

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: Educators on Colorado Academic Standards



THE COLORADO EDUCATION INITIATIVE



COLORADO Department of Education

Overview

The [Colorado Academic Standards](#) define what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade. Standards for ten content areas — comprehensive health and physical education; dance; mathematics; music; reading, writing, and communicating; science; social studies; theatre; visual arts; and world languages — were created through a yearlong process engaging education leaders, business leaders, parents, and citizens. The standards reflect what Colorado views as the essential skills and knowledge students need to be successful.

The results of a recent survey conducted in 26 districts by The Colorado Education Initiative and the Colorado Department of Education suggest that, in general, teachers have positive attitudes about the Colorado Academic Standards, their ability to implement the standards, and the alignment of curriculum and assessments to the standards. The findings suggest that principals are even more positive than teachers, as are teachers trained in the [Literacy Design Collaborative \(LDC\)](#) or [Math Design Collaborative \(MDC\)](#). LDC offers teachers an instructional system for developing students' literacy skills across all subject areas; MDC provides teachers with formative lessons and professional development so that they can use evidence of learning to adapt teaching. Despite readiness for implementation and general support, the survey results suggest that teachers need more tools and training. In fact, the percentage of teachers reporting that they have access to tools to help them implement the standards has decreased slightly since a similar survey was administered last year. This suggests that more emphasis should be placed on providing teachers with effective tools, including LDC and MDC, to help implement the standards with fidelity.

About the Findings

To evaluate the implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards, The Colorado Education Initiative and the Colorado Department of Education surveyed teachers and principals in 26 districts across the state in 2014. Unless otherwise noted, the findings presented here reflect the percentage of teachers or principals who agree or strongly agree.¹

"I appreciate the effort to begin to communicate standards and evaluation measures as well as to include teaching professionals in their creation. I feel more confident about the portions that I've been able to participate in."
— Secondary teacher

Understanding and Support

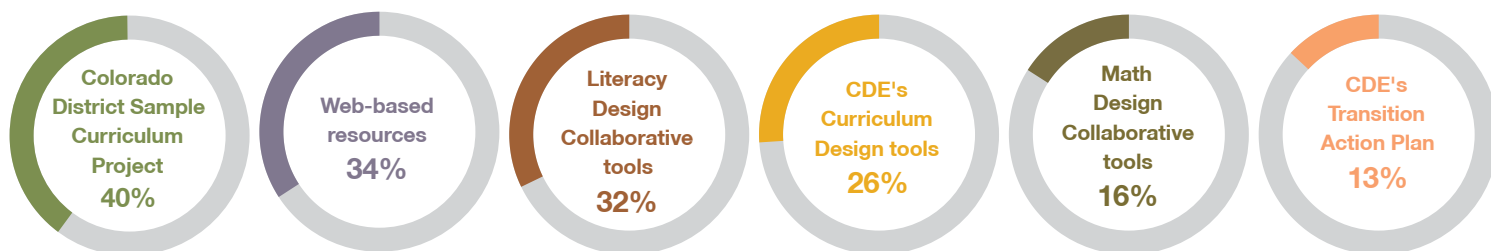
Overall, teachers report that they understand and support the Colorado Academic Standards. In fact, 71 percent report that they either have a good or complete understanding of the standards, while 70 percent are supportive of the standards in their district. These percentages are even higher for principals (90 percent and 97 percent, respectively). However, only 53 percent of teachers report that their district has fully transitioned to the Colorado Academic Standards.

Preparation and Implementation

The majority of teachers (74 percent) and principals (93 percent) feel prepared to implement the Colorado Academic Standards. Additionally, 76 percent of teachers have access to tools for implementing the standards, but a slightly lower percentage of teachers (68 percent)

believe that the tools they have access to help them in their practice. The tools that teachers report using most commonly include the Colorado District Sample Curriculum Project, various Web-based resources, and LDC (see Figure 1).²

Figure 1. Tools Teachers Use to Implement the Colorado Academic Standards



¹ Responses have a four-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

² In Figure 1, CDE's Curriculum Design tools include vertical progressions, standards graphic organizer, and content connections.

Alignment of Curriculum and Assessments

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of teachers and principals report that the standards and their classroom curriculum, district curriculum, and the assessments administered to their students are aligned. Interestingly, the percentage of teachers reporting that the assessments their students take are aligned with the standards is lower than the percentage of teachers who see alignment in their district's policies regarding assessments and standards (see Connection with Other Initiatives).

