

# States' Description of Common Core State Standards to Support Students with Severe Disabilities

Research and Practice for Persons  
with Severe Disabilities  
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## Abstract

A review of State Department of Education and school district websites was conducted to determine how policy related to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was communicated to teachers of students with severe disabilities. Four states were selected: California, New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. State Department of Education websites and three local school districts within each state were chosen for review using locale codes to ensure representation of city, suburban, and rural districts. A total of 16 websites were analyzed using an original instrument designed to capture information about CCSS implementation efforts. Results indicate that there is little information about students with severe disabilities or instructional/pedagogical guidance for teachers in regard to the CCSS on these sites. Thus, it may be difficult for teachers, based on this sample of websites, to translate standards into educational programming for students.

## Keywords

Common Core State Standards (CCSS), policy learning, policy implementation, standards-based education

What knowledge is of most worth? This question originally posed by Herbert Spencer (as detailed in Kliebard, 2004) might be extended to a specific population to ask, what knowledge is of most worth for individuals with severe disabilities? Furthermore, what educational experiences are of most worth and how might an educational system be designed to ensure that all students receive such experiences? It is difficult to appreciate all that is required to answer such questions, as it is not simply about what should be taught, but how, when, where, and by whom as well. Such an examination requires a consideration of how information is disseminated and ultimately translated into educational experiences for all students. Is policy, standards, curriculum (academic or functional), and/or instruction the more salient issues? Or, are those responsible for implementing standards, curriculum, and instruction the more appropriate points of focus? The point here is that the enterprise is quite vast and to resolve issues related to the educational priorities for individuals with severe disabilities, much is required.

Policy is “a course of action adopted and pursued by a government” (Policy, n.d.). Much of the historical special education narrative has been constructed through policy and legislation (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011); thus, attention should be paid to policy, particularly when there are implications on a national scale. Education in the United States is multilayered with various entities and individuals involved. For example, in addition to the federal government, there are states, local school districts, and individual schools at the

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elementary, middle, and secondary levels. States control their own educational systems with the federal government providing legislation, rules/regulations, and of course, policy. Perhaps most relevant to students with severe disabilities, policies have to be considered in light of additional issues. For example, students with severe disabilities require support to develop skills in daily living, self-determination/interpersonal, employment/transition, and the like that might receive less attention in some policies. As such, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which originated from a call for more effective college and career readiness for all students, were in part created to ensure that students have equal opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for successful life outcomes (Conley, 2014). Like many policies, the content must be differentiated from the initiative or implementation mandate. This is typically done at the state level. The CCSS initiative must be separated from the standards to be implemented. Such analysis requires an understanding of, and distinction between, the *standards* and the *initiative* to implement those standards.

In the United States, many educational policies emanate from a notion of equality of educational opportunity. Coleman (1968) referred to the ideal that policy can and should be used to create educational systems that serve all students as an “American ideal.” In spite of the seemingly pervasive nature of this American ideal, there is evidence that in general, policy is not *equalizing*, leading to “school-based efforts to create more equal education outcomes” (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014, p. 6). Nor are these policies equitable or *expansive*, to fully serve the larger portion of non-White and/or male students. This has led to the creation of “compensatory resources within and beyond the education system to close achievement gaps” (Kornhaber et al., 2014, p. 8). Yet, this assessment must be contextualized in the reality that it is not the policy itself, but the interpretation and ultimately the implementation of said policy that actually leads to outcomes. Policies may be said to be effective or ineffective for different populations of students for different reasons, including students with disabilities.

Based on the notion that the CCSS is intended for all students, it is logical to assume that the policy can/should be implemented to ultimately serve students with severe disabilities. There are some unique features to consider when judging the viability of a policy that can actually serve all students. In the past, low expectations, lack of knowledge, and other factors fueled the misperception that students with severe disabilities actually lack the capacity to learn. This notion seems to be steadily eroding. In fact, perceptions about people with severe disabilities have changed over time, replaced by a fundamental belief that students can learn and deserve effective instruction (Shalev, Asmus, Carter, & Moss, 2016; Simões & Santos, 2016).

When policy is mandated by one entity (e.g., federal government) to another (e.g., state and eventually school districts), one might believe the line of implementation is seemingly linear. But often the path of implementation is not linear, rather a dynamic, perhaps complex and difficult to define, process. Where does the work of policy translation and ultimately implementation actually take place? Is it at the state level where a Department of Education provides implementation guidelines, resources, professional development to school districts who in turn pass this information and training on to teachers? Perhaps, it is at the teacher level where a policy’s course of action is actually implemented, as teachers must design and deliver the programs.

