

Overview of CCSSO's High Quality
Instructional Materials & Professional Development Network



HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT THE ADOPTION & EFFECTIVE USE OF HIGH-QUALITY STANDARDS ALIGNED INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

This is the first in a series of CCSSO publications designed to help state education agency (SEA) leaders support their districts in moving toward wider use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and more effective professional development linked to these materials, so teachers can make the best use of them.

Introduction

As states have been working to deliver equitable educational opportunities to each and every student, they are increasingly considering the role of instructional materials in a high-quality education.

The selection and implementation of curricula has historically been a focus of local education agencies (LEA) and not a state-level policy consideration. Most states have centered their efforts around setting academic standards and building knowledge about those standards, and less on supporting localities in identifying instructional materials which are aligned to those standards.

This pattern is changing, however, and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) currently is supporting a network of states that are encouraging their districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials and provide professional development that are aligned to those materials. CCSSO's High Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Network began in 2017 with eight states and has expanded to 13:

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| 1. Arkansas | 6. Mississippi | 11. Tennessee |
| 2. Delaware | 7. Nebraska | 12. Texas |
| 3. Kentucky | 8. New Mexico | 13. Wisconsin |
| 4. Louisiana | 9. Ohio | |
| 5. Massachusetts | 10. Rhode Island | |
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This list of states and the steady increase in membership are a direct result of states' leadership on this issue and their willingness to support districts on their processes for selecting and adopting curricula and instructional materials.

This introductory overview will be followed by a series of case studies that illustrate the different approaches IMPD Network states have taken with respect to their own contexts and challenges. Despite their differences, these states are pursuing a common goal:

To make sure every student, every day, is engaged in meaningful, affirming, grade-level instruction, by ensuring that every teacher has access to high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials, and every teacher receives relevant professional development to support their use of these materials.

What the Research Says

According to [The Brookings Institution](#),¹ while many teachers (62%) still use district-adopted textbooks, large proportions of teachers use them as simply one resource among many. Surveys—including one conducted through RAND’s American Teacher Panel and Brookings—found that 43-53% of teachers use materials produced by external organizations (such as publishers’ materials) at least once a week; more than 72-80% use materials developed by themselves or their colleagues at least once a week; and 90% use Google to find lessons. Teachers spend an average of 12 hours per week searching for or creating their own materials.

Brookings also found strong evidence that the choice of instructional materials has an effect on student learning — an impact that can rival that of teacher effectiveness. Coupled with professional development focused on utilizing these materials, the positive effect can prove to be even stronger.

The quality of instructional materials is particularly important for those students most in need of high-quality instruction: those who attend schools in marginalized communities, primarily located in urban and rural areas. Students at these schools are most likely to be taught by new teachers, out-of-field teachers, or teachers who are otherwise in need of improvement or support.

A [research review](#) conducted by the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and the Johns Hopkins Center for Research and Reform in Education,² which focused curricula choices in K-12, found that the cumulative impact of high-quality curricula can be significant, particularly in the upper grades, adding years of additional learning. This was exhibited through a longitudinal study which tracked the performance of students receiving instruction from the University of Chicago School Mathematical Project (UCSMP) curricula. These students who were taught using this curriculum for four consecutive years (grades 7–10) outpaced comparison students by a margin of 38 percentile points—an effect size of roughly +1.16, which amounts to a stunning four additional years of learning (Hill et al., 2008)

High-quality instructional materials also can help schools ensure that their students are receiving appropriate, grade-level work. As illustrated vividly in The New Teacher Project’s (TNTP) [Opportunity Myth](#) report,³ although many students are doing what’s expected of them and earning decent grades, their assignments are not reflective of grade-level content.

In fact, students spend approximately 500 hours per school year on assignments that are not appropriate for their grade, and with instruction that does not require further development of their critical thinking skills.

It is then not surprising that “students only demonstrated mastery of grade-level standards on their assignments 17% of the time.”⁴

¹ Polikoff, M. *The challenges of curriculum materials as a reform lever*, (The Brookings Institute, June 28, 2018). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-challenges-of-curriculum-materials-as-a-reform-lever/>

² Steiner, D., *Curriculum Research: What We Know and Where We Need to Go* (Standards Work, March 2017). <https://standardswork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/sw-curriculum-research-report-fnl.pdf>

³ THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH: *What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It*. TNTP, Inc. (Sept. 2018) <https://tntp.org/publications/view/student-experiences/the-opportunity-myth>

⁴ *Ibid.* <https://tntp.org/publications/view/student-experiences/the-opportunity-myth>

What the Research Says (cont.)