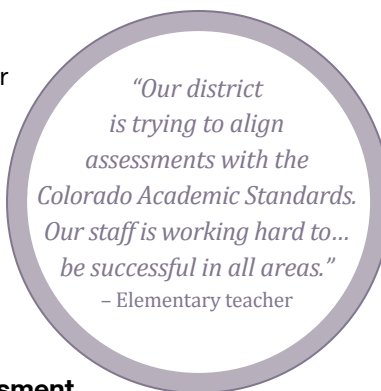
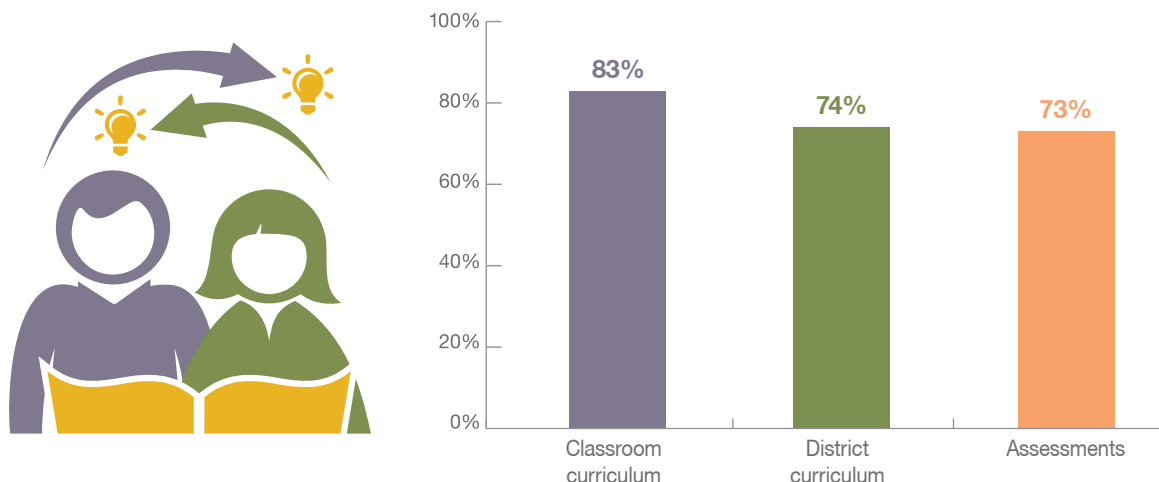


Figure 2. Teacher Perceptions of Curriculum and Assessment Alignment to the Colorado Academic Standards



Changes Over Time

Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of teachers with a good or complete understanding of the Colorado Academic Standards increased from 67 percent to 81 percent. The percentage of teachers responding that their districts have fully transitioned to the standards and that their curriculum is aligned has also increased since last year, but the percentage of teachers who see alignment between the assessments their students take and the standards has decreased (see Table 1). Furthermore, while a slightly higher percentage of teachers feel prepared to implement the standards, fewer teachers say they have access to tools to help them in their practice.³

Table 1. Teacher Perceptions of the Colorado Academic Standards: 2013 and 2014

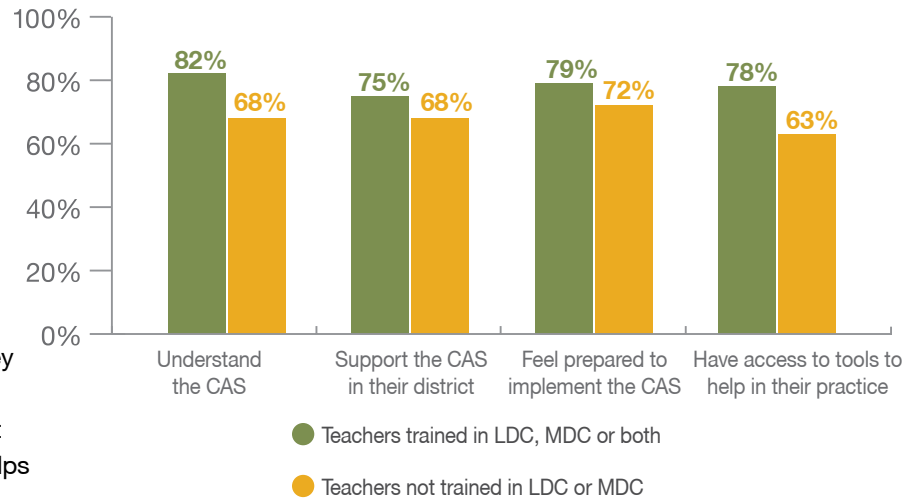
Survey item	2013 teachers who agree	2014 teachers who agree	Change
<i>Has your district fully transitioned to the standards?</i>	40%	54%	14%
<i>My district has aligned our curriculum to the standards.</i>	76%	78%	2%
<i>I have aligned my classroom curriculum to the standards.</i>	85%	87%	2%
<i>The assessments my students take are aligned to the standards.</i>	82%	76%	-6%
<i>I feel prepared to implement the standards in my classroom.</i>	77%	78%	1%
<i>The tools I have access to help me in my practice.</i>	88%	77%	-11%