Stowe and Turnbull (2001) provided a rather illuminating conceptual framework for analyzing policy and made a distinction between *policy on the streets*, the actual consequences of policy, and *policy on the books*, “any document that has the purpose or effect of changing laws, regulations or practices” (p. 209). Some investigations have been conducted that might be characterized as inquiries into policy on the streets. For example, Murphy and Haller (2016) interviewed 13 teachers of English language learners and students with disabilities about their experiences implementing the CCSS in regard to professional development and teaching practices. The teachers reported a general positive attitude about the prospects of using standards that might promote more depth than breath for both populations. But, these teachers also expressed concern that professional development available to help translate the standards into lessons and educational experiences appropriate for all students were lacking. Similar sentiments were reported by 23 high school English Language Arts general education teachers charged with teaching students at-risk for school failure (see

Ajayi, 2016). These teachers completed a survey, reporting concern about the inadequacy of the materials provided to translate the standards into educational experiences for students as well as the lack of professional development necessary to implement the CCSS.

Seemingly, at times, policy discussions can take place at a level that seems to ignore those who are ultimately responsible for implementing the policy itself. These examples of policy on the streets provide one viewpoint about the implementation of the CCSS. A far-reaching policy like the CCSS should be examined from a number of different perspectives, including communication of the policy on the books. As a means to understand translation of the CCSS policy for students with severe disabilities, a review of State Department of Education and school district websites within specific states was conducted. The purpose of this inquiry was to gain an understanding of how a policy might be communicated through state and local school districts, essentially the policy on the books in regard to the CCSS, to teachers of students with the most extensive and intensive educational needs. This work was conducted to answer two research questions: (a) how are State Departments of Education and school districts supporting implementation of the CCSS for students with severe disabilities? and (b) what resources/supports are available via State Department of Education and school district websites for teachers to implement the CCSS for students with severe disabilities?

## **Method**

A review was conducted of select State Departments of Education and school district websites to determine how policy related to the CCSS was communicated to teachers of students with severe disabilities.

### *Selection of States and Districts*

Based on information available from the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) website (<http://www.corestandards.org>), 42 states had adopted the CCSS at the time data collection. Using population data from the National Center for Education Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp>), we selected the four most populous states that had adopted CCSS: California, New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. These states were chosen as a means to tap into a broad range of districts with differing resources, allowing for a broad perspective on CCSS implementation. No assumption was made in regard to quality of efforts instituted by states or school districts.

In each state, three individual school districts were randomly selected to reflect one of three categories (i.e., city, suburb, or rural) and geographic diversity (i.e., north, south, east, and west) within the state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). To determine if a school district was categorized as city, suburb, or rural, locale codes were used. Locale codes are based on the U.S. Census geographically encoded referencing system. The varied population of the individual school districts was thought to serve as a proxy indicating a diversity of effort in regard to the policy, perhaps reflective of differential implementation of policies, specifically, the CCSS. In total, four states and 12 school districts were selected. See Table 1 for a complete list of all State Department of Education and school district websites included in the review.

### *Instrumentation*

The Perceived Quality of Websites Instrument (PQWI) is an original instrument developed for the present study. It was developed using an iterative process that began with a discussion (i.e., brainstorming session) among the three authors in an attempt to generate ideas about the information/support teachers might need to translate standards into educational programming. Ideas such as “what is common core?” “what does common core mean for students with disabilities?” and “common core standards in practice in the classroom” were generated and recorded on a white board. Each author used these ideas over a 1-week period to generate specific questions for the PQWI. Commonalities were identified and a single list of 12 questions was developed.