By contrast, in classrooms where children had greater access to grade-appropriate assignments, TNTF found the students gained nearly two months of additional learning, as compared to their peers; moreover, those students who started the year behind grade level but had more grade-appropriate assignments caught up even faster than those with only strong instruction.

*Unfortunately, as reported in [The Opportunity Myth](#), 38% of classrooms that serve predominantly students of color provided **no** grade-level assignments (versus only 12% of classrooms that serve predominantly white students).*

Over the past few years, more and more curricula have emerged that are aligned to college- and career-ready standards, and many of these resources are open-source or available at low cost. Additionally, rubrics and rating systems have been developed to compare the quality of educational materials. Such tools include independent, nonprofit databases such as [EdReports](#)⁵ and state-created, instructional-materials reviews in [Louisiana](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New Mexico](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Mississippi](#).

Materials Matter More When Coupled with Skillful Teaching

A high-quality curriculum is especially powerful when connected to strong professional learning for educators that is job-embedded and content-focused. It is particularly important for teachers to receive training on how to use the more demanding, new instructional materials.

Both adults and students benefit when professional development is anchored in the specific curriculum and materials teachers are using. “Teachers deserve both materials and professional learning experiences that address the decisions they are making with their students in the context of the actual materials they are using. Providing teachers with generic strategies divorced from their day-to-day reality makes it less likely teachers will apply what they learn to improve practice or student outcomes,”⁶ note Ross Weiner and Susan Pimentel of the [Aspen Institute](#).

Research on professional development that is tied to specific instructional materials confirms the strong, synergistic impact of this approach. A recent review⁷ by the nonprofit research institute SRI International found that most of the professional development programs with positive impacts on student learning include aligned instructional materials. A [2019 meta-study](#) of professional learning programs in STEM, conducted by Harvard professor Heather Hill and colleagues, found that “programs post stronger average effects when they feature professional development paired with new curriculum materials,” which may result from “teachers learning how to use the materials and improving their content knowledge and knowledge of students along the way.”⁸

⁵ EdReports is an independent nonprofit that reviews instructional materials and supports “smart adoption processes” to equip K-12 teachers with excellent materials. <https://edreports.org/>

⁶ Weiner, R., Pimentel, S. Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum & Professional Learning in Schools. Aspen Institute (April 2017), p. 8. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Practice-What-You-Teach.pdf>

⁷ Gallagher, H. Alix. Professional Development To Support Instructional Improvement: Lessons from Research. https://www.sri.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/professional_development_to_support_instructional_improvement.pdf

⁸ Lynch, K., Hill, H., Gonzalez, K., Pollard, C. Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis. (vol. 41, no. 3, Sept. 2019), pp. 260–293. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0162373719849044>

A State Model

The Louisiana Department of Education offers a successful model for other states and served as a mentor to the initial eight states in the IMPD Network. Louisiana made high-quality curriculum adoption and professional development support the focus of its academic strategy, with a simple mantra for what was, in fact, complex work: “make the good choice the easy choice.”

To help schools understand which materials are of high quality and aligned to college- and career-ready standards, the state’s Department of Education created its own rubric. Using the rubric, the state vetted curricula and shared this information with the field through a “tiered list”—with Tier 1 materials defined as being the highest-quality and most aligned to state standards. Louisiana officials also made it easier for schools to adopt the recommended materials by granting state contracts to the highest-rated publishers and offering districts discounts and streamlined procurement for adopting the Tier 1 materials produced by those publishers.

The state has provided schools with extensive information about the strongest professional development offerings that are tied to Tier 1 curricula, and it hosts calls and convenings that bring together districts and professional development vendors to discuss how they can best meet the needs of schools.

