

Transition to the COMMON CORE

Authorizers Must Act Now
to Maintain Accountability

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Staying the Course: Maintaining Strong Accountability in the Transition to the Common Core

Panelists:

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Director of Knowledge
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Authorizers & the Common Core

Authorizing

Matters

Issue Brief

STAYING THE COURSE INTRODUCTION

Staying the Course: Authorizers and the Common Core

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is committed to helping authorizers effectively manage the challenges they face as their states and the schools they authorize move forward with implementation of the Common Core. This brief and the others in our new *Staying the Course* series are intended to offer authorizers useful guidance about how to fulfill their responsibilities to students, schools, and the public in the face of substantial, rapid change. While the new standards are sure to alter public education in deep and lasting ways, the critical work of authorizing will remain the same. By being thoughtful and strategic, by upholding high standards for schools, and by putting the interests of students above all else, authorizers can meet and overcome the challenges ahead.

Few changes in policy and practice will have greater impact on public education in the United States over the next decade than the development, implementation, and assessment of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In every state the standards are adopted, students, educators, schools, districts, and state departments of education will experience the impact of these new standards almost every aspect of their work. From curriculum to assessment, from teacher evaluation to school accountability, the CCSS will shape the future of public education practice in far-reaching ways. This impact will be no less significant for charter schools and authorizers. The flexibility that charter schools have over such matters as instructional materials, content delivery, human capital, and learning time may allow them to be more successful in implementation in ways that district-managed schools are not usually allowed. At the same time, the average size of charter schools and their accountability to the public may make them more likely to present special challenges in implementing the Common Core.

Charter school authorizers will face challenges and opportunities, as well. Because authorizers do not operate charter schools, mandate curriculum or decide what or how content is taught, they are not supervising classroom-level implementation the same way as school districts. Yet as the responsibility for promoting both accountability and school autonomy, authorizers may find themselves walking a Common Core tightrope.



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STAYING THE COURSE SERIES

Upholding Autonomy & Enabling Success

JANUARY 2014

Issue Brief

COMMON CORE SERIES

By Richard J. Werning and Parker Baxter

Matters

Staying the Course: Maintaining Strong Accountability in the Transition to the Common Core

Of all the challenges presented by implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the highest hurdle for charter school authorizers will be managing accountability for school performance during the transition to the new standards and assessments. Implementation will require many schools and authorizers to shift from their current means of measuring performance to a more complex and rigorous approach, and the transition will pose challenges for evaluating school performance over time. This will require smart policy, thoughtful problem-solving, and flexibility to ensure that schools are held accountable fairly and reasonably.

Authorizers do not have time to waste. In the spring of 2015 (and in some states sooner), charter schools and authorizers will begin receiving test results from Common Core-aligned assessments. Some states such as Massachusetts and Louisiana have decided to extend the roll-out of new tests over multiple years, but the vast majority of states that have adopted the Common Core are still planning to implement the new assessments after piloting them in the spring of 2014.

The transition to the Common Core will have significant implications for everyone in public education. For authorizers, the most pressing concern is maintaining strong accountability, especially for low-performing schools, those that have already consistently failed to meet existing standards and are on the brink of losing

their charter. Schools should never face closure based on a single year of academic performance, or in ways that ignore their cumulative record of performance. By schools that for years have failed to propel their student toward mastery of current standards, as measured by current assessments, should not escape accountability because the metrics change. Yet the scale of the Common Core transition will create great pressure on authorizers to avoid imposing consequences for persistent failure. Unless they are properly prepared for it, that pressure may be too much to resist.

Authorizers also need to prepare for fluctuations in assessment performance among schools that are doing relatively well on current tests. Evidence from states that are piloting their own new assessments indicates that proficiency scores are likely to drop significantly in all schools and that some schools will be able to adapt more quickly and effectively than others.

By acting now, authorizers, charter schools, education officials, and policymakers can develop practical strategies to maintain accountability in the near term and beyond. Authorizers should adopt strategies for reporting, evaluating, and acting on charter school performance results throughout the transition period. By doing so, they can make implementation of the Common Core an opportunity to raise expectations and strengthen performance, rather than suspend accountability.

About this Issue Brief

This Issue Brief is part of NACSA's new series, *Staying the Course*, which provides guidance to authorizers in navigating the challenges presented by implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This brief provides strategies for managing accountability during the transition to the new standards and the assessments designed to align to them. Other briefs in this series include an introduction to the CCSS and the accompanying new assessments and an overview of the challenges presented by implementation: a guide to help authorizers understand the new assessments, and strategies for upholding accountability for charter schools and enabling their success during the transition.



NACSA develops quality authorizing environments that lead to a greater number of quality charter schools. Learn more about NACSA at www.qualitycharters.org.