**Table 1.** Websites Reviewed for Common Core.

State or school district	Location	Size of entity	Weblink
<b>California</b>			
California State Department of Education	State of California	NA	<a href="http://www.cde.ca.gov/">http://www.cde.ca.gov/</a>
Los Angeles Unified School District	Los Angeles County	City	<a href="http://home.lausd.net/">http://home.lausd.net/</a>
Elk Grove Unified School District	Sacramento County	Suburb	<a href="http://www.egusd.net/">http://www.egusd.net/</a>
Three Rivers Union School District	Tulare County	Rural	<a href="http://www.3rusd.org/">http://www.3rusd.org/</a>
<b>Illinois</b>			
Illinois State Board of Education	State of Illinois	NA	<a href="http://www.isbe.net/">http://www.isbe.net/</a>
Chicago Public School District 299	Cook County	City	<a href="http://www.cps.edu/Pages/home.aspx">http://www.cps.edu/Pages/home.aspx</a>
Springfield Public School District 186	Sangamon County	Suburb	<a href="http://www.sps186.org/">http://www.sps186.org/</a>
Jasper Community Consolidated School District 17	Wayne County	Rural	<a href="http://www.jasperpolecats.com/">http://www.jasperpolecats.com/</a>
<b>New York</b>			
New York State Department of Education	State of New York	NA	<a href="http://www.nysed.gov/">http://www.nysed.gov/</a>
New York City Public School District	New York City (5 Boroughs)	City	<a href="http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm">http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm</a>
Homer Central School District	Cortland County	Suburb	<a href="http://www.homercentral.org/">http://www.homercentral.org/</a>
Delhi Central School District	Delaware County	Rural	<a href="http://www.delhischools.org/">http://www.delhischools.org/</a>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>			
Pennsylvania State Department of Education	State of Pennsylvania	NA	<a href="http://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1">http://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1</a>
Philadelphia Public School District	Philadelphia	City	<a href="http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/">http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/</a>
Bethlehem Area School District	Lehigh County and Northampton County	Suburb	<a href="https://www.beth.k12.pa.us/">https://www.beth.k12.pa.us/</a>
Cameron County School District	Cameron County	Rural	<a href="http://www.camcosd.org/">http://www.camcosd.org/</a>

Note. NA = not available.

All authors reviewed and provided input to create the final list of eight questions, constituting the PQWI. This review served two purposes: (a) to refine the questions and (b) to establish validity. The 12 questions were piloted with two websites in Pennsylvania. All authors recorded what information was gleaned from reviewing the State Department of Education and Pittsburgh Public Schools websites to establish validity. Establishing validity was an attempt to ensure accuracy of the data collection. Based on this process, the search procedure was refined, question redundancy was eliminated, and question content was refined.

### Data Collection

The third author collected all data from the state and district websites using the PQWI. Each state and school district website was accessed and reviewed between August 30, 2016, and September 30, 2016, using the PQWI. The questions on the PQWI were answered using a specific search logic (see Table 2). This logic dictated that reviews of each website begin with the home page and then move through the site systematically using specific keywords. These keywords appear in italics in each of the questions listed in Table 3. The review of these websites was conducted using keywords, yielding search hits. Using the search field and the search function of WINDOWS, a search hit was identified if a match was produced from using the keyword (e.g., mission statement) from the PQWI and search terms (i.e., CCSS and students with severe disabilities). If this yielded more than one match, all matches were explored. Presence or absence of information was recorded by tallying the frequency of information contained in each question. For example, when using the keywords *mission statement*, the search began on the home page of a website. Each resulting

**Table 2.** Website Search Logic.

Steps	Directions
Step 1:	Go to home page for state Department of Education or school district.
Step 2:	Use the “Find” function (i.e., “Control+F” in Windows®) and search the home page for the key term of the item from the PQWI.
Step 3:	Is the key term found on the home page? If yes, go to Step 4. If no, go to Step 5.
Step 4:	Complete one of the following steps (4a, 4b, or 4c), then return to Step 1: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4a. Key term is present and is described on the home page. Complete this item of the PQWI.</li> <li>4b. Key term is a hotlink to a document (e.g., pdf, Word). Save the document to hard drive, then use the “Find” function to complete this item of the PQWI.</li> <li>4c. Key term is a hotlink to another page. Click on the link, then use the “Find” function to complete this item of the PQWI.</li> </ol>
Step 5:	Go to the search field of the home page and enter the key term from the PQWI, follow Steps 5a or 5b ( <i>Please note: Step 5b is used in conjunction with 5b1 or 5b2</i> ), then return to Step 1: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5a. If this yields “no results,” indicate “no results” in all fields for this item on the PQWI. Go to next item on PQWI.</li> <li>5b. If this search yields less than 10 links, search all links. If the search yields more than 10 links, search the first 10 links.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5b1. Key term is a hotlink to a document (e.g., pdf, Word); save the document to hard drive, then use the “find” function to complete this item of the PQWI.</li> <li>5b2. Key term is a hotlink to another page. Click on the link, then use the “Find” function to complete this item of the PQWI.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Note. PQWI = Perceived Quality of Websites Instrument.

