowledge the Neutral Zone (and try to avoid it), and
> do nothing to help people make a fresh, new beginning, even as they trumpet the changes.
> Then they wonder why their people have so much difficulty with change. (Bridges, 2009,
> "It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 27)

In navigating a transitional period, it is also important to understand the natural learning curve that is being experienced by those who are being asked to change what they do. Change will not

just happen, individuals will experience it more like a spectrum of events—not one event. Fullan (2010) talked about "honoring the implementation dip" when he discussed the natural progression of the change process within an organization. The implementation dip is the natural learning dip that is visible within an organization when an initiative has success at first, but then hits a plateau—at times making the initiative seem like it is not working. The act of stating a new direction does not ensure that a change initiative will take root. Change leaders who take the time to understand the process of change will also recognize that the messages that organizational leaders convey are not always the same messages heard by members in their organizations. Messages of change move through individual and organizational filters that then have an impact on how the change initiative is interpreted and acted upon. In her study on how England, Portugal, and Denmark understood and implemented the Bologna Process, and how that understanding led to diverging results after implementation, Sin (2012) advised readers that "policy, therefore travels, and is modified, both downward and upwards" (p. 393).

By understanding change as a process rather than an event that occurs to organizations, change leaders are better equipped to manage the difficulties that arise from the changes taking place. Bridges (2009) noted, "Those changes [the big ones] trigger thousands of smaller changes, all of which require people to stop doing things an old way—which earned them rewards, gave them the satisfaction that comes from doing things 'right,' and got them the results that made them feel successful—and try new and unfamiliar behaviors" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 12). Understanding change in this manner is complicated, but the complexities of change are well documented in the literature that no longer describes it as a linear process, but rather a dynamic state of chaos. Change leaders should not try to avoid change. They should

strive to master it. In describing the value of having a firm understanding of the change process, Fullan (2010) stated, "Motion leaders not only learn so much about the essence of change but also become comfortable, even excited, about heading into the next change situation" (p. 75).

The School is the Principal Unit of Change

Ben Levin stated, "If we have learned anything about large-scale improvement in education since the 1980s, it is that reforms done to the system do not have the desired effects" (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 259). Even with that knowledge, most of the major changes taking place in education today have their origins at the state or federal level. This creates a problem for change agents who are urged to promote the new ideas, but do not have a complete understanding of how to engage their personnel in the tasks necessary to make the new way their way. Elmore (2000) stated, "Organizations that improve do so because they create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving, and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile" (p. 25). These organizations are successful because they tap into the "teachers [who] are the experts in their school, and they make professional decisions based on their knowledge" (Cody, 2013, p. 70). Not to include the teachers as the primary source of information when it comes to increasing student learning is akin to not using one's best runner in a race. Van Tassell (2014) described the value of the teacher when she stated:

> The vast majority of teachers are doing their absolute best, every day, to educate students. This makes us the solution to many of the problems of public education because we know our students best and spend the most time with them. (p. 78)

The school, and in more specific terms, the teachers and the students, have to be the focus of all change initiatives because at the end, they are the ones being affected. Fullan (2001) stated, "In the long run, however, effectiveness depends on developing internal commitment in which the ideas and intrinsic motivation of the vast majority of organizational members become creative" (p. 46). When analyzing whether a change initiative has in fact taken root, it is paramount that teachers become the source of those metrics. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) stated, "An assessment of the extent of continuation [of the programs started with federal seed money] therefore must encompass the decisions and actions of both the district and the classroom teacher" (p. 6).

Organizations Adopt Change—Individuals Implement Change

It is important to understand who holds the key to the successful implementation of any initiative. Those who are asked to change the most will ultimately determine how successful a change effort will be. DuFour and Eaker (1987) stated, "Perhaps the most essential ingredient in the creation of an excellent school is the desire of those within it to make the school excellent" (p. xxv). Pascale Millemann, and Gioja (2000) supported that idea when they stated:

> The top can't possibly have all of the answers. The leaders provide the vision and are the
> context setters, but the actual solutions about how best to meet the challenges of the
> moment—those thousands of strategic challenges encountered everyday—have to be
> made by the people closest to the action. (as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 115)

Cody (2013) called for teachers to be the "primary voices at the table in discussion about educational reform" (p. 71). Woodland, Barry, and Roohr (2014) stated, "Diffusion of innovation theory posits that social relationships support and impede contagion—that is, the quality, depth,

type, and rate of innovation spread throughout a network of actors" (p. 114). Teachers are a valuable source of insight for what will and what will not work in the classroom, and they are also valuable allies in a change agent's efforts to initiate a change. Paciotto and Delaney-Barmann (2011) found that, in Illinois, teachers working around the state's language policy (LP) were able to interpret the law in a way that allowed them to better serve their English language learner students. They wrote, "The ambiguity of many state LP texts leaves spaces open for multilayered and unpredictable LP interpretations by individual stakeholders at the local level" (Paciotto & Delany-Barmann, p. 223). Changing the focus of an implementation from the organization adopting a change to teachers adopting the change makes the change more tangible, and thus more likely that teachers will adopt behaviors that will result in the initiative taking root.

Interventions are Key to the Success of the Change Process

In guiding an organization through the change process, organizations have to be armed with the tools that will allow them to enhance the chances that the change initiative will survive the transitional period. Douglas Reeves asserted, "Behavior, communication, and the networks that sustain them change the world" (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 252). Thus, it is beneficial for an organization going through the change process to establish or strengthen procedures that support the new, desired behaviors, facilitate communication, and allow members of the organization to create connections or networks that enable streamlined access to needed knowledge or resources.

One important tool for organizations is a clear vision of where they want to go. Having a clear destination for the organization is vital for member buy-in and coherent implementation.

DuFour and Eaker (1987) voiced the value of a vision when they stated, "It is the shared vision that provides the organization with a sense of purpose, direction, and ideal future state" (p. 5). That vision informs the decisions of how to best approach the initiative.

While the vision is important, other researchers voiced the importance of communication during the implementation stages of the transition. Fullan (2010) stated, "Communication during implementation is far more important than communication prior to implementation" (p. 26). This is due to the dynamic reality of the change process that calls for changes to the plan as it is unfolding during implementation. Heath and Heath (2007) made reference to the distinction between the vision and the on-going dialogue during implementation when they discussed the idea of the Commander's Intent, a liquid state during implementation that allows changes to the original plan t in order to ensure the goal of accomplishing the mission. Heath and Heath (2007) stated, "Commander's Intent manages to align the behavior of soldiers at all levels without requiring play-by-play instructions from their leaders" ("Simple," para. 10).

The value of having buy-in or support from the bottom is supported in the literature in part because it allows organizational members to make the changes. For example, Fullan (2001) described the importance of members of an organization struggling through the daunting change process, stating, "Unsettling processes provide the best route to greater all-around coherence. In other words, the most powerful coherence is a function of having had worked through the ambiguities and complexities of hard to solve problems" (p. 116). This can present a problem to organizations that are not equipped with the right tools to handle transitions. In discussing the failed acquisition of Rollerblade by Benetton, Bridges (2009) summarized what many failed efforts experience, "The company neither offered nor acknowledged the need for any support

during the difficult Neutral Zone, and their notion of help in making a new beginning was new

titles and higher performance targets" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 9). Thus, the

delicate balance between perseverance and neglect, as well as the need for a clear vision,

constant communication, and countless other change strategies should be housed within the

organization *prior to* initiating change. By doing so, when problems arise during

implementation, the organization can become stronger and more resolute in its desire to attain

the hoped-for result, as opposed to quitting on the initiative or giving it a half-hearted effort.

Appropriate Interventions Reduce Resistance to Change

Heath and Heath (2010) discussed three surprises of change: (a) people problems are

often situational problems, (b) what looks like laziness is often exhaustion, and (c) what looks

like resistance is often lack of clarity. Fullan (2010) discussed excitement as a fragile source of

energy when implementing a change initiative. He advised that true excitement comes from real

progress and accomplishments. If organizations want to move through the change process

successfully, they have to provide the necessary interventions to address the needs of members

so that they can embrace the change. Those interventions can be practices that empower

members of the organization. In schools for example, having leaders who understand shared-

governance or who exercise distributive leadership can enhance the chances that teachers will

buy into and help shape the change initiative. In analyzing LPs in Illinois, Paciotto and Delaney-

Barmann (2011) stated, "The study of how power is distributed among local policy makers and

how educators can take ownership of the policy process becomes central in unveiling processes

of (un)democratic LP enactment from the bottom" (p. 223). Sin (2012) discussed the reasons

why the three participating countries took up the Bologna Process differently as stemming from a "context of loose policy" (p. 400). Sin (2012) stated:

> It has therefore drawn attention to the power of bottom-up forces, to the interplay between agency and structure and to the superiority, in a context of loose policy, of the former over the latter, thus exposing the key role of academic priorities and agendas in the implementation of Bologna. (p. 400)

To better manage the transitional period that unfolds during change, it is vital to understand the process and the people that it involves. This helps in being able to deliver the necessary interventions to the right people at the right time. Bridges (2009) suggested that leaders create a hierarchy of actions to be taken. This list should consist of actions that "need to be taken right now" to "No! Don't do this!" By taking an active look at the how the members of one's organization are adopting an initiative, change leaders can tailor the interventions so that resistance is minimized. With the minimizing of resistance by those who are to implement the change, transitioning into the new way becomes more attainable.

Administrator Leadership is Essential to Long-Term Success

Because leaders play a key role in the direction a school moves, "change without leadership has no chance of sustainability" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 33). Fullan (2001) explained this by saying, "Change leaders work at changing the context, helping create new settings conducive to learning, and sharing that learning" (p. 79). Leaders play a crucial role in transitioning successfully.

According to Heath and Heath (2010), a leader must be able to do three things: (a) direct the rider (with crystal clear directions), (b) motivate the elephant (engage people's emotions),

and (c) shape the path (change the situation or environment). DuFour and Eaker (1987) proposed a more direct approach to leading a school improvement plan: determining where the organization is now and where it wants to be, followed by close monitoring of the progress. Leaders do a lot to move their school in one direction or another. They manage countless variables and make them work together seamlessly or make such a mess of things that their tenure is cut short because of the frustrations imposed on staff and students by their inability to manage these interdependent variables. In distinguishing between effective and ineffective leaders, Douglas Reeves stated, "Even when organizations have the same budget, clientele, regulatory environment, physical facilities, infrastructure, and, in economic terms, 'externalities,' leadership makes a difference in organizational performance" (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 243).

One of the standards for school leadership in the state of California is the need for school leaders to ensure student learning. Fullan (2001) paralleled that idea when he wrote, "The single most important factor ensuring that all students meet performance goals at the site level is the leadership of the principal—leadership being defined as the guidance and direction of instructional improvement" (p. 126). School leaders must be able to promote the vision of the school, the district, the state, and the Union. They do this by taking "multiple opportunities to communicate and refine the vision in relation to concrete implementation and of the implementation strategy itself" (Fullan, 2010, p. 26). Many times, school leaders are asked to implement change in settings that do not necessarily want to change. They are asked to shape school cultures and school climates that require certain interpersonal skills. For example, cultural change "requires leaders adept at gaining cooperation and skilled in the arts of diplomacy,

salesmanship, patience, endurance, and encouragement" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 12). Change

leaders learn to create change by weaving new behaviors into current practice. In her article

discussing sense making (a process of meaning construction and rethinking of existing

understandings) and sense giving (sharing new understanding) in the transformational change

process at colleges and universities, Kezar (2013) stated, "On campuses that accomplished

transformational change, compared to those that did not, leaders helped create sense making

through their strategic actions, and they intentionally established sense making mechanisms like

roundtables" (p. 764). Yet another skill school leaders must master is understanding the

organization and organizational members who are a part of their team. To maximize the potential

of the organization, reading people and their abilities is important. In their work analyzing

schools' use of social network analysis (SNA), Woodland et al. (2014) stated that school leaders

could use SNA "to configure teacher teams to intentionally increase diffusion of knowledge and

bring instructional innovation to scale" (p. 139). They posited, "SNA can be an important tool in

a leader's arsenal for understanding and leveraging the social relationships that support and

restrain instructional coherence and the quality and pace of school reform initiatives" (Woodland

et al., p. 142). Tapping into talent is something that change agents are to strive for: "They must

be willing to cede some of their authority to faculty members, who after all are the experts when

it comes to academic matters" (Jenkins & Jensen, 2010, p. 25). DuFour and Eaker (1987) stated,

"Leaders monitor what they value most" (p. 44). In schools, leaders must monitor many

interdependent pieces that, when done right, lead to desired surges within the school.

Facilitating Change is a Team Effort

Fullan et al. (2006) stated, "Coherence between the multiple levels of schooling—the classroom, the school, and the larger system (e.g. district, state, and federal jurisdictions)—is an important precondition for successful school reform" (p. 27). There is an old proverb that says it takes a village to raise a child. In our educational system, the village is huge; it includes stakeholders from individual school sites to individuals in Congress and the presidency. At times, having such a huge village is a good thing because it brings in more resources and varying perspectives. At other times, however, it becomes problematic because individual stakeholders have individual and group agendas they are trying to push, which complicates the manner in which schools adopt change. All of the stakeholders must work together because "changes of any sort—even though they may be justified in economic or technological terms—finally succeed or fail on the basis of whether the people affected do things differently" (Bridges, 2009, "It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 10). An example of diverging possibilities can be seen in the manner that the Bologna Process was adopted by England, Denmark, and Portugal. Sin (2012) stated, "It is therefore worth noting how Bologna, despite its prevalent interpretation as a structure, is decoded differently by academics in the three countries and leads to radically different attitudes and responses" (p. 401). Thus, the varying perspectives and willingness to work together of different individuals or groups of individuals impact how initiatives take root.

Working as a team also entails bringing all members of the organization to some common level of understanding of the objective. Kezar (2013) found that "teams that made the most progress first had to develop common understandings" (p. 768). Change leaders engage in a type of capacity-building approach with their teams when it comes to implementing change. For

example, Douglas Reeves asserted, "Networks are more effective than hierarchy when the organization requires significant and profound change" (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 244). This could be the case because of the number of active participants within the organization who are working toward attaining the desired change—as opposed to the passive approach that can be taken if members of an organization—are being told what they have to do. In her work with institutions of higher learning, Kezar (2012) discussed the interrelationship between administrators and faculty pushing a grassroots effort and used the term *convergence*, defined as "the joining of efforts between grassroots leaders and those in positions of authority" (p. 726). The success of the grassroots efforts depended on the ability of the leaders and faculty to trust one another and allow for the ideas of the efforts to stay true to the original intentions of the faculty—demonstrating the interdependency between administrators and faculty. In successful cases, "Faculty who were resistant had more confidence if they knew that the learning outcomes were going to be measured by the institution and chairs would be willing to provide additional resources" (Kezar, 2013, p. 770). Change entails building relationships—Fullan (2001, 2010), and Smith (2008) expressed this in their writing. These relationships become the foundation to the teamwork that must take place if an initiative stands any chance at surviving the implementation stage of the process.

Mandates Can Work

The notion that change can only be successful if it has grassroots, bottom-up origins is misleading. Sir Michael Barber discussed three paradigms for large-scale public service: (a) command and control, (b) quasi-markets, and (c) devolution and transparency (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). The paradigm of command and control "involves top-down

management approaches and conveys at least an impression of government taking charge" (p. 73). Barber suggested that each of the paradigms is useful and appropriate for specific circumstances. Fullan (2010) posited that it is acceptable for leaders to be assertive because "leadership is a mixture of authority and democracy" (p. 30). He asserted that leaders could be successfully assertive when they had built relationships, had good ideas, and when they had empowered people to partake in the change process. Barber asserted that change leaders have to be able to distinguish when and where to use each of the three paradigms that he discussed (as cited in Hargreaves and Fullan, 2009). Even laws that are spoken poorly of because of their top-down approach, such as the NCLB Act of 2001, demonstrate how mandates are successful. Anderson (2007) stated, "Supporters of [NCLB] have portrayed its subgroup accountability requirements as a continuation of the federal role in protecting the civil rights of children with disabilities, English language learners, and disadvantaged children" (p. 98). Fullan (2001) discussed England's Literacy and Numeracy Plan, which called for "coercive and pacesetting" elements, which, although contradictory to research, created the necessary push to get the initiative off the ground. Other benefits of orchestrating a mandate approach to change can be political or financial. In the US, "There was a respectably conservative argument for the dramatic increase of federal authority under NCLB: Mandatory testing is the only way to make sure the government does not continue wasting money on low-performing public schools" (Anderson, 2007, p. 86). Other researchers acknowledged the benefits of top-down leadership because it does provide certain benefits. For example, Kotter (1996) established an eight-step process for top-down transformation: (a) establish a sense of urgency, (b) create a guiding coalition, (c) develop a vision and strategy, (d) communicate the change vision, (e) empower a broad-based

action, (f) generate short-term wins, (g) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (h) anchor new approaches in the culture. Although described as top-down, many of the strategies that Kotter discussed are also characteristics of a broader and more democratic approach to change.

Context Influences the Process of Learning and Change

Context is important when planning for change. According to Woodland et al. (2014), "The structure and attributes of the relationships among individuals and groups within dynamic, network-based social systems are of increasing importance to school reformers" (p. 114). Educational reformers have learned that the context of the culture in which practices are embedded is hard to change. When a reformer does have success, too often the reform diminishes rapidly after that energetic leader leaves the school site. Fullan (2001) voiced a similar idea when he stated, "The need to have different strategies for different circumstances explains why we cannot generalize from case studies of success" (p. 47). The fact that there are many moving parts to any single change effort complicates a change agent's ability to initiate and maintain any initiative, even if it is a positive one. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) supported this idea when they stated, "The difference between success and failure depended primarily on how school districts implemented their project" (p. vi). The adoption of the Bologna Process further exemplifies the complexity of a school's culture in that the process itself is very clearly spelled out and understood by those involved in the project, "The agents' reinterpretation of the 'structure' Bologna results in outcomes which are closer or more remote to the original intentions of the initiative, depending on contextual traditions, beliefs, priorities and constraints" (Sin, 2012, p. 393). Muhammad (2009) asserted that one could battle the difficulties of the

established culture by being able to identify the different types of individuals within a staff. Whereas tweeners (i.e., newcomers trying to find their role in the organization) need to be developed and supported, some of the fundamentalists (i.e., established members whose identity has been solidified in the organization and who at times stand in the way of progress) need to be ushered out of the profession. However, Buchanan and Midgette (1997) contended,, "Replacing personnel will not eliminate this difficulty as it is generally the societal and cultural norms that need changing" (p. 17). A more successful approach to addressing the needs of the cultural context in which change agent finds himself might be that of building the organizational capacity. Fullan (2010) stated, "At the beginning of a new change process, you need to become more consistent about the new way of doing things" (p. 56). Heath and Heath (2010) made a similar claim when they stated that crystal clear directions of what is expected is necessary if members of an organization are going to make the *Switch*.

Summary

The academic literature is clear on the topic of change—it is not easy. The fact that it is not easy can clearly be seen in the lackluster success rate of change initiatives attempted in schools across the nation throughout history. To further complicate the matter, change is expensive. President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative alone cost taxpayers $4.35 billion to, besides other things, get the CCSS in as many states as possible. These facts, however, should not discourage change agents who want to see the promises of legislation like that of ESEA attained for the benefit of individual students and the nation as a whole. Change agents who understand the change process and who can master the intricacies of juggling the many moving parts involved in the change process can provide invaluable leadership to schools, districts,

states, and the federal government. As the nation moves deeper into the implementation of the CCSS and all the changes associated with that move, including the new accountability requisites of ESSA, leaders who can stay true to the vision set forth in the current transition period hold the potential of saving the American public vast sums of money while fulfilling the promise that schools will prepare students for a future to compete both domestically and internationally.

Change in Education

In her book *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work*, Darling-Hammond (1997) stated, "It might be said that Americans are always fixing their schools" (p. 22). When one considers the sheer number of changes that have been made to the educational landscape since the enactment of ESEA in 1965, one is compelled to agree with her. The extensive efforts to fix our schools are partly rooted in wanting to make our school system work for all students through legislation like ESEA and in part to address the shortcomings of our students as their performance is contrasted with their international peers in recurring reports, such as those from PISA and TIMS. Although educational settings seem to always be changing or under repair, the outcomes of the educational process do not always reflect those efforts. Smith (2008) stated:

> Despite reports that have complained about the Unites States being a 'nation at risk' or initiatives that feel compelled to remind us that 'no child should be left behind,' many American schools just coast along, doing what they have always done. (p. 5)

Although there have been many efforts to change education since ESEA in 1965, the benefits of those initiatives—or lack thereof—are debated passionately. The American public feels that schools need to do a better job at educating students. A 2014 survey by EducationNext asked the

public to grade our nation's public schools: only 3% of the public gave the nation's public schools an A, 17% gave them a B, 57% assigned a C, 19% a D, and 6% gave public schools an F (Education Next, 2014). Fullan et al. (2006) stated:

> We are left with a rather discouraging picture: despite scads of money, the use of the best expertise to design and put into place strategies most likely to succeed, and the political will to stay the course, no one has yet cracked the classroom code leading to better instruction for all. (p. 12)

As ideas on how to improve education (e.g., the implementation of the CCSS) continue to pour into education, Fullan (2001) stated, "The main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic piecemeal, superficially adorned projects" (p. 109). This should worry educational stakeholders who want to improve education without the revolving cost of change initiatives that fail to bring about those results.

The fact that our efforts to improve schools have not always panned out the way that change leaders have envisioned is not necessarily a sign of failure. To the contrary, everything that we have done and what we continue to do is simply the messy process that is change. Fullan (2001) stated, "A culture of change consists of great rapidity and nonlinearity on the one hand and equally great potential for creative breakthroughs on the other" (p. 31). Smith (2008) described the schizophrenic nature of our educational system when he pointed out its dichotomous nature. He described it as an environment where "schools need to change, but they also need to continue doing what they are doing" (p. 27). Smith continued by stating, "Change is good, but it is also resisted" (p. 27). He described our education system as an environment where "teachers must do their job, but they are also asked to change what they do," and leaders have to

"maintain the status quo, but they have to also be visionaries" (Smith, 2008, p. 27). This seemingly contradictory reality can only exist because the institution of public education is first and foremost a human endeavor. Muhammad (2009) summarized the complexity of school systems and change when he stated, "The interaction of social, economic, parental, and political forces with the experiences and worldviews of educators and students creates a complex school culture that is difficult to transform" (p. 28). Thus, when change is initiated, it is an emotional rollercoaster where some want to be in the front cart, others want the back, and many would rather not be on it at all. Somehow, in order to be successful in the process, all of these people have to come together and make the changes necessary to bring forth that new and improved existence. Is it surprising, then, that change initiatives continuously fall short of their envisioned proposals?

Political, social, economic, and psychological forces influence education. These forces are further influenced by the individuals who play a role in education, everyone from the President of the United States to the five-year-olds beginning school for the first time every fall. An opportunity like the one American educational professionals have at hand, a time in which the heavy-handed expectations of NCLB are no longer in place and the new parameters of its successor have yet to be set, is in fact a rare opportunity for educators to exercise their creativity and find solutions to problems that continue to plague their individual school or district.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

The federal government has influenced public education quite successfully through the funding of programs that align with the political agendas of different presidents (e.g., Bush's NCLB Act, 2001), congressional leaders (e.g., Serviceman's Readjustment Act or G.I. Bill of

Rights, 1944), or judicial orders (e.g., Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas, 1954).

For that reason, the analysis of this study will be rooted in the on-going changes that stem from

the growing influence of the ESEA, "the primary source of federal K-12 support" (U.S.

Department of Education, 2005, p. 1).

Education in the United States is an interesting entity—one of national concern, under

state control. The 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states, "The powers not delegated to

the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States

respectively, or to the people." This division of power placed control of education in the hands of

the individual states. Anderson (2007) stated, "Throughout most of the nation's history, the

federal government was not expected to play a major role regulating or directly financing

schools" (p. 1). This check on power has been both a safeguard for state and local governments'

right to chart the course of education within their jurisdictions while being an obstruction to

national education goals. This, however, has not stopped the federal government from increasing

its influence in the direction public education takes. For example, the 1957 federal policy paper

titled *Education in Russia* called on the U.S. education system to cultivate academic excellence

to win "the race to space" (SIFEPP, 2009, pp. 12–13). With the Russian's successful launch of

Sputnik and Sputnik 2, the national sentiment was that of being in a race to stay ahead of Russia.

With an urgency to improve educational outcomes, Congress passed the National Defense

Education Act (NDEA) to assist schools in producing more scientists and engineers who would

ensure America's standing as a global leader. During the 1950s, the Cold War was front and

center, but by the 1960s, civil rights and the war on poverty drove educational policy.

Passed in 1965 under the Johnson administration, ESEA provided funding to LEAs that

served underprivileged children. The State's Impact on Federal Education Policy Project

(SIFEPP, 2009) stated, "The main stipulation underlying the ESEA was that schools receiving

federal grants had to help children overcome the effects that poverty had on learning" (p. 18). At

the bill's signing, President Johnson stated that the new law would help "five million children of

poor families overcome their greatest barrier to progress: poverty" (socialwelfarehistory.com).

No longer were the children of poor families to be ignored; Title I funds under ESEA provided

LEAs with money to address the needs of these students. Lareau (2011) wrote, "Studies have

demonstrated that parents' social structural location has profound implications for their

children's life chances" ("Inequality," para. 5). LEAs in need of funds agreed to take the money

that came with few if any strings attached. By creating a way for LEAs and states to secure funds

that had not existed before, the federal government changed the way that these bodies worked.

"In order to secure as much ESEA money as possible, school districts throughout the country

implemented major organizational changes" (State's Impact on Federal Education Policy Project

[SIFEPP], 2009, p. 18). This seminal encroachment of the federal government into public

education—not without controversy and opposition—established a road for the federal

government to influence the direction of public schooling. In fact, ESEA can be seen as

President Johnson's coup de grâce on the maladies caused by poverty in his War on Poverty in

the late 1960s. The ideas behind ESEA and other legislative acts to support students with

disabilities, students of low socioeconomic status, and migrant students were intended to solve

the problems that these students faced in schools, giving them new opportunities to succeed. For

many Americans, "education has traditionally been viewed as the best route for social mobility" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 5).

Shortly after ESEA was signed into law, its limitations were visible in the enactment of amendments to the law, the morphing of its intentions, and the manner in which those intentions were to be carried out. Increasing public concern over immigration and desegregation, as well as the inappropriate use of Title I funds in reports, such as *Title I of ESEA: Is It Helping Poor Children?* in 1969 and Coleman's (1966) report *Equality of Educational Opportunity,* raised questions about the use of federal money for unproven approaches to improve the educational outcomes of disenfranchised students. The goals of ESEA, combined with numerous reports critiquing it and the changing social perception of public education, due in some part to the growing cost of public school funding, fueled a desire to link funding and student achievement. As a response to these critiques, the Nixon administration created the NAEP to "track variations and fluctuations in student achievement throughout the country over time" (SIFEPP, 2009, p. 25). The new idea of linking funds to accountability would take some time before it appeared as mandates in ESEA legislation, but as noted by SIFEPP (2009), "Certain policy ideas must 'incubate' and evolve before they are ready to hatch in politically acceptable form at some later date" (p. 14). ESEA was created to help LEAs support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The social equality ideals of ESEA remained prominent until the 1980s, when the direction of federal support enveloped a sense of global competitiveness coupled with the education of all children.

A Nation at Risk and Beyond

"Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (Gardner et al., 1983, p. 9). The opening to what has become a very influential government report discussing the state of America's educational system continues to resonate today. In their book *Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence*, DuFour and Eaker (1987) referenced the influence of *A Nation at Risk* when they stated, "Future historians will certainly point to 1983 as the year in which national attention was focused, once again, on the plight of U.S. public schools" (p. xiii). *A Nation at Risk* created a sense of urgency in the American psyche to take an active approach in securing America's future as the global leader in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation. Zhao (2009) described this national sentiment when he stated, "The sense of an economic threat from other countries has long been associated with the sense that the American education system is much inferior to those of its foreign competitors" ("Closing the Achievement Gap," para. 4). The publication of that pamphlet changed the American education system drastically. According to Urban and Wagoner (2014), "The net effect of the state school reforms that followed publication and the arguments in *A Nation at Risk* imposed more regulations on local schools than federal educational officials had ever contemplated" (p. 327).

A Nation at Risk was not the first federal report on education to call attention to a perceived decline in academic achievement of our children. *A Nation at Risk* became one of the reports that forced the American people to acknowledge that their investment in the nation's future through federal funding was not having the outcome that was promised to them. Urban and Wagoner (2014) stated, "Despite increased federal commitment to educational programs for

the poor, there was little hard evidence that federal spending had produced substantial improvement in the educational accomplishments of poor children" (p. 298). Reports like those from the RAND Corporation and Berman and McLaughlin (1978) revealed that the federal investments for school improvement programs through seed money was having little if any long-term effect on the schools that received funds. By the early 1980s, *A Nation at Risk* reiterated that America was not at the forefront of global standings as it had been in the past. The report declared that America had allowed gains made during the Sputnik challenge to erode.