Maintaining Accountability

Matters

Issue Brief

STAYING THE COURSE: UPHOLDING AUTONOMY AND ENABLING SCHOOL SUCCESS

Staying the Course: Upholding Autonomy and Enabling School Success during Common Core Implementation

Arrival of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and related assessments will have significant implications for charter schools. Because both autonomy and accountability are part of the "charter bargain," individual charters and charter networks will bear primary responsibility for implementing the new standards and conducting the accompanying new tests.

Authorizers will play a key role in making sure that both ends of the bargain are upheld. Before, during, and after this transition, they will continue to focus on accountability for school performance, navigating the shoals of higher expectations and rapid test score changes. But they will also need to be vigilant in upholding charter school autonomy. Starting now, authorizers should be working with districts and state departments of education to ensure that charters have a voice in policy decisions—and that they receive an equitable allocation of any public resources that support the rollout of the Common Core and aligned assessments.

Upholding School Autonomy

School-level autonomy over educational programming, financial and operational management, and governance is a fundamental element of the charter school concept and a core principle of charter school authorizing.

A quality authorizer:

- Honors and preserves core autonomies crucial to school success.
- Assumes responsibility not for the success or failure of individual schools, but for holding schools accountable for their performance.
- Minimizes administrative and compliance burdens on schools.
- Focuses on holding schools accountable for outcomes rather than processes.

NACSA's Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing

As public schools, charters have always been subject to state standards. What sets them apart is the ability to determine how best to meet those standards. Charters have the flexibility to choose their curriculum, select their instructional materials, and structure their learning time.

Once a charter school's educational program is approved through a rigorous application process, the authorizer's job is not to evaluate lesson plans or meddle in textbook selection, but to hold the school accountable for its performance. Nothing about the Common Core should change this; after all, it's simply a different set of state standards. But implementation may create several special challenges for preserving charter school autonomy. These include: 1) the potential conflation of standards and curriculum; 2) the need to align school programs to the standards; and 3) the temptation to focus on compliance over performance.



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Authorizers and the Common Core

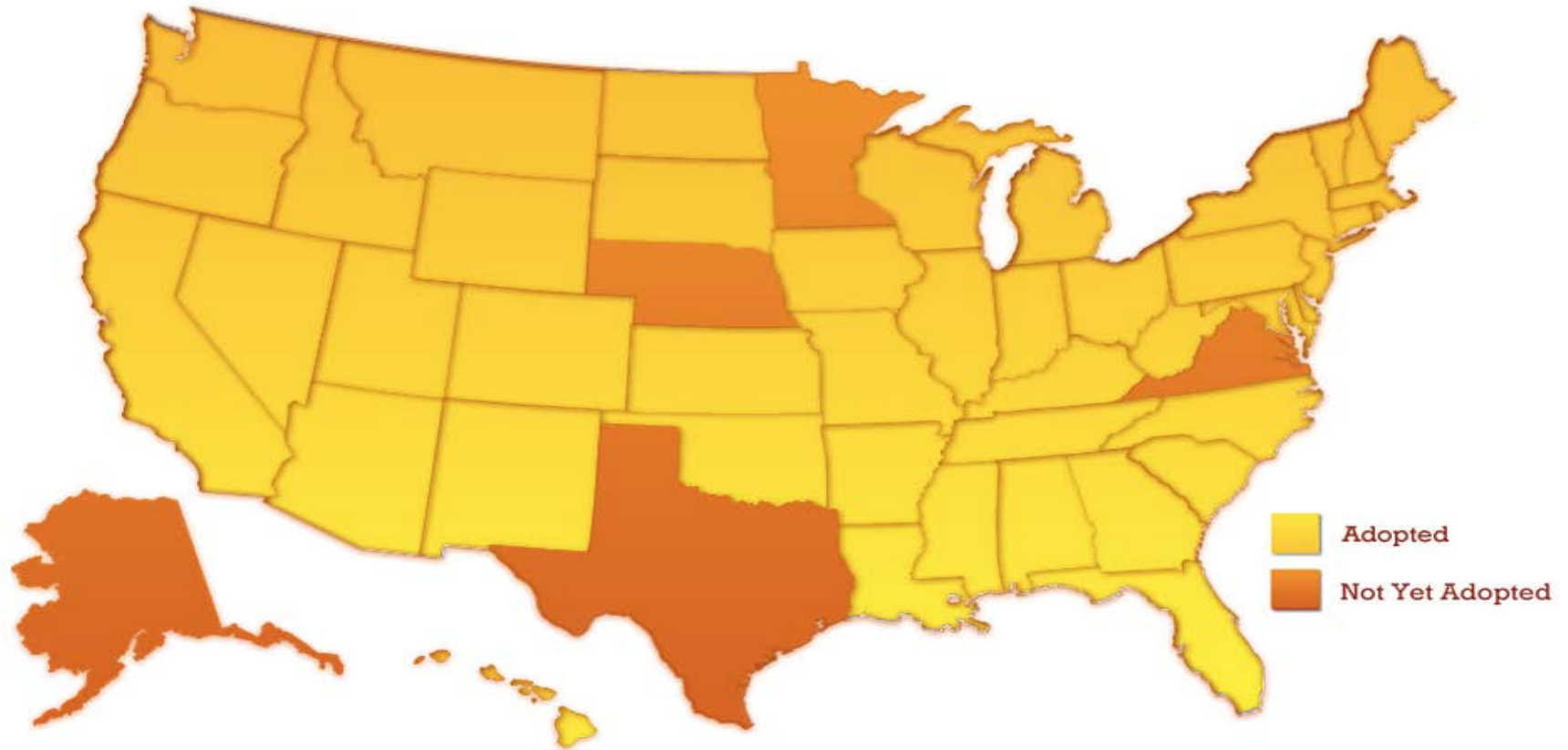
The Common Core is:

- a set of internationally benchmarked K–12 academic standards for mathematics and English language arts and literacy that establish what students are expected to have learned when they graduate from high school and enter postsecondary education or the workplace.

The Common Core is NOT:

- a curriculum
- something to “enforce”

Authorizers and the Common Core



District of Columbia



Puerto Rico



Guam



American Samoa Islands

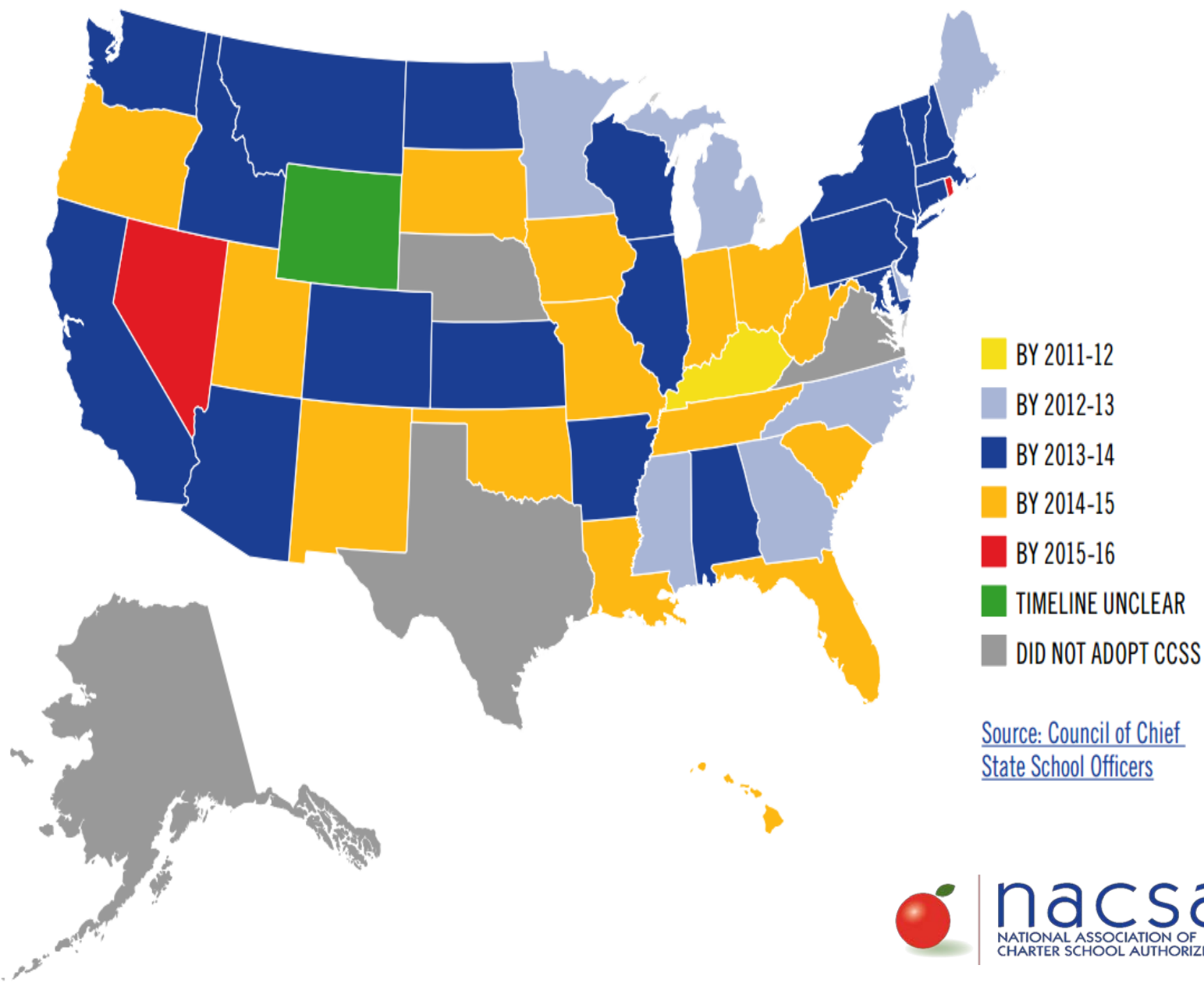