**Table 3.** Questions Used to Review State and District Websites.

1.	Does the site <i>mission</i> statement reference CCCS?
2.	Does the site <i>vision</i> statement reference CCSS?
3.	Does the site contain a <i>statement/position statement</i> about students with disabilities (no specified population) in regard to the CCSS?
4.	Does the site contain a description of or link to <i>research</i> related to the CCSS?
5.	Does the site provide <i>general information</i> about the CCSS? If so, what kind of information?
6.	Does the site provide <i>instructional or pedagogical information</i> intended for classroom teachers about the CCSS and students with disabilities?
7.	Does the site provide information about <i>students with significant cognitive disabilities and the CCSS</i> ?
8.	Does the site provide <i>contact information</i> for an office or specific person reported to provide information in relation to the CCSS?

Note. CCSS = Common Core State Standards.

link to a webpage or document was reviewed/read to determine the presence or absence of the keyword (e.g., mission statement) and the phrase “students with severe disabilities.” If a webpage or document was located on the website describing a mission statement that included reference to students with severe disabilities and CCSS, this result was counted as a search hit. This search logic was used for all questions except for Question 7, where the term “significant cognitive disabilities” was used in addition to “students with severe disabilities” as a means to expand the search for general information about this student population in relation to the CCSS. This process was repeated for each of the eight questions for all 16 websites.

### Data Analysis

The PQWI was designed to capture a frequency count of the different resources available on state and school district websites. Each website was reviewed, recording presence or absence of items (e.g., general

**Table 4.** Number of Search Hits for PQWI Items.

State or school district	PQWI items								Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	
<b>California</b>									
California State Department of Education	0	0	0	2	5	3	4	2	16
Los Angeles Unified School District	0	0	0	2	5	9	4	1	21
Elk Grove Unified School District	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rivers Union School District	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Illinois</b>									
Illinois State Board of Education	0	0	0	0	4	2	2	0	8
Chicago Public School District 299	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	4
Springfield Public School District 186	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Jasper Community Consolidated School District 17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>New York</b>									
New York State Department of Education	0	0	0	3	3	7	5	1	19
New York City Public School District	0	0	0	2	1	3	2	0	8
Homer Central School District	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Delhi Central School District	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
<b>Pennsylvania</b>									
Pennsylvania State Department of Education	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	0	8
Philadelphia Public School District	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	4
Bethlehem Area School District	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cameron County School District	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. See Table 3 for actual text of PQWI items. PQWI = Perceived Quality of Websites Instrument; Q = question.

information about the CCSS) indicated by the search hit frequency. Simultaneously, examples of the items were recorded on the PQWI by copying the information and inserting into a form, solely for the purposes of reviewing the content at a later time. This material was reviewed to retrieve specific examples of the kind of content posted on the webpage or contained in the document.

## Results

The PQWI was used to review each website, and information was gleaned based on the eight questions contained in the instrument. The reported results are based on the trends indicated by the number of search hits for each of the eight questions as well as some description of the kinds of materials identified on the websites. See Table 4 for a report on the number of search hits found for each question.

Questions 1 and 2 were intended to capture the *mission* or reason for implementing the policy and the *vision* or direction the state and school districts might take to implement the CCSS. None of the websites from State Departments of Education, nor individual school districts, contained a mission or vision statement in regard to CCSS.

The third question was intended to capture information about a *position statement* or goal(s) states or school districts may espouse about the CCSS in regard to students with disabilities in general. This was not found on any of the State Department of Education or local school district websites specifically. However, three State Departments of Education included an excerpt from a common document, alluding to a position statement, which is found on the CCSSI website (<http://www.corestandards.org>).

Connection to research of some kind was the focus of Question 4, with the intent of identifying research that might be used at the state and/or local school district level to support implementation of the standards. A total of 10 search hits were found on five different websites for *links to research* related to students with severe disabilities and CCSS. All State Departments of Education websites linked to one common

document, which is a technical manual on research for supporting students with severe disabilities and CCSS. One state also linked to additional supplemental information related to students with severe disabilities and CCSS.