Other reports also called attention to the lack of progress in public education. Coleman's (1966) study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity,* found that neither integration nor compensatory education made a difference in the academic outputs of disadvantaged students. By the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the American public seemed more willing to accept an increase in accountability for federal funds that were not having the desired effect. America 2000 expressed this sentiment when it voiced, "The schools were in need of a revolution, school people would have to be held accountable for their results" (Urban & Wagoner, 2014, p. 324). *A Nation at Risk* married the ideas of the past, the societal need to provide education to all, to the reality that schools were not succeeding when it stated:

> If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in the world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our education system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. (Gardner et al., p. 10)

Later, the report stated, "More and more young people emerge from high school ready neither for college nor for work" (Gardner et al., p. 13). The report called attention to four areas of concern

that could be addressed to alleviate the failures of public education: (a) content, (b) student expectations, (c) time spent in school, and (d) teacher quality. Many of the problems with education voiced in the report continue to be problems today—more than 30 years later. The amount of time that students were required to be in school then—180 days—was referenced as a problem, and continues to be the length of time American students are required to be in school today. Not surprisingly, "By the late 1980s, political pressure to show accountability through test scores was becoming inescapable" (SIFEPP, 2009, p. 63), and these tests would be rooted in standards, marking an important shift in holding LEAs accountable for federal dollars.

In discussing the declining test scores and lessened academic requirements, Urban and Wagoner (2014) stated, "Despite its sensationalism, *A Nation at Risk* raised a concern that many political, educational, and business leaders considered to be of the utmost importance" (p. 319). *A Nation at Risk* changed the direction of education policy. Since its publication, public school systems entered an era of public scrutiny and change initiatives. One of the most noticeable shifts was seen in the early 1990s with the national desire to have standards become the norm in all of the states. These standards were created by the individual states, promoting the idea that the states were responsible for the education of the children of the state. America 2000, an initiative by President George H. W. Bush that was not enacted before he left the presidency, voiced a desire to have national standards. Former President Clinton, who was a part of the summit that created the ideas of America 2000, would bring about the changes generated in the 1989 summit when he reauthorized ESEA in 1994 under the title of Goals 2000. The SIFEPP (2009) stated, "The core of Goals 2000 was a grant program to support state development of standards and assessments and school district implementation of standards-based reform" (p. 65). Of the last

two decades of the 20th century, Urban and Wagoner (2014) stated, "There was more continuity than discontinuity in federal education policy between 1980 and 2000" (p. 310). The ideas of America 2000 became Goals 2000. The reauthorization of ESEA in 2002 during President George W. Bush's tenure capitalized on the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA's move to standards and the call for accountability voiced by the public. This reiteration of ESEA became the NCLB Act of 2001.

Leaving No Child Behind

NCLB was not intended to be draconian by nature. In the contrary, the law was written with altruistic ideas as its foundation. In the Statement of Purpose of Section 1001, the law states, "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments" (NCLB, 2001). Echoing the message that was set out as the vision when President Johnson first enacted the ESEA of 1965, NCLB simply became the newest attempt to make the vision of "opportunity for all" a reality, albeit with accountability checks that had not before been imposed. Unlike previous reauthorizations of ESEA that had the federal government playing a passive role in education, NCLB cemented the idea that federal funds for education would, from that point forward, be strictly tied to the high stakes testing of children across the nation through its AYP accountability system.

Dee and Jacob (2011) noted that NCLB was the most imposing federal legislation governing public education in the last 40 years. The law "had sweeping implications for those who work in public education. The legislation set in place requirements that reach into virtually

every public school classroom in America" (Kowalski & Lasley, 2009). Gone were the days that schools or districts benefited from federal grants that came with few if any strings attached. Gone were the days of the federal government tiptoeing around the notion that education is solely a state power in which the federal government had little if any say. NCLB changed education by creating benchmarks that LEAs had to meet through its AYP goals. The most pronounced of all the benchmarks was the requirement that all students in public schools receiving federal funds be proficient or advanced in math and language arts by the end of the 2013–2014 school year. As the title of the law implies, no child would be left behind under this version of ESEA. The law forced districts to monitor the growth of significant subgroups—and it held them accountable for ensuring that these subgroups were making the same gains as their mainstream peers. Failure to meet the required growth of any of the significant subgroups that made up the school or district's population meant failure to meet the benchmark for that year. Fritzberg (2003) discussed the importance of acknowledging the subgroups in schools since "33 states had previously neglected sub-group performance all together" (p. 38).

NCLB created a punitive system that had not been seen before for schools that were not making the grade. The law mandated that each school publish whether it had made the grade on a yearly basis through the implementation of AYP that delineated "good schools" from "bad schools" for more than a decade after the implementation of the law. The labeling of schools in this manner created a problem for educators and politicians. For example, Fritzberg (2003) stated, "In California, state officials had to explain why John Glenn Middle School, one of California's three model middle schools, now carries the federal label of failure" (p. 37). Although the changes brought about by NCLB were geared towards more accountability,

problems with the seemingly arbitrary benchmarks became problematic. Like the previous versions of ESEA, the shortcomings to the law surfaced quickly. Many questioned the logic behind the goal of having each and every child proficient by the end of the 2013–2014 school year. Kowalski and Lasley (2009) labeled NCLB, "A prime example of absurd education policy that is divorced from data and reality checks about the meaning of data" (p. 72). In their book, Kowalski and Lasley made a simple argument: what NCLB was asking educational professionals to do was statistically unattainable. Nonetheless, as of the time of this writing, NCLB remains in place. As many of its accountability mandates are held in limbo during this transitional period, the cost of educating America's children continues to grow.

The Latest Solution to Improving America's Schools

"The CCSS initiative is a voluntary, state-led effort coordinated by the CCSSO and NGA to establish clear and consistent education standards" (CA Systems Implementation, 2014, p. 2). Internationally benchmarked, the standards are a national movement to make American students better prepared to enter college or career life after high school and making them more compatible with their international peers. Hulce et al. (2013) stated, "The standards themselves don't lay out a specific route to the desired destination, nor do they provide the vehicles necessary for the journey. Instead, they identify a series of essential grade-level progress markers" (p. 4). These "markers" are

> designed to cover most of the skills in greatest demand by employers, postsecondary systems and our society, including the ability of students to communicate effectively in a variety of ways, work collectively, think critically, solve routine and non-routine problems, and analyze information and data. (Blosveren & Achieve, 2012, p. 3)

With "parents, educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia all participat[ing] in the development of the standards" (CA Systems Implementation, 2014, p. 2), the resources spent in creating the standards can be seen as a function of the importance education has in children's lives for the American citizenry. After more than a decade of NCLB and continuing lack of gains on international tests like PISA and NAEP, the direction in which American education should move became clear with the creation of these standards. As written in the CA Systems Implementation (2014), "They are founded upon the best state standards; the experiences of teachers, content experts, and leading thinkers; and feedback from the general public" (p. 2). For many in America, the standards are a drastic change in what a language arts classroom looks like.

Goatly (2012) referenced the six shifts present in the ELA CCSS: (a) increased exposure to informational text, (b) increased text complexity, (c) increased demands for text-based answers, (d) increased use of academic language, (e) writing from sources, and (f) literacy in all content areas. According to Goatly, "Under the CCSS, at least 50% of what students read should be informational text; that figure increases to 55% in middle school and 70% for high school" (p. 21). Traditionally, students have had little exposure to informational text in their language arts classes, which have had a heavy literature concentration. The CCSS Initiative (2010a) discusses the current dilemma that students face once they leave high school because they have been taught to be dependent on teacher, peer, and text scaffolding for support in comprehending expository text, and they experience a decline in the complexity of text material that is provided to them. To their detriment, "Students in college are expected to read complex texts with

substantially greater independence than are students in typical K-12 programs" (CCSS Initiative, 2010a, p. 2). This has made remediation classes a commonplace occurrence for students entering American universities, as far back as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

In conjunction with more expository and more complex texts, the CCSS requires a different approach to classroom instruction to reach the goals of having students utilize academic language, support their ideas from textual evidence, utilize a variety of sources to guide their writing, and exercise literacy in all content areas. Hulce et al. (2013) stated, "The CCSS are clearly more rigorous in their learning demands on students and, therefore, require teachers to deliver instruction in a new way" (p. 4). Because students are often required to write, research, and analyze nonliterary texts in college and the workplace, the CCSS place an emphasis on developing literacy in history, science, and technical subjects (CA Systems Implementation, 2014, p. 2). Goatly (2012) stated, "The writing standards place a strong emphasis on these real reasons [genre types] for writing and remind educators that writing also needs to be an in-depth component of literacy instruction" (p. 20). Cristol et al. (2014) discussed the changes that teachers report about the demands on their content and skill knowledge when they stated, "CC demands that text be covered over multiple days or blocks, which requires more planning and a more sophisticated lesson," and "the emphasis on complex text means that teachers must be ready to scaffold for struggling students" (p. 18).

"The [CCSS] represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over the previous work" (California, 2013, p. 2). Torlakson and California (2012) stated, "The Common Core standards emphasize higher-level skills and abilities not emphasized in the previous generation of California standards" (p. 7). These shifts

required teachers to be more reliant on their experience as educators to meet the demands of the ELA CCSS in the classroom. The six instructional shifts are only one part of the changes required by the CCSS. Stated in the CA Systems Implementation (2014), "Although California's 1997 academic content standards and the CCSS for English-language arts and mathematics share many similarities in content and design, there are a number of notable differences between the two sets of standards" (p. 2). The task of analyzing the old standards and comparing them to the new ones, used by many LEAs, allows teachers to see the similarities between the two sets of standards, making it possible to discover the shifts themselves and to take ownership of the CCSS. The fact that the standards do not focus on the means of teaching empowers teachers "to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge that professional judgment and experience deem to be most helpful for meeting the [CCSS]" (California, 2013, p. 3).

Another marked difference between the previous standards in California and the CCSS is the need for students to work collaboratively as they process learning material in class. "The new CCSS require significant student collaboration, fluency with multimedia and technology, and the development of strong complex reasoning, problem solving, and communication skills" (CA Systems Implementation, 2014. pp. 2–3). In an attempt to make things more "real world," the CCSS allows for teachers to have students work together to solve complex problems. Blosveren and Achieve (2012) stated, "The ELA/literacy CCSS are particularly strong when it comes to providing regular opportunities for students to work collaboratively, present information, communicate in a variety of ways and use research to make informed judgments" (p. 15). The standards ask students to be able to learn new material, synthesize new learning with old learning, use English to communicate and synthesize ideas as they interact with peers, apply their

knowledge, and then be able to present their experience and conclusions with their peers and adults. The use of technology is now part of the CCSS, making it more likely that American children will have the technical skills required in a 21st-century workforce. The mandates of the standards are not only interwoven into each individual class; but their utility and interconnectedness can also be seen in their being required in all classes. According to Torlakson and California (2012), "The CCSS are also interdisciplinary, stressing the use of language and mathematics skills in content disciplines, such as science, history/social studies and the arts" (p. 7). Furthermore, the ELA and Math CCSS, the English Language Development (ELD) Standards, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) demonstrate the national perspective that learning is not segmented and unrelated. Instead, there are common threads within the requisites of all classes that are addressed by the standards. The cohesiveness of the standards is demonstrated in the manner with which they weave their skills into multiple educational settings. Hulce et al. (2013) made this point when they stated, "The shift to CCSS is a recognition that content and language are inextricably linked and, therefore, that English language development instruction and the CCSS must be connected" (p. 4). As we examine the standards themselves, the idea that the CCSS is a system of standards will resonate more and more because that is what the creators of the CCSS have made—an interconnected, interdependent skill set that, when achieved, will lead to our students being better prepared to succeed in both postsecondary educational settings or the American work force.

The Standards

The ELA CCSS is part of an integrated approach to addressing the English language development of students that is more reflective of how language works in day-to-day life.

According to California (2013), "The interdisciplinary approach to literacy promulgated by the standards is extensive research establishing the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (p. 3). This dissertation did not include the English language development (ELD) standards as part of the ELA CCSS, even though they are very closely intertwined and support one another in addressing students' needs in language development, nor did it touch on the math standards or the Next Generation Science Standards, which include communication and literacy skills present or interwoven with skills found in the ELA CCSS. To narrow the focus of this dissertation, the scope of my work revolved around the English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Like the Math CCSS and Next Generation Science Standards, these standards are an independent—albeit interconnected—set of standards.

The grade-specific standards of the ELA CCSS fall under the umbrella of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards. The CCR standards "define general, cross-disciplinary literacy expectations that must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce training programs ready to succeed" (California, 2013, p. 3). The ELA CCSS supports the CCR anchor standards by providing the year-to-year milestones that students should be achieving on their journey to being ready for the requirements of college or career work upon exiting California's high schools. The ELA CCSS are comprised of three sections—the K–5 standards, the 6–12 standards, and the literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. The K–5 and 6–12 standards are each broken up into four strands: (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) speaking and listening, and (d) language. The literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects standards are composed of only the first two strands—reading and

writing. These strands each include a number of standards that specifically address the goals of the strand, and are uniformly organized to provide cohesiveness from year to year, culminating in the abilities described by the CCR standards.

In addition to the cohesiveness of the standards, there are a few other notable changes from the previous standards. One said difference is the separation of the reading standards into two branches: reading literature and reading informational text. The reading standards are organized in the same manner as the CCR standards (see Appendix A to see the connection and relationship between the interrelated skills).

Similar to the cohesiveness of the standards that can be seen within each academic year, each standard was made to progress from kindergarten to 12th-grade with the same close-knit approach (see Appendix B for a review of this interrelatedness with Language Standard One).

The Cost of Free and Appropriate

A decade after the Civil Rights Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and two decades after the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education, the meaning of the phrase *equal educational opportunity* still was not entirely clear. What was clear, however, was the rapidly growing cost of public schools throughout the nation. (SIFEPP, 2009, p. 30)

It is difficult to find someone willing to argue against the idea that it is in the nation's best interest to educate every child. But, it is also not too burdensome to find a person willing to condemn the increasing cost of public education. A 2014 EducationNext poll asked the public, "Do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, stay the same, or decrease?" (Henderson et al., 2015). Thirteen percent of the public responded with

greatly increase, 47% said *increase*, 33% stated *stay the same*, 5% *wanted funding to decrease*,

and 2% reported they *wanted funding to greatly decrease*. When they were asked whether taxes

to fund public schools in their district should increase, stay the same, or decrease, only 3%

reported a desire to *greatly increase taxes*, 23% *wanted an increase*, 57% said *keep taxes the*

same, 13% *preferred a decrease*, and 5% *wanted to decrease their taxes greatly*. The reason for

this is simple: funding all programs associated with providing all children with a free and

appropriate public education does not come cheap. Although the public values education, they do

not have limitless financial resources at hand. Thus, conversations about money for education are

dichotomous by nature. Under the requirements of NCLB, "Many state-level Republicans fear

rising costs as states are increasingly required to intervene in 'failing' districts, and Democrats

remain wary of appearing soft on accountability" (Fritzberg, 2003, p. 40). According to a report

by the U.S. Department of Education, *10 Facts About K-12 Education Funding,* since 1966

federal spending under ESEA has grown from $1 billion dollars to more than $25 billion dollars

in 2006 (see Chart 1 in Appendix C). In the same report, the total expenditure per pupil for the

same time span grew from $3,500 in the fall of the 1965/1966 school year to $8,997 in the fall of

the 2001/2002 school year (see Chart 2 in Appendix C). The federal contribution to Title 1, the

funding that President Johnson hoped would eradicate the deficiencies caused by poverty,

increased from $3.5 billion in 1980 to $14 billion by 2006 (see Chart 3 in Appendix C). It is

worth noting, however, that the amount of money provided through Title 1 and ESEA is only a

fraction of the total cost to educate children in our school systems (see Chart 4 in Appendix C for

an illustration of the total U.S. expenditure for elementary and secondary education). In the

1990/1991 school year, the expenditure was $249 billion, and the expenditure more than doubled

to $536 billion by the 2004/2005 school year. Since public education falls under the states'

powers, the majority of this cost falls onto the individual states and local governments. The U.S.

Department of Education (2005) reported that, "83 cents out of every dollar spent on education is

estimated to come from the state and local levels (45.6% from state funds and 37.1% from local

governments)" (p. 2).

On the value Americans place on education, Zhao (2009) stated, "Public education is one

of the largest investments Americans make, and it affects their future on many levels" ("No

Child Left Behind," para. 8). Funding education is important for citizens of many states. For

example, California passed Proposition 98 to amend the state's constitution to ensure minimum

funding for K–14 schools in 1988, demonstrating the value of K–14 education to its citizenry

(Manwaring, 2005); however, its people also passed Proposition 13 in 1978, a decision that

limited the amount of property taxes the state can take in. These taxes, cut by 57% by Prop 13,

were the primary source of school funding at the local level. Needless to say, with the increasing

cost of education and the cap on the taxes the state is able to collect, funding has fallen short for

many schools since the passage of that proposition. Proposition 98 was, in part, a response to the

financial shortcomings in California school financing.

The expense to the American taxpayer is only one argument made when discussing

public education. Recent reports by NAEP and PISA highlight the lack of progress American

students are making when compared to their international peers. The OECD (2013) summarized

the performance of American 15 year-olds who performed below average in mathematics and

who performed average in reading and science in the 2012 international assessment when it

stated, "The trend data show no significant changes in these performances over time" (p. 7).

Only Switzerland and Norway outspend the United States in secondary education expenditures per pupil. With such a costly investment, education stakeholders closely monitor the lack of progress on international benchmark tests. OECD and PISA (2014) noted that nations like Japan, China, the United Kingdom, Korea, and Germany outperformed American children in math ability, while their respective countries spent far less to fund their educational systems.

Summary

Echoed in reports and legislation since its publication, the message conveyed throughout *A Nation at Risk* spawned countless change initiatives that have had varying degrees of success. The 2012 PISA statistics have America's 15 year-olds scoring below average in mathematics and scoring average in reading and science when compared to their international peers (OECD, 2013). The mission to cement America as the global leader has yet to materialize—a mission that has been costly in both financial and human capital. Zhao (2009) stated, "The dominant image of American public education today is still an image of a system that is broken and obsolete" ("A Nation at Risk," para. 7). How can it be that a nation such as ours, rich in monetary resources, knowledge, and a willingness to experiment with new approaches and methodologies is still behind other nations that, according to a U.S. Department of Education (2005) report, spend far less money on their public education system? One can start to formulate an answer to that question by considering the history of the change initiatives that have guided public policy on education since the inception of the ESEA and the manner in which these initiatives have been rolled out. Owens and Valesky (2011) described power-coercive strategies of change as change initiatives that start from the outside of the organization and use sanctions to force compliance, describing it as "an exemplar of power-coercive change" (p. 178). Approaches like NCLB, the

2001 reauthorization of ESEA, have been top-down approaches that do not give a voice to those who are closest to the students—the teachers and administrators at the school sites. Considering the large financial investment America makes in education, finding untapped veins of knowledge that enhance the possibility of moving through the change process successfully presents the opportunity to save vast amounts of money and improve the quality of education for each student in our schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Smith (2008) summed up the confounding nature of change when he stated:

If we do not understand the complexities of change—its nonlinear and chaotic nature, its unpredictability, its emotional component, its attacks on our assumptions and disruptions to our routines—then our design of a change process (to the degree that we can design one) will be limited, incomplete, and probably unsuccessful. (p. 32)

Change is a complicated endeavor for all stakeholders involved. Transitioning into a new system brings about confusion and angst among those who are affected, while simultaneously bringing about opportunities to improve and surge toward achieving the vision of the organization. This dissertation gathered the voices of key role players in three school districts in the Greater Los Angeles area. The narratives of the participants of this study were analyzed for consistencies with the 10 principles of change, as described by Hall and Hord (2011), who posited, "Change efforts can be more successful if these principles are acknowledged" (p. 6).

Furthermore, Bridges's (2009) Neutral Zone was used for this study to investigate the benefit of creating an information loop during the transitioning period of an initiative. Bridges (2009) posited that the Neutral Zone "is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves" ("It Isn't the Changes That Do You In," para. 26). Thus, the Neutral Zone becomes vital to organizations undergoing periods of change to establish progress checks or check-in points with their constituencies in order to actively drive the change efforts into a state of fruition. Not using the

Neutral Zone can end in prematurely abandoning the goal, resulting in a needless waste of time and resources for individuals and the organization.

Bridges (2009) described the process of transitional change as encompassing three distinct phases: (a) Ending, Losing, Letting Go; (b) the Neutral Zone; and (c) the New Beginning. In his analysis of transitional periods, the Neutral Zone, he asserted, brings opportunities for success; however, he also warned that prematurely exiting the Neutral Zone can compromise the change initiative and the opportunity to materialize those efforts into the desired goal. The current transitional period that the educational system in the US is undergoing can be described as a Neutral Zone. This study investigated Bridges's assertion that the Neutral Zone is a time period in which a change initiative can be strengthened, if attended to constructively. Educators across the nation have departed from the old ways of managing schools imposed by the NCLB legislation, which included punitive measures for LEAs that failed to make the pre-established benchmarks. LEAs across the US are embarking on a journey to bring forth a better school system for all under the more uniform, internationally benchmarked CCSS.

Consistent with constructivist philosophy, this research study gave teachers, school administrators, and district administrators a voice in describing their experiences during the implementation the CCSS in each of their districts. Hatch (2002) stated, "Constructivist science argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points" (p. 15). Each of the participants of this study presented his or her own experience in the transitional period into the CCSS. By giving a voice to these individuals and examining their reported experiences and perceptions about the rollout of the CCSS, school districts and schools will be able to reflect

upon their approach to implementing the CCSS. Taking the time to gather the experiences of teachers, principals, and district administrators during the implementation phase of the CCSS may hold value for change agents because it can provide a district or school with affirmation of moving in the right direction or it can bring to light the need to reassess and adapt the plan that was put in place when the initiative was first implemented.

Research Question

This study is a qualitative interview study that answered the following question:

1. What are the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district administrators during the transition to the ELA CCSS in three public school districts in the greater Los Angeles area?

This question was uniquely timed for the major transitions that took place in educational settings throughout the United States. In their pursuits of fully adopting the CCSS, states were also rushing to transition to new assessment systems. They were trying to find or develop an instructional curriculum that aligned with the CCSS. They were working with various groups to formulate professional development for teachers and new credentialing requirements for soon-to-be teachers. In the changes that have followed the adoption of the CCSS, LEAs have invested large sums of resources—both monetary and human—to ensure they were transitioning into the new systems in a manner that each determined would best promote the success of their students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reflect on the current approach three districts took in their efforts to transition into the CCSS by listening to the voices of those who are intimately involved in the implementation of the initiative—district administrators, school

principals, and classroom teachers. Hall and Hord (2011) emphasized the value of these participants when they stated, "The key organizational unit for making change successful is the school" (p. 9). Teachers, principals, and district administrators' narratives of their experience thus far with the implementation of the CCSS presents an opportunity that can be valuable in enhancing the chances that their LEA's plan will improve student learning as envisioned by the adoption of the CCSS. The time period in which schools found themselves falls into what Bridges (2009) described as the Neutral Zone, a phase in which the old is gone, but the new is not yet in place. In gathering the voices of teachers, principals, and district administrators during this transitional period, LEAs can gauge the progress of their implementation plan during the Neutral Zone. That measure can then be used to affirm success or determine needs, as determined by each LEA, thus providing a valuable tool for change agents to use in their efforts to bring about change to an organization. Whether an LEA was implementing the adoption of the CCSS successfully or whether the LEA's plan was in need of adjustment should be dependent on the narratives that the participants of the change process reported. By synthesizing the participants' narratives and the 10 principles of change, as outlined by Hall and Hord (2011), this research aimed to investigate the benefits of having an information loop during the Neutral Zone as a potential significant tool to use during any transitional period.

Methodology

The complexities of a transition such as the one LEAs were undergoing across the US have many layers of interpretation. As such, qualitative methods provide researchers with valuable tools to be able to understand and make meaning out of those sometimes-subjective interpretations of the change that is taking place. According to Hatch (2002):

Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspective of those living in

it. It is axiomatic in this view that individuals act on the world based not on some

supposed objective reality but on their perception of the realities around them. (p. 7)

This qualitative study is an interview study within the constructivist paradigm. In it, I examined

the transitional phase in the adoption of the CCSS, a phase that embodies Bridges's notion of the

Neutral Zone, to examine the use of an information loop to reflect on the current progress that

has been made in the collective effort to fully implement the ELA CCSS in three districts in the

Greater Los Angeles area. Fullan (2001) stated, "Communication during implementation is far

more important than communication prior to implementation" (p. 26). The practice of listening

to the stakeholders undergoing change efforts is valuable for individuals and organizations

considering the resources utilized when undergoing transformations. The reflection point

provided to organizations during the Neutral Zone becomes even more important when change

leaders recognize that resources spent on failed change efforts represent significant losses to an

organization.

Participants and Setting

I interviewed nine participants from three different school districts within the greater Los

Angeles area. The sample consisted of district administrators ($n = 3$), school-site principals ($n =$

3), and ELA teachers ($n = 3$), one from each of the participating districts. Participants were

coded with numbers to protect their identities. I assigned the numerical identifier to each district

and addressed each entity with only that identifier throughout the study. Furthermore, the data

was reported back to the districts as a completed project that includes all of the participating

districts and schools, thus not isolating one individual district or individual participant within the groups that were a part of the study.

At the time of the study, District 1 served approximately 8,800 students. This district's student body was composed of predominantly minority students, with Hispanic or Latino students making up 71% of the population. The next largest group was the African American group, which made up approximately 21% of the population. Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and White students each accounted for approximately 2% of the student population. In this district, a third of the student body was English language learners, and almost 90% of the students were on the free or reduced lunch program. The district employed 416 teachers and had a reported student to teacher ratio of 26:1. Thirty-one percent of the students in this district met or exceeded the standards in the 2015 SBAC ELA state test.

At the time of the study, District 2 was the largest in the study; it served almost 13,500 students. Hispanic or Latino students also made up the largest ethnic group in the district, accounting for 57% of the student body. African American students represented 40% of the student body. No other ethnic group made up more than 1% of the student body in this district. Of the students attending this district, 27% of them were English language learners. Seventy-eight percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch in this district. For the 2015 SBAC ELA state assessments, 25% of the students met or exceeded the standard.

At the time of the study, District 3 served approximately 6,750 students. This district had a slightly more heterogeneous group of students, but Hispanic or Latino students also made up the largest part of the student body, representing approximately 40% of the student population. White students accounted for 26% of the population. The African American subgroup was the

next largest, accounting for 16% of the student population. Asian students made up about 10.5% of the student body, and 5% of the students reported that they were of two or more races. In this district, 12.5% of students were English language learners, and a third of all students were on the free or reduced lunch program. Sixty-three percent of the students in this district met or exceeded the standards on the SBAC ELA state assessments for the 2014–2015 school year.

To gather the participants for this study, snowball sampling was used. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) stated, "Snowballing is most useful when it is difficult to find participants of the type needed" (p. 143). This type of sampling is useful in education because it is uncommon to have access to district administrators, school principals, and classroom teachers. Also, district administrators who have been leading the CCSS implementation were—more likely than not—the most knowledgeable about what principals and teachers were better prepared to discuss regarding the implementation of the CCSS at their level. To gain entry into the district, I contacted the district administrator leading the transition into the CCSS via e-mail. Through email, I set up an appointment to talk to the potential participant about the study and the commitment required (i.e., a 20-minute questionnaire and one semistructured, in-person interview with the primary investigator). Once the district administrator agreed to participate in the study, I asked him/her for potential middle school-site administrators who would be interested in assisting me with the study as well. Thus, a snowball sampling method was utilized to secure participants for this 3x3-designed study. Similar procedures were followed with the school-site administrators: I initiated contact via e-mail and followed up with an introduction session in which I elaborated on the study and the required participation. Once the school-site administrator agreed to participate, I asked for names of ELA teachers who might be interested

in participating. Teachers were then contacted through the same means as the district-level and school-site administrators. Like the other participants, the teachers were given a survey to extrapolate information that was then used to inform the semistructured interview.

Data Collection

Each participant took part in an electronic questionnaire that was distributed through Google Forms approximately one week prior to the face-to-face, semistructured interview. The survey consisted of questions that asked for general information (e.g., the individual's role in the CCSS rollout and the type and length of in-service received on the new standards). The information from the survey informed the semistructured interview that followed a week later.

