

# American teacher panel surveys teachers' knowledge and perceptions of state standards

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A new RAND Corporation survey of American teachers provides several key areas where states and school districts can do more to help teachers engage in instruction that will most help students meet state standards.

In June and October of 2015, RAND surveyed [teachers](#) on their understanding of state standards and what instructional materials are used in the classroom to teach the standards, as well as how their teaching practices are aligned with the state standards. They focused particularly on teachers' understanding and practices related to Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted in 42 states.

"These surveys, which make use of RAND's American Teacher Panel, are unique because we are trying to find out how teachers understand their standards and how they are addressing those standards in their classrooms," said Julia Kaufman, co-author of the study and a policy researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "We will track change in their responses over the next few years to better understand how state standards could support improvements to teaching and learning."

The study found that a high percentage of mathematics teachers report using instructional materials with some demonstrated evidence of alignment to Common Core State Standards. However, there is less evidence that state standards are playing a role in the materials English language arts teachers use for instruction.

For example, the dominant reading materials English teachers report using for their instruction are leveled readers, which are texts written at [students'](#) individual reading levels rather than students' grade level. The Common Core State Standards, in contrast, emphasize use of complex and grade-level texts with all students. Use of leveled readers was especially high among teachers with higher populations of English-language learners—those for whom English is not their first language—in their classrooms and higher numbers of students who receive free and reduced-price lunches.

Teachers' use of instructional materials could be related to their understanding of state standards, according to researchers. For example, high percentages of teachers in states that have adopted Common Core Standards indicated that selecting texts for individual students based on their reading level is aligned with their state standards, despite the emphasis on complex texts found in the standards.

In mathematics, on the other hand, high percentages of teachers could identify topics aligned with Common Core State Standards at their grade level. At the same time, teachers who instruct more low-income students, as well as teachers with more years of experience, were more likely to think that certain state standards focused on procedural skills rather than conceptual understanding. This is the case even though Common Core State Standards tend to focus more attention on fostering students' conceptual understanding.

Despite some differences in understanding about the approaches most aligned with their state standards, most teachers reported regularly asking their students to engage in practices aligned with Common Core State Standards.

"We see some evidence that teachers are addressing some standards-aligned practices regularly, although we still need to better understand

how differences in teachers' perceptions of these practices impact what students experience within classrooms," said Darleen Opfer, co-author of the study and director of RAND Education.

The study also found differences between mathematics and English language arts teachers in the factors influencing use of instructional materials. Mathematics teachers reported that state standards and district guidance informed their use of materials, whereas English teachers reported that students' needs and the quality of materials more often informed their use of their main materials. Furthermore, elementary mathematics teachers more often reported that their district required use of their main instructional materials.

"These responses suggest secondary mathematics teachers and English language arts teachers do not receive the same supports and guidance from their state and district as elementary mathematics teachers; however, it may be that elementary mathematics teachers are also seeking out and using that guidance more than other teachers," Kaufman said.

The teachers who participated in the surveys are part of the RAND American Teacher Panel, which includes more than 2,700 teachers. The same teachers, along with others recruited during the past year, will participate in future surveys. The first surveys provide a baseline that will allow researchers to see the changes over time in teacher perspectives and experiences with the new state standards and tests.

To ensure a representative sample, panel members were chosen randomly from across the country. The teacher sample included full-time public school teachers in grades K-12 across all subjects, including teachers of special education students and English-language learners.

**More information:** The report, "Implementation of K-12 State

Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy," is available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) . Lindsey Thompson is an additional author of the study.

Provided by RAND Corporation

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