Questions 5, 6, and 7 served as the crux of the PQWI instrument, with the intent to reveal both information and practices that might help teachers translate the CCSS from policy to educational experiences (e.g., lessons, activities) for students with severe disabilities. The term “significant cognitive disabilities” was used as a search term to capture students more likely to be assessed using alternate assessments. Eleven websites (representing three State Departments of Education and eight school districts) provided *general information* about the CCSS generating a total of 25 search hits. A total of 10 websites (i.e., all four State Departments of Education and six school districts) provided *instructional/pedagogical information for classroom teachers* resulting in a combined total of 32 search hits. Four State Departments of Education and two school district websites produced a total of 21 search hits related to *students with significant cognitive disabilities*.

The final question, Question 8, was posed as a means to identify the presence or absence of information for a *contact person at the state and/or local school district* level that might assist classroom teachers with implementation efforts in addition to whatever information or resources that might have been available on the websites. Two State Departments of Education and five school districts provided contact information for a person, totaling seven of the 16 websites reviewed.

## Discussion

The purpose of this inquiry was to gain an understanding of how the CCSS policy might be translated through state and local school districts to teachers who are responsible for developing educational programming for students with severe disabilities.

Several common themes emerged from this review, the most consistent being the main source for disseminating information is apparent at the state level. For each of the states, the State Department of Education website served as the main information hub, housing the largest volume of state specific web-based content for initiatives, state testing, curriculum, and most pertinent to this investigation, CCSS. Each of these states generally posted information on the state website and then disseminated to school districts, individual schools, and beyond. While almost all districts linked to information found on the state website in some manner, the large urban districts such as New York City Department of Education and Chicago Public Schools are most closely aligned in regard to content. These school district sites contained the highest number of related links, and in some cases these districts developed original content to support the common core initiative, such as “We Teach New York,” a district-specific website containing resources for CCSS. Based on the findings, it appears that more information is available from larger school districts and as the size of the district decreases, so does the total amount of information found. This may be an artifact of the search process rather than reflective of an overall decrease in information available, but it is also possible that smaller, rural districts rely on state-level resources more than larger urban districts for information on national policies like the CCSS.

There is a lack of consistency in standard CCSS terminology across both state and school district sites. Each state identified standards aligned with the CCSS using different terminology. For example, California uses CCSS, New York State uses Common Core Learning Standards, Pennsylvania uses Core Standards, while Illinois uses the Illinois Learning Standards. In addition to the name difference, each of these standards seems to be connected to the national CCSS initiative in different ways. This made it somewhat difficult to clearly discern the level of relationship, as the measurement tool was neither designed nor intended for this purpose. Inconsistency in terminology and alignment with the common core initiative may create confusion when attempting to draw a clear link between individual state standards and the national CCSS initiative, especially in regard to implementation efforts. The lack of consistent terminology may also limit accessibility to important common core directives and resources, as it may affect how this material is located online, particularly when keywords are used. Without consistent language aligned to the common core initiative, a state’s message regarding the shift toward new standards may be compromised as

information moves from national to state to district websites. In spite of this, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the amount of information present on the sites either directly linked or referenced to the CCSSI website.

States made information about the CCSSI and resources in support of the initiative accessible through portals of information. These portals either used separate websites with unique Uniform Resource Locators (URLs), such as Pennsylvania's *Standards Aligned System* (SAS) and New York State's *EngageNY*, or embedded within the state site sharing the same URL, such as California Department of Education. Having CCSS information organized on a single site would seem to make access to content and updates more uniform. In contrast, the Illinois State Board of Education website had links to common core resources, but these resources were not all located in one designated area on the site, or elsewhere. This may make it difficult for stakeholders to find essential CCSS information efficiently and reliably, especially when terminology is not consistent and the search path is not easily identifiable.