I interviewed each of the participants once through a scheduled, semistructured interview. Hatch (2002) described interviews as a researcher's tool to "uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (p. 91). The interview was planned to take approximately 60 minutes, consistent with Hatch's suggested time frame for interviews. The interviews were recorded on a cell phone's audio recorder with the participant's permission. To assuage concerns of being identified, I gave each of the participants a numerical pseudonym that was recorded during the interview. The name of the participant and the school or school district in which he or she worked was not recorded. I went through great efforts to ensure the participants that I was only there to give them an opportunity to voice their experiences during the transitional period of moving into the ELA CCSS. Hatch (1985) stated, "Truth is, in fact, what we agree it is" (p. 161). Using this philosophy and the ideas of constructivism, I engaged all of the participants in meaningful and inquiry-driven dialogue about the individual's experience in transitioning into this new set of expectations for students and

teachers. Smith (2008) stated, "Constructivists believe learners should construct their knowledge, discover and create it rather than having it force-fed to them" (p. 271). The goal of gathering the voices of the participants in this study was simple: to attempt to capture the experiences had by each of the participants. By listening to district administrators, school-site administrators, and teachers, this study gave them a voice to which change agents and researchers could then listen in their efforts to ascertain how the process was progressing within a given district for teachers, school principals, and district administrators.

Analysis Plan

Hatch (2002) stated:

Studies that rely on interviewing as the sole or primary data collection tool are often undertaken with a fairly focused purpose, a fairly narrow set of research questions, and a fairly well-structured data set in terms of its organization around a set of fairly consistent guiding questions. (p. 152)

This interview study was narrowly focused. The interviews included inquiries into the implementation of the CCSS in the area of language arts within middle school sites. The study was approached in this manner because the ELA CCSS had been available the longest, and the districts were more likely familiar with these standards. The data collected from this study were transcribed by an accredited and reliable transcription service. Once the data were returned, I compared the audio data with the transcribed data to check for quality and errors in the transcription. I exposed myself to the data multiple times before generating themes. This was done in an effort to ensure that the themes derived from the data were themes that were seen in all of the interviews, not just in a small portion of them. Constructivism posits the need to have

the themes sprout from the data rather than having the primary investigator's mind set on predetermined ideas of what the participants' answers are going to formulate. Once themes arose from the interview data, an analysis of the information was performed in which data was first compared between the information provided by the participants from each of the districts where the research was conducted. Once that information was gathered, a comparison between similar participants (i.e., teachers, principals, and district administrators) was conducted.

Validity and Reliability/Authenticity and Utility

Hatch (2002) stated, "When informants think that 'correct' answers exist to the questions they are asked, the interview becomes a game of finding the right answer" (p. 102). Ensuring that the proper interviewing practices are utilized for an interview study is paramount to generating knowledge that is both authentic and useful for the participants and the researcher. As part of the interview study that I conducted, I tailored the questions for the semistructured interview from the information that I gathered from the initial questionnaire the participants completed. The questions on the questionnaire were general information questions such as, "How long has your district been working on implementing the CCSS?" and "What type of professional development on the contents of the Common Core have you participated in?" Follow-up questions for an individual who stated that work toward implementation of the CCSS started in 2010 differed from follow-up questions for someone who reported that the work began in the 2013–2014 school year. An appropriate question for the former was, "Where was your district getting the information necessary to begin work on the implementation of the CCSS at such an early stage?" whereas a more appropriate question for the latter was, "Why do you think your district chose to start this work last year as opposed to any other time?"

Gay et al. (2012) defined validity as, "the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauge what we are trying to measure" (p. 391). To this end, I worked with colleagues, both teachers and administrators, to refine the questions in both the questionnaire and the semistructured interview. Two school-site administrators, one principal, one assistant principal, and three English teachers were asked to offer answers to the questions. Their responses were then analyzed through conversation about what was provided and what the intent of the question was. If questions and answers were aligned, it was kept as part of the interview protocol. If the question and answers did not align, the question was rephrased, clarified, or thrown out. The semistructured interview consisted of 10 questions, each holding the possibility for elaboration or refinement during the interview process, depending on the responses of the participants.

Triangulation was attempted as a tool to check for reliability. Gay et al. (2012) stated, "You may address the trustworthiness of your data collection through the use of triangulation, which is the use of multiple data sources to address each of your research questions" (p. 119). Participants were asked to share their district's *Plan for CCSS Systems Implementation*. Per the State's *CCSS Systems Implementation Plan for California* guiding principle seven—design and establish systems of effective communication among stakeholders to continuously identify areas of need and disseminate information—each LEA "should develop its own local plan for Common Core State Standards (CCSS) systems implementation based on local needs and resources" (CA Department of Education, 2014, p. 40). This plan, to some degree, was expected to parallel the experiences being reported by the participants in the study since it spelled out the manner in which the CCSS was to be implemented and what each stakeholder should have

participated in throughout the awareness phase, transitions phase, and implementation phase of the process.

Timeline

I gathered the data necessary for this interview study in six weeks. There was one week planned between the initial survey and the semistructured interview for each of the participants. Pursuing multiple participants simultaneously was paramount to ensuring that I stayed within the planned six-week schedule. I started by contacting all three of the district administrators within week one after having received approval for the study through LMU's institutional review board (IRB). The process for gathering the participants of the study went as planned, with the district administrators identifying a principal that would be willing to participate, and the principal identifying a teacher who was interested in participating. The interviews were conducted and the information was sent to the transcription service company on the same day. The data were returned within a couple of days and were compared to the audio. I reviewed the data multiple times when it was first received and then again when the data for all nine participants were available. As expected, the themes derived from the interviews allowed for each participant's narrative to develop, creating a picture of how these three districts have progressed through the implementation process of the CCSS during a time where "repatterning takes place: old and maladaptive habits are replaced with new ones that are better adapted to the world in which the organization now finds itself" (Bridges, 2009, p. 287).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The implementation of the CCSS will at some point be evaluated by its success in attaining the goals that policymakers, politicians, and numerous stakeholder groups set out to achieve. Harris, Rodriguez, and Achieve (2012) summarized the optimism of the movement when they stated, "We are at one of those rare, maybe once-in-a-lifetime moments. After 30 years of fits and starts, true transformational reform in education is not only possible but also entirely within our grasp" (p. 5). Optimism, however, does not necessarily mean success in any change endeavor. As stated in the CA Systems Implementation (2014), "We will know that our education system has been transformed when teachers across the State, informed by student assessment data gleaned from CCSS-aligned tools, employ differentiated instructional strategies to support the success of every student in attaining the standards" (p. 5). Whether there has been true change or not will be derived from the experiences had by those who are in constant contact with California's school children, the student achievement data to support those experiences, and the changes made to classrooms across the state.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reflect on the approach three districts were taking in their efforts to transition into the CCSS by listening to the voices of those who were intimately involved in the implementation of the initiative—district administrators, school principals, and classroom teachers. This study did not set out to determine whether the implementation of the ELA CCSS had been successful. It set out to gather the voices of educators during the transitional period that Bridges (2009) labeled the Neutral Zone. It is during this time period, he posited, that organizations have the best opportunity to be creative and

reinvent themselves because the old is gone and the new is still not in place. The narratives of these individuals are important to the bigger picture in education because, as Hall and Hord (2011) stated, "Successful change starts and ends at the individual level" (p. 9).

To create a picture of what has taken place in education during the last few years, this dissertation set out to answer the following question: *What are the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district administrators during the transition to the ELA CCSS in three public school districts in the greater Los Angeles area?* The data were analyzed for common themes by the primary investigator by reviewing the responses to the questions asked during the interviews on two levels. First, the data were reviewed within district groups. Common experiences and common themes were drawn out from this analysis to establish a sense of what took place within the district during the implementation of the ELA CCSS in each of the districts. Then, the data were reviewed in groups by professional levels—district administrators, school principals, and classroom teachers. This data was analyzed for common experiences at these levels to determine whether there were commonalities or differences that transcended an individual's place of employment. The data revealed that transitioning into the ELA CCSS varied substantially between the three participating districts. It also demonstrated that the understanding of the goals and vision of the implementation of the ELA CCSS varied, with one district having a consistent message reported by all three participants and another district having their three participants discussing similar experiences with little connection to a vision or goal for the actions being taken by the district.

Narratives for District 1

At the time of the study, District 1 served approximately 8,800 students. This district's student body was composed of predominantly minority students, with Hispanic or Latino students making up 71% of the population. The next largest group was the African American students, making up approximately 21% of the population. Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and White students each accounted for approximately 2% of the student population. In this district, a third of the student body was English language learners, and almost 90% of the students were on the free or reduced lunch program. The district employed 416 teachers and had a reported student-to-teacher ratio of 26:1. Thirty-one percent of the students in this district met or exceeded the standards in the 2015 SBAC ELA state test.

The District Administrator

The district administrator for District 1 had been in education for 18 years. He reported being a teacher, a coach, new teacher mentor, school administrator, and a professional development provider. He had been in his position for five years. His narrative expressed cohesion and capacity building throughout the district for the benefit of its students. Cohesion and capacity were actively sought after from the beginning of the ELA CCSS implementation process, as reported by the district administrator for District 1. He voiced the importance of utilizing the state's *CCSS Systems Implementation Plan for California* as a model to ensure progress. He and his district-level team learned about the standards before having a larger team take on the challenge of implementation. Once the teams were drawn in, regular meetings to learn about the CCSS and refine the implementation process took place multiple times a month. From these meetings and from guidance from the Talking Teaching Network (TTN), the

strategies, resources, professional development, and monitoring were outlined and communicated throughout the district's teaching staff.

Being in his current position for the five years of implementation allowed the district administrator to drive the implementation of the ELA CCSS for District 1 from the beginning of the adoption process. The district administrator reported being the initiator of the implementation process when he stated, "I did the bulk of the work in putting and laying the plan out with input from district staff" (0101). This, however, soon shifted with the pulling in of the transition teams that were established as part of the planning on how the ELA CCSS would be rolled out in the district. He further stated, "Shortly after that, when we started bringing in the teams to do the work of studying the standards and designing professional development, then the activities became directed by our internal teams" (0101). A compelling message stressed by the district administrator about the manner in which the implementation of the ELA CCSS took place in this district was the importance of being self-reliant in developing capacity and maintaining the district's goals during and throughout the implementation process. He referenced this idea when he stated, "The whole idea from day one was that these changes are so big and lasting that we needed to build the internal capacity not only to make the change but to sustain the change" (0101). The district administrator's experience during the implementation of the ELA CCSS was one of establishing the framework of what the CCSS entailed for the district, the teachers, and the students; it stressed the inclusion of the teachers and administrators in the process; and it voiced the need to make uniform changes for the benefit of the students.

What is the ELA CCSS? To begin to understand the experience of the district administrator at District 1, it is important to have an idea of what he perceived the ELA CCSS to

be. As the driving force behind the implementation, it is important because it helps frame the efforts made by the district in transitioning to the ELA CCSS. When asked, "What is the ELA CCSS to you?" The district administrator in District 1 responded:

> Well really I mean, ELA Common Core is students interacting with texts and interacting with their peers in a different way than expected before. It's really allowing students to be broadly literate which means interacting with a range of text... online and in print, synthesizing multiple sources. So really building a utility to work with a variety of the text and then also building their capacity to be able to interact with different audiences so to establish an argument, to contribute to a interview and argument, to critique an argument, and to really be open to the ideas of others. (0101)

His response highlighted a couple of key points about what he perceived the ELA CCSS to be. First, his response pointed to the fact that the CCSS required new skills of the students. Then, he referenced the need for students to be able to interact with a variety of texts: informational, literature, both online and in print. Third, he voiced a need for students to be able to interact with a variety of audiences to establish an argument. Lastly, he stated the need for students to be able to collaborate with others when he mentioned the need for students to be "open to the ideas of others."

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The narrative presented by the district administrator about how the transition was managed included the origins of the plan and the evolution of the implementation as originating at the district level and then being taken up by the transition teams that included teachers and administrators.

During the interview, the district administrator recalled, "2011-2012 was our planning phase towards the end of the year and then really in 2012-2013 is when we started the building of our teams and meeting collaboratively" (0101). The plan that was created was an adaptation of the State's *CCSS Systems Implementation Plan for California* (CA Systems Implementation, 2014) as adopted by the State Board of Education on March 7, 2012. He stated, "The plan was developed in the end of 2011-2012 year and that was using the state templates. California Department of Education (CDE) had created a state Common Core transition plan and we used that same template" (0101). He further shared:

> We customized the [Systems Implementation Plan] to meet our individual needs
> of where we were and how we thought this process would roll out, how inclusive
> we wanted to be with staff, and then we posted that plan on our Common Core
> web page immediately after it was developed. And that's, we mostly stayed on
> track with that as we moved forward. (0101)

This plan became a touchstone to refer back to as the process unfolded in the district. The district administrator for District 1 referred back to the state's template on a number of occasions, signaling that the document was crucial in establishing a game plan for this district.

> Our plan includes the detail down to, you know, the formation of our internal
> teams and our own particular timeline for piloting activities or implementing
> activities. But, the only external fact on the plan is really some guidance from
> what the State timeline and their activities look like. (0101)

The district administrator for District 1 reported a methodical approach in the manner that the implementation of the ELA CCSS would take place. He reported understanding that, "around

that time there wasn't any site input that could really contribute to the same end of knowing the standards" (0101). Thus, the initial steps in developing a plan took place at the district office with district staff. He recalls dedicating themselves to studying the CCSS "at the district level saying, let's dig into this and really see what this is all about, what type of changes is it going to take and then how do we craft a centralized plan to make that happen" (0101). Although the initial work to transition into the ELA CCSS took place at the district level, the district administrator for District 1 acknowledged the interdependency of classroom practices and the monitoring of those practices when he discussed student "access [to the CCSS] comes from, I think, professional buy-in from teachers being included in the process and then also from instructional monitoring with administrators" (0101).

After the initial phase of developing an understanding of the CCSS and devising a trajectory for implementation, the district administrator's experience with the transition to the ELA CCSS took the role of a moderator. Making sure that the right people were in the transition teams, that the teams had guidance by experts, and that they had the resources necessary to accomplish their goals became a priority. The district administrator stated:

Throughout that 2011-2012 year at the administrative level, we studied what was coming [and] looked at the alignment or misalignment with some of our practices and programs, and then we had to determine our own ability for funding, how it could be sustained in our Common Core transition teams. How frequently could we meet? What would an adoption timeline look like? So all things that were kind of, be on the scope of, what it would be to work at a school site. So most of that was done at the district office. (0101)

Once the work at the district office was at a satisfactory stage and the framework was established, people were pulled in and changes began to roll out into the classes from the participants of the transition teams. The team that the district administrator discussed included 30 to 35 participants, a mix of classroom teachers, support staff such as academic coaches, and site administrators. He explained:

> It was in 2012-2013 or 2013-2014 that we started really looking at some curriculum refinements and what those really look like and then allowed some breathing room for teachers to spend more time with students on those texts. We also, at the middle school level, brought in nine novels across the three years.
>
> (0101)

The plan that took shape included some key actions at the district level to allow teachers to make the changes necessary to transition to the ELA CCSS. First, the pacing guide used by the district in all ELA classrooms was adjusted to allow teachers to delve deeper into the curriculum being presented to the students. The district, which was very dependent on its ELA adoption, allowed teachers to use outside sources to draw in more informational texts for students to use in class, including newsela.com. The plan also included teaching strategies to target the skill sets required of the ELA CCSS, such as student collaboration, close reading, citing textual evidence, and reading complete novels as opposed to just excerpts of works of literature

The changes that were decided upon at the district level and generated by the transition team were not made in isolation. TTN, a nonprofit research organization with connections to UCLA, guided it. TTN guided the teams through the processes of learning the ELA CCSS and

developing the strategies that would best fit within the classrooms. The district administrator stated:

> We have a partnership with Talking Teaching Network and they facilitated a lot
>
> of that work of you know before jumping in and assuming that we know this and
>
> then starting to implement in the classroom to take a really extended and
>
> extensive study of the standards themselves and to try to code those standards
>
> against what's currently taking place in our classroom to identify our greatest
>
> areas of need. (0101)

As part of the changes taking place, District 1 also developed a monitoring system that would inform the district administrators and site administrators with regard to whether the desired changes were taking place in the classrooms. The monitoring pieces include the use of Instructional Rounds and site administrator observations utilizing a district-developed survey, as well as on-going interview between teachers and coaches at all of the school sites.

> We try to build in room in our professional development settings for really
>
> evaluating what's working or hearing what's working, what's not working. With
>
> our observations, with self-supported comments from teachers, we have collective
>
> shared feedback forms, that all of our coaches and specialized project teachers
>
> have access to. (0101)

The plan, as experienced by the district administrator, was one of having the district learn about what was expected with the new standards, taking inventory of the resources that were available to the district, creating teams to lead the schools through the changes that were agreed

upon, pushing out strategies and learning opportunities for teachers who were not on the transition team, and have a monitoring program in place to measure success.

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The district administrator for District 1 reported an experience that entailed spending more than two hours a week learning about the new standards. He reported doing this at the beginning stages of the implementation and continued to do so at the time of this dissertation. He reported that the learning had changed:

> The awareness phase was really studying the standards, coding the standards,
>
> coding the areas of alignment, misalignment with our current tools and curriculum
>
> and also our strategies, our professional development, and then moving more into
>
> the implementation phase and actually starting to pilot activities on a broader
>
> scale. (0101)

At the time of the study, the district administrator stated, "We are in the out years now where we are just continuing to implement and refine the implementation" (0101). His experience up to the time of this study could best be described as having moved through the learning cycle. In a very simplistic way, new information was brought in, applied, and the results were being scrutinized for possible improvement. The experience of having to orchestrate the implementation of the ELA CCSS for District 1 began as a solitary endeavor. He stated:

> The initial looking at the standards really came from first looking at the traits that
>
> were identified for college and career readiness and saying, "Okay, what are
>
> students going to be asked to do now?' So whether it's P21, Partnership for 21st
>
> Century and the 4Cs, or looking at those kinds of habits of mind or characteristics,

I mean, that kind of set the stage for, "Okay, what is it that the kids are going to

be asked to do?" (0101)

For it being such a big shift in education, the district administrator in District 1 recalled only one

conference on the ELA CCSS. That was a conference presented by the Association of

Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in the Los Angeles area four years prior to

the time of this study. He commented on the rest of the formal professional development in

which he participated:

From a county level, there really wasn't a study of the standards as much as the

formative assessment pieces that kind of transcend any standards. We spent three

years really digging into formative assessment and all the pieces of learning

targets and student goal-setting and… everything that needs to come together to

have students own the learning. (0101)

The experience described by the district administrator is one of acknowledging the job at hand

and taking the steps necessary to make those changes possible. On the actual learning of the

CCSS and what it entailed, he reported, "The direct study of the standards really happened more

here, in-house, than anything external" (0101). His experience of learning the CCSS was driven

by his knowledge that the educational landscape was changing and his district had to embrace

the challenge.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The notion of ensuring

that the labors of the district culminated in processes that were beneficial to all students in the

district surfaced as an underlying theme in the approach the district administrator reported. The

district administrator for District 1 reported, "I think a successful roll out for us would be something that allows every student in every setting to access the standards" (0101).

Has the implementation been successful? When the district administrator was asked about whether the implementation of the ELA CCSS has been successful, he responded:

> I think in California the roll out has been phenomenal. In our school district, I've been very impressed with how our teachers have embraced it and impressed with their understanding of the shifts. I think we've really tapped into a desire for teachers to do something for kids that maybe they felt like they couldn't do with the previous set of expectations and standards. (0101)

District 1, district administrator summary. The district administrator for District 1 presented an experience that was both positive and optimistic from the beginning. He stated, "I was confident from the get go." The standards were in line with what he perceived to be the right direction for what is expected of children at school. He further shared:

> I was inspired from my initial reading of the standards and the overall architecture, the way it was laid out, and what it asked us to do for kids. I did not in any way think that there would be anybody saying we are going in the wrong direction, we should not focus on something as simple as collaboration. Sometimes it takes a set of standards to really say that kids need to talk in classrooms. (0101)

He discussed some of the obstacles that the implementation of the CCSS faced, and noted that he had heard more concerns about the MCCSS than about the ELA CCSS. Furthermore, the overall

sentiment of whether the implementation was feasible for his district was captured when he

expressed:

> I mean, when I initially looked at what kids are going to be asked to do, I knew
>
> that the areas where we weren't aligned with what needed to happen were areas
>
> that no one could argue. I should not say no one, but that most people could not
>
> present a valid argument that it was not in our kids' best interest to get there.
>
> (0101)

The district administrator's experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS was reported

to be positive, with visible success. Monitoring was an important piece of the implementation

plan for District 1 because, as the district administrator stated on a number of occasions, the

academic success of every student was paramount. He stated, "I think it's been very successful,

and my observations on walking around schools and classrooms supports that" (0101).

The Middle School Principal

The middle school principal who participated in this study for District 1 had been

working in education for 16 years. He reported having been a teacher, a new teacher mentor, and

school administrator. He had been in his position as principal of the participating middle school

for four years, since the 2011–2012 school year. The principal of the participating middle school

led the school through the process of ELA CCSS implementation from the beginning. For the

principal of the participating middle school, the implementation of the ELA CCSS was in line

with what the school was already doing as a program improvement school. He stated, "We are a

program improvement school and one of our program improvement recommendations… is to

implement Common Core.... l looked at this, and this is where I based kind of everything that we

would be doing" (0102). Per the job at hand, the principal for the participating middle school reported the task at hand was something with which they, as a school, were familiar. He further shared:

> We know what the end product needs to be. We know that some kids are [meeting the standards], we have a bunch of kids historically at the school site that are close in the middle, and then we also have a group of kids... they really need some help. (0102)

The participating principal for District 1 presented a narrative couched in optimism and a perceived sense of moving in the right direction. He stated, "I think we are in a better place than we were in 2011; I think 2012 was better than 2011; 2013 was better than 2012. So we are getting better, in what we are doing" (0102).

What is the ELA CCSS? When the principal for the participating middle school for District 1 was asked what the ELA CCSS meant to him, he responded:

> ELA Common Core to me is where students are able to read not only one source, but multiple sources, to develop, defend, and argue for or against a point of view or subject in oral, written, or all forms, [and] the development of critical thinking and inference [skills]. (0102)

In discussing what the ELA CCSS was and what it demanded of his staff and the students at his school, the participating principal noted the importance of being "methodical in what we are doing and chang[ing] what happens in the classroom" (0102). The significance of taking this approach was reported to be rooted in the logic of, "If we continue to do the same thing as we did with previous standards, we are doing the same thing and there is no reason why we should

expect different results" (0102). In articulating what some of the changes were that he expected to see taking place within classes, the principal listed strategies such as *philosophical chairs*, *Socratic seminars*, and *Cornell Notes* as examples of the shifts made toward the implementation of the ELA CCSS. These practices, the participant reported, allowed the students to exercise the requisite skills sought after by the ELA CCSS. The school principal reported that "the most difficult thing for a student right now is managing the information that they are receiving, that they are reading, that they are hearing" (0102).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The principal for the participating middle school in District 1 reported an experience in the implementation plan that had two big focus areas. The first was to establish in-house experts on the shifts the ELA CCSS brought to the classrooms. He stated, "Our philosophy is that we will grow as a team. As a group, we will bring out content experts from our roots" (0102). The second piece was to ensure that teachers and administrators participated in the implementation process by either being a part of the committee's set-up for implementation or to ensure that buy-in was created when expectations of what had to take place in the classroom changed. He admitted that not all of the teachers got to participate in the process by being a part of the committees working with the district. But, he stated, "There is always a reason that is always established. Why do we need to do this? There is always some argument or some kind of launching point" (0102). He discussed the shift in the administrator meetings that took place at the beginning of the implementation process when he reflected on the focus of the meetings and said, "Initially it was kind of altogether, but then we did split some of our meetings or dedicated [some meetings] specifically

for Common Core" (0102). He reported that two out of the four monthly administrative meetings were centered on the implementation of the CCSS.

The participating principal stated that the plan for implementation was, "in conjunction with the district, to kind of go over partnering with the Talking Teaching Network" (0102). He stated, "At the admin level, we discussed kind of what it would be and how it would roll out" (0102). Through the partnership with the TTN, he reported that the participating groups dove into "what [was] new, what [was] the same, what [was] different, what [were] some changes as far as the classroom teacher that we are going to have?" (0102). After these meetings, the participating principal reported having to establish a Common Core Transition Team. This team, he stated, would "go through the process… coding and establish a building capacity, you would say, who would then kind of be more of a direct connection with the Talking Teaching Network and they would roll out the PD for the teachers" (0102). Alongside those changes, he reported that implementing the ELA CCSS included establishing formative assessments and learning targets that the administrators could look for in the classes. He also recalled the district office loosening the requirements on the teachers to do away with the assessments used under NCLB (e.g., district benchmarks and district writing assessments). He stated, "We are not just adding to everything that we were doing before, we are taking some stuff away" (0102).

The principal participating in this study reported an experience for the implementation of the ELA CCSS that took shape at the district office in collaboration with the administrators. The establishment of what the plan would look like (e.g., the partnership with TTN), and the creation of the teams that would spearhead the change initiative, all emerged from meetings at that level. Reflecting on the CCSS movement as a whole, he stated, "I think the state has identified what

needs to be taught. How you teach it or what tools you use to teach; that is kind of more at that local level" (0102).

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The principal for District 1 reported a learning experience rooted in activities that took place within the district. He described his learning of the ELA CCSS as being "formal, with meetings at work" (0102). He stated, "I would say that here at the district, I have attended or learned about the meat and potatoes of [the CCSS]…. This is what the standard is, this is what you will do, these [are the] strategies that we look at" (0102). He discussed attending professional development sessions that were provided by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and described the content for these sessions as being "more of the management" (0102). He stated:

> I have attended some LACOE sponsored PDs on Common Core, on monitoring student achievement, basically the effect of supervision on the classroom and looking at walkthroughs, you know what are walkthroughs, instructional rounds, trainings, just kind of monitoring [pieces]. (0102)

His interview about the learning process during the implementation of the ELA CCSS reflected the inclusion of many layers that have come together during the implementation process. Besides learning about the ELA CCSS at district meetings and monitoring processes for the changes required of the new standards at LACOE, he discussed learning strategies through AVID trainings that he reported go hand-in-hand with the requisites of the ELA CCSS. His learning about strategies like Socratic seminars, philosophical chairs, and Cornell Notes have helped him guide his school through implementation. The ACE strategy was another strategy adopted school wide that was rooted in the expectations of the ELA CCSS and was derived from

AVID. This strategy asks students to *answer, cite*, and *expand* on their answers. The learning of tools like the ACE strategy then connect to trainings on monitoring. He states, "[Once] I have given PD on the ACE strategy, how am I going to monitor, how am I going to keep tabs on... the actual in-class change" (0102). The principal for District 1 reported a learning experience that was both ongoing and layered. He discussed the different components that made up the new approach in schools and how they have all come together at his site.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The participating principals were asked to think about what the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS would look like in a classroom. The participant for District 1 responded by stating:

Success to me would be the students [being] able to think critically, view multiple sources, apply the critical thinking skills to expand their knowledge; to be able to express orally or in writing if they are in favor or in disagreement for a product; to be able to persuade you or make an argument for their point of view. Ideally, it would be in oral form, but most importantly it is not until we get it in any written form that I would say we are successful. (0102)

Has the implementation been successful? When the participating principal for District 1 was asked when, if ever, he became comfortable with the implementation of the ELA CCSS, he responded by stating:

I don't think I am comfortable yet with what we are doing because there are still tweaks and changes that are currently on their way. We have also identified some needs, which we haven't addressed, to make sure that we are fully supporting and we are fully preparing every single student to be successful. (0102)

The participating middle school principal discussed the implementation of the ELA CCSS as an ongoing process, a job at hand that does not have an end since there would be continuous monitoring and modifying to reach the goal of reaching all students with the school's mission. He stated, "I don't think that we will ever get there because once you meet one need, once you address one need, there is a different need, and then your focus becomes that" (0102). However, when asked whether he felt that the implementation of the ELA CCSS had been successful, he reported, "I think so" (0102). He provided the disclaimer that he was not completely sure about how other districts were working toward implementation:

> When I talk to other colleagues, it is either hit or miss. Some are in line to what we are doing and where they are. Some are saying, 'Hey we are just starting with this.' And some are saying, 'No, we are going to buy a book.' And that is not Common Core and really not changing. You know they are changing the materials, but they are really not changing anything that is being done in the classroom that they could elaborate to me. It would be a hit or miss as far as the state is concerned. (0102)

The principal for District 1 referenced some key factors as causes for the variability in implementation that he noticed when speaking to colleagues. He stated that one is "the role of technology and the access to technology and fluency of students with technology, two is the strategies that are being learned in the PD" (0102). In discussing the implementation of the CCSS, the participating principal described it as a work in progress.