U.S. Virgin Islands



Northern Mariana Islands

The Common Core State Standards: Development, Adoption, and Implementation



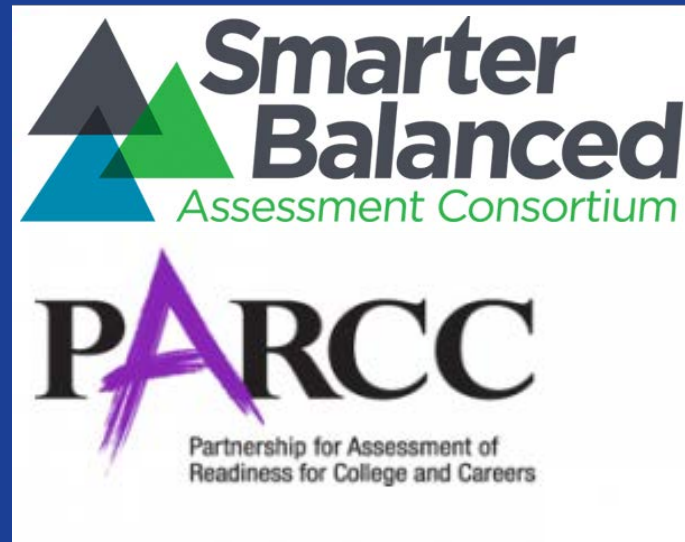
Source: [Council of Chief State School Officers](#)



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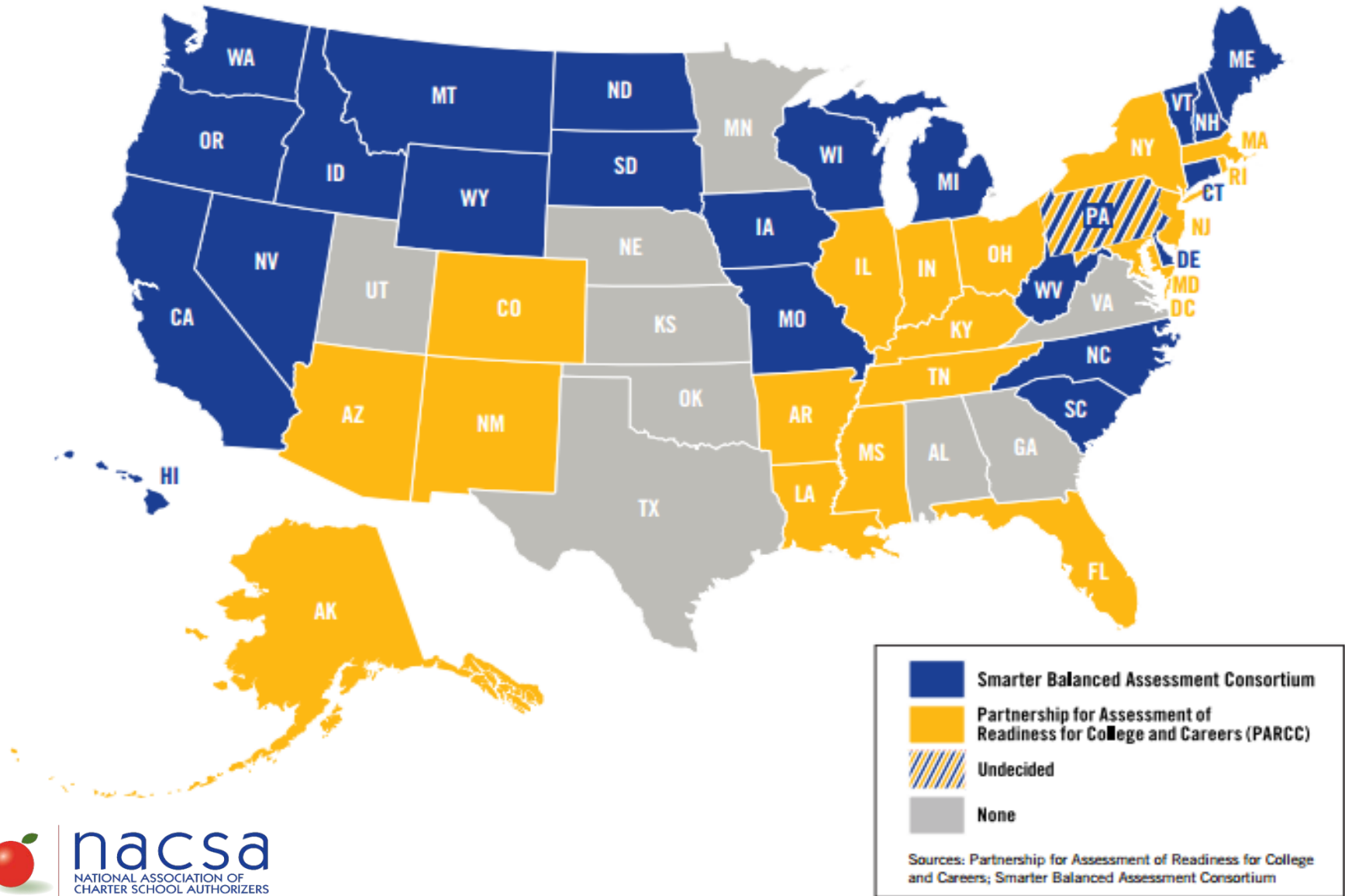
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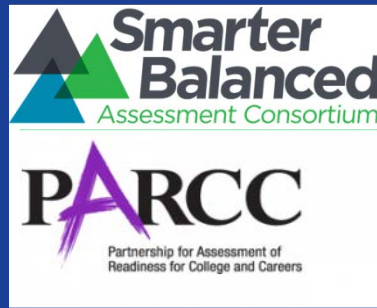
New Common Core- Aligned Assessments