While each of the websites address accommodations for students with disabilities to some degree, often by aligning with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) position statement regarding the application of CCSS to students with disabilities, inconsistencies remain from state to state regarding the types of resources available, especially for students with severe disabilities. Most notable is the lack of uniform standards aligned with the national CCSS initiative. Just as each of the reviewed states has unique terminology and resources related to CCSS, the same holds true for material connected to the teaching and assessment of students with severe disabilities. The greatest support provided to school districts, seemingly for teachers, entails modified academic standards in line with the state-level implementation of the CCSS and alternate assessment, administered to students with severe disabilities. For example, Pennsylvania prominently connects modified standards, referred to as alternate eligible content, to their CCSS framework and makes these standards available through a standards portal. In contrast, California and Illinois utilize more generalized modifications, with California following the National Center and State Collaborative content target frameworks and Illinois following Dynamic Learning Maps essential elements, both linked to CCSS. While New York State indicates a partnership with Dynamic Learning Maps for their alternate assessment, no specific modified standard framework is available. While there is a need for highly individualized content, a lack of consistency in developing modified CCSS standards for states has the potential to produce unbalanced and inadequate content that lacks connection to the alternate assessment. Most notably, there are few links to classroom resources or materials on the state or district websites specifically intended for students with severe disabilities. Instead, much of the content regarding students with severe disabilities is found intertwined with information about alternate assessment.

The debate about standards-based education for students with severe disabilities is often characterized as a dichotomy, functional versus standards. It would be a mistake to describe the issue as only two sided (see Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011, 2012; Courtade, Spooner, Browder, & Jimenez, 2012, for healthy debate of the issue). Indeed, students with the most extensive and intensive needs need a comprehensive education that promotes a host of skills across a number of life domains. The standards are an attempt to better prepare students, but are the standards enough for students with severe disabilities? The findings here indicate that while there is some information available via websites to assist teachers, there is a great deal that is not present on the sites to support the translation of standards into educational programming, particularly for students with severe disabilities. School districts might provide online modules, afterschool professional development sessions, consultants, or a host of other activities that are simply not available through the State Department of Education or school district websites. It is also possible that the translation process is not driven by a common set of principles, thereby rendering implementation an inconsistent process that may not require large amounts of information available at either the state or local district level.

Some information is available and accessible on state and local district websites. Thus, teachers do have some support if desired about translating the CCSS into educational programming. This information is limited and almost certainly must be supplemented to create a comprehensive educational program for students with severe disabilities. The paucity of information available on websites certainly does not indicate that more information is not present elsewhere. The current findings do lend to some implications for policy implementation. Implementation or translation efforts for the CCSS for teachers of students with



severe disabilities are not extensively or explicitly present on state or school district websites. The extant literature offers mixed reports about the implementation of the CCSS. For example, Murphy and Torff (2016) conducted a survey of 370 teachers and found that teachers reported difficulty teaching effectively in light of standards-based reform and accountability reform. In contrast, Matlock et al. (2016) found that teachers reported generally positive attitudes about the implementation of the CCSS, but these positive reports were mediated by grade level taught; as grade level increased, less positive perceptions were espoused and if teachers planned to leave the profession, more negative perceptions were reported.

While it must be acknowledged, websites are not the only means to disseminate information or support policy translation methods, it is troubling that for such a large-scale effort, more is not present on both state and school district websites. In many cases, educational policy is intended to direct action, intended to improve educational programming for students, at times directly and at other times, indirectly (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016). The CCSSI was intended to provide the impetus, while the standards or the content of the initiative provides the basis for creating educational programming. This review is likely only reflective of a snapshot of an optional policy. Education is ever evolving. The nature of websites is ever evolving. Perhaps time and a better understanding of evidence-based practices for teaching students with severe disabilities will lead to a standards-based education that meets the needs of all students.

### *Limitations*

The findings from this study should be considered in context of some limitations. First, while the intent of the website review was intended to identify content specific to students with severe disabilities, the presence of this information may or may not indicate implementation. The instrumentation for this study was not externally validated, as the purpose was simply to identify the presence or absence of information and implementation efforts as described on each of the different sites. The method effectively led to the identification of information, but the presence of implementation efforts was not directly described. Second, the selection of content from four State Departments of Education and 12 school districts limits the information identified to these particular websites. It is possible that a different pattern might have been identified with the inclusion of more State Departments of Education and school district sites. Third, data were collected by one researcher; thus, it is possible that an error could have occurred in determining the presence or absence of the keywords. Finally, the Internet provides an unimaginable amount of information that increases at a geometric rate. It is possible that the amount and sophistication of the information available on these sites is different from the time when this study was conducted.