District 1, school principal summary. The participating principal for District 1 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was both driven and supported by

the district office. His learning of the standards and the direction in which his school was expected to move came from the district office in the form of professional development or through participation in group meetings that worked through the implementation process. He discussed working with the TTN, participating in district-level meetings that determined the teaching strategies and teaching resources expected to be in place in each classroom, and being an important part of the monitoring piece expected to be in place at each school in District 1. His overall sentiment about the ELA CCSS implementation process that had unfolded in the district was captured when he stated, "If you do not change what we are doing in the classroom, then it is business as usual" (0102). He expressed the value of the capacity building that had taken place in the district, the focus on key teaching strategies identified by the groups working toward implementation, and the ongoing monitoring through the use of instructional rounds that included teachers and administrators.

The Middle School Teacher

The teacher participant in this study had been in education for eight years. All eight years had been at this middle school site. She was an English and social studies teacher. The experience she reported was centered on the day-to-day challenges the new standards had brought to her classroom. She stated, "You have to be open to, it's going to look a lot different now, grading is going to look different, there's a lot more writing" (0103). Given the changes, the participating teacher voiced the value of being involved in the ELA CCSS Transition Team for the previous two years. She also discussed the experience of being on that team in a positive light, praising the fact that she and her group were led to discover the changes and work toward developing the approach that was to be implemented in each classroom. When talking about the

driving force for the implementation meetings at the district office, she referenced the TTN and the district administrator that also participated in this study. Of his role, she stated, "Not so much him giving us the ideas, but allowing us to figure it out" (0103). Finally, she discussed the individual needs of the students as a key factor in how successful the implementation plan was taking root for the students. When discussing whether she perceived the students to be better prepared for the ELA CCSS this year over previous years, she stated, "These are my support kids, so they need a lot more teacher involvement; whereas, if I had a proficient group, they can do more on their own" (0103). Although the participating teacher for District 1 reported difficulties with the change, she praised the district's approach when she stated, "Aside from all the PDs and the committees, I just feel like we have the support" (0103).

What is the ELA CCSS? The participating teacher for District 1 reported an understanding of the ELA CCSS as a national movement, rooted in having all students across the nation on "the same playing field" (0103). When the classroom teacher for District 1 was asked to talk about what the ELA CCSS were to her, she stated, "To me it's basically trying to get all of the kids across the nation on the same page" (0103). She was asked to elaborate on that statement; she added:

> There's a disadvantage to the kids if they lived currently in California, and have
>
> to go move to the East Coast. They're either behind or ahead, depending on what
>
> state they're coming from. If we were all kind of on the same playing field,
>
> movement shouldn't affect the child, it should all kind of be straightforward.
>
> (0103)

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating teacher for District 1 reported an experience during implementation in which "they gave us everything we needed ahead of time, so teachers would have more time to play with it, so then when we actually started the year, we wouldn't be overwhelmed" (0103). She discussed being a part of the District's Common Core Transition Team during the last two years. She reported that District 1 had been working on implementing the ELA CCSS since the 2014–2015 school year. It was because of the work that she did while on the transition team over the summer that she felt comfortable with the standards. She stated, "We had time to see the standards, compare them, and actually plan before we even adopt[ed] a book or anything else" (0103). She gave credit to the district administrator leading the transition because the approach was selective: "He wanted people that actually cared enough to go through this" (0103).

Another part of the plan on which the participating teacher reported was the value of the support and guidance that had been provided for teachers. Support, she discussed, comes from both the district ELA coach and the school's ELA coach. She reported meeting as a group with the school coach every other week, and that these meetings focused on accountability and on time for teachers to share with one another. She stated:

> There are certain things [the school's ELA coach] has to do on a district level to show that we're doing X, Y and Z and she's doing her job, but the agenda is always open at the end for, 'Okay, do we have time to now discuss this or if you want something added?' You can go to her, of course, and say okay, 'I need 10 minutes at the end to share this.' It's usually pretty flexible. (0103)

The participating teacher for District 1 expressed an experience with the transition plan that had changed the expectation of the teachers in the district. This had made it difficult for some teachers who had worked in the ELA department for years and were now being asked to change their practice. She stated, "The role of you as a teacher is basically to be open-minded to the fact that things are changing, so you can't just open up… your file cabinet and go to that folder you have for that story" (0103). The plan that she reported for the ELA department in the district was one of teaching the students strategies in the sixth grade that were also used in the seventh and eighth grade. She stated:

> The goal is that if I teach it in sixth grade, by the time they get to seventh, they no longer have to take the time to teach it. They should already know ACE means this, mark means this. By the time they get to eighth grade, it's just, it should be a breeze. (0103)

The strategies that the teacher discussed throughout the interview were strategies that she and the transition team decided to focus on. For the current year, she stated, "We're all doing these two and the AVID ones, basically" (0103). The purpose of this uniformity, she explained, was that "we're all trying to kind of do the same thing so when they get to seventh grade, no matter [which teacher] you go to, you should kind of have this foundation" (0103).

The participating teacher reported feeling supported by the plan that the district and the school site had in place. She discussed the meetings taking place during school hours to make it easier on the teachers to be involved in the planning and discussions about the transition and the expectations. She also discussed the monitoring pieces that were in place, although she "wouldn't say monitoring" (0103). She stated, "I just think they kind of check in to make sure,

Do we have questions? Are we really using the new stuff? It's hard to get away from what you've been doing for so many years" (0103).

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating teacher from District 1 voiced an experience of learning about the ELA CCSS through her participation in the district's Common Core Transition Team and through her participation in collaborative meetings with peer teachers and ELA coaches. She voiced that it was primarily through her participation in these groups over the summer that she had become familiar with the new standards. She also discussed the fact that being a part of this group allowed her to become familiar with the practices that the district would be looking for during implementation. When she discussed the willingness of having teachers participate in change efforts that called for teachers to take time to learn new information and change their practice, she stated, "Usually this site wants to be on the committees. We want to voice our opinion" (0103). At the district meetings, the teacher reported having had the opportunity to dissect and analyze the new standards. Plans for implementation (e.g., the creation of a pacing guide) were accomplished there. Of that experience, she stated, "We worked backwards, so we looked at all the new standards and we made sure that we covered all of them with a story" (0103). The meetings with the ELA coach at the school site were also reported to be informative with regard to the expectations on implementation. She described the meeting agenda and content:

> It's a full blown agenda when you get there. There are certain things, whether it's
> data we're looking at, what's coming up, we're sharing how we taught this, or
> what we need to, what didn't work maybe that week, our kids frustrated with

something, how to test. You're seeing what's to come, so you're not

overwhelmed when it gets there. (0103)

The meetings that the teacher reported provided opportunities for learning that was mutually

beneficial for the teachers who participated. She stated, "When you have four, five [academic

subject] teachers in the room, if I'm stuck as to how to approach it, then I hear four other ideas,

and one might stick with me. I can bring that to my classroom" (0103). The participating teacher

was asked to provide an example of a learning experience at one of these meetings, and she

discussed a collaborative session in which the group tackled a core novel. She described the

experience:

Everybody kind of brings something. So somebody can bring [something] they

made up [like] comprehension questions. Another person made an evidence chart

that goes with one of the chapters. One teacher thought of the character heads.

Everybody just kind of brings a little bit, then you know, at our next meeting, it

will be, "Well, how's it going, how are you teaching this part of the book?" or

"This worked really well for me," or "My kids aren't reading, what are you doing

so that they read?" So, then you get to just share with each other. (0103)

The learning experience the participating teacher for District 1 reported was one that

centered on her participation in district committees and school meetings on the implementation

of the ELA CCSS. The journey to full implementation had not been completely smooth. She

discussed teachers who were struggling to accept the changes, pointing to the difficulties of once

having their lessons in files and ready to go now being useless. She discussed the experience for

herself in transitioning from teaching fifth grade to teaching in middle school as being similar.

She felt the frustration of having had worked on lessons that she had to leave behind to start anew. The participating teacher summed up the challenges and benefits of the learning experience when she stated:

> When you learn a new strategy, you're not going to be comfortable with it right away. It took me a lot to feel comfortable with the ACE and the mark your text. I had to do it with them, I had to make sure they understood it. (0103)

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? When the teacher was asked to talk about what the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS would look like in a classroom, she reported, "The biggest thing we keep hearing over and over again is they want to see the students collaborate, and they want to see a lot of opportunity for them to get up and talk" (0103). Students, she discussed, were becoming accustomed to the new requirements. She discussed a routine class activity such as responding to questions and pointed out, "Instead of just answering the question like they would a few years ago, now they have to ACE the question" (0103). In her words, the current classroom practices are

> completely aligned, because of everything they have to do. They have to pull things from the article, they have to know how to chunk it and break it up, and the vocab. They're doing most of it on their own with my guidance. (0103)

She elaborated on this successful use of the ELA CCSS and the new strategies that were being arranged into the classroom:

> Monday for example, they'll read an article and they have to mark the text, which is Common Core aligned. So, they're going through it and they're finding, 'I don't get this.' Instead of asking me, they put a little question mark. If they get to

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an Aha! idea, something that just completely captures them, instead of wanting to

share right away, they just put a little star next to it. So they know how to come

back to it. The biggest thing is, basically, they're supposed to be marking

everything up. It's no longer just read it to read it. Mark it up, find stuff that

interests you so that when we start discussing it, they know where to go. (0103)

Has the implementation been successful? The participating teacher for District 1

reported having family members who were teachers in two other districts in the greater Los

Angeles area. She stated that the success of implementing the ELA CCSS at schools was "hit or

miss." For one sibling, the approach to implementation mirrored the approach at District 1

closely, so she felt it was being done successfully. The second sibling, she reported, was in

another district. There, the teachers were not being given a lot of support or direction. She

described this sibling as a "take charge" guy. She elaborated and stated, "He's trying to take all

the leadership roles, which is draining because there's no one—there is no committee" (0103).

As for her own experience, the participating teacher reported the overall implementation

of the ELA CCSS at District 1 as successful. She reported the teachers felt like they had what

they needed and, overall, were supported by the processes that had been put in place. As a

classroom teacher, the success of the new practices was determined by what was seen in class.

To illustrate the changes in class, she discussed students who were experiencing difficulties in

class:

If one doesn't [get it], they've got three or four others that will try to help them,

make them understand. They're kind of helping each other, and it grows like into

this little family. I guess the little groups or the classroom atmosphere—it's not so much my classroom anymore. (0103)

District 1, classroom teacher summary. The participating teacher for District 1 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that included groups of teacher leaders taking part in the decision-making process of the implementation. The experience she voiced included a knowledgeable understanding of the expectations that were in place for the teachers and the schools. She readily echoed the teaching strategies discussed by both the principal and the district administrator. The teacher also discussed the collaboration that was taking place in the district regarding the implementation of the ELA CCSS in a positive manner. Of the teachers' experiences with the implementation, the participant stated, "Our teachers are basically not freaking out, for lack of a better word, when you throw all this at them because they've seen it" (0103), affirming that she and her peers were probably not overwhelmed by the process.

Summary for District 1. District 1 provided a collective narrative in which the ideas formulated at the district level about how the implementation of the ELA CCSS would look in each classroom were cohesive. All of the participants shared similar information about the processes that took place in the district to ensure that teachers and administrators learned about the ELA CCSS. All of the participants reported working both with the TTN and in committees that grew in numbers to reach the goals set forth by the district. All participants reported that teachers and administrators were a part of these committees. The participating district administrator reported that all of the participants—teachers and administrators—went through the same processes to become familiar with the CCSS and to become engaged in the changes decided on at the meetings. All of the participants voiced an ongoing monitoring process that

included the teachers. The participating district administrator and participating middle school principal discussed them and the teachers using instructional rounds and learning walks to monitor and observe classrooms and to ensure that new practices were being implemented. The participating teacher did not label walking into the classrooms as instructional rounds or learning walks, but she did reference people walking into the classrooms and looking at the practices that had been put in place. The overall sentiment of the messages conveyed by the participants was one of support and progress towards the full implementation of the ELA CCSS.

Narratives for District 2

District 2 was the largest in the study, serving almost 13,500 students. Hispanic or Latino students made up the largest ethnic group in the district, accounting for 57% of the student body. African American students represented 40% of the student body. No other ethnic group made up more than 1% of the student body in this district. Of the students attending this district, 27% was English language learners. Seventy-eight percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch in this district. For the 2015 SBAC ELA State assessments, 25% of the students achieved at meeting or exceeding the standards. District 2 was a district that had been taken over by the state, and had been under state control for five years. Being under the state's control had led to many changes in the leadership of the district during that time period, a fact that all of the participants discussed. District 2 experienced declining enrollment during these years as well. The participants of this study reported that these characteristics created a tumultuous climate for all stakeholders.

The District Administrator

The district administrator for District 2 has been in education for 26 years. She had been an administrator at the school level as well as at the district level. At the time of this study, she had been in her position for one and a half years.

The district administrator's interview about her experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS touched on the details of coming into a system during a transitional period. On the one hand, she reported having a deep understanding of the ELA CCSS and the shifts required of them because of the roles she served in her previous district. She stated:

> That's what I used to do, help with implementation and unwrapping the standards:
> What does it look like when you read the standard? How do you take it apart and
> know what should you see when you walk in the classroom according to the
> standard? (0201)

With that knowledge, her perspective and understanding of undertaking a change effort was best summarized when she discussed collaborating with her peers from different schools and districts at meetings in the County Office of Education. She stated:

> We all had the same questions: Where do we start? We realized it doesn't matter,
> it does not matter where you start. You can start with the shifts. You can start with
> four Cs. You can start with rigor. It doesn't matter. It's starting and then moving
> forward from there. (0201)

The interview with the participating district administrator indicated that District 2 was not at the place of implementation that she would have liked to see had she been in charge of implementing

the ELA CCSS earlier. Her experience with implementing change and her knowledge of the

CCSS allowed her to surmise:

> I think starting that process sooner would have helped [District 2] kind of get
>
> everybody on the same page, because really it doesn't matter what you focus on,
>
> but if you provide one thing that you expect teachers to focus on, they can do it.
>
> But when you look at Common Core and think of all of the different strategies
>
> and shifts that are needed, it's hard. (0201)

What is the ELA CCSS? When the participating district administrator for District 2 was asked what the ELA CCSS were to her, she responded by stating, "It's ELA [and] ELD. It's just the outcomes of what students should know and be able to do by the end of the school year in regards to mastering English language arts and English language development" (0201). The district administrator for District 2 reported understanding the ELA CCSS as more encompassing than the new standards. She discussed the different pieces that made up the ELA CCSS by stating that they included "listening and speaking, reading, writing, language acquisition, collaboration, [and] digital knowledge of how [a student] communicate[s]" (0201).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating district administrator for District 2 discussed the current plan being implemented in the district at length. In discussing the plan, the district administrator painted a complicated picture of things that were there beforehand, detailing how a lot of that work had been integrated into a refined approach to the implementation of the CCSS. Of the plan that was in place, the district administrator reported, "I think they were trying to do too many things at once and you can't expect teachers to do that" (0201). The district administrator was able to discuss numerous goals in which different

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teachers were participating, but with no visible, district-wide focus. She expressed that the she was trying to move the district toward having a focus and working toward a more limited number of goals. She stated, "The strongest plan is to just pick a focus, work on it, support it, then move forward to the next thing" (0201). The district administrator reported:

> We have a group called Pivot Learning Partners, and this year our focus is on
>
> developing professional learning communities, increasing students' engagement,
>
> increasing rigor in the classrooms, and then conducting instructional rounds, and
>
> so through those processes, it's all focused on the strategies to implement
>
> Common Core. (0201)

The district administrator acknowledged that there had been work done toward the implementation of the ELA CCSS. She noted that some of the work that had taken place in the district had merged or morphed into a refined approach that was taking place at the time of this study. For example, she discussed the plan that had been in place in the district before her arrival: "There used to be something called DSLT and then they created like this Common Core road map or implementation plan but it was very broad and so we took that" (0201). The DSLT was described as a team that developed a focus for the district to move in during the early stages of implementation. The district administrator reported that a similar group—the Educational Adviser Committee—replaced the DSLT group. She stated, "We have an Educational Adviser Committee who is working on a long range professional development plan that hits on the Common Core and implementation of the Common Core" (0201). She shared that this group was made up of various stakeholders that included teachers, administrators, parents, and high school students. She stated, "Five areas were identified [by the group]: professional development,

English language learners, students with disabilities, RTI systems, and technology" (0201). She elaborated on the significance of the five areas when she stated, "We realized that those five areas… if we can to do the correct things with and for those students, then we will increase student achievement for all of our students" (0201).

Of the work that had been done by the teachers, she stated, "The teachers went through aligning their curriculum to the Common Core State Standards, kind of unwrapping those standards, what does it look like and then what kind of strategies does our current curriculum already have" (0201). She also discussed the professional development that had been available to teachers over the summer for the last couple of years. She stated that 95% of her teachers were at some point or another touched by the PD offered by the district or at the school sites.

The district administrator's interview about the plan in place in the district at the time of this study revolved around a number of key points. First, she discussed a refined and more focused approach to implementing the ELA CCSS. She discussed the push in utilizing the resources available to the teachers and the principals, such as the ELA coaches. She then discussed the monitoring piece that included the use of instructional rounds as both a source of professional development and accountability. This plan, she stated, was scheduled to be implemented in earnest the following school year, with many pieces already in place at the school sites. She further stated:

> We were kind of separate, every school kind of did its own thing, so it's kind of
> bringing everybody together with that common goal and vision. We want rigor
> across the curriculum, not just in certain sites, so this is our focus, and tying it all
> together rather than these little separate pods. (0201)

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The district administrator reported learning about the ELA CCSS equally in both formal and informal settings. She discussed the forward-thinking culture of the district in which she used to work. While there, the "county department of ED had a lot of district-level training [on] rollouts for the Common Core State Standards" (0201). She also reported having learned from conferences she attended. She stated, "I am also a member of ASCD so I attended some conferences… which were very, very good on Common Core implementation for both math and ELA" (0201). The district administrator discussed staying at the forefront of change as vital and important to her position. She stated, "You have to keep up to date, that's just part of what you have to do in education" (0201). As part of that keeping up, the district administrator also reported, "A lot of it [is] just on my own. As you can see I have tons of books on Common Core" (0201). The district administrator reported that she subscribed to a number of educational journals because her job entailed being "up to date on good instruction" (0201). The district administrator for District 2 reported spending more than two hours a week in formal and informal learning during the beginning phases of the CCSS implementation. She reported that she currently invested about an hour per week in both formal and informal learning about the CCSS.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The district administrator was asked to share what would demonstrate the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS. She responded by providing examples of what she would expect to see in both the students if she were to walk into a classroom and what she would like to see in the teachers who were tasked with teaching the CCSS.

The district administrator reported that if she were to walk into a classroom, some of the characteristics that would tell her that the ELA CCSS were in place would include inquiry-based learning, research, asking and answering questions at a higher depth of knowledge or that require higher-level thinking, and having students complete assessments that are more like the performance tasks. She added that she would "expect to see more collaboration for the new ELD standards" (0201), and to see language standards in more than just the ELA classrooms because "the common core ELA standards are in every content area" (0201).

The district administrator also discussed the shift that the CCSS demanded of teachers. Discussing the need for teachers to be more willing to take risks, she stated, "We're trying to let teachers know, 'It's okay, it's okay to make a mistake'" (0201). That, she reported, had been a problem in District 2 because, she surmised, "Here I think teachers were told 'Thou shall,' and so that's what the teachers were used to. And when you're asking them to now be creative, it's a little bit of a panic" (0201). The district administrator discussed the difficulties that District 2 faced in having teachers embrace these ideals on various levels.

Has the implementation been successful? When asked whether the implementation of the ELA CCSS had been a success, the participating district administrator reported a mixed bag of results. She stated that the rollout from the state had been successful, acknowledging the difficulties of the change process itself by stating, "There's more support now than there was in 2010" (0201). She discussed the numerous resources available to individuals working toward implementation, including vignettes for what implementation should look like and videos that professionals can access. For districts and schools, she reported that the success of the

implementation was more dependent on the individuals leading the change. She contrasted her current district and her past district to make the point:

> This district was a little behind. It's hard when you have leadership change that often, just nothing's going to be implemented. My past district, I feel like we had a great roll out…. Here it's a little slower but I feel like we're on the right path. (0201)

She noted the time commitment that was in place at her previous district in making the change successful when she stated, "[The County Office of Education] really did a lot of work down there trying to help their districts implement Common Core. That was our main topic of discussion for at least two years" (0201). Making similar comparisons, she reported that how successful the implementation had been at the different schools depended on the staff—both administrative and teaching staff—and the circumstances that surrounded each site. She stated:

> Some schools are moving forward faster than others, but there's a lot of different things that go into that. How are the teachers working together? What's the make-up of the staff? What kind of work have they already done on Common Core? And again, [if] a lot of leadership has changed, that's going to impact the staff too. (0201)

She noted of her current district, "Probably 60%... are like, 'I want to keep what I've always done.' And 40% are getting on board and implementing stuff and working hard to change what they're doing in the classroom" (0201). She stated that this could be due to the fact that "the majority of our teachers that were hired here were hired during the time when the expectation was: you will follow the script—page 1, page 2—and I want to see that everybody's on the same

page" (0201). Ultimately, however, she stated that the success of implementing something new had more to do with the change process than anything else:

> It goes to change and everybody deals with change differently. Some folks are very open and excited about it and rejuvenated by it. Others are afraid of it because, 'I was good doing it this way, I'm afraid I won't be good doing it that way.' (0201)

District 2, district administrator summary. At the time of this study, the overall success of implementation for the ELA CCSS according to the district administrator for District 2 was still undetermined at many levels. She stated, "This is an experimental phase with Common Core. We don't know what's going to work unless we try different things and see what strategies are most successful in helping students do whatever skill that they need to do" (0201). The message that the ELA CCSS implementation was a process was clear in the narrative the participating district administrator provided. The experience of coming into a new system, especially a system that was not as advanced in its implementation of the new standards due to changes in leadership or too broad a focus, was reported as an obstacle to her efforts to move the district forward with the implementation of the CCSS.

The Middle School Principal

The middle school principal who participated in this study had been in education for 18 years as a teacher, a coach, a professional development provider, and a school administrator. At the time of the study, she was completing her second year as principal at the participating middle school. The participating principal's experience with the district as a teacher, a coach, and now an administrator lent itself to a unique understanding of the implementation process that had

taken place within the district during the transitional period into the CCSS and during the time period the district had been in a state of *state receivership*, a process that takes place when a school district is in financial distress and must borrow money from the state for solvency. Under state receivership, the participating principal referred to the fact that there had been leadership changes within the district office on a number of occasions. That, however, did not take away from the excitement she reported having with other teachers during the initial stages of implementation. During that phase, as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), she recalled the feeling of the group as reminiscent "of when [she] was in school in elementary school [and] in middle school… because it just seem[ed] as if it was just good teaching that prepared you for whether you're going to college or whether you're going to just work or have a trade" (0202). During that initial introduction to the standards and the shifts that were to take place within the district, the participating principal recalled her concern being "the transition for the teachers because the textbooks were not aligned to Common Core" (0202).

The participating principal summarized her feelings about the changes that had taken place in the district during the past five years when she discussed the success the district had with implementing the ELA CCSS. She stated, "Regardless of the different roles we had to take with different leaders, I think that what still remained was that we have a job to do, which is to educate students" (0202).

What is the ELA CCSS? When the participating principal was asked to talk about what the ELA CCSS was to her, she responded by stating, "Common Core, it's all about problem solving. We're preparing our students to be intelligent, critical thinking problem solvers" (0202). The participating principal for District 2 had an understanding of the ELA CCSS that was rooted

in her practice as an ELA teacher and an ELA coach for many years. She voiced an example when she stated, "Where you say, 'What's the main idea of this?' Now it goes deeper than 'What's the main idea?' It's 'What is the author's purpose?'" (0202). Her point being that students are being asked to do many of the things they had been asked to do under the California State Standards during NCLB, with students now being asked to go deeper with the information and to do so more independently. She paralleled the two standards when explaining that the ELA CCSS "still has something to do with learning a lot of the previous standards. However, it's taking it to a different level" (0202).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating principal for District 2 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was affected by the circumstances that surrounded the district during the beginning of the implementation process. Being under state receivership had an effect on the manner in which a plan was initiated and implemented. The participating principal stated that there was a plan for the implementation of the ELA CCSS when she was in the district office as a TOSA. She stated that at the time, people at the district office "were preparing [TOSAs] to prepare the teachers…. We were attending workshops so that we could help teachers transition" (0202). The participating principal stated that the "big concern for a lot of us as teachers on special assignment… was, 'How are we going to help the teachers to move into Common Core?'" (0202). But the work that was initiated during the guidance of various leadership teams was not always synchronous with previous teams. She stated, "Because of the different changes, a lot of things got dropped and handed to somebody else" (0202). She recalled that at one point during the receivership, there were only two individuals "who ran the district effectively" (0202). She gave one of the state-

appointed administrators credit for having the forethought of "getting a group of educators together" (0202). She recalled that these individuals met on a weekly basis, "and we would not just create a plan to just throw at people, but we would come up with different strategies or different things that we needed to do" (0202).

The current approach to implementation—as expressed by the participating principal for District 2—was a mix of ideas that had been around the district and the ideas of new individuals and groups that were in charge of both the school and the district. Having students collaborate more and problem solve, having teachers use text-dependent questions, increasing rigor with students, integrating technology, utilizing an ELA coach in tandem with an EL coach, utilizing the practice SBAC tests with students and teachers, and monitoring student progress at the school level as well as the district level were all touched upon by the participating principal. She did not present a plan for implementation in a linear manner, neither from the district nor the school. The interview about the plan was about having all of these elements being implemented in various degrees to fully transition to the ELA CCSS.

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating principal from District 2 reported learning about the ELA CCSS through both formal trainings with the district and with the LACOE, and through informal learning through reading about the new standards. She stated, "I'm constantly reading" (0202). The participating principal discussed the learning opportunities available to her as a principal in the district. She reported that administrators were "provided with books for transitioning to the Common Core" (0202). She also stated that through her work in the district, administrators "have mentors through PIVOT Learning…[where the mentors] are

providing opportunities for [administrators] to dig into the standards and how we do this with teachers" (0202). In talking about the learning that took place at LACOE, she stated:

It was more content because it gave you, for example, "Here is the CST, here is a Common Core standard. This is the way this standard is presented on CST. This is the way the standard is presented in the Common Core." So there needs to be a shift. (0202)

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The participating principal reported that her focus for the current year was on rigor and student engagement. What the ELA CCSS looked like in a classroom that was fully implementing the changes required of the new standards was defined by the participating principal when she stated, "I would want to see every student working to solve the problem" (0202). She also stated, "I want to see them not just reading and answering questions, but reading and really, truly identifying the purpose of why we're reading this. 'How was that going to help me get to college?'" (0202). She reported, "There still has not been a smooth transition" (0202) to the ELA CCSS for the teachers. She referenced this in connection to her doing informal observations. She stated that from those walks, "I see [teaching with the ELA CCSS] has not transferred yet" (0202). However, the participating principal's understanding of implementation has her at the center of what happens in the school. To help make the process better, she stated, "I think there is some work that I could initiate here at the site" (0202). The principal noted that a focus on teacher collaboration and giving them the opportunity to create ELA CCSS lessons, and possibly having her ELA team visit other sites (not necessarily in the district) were things she was working on initiating. The ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS for the participating principal focused on continuing to

develop the teachers as opposed to specifics about what would be taking place in the classroom. Although there were characteristics that she referenced, the dialogue touched on the need to enhance many things that were, to some degree or another, taking place in the school.

Has the implementation been successful? When the participating principal was asked whether the implementation of the ELA CCSS had taken shape successfully, she reported that the transition had been successful. She was positive about the manner in which her district had managed the shift while having a number of leadership changes in the district. She stated:

> We've actually done well in regards to the different changes in leadership. I think
>
> what remained constant was that we're educators. Regardless of what role you are
>
> in, you can be an assistant, a classroom assistant, the actual teacher, principal,
>
> vice principal, director… I think that what still remained was that we have a job to
>
> do. (0202)

During the interview the participating principal discussed the difficulties that her district experienced during the transition from the California State Standards under NCLB and the ELA CCSS. She stated, "I could say this as a classroom teacher and as a coach and as an administrator, when it came down to CST, CST was clearly outlined. Common Core is still in the gray area" (0202). The principal readily admitted to the need for more work to be done at all levels before her school could get to full implementation. She discussed the need for the state to do more work with regard to textbooks. She discussed the dependency that her teachers had on the textbooks and how that dependency was a stumbling block for some teachers. With the upcoming adoption of textbooks in her district, she was optimistic that it would help her teachers implement the ELA CCSS more successfully.

District 2, school principal summary. The participating principal for District 2 was positive and assertive in the belief that her school and district were moving in the right direction. She stated, "I think that from a site level to the district level, I think that we're doing the best that we can and our best is good" (0202). She was optimistic about the team that she had in place, having been a coach before and having an ELA coach that she described as "wonderful" (0202) and an assistant principal who had also been a coach. The participant communicated that the hard work that had taken place in the district during the last five years outweighed the challenges that they had to endure. She stated of the process, "Common Core never dropped, that ball never actually dropped" (0202). The experience that she voiced acknowledged the difficulties of the transitions that her district experienced during the time period in which it was also implementing the CCSS. She acknowledged the shortcomings of those changes, but was passionate and optimistic about making the change successful for the benefit of the students at her school.