Authorizers and the Common Core

Which Assessment is Your State Using?





Key Similarities:

- Assessments will be computer-based for grades 3-8.
- There will be a variety of assessment types, including selected-response, constructed response, and complex performance tasks.
- Both assessments will be given annually in the spring and currently will cover language arts and math.
- Results will be available within weeks of administration.
- Each consortium will make available optional interim assessments, professional development materials, formative items, model curriculum units, and online libraries of aligned-content resources.

Key Differences:

- PARCC summative assessments will be fixed-form—each student in a cohort will take the same test.
- Smarter Balanced will be adaptive—each student will take an individually tailored set of items that will change in difficulty as students progress through the test.
- PARCC will have one optional diagnostic and one optional midyear assessment.
- Smarter Balanced will have optional interim assessments for grades 3-12.

Authorizers and the Common Core

Assessments: By the Numbers (as of January 2014)

46 states & the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core

SPRING 2014 new assessments scheduled for field testing

SPRING 2015 new assessments ready for official use

24 states belong to Smarter Balanced

\$22.50 - \$29.95 cost range of new assessments per student

23 months until first renewal process with new assessment results

18 states are part of PARCC
1 state is undecided

100 kbps recommended minimal external bandwidth per student for test administration

Assessment Implementation Timeline

2013-2014

... will be the last school year that most states administer their own state assessments in language arts and math.

... PARCC and Smarter Balanced will both be field-tested in place of or alongside of state assessments.

Do you know how your state plans to handle double testing and how it plans to use results from state tests?

Assessment Implementation Timeline

2014-2015

... will be the first school year of full implementation of the new assessments.

Will you and the schools you authorize be ready?

Authorizers and the Common Core

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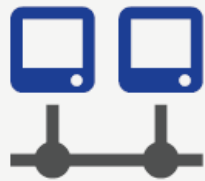
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Technology Readiness



Operating system
compatibility



Minimum bandwidth



Required memory



Monitor screen size



Browser security

Implications for Charter Schools

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Will vary by state and by type of charter school



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Implications for Charter Schools

Will vary by state and by type of charter school

Will depend on size of school and whether school is a stand-alone or part of a network



Implications for Charter Schools

Will vary by state and by type of charter school

Will depend on size of school and whether school is a stand-alone or part of a network

Will depend on state policy factors such as how much flexibility charters have over curriculum and how much support state provides for implementation



Implications for Authorizers

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Core responsibilities of authorizing remain the same:



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Implications for Authorizers

Core responsibilities of authorizing remain the same:

Maintain high standards



Implications for Authorizers

Core responsibilities of authorizing remain the same:

Maintain high standards

Uphold School Autonomy



Implications for Authorizers

Core responsibilities of authorizing remain the same:

Maintain high standards

Uphold School Autonomy

Protect Student and Public Interests



What Role for Authorizers?

What Role for Authorizers?

Upholding School Autonomy



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Upholding Autonomy

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NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*



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What Role for Authorizers?

Upholding School Autonomy

Enabling School Success



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Enabling Success

Authorizers shouldn't:

- Tell schools what to teach and when.
- Help schools align their curriculum to the standards.
- Give schools other kinds of direct support.

Authorizers should:

- Make sure charters have a seat at the table when state and district policy is made.
- Advocate for equitable distribution of public resources for implementation.
- Provide technical assistance that helps schools understand how they will be evaluated and what is expected of them.
- Connect schools to each other and to external resources that they can use to build their own capacity for success.

What Role for Authorizers?

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Maintaining Strong Accountability



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Maintaining Strong Accountability

We cannot allow the transition to the Common Core to be a break from accountability, especially for the lowest performing schools.

