

Instructional Materials + Teacher Supports → Student Success



There is wide agreement that students should graduate from high school ready for postsecondary success in college, careers and citizenship. And nearly everyone agrees that most states and districts are not currently providing every student in every school an education that meets that lofty goal. With good intentions, educational leaders too often careen from one great-sounding idea to another, looking for the quick fix. Rarely are they—or parents or educators—satisfied with the results.

So, what if, instead of looking for the education silver bullet, district and school leaders committed energy and resources to a longer term, slow-but-steady research-based strategy for improving student outcomes? *By concentrating resources and attention on the improvement of classroom instruction, leaders can make the kind of transformative change in our schools and districts that they seek.* That is because one of the most effective and affordable ways to improve classroom instruction at scale is to provide teachers and students with high-quality instructional materials and the opportunity to learn, through professional development and time with colleagues, how to enact them effectively. Multiple studies show that a sustained commitment to providing high quality instructional materials coupled with professional development can dramatically improve student outcomes at scale.

Want to learn more about the research base for how instructional materials and teacher support can lead to student success? [Read this companion document.](#)



The Problem

Although many states are several years into the implementation of demanding college- and career-ready academic standards in mathematics, English language arts—and more recently science—teachers, principals and district leaders remain frustrated with the dearth of high-quality instructional materials (textbooks, curriculum packages, online lessons, etc.) designed for and aligned to these new standards. When teachers are provided with instructional materials—at great expense to schools and districts—they may fail to follow current research about effective instruction, their state’s expectations, or district’s end-of-year state assessments. Educators are left trying to fill in the blanks and create—often on their own—the lessons and units they use in the classroom. Given that new and higher standards demand more learning from both students and teachers, schools and districts that don’t provide useful tools and scaffolding to help teachers determine what to teach and how to teach it are disempowering their teachers and disadvantaging their students.

Instructional materials in action: Louisiana

A recent RAND Corporation study [found that](#) educators in Louisiana “had a significantly stronger grasp and use of standards-aligned materials and practices than their peers in other states.” This appears to be due at least in part to a rigorous system for ranking and supporting high-quality materials at the state level, through which few materials make the “Tier 1” cut and lead teachers from every school are tapped to vet materials. More than 70 percent of the state’s districts now exclusively use aligned materials, an increase from just 20 percent five years ago. During that same time period, Louisiana has also shown high improvement rates in fourth grade NAEP scores in both reading and mathematics.

A 2016 report from the RAND Corporation shows just how often teachers who are searching for materials resort to Google and Pinterest to find engaging materials to meet their needs—taking up huge amounts of valuable planning time and putting teachers in the untenable position of discerning quality, alignment, and coherence.

Developing quality instructional materials isn't easy. And all teachers deserve access to well-organized, high-quality resources they can adapt to meet the daily needs of their students. More than just writing lesson plans, developers organize and sequence learning goals and instructional ideas into classroom activities and routines for teachers and students. They test and retest their products, revising and improving them in response to feedback, and then package them to make enactment as straightforward as possible.

A Solution



- Districts should ensure that personnel making instructional materials decisions understand how to evaluate quality and alignment. Tools such as [EQuIP](#) and [IMET](#) have been used by states and districts to help evaluate potential instructional materials and should become a regular part of the review process.
- States and districts should use the power of their procurement process to select quality instructional materials, saving money and enhancing coherence system-wide.
- Beware of labels! Just because a set of materials claims to be aligned with a particular set of standards doesn't mean it is.
- Districts should manage the rollout and use of instructional materials wisely, making adjustments in policies and support systems as needed while simultaneously making a commitment to stick with them. **Change takes time**—it can take 3+ years for a teacher to become facile teaching new lessons and units.
- Educators should be supported with professional learning and collaborative team time that enables them to engage with and practice using the materials. Even the best materials will not change student performance if there is not at least a school-wide, if not district-wide, commitment to using them in the service of improved student learning.

The Benefit



As an improvement strategy, providing aligned instructional materials coupled with professional learning for educators has the potential to drive changes in teacher practice and improve student outcomes. When high-quality tools are combined with aligned professional learning, real gains can occur.

Why Instructional Materials Matter

- Teaching is incredibly demanding work. Robust instructional materials are the tools that make that work easier, more efficient, and more effective. While top-down scripted lessons can be demoralizing and de-professionalizing, enacting robust instructional materials is an artful, intellectually demanding, and inspiring endeavor for novice and expert teachers alike.
- Not all instructional materials are created equally. Data show that some instructional materials are easier for teachers to enact, and some advance student learning more than others.
- Instructional materials have the potential to increase coherence within a district or school system, connecting high standards, effective classroom practices, assessments, and professional learning. In contexts where students frequently move between schools or neighborhoods, the power of coherence becomes even greater.