The Middle School Teacher

The teacher from this district had been in education for 11 years and had been an ELA classroom teacher for the previous nine years in the participating school. Although she reported many positives in the form of trainings and strategies that had been discussed or put in place to some degree or another, the participating teacher for District 2 voiced an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was marred by changes in the leadership at the district office and a lack of focus on what the expectations for implementation were at her site.

The participating teacher discussed various professional development sessions she and her colleagues had attended over the summers, with the AVID Summer Institute being one of them. She voiced having common prep-periods with all but one of her department peers, and she

discussed objectives for all ELA teachers to implement new strategies (e.g., Cornell Notes and annotating the text). Although the participant reported that the district had plenty of resources to provide professional development and opportunities for teachers to collaborate, the participant voiced, "I still have a lot to learn. I feel really frustrated that we don't have a set program or curriculum or anything to guide us. I feel like I'm just trying to fill the gaps on my own" (0203). She discussed the lack of an adopted curriculum as a hindrance to providing an instructional program fully aligned with the ELA CCSS: "We don't have a curriculum that is Common Core based…. It's been difficult to fill in the gaps with my own research and some professional development that we've had" (0203).

The participating teacher for District 2 also discussed the constant changes in leadership at the district office and how that had an effect on the progress that was taking place in the school. She stated, "We've had a different principal almost every year" (0302), and of the principal that is currently at the school site, she stated, "I don't know if [the principal] had the support from the district, again because it was during the move from… the change with the state administration" (0203). The participant was asked to clarify how big the changes in leadership were during the implementation process, to which she responded:

> A huge group of people [left]…. We had a program that we were going to start
> this year, School to Home. We were going to start one-to-one with computers, we
> were going to start with the seventh graders, and last year, it was the planning
> stage with the district, everyone who was supporting the program left over the
> summer. Everyone, IT, state superintendent. (0203)

What is the ELA CCSS? When the participating teacher was asked to discuss what the ELA CCSS was to her, she responded by stating, "Just a lot of new standards and many of them that require technology" (0203). She elaborated on the standards by discussing the anchor standards and clarifying, "It's a lot and I haven't really internalized all of them. I mean, I have an idea about what I need to cover, I do, but we don't have the materials yet" (0203). The participating teacher articulated an understanding of the ELA CCSS, with technology having a pronounced role in the changes students were expected to exhibit for state testing. She stated, "I think technology is a big change with Common Core overall but also, in ELA, a lot of students need to know how to type, especially because the test is all computer-based" (0203).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? When the participating teacher for District 2 was asked whether there was a plan in the district to implement the ELA CCSS, she noted, "I just don't know what the plan is" (0203). She described the manner in which the ELA CCSS was put out to the teachers:

> I feel like Common Core was, "Okay we're doing Common Core." It wasn't
> really explained well. "What is Common Core?" They just gave us a standard. I
> remember having professional development where we sat there comparing the old
> standards to the new standards and how this is not really helping me. It was just
> two big booklets we're comparing. (0203)

The participating teacher's interpretation of the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS was voiced best when she stated, "Everyone's doing their own thing it seems" (0203).

The participant's interview about the manner in which she and the ELA department at her school had been addressing the implementation of the ELA CCSS presented many strategies and

professional development opportunities that she acknowledged were somehow a part of the plan. From the interview with the participant, the plan was somehow lost on teachers. She discussed having had attended trainings at the district office and having attended regularly scheduled collaboration meetings to discuss the implementation of the new standards or data derived from district-mandated benchmarks. She reported, "We had a grant that allowed us to collaborate every Thursday after school for an hour. The goal was to work as a department to plan out our curriculum" (0203). She shared that those meetings were not always productive, and stated, "The time that we are given to plan, [participating teachers] don't use it. They lack focus. They start talking about something else" (0203).

The lack of follow through by the teachers was, in part, caused by the constant changes in leadership. The participant reported that it was "rare" (0203) to have administrators in her classroom look at what was taking place. She noted that there was an agreement to use annotation and Cornell Notes in all of the classrooms, "but then again there was no one at the school holding anyone accountable for it. If they don't hold us accountable for it, it's pointless really" (0203).

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating teacher for District 2 presented a learning experience with the ELA CCSS that was a composite of many trainings that were in one form or another applicable to the implementation of the new standards. She stated, "We picked up bits and pieces from the professional development that we've had over the last three summers" (0203). The participant also discussed learning about the ELA CCSS through the various informational websites available to teachers. She discussed going onto Achieve the Core, NewsELA, and Readworks. She elaborated on the usefulness of the resources when she said,

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"What I like about those websites, especially NewsELA, is [that] they have the same article but in different lexiles" (0203). The learning experience through formal settings such as conferences and professional development sessions that the participant described were not ideal. She described them when she stated:

> A lot of the training that I've been to, a lot of it was very boring. We just sat there and kind of listened. I feel like the best way to really learn something is by applying. The information is important, but once you apply it, it's like, "Ok this is working." (0203)

She described the formal learning experiences as leaving her overwhelmed with information. She stated that those sessions presented "a lot of different information that at the end you feel overwhelmed. You didn't even know what to implement because you have so much content, but you're like, 'Whoa, what's gonna work?' It's trial and error" (0203).

The application of information and seeing the end product of what was expected of the students were beneficial learning experiences for the participant. She discussed that form of learning when she stated, "I learned about Common Core through performance tasks, the Smarter Balance tests" (0203). She stated that through that experience she was better able to target the skills her students would have to master with her during the school year. The participant discussed her focus on writing with her students as stemming from that experience. She also discussed a beneficial collaboration meeting as one that the ELA coach led—it was on analyzing the data for her class on a recent benchmark her students completed.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The participating teacher for District 2 outlined the ideal outcome of what successful implementation of the ELA CCSS in

each ELA class at her school would look like. She discussed what it would look like for the students and for the professionals in the school. Of the students, she stated:

> I want to be able to see my students read and annotate on their Chrome Books, not
>
> paper, everything online. I want them to be able to type. I want them to be able to
>
> take notes as they read, so whenever they have to respond to those questions, they
>
> have their notes. I want them to be able to read and think, processing the
>
> information that they are reading. I want them to be able to write explanatory
>
> paragraphs and essays and be able to explain something.... I would want them to
>
> be better writers overall, and read more of course. (0203)

As the individual who was ultimately responsible for the learning her students are achieving in her class, the participating teacher discussed what she was currently doing to ensure that the vision that she held of the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS was taking shape in her class. Acknowledging that there was work to be done, she discussed the proactive approach she took to ensure that her students did more reading. She stated, "Because we don't have anything school-wide, I push my students to read a novel" (0203). She noted pushing students to read, digest, and produce a report on assigned novels once a quarter.

With regard to what the ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS was for the teachers, the participant described a change of culture that would have to take place at her school. In this changed culture, the participant discussed having more collaboration, having a focus, and having consistency in the leadership to ensure that progress was being made and people were being held accountable for the work at hand. She discussed the benefit of collaboration when she discussed the manner in which she has successfully collaborated with and learned from a peer. She

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described that teacher as an "8th grade English teacher… [whom] I work really closely with because my students go to him, so we work together consistently" (0203). The participant expressed enthusiasm and encouragement from having this individual for support. She stated:

> I've learned a lot working with him. He is our tech coach and he introduced me to the whole Google Docs and how to use it in my classroom, and that was like, "Wow! This is amazing!" So I feel that collaborating with teachers, there is a great benefit. You learn from one another and gather ideas. It's just unfortunate that most of our department, they're not willing to work together. (0203)

The participant voiced a desire for embracing the challenges the ELA CCSS presented to her and her colleagues. She talked positively of experiences in which the labors of implementation were spread over the larger group and were focused. A meeting that she reflected on during the interview encapsulated this point. She shared, "We just gathered data on what skills we need to focus on prior to Smarter Balance. That was really helpful" (0203). The collaborative culture that the participant expressed went further than just the ELA department at her school. She discussed the need to have others embrace the interconnectedness of the literacy standards when she stated, "As a department, we feel like the other subjects could help by giving the students a writing assignment, especially explanatory pieces. If they do that in science and social studies, [students'] writing skills could improve a lot more" (0203). With the need to be more collaborative, the participant also discussed the importance of consistency in leadership. She expressed an experience in the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was marred by the constant changes in leadership at the district office. She voiced frustration with an on-again, off-again approach that had become the status-quo in the district. She stated, "With the constant

change in the administration, there are some systems that they start but then they don't finish, there's no one that continues" (0203). The participant's vision of the ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS continued to be positive and professionally sound. She summarized this point when she stated, "I would like to see more involvement in my school, in my department, more collaborations so we could all help each other with this new set of standards instead of [having] that feeling that I'm on my own" (0203).

Has the implementation been successful? When the participating teacher for District 2 was asked whether the implementation of the ELA CCSS has been successful, she opined that it had not been successful. She stated that it had not been successful at the state level because "it require[d] a lot of technology use and not all the teachers [were] technology savvy. They don't feel confident using technology in the classroom" (0203). She explained that the ongoing changes in the leadership at her district was the reason it was not successful there. She stated, "No, the inconsistency. There's really no one at the district office... pushing anything on the schools" (0203). The same inconsistency with the leadership at her school hindered the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS. She stated, "We've had a different principal almost every year since I've been at [the participating middle school]. So the administration, they really haven't been part of the push" (0203). To further complicate the experience she had during the implementation process of the ELA CCSS at her site, the participant reported that the school lacked a culture of collaboration, making a shift like this very difficult. She voiced, "Most teachers don't really want to collaborate. They wouldn't attend the meeting—they would just complain. It was more about time to vent and not really time to plan" (0203). The participating teacher for District 2 summarized her experience when she stated:

I think it's because of the inconsistency starting from the top. [At the participating middle school], we have not had consistency. So many teachers get away with things because we have not had an administrator that's really there to see what's going on and do something about it. (0203)

District 2, classroom teacher summary. The participating teacher for District 2 presented an experience with the implementation of the new standards that was taxing to her and the students with whom she worked. When asked to talk about why the state left the implementation of the CCSS open for each LEA to determine, she stated, "I'm guessing they're giving teachers more liberty to really take charge of their classroom. I could see that" (0203). She understood that there had been many changes made to the educational landscape with the introduction of the CCSS and was aware of the fact that she and her colleagues had been to trainings that should have provided them with the resources and tools needed to embrace the challenges that the new standards presented to them and their students. However, the lack of focus and the sense of isolation she voiced throughout the interview were consistent. Of the whole experience, she voiced, "I don't feel like we have… a good guide to lead us, you know we have done a complete 180" (0203).

Summary for District 2. The participants for District 2 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was visibly segmented by the changes that had taken place within the district during the five-year period that preceded this study.

At the district office, the district administrator expressed an experience that had her evaluating the status of the implementation process, determining whether that was a viable option under the current circumstances, enlisting a team to advise her on the best next steps, and

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implementing an approach to the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was refined and more focused. This was all throughout her short tenure with District 2. The new plan was slowly being put out to the administrators and the teachers, with the expectation that it would be in full effect the following school year. The participating district administrator reported having a strong background in the CCSS, thus making much of her previous experience in a different district valuable knowledge in her current position.

For the participating principal, the fact that she had been a part of previous work to implement the ELA CCSS gave her a deeper understanding of what had taken place in the district. For that reason, the participating principal for District 2 presented an experience with the implementation that had many pieces in place but lacked a piece or two. In her interview, she discussed the trainings and strategies that were in place and brought in the focus areas that were in the works for refining the implementation of what was taking place in the district. She discussed the professional learning communities in which the teachers were working as strengths to the implementation process.

The teacher in District 2 reported a frustrating experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS. Although she readily spoke of the numerous trainings that she and her colleagues attended, she voiced a lack of follow through on the ideas that the ELA team was expected to execute. The difficulties she expressed throughout her interview called for a better focus and clearer directives for which the teachers would then be held accountable. The participating teacher discussed the members of her department being a mix of individuals who embraced the changes taking place and who passively rejected them.

Both the district administrator and the principal voiced knowing there was resistance to the implementation of the new standards throughout the district and school, respectively. That fell in line with what the participating teacher reported experiencing throughout the implementation process. All of the participants voiced a desire to do what was right for students and a need to implement a plan that would result in the students attaining the skills to be college or career ready. The participants in District 2 spoke of the challenges that lay ahead with regard to fully implementing the ELA CCSS with a sense of confidence in being able to make the changes necessary. Each discussed goals they had to make the process better in the near future.

Narratives for District 3

District 3 in this study served approximately 6,750 students. This district had a more heterogeneous group of students, but Hispanic or Latino students made up the largest part of the student body, representing approximately 40% of the student population. White students accounted for 26% of the population. The African American subgroup accounted for 16% of the student population. Asian students made up about 10.5% of the student body and 5% of the students reported that they were of two or more races. In this district, 12.5% of students were English language learners, and a third of all students were on the free or reduced lunch program. Sixty-three percent of the students in this district met or exceeded the standards on the SBAC ELA state assessments for the 2014–2015 school year.

The District Administrator

The district administrator had been in education for 29 years. She had served as a teacher, a new teacher mentor, a school administrator, and a curriculum director, and had been in her current position for three years. The district administrator for District 3 reported bringing a lot of

knowledge from her previous place of employment. This knowledge, she reported, was used to provide a structural framework and understanding of how she would approach the implementation of the ELA CCSS for her current district, and although most of that learning was with a science, math, or EL focus, she found that the ELA CCSS lent itself to the same understanding once one had wrapped one's mind around what the new standards were asking of students and teachers. She provided an example of this understanding when she discussed the Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects and science teachers going through training on those standards. She stated, "Teaching a science lesson actually is applicable to the ELA standards, and having kids defend is applicable to the ELA standards. I think that's my favorite part of the whole thing, the interconnectivity" (0301). With a background in mathematics and science—as opposed to language arts—the district administrator for District 3 provided a unique experience with implementation of the ELA CCSS in her district.

What is the ELA CCSS? When the district administrator for District 3 was asked what the ELA CCSS was to her, she responded by stating that they "allow for literacy growth throughout all different disciplines" (0301). She continued by adding, "It really focuses on students being able to defend their practice… being able to utilize multiple sources and understand that a book could say one thing and another book could say another thing… synthesis" (0301). In making a quick comparison between the previous standards and the ELA CCSS, the district administrator for District 3 mentioned that they are "not hugely different from the prior standards, but then there is an added… rigor element that… I think tries to bridge the gap of where our 21st [century] learning skills and our colleges are telling us kids are struggling"

(0301). The difference that the district administrator repeatedly referenced was in the writing. She stated, "I think there is a more conscious effort around using writing to defend what kids know" (0301). She also discussed the spiraling of the standards, which allowed for teachers to look at the standards from where students were expected to be at the high school level and where they were expected to be at their current level. She expressed the value of this characteristic when she stated, "I think it spirals a lot more purposefully to allow [for] those interview to continue to even occur" (0301).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating district administrator in District 3 joined the implementation process of the CCSS for her district during the 2013–2014 school year. As a picture of the approach that was taken by the district since she had been involved developed, it became clear that the experience could be divided into three distinct pieces: (a) the plan that was in place before she got there, (b) the plan that was initiated shortly after her arrival, and (c) the plan that she and her team developed once she had a better understanding of where the district was and what had to take place to move it forward.

Upon her arrival at the district, the district administrator took a learning approach to help her understand where everyone was at with the implementation of the ELA CCSS. She stated, "I didn't want to assume they didn't know anything or it was all good." Using the framework from the TTN, she took inventory of what had been done at the district to build the capacity necessary to make the shift to the ELA CCSS. When she got an idea of what had already been done in the district, she realized that "there may have been some initial exposure to the literacy standards as opposed to the ELA standards" (0301). As she described what had taken place in the district, she realized that the teachers were given a lot of control in deciding what would and what would not

be a focus for them during the transition period. The district administrator recalled learning that there had been sessions in which the teachers gathered together and went over the standards to make these decisions. She stated, "They just decided what they didn't need to spend time on, and on what they needed to spend time on, what they were going to tackle at the school site, or what they needed district support with" (0301). From those meetings, she reported, the middle school teachers "felt that they had the reading comprehension pieces, even nonfiction, because the Internet, they thought, was okay for now, and it was really the writing they were really calling for" (0301). With this information in hand, the district adopted Writer's Workshop as the material that would support the middle school teachers with the implementation of the ELA CCSS in the middle school. The participant reported, "I was just at that point, you know, new and trying to figure out where they were" (0301). Her understanding of the implementation approach taken at that time was that it was something the district "left up to [teachers]" (0301).

Gathering the status of the ELA CCSS implementation was work the district administrator reported took place in year one. She reported, "The initial response I got from middle schools was we are all good with this ELA stuff" (0301). She summarized where the district was at that point:

The first thing I had to do was to try to get an analysis of where they were, and so I would say that when we started with a larger effort, there may have been some exposure. There may have been some teachers who attended different things, but it wasn't a collective. 'Where are we?' and 'Where do we need to go?' and 'How are we going to get there?' really started... two years ago. (0301)

Once she had an idea of where the district was, she utilized the knowledge of the new standards that she had learned from working with her previous district as a director of curriculum. She reported that in her previous district, the Title 1 elementary schools had asked to use the TTN to assist them with the implementation of the ELA CCSS. During that process, she was introduced to their materials and activities to help the teachers become familiar with the new standards. The district administrator reported that the TTN activities were "almost like our needs assessment" (0301). From the activities, the district administrator reported that she came to understand that the perception of where the district was with the implementation of the ELA CCSS was not as accurate as the teachers and administrators reported. She stated:

> That's been, continues to be, the mantra and we know that that's not the case. So
>
> we are coming at it as a different way. But that's what the principal also said,
>
> 'Work with math [district administrator's name]. ELA's got it, they're hot, they
>
> are great.' (0301)

The third part of the plan for District 3 had been taking shape since her arrival at the district office. Armed with the knowledge of the approach District 3 took to implement the ELA CCSS prior to her arrival, seeing that there was a bigger need in the middle school level than just writing, and having the ELA framework to accompany the ELA standards to fall back on now, the participant reported being able to work toward a more comprehensive approach to implementation the following school year. She stated, "Because the framework just came out and there was a conscious decision to actually delay a little bit to have that ELD emphasis be spiraled in the ELA adoption trainings and implementation" (0301). She reported that she has an educational services team working toward building capacity with the administrators and teachers.

The current plan, which included the ELD standards alongside the ELA CCSS, was to be rolled out in force next year. The district administrator summarized her current mindset by stating, "I think our philosophy is: the 'what' is not negotiable and the 'how' is totally up to the teachers, with evidence" (0301).

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating district administrator recalled her learning about the ELA CCSS and the CCSS from her previous district, where she was a director of curriculum with a focus on math and science. She reported, "For me a lot of my ELA mastery has occurred though attending math and science Common Core NGSS trainings" (0301). Her learning of how to transition from one way of doing things to another spanned the 29 years she had been in education. The participant discussed the experience she had when the state first implemented state standards in the late 1990s. She recalled:

> When the first set of standards came out, people gave a test without standards
> before. There was time and then NCLB. There was a little bit of time to kind of
> wrap your head [around the new idea of standards]. This [SBAC] showed up. We
> did not even have our framework; we did not even have materials. (0301)

The district administrator reported having attended many trainings at LACOE that pertained to the ELA CCSS. She also recalled working with Title 1 schools in her previous district where the teachers asked for the TTN to come in as a resource on how to transition to the new standards. From the exposure with the TTN there, this district administrator learned about the processes they used to help make teachers aware of the new standards. These processes, she discussed, were then used in her current capacity to determine the status of where teachers and administrators were with the implementation of the new standards. The participating district

administrator for District 3 also voiced the value of the meetings in which she was and where she continued to be exposed to the standards and the requisites of teaching with these standards in the classrooms. She stated, "Most of the work has really been through our own PLCs" (0301).

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The district administrator reported an experience for implementing the new standards as challenging because she came into the system as opposed to having had been involved in the process from the beginning. She stated, "We could have done some things in parallel or a little quicker to just give that some initial exposure, but it was my first year here, [I] was kind of relying on what they were telling us to do" (0301).

During the interview, she expressed the difficulties of having to come into a new system, having to ascertain what the staff had done and learned, and where they needed to go from there. She expressed that her first year there was dedicated to developing an understanding of what the district had already done and setting the foundation for the new direction once she had a grasp on the district's needs for the implementation of the ELA standards. The district administrator reported that the district's approach in the middle schools was insufficient:

> I think we could have been more intentional around providing some common
> professional development time. Especially… I am thinking just specifically for
> middle school, because elementary school we have knocked this out of the park I
> think, but for middle school I think a little bit of purposefulness. (0301)

Now, with an understanding of what had taken place in the district and an idea of how to increase her staff's capacity with the implementation of the ELA CCSS, the participating district administrator for District 3 reported being optimistic about the improved plan she and her team

had developed. This improved plan consisted of utilizing the in-house experts to build teacher capacity and establish a monitoring process that both supports teachers and makes them accountable to the changes put in place. The current trajectory for implementation evolved over the time span that she had been in District 3, with it really taking shape this year. The district administrator reported that the approach she had mapped out would entail three pieces coming together to build capacity for the staff while building in accountability and modeling. The district administrator reported that there would be three pieces that would come together to ensure that the standards and their requisites were understood and present in the classrooms. First, she discussed the English learner (EL) TOSA as the expert on the EL standards and strategies. Second, she discussed the ELA coach available to teachers to work with the ELA CCSS. Finally, her educational services team that included administrators would be expected to look for progress as they moved through the classes. She stated, "The idea is that experts are ahead of our admin, who are then ahead of the teachers. So when we bring our teachers in, they will have shorter chunks" (0301). The monitoring piece of the refined approach, the district administrator reported, would come from the instructional rounds process:

> Via some instructional round work, they can hear about it and go see it live, real,
>
> and then have time for everybody to get together and discuss what they saw, how
>
> that could look differently tomorrow in the classroom. (0301)

Describing the vision that she had for the implementation of the ELA CCSS for the following school year, the district administrator admitted, "It kind of sounds difficult. It has lots of moving parts" (0301). She summarized it when she stated:

Then new teachers come to training, [they] go to our veterans as part of training to see it in practice for that discussion. The principal can go into those [instructional rounds] with us if we are in their school. When they go on and [observe] a Guided Reading lesson they got to be able to know if there is a red flag and call for some coaching help and not miss the key aspects of what we are looking for. (0301)

Has the implementation been successful? When the district administrator was asked whether she felt that the ELA CCSS had been rolled out successfully, she stated, "Well I think it is still to be decided, I mean I think we are in process" (0301). The experience that she reported was of a process that continued to be in progress. She reported aspects of the experience that were successful or necessary. For example, her exposure to the EL standards continued to be something that she fell back on. She stated, "For me, it's my EL expertise helping me with the ELA, but I would not consider myself an expert in ELA standards" (0301). Another successful part of the implementation was the ongoing improvement of what was taking place in the classrooms. She reported that a colleague summarized her excitement when he told others:

We know when [the participant] is energized, it is every time she comes back from classrooms because she bursts into my office, and when he says bursts all over, he means I won't shut up because I get so excited about… really good stuff happening. (0301)

Other parts of the implementation, she reported, could have used a more focused approach. Of her transition to her current district, she stated, "Then I came here and I had been told they hadn't really done anything" (0310). The experience of having seen the transition to the CCSS from the perspective of two districts allowed her to utilize what she learned at one in the

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other because of the variability in the implementation process. She explained that her current district was "much more organized in elementary than in secondary" (0301). She also reported that the approach taken by the state was necessary while also creating difficulties for districts. She stated, "I think that you have to grow capacity. Now I am not saying that a little bit more direction and help might not have been nice" (0301). But she also readily admitted, "Anytime you tell people how it has to be done is the beginning of the end, in teaching especially" (0301). Ultimately, in a successful implementation of the ELA CCSS, she hoped "that our teachers [would be] more confident about why they are doing what they are doing" (0301).

District 3, district administrator summary. The participating district administrator for District 3 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was optimistic about the job at hand, with a lot of work still needing to be done. She talked at length about the work that still needed to take place at her district in order to have full implementation of the ELA CCSS. Having had come into the system, she expressed the difficulties of picking up the task of transitioning to the new standards from a plan that was not as comprehensive as it needed to be. In discussing the decision of focusing only on writing, the participant acknowledged the shortcomings of such a limited focus. As the person leading the implementation of the ELA CCSS in the district, the participating district administrator for District 3 presented an experience that combined knowledge learned in a previous district with her knowledge of change to drive the manner in which she guided District 3 to refine the implementation process in place for the district. To do so, the participant had been working with her educational services team to broaden the scope of implementation. Part of this refined approach included having a bigger picture in mind of what full implementation would look like that others might not be able to see.

She stated, "They may not realize some of the intentionality around all of it at this point" (0301). She reported that this approach was a conscientious effort to not overwhelm teachers and administrators, while also taking necessary steps forward to ensure that progress toward implementation was being made.

The Middle School Principal

The middle school principal for District 3 had been in education for 16 years and had served as a teacher, counselor, school administrator, and professional development provider. The participating principal came to the district about a year and a half ago, making this the second year she had served as the principal at the participating middle school.

What is the ELA CCSS? When the participating principal for District 3 was asked to discuss what the ELA CCSS was to her, she readily discussed the demands the new standards were placing on students. She articulated that the new standards were "a shift in what our students are able to do" (0302). She \ elaborated on the changes being required of students when she stated:

> I think it encompasses a lot of moves that are a little bit more student driven in the classrooms; so less teacher driven, a little bit more of 'guide on the side.' But also the ability for kids to really show what they know whether it be through reading, writing, speaking. (0302)

The participating principal for District 3 viewed the new standards as "expecting more from the kids academically" (0302). She also discussed how District 3 had interpreted the shift when she discussed the focus the district had chosen to take. She stated:

For us, it's been less of a focus on literature. There's been more of a shift to have

kids use academic discourse in the classroom in a way that they've never had [to]

before using text-based evidence and speaking from a point of academics, less

feelings. (0302)

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating principal for

District 3 had been the principal at the middle school for approximately a year and a half at the

time of this interview. She joined the district after the implementation of the ELA CCSS had

been initiated. A challenge that she touched on was that of gaining an understanding of what the

district had done in assisting the teachers to transition to the new standards. When asked about

whether the district had articulated a vision of what the implementation of the ELA CCSS would

look like, the participating principal stated:

It's hard for me to say because I wasn't here at the time. From what I understand,

it hasn't been clearly communicated to the teachers, and this is secondhand, so it's

not a good answer because this is what teachers expressed to me when I came into

the position. (0302)

The plan that the participant described was one of having various pieces at work without any

obvious coordination among them. She discussed a focus on writing through trainings in Writer's

Workshop and she discussed her support staff being trained in Guided Reading, Café, and Daily

5. Although the participant could see that these pieces were in place, she noted that the teachers

were having a hard time seeing the whole picture: "There [had] been a focus on writing for our

teachers but in terms of seeing the entire vision, no. I don't think so" (0302). The lack of clarity

or focus that the district administrator reported resulted in her noting that she had to refocus the approach the school was taking in implementing the ELA CCSS.

From the interview we had, the principal reported that the district placed a lot more focus in two areas during the transition—math and elementary. Of the elementary focus, she stated, "They've done less with middle and high than they have with the elementary" (0302). Some of the support that the principal could articulate to me was in regards to the district's ELA coach or support staff. She stated, "A lot of times, if they're really busy doing elementary stuff, they can't come over for half a day and work with our teachers" (0302). She further articulated, "A lot of the stuff that [teachers at her site] have been doing has been trial and error" (0302). Of the math, she commented, "Math has gotten a lot of love in terms of money [and] attention" (0302). The participant discussed the partnership the district had with Loyola Marymount University in implementing the Math CCSS. She stated that the approach "was very prescriptive as to what it was that the teachers should be doing, what it looks like, the amount of coaching and support that they got" (0302). She described the approach as being intensive and having been in place for three years. The goal, she described, was "creating kind of a sustainability model for math… so we have instructional coaches that we have supported… created. And the idea is that those coaches are then going to sustain this program forever" (0302).

The principal reported that there was some work done with the secondary schools, but most teachers could only recall one session in which they worked closely with the ELA CCSS. She reported, "The only thing that they feel like they have done, and this is them speaking, is kind of breaking down the standards and kind of looking at how they're different from the old contents standards" (0302). The principal stated that the teachers described that experience as

beneficial. She also discussed her EL specialist, the special education teacher, and the reading

specialist being trained on Guided Reading, Daily 5, and Café. In doing so, she described the

benefits of that knowledge as limited to the students assigned to those teachers. She stated, "It's

not like everyone has been trained and things like that, but I think it's also a little bit of a

different interview when you're dealing with 175 kids or you're dealing with 30" (0302).

