The reality that implementation is iterative calls for a more nuanced and appreciative view of the complexity of implementation; an acknowledgment that the adult learning process will continue to unfold in the years ahead; and a willingness to let go of short-term expectations, instead allowing schools and districts the time to build and iterate upon the real progress they have already made.

Schools are working to implement the standards—and making progress—within their own special circumstances and their own resource constraints. Many leaders are quick to point to local challenges, but the timing and availability of the supports provided to them have not always helped their cause.

“We were able to get teachers to county training much earlier, so we didn’t feel like we were a step behind all the time. We feel more like we’re a step ahead now. Language arts and math kind of came all at once. Trying to learn too much at one time shut some teachers down, whereas with science now they’re comfortable with language arts and they’re comfortable with math.”

— District Leader

The [math] practice standards lend [themselves] to a whole new challenge for math that had not been explored. We’re told that we’re going to teach perseverance, which is not only an instructional shift but a different way of teaching mathematics. I’m not so sure that we were prepared for the additional [pedagogical] standard shifts… On top of that now, [the state says] I’m going to ask you for technology, because the actual assessment itself is a test that’s computerized. All these shifts I think were unfair and unreasonable for the amount of time that we had to do it.”

— Principal

“Science is going to be so unique. The secondary people are dying to have it. They’re already trying to teach it even without textbooks. The elementary people don’t even want to think about it, because they’re overwhelmed already with, in the last four years they’ve had two different major textbook adoptions and major curriculum changes.”

— District Leader

For more of The Center’s CA Insights, visit us at TheCenter.wested.org/2017-18.

Three years of listening to educators has taught us that implementing the California State Standards is a highly varied and localized experience—a constant exercise on the part of school leaders, district leaders, and teacher leaders to integrate what they’re learning into existing organizational structures and calibrate instruction and training in response. In our final domain we explore the common theme across educators’ experiences in our large and diverse state: that implementation is iterative.