Louisiana educators have embraced the entire process, because it provides value to them in the classroom— and because teachers themselves have been enlisted as curriculum reviewers and instructional materials trainers. As a result, 99% of all students in the state of Louisiana have access to high-quality, aligned materials and are being taught by teachers using those materials.⁹

At first, although it served as a mentor state to other IMPD Network states, Louisiana was not itself a member of the network. However, the state’s department of education eventually determined that, even with the strong traction the state had gained in district adoptions, Louisiana still had further work to do around aligned professional development. In the summer of 2020, Louisiana joined the IMPD Network, along with four other states—bringing the current number of IMPD Network states to 13.

For more insight into Louisiana’s IMPD initiative, see the RAND reports:

[Raising the Bar for K–12 Academics: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working for Schools, Teachers, and Students](#)

[Creating a Coherent System to Support Instruction Aligned with State Standards: Promising Practices of the Louisiana Department of Education](#)

⁹ Per 2021 internal CCSSO resource, *Stock Take: Louisiana Data*.

Utilizing both the research and Louisiana's strong example, the IMPD Network states have come together to develop state specific strategic plans as they learn new tactics from their peers and leading experts in the field around increasing the amount of high-quality instructional materials schools adopt and aligned professional development teachers receive. In addition, while embracing and addressing their varied contexts, the IMPD Network states have worked over the last four years (2017-2021) to address critical questions that must be considered in any state effort to improve the quality and alignment of instructional materials and professional learning.

To facilitate this work, CCSSO—with support from Louisiana state education agency staff—developed a free, downloadable [IMPD Policy Roadmap](#). This roadmap encompasses the different strategies around which states can develop policies in order to support their districts with this work. The roadmap includes:

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT:

Does the state have an approach with clear, high-priority strategies to engage relevant stakeholders, communicate about this work, and build allies? Is it clear which stakeholders the state is enlisting and using as allies in this work? Is it clear how these allies and stakeholder groups will be used, and when? If appropriate, have potential detractors been identified and mitigation strategies proposed? Does the state have clear, high-priority strategies specifically targeted at educators, including: learning from/ listening to district and school leaders to build effective strategies; garnering educator support as well as leveraging the voices of those practitioners who are on the leading edge of this work; and/or communicating at scale to most/all educators in the state. Do all stakeholders know why the state is taking this approach on IMPD and what the expected outcomes are?

SIGNALING QUALITY:

Whether or not a state has a role in curriculum adoption, it can educate its districts about the importance of HQIM, and it can help those who are interested to choose the best materials. What approach will the state will take to increase LEAs' selection and use of HQIM? Should the state categorize instructional materials into quality categories or tiers? Is there a clear plan for signaling to districts which instructional materials are high-quality? Does the strategy clearly articulate how partnerships (if applicable, such as with EdReports) will be leveraged?

INCENTIVIZING QUALITY:

How might a state incentivize its districts to select and use top-rated instructional materials? Does the state have a good sense of its instructional materials landscape-- e.g., including current materials in use, LEA selection timelines, etc.? Does the state have clear, high-priority strategies to incentivize its districts to select HQIM? Does the state have clear, high-priority strategies that compel the use and implementation of HQIM?

ANCHORING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN HIGH-QUALITY MATERIALS:

How can a state increase the number of teachers statewide who participate in professional development programming that is grounded in the skillful use of HQIM? Is there a strategy for ensuring that all state-provided professional development incorporates training that is grounded in the use of HQIM? Is there a strategy for driving coherence and alignment across all state policies-- e.g., including teacher observation and evaluation, teacher competencies, professional learning competencies, school improvement, etc.? If there are regional support centers in the state, does the state have clear, high-priority strategies to support and/or incentivize the centers to provide high-quality professional development that is grounded in the use of HQIM? Does the state have clear, high-priority strategies to support and/or incentivize their districts to provide high-quality professional learning that is grounded in the use of HQIM? If the state plans to partner with outside vendors, does it have clear, high-priority strategies for identifying high-quality vendors and incentivizing districts to select them? For each strategy, are the state's supports, incentives and/or pressures likely to be strong enough to compel action locally?

PREPARING NEW TEACHERS TO IDENTIFY & USE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:

What approach will the state take to increase the number of educator preparation programs that prepare new educators to recognize and skillfully use HQIM to meet the needs of students? Are there plans to expose educator preparation programs to the state's IMPD initiative and garner support and buy-in, including around the research basis for this work? Does the state have clear, high-priority strategies to support, incentivize and/or compel educator preparation programs to build teaching candidates' capacity to identify and skillfully use HQIM?