The participant noted that the focus at the secondary schools for implementing the ELA

CCSS "has been a focus on writing, that's kind of the first thing" (0302). She reported that the

district enlisted the services of Momentum to provide teachers with professional development on

Writer's Workshop. She stated, "I went to one of the trainings…. It teaches them a model on

how kids generate ideas for writing and it's the Writer's Workshop model" (0302). As part of this

training, she elaborated, the teachers had been introduced to the practice of instructional rounds,

wherein teachers learn a strategy, go to a peer's classroom to see the strategy modeled, and then

attend a discussion session in which the teachers could gain further clarity. She admitted to a

need to refine what the school was doing to ensure that the teachers and students were benefiting

from the new standards. At the time of the interview, the principal described the approach being

taken when she stated:

> I think there is a lot of 'teacher pay teachers' happening, there's a lot of Googling,
>
> Engage New York. I think they really have just been kind of hustling to get
>
> whatever resources they need and then the district has been helpful in terms of…
>
> responding to requests. (0302)

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating principal from District 3 presented a

learning experience that was very dependent on her own ability and desire to stay on top of the

changes that were taking place more so than formal training within the district. When asked if she was receiving ongoing PD in the district, the principal responded by saying, "Here, no. I've just done a lot of work on my own" (0302). She discussed how her previous district had proven to be a resource for her in her current position. In her previous district, the participating principal was exposed to the standards through some trainings that were led by the TTN. She referenced them when she stated, "In my previous district, they contracted with [the TTN]… and they did 12 days of PD the first year and then I left" (0302). The principal reported attending 10 out of the 12 professional development sessions that the district had with the TTN. In discussing the content of the trainings, the principal described them as

> breaking down the standards, sitting with teams, looking at curriculum, not
> throwing the baby out with the bathwater. How can we make this Common Core,
> how do we shift this and bring in other things? A lot of it was teachers working on
> things, but it was also really telling for me about what the expectations were. So,
> it was a lot of hours. (0302)

The participating principal discussed the various sources of information that she utilized to stay ahead of the transition to the ELA CCSS. She reported being an avid reader so as to stay current. She stated, "I read a lot of different education blogs, every time we have the leadership magazine, that EL update, I really do read all of them. Sometimes I'm on teaching channel" (0302). She also discussed an informal PLC with principals in other districts across the Southbay. Although the meetings with her informal PLC were not focused on the implementation of the CCSS, she reported that it touched on topics that indirectly had an effect on the classroom instruction such as "PLC-type things" (0302). From her contact with other

schools, she reported, "If I ever hear about schools that are doing it right, or schools that are doing something cool, I always want to know that" (0302). She also reported that she continued to talk to peers from her previous district, asking them, "What are you guys doing for this?" and, "Can you help me out with that?" (0302).

A motivating factor for the participating principal was that she wanted to be able to guide teachers through the process that was taking place. She stated, "That way I know what I'm supposed to be looking for when I go and I do an evaluation and am able to talk with the teacher" (0302). Her learning was ongoing, having to check her knowledge when she felt that there was a problem in the classrooms. She reported, "I've had to then go back and be like, 'Okay let me make sure I'm right' so when I have this interview about 'Let's talk about the way you plan,' I know what I'm talking about" (0302). Nonetheless, as she navigated the waters of this transition with her teachers and tried to stay ahead of the learning curve, the participating principal articulated, "I'm just careful because I don't want to step on the toes of the vision that is happening" (0302).

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The participating principal described a class that exemplified the use of the ELA CCSS during the interview. In discussing the differences between the classes in which she saw Common Core and those where she did not, the principal stated:

The academic discourse is happening between kids. The classroom discussion starts with, "You know, I believe this, this and this, based on… paragraph three and line two where he says this," and [a responding student] says, "I actually

disagree because on paragraph four, line six he goes back and says...” Just kind of the type of discussion that happens is a little bit different in some of those trained teachers’ classrooms. (0302)

In discussing the ELA CCSS behaviors that she saw in classes, she mentioned seeing “a lot of student-to-student [discussion] that’s happening in Common Core teachers’ classrooms” (0302). She also mentioned “the use of technology in the classroom, whether that is via podcast and then Socratic seminar afterwards” (0302). She described these classrooms as having “a very different feeling” (0302). Of these classes, the participating principal stated, “It's more about kids doing some of the heavy lifting, and so they're doing the listening, they're writing down quotes, they have interview where they're asking questions” (0302).

In discussing what the implementation of the ELA CCSS in the classrooms looked like, the principal discussed what teachers who had such learning environments embodied. The participating principal stated, “I definitely think that there are some people on campus who are just with it” (0302). She described the “with it” teachers as:

Leaders on campus who have kind of taken the ball in terms [of] their grade level team or [have made] suggestions in a department meeting or whatever it might be... they’ve also picked up strategies like when they went to the Pre-AP course. They're like, “Oh, so this is a thing,” and they come back and they share whatever they learn. (0302)

The principal’s interview that touched on what the ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS looked like more than just an interview about what the students were doing in class. She discussed the teachers and the processes that had to be in place to make those behaviors a daily

thing in the classrooms. As she discussed the behaviors that needed to be in place, she mentioned one that she could already see in her school:

> The one thing I can say that's been pretty phenomenal about the school is that we talk as grade level teams and we talk as a leadership team about what we want our kids' writing to look like across the board and what we want annotation to look like in the sixth grade, and what does it look like in the seventh grade? What types of interview are kids having in content-area classes, not just the ELA? (0302)

Has the implementation been successful? When the participating principal was asked to assess the success of the implementation of the ELA CCSS at the school, she responded with, "I definitely think it's an interesting model how we've done it, but I don't necessarily know the teachers have gotten everything that they need" (0302). She reported that she felt the school was not where she would like it to be with the implementation of the ELA CCSS, "but it's coming" (0302). She reported that, as a district, the implementation had been successful, especially in the elementary schools where they have "all kinds of stuff going on… because they're always getting all kinds of trainings" (0302). In assessing the state's success in the implementation of the ELA CCSS, she reported, "As a whole, no" (0302). She elaborated by stating, "I think that there are some sites that have done it well, but I think generally, when we talk to other schools, we need to change things, but nobody feels fully prepared" (0302).

District 3, school principal summary. The participating principal expressed an experience that remained optimistic about the job at hand. The fact that the participant had only been the principal at the school for a year and a half and had joined the district after the implementation had taken shape were spoken of as having both pros and cons. Of the changes

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that had taken place at her school, she commented, "I think it's been a positive shift but I definitely think that it's been difficult for our teachers to make the change" (0302). She also stated, "We just have a little bit of room to grow, but I have a great staff so I'm really lucky" (0302).

The Middle School Teacher

The classroom teacher participant for District 3 had been a teacher in education for 25 years and had been in her current position for 17 years. The participating teacher reported being the English department chair. She also reported that she had been a part of the ELA CCSS implementation group in the past, but opted out in the current year. She stated that she spent approximately 30 minutes per week on formal learning of the ELA CCSS and approximately one hour per week of informal learning pertaining to the new standards. The participating teacher also expressed the differences between teaching under NCLB and the new ELA CCSS. Often, she found there to be little difference between the two standards. Teachers' familiarity with NCLB versus the new standards was noted best when she stated:

> I think teachers were getting too focused on the test before because they could
>
> predict what the questions were going to be, and they started to dumb down the
>
> curriculum with the CST… and teach really basic things. I love looking at the test
>
> now, realizing that every kid's got a different test, and you'd better just teach
>
> them, really, how to write well and how to read closely. (0303)

The participating teacher provided a perspective, often referring back to testing and resources.

What is the ELA CCSS? When the participant was asked to provide details on what she perceived the ELA CCSS to be, she responded by stating, "ELA Common Core is a way to get

kids real-life skills that they can use, after high school, to be prepared for college and the workplace" (0303). The participating teacher for District 3 reported an understanding of the ELA CCSS as interconnected with other aspects of a student's life. For example, she discussed the desire to have the skills taught in an ELA classroom as the skills that should be present in other areas of a student's life. She stated, "We'd want kids to be able to learn to transfer English language arts to a skill they would use at the job" (0303). Furthermore, her understanding of the standards was representative of the interconnectedness between the ELA CCSS and the literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects standards. She noted the link between them when she stated, "Ideally, they would come up with a project that they would create to solve a problem that they see in their present life" (0303). From the interview with the participating teacher in District 3, the ELA CCSS were reported as encapsulating a skill set necessary for both the students' academic experience and their usefulness in day-to-day life.

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating teacher for District 3 reported an experience with the implementation plan of the ELA CCSS that could best be described as segmented. The segmentation appears to have had occurred in the focus and attention that was provided to the elementary schools and not to the secondary schools. The participating teacher was readily able to speak about the resources and direction in which the elementary schools were being asked to move. She expressed the expectation when she said:

> I know that Lucy Calkins is being followed strictly, that they have to have
> Writers' Workshop as part of the reading program... running records. All the
> elementary school teachers have been trained in running records. And they really
> want the elementary teachers to teach in... [centers]. (0303)

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For the secondary schools, the participant did not report having that type of focus. She reported having had professional development at the beginning of the implementation process, in which

> they gave us the CST standards, and they gave us the Common Core standards,
>
> and they asked us to compare the two, to see what was similar and what was
>
> different…. Then I remember them giving us a stepladder, and these were all cut
>
> up, and we had to figure out the order they went in. I recall that they gave us time
>
> to look at the test... and we took the test online. (0303)

From these training sessions, the participant reported being given time to "look at the college career standards, and then we tried to figure out, when we did get the Common Core standards, which ones were the most important for us to focus on" (0303). She reported, "I was department chair for the Common Core, and I felt that I wasn't sure they were being taught writing" (0303). As part of the planning process, the secondary team decided that writing would be the focus of the implementation plan for the ELA CCSS. The participant stated, "Our department decided to focus on writing so that we could easily build what skills were needed in sixth grade, to help seventh grade, to help eighth grade" (0303). Having made that determination, the district office moved to adopt Writer's Workshop as the resource for helping teachers make that transition.

The interview with the participating teacher focused on having been involved in the process, having had determined a viable direction for the implementation of the ELA CCSS, and having received tools from the district office to support their decision. However, as the picture evolved, the participant described a scenario in which little had been done to build on that initial success. The participating teacher reported:

> I feel like it started to be rolled out successfully two years ago, but we have all

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new teachers. That young teacher has never ever gotten to see the test. So you rolled it out two years ago, but you haven't done anything to train the new teachers. (0303)

With an apparent lack of follow-up for the plan and the need to further develop the teachers, the participant painted a picture of having pieces for implementation that were either not fully understood (e.g., the online reading test provided by SRI) or not completely aligned to the needs of the teachers at the middle school (e.g., Writer's Workshop). On the adoption of Writer's Workshop, she stated, "That program is a little elementary. So it really hasn't helped address when kids are given multiple sources and how to synthesize information" (0303). Of SRI, she reported, "I like it because it tells me the child's reading level. What I don't like about it is we don't do much with that" (0303).

The participant's experience with the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS appeared to have a vision in mind that had not been achieved, as exemplified by the interview about the plan to improve the vertical articulation between the elementary, middle, and high schools in the district. When asked whether she thought the district's approach to focusing on the elementary schools would soon benefit the middle schools—because the students moving into the middle schools from the elementary schools would be bringing specialized skills taught at the elementary level through that focus—she responded by saying, "I don't think there's enough communication at all" (0303). She further stated, "We changed our whole schedule with this idea that we were going to have time to go meet with them on Wednesdays. The same with the high school, and there's very little communication" (0303).

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating teacher reported learning about the ELA CCSS through both formal and informal avenues. A portion of the learning took place through district-provided professional development sessions that took place two years before this interview took place. She described the learning experience when she stated:

> [We had] multiple sessions of PD. The first one was with high school teachers, and it lasted two hours and was overwhelming. They just threw everything at us. Then the next one was at the district, and I feel like that was a good day and much more focused (0303).

She reported, "I would say that much of [learning the ELA CCSS] is probably informal. I'd go to Achieve the Core and steal lesson plans from there" (0303). The participating teacher reported spending approximately one hour per week learning about the new standards in this informal manner. When asked about the information she found online, she reported that it was

> great, with the exception that it's so much… material that you feel like you could teach something for a month, and that's not the interest level of students. So, I know they want you to go in-depth, but if you teach a short story for more than two weeks, you've lost them. (0303)

The participating teacher reported that wading through the copious amounts of information online was necessary for her as a teacher because "we have to create everything ourselves" (0303). The experience she expressed might have been rooted in the district's approach to implementation, in which the elementary schools were receiving the bulk of the attention in terms of professional development and resources. She captured this sentiment when she recalled:

I do remember going to the lady that said, "How can we help you?" and I said,

"This is what we need. We need someone to help us with the argumentative essay.

Could you find us two pro, two con on the appropriate topic?" That type of thing.

And that kind of died. (0303)

Currently, she expressed, "I don't feel like we have some expert we can all run to" (0303).

The participating teacher for District 3 expressed a learning experience that appeared to be driven by the understanding of the current and past expectations of student learning. She stated, "If you look at the CST standards and the Common Core standards, there was always the standard for writing, the same [standards]" (0303). In working toward implementation, the participant discussed the learning that she was doing through the scheduled meetings with her peers. She recalled a recent experience in which the collaboration had been beneficial:

Yesterday, we were talking about teaching kids to paraphrase, and my colleague

brought up that she had the kids talk to each other about paragraph one. And I

thought, "Oh, yeah. I forget. I should have done that." (0303)

The participating teacher was asked to contrast the experience of working under NCLB and the ELA CCSS with respect to the liberty she felt in determining what she could do in her classes and the amount of time she was able to spend collaborating with her peers to share ideas. Of both, she reported the experience to be similar. Of the meeting time, she stated, "It's the same. I'm not sure it's as effective because we have new teachers" (0303). Of the freedom to make decisions pertaining to instructions within her class, she stated, "I think we've always had flexibility. Nobody said, 'You have to be on this page'" (0303).

The participating teacher for District 3 expressed a complicated learning experience. A mix of experiences provided teachers with independence and control over the direction the implementation of the ELA CCSS would take at their school site while being supported by the administration. She reported that her current principal made time available to the teachers to learn and plan by paying to have them work together during the school year. However, she also expressed a sense of a lack of direction because of a perceived lack of resources and attention from the district level and down to the school, wherein the focus of the resources had been placed at the elementary level. Nonetheless, in reflecting on how she felt about her overall sentiment and comfort with the ELA CCSS, she stated, "I feel comfortable with them. I would say in the last year I've felt more comfortable with nonfiction. All the other parts, I was fine with" (0303).

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? When the participating teacher was asked to describe what the results of the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS would look like in a classroom, she responded by stating, "I would want my students to be able to write an essay that's proficient or advanced, that follows all the standards" (0303). She elaborated on that statement by talking about her use of the exemplar essays that SBAC provided and the manner in which she would like to see her students produce that type of work. She was asked whether she felt she was on pace to have her students produce that type of work with the current approach being taken. She stated, "I would say with 80% of the students" (0303). The participating teacher appeared to be optimistic about the potential the ELA CCSS had for students. She discussed where they were in their approach, and it resonated with the idea that there was still a lot of room to grow. This was evident when she stated:

I don't think we've had the discussions about the creative aspect we want our kids to do. It's been much more on concrete things, such as can they answer the question and bring in evidence to prove that—very basic skills. (0303)

Has the implementation been successful? When the participant was asked whether she felt the implementation of the ELA CCSS had been successful in her district, she responded by saying that it had been in its initial stages. The participant described difficulties that the teachers had encountered since the initial learning experiences at the beginning of the implementation process. Of an unforeseen or unaddressed need that had become apparent to her, she stated, "I think that our district is a bit behind when it comes to typing skills" (0303). She also discussed the misalignment between the materials being used in the classroom and the expectation of the students during state testing. She said, "We don't have a textbook that looks anything like the test" (0303). She also discussed the lack of continuing learning for new teachers as being a problem. She stated, "This young lady probably hasn't even seen the test, at all" (0303).

The participating teacher also discussed some of the positives that were taking place at her school because of the transition to the ELA CCSS. She discussed the collaboration time that was in place at her school as beneficial to her and others in the ELA department because they were able to share ideas and learn from one another. She stated, "Today, it seems like people tend to agree more on what they're going to teach because they have to have formative and summative assessments, and it just makes it easier to get data" (0303). She also discussed the willingness of her principal to provide teachers with time to collaborate or work toward implementation as readily available to the team. She stated, "Our principal is more than willing to give us time" (0303). The participating teacher summarized how successful the

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implementation of the ELA CCSS had been thus far when she discussed the manner in which she would attack the task if given the chance to do so. She stated:

> I would have the big picture. "This is where we want the kids. This is what we want to see them producing," and so, this vision of, "Look, this is what some people are doing and having their kids do," so we understood. "Got it. Okay. That's where we need to go. And, how are we going to get there?" It's a backwards plan. Instead, it felt like, "Okay, let's just understand, baby steps," and "See how similar it is to the CST? So don't be scared." (0303)

District 3, classroom teacher summary. The participating teacher for District 3 reported an experience with the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was inclusive of the teachers and generally headed in the right direction. The teacher reported being a part of the original team that focused on writing for its transition to the ELA CCSS. She also discussed a number of other changes that took place because of the implementation of the ELA CCSS, which included the use of technology by the students and the need for more collaboration and discussion by the students. She also discussed the increased need for collaboration by the teachers, which she reported as being a positive thing because they learned from one another. The participating teacher acknowledged some of the shortcomings of the current approach to implementation that District 3 was taking by voicing concern about the lack of follow-up training for new hires. The participating teacher expressed an experience that was positive overall, but was in need of some updating to address problems such as having some teachers more knowledgeable than others and having resources such as professional development and district coaches concentrated at the elementary schools with no plan to provide more support for the secondary schools.

Summary for District 3. District 3 provided a collective narrative that was, in some ways, uniform and, in other ways, disconnected from one another. The pieces that were synchronized were reported to be based on the initial implementation approach set by the individuals in charge of that process during the initial phases. All three participants spoke to the fact that the district made a decision to focus on the elementary school sites with more training and resources than what was afforded to the secondary school sites. Furthermore, all three participants were able to speak to the plan developed during the initial phases that cemented writing as the area of most need for the teachers at the middle school level. The district administrator and the school principal reported that this focus appeared to be too narrow at the time of this study. The teacher's perspective on the need to focus on writing continued to be valid, with the lack of progress being placed on not having the right resources or focus to make that happen. From the interview with all three participants, the need to broaden the scope of the implementation of the ELA CCSS was apparent. At the district level, the participating district administrator discussed plans that were already in place to help with these needs. The plans were reported to be carefully mapped out with the help of administrators and her educational services team. She reported that those plans would be in effect starting the following school year. The principal also reported having a plan in mind to assist the teachers with a refined map for implementation. She reported working with the district office to be able to initiate those ideas. The teacher was unaware of further planning taking place from either the district level or the school site at the time of this study. She vocalized the need to adopt a better, more focused plan due to the shortcomings she and other teachers were experiencing. The overall sentiment of the

interviews with the participants of District 3 was that of optimism and ability with an acknowledgement of plenty of room to grow.

Overview of Findings

The experiences expressed during the interviews for this study held both commonalities and differences among the groups that participated. The overall sentiment of the experiences of the participants at the time of this study were positive, with none of the participants feeling that the ELA CCSS presented a negative shift in education. All of the participants' narratives expressed a willingness to embrace the challenge at hand, and all of them talked about the shifts as being worthy of the efforts made thus far for the benefit of the students in each district. Nonetheless, each participant category also presented differences from the others, most notably in the area of learning about the ELA CCSS and the understanding of the overall goal of the transition plan that was in place at each of the participants' districts at the time of the study.

District Administrators

Together, the district administrators represented 73 years of experience in education. Each reported that he or she had started the implementation process during different school years (i.e., District 1 starting in 2011–2012, District 2 in 2010–2011, and District 3 in 2013–2014). It is important to note that the district administrator for District 3 reported learning about the ELA CCSS earlier than the 2013–2014 school year, thus possibly responding to the question in reference to when she started working with the ELA CCSS in her current district as opposed the her first exposure to the new standards. The district administrators for District 1 and District 3 reported there being a plan developed to address the implementation of the ELA CCSS, and only District 1 provided the plan. All three of the participants reported that most of their learning

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about the ELA CCSS occurred within their district or independently. Only District 2's district administrator voiced learning a significant amount through formal sessions that took place at the County Office of Education. The district administrator for District 1 led the transition to the ELA CCSS from the beginning and the administrators for District 2 and District 3 joined the implementation process 1.5 and 2.5 years prior to the time of this study. The three district administrators were positive about the direction their district was moving in at the time of their interviews. All of them voiced having more work to do to reach full implementation.

Throughout their individual interviews, the district administrators who participated in this study discussed their role in the implementation process of the ELA CCSS in a way that can best be described as facilitating the process. Each discussed developing the trajectory in which they expected their district to move, but also discussed having input from other district personnel or a leadership committee that included teachers and administrators. All three of the district administrators talked about the process at hand as being a work in progress being refined to varying degrees at the time of this study. All of the district administrators reported being confident in their knowledge of the ELA CCSS.

What is the ELA CCSS? Collectively, the district administrators reported that the ELA CCSS called for students to be more independent, requiring more critical thinking skills, more collaboration among students, and that it highlighted the need to utilize multiple sources of information, including more informational texts than what students had been exposed to with the previous standards. The participant for District 1 stated that the ELA CCSS required "kids [to become] independent thinkers that are building their own arguments and interacting with others and then also accessing a broad range of text" (0101). The participant for District 2 voiced the

need for students to collaborate, read closely, and defend their answers utilizing textual evidence. She stated that the new standards entailed "listening and speaking, to reading, to writing, language acquisition, collaboration, [and] digital knowledge of how [students] communicate" (0201). The district administrator for District 3 stated that although there were many commonalities between the previous ELA standards and the new ELA CCSS, the new standards had "an added rigor element [that focused on] students being able to defend their practice" (0301).

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The district administrators described the plan that was in place within their respective districts as originating from them but later including a collaborative group of stakeholders. That initial stage of the district administrator being the source of information and decision making developed into a bigger group that then made decisions on the approach taken by the district. In District 1, the collaborative team was made up of teachers, curriculum coaches, and school administrators who were being guided through the process by the TTN. In District 2, where the plan was disrupted by multiple changes in the leadership at the district office, the plan being refined at the time of this study stemmed from a group of stakeholders that included teachers, parents, school administrators, and classified personnel known as the Educational Advisor Committee. This group determined the goals for implementation of the CCSS. It developed five goals or focus areas that would provide a comprehensive approach to addressing student needs: (a) professional development for teachers, (b) English language learners, (c) students with disabilities, (d) response to intervention (RTI) systems, and (e) technology. By focusing on the five areas identified by the group, the participant for District 2 stated, "We will increase student achievement for all of our students"

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(0201). District 3 also had a change in leadership during the implementation process, but its original plan was still in place at the time of this study. The district administrator for District 3 worked with an educational services team that included teachers, curriculum coaches, and administrators to refine the plan that was in place in their district. The initial plan to focus primarily on writing at the middle school level was a conscientious plan developed by the teachers and accepted by the district to allow time to gather more information about the changes that were taking place. The district administrator touched on this when she stated, "We kind of like to have a couple year's data behind us so we can focus" (0301). From the work within that group, it was determined that the narrow focus on writing was not sufficient to address all of the shifts called for by the new standards. At the time of this study, the district was moving toward a broader approach to implementing the ELA CCSS, which included a focus on the ELD standards, the use of instructional rounds, and a refined set of teaching strategies to use in ELA classrooms. All three of the district administrators described their respective plan for implementing the ELA CCSS as a work-in-progress. District 1 was working on refining its monitoring piece to ensure that the changes that had been agreed upon had made it to all of the ELA classrooms in the district. In District 2 and District 3, the plan was being refined to provide a clearer focus of what implementation of the ELA CCSS should look in each district.

Learning about the ELA CCSS. The district administrators who participated in this study reported similar learning experiences when it came to learning about the ELA CCSS, with a significant portion taking place in informal settings such as independent reading. The representative for District 2 was the only one to report a significant amount of learning that took place in a formal setting, specifically mentioning the training she attended at the County Office

of Education. Each of the participating district administrators also referenced working with outside bodies to build capacity. The TTN was a source of information for both District 1 and District 3, with the former utilizing the group's services and the latter utilizing their reading material to guide the process. During the year of this study, District 2 partnered with Pivot Learning Partners to address the needs of the focus areas for implementing the ELA CCSS developed by the Educational Advisors Committee. All three of the participants reported that a significant portion of their learning of the new standards came from their own reading, which included websites, books, and journals on the topic. All three of the participants also voiced ongoing communication with peers on educational topics that touched on the CCSS.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The district administrators who participated in this study reported the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS as including more than changes to the ELA classrooms. They all talked about the shifts that the new standards required of both the teachers and the students. These changes included practices such as utilizing text-dependent questions, citing textual evidence, student collaboration and discussions, using higher depth of knowledge questions, and the use of technology. An interesting point about what would constitute successful implementation for the district administrators was their desire for the changes to be long term. Each of them voiced the importance of having the changes become everyday practices for teachers and administrators at the school sites. The participant from District 1 stated a desire "to [transition to the ELA CCSS] in a way that wasn't those surface level changes but really a deep change involving lots of different stakeholders" (0101). The district administrator for District 2 asserted that the focus on the transition could not be on a specific strategy or focus: "There's not just one thing that you

look at, and it has to be a long range plan" (0201). The participant from District 3 discussed the

value of teachers and administrators buying into the change to solidify its long-term prospects.

She stated, "We are hoping that those leadership teams that we have been working with…

bought in and said this is what we need" (0301). The district administrators all voiced the need to

have the classroom settings change for students in order to visibly demonstrate that the changes

called for by the ELA CCSS were in place. However, their focus on the longevity of the changes

was a notable point in their narratives.

Has the implementation been successful? The district administrators reported the

implementation of the ELA CCSS as having been successful. Each of the participating district

administrators expressed the importance of individual LEAs being able to determine their own

plan for implementation. In part, the ability for each district to determine its own plan for

implementation was credited to each having unique obstacles that had to be overcome. For

District 1, ensuring that all ELA teachers were implementing the changes adopted as part of the

ELA CCSS was important. The district administrator for District 1 reported feeling like this was

accomplished successfully in his district. He reported, "I feel like our teachers have a deeper

understanding of the standards.... I feel like we have made those practices come to life in our

classrooms to what we have promoted in our professional development" (0101). His narrative

was very positive of the changes and the direction in which the district had moved. For District

3, the success of the implementation was best described as "success in the making." She reported

many positives taking place in the district when she stated, "My favorite thing is to then be able

to boast about the cool thing I saw happening and what kind of evidence it was providing when I

go out and do my classroom visits" (0301). With an optimistic tone, she discussed these

successful changes and refined them to reach more teachers and students. In District 2, the message needed to focus on what implementation of the ELA CCSS was. The district administrator reported that the "district was a little behind" (0201) but was positive about the efforts and progress that had been made. She reported that the transition had been successful in her previous district and was excited about doing the same in District 2.

District administrator summary. The collective narrative the participating district administrators for this study presented in their individual interviews reflected their position in their respective districts the individuals responsible for the implementation of the ELA CCSS. During their interviews, each of the district administrators talked about the implementation plan as a process that each was guiding. All three of the district administrators discussed their learning of the ELA CCSS as including some formal learning through conferences; however, the majority of the learning that took place related to the ELA CCSS was reported to be from informal, individual learning such as exploring web sites and reading books and journals. Their perspectives on what would constitute an ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS in classrooms in their districts were congruent, with each citing teaching strategies and skills that would be demonstrated by the students and the teachers. The implementation process that had unfolded had been successful to some degree, but the extent to how successful it has been, as reported by the each district administrator, varied by district.

School Principals

The school principals in this study represented 50 years of experience in education. All of the principals reported being classroom teachers in the past, with District 1's principal having been principal at his site since the onset of the ELA CCSS transition. District 2's and District 3's

school principals had both been principals at their respective site for less than two years at the time of this study. All of the principals reported the vast majority of their learning of the ELA CCSS taking place within their district, either current or previous. The narratives presented by the principals of this study had a positive tone about the implementation of the ELA CCSS and all spoke of needing to continue to refine the implementation in order to reach their respective vision of what the ideal implementation of the CCSS would look like at their site.

Through their individual interviews, the school principals presented a collective experience of the implementation of the ELA CCSS that involved them in both the implementation and monitoring process. The district administrators reported varying degrees of involvement in district meetings pertaining to the implementation of the ELA CCSS. The learning experience reported by the school principals took place in district office professional development sessions or during independent readings. All three of the principals' experiences with the implementation of the ELA CCSS at the time of this study were reported to be works in progress, whereas varying aspects of the implementation were to be targeted in the near future. All three reported having the support of the district office in their efforts to ensure that implementation was occurring in the classrooms.