NACSA urges all authorizers, as well as federal and state policy makers, to stay the course on accountability.



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Maintaining Strong Accountability

Except for a lack of political will or a failure to plan ahead and act thoughtfully, there is no legitimate reason not to hold schools accountable for their performance during and following the transition to the Common Core.



Be Prepared. Act Now.



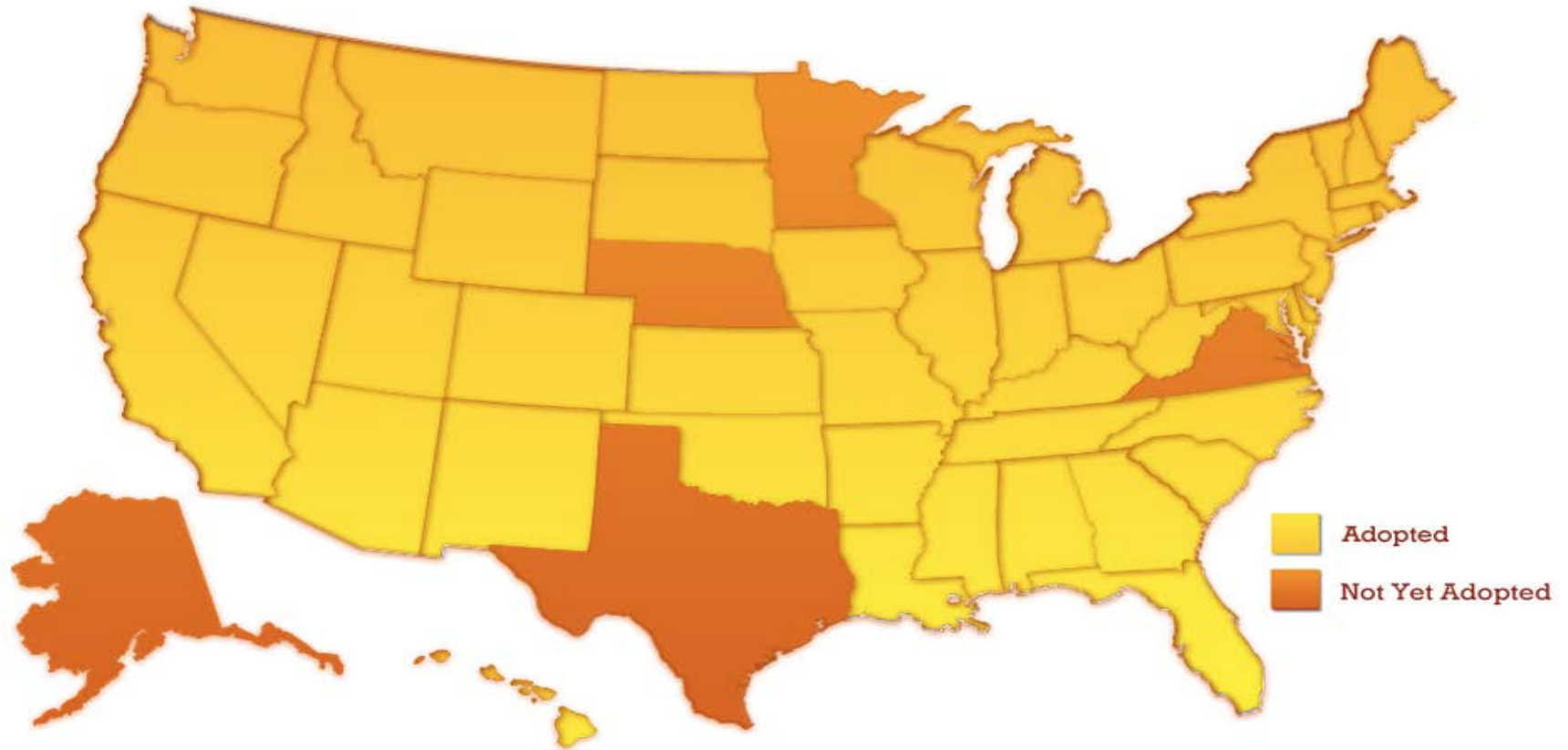
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YOU ALREADY NEED TO KNOW:



Whether your state has adopted the
Common Core

Authorizers and the Common Core



District of Columbia



Puerto Rico



Guam



American Samoa Islands



U.S. Virgin Islands



Northern Mariana Islands

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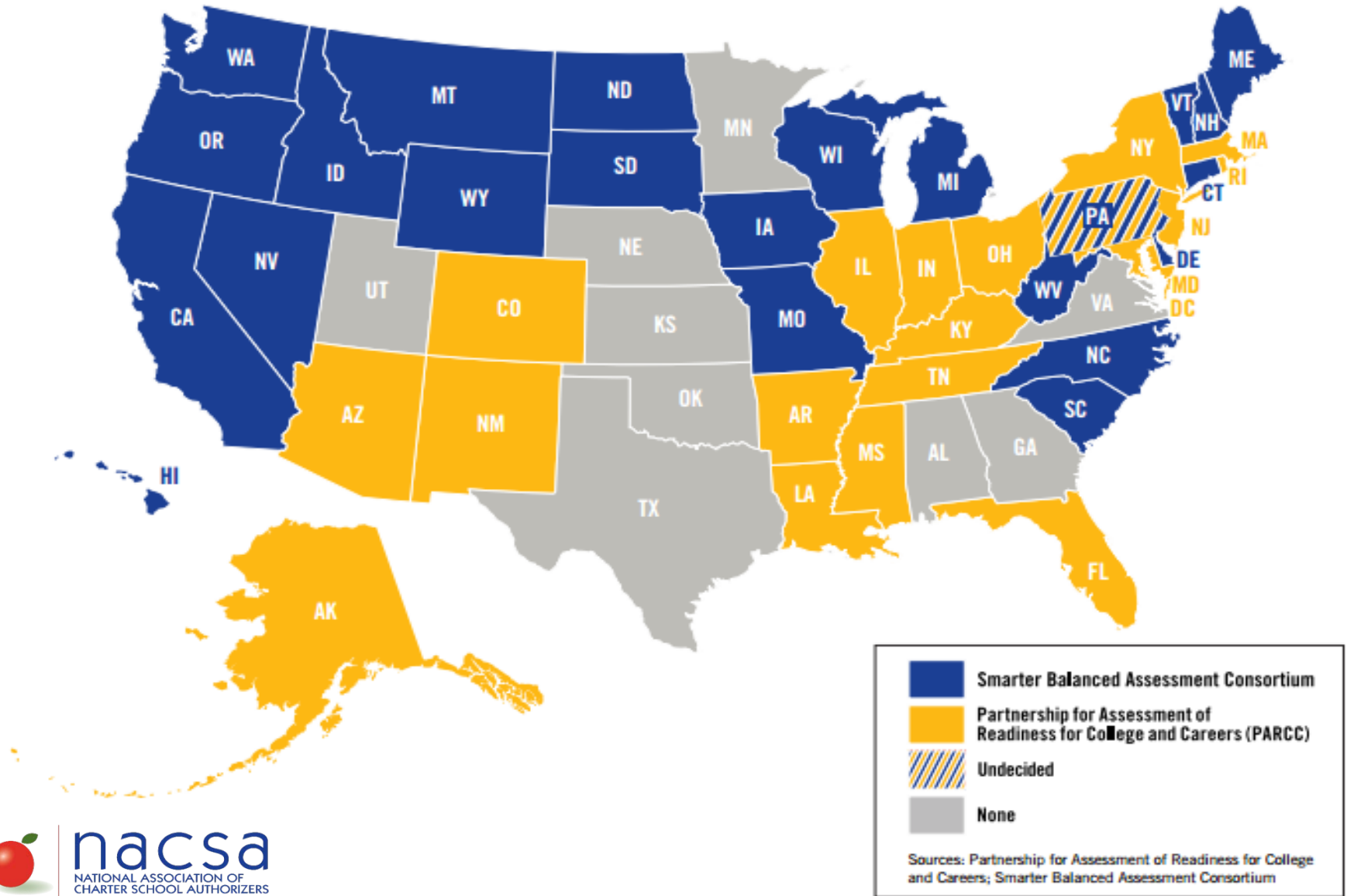
Whether your state has adopted the Common Core



Which testing consortium your state has joined

Authorizers and the Common Core

Which Assessment is Your State Using?



YOU ALREADY NEED TO KNOW:



Whether your state has adopted the Common Core

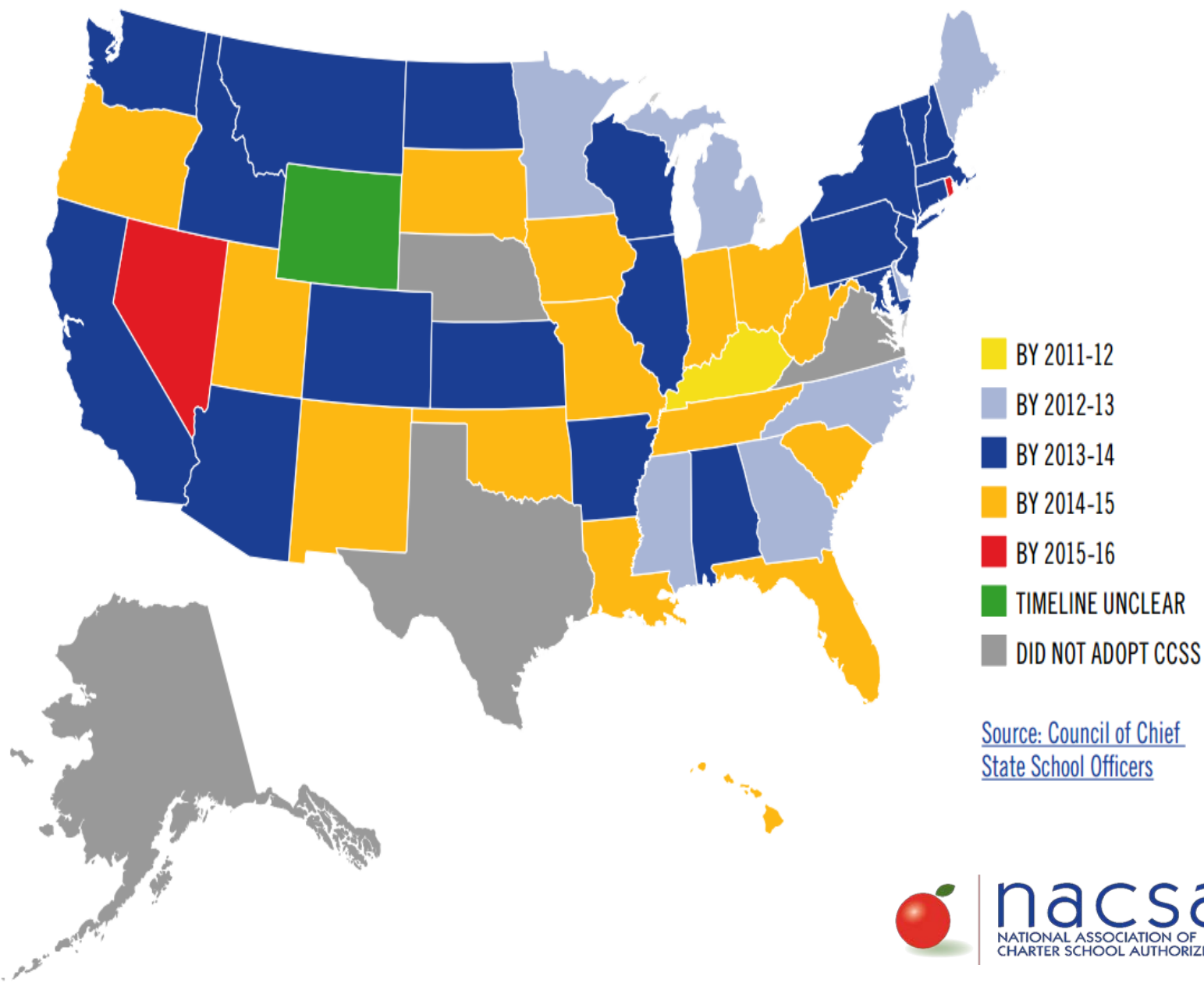


Which testing consortium your state has joined



Your state's timeline for standards and assessments implementation

The Common Core State Standards: Development, Adoption, and Implementation



YOU ALREADY NEED TO KNOW:



Whether your state has adopted the Common Core



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Your state's timeline for standards and assessments implementation



How your state plans to field test its new assessments

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Whether your state has adopted the Common Core



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Your state's timeline for standards and assessments implementation



How your state plans to field test its new assessments



How your accountability system works and the data it uses

YOU ALREADY NEED TO KNOW:



Whether your state has adopted the Common Core



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Your state's timeline for standards and assessments implementation



How your state plans to field test its new assessments



How your accountability system works and the data it uses



How your system interacts with your state system



Understanding and Adjusting Your Body of Evidence

- What kind of accountability system do you use?
- How dependent on state data is it?
- Does it include multiple variables?



Strategies for Maintaining Strong Accountability



Strategies for Maintaining Strong Accountability

- Use a Performance Framework



Strategies for Maintaining Strong Accountability

- Use a Performance Framework
- Simulate the Future



Strategies for Maintaining Strong Accountability

- Use a Performance Framework
- Simulate the Future
- Evaluate Comparative Performance

Strategies for Maintaining Strong Accountability

- Use a Performance Framework
- Simulate the Future
- Evaluate Comparative Performance

Be Prepared. Act Now.



Be Prepared – Act Now.

Winter 2014–
Fall 2015

Engage schools in discussions and decision making on how accountability will be handled during transition

Collaborate with stakeholders to create or improve your multi-indicator performance framework

Determine what assessment data will be available during transition

Review current performance evaluation system and decide how to adapt and strengthen for transition

Spring 2014

**Milestone: Field testing new
Common Core-aligned assessments**

Be Prepared – Act Now.

Winter 2015

Conduct a trial run of your framework using estimated data

Finalize transition accountability policy

Finalize Performance Framework

Communicate transition accountability policy to schools and other stakeholders

Spring 2015

Milestone: First full administration of Common Core Assessments

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Discussion

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Resources

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