### *Implications for Research and Practice*

Education law (e.g., Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] and Every Student Success Act [ESSA]) as well as policy (i.e., CCSS) are essentially designed to influence practice. In some cases, practices are mandated and nonnegotiable, while in other cases, the influence on practice is not necessarily mandated and it is difficult to predict what practices might emanate from the policy, in spite of intent. The CCSS can be described as an instructional policy—"policies designed to influence some aspect of classroom instruction, including the content teachers teach . . ." (Coburn et al., 2016, p. 245). The function of instructional policies is to influence classroom instruction, but the function of policy must be understood in the context of implementation. In other words, in spite of how policy is intended to function, implementation of the policy is mediated by a number of factors. For example, policy implementation, particularly a policy as far reaching as the CCSS, affects different systems (e.g., state, school districts, and schools), professionals (e.g., teachers, administrators), and student populations (e.g., elementary, secondary, typically developing students, and students with disabilities). Thus, policy implementation can effectively serve as a guide for developing a rich line of inquiry to understand the influence of the CCSS on educational practices for students with severe disabilities.

Often, instructional policies have influence on many aspects of education outside of the classroom, whether intended or not. For example, the CCSS contributes to the movement calling for greater

accountability, almost guaranteeing that teacher practice will change, although it is not yet clear if for better or worse (Coburn et al., 2016). Using policy implementation as the backdrop can lead to a number of investigations focused on teacher populations, general and special education, as well as teachers within and between different systems (e.g., elementary and secondary schools). Specifically, investigating teacher beliefs about the policy might yield information about how the CCSS is interpreted by different teachers; how these teachers perceive the intent of the policy; and how educational practices, curriculum development, and lesson planning might be developed based on how the policy is understood.

In addition to specific populations, future research may focus on the different systems affected by the CCSS. Policy must be implemented at the state, district, and ultimately, at the school level. Aligning policy is a rather fertile area of inquiry and essential to influencing teacher practice (Coburn et al., 2016). For example, policy must be conveyed to teachers. This requires that professional development activities are aligned with the policy, and in turn, this also requires that curriculum materials and lesson plans are also aligned with policy. Inquiries into the alignment of policy at different system levels can potentially illuminate information about how this process is facilitated as well as products resulting from these efforts.

Instructional policies are intended to influence and perhaps even fundamentally change practice. The CCSS policy may have implications for practice in at least two critical areas for students with severe disabilities: (a) instructional planning and (b) curriculum development. In a broad sense, the CCSS may have implications for the teaching and learning process. A policy providing standards may provide the groundwork for teachers to plan within and across different levels (Conley, 2014). While some standards may be appropriate for young children and clearly inappropriate for adolescents and young adults, it is possible that some standards can be referenced several times across PK-12 creating an opportunity for common planning across an entire school district. Teachers may be able to make connections for students across people, environment, and content as students with severe disabilities might be presented with several different ways to master skills across standards and time. For example, skills might be introduced early in a broad general manner and then again later in a more sophisticated manner.

The standards are intended to provide a guide for the creation of content (i.e., curriculum). While the alignment between the standards and curriculum for students with severe disabilities is still in need of work, a strong alignment between standards and curriculum may be quite beneficial for teacher practice. An ecological curricula framework has been put forth for developing standards-based academic goals (Hunt, McDonnell, & Crockett, 2012). In addition, Trela and Jimenez (2013) argued for the use of the term “personally relevant curriculum,” as a means to shift the conversation away from the “functional curriculum,” that may have unnecessarily limited educational experiences for students with severe disabilities to a small set of skills. If teachers believe in the standards (Fives & Buehl, 2016), it is possible that the development of curriculum will be enhanced, as teachers create or promote broad skills that benefit students with severe disabilities. For example, there is a need to better understand how the development of social relationships, both friendships and romantic, can be supported (Sigstad, 2016). The point here is that standards might serve as a means for teachers to expand their focus to include broad, life-enhancing skills based on an understanding of the connection between standards and a viable curriculum development/alignment process.

## **Conclusion**

Websites are commonly used as portals for providing pertinent information for business and industry, essentially used to describe goods and services, along with other information (Smith, 2008). Seemingly, State Departments of Education use their websites in a similar manner, to convey critical information to constituents. This review of four State Department of Education and 12 school district websites indicates that little information is present about students with disabilities and CCSS. This lack of information may indicate that the CCSS is not being conveyed to constituents in a comprehensive manner, at least via websites. Yet, there may be other means of translating this information to teachers. Whatever means may be used, it is critical that all teachers of all students are provided with the support needed to promote skill development and a quality education.

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