What is the ELA CCSS? The school principals highlighted the need for students to be critical thinkers and to utilize the skills they learned under the ELA CCSS to better tackle the demands that would be placed on them in the future. The participant for District 2, for example, stated, "I'm talking about think[ing] critically. Learn[ing] how to deduce or induce. They have to really teach them how to problem solve" (0202). The participating principal for District 3 paralleled that idea when she stated that the school was "prepping [students] so that at the middle

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school level they are getting ready for high school and at the high school level, ready for college" (0302). The participating principal for District 1 also voiced the development of critical thinking and inference skills through the reading of multiple sources, defending and arguing for their point of view, both orally and in writing. The participating school principals' understanding of the ELA CCSS was broad and inclusive of a set of skills referenced by all three of the principals: (a) working collaboratively, (b) reading informational text, (c) citing evidence, (d) reading multiple sources, and (e) being able to write clearly to express and defend an idea.

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The three participating school principals reported different implementation plans for the ELA CCSS at their respective schools and districts. All of the plans, however, had an overarching goal of improving students' skills in language arts to enhance their chances of success in the future. Whereas the plan for District 1 was expressed as a series of strategies using teacher developed materials and common assessments that included instructional rounds as a monitoring mechanism, District 2 and District 3 had a plan that could be described as being more open-ended or loose. In District 2, the participating principal talked about the pieces that would come together as part of the implementation plan. These pieces included the use of Illuminate, a data and assessment software system "to mimic SBAC" (0202), increasing rigor in the classrooms and including the use of mentors through PIVOT learning to help guide the teachers. The principal for District 3 described an initial plan that focused on writing at the secondary sites in the district. The principal reported that she was working with the district to refine the plan that was in place to address shortcomings that have been discovered. All of the principals reported having the support of the district office and having access to ELA coaches to assist them with the

implementation process. Their collective narrative pointed to their being in the middle of the implementation process, wherein they have to be knowledgeable of the ELA CCSS and the procedures that have been agreed upon for its implementation to be able to monitor and guide the process they see unfolding in the classrooms. During her interview, the principal for District 3 discussed this when she talked about the need to have a conversation with a teacher about the manner in which she planned. She stated, "I'[d] [have] to then go back and… make sure I'm right; so when I have this conversation about 'Let's talk about the way you plan,' I know what I'm talking about" (0302).

     Learning about the ELA CCSS. The participating school principals learned about the ELA CCSS primarily within the district in which each of them worked. That learning was either through district-directed professional development or through independent reading of ELA CCSS material. Both District 1 and District 2 representatives reported attending regular professional development meetings sponsored by the district office. Through these meetings, the two participants reported learning about the standards and the strategies they would be looking for and with which they would be supporting teachers as they monitored the implementation process in the classrooms. The representative for District 3 reported that she did not receive regularly scheduled professional development through her district office. Like the other two principal participants, she reported doing a lot of reading on her own to stay informed about the ELA CCSS. She reported that in her previous position in a different district (not included in this study), she went through a series of professional development sessions with representatives of the TTN. During her interview, she talked about conversations that she had with teachers to gain

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information about what the approach to implementation had been at her school site and the amount of training the teachers had received.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? The narratives created from the interviews with the participating school principals painted a picture of the ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS as including shifts for both the teachers and the students. For the teachers, the shifts included changes in practice such as implementing the use of collaborative groups, utilizing more text-dependent questions, and creating learning experiences that would allow students to utilize their problem solving skills. For the students, the skills that the principals discussed included being able to use multiple sources to inform their understanding of a topic, being able to discuss and defend their perspectives with their peers, and being able to use technology as a tool to enhance their learning. All three of the principals brought up the need for students to be able to think critically about problems presented to them in the classroom.

The perspective that the principals presented in their interviews could be seen as one that had them positioned in the middle of the vision created by the district office and in the middle of the reality that their respective school faced in the implementation process. Each of the principals credited his or her teacher leaders for working hard to make the changes necessary to be in line with the vision their district established. For example, the participant for District 3 stated, "There are some really good things that are happening, but I think a lot of it is just because we have some internal leaders" (0302). The participant for District 1 readily talked about the role the teachers selected to be a part of the Common Core Transition Team within his district had in the process when he stated that those teachers had "more of a direct connection with the TTN and…

[the district] roll[ed] out the PD for the [other] teachers" (0102). From the interview data, the principals appeared to understand the significance of the teachers' willingness to take on the changes imposed by the ELA CCSS in order to have a successful implementation of a plan that was in place within their respective districts.

Has the implementation been successful? The degree to which the implementation of the ELA CCSS was successful varied by district. As reported by the participants themselves, the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS was dependent on many variables that had to come together. In some districts, the changes had worked out well, while others were still trying to solidify what the implementation would look like.

The District 1 participant had the most positive assessment of the implementation process that took place within his district. He talked about the path to implementation, the shifts that were agreed upon, and the monitoring that took place as various pieces started to come together. He reported that, at the current state of the implementation plan, the school was looking for ways to refine and build upon the ideas put in place by the transition team. Of the successful implementation, he surmised, "I will never be fully comfortable with our implementation of Common Core because you are consistently trying to get better" (0102). The principal for District 2 reported that the transition was successful in her school, citing the support for the school in the form of an ELA coach assigned to the school and the fact that both she and her assistant principal had been curriculum coaches in the district. A need that she emphasized at the time of this study was adopting a curriculum aligned with the ELA CCSS. Although all three of the principals voiced this need, the principal for District 2 highlighted this need more than the other two and talked about the dependency that some of her teachers felt on a textbook. She

stated, "There are still teachers who are going to be tied to that textbook" (0202). The District 3 participant reported that the implementation of the ELA CCSS was somewhat successful, bringing necessary changes to the ELA classrooms, but with a definite need for enhancing the focus. She stated that a goal she had in moving forward with the implementation was "to revisit with our ed services at the district, just because I think that there are some things that our teachers need more clarification on" (0302).

      School principal summary. The participating principals' perspective on the implementation of the ELA CCSS was unique in that they were in the middle of the changes taking place. They were neither the ones that determined the direction for implementation, nor the practitioners implementing the changes. The interviews with the principals brought this to light as they presented knowledgeable summaries of what their respective districts had been working on or what the vision of the implementation was, while acknowledging that they played an important role in monitoring the implementation to ensure that the changes were taking place in the classrooms. All of the principals discussed learning about the ELA CCSS through district meetings and through readings on the topic. Each reported the importance of being knowledgeable about the new standards to be successful in supporting teachers during the implementation process and beyond. The principals all reported having access to the district office if they needed support. The participating principals discussed the numerous changes taking place in their respective districts with varying degrees of being able to tie all of those changes to one specific, overarching vision.

Classroom Teachers

The teaching staff that participated in this study represented 44 years of experience in education, with the teacher representing District 3 accounting for 25 of those years. The teachers all voiced learning about the ELA CCSS through their district or through independent exposure to information sites such as achievethecore.org. The teacher participants for District 1 and District 3 reported participating in the planning meetings at which the implementation plan for the ELA CCSS was shaped. All three of the teacher participants reported having an ELA coach at the district office as a resource. District 1 reported having a school-site ELA coach. At the time of this study, it was the first year in which she was available. All three of the classroom teachers voiced the lack of a standards-aligned curriculum as an obstacle for full implementation.

Ultimately, the changes implemented as part of the ELA CCSS need to make their way into all ELA classrooms. Thus, the participating teachers presented the most important narratives of the implementation process that took shape in their individual districts. The participating teachers for this study reported the transition to the ELA CCSS as mirroring the changes reported by the district administrators and the school principals to varying degrees. The teacher in District 1 mirrored the reports of the district administrator and the principal most closely, as she discussed the trainings that were provided for implementing the ELA CCSS, the teaching strategies for which the district was looking, the shifts required of both students and teachers, and the resources available to her and others. District 3's participant reported an experience that was consistent with what had taken place in the district prior to the district administrator and the school principal joining the district. However, both the district administrator and the principal reported having heard of these activities or meetings taking place by teachers or others in the

district. Her interview did not include any of the changes that were unfolding in the district at the time of this study. The narrative from the participant in District 2 corroborated the trainings that the teachers had been a part of as part of District 2's approach to implementing the ELA CCSS. However, she reported that she and her peers lacked an understanding of what to do with the knowledge they gained at the various trainings. She also reported that trainings like the AVID Summer Institute, which was attended by all the ELA teachers in her school, was not specifically focused on the ELA CCSS. She reported that these trainings were more about teaching practices that should be in place in classrooms.

What is the ELA CCSS? The participating teachers reported an understanding of the ELA CCSS that was very concrete in what students were supposed to gain from the standards. In defining what the ELA CCSS was to her, the participant from District 1 talked about the national significance of the shift by stating the importance of all the states adopting similar standards. She talked about the impact that moving from one state to another had on a child when she stated, "They're either behind or ahead, depending on what state they're coming from" (0103). The participant from District 3 articulated a simple but valuable interpretation of what the ELA CCSS was to her when she stated that the standards represent "real-life skills that [students] can use, after high school, to be prepared for college and the workplace" (0303). The participant for District 3 discussed the significance of moving away from the scripted curriculum that had taken over education, pointing to the significance of empowering teachers to direct how the students learn in a class. She stated, "Common Core doesn't insist that you have to be on the same page" (0303). The collective understanding of the ELA CCSS for the participants included an understanding of the national emphasis on providing all students with skills that will enhance

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their opportunities as adults within every schoolhouse in every state, with teachers being empowered to determine the best approach to assuring that their students are benefiting from the standards.

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? The participating teachers for this study presented an understanding of the plan that was in place in their respective districts that varied from what was presented by the other participants to varying degrees. The participating teachers for District 1 and District 3 were able to articulate a plan for implementing the ELA CCSS consistent with the plans articulated by the district office administrator and the school principal. Each of them described the focus areas for his or her respective districts. The plan presented by the participating teacher from District 1 paralleled that of the other participants in her district the closest. She articulated the process that had taken place to learn about the ELA CCSS, the process to determine the focus areas of the transition, and the ongoing training and monitoring of the changes. The participant for District 3 corroborated what had taken place in the district with regard to the learning experience presented to the teachers and the district's focus on writing. The participant for District 2 reported an understanding of the plan in place in her district that included information about trainings and collaboration sessions in place for teachers. However, she reported a lack of focus and leadership in the district that resulted in her department not having clarity on what was expected within the classroom. Her experience reflected more frustration with the changes taking place than the other two participating teachers.

Learning about the ELA CCSS. All three of the participating teachers reported learning about the ELA CCSS primarily through district professional development sessions. All three of them reported attending meetings at which the ELA CCSS was compared to the California State

Standards and analyzing the stepladder sequencing that is present with the ELA CCSS. After that

initial introduction to the standards, continued exposure to them varied. For the participant from

District 1, ongoing team meetings at the district office and collaboration meetings with her

department provided further familiarity with the standards and the expected changes that were

decided upon by the Transition Team. The participant from District 2 reported having a lot of

professional development throughout the two summers prior to this study. The professional

development sessions included attending conferences such as the AVID Summer Institute and

collaboration meetings with members of the ELA department at her school. She reported these

meetings as being "boring" (0203) and mostly unproductive because "the time that we are given

to plan, they don't use it" (0203). The participant for District 3 expressed a learning experience

that was rooted in her exposure to web resources for the ELA CCSS that included

achievethecore.org and newsela.com. She discussed the lack of resources offered to the middle

school because of the district's focus on the elementary schools. The teachers learning about the

ELA CCSS was reported to have originated within their district, with very different learning

opportunities and outcomes stemming from those initial experiences.

Has the implementation been successful? The teacher participants for this study

reported varying degrees of success with the implementation of the ELA CCSS within their

respective districts. The teacher from District 1 presented a narrative with the most optimistic

perspective of how successful the implementation process had been at her district. The

participant from District 3 reported the implementation process as having been somewhat

successful. She reported problems that had come to light now that they were a year into the

implementation. She reported problems with students being able to use technology, the lack of a

standards-aligned curriculum, and the lack of resources available to the teachers, including ongoing training on the ELA CCSS for new teachers that have joined the group in recent years. She also highlighted the benefits of the transition when she talked about collaborating with her peers to refine and enhance the classroom instruction. The teacher in District 2 was the only teacher to report that the implementation of the ELA CCSS had not been successful in her district. She reported participating in many opportunities to learn, but stated that she and her department lacked focus. She also discussed difficulties that had developed because of the changes in leadership within the district. She attributed the constant changes in leadership as the reason that some of her peers continued to be reluctant to embrace the changes that the ELA CCSS entailed. On having a focus to benefit all of the students in her school, she stated, "School-wide we're not really implementing anything that would help the students [in] every class" (0203). The success of the implementation process in each of the districts varied substantially, as reported by the participating teachers.

What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? As a collective, the participating teachers reported the ideal implementation of the ELA CCSS as encompassing a classroom environment that allowed students to become active and engaged students. The participant for District 1 stated:

> If you were to walk into a Common Core classroom, the kids should be engaged
> somehow, not sitting there and listening to the teacher talk, however that may
> look. Yes, there are going to be times where I have to teach something,
> specifically, where it will just be me talking for 15 or 20 minutes. We understand

that that's still going to take place in the classroom. But most of it should be

geared by them. (0103)

All three of the participating teachers voiced the successful implementation of the ELA CCSS

being students who are problem solvers and who became engaged in the art of drawing

information from multiple sources to establish and defend a position. Each of the teachers

discussed the use of technology with the new standards and the value of the students talking to

each other in class. The overall message from the teachers was that under the ELA CCSS,

students were expected to become active learners in class to refine skills that would be beneficial

to them later in life.

Classroom teacher summary. The teacher participants for this study presented a

collective experience that was very dependent on other factors within the district. In District 2,

for example, the constant change in leadership was reported by the teacher as negatively

impacting the effectiveness of the implementation of the ELA CCSS. In District 1, the teacher

participant credited the district administrator who guided the process from the beginning as a

reason for the smooth and effective implementation experience she reported. The teacher

experiences that were presented also brought to light problems that were uniquely rooted in

being the practitioners of the new strategies or procedures. In District 2, for example, having an

ELA coach focused on the elementary schools became a problem when the ELA department

asked for support in creating learning materials, a request that was never followed up on. For

District 1, the characteristics of the teacher's individual classes became an important factor to

consider when planning activities or assignments. She talked about having students who varied

in achievement levels and how that determined the amount of support that she had to provide for the different classes.

Conclusion

The participants in this study presented very complex experiences with the transition to the ELA CCSS. When asked about their opinion as to why the state approached the implementation of the ELA CCSS in the manner it did, participants reported that every district is different with unique needs and characteristics that would make a one-size-fits-all approach disastrous. The district administrator of District 1, District 3, the principal for District 3, and the teacher for District 2 voiced this sentiment. The purpose of this study was to capture the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district administrators with the goal of giving their voices value when examining the change processes taking place in organizations as complex as schools and school systems. Although there were similarities in the expressed experiences of all participants, both within their respective districts and within their professional category, there were also many differences that should make change agents want to seek information from those within the organization who are ultimately expected to make the changes necessary to attain the vision of the change effort.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Research Question and Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to answer the following question: What are the experiences of teachers, school principals, and district administrators during the transition to the ELA CCSS in three public school districts in the greater Los Angeles area? Although the state adopted the ELA CCSS in October of 2010, full implementation of the ELA CCSS in California took effect during the 2014–2015 school year, which allowed each LEA to construct its own approach to implementing the new standards. With large amounts of financial and human resources invested in making this change, taking the time to listen to the voices of those involved in the change process promised to provide an information loop that had the potential to benefit an organization undertaking a change initiative.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reflect on the approach three districts took in their efforts to transition into the ELA CCSS by listening to the voices of those who were intimately involved in the implementation of the initiative—district administrators, school principals, and classroom teachers. The participants were asked to complete a 20-minute, online survey and to participate in a 60-minute semistructured interview. I analyzed the information gathered from both of these sources using the 10 principles for successful change, as presented by Hall and Hord (2011). Hall and Hord posited that these principles are necessary for successful change to take place in an organization. To identify whether these 10 principles were present in the narratives provided by the participants, the primary investigator first organized the data into five distinct categories that informed the following big ideas: (a) What is the ELA CCSS? (b)

What was the plan for implementing the ELA CCSS? (c) What is the learning about the ELA CCSS? (d) What does the ideal ELA CCSS implementation look like? and (e) Has the implementation been successful? Once the narratives were disaggregated with these big ideas in mind, whether the 10 principles were present was determined by the information in the narratives provided by the participants.

This study set out to capture the voices of educators during the time period described as the Neutral Zone by Bridges (2009) and then analyze the reported experiences for similarities and differences between members of the same organization and between members of the same professional level. As these similarities and differences arose, an attempt to identify the 10 principles of change followed. The presence of differences between the experiences that were communicated by some of the participants and the presence of the principles of change at varying degrees demonstrates that there is value in implementing an information loop during the Neutral Zone for change agents who have invested human and fiscal capital to bring about needed changes to their organization. I made the argument that the information loops in the Neutral Zone provide an opportunity for change agents to address inconsistencies between the experiences captured by interviewing members of the organization and from the lack of seeing at least some of the 10 principles of change. It is up to the reader and future researchers to determine the extent to which this information loop during the Neutral Zone is beneficial to an organization and whether the presence of some or all of the principles is necessary for successful change to take place.

LEAs were tasked with developing a plan for the manner in which the ELA CCSS would be implemented. In conjunction with other non-government entities, the CDE created and made

public a variety of resources for LEAs to access in their transition to the CCSS. Among the resources, the state published the *CCSS Systems Implementation Plan for California,* in which it stated, "Each of California's local education agencies should develop its own plan for Common Core State Standards systems implementation based on local needs and resources" (CA Systems Implementation, 2014, p. 40). By not providing LEAs with a mandated plan for implementing the new state standards, the state acknowledged the complexities of change, providing each LEA the opportunity to tailor its approach to the implementation process most suitable for its constituencies. This, however, also created the possibility for there to be fluctuating levels of implementation that would invariably have an impact on students and student learning. Whether those fluctuations are beneficial or detrimental is a research study for a later time, once there is more student data to tie to the implementation plans of each LEA to student outcomes.

This dissertation set out to gather the voices of educators in three districts to create a narrative of how the ELA CCSS implementation process had taken shape for them well into the second year of full implementation. It set out to utilize the principles of change as presented by Hall and Hord (2011) as a way to understand the processes taking shape. Furthermore, it focused in on a time period that Bridges (2009) referred to as the Neutral Zone in his work about the processes that take shape during transitional periods. It is in this time period, after the initial period of Ending, Losing, Letting Go, and before the third phase, The New Beginning, that the Neutral Zone occurs. The Neutral Zone is described as the old way being gone, but the new way not being quite in place (Bridges, 2009). Bridges further described this time period as a prime opportunity for an organization to be creative and to experiment to become what it set out to

become. The work of Hall and Hord and Bridges is the lens through which the change process was observed.

Muhammad (2009) discussed what it will take to make America's schools better when he stated, "If our schools are going to improve student learning, they must embrace strategies that are radically different from those we have embraced in the past" (p. 62). The national movement to adopt the CCSS can be seen as America's current attempt to make those radically different strategies part of every child's educational experience.

Findings of the Study

Invariably, when individual organizations are responsible for implementing a change initiative, the results for any one of the organizations will vary to some degree from the others. The range of variability will depend on the complexity of the change initiative, the number of individuals affected by the initiative, the capacity levels of the organization's members, and a number of other variables. All of this can be seen in the experiences of the LEAs that participated in this study and their efforts to implement the ELA CCSS. The three districts had notably different approaches to the implementation of the ELA CCSS, each with intentions of utilizing the new CCSS as a way to ensure that their students attain maximum benefits from the educational experience. Each of the three districts presented a distinct approach to the implementation of the ELA CCSS, with the participants' voicing varying levels of agreement with one another. Each of the districts discussed having a plan for implementation, but only District 1 was able to provide it for me. This made triangulation between the narratives and the plan that developed in the individual districts impossible.

To ascertain whether including an information loop that includes the voices of key members of an organization during the Neutral Zone holds potential for implementing a change initiative, Hall and Hord (2011)'s 10 principles of change were used to analyze the narratives that the participants of this study presented. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 10 principles include: (a) context influences the process of learning and change; (b) change is learning; (c) change is a process, not an event; (d) the school is the principal unit of change, (e) organizations adopt change—individuals implement change; (f) interventions are key to the success of the change process; (g) appropriate interventions reduce resistance to change; (h) administrator leadership is essential to long term success; (i) mandates can work; and (j) facilitating change is a team effort. From the responses the participants provided during their individual interviews, an attempt to draw out elements of each of the principles was made. Some of the principles were present in some of the participants' narratives, while others were either completely absent or had to be inferred from the messages provided by the participants because the principles were not the direct focus of the study and the participants were unaware of this focus.

Common Principles Throughout the Study

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that some of the principles were more pronounced in the transitional experience of the participants than others. The principles of change that readily came up in the participant's narratives included: (a) change is learning; (b) change is a process, not an event; (c) mandates can work; and (d) context influences the process of learning and change.

Learning about the ELA CCSS was a topic directly addressed within the interviews. Participants were asked to discuss the manner in which they learned about the ELA CCSS and to

differentiate between formal learning settings (e.g., conferences and professional development sessions) and informal learning settings (e.g., researching the standards online and reading journals and articles on the topic). Hall and Hord (2011) discussed the dependency of learning during any change process when they discussed a change in a mathematics class to include critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. They stated, "Before these new outcomes (changes) can be realized in the students, the instructional staff must change their teaching" (p. 6). Similarly, the teachers being required to implement the ELA CCSS required learning the standards to perform their job. The school principals had to learn about the standards to support the teachers and monitor program implementation, and the district administrators had to learn about the ELA CCSS to be able to guide their teams through the implementation process. For example, the district administrator for District 1 recalled providing professional development for the school administrators when he stated, "I've been doing monthly professional development sessions for the administrators here" (0101). He reported designing and leading those sessions. The school principal for District 2 acknowledged the need to be informed about the standards, "to be able to talk with the teacher" (0302) for instances where the teacher may not be using a key strategy as designed. Teachers reported having a variety of learning experiences that included learning strategies expected to be implemented school-wide. The teacher for District 2 noted, "They sent the whole staff to have a training" (0203) on the use of Cornell Note taking. Learning about the ELA CCSS was a theme that each participant discussed, pointing to experiences in which they did things like compare the old standards to the new ones.

Another principle that was present in the narratives of the participants was *context influences the process of learning and change.* This principle appeared consistently when the

participants were asked about the state's vision for implementation of the ELA CCSS being driven by LEAs. The participants voiced the importance of allowing the individual districts to determine what would be the best approach for each one because of individual differences that would make a one-size-fits-all approach useless. The district administrator for District 3 talked about the fact that if the state had come down and imposed a process for each LEA to follow, it would be "the beginning of the end" (0301). She went on and elaborated on the fact that educational professionals do not like having others come in and tell them what to do because of the uniqueness of each district, each school, and even each class within the schools. The teacher for District 2 also voiced the importance of recognizing that each district is unique because of the student body that makes it up.

All three of the districts and their participants discussed the implementation of the ELAS CCSS as something still on-going at the time of this study, pointing to the principle of *change is a process, not an event*. They discussed the ongoing need for ELA CCSS-aligned materials that two of the districts were going through and that the third district had decided to wait on until the following school year. All of the participants talked about ongoing refinements to what was taking place within their respective districts as part of the process for implementation. All three of the district administrators discussed a monitoring process in place as part of the plan in each of their districts to monitor the changes expected to be in place as part of the ELA CCSS implementation. District 1, for example, designed a walk-through protocol that administrators were expected to use multiple times a year; however, the district administrator for District 1 acknowledged that they were not expected to use them more than once this school year while they worked on becoming familiar with the protocol and the expectations for its use. District 1

and District 2 were prime examples of change being a process, not an event. They, with the change in leadership had by each, discussed the process of having to refocus what was taking place in their respective districts. In District 2, the participants described the implementation process as needing a lot of attention for a variety of reasons. The district administrator discussed needing to focus more on specific actions that would characterize the ELA CCSS, while the classroom teacher for District 2 talked about the need to enhance their collaborative approach to ensure that teachers were better supported so that the teachers "helped each other out" (0203). In District 3, the change in leadership was not reported as something that necessitated completely changing the direction the district. All three participants acknowledged the value in focusing on writing. The district administrator and the principal both reported that this focus was too limited and that there was work being done to capture more of the ELA CCSS as part of their refocused approach to the implementation of the ELA CCSS. The teacher in District 3 reported the need for further training from the District Office. She discussed the changes in staffing for the ELA department at her school and pointed out that many of the new teachers who were hired recently had not done any training with the ELA CCSS and they were unaware of how and why the district decided to approach the implementation of the standards.

Another principle that surfaced in the narratives of the participants for this study was that *administrative leadership is essential to long-term success.* In District 1, the participating principal and teacher acknowledged the leadership that the district administrator provided. They acknowledged his role in pointing the implementation group in the right direction and making resources available so that capacity building was happening at all levels. In District 2, the administrative leadership was reported as more of a problem because of the changes that took

place. They did not report a problem with the leadership in place at the time of this study, but all of the participants expressed the significant impact the changes had on the implementation of the ELA CCSS. In District 3, the focus on supporting the elementary schools more than the secondary schools was something that was blamed for the expressed lack of support at the school site. To the teacher and the principal that participated in this study, district administrators made the decision. However, the district administrator and the principal acknowledged that the teachers at the secondary level reported that they did not need help with the implementation of the ELA CCSS when they reported only needing support in the area of writing.

Another principle that surfaced from the narratives of the participants was *facilitating change is a team effort*. In all three of the districts, the participants reported the value of having representatives at all levels taking part in the decision-making process of implementing the ELA CCSS. In District 2, for example, the district administrator assembled a committee to make decisions on the refocused approach to implementation; the committee was made up of teachers, administrators, classified personnel, and parents. The group determined the five focus areas that were then reported to be the focus of implementation for the following school year. In District 1, the transition team put in place was a group of teachers and administrators who continued to meet and direct the implementation process. For the teachers, adopting a new curriculum was becoming their focus, while the principal's was on the monitoring aspect of the implementation.

The participants for the three districts had very different experiences with the implementation of the ELA CCSS; however, the principles of change were present in how they reported their experiences, with some being more pronounced than others. From this

information, I made the following assertions about the implementation of the ELA CCSS at each of the participating sites:

A structured approach. District 1's narrative was one of having consistent leadership with a clearly planned out vision, disseminated throughout the organization, and monitored for progress. The consistent leadership in this district throughout the implementation process was a notable difference between the three participating districts. The district administrator leading the transition was the same individual who initiated the plan for implementation and who guided it since its inception. The school principal and the teacher who participated in this study echoed many of the characteristics of the plan and provided examples of what their district meant when it talked about doing Common Core in the ELA classes. Notable characteristics of the transition into the ELA CCSS for this district included the extent of the involvement of both teachers and administrators throughout the process, the explicit need for teachers to adopt specific teaching strategies within their classrooms, and the development of strategies to monitor what is expected to be taking place in the classrooms as a consequence of adopting the new standards.

The district administrator for District 1 referred to the extent of inclusion into the implementation process when he stated:

> What we hear time and time again from our association leadership and from other individuals that interact with other districts is that they have not found any district anywhere where the process has been more inclusive of hearing the voice of our teachers, hearing the voice of our support staff, or administrators. I am really proud of that. (0101)

Change theorists (e.g., Fullan, 2010) have discussed the value of inclusion and conversations at length. These relationships between the change agents and the members of the organization are vital to the change effort. Fullan (2010) stated, "Communication during implementation is far more important than communication prior to implementation" (p. 26). Involvement and participation leads to building relationships. Through participation, members of an organization acquire the buy-in necessary to endure the day-to-day challenges that present themselves. Fullan went on to state, "The leader has multiple opportunities to communicate and refine the vision in relation to concrete implementation and of the implementation strategy itself" (p. 26).

District 1 had the most consistent message when it came to the interventions that should be in all classes in an ELA Common Core era. Those strategies, enumerated by all three of the participants, included student collaboration, close reading, annotation of the text, text-dependent questioning, citing the text, participation in instructional rounds or walk-throughs, and common assessments that would result in data to be utilized by teachers, coaches, and district staff to inform instruction. The selection of these strategies came from group meetings in which the representative group agreed to take them on, implement them in class, and have others come around and see the practice in action. Both teachers and administrators monitored these practices throughout the year.

Having administrators from both the school and the district observe classrooms was commonplace in this district, and all three participants touched on these observations during their interview. More important is the fact that teachers had the opportunity to walk around to other classes, an idea promoted at the schools from the district level down to each of the classes. The principal for District 1 expressed this when he stated, "Yes [teachers] are comfortable with going

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in and observing and that is something that you know, and I have tried to say, you know, you have got to get out. You got to get out and see classrooms" (0102). This is a part of the ongoing monitoring plan that this district has in place. The goal for the district is to have teachers observe what is taking place in their school and be willing to showcase what they do. In addition to the ongoing observations, the district cited common assessments scheduled for the students throughout the school year. These assessments, because of the current flux in what is available to the staff, are not fully in place. However, the district was testing the use of various sources of assessments at their disposal.