³ These percentages only reflect the responses of teachers who completed the survey in both the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years.

LDC, MDC, and the Colorado Academic Standards

LDC and MDC provide teachers with a research-proven framework, including high-quality tools and resources, to help them make instructional shifts that will effectively implement the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS). As shown in Figure 3, teachers trained in LDC, MDC, or both report a higher level of understanding of, support for, and preparation to implement the standards compared to teachers not trained in LDC or MDC. Additionally, a greater percentage of LDC and MDC teachers report that they have access to tools that help them in their practice. Over three-quarters of LDC and MDC teachers report that using the LDC and MDC tools in their classes helps them incorporate the standards into their instruction.

Figure 3. Teacher Perceptions of Curriculum and Assessment Alignment to the Colorado Academic Standards



Connection with Other Initiatives

It is also important to highlight the connections between standards and the evaluation system and assessments. The findings suggest that districts that integrate their work in these three areas are also able to build more responsive systems for their educators and students. To better understand this dynamic, both teachers and principals were asked about their overall perceptions of the interconnectedness of assessments, standards, and evaluation systems in their districts. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of teachers and principals believe their district policies are aligned with assessments, standards, and evaluation systems, with the strongest perceived alignment between the new standards and assessments. A majority of teachers and principals also report that they are optimistic about the ability of these initiatives to positively impact instruction, student outcomes, and the quality of professional support for teachers (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Educator Perceptions of Alignment in District Policies Regarding Assessments, Standards, and Evaluation

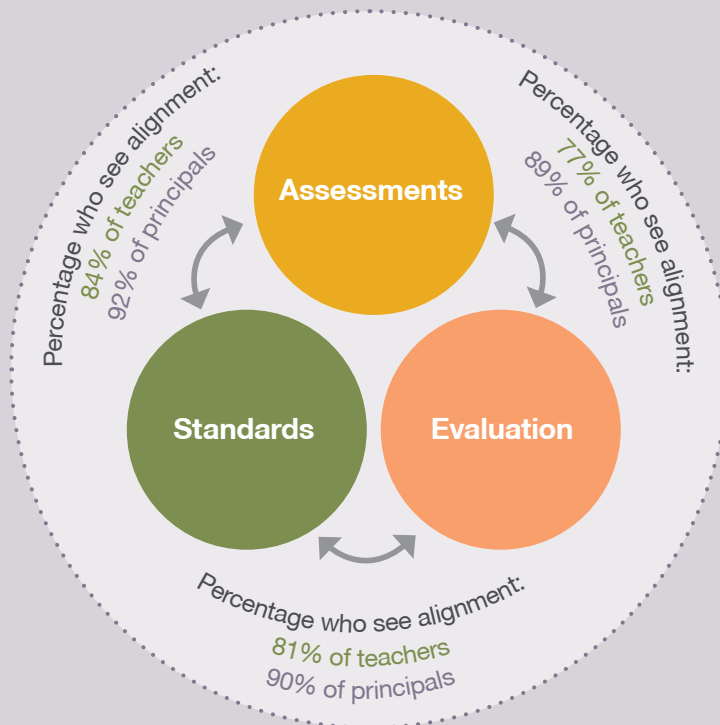


Figure 5. Educator Optimism about Initiatives

Percentage who are optimistic about the ability of assessments, standards, and evaluations to improve:

The instruction in their classroom.

67% of teachers
87% of principals⁴



Student outcomes.

63% of teachers
82% of principals



The quality of the professional support they receive.

58% of teachers
76% of principals⁴



⁴ The principal versions of these two items are slightly different: "instruction in their school" rather than classroom and "professional support they can provide teachers in their school" rather than what they receive.