USE OF DATA:

How will the state collect and analyze data for continuous improvement, and to verify the outcome targets? Does the state have baseline data to describe the current state of use, especially with respect to LEA selection of HQIM, disaggregated by student population? Is the plan clear about the data that needs to be collected (both for continuous improvement and to monitor progress) with respect to HQIM, professional development, and educator preparation programs? Is the plan clear about who, how and when the state will collect this data?

Each IMPD Network state is charting its own path in terms of signaling and defining high quality and incentivizing districts to adopt better curricular materials and aligned professional development programming. Note that IMPD Network states are not mandating specific curricula. They are providing information and guidance to their districts, so that teachers will have what they need to support their students in the classroom.

Each IMPD Network state adjusts its approach to meet that state's needs and unique contexts, as well as the different populations served by their districts. All the network states recognize that finding and adopting stronger curriculum, however, is just the first step: they also need to refine the selection of professional development providers and programs, making sure that all professional learning is anchored in their high-quality curricula choices.

Progress & Next Steps

As the IMPD Network states have made changes to their policies and practices to embrace and incentivize quality, they have seen significant upticks in the adoption of high-quality materials—which, it is hoped, will give rise to stronger teaching and learning. This work is being translated into meaningful change on the ground during a time when educational innovation has become an imperative.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the entire landscape of teaching and learning, as educators around the nation strive to best serve the evolving needs of students who are learning in a variety of settings (in-person, remote and hybrid). The importance of high-quality instructional materials has become even more apparent, and an increasing number of districts are adopting better curricula. Perhaps more importantly, district and school leaders are reflecting upon and refining their entire academic vision and approach.

Since joining in the summer of 2020, the five new IMPD Network states have developed strategic plans to increase their districts' adoption of high-quality instructional materials and curriculum-embedded professional development for teachers. For the original states, in just four years, they have made significant progress in district adoption of high-quality instructional materials.

The [American Instructional Resource Survey](#) (AIRS) is conducted by the RAND Corporation to determine how instructional materials in K-12 mathematics, English and science are being implemented and utilized across the country. In their [August 2020 report](#) summarizing findings from the 2019 survey, AIRS specifically focused on the connection between standards-aligned curricula and teaching practices.¹⁰ The authors of that report found that—as of Spring 2019—teachers in IMPD Network states were significantly more likely than other teachers across the United States to report use of standards-aligned instructional materials. Because of their persistent commitment to this work, the original eight IMPD Network states (plus Louisiana) are oversampled in the current AIRS data set; in the upcoming Spring 2021 iteration, the remaining four states (i.e., the most recent IMPD Network members) also will be oversampled.

The most recent survey found:¹¹

- 4 out of 9 IMPD Network states have more teachers using at least one fully-aligned English language arts (ELA) curriculum, as compared to the national average.
- For mathematics, teachers in 7 out of the 9 IMPD Network states were using at least one fully-aligned curriculum more often than the national average of 41%.
 - In Nebraska, use of standards-aligned curricula has appeared to grow the most, with only 2% of math teachers were using at least one fully-aligned curriculum in 2018 and 22% doing the same in 2020, based on RAND surveys.
 - Wisconsin also has seen significant gains in their math teachers' usage of fully-aligned curricula—from 29% in 2018 to 48% in 2020.

¹⁰ Kaufman, J.H., Doan, S., Prado Tuma, A., Woo, A., Henry, D. and Lawrence, R.A., *How Instructional Materials Are Used and Supported in U.S. K-12 Classrooms* (RAND Corporation Research Reports, 2020). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR134-1.html

¹¹ RAND researchers' findings based on the most recent AIRS survey conducted in 2020.

Progress & Next Steps

(cont.)

The original states also have developed data systems to track their own progress. Many of the original eight states are seeing similarly significant gains to those documented in the 2020 AIRS. CCSSO will soon release a case study that details state progress in districts adopting HQIM and the increasing number of students—including low-income and students of color—who have access to HQIM. This introductory case study will be followed by a series of case studies that will more deeply examine the different approaches IMPD Network states have taken with respect to their own contexts and challenges.