The continuous change handicap. District 2 was experiencing the transition to the ELA CCSS as a collection of individuals navigating the waters of change as professionals who knew that something should be taking place, having an idea of what the change should be, but not yet having a clear or completely developed picture of the end product of their labors. District 2's narrative can be readily divided into three sections, each with some overlap with the others but unique in its own right.

The district administrator was a very knowledgeable individual who brought a wealth of knowledge from her previous experiences in various other settings. She presented a well-informed trajectory of where she planned to move the district. But, even in her focused and informed approach, she had a solid understanding of the challenges that she faced in moving the entire district into the direction she knew it had to go. She voiced this understanding when she stated, "The hardest part to change is the belief systems or culture, it's not so much—the standards aren't that part, that's just more of the belief systems" (0201).

The principal of this district presented a hybrid narrative of what had taken place at the school and the district already, mixed in with pieces of the new approach that had been presented to her through the current leadership. She had experienced much in the multiple roles she had held within the school district. She was a participant at the beginning of the implementation process, under a long-gone district leadership team, and had moved up the ranks throughout the different changes in leadership that had taken place in the district, while continuing to participate in ELA CCSS and providing support to teachers as the transition got underway. At the time of this study, she was the point person at the school and understood that she would be driving the success of the implementation process. She was optimistic about where the school and the district were at that time, while understanding that there was room for growth. This was evidenced in her story when she stated, "I think that from a site level to the district level, I think that we're doing the best that we can, and our best is good."

The teacher participant of District 2 presented a narrative rooted in her day-to-day frustrations with what was taking place and her understanding that what the teachers should be doing could be much improved. Her story was couched in Hargreaves and Fullan's (2009) words when they stated, "In reality, few people really change unless, at some point, they see the need to" (p. 1). The teacher participant was a classic example of a teacher—passionate about what she does and the importance of her job with regard to the impact she had on students' lives. She was in the trenches with a mix of other professionals who themselves had their own opinions about the ELA CCSS movement. She also acknowledged the need for more support, direction, and tools to be able to embrace the challenges of the movement at hand.

The slow and steady approach. District 3 shared a narrative that reflected a planned and calculated pause at one level partly due to a change in leadership and partly to an approach to the implementation of the ELA CCSS that was in need of refinement. While there was a plan in place that was expected to be beneficial to the bigger plan yet to come, the perceived lack of focus and training was apparent through the participants' experiences. The district administrator and the principal of District 3 shared that the results of the 2015 SBAC paralleled their achievement levels under the previous testing system, STAR, to a close degree. The higher achievement of this district, coupled with the rationale that ELA instruction was not changing as dramatically as math, provided some justification for taking a slow and steady approach to the implementation of the ELA CCSS. This district's narrative could best be understood by understanding the two distinct phases that the district had undertaken, one that was centered around writing for the secondary schools with little guidance and the second being a refined and more comprehensive feat developed from that experience.

Many of the participants of the study voiced a state of not knowing what was expected of the schools during the initial stages after the State adopted the CCSS. The district administrator for District 3 voiced the need to get more information before making any drastic changes when she stated, "It is complicated and it will take time. And we don't expect to have it done, and I think purposefully. We do not have a lot of data behind where we are." Knowing that the district had to take steps toward implementation, but not wanting to make drastic changes that might not be necessary for their schools, the district provided teachers with training that made them aware of the differences between the old and new standards. With that, the teachers were asked to provide input into how much support they needed and what their areas of need were. Teachers,

coaches, and administrators reported that the writing aspects of the ELA CCSS would be important to address, especially because writing was not a big focus under the previous standards. Teachers also reported to the district that "they were good with this ELA stuff" at the middle schools. Both of these factors resulted in the district taking a more hands-off approach to the ELA CCSS implementation at the middle schools, allowing them to focus in a lot more on the elementary schools, a detail that all of the participants echoed.

The second part of the narrative for District 3 was developing as this study took place. With data from the state test and common assessments administered at the middle schools, as well as from communication with the coaches, administrators, and teachers, the district was moving into a second phase of implementing the CCSS at the time of this study. This stage of implementation was better known to the district administration and her educational services team that were developing the framework, a framework that groups of teachers and administrators would further inform in the future. In this phase of the implementation process for District 3, there would be more support provided for teachers beyond a focus on just writing. Once they saw the test demands of students, the district felt they had a better understanding of how to address the needs of their students to make the investment of time and money more impactful.

Significance of the Findings

Educational change researchers and theorists discuss the complexities of change in countless pieces of literature. Within these pieces of works, each researcher and theorist posits an approach to change that holds a special focus or approach that, if followed, holds the promise of a successful transition. For a change agent, the theorist or researcher that they decide to follow may not be the most important part of a transition plan. The district administrator from District 2

mirrored this idea when she stated, "It does not matter where you start, you can start with the shifts, you can start with four Cs, you can start with rigor, it doesn't matter. It's starting and then moving forward from there" (0201). What might prove to be the most important part of transitioning could be selecting one approach to creating a plan that is well disseminated and monitored diligently throughout the implementation process and beyond to have an initiative take root as intended when it was adopted.

Like other researchers who study change, Smith (2008) simplified the process as encompassing three major points: (a) point A, where the organization is; (b) point B, where the organization wants to be; and (c) the manner in which an organization bridges the two points. Of the three points, Smith (2008) reported, "The most important concern is the journey, how we will travel from point A to point B" (p. 274). He is not the only researcher that makes this argument. In a number of his books, Fullan made similar observations about the importance of the process that unfolds during times of change for an organization. He further posited that this process of going from point A to point B is not a neat and linear experience. To the contrary, he and other researchers (e.g., Bridges, 2009; Heath & Heath, 2010) discussed the complexity and messiness of implementing change within an organization. This study affirmed that change in complex organizations such as schools and school districts is a messy process with many individuals navigating the transitional experience in very different, yet congruent ways.

In the three districts that participated in this study, one thing was apparent. Each district's representatives voiced a desire, if not a passion, to do what was right for students. The ELA Common Core was but the measuring tool to provide focus and drive the daily instruction in their classrooms. Teachers, principals, and district administrators would have the same job to do

with any set of standards developed by the state. The district administrator for District 1 voiced this sentiment when he stated, "I've been very impressed with how our teachers have embraced it and impressed with their understanding of the shifts, and I think we've really tapped into a desire for teachers to do something for kids that maybe they felt like they couldn't do with the previous set of expectations and standards" (0101).

It was apparent that each LEA had taken a different approach to the CCSS and to what makes up good ELA CCSS instruction. My research brought to light that although there was no right way of approaching change, the result of what that change would be could benefit from conversations with the members of the organization. Variables such as changes in leadership, dissemination of information, and inclusion of members all play a significant role in how initiative takes root. However, whether an initiative takes root cannot be determined until implementation has taken place. The degree to which an initiative takes root depends on the individual classroom teachers. Determining whether the new practices associated with an initiative are in place or not requires some type of contact with teachers. There is a variety of ways that this information can be gathered, and of those methods, a rich conversation with them can result in an eye-opening revelation of what has truly taken place in a complex organization experiencing change.

The Neutral Zone, as presented by Bridges (2009), is a time period that holds the potential to realign or confirm the strategies and work to which an organization has committed. In a complex system like a school or school district, having rich conversations with those members responsible for implementing the change initiative could be the key to maximizing the benefits of the initiative being implemented in a variety of ways. For District 1, for example,

taking the time to discuss the implementation of the ELA CCSS initiative served as a validation point to a lot of the work that had already taken place. Asking specific questions of a larger number of individuals would result in the discovery of some other areas for improvement, as minor as they may be. For organizations like District 3, the time to have a dialogue with the implementers of the initiative could inform the next steps that are necessary in the implementation process. For districts that can afford to take a slower approach to implementation, the slow and steady approach provides many benefits. Lastly, for organizations like District 3 who are having to deal with outside forces that affect the effectiveness of any implementation plan, taking the time to have conversations with the members of the organization could be priceless, especially when one considers the investment that many initiatives require in both financial and human capital. For District 3, it was apparent that a coming together was required to review the plan that was in place or to create a plan that could be shared with the organization. That plan needs to be cemented through publishing and promotion. If change continues to take place, those who come into the system have something to which they can refer and provides a point at which they can pick up where others have left off. Without conversations during the Neutral Zone, the disconnect between the different levels of the organization could go unaddressed, possibly leading to frustration for the professionals involved and a loss of potential benefit for the initiative that was adopted.

Recommendations for Future Research

Like many other research studies, this dissertation provided more questions than answers. It set out to piece together the experiences of teachers, principals, and district administrators during this massive transition for all involved in education. In doing so, it brought to light some

well-known facts about change: change, especially complex change, results in various states and levels of implementation among individuals and individual groups. In understanding that change initiatives are normally adopted to improve the functionality and success of an organization, and that these initiatives come at great expense in both monetary and human capital for organizations, change agents must exploit all facets of the change process to ensure that the benefits being sought after with the adoption of an initiative are attained.

To better understand what took place in the different LEAs within districts, counties, states, and across the nation, a much more comprehensive study must take place. Such a study would benefit from a case study approach to best get at the root of the differences seen on the surface level of the implementation experience for participants. Furthermore, a case study approach would be better equipped to establish the end result of the implementation plan for a given school and district and connect that to the real experiences had by the members of that organization. This interview study provided a glimpse into what was taking place at three local districts. The findings hold significance in that they have confirmed the real possibility of taking the exact same initiative, with extensive funding and information available to the leaders at each LEA, and having the efforts of each organization turn out completely unique from the others. The question that remains is whether the manner in which the initiative was implemented resulted in student achievement. A case study would provide a researcher with a much deeper understanding of that reported experience through the building of relationships and the possibility for extensive triangulation. It would also provide researchers with the possibility of following the implementation for a longer time period than what was possible with this study.

A quantitative study on the approach each district has taken might also be considered for future study. Such a study could capture a wide array of experiences from many more individuals and from many more LEAs. Such a study has the benefit of capturing a more complete picture of the variance in implementation approaches. Furthermore, such a study could inform a researcher to focus in on specific approaches to implementation, to hone in on specific leadership styles, or to link various pieces of assessment data to the type of transition put into place. Such a study could then disaggregate the data to look for specific benefits for various types of schools, various student groups, or different communities.

The need to implement change more strategically is not a question. In capturing the voices of members of three different school districts in the greater Los Angeles area, this study uncovered varying degrees of alignment with the vision that was set forth by the state when the president of the CDE, Michael Kirst, stated that the ELA CCSS fulfilled "California's vision that all students graduate from our public school system as lifelong learners and have the skills and knowledge necessary to be ready to assume their position in the global economy" (California, 2013, p. v). This vision will only be reached if the changes that these standards require are in every district and in every classroom across the state. Having only some schools embrace changes, while others stay fast with "the way things have always been done" will only result in more of the same. Looking at the bigger, national picture, the ESEA of 1965 has driven educational policy for more than 50 years now, a vision echoed in these standards and the standards before them, in policies of today and yesterday, in current and past, laws, and initiatives, both new and old, and adopted by educators across the nation. Success in reaching our goals is far outnumbered by instances of coming up short or failing altogether. This study

provided a small portion of information as to why that may be the case. It is up to future researchers to further examine the social phenomena that is organizational change to improve upon our desires to make things better for all students across the nation.

Conclusion

Change can be a stressful and dreaded experience, or it can be an opportunity to refocus and reenergize an organization. In discussing the value of change for motion leaders, Fullan (2010) stated, "Motion leaders not only learn so much about the essence of change but also become comfortable, even excited, about heading into the next change situation" (p. 75). Because change and the change process holds much value to organizations, it is important that researchers take note of unexplored or untapped veins of information that may have a positive impact in the successful implementation of a change initiative. The amount of human and financial capital invested in reshaping an organization to become more efficient, effective, or impactful in the marketplace warrants these investigative studies to discover those untapped veins of information. This study posited that the narratives of individuals most affected by a change initiative held an important vein of information that could, during the Neutral Zone, provide change agents with an opportunity to assess how a process was unfolding within an organization and redirect the initiative if necessary.

Appendix A
Samples of Standards Alignment

Table A1

Sample of Standards Alignment

College and Career Standards	ELA Reading Literature Standards	ELA Reading Informational Text 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.	1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.	2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.	2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.	3. Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

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.	4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.	4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
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.	5. Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.	5. Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept. A. Analyze the use of text features (e.g., graphics, headers, captions) in consumer materials. CA
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.	6. Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.	6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas		
7. Integrate and evaluate	7. Analyze the extent to	7. Evaluate the advantages

content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.	and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.
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.	8. (Not applicable to literature)	8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
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.	9. Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new	9. Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity		
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and	10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

	proficiently.	

Table B1

Progression of ELA Standards Using Language Standard One

CCR L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

LK.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
  a. Print many upper and lowercase letters.
  b. Use frequently occurring nouns and verbs.
  c. Form regular plural nouns orally by adding /s/ or /es/ (e.g., dog, dogs; wish, wishes).
  d. Understand and use question words (interrogatives) (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, how).
  e. Use the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with).
  f. Produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities.

L1.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
  a. Print all upper and lowercase letters.
  b. Use common, proper, and possessive nouns.
  c. Use singular and plural nouns with matching verbs in basic sentences (e.g., He hops; We hop).
  d. Use personal (subject, object), possessive, and indefinite pronouns (e.g., I, me, my; they, them, their; anyone, everything).
  e. Use verbs to convey a sense of past, present, and future (e.g., Yesterday I walked home; Today I walk home; Tomorrow I will walk home).
  f. Use frequently occurring adjectives.
  g. Use frequently occurring conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or, so, because).
  h. Use determiners (e.g., articles, demonstratives).
  i. Use frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., during, beyond, toward).
  j. Produce and expand complete simple and compound declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences in response to prompts.

L2.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- a. Use collective nouns (e.g., group).
- b. Form and use frequently occurring irregular plural nouns (e.g., feet, children, teeth, mice, fish).
- c. Use reflexive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves).
- d. Form and use the past tense of frequently occurring irregular verbs (e.g., sat, hid, told).
- e. Use adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.
- f. Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences (e.g., The boy watched the movie; The little boy watched the movie; The action movie was watched by the little boy).
- g. Create readable documents with legible print.

L3.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- a. Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences.
- b. Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns.
- c. Use abstract nouns (e.g., childhood).
- d. Form and use regular and irregular verbs.
- e. Form and use the simple (e.g., I walked; I walk; I will walk) verb tenses.
- f. Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.*
- g. Form and use comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.
- h. Use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.
- i. Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.
- j. Write legibly in cursive or joined italics, allowing margins and correct spacing between letters in a word and words in a sentence.
- k. Use reciprocal pronouns correctly.

L4.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- a. Use interrogative, relative pronouns (who, whose, whom, which, that) and relative adverbs (where, when, why).
- b. Form and use the progressive (e.g., I was walking; I am walking; I will be walking) verb tenses.

c. Use modal auxiliaries (e.g., can, may, must) to convey various conditions.
d. Order adjectives within sentences according to conventional patterns (e.g., a small red bag rather than a red small bag).
e. Form and use prepositional phrases.
f. Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons.*
g. Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to, too, two; there, their).*
h. Write fluidly and legibly in cursive or joined italics.

L5.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
a. Explain the function of conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections in general and their function in particular sentences.
b. Form and use the perfect (e.g., I had walked; I have walked; I will have walked) verb tenses.
c. Use verb tense to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions.
d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.*
e. Use correlative conjunctions (e.g., either/or, neither/nor).

L6.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
a. Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).
b. Use all pronouns, including intensive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves) correctly.
c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.*
d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).*
e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.*

L7.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
a. Explain the function of phrases and clauses in general and their function in specific sentences.
b. Choose among simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences to signal differing relationships among ideas.
c. Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers.*

L8.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

    a. Explain the function of verbals (gerunds, participles, infinitives) in general and their function in particular sentences.

    b. Form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.

    c. Form and use verbs in the indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional, and subjunctive mood.

    d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.*

L9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

    a. Use parallel structure.*

    b. Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

L11-12.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

    a. Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

    b. Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, Garner's Modern American Usage) as needed.

Note: California, 2013

Appendix C
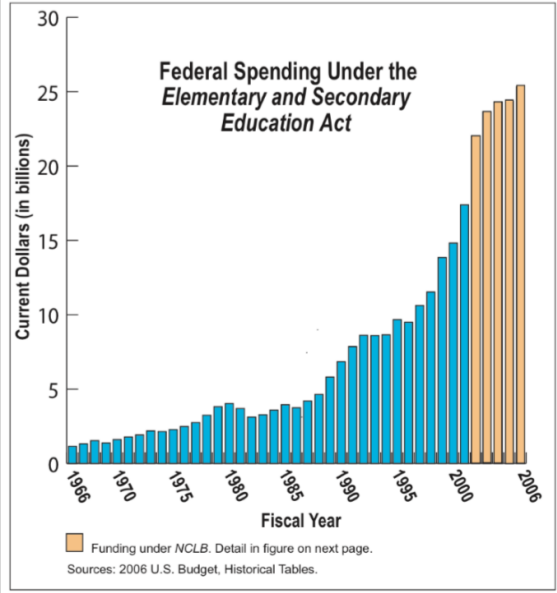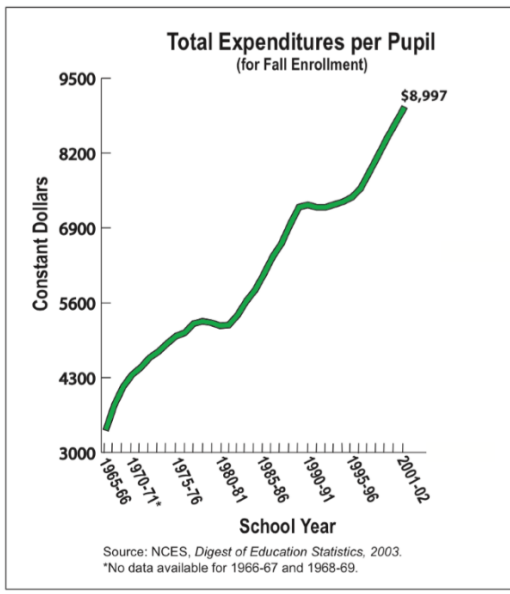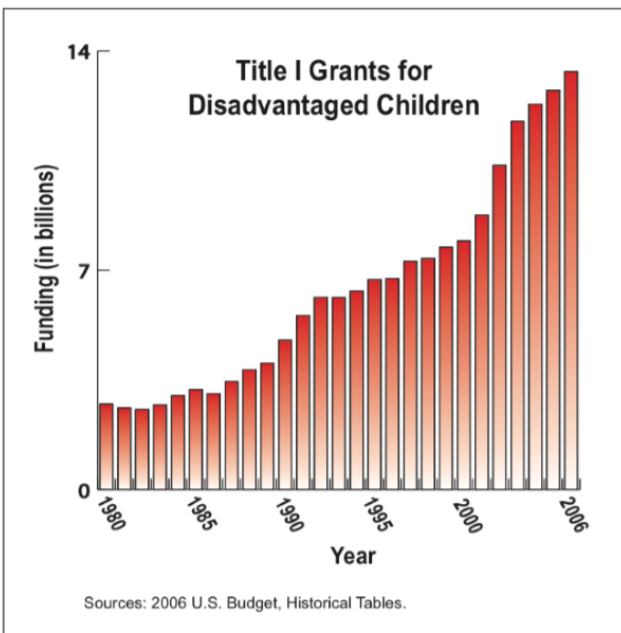*Expenditures for Elementary and Secondary Education*

Chart 1

Federal Spending Under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*

Funding under *NCLB*. Detail in figure on next page.
Sources: 2006 U.S. Budget, Historical Tables.

Chart 2

Total Expenditures per Pupil
(for Fall Enrollment)

$8,997

Source: NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003.*
*No data available for 1966-67 and 1968-69.

Chart 3

Title I Grants for Disadvantaged Children

Sources: 2006 U.S. Budget, Historical Tables.

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Chart 4

Total U.S. Expenditures for Elementary and Secondary Education

Legend:
- Federal
- State
- Local
- Other

Y-axis: Dollars in Billions (0 to 600)

Values by year:
- 1990–91: 248.9
- 1991–92: 261.3
- 1992–93: 274.3
- 1993–94: 287.5
- 1994–95: 302.4
- 1995–96: 318.2
- 1996–97: 339.2
- 1997–98: 361.4
- 1998–99: 384.0
- 1999–00: 411.5
- 2000–01: 442.0
- 2001–02: 467.9
- 2002–03: 490.9
- 2003–04: 514.0
- 2004–05: 536.0

X-axis: Years

Sources: NCES, "Common Core of Data," surveys and unpublished data.

**Because of rounding, detail does not add to 100 percent.

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Appendix D
Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to inform my study. My research in on the experiences of stakeholders during the implementation phase of new initiatives.

1. What position do you hold at your district?

      A) District administrator

      B) School-site administrator

      C) Classroom ELA teacher

2. What district are you currently working with?

3. How long have you been in this capacity?

4. What other roles have you filled as an education professional? (mark all that apply)

      A) Teacher

      B) Coach (non-sports)

      C) New teacher mentor

      D) School administrator

      E) Professional development provider

      F) Other: _____

5. How many years have you been working in education?

Common Core State Standards

The following questions are to get an understanding of your familiarity of the ELA CCSS and your district's approach to implementing the CCSS initiative. Your answers to these questions will inform the follow-up interview.

1. During what school year did your district start working at implementing the ELA CCSS?

      A) 2009-2010 school year

      B) 2010-2011 school year

      C) 2011-2012 school year

      D) 2012-2013 school year

E) 2013-2014 school year

F) 2014-2015 school year

2. Does your district have a "Local Plan for CCSS Systems Implementation"?

A) Yes

B) No

C) I do not know

3. Please describe your district's approach to implementing the ELA CCSS.

4. According to your district's vision of the ELA CCSS, what does the ideal ELA classroom look like in the CCSS era? Please describe in detail.

5. Is your district using the services of a group of company to help them drive the implementation of the ELA CCSS? If yes, provide the name of the organization.

6. What has been your involvement in the implementation of the ELA CCSS within your district?

7. Up to this point, what has been our primary source of knowledge to inform you about the ELA CCSS?

8. When you first started working towards implementing the ELA CCSS, approximately how much time did you invest in learning about the new standards in a professional setting?
*Professional settings may include workshops, conferences, district in-services, etc.

A) Less than ½ an hour a week

B) About ½ an hour a week

C) About 1 hour a week

D) About 2 hours a week

E) More than 2 hours a week

9. During this school year, approximately how much time have you invested in learning about the ELA CCSS in a professional setting?

*Professional settings may include workshops, conferences, district in-services, etc.

A) Less than ½ an hour a week

B) About ½ an hour a week

C) About 1 hour a week

D) About 2 hours a week

E) More than 2 hours a week

10. When you first started working towards implementing the ELA CCSS, approximately how much personal time did you invest in learning about the new?

*Personal time includes research, reading, and discussions that were not a part of your duties as an educator.

A) Less than ½ an hour a week

B) About ½ an hour a week

C) About 1 hour a week

D) About 2 hours a week

E) More than 2 hours a week

11. During this school year, approximately how much personal time have you invested in learning about the ELA CCSS?

*Personal time includes research, reading, and discussions that were not a part of your duties as an educator.

A) Less than ½ an hour a week

B) About ½ an hour a week

C) About 1 hour a week

D) About 2 hours a week

E) More than 2 hours a week

12. Has the ELA CCSS changed the daily practices of the average ELA classroom? If yes, how? If not, why not?

District Administrator	School Administrator	Teacher
What is ELA Common Core to you?	What is ELA Common Core to you?	What is ELA Common Core to you?
You stated that your district started working towards implementation during _____ school year; at that point, was there a plan for how the ELA CCSS would be implemented in your district?	You stated that your district started working towards implementation during _____ school year; at that point, was there a plan for how your school would implement the ELA CCSS?	You stated that your district started working towards implementation during _____ school year; at that point, was there a plan for how the ELA CCSS would be implemented into your classroom?
On having a Local Plan for CCSS Systems Implementation Plan: ● Yes: ○ Tell me about the document ○ Where is the district in its implementation plan? ○ What role do you take on, per the plan? ○ How is progress reported? ● No: ○ How is the implementation organized ○ How do people know what they are responsible for? ○ How is progress reported?	On having a Local Plan for CCSS Systems Implementation Plan: ● Yes: ○ Tell me about the document ○ Where is the district / school in its implementation plan? ○ What role do you take on, per the plan? ○ How is progress reported? ● No: ○ How is the implementation organized ○ How do people know what they are responsible for? ○ How is progress reported?	On having a Local Plan for CCSS Systems Implementation Plan: ● Yes: ○ Tell me about the document ○ Where is the district / school in its implementation plan? ○ What role do you take on, per the plan? ○ How is progress reported? ● No: ○ How is the implementation organized ○ How do people know what they are responsible for? ○ How is progress reported?
Where did 'the plan' for implementation come from? ● Outside of the district: ○ Where did 'the plan' originate? ○ Who was informed of	Where did 'the plan' for implementation come from? ● Outside of the school: ○ Where did 'the plan' originate? ○ Who was informed of 'the	Where did 'the plan' for implementation come from? ● From people other than classroom teachers: ○ Where did 'the plan' originate?

‘the plan’?
○ How was ‘the plan’ brought back to the district?
  ■ Who was at those meetings?
  ■ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
● Within the district:
○ Who was involved?
○ How often were meetings about implementation held?
○ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
○ Is the district using any *Guiding Strategies? If so, can you tell me about them.*
	plan’?
	○ How was ‘the plan’ brought back to the district?
	  ■ Who was at those meetings?
	  ■ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
	● Within the school:
	○ Who was involved?
	○ How often were meetings about implementation held?
	○ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
	○ Is the school using any *Guiding Strategies? If so, can you tell me about them.*
		○ Who was informed of ‘the plan’?
		○ How was ‘the plan’ brought back to the district?
		  ■ Who was at those meetings?
		  ■ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
		● From classroom teachers:
		○ Who was involved?
		○ How often were meetings about implementation held?
		○ What was accomplished (what was the agreed upon action plan for implementation)?
		○ Is the school using any *Guiding Strategies? If so, can you tell me about them.*

Talk to me about the manner in which you learned about the ELA CCSS? ● Formal training: ○ Conferences? ○ Information meetings? ● Informal learning: ○ Readings? ○ Media sources?	Talk to me about the manner in which you learned about the ELA CCSS? ● Formal training: ○ Conferences? ○ Information meetings? ● Informal learning: ○ Readings? ○ Media sources?	Talk to me about the manner in which you learned about the ELA CCSS? ● Formal training: ○ Conferences? ○ Information meetings? ● Informal learning: ○ Readings? ○ Media sources?
At what point (if ever) did you feel confident / comfortable about the manner in which your district was going to undertake the implementation of the ELA CCSS?	At what point (if ever) did you feel confident / comfortable about the manner in which your school was expected to undertake the implementation of the ELA CCSS?	At what point (if ever) did you feel confident / comfortable about how you were expected to implement the ELA CCSS in your classroom?

Do you think that there is a vision/goal in mind for making school districts and schools go through implementing the ELA CCSS?
● What is that vision/goal?
● Do you feel that that vision was conveyed to the state, district, school?
	Do you think that there is a vision/goal in mind for making schools go through implementing the ELA CCSS?
	● What is that vision/goal?
	● Do you feel that that vision was conveyed to:
	  ○ All principals
	  ○ All ELA teachers
		Do you think that there is a vision/goal in mind for making schools go through implementing the ELA CCSS?
		● What is that vision/goal?
		● Do you feel that that vision was conveyed to all classroom teachers

In your opinion, has the ELA CCSS been rolled-out successfully in: ● The nation ● California ● Your district	In your opinion, has the ELA CCSS been rolled-out successfully in: ● California ● Your district ● Your school	In your opinion, has the ELA CCSS been rolled-out successfully in: ● California ● Your district ● Your school
Is the district monitoring the implementation of the ELA CCSS? How?	Is the district monitoring the implementation of the ELA CCSS? How?	Is the district monitoring the implementation of the ELA CCSS? How?

What would be considered a successful implementation of the ELA CCSS at the district level?
● Is there any part of the implementation that you would change at this point?
  ○ Is there anything stopping you from changing that at this point?
	What would be considered a successful implementation of the ELA CCSS at the school level?
	● Is there any part of the implementation that you would change at this point?
	  ○ Is there anything stopping you from changing that at this point?
		What would be considered a successful implementation of the ELA CCSS at the classroom level?
		● Is there any part of the implementation that you would change at this point?
		  ○ Is there anything stopping you from changing that at this point?

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