A District Leader's Guide

Series Articles

Why New Materials? Why Now?

You are a district leader in a district with math materials that have been around for a couple years. You may have feedback from teachers and parents about the usage and content. You may have some state policies that have changed since you adopted the curriculum and are aware of the rising demand for high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). You want to make sure your curriculum is meeting your needs and need a strategic plan for assessing your current curriculum to understand if and why you need to change and what you are looking for in new materials.

Understanding the factors that are driving the decision to update your curriculum, or your "why", is essential to ensuring that your adoption plan aligns with your district's needs and goals. Common factors influencing districts to adopt new materials include state state-level policies or adoptions, district concerns about the quality of current materials, and local advocacy from teachers or other community members.

Key Actions for Common Influencing Factors

State Policies or Adoptions

- Be aware of state policies and materials options.
- Leverage state incentives, resources, and timelines.
- Prepare proactively with professional learning and capacity-building initiatives.

District Concerns About Quality of Current Materials

- Evaluate current materials for alignment with standards and usability.
- Identify gaps in alignment to standards, support for diverse learners, and research-based instructional practices.
- Use this knowledge to guide the selection and implementation of new materials.

Local Advocacy

- Understand the needs of those advocating for new curriculum.
- Maintain regular collaboration and communication with stakeholders throughout planning and implementation.

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State Policies or Adoptions

As state policies increasingly support the use of HQIM, it is important to know your state's policies, which math materials they endorse, whether "off-list" adoptions are permitted, and whether your state provides professional learning or other resources to support math HQIM.

If you are in California, Texas, or another state with a state-wide math adoption, mapping your state's timeline against your district's readiness and needs can help you decide whether to wait for state guidance or transition to new materials sooner. Curriculum HQ offers an interactive map with links to state-specific curricular resources, adoption guidance, and tools. Several independent support providers have also developed resources to specifically support districts in California and Texas:

- **California:** CalCurriculum offers extensive tools and resources to support California districts with materials adoptions, including reviews of California-specific versions of several curricula.
- **Texas:** Instruction Partners' Texas Curriculum Support Guide is designed to support Texas districts with selecting, adopting, and implementing HQIM.

If you decide not to wait for state guidance, state-specific resources such as California's revised Math Framework may be useful in shaping your instructional vision and selection criteria.

Districts waiting on state guidance can still prepare proactively for an upcoming adoption. The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) (CA) has launched the Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Leadership Collaborative—a new, innovative unit to support districts in implementing a coherent approach to curriculum, professional development, and systems that support collaboration. This unit provides a model for helping districts prepare their people and systems for transitioning to math HQIM. One approach engages districts in a year-long professional learning series on high-quality math instruction. Through book studies, lesson videos, and model classroom visits, OCDE's Collaborative helps districts build their instructional vision for math—a crucial first step in preparing for an upcoming math materials adoption.

The unit is also field-testing an approach to build enabling systems for HQIM success at the site level prior to adoption. This initiative involves capacity building around high-impact activities such as teacher collaboration, grade-specific professional learning, school-wide professional learning, instructional coaching, and learning walks by administrators and coaches. District leaders are participating with OCDE to prepare for broader implementation.

District Concerns About Current Materials

With only 52% of the math materials currently on the market meeting EdReports' expectations for alignment and usability, it is possible your district is using materials that are not high-quality. The older the math materials, the more likely that this is the case [1]. Older, unaligned materials often lack in one or many of the following ways:

- They do not meet or only partially meet grade-level standard expectations for math.
- They do not address or only minimally address math process or practice standards, such as the Standards for Mathematical Practice, which define how students should engage with and apply mathematics.
- They do not include research-based instructional practices such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices.
- They lack adequate support for diverse learners, such as multilingual learners and students with special needs.

> **"What was very clear is that we had something that was absolutely not fully aligned to research and evidence-based practices. We knew that what we were doing wasn't going to work with our standards, and it wasn't going to work with what the research says. But I don't think we really knew what to do about it. And so that was really the initial catalyst—knowing that we had a materials gap."**
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> **- Director of Elementary Academics, Texas**

Some districts describe this disconnect between curriculum, standards, and pedagogical best practices as a "materials gap." If your district is experiencing a materials gap, it is important to identify what your math materials are missing or where they fall short. Conducting a curriculum audit can also help you understand how teachers are using (or not using) current materials. Some districts have led these audits themselves, while others have collaborated with external partners to evaluate the usage and effectiveness of materials used in classrooms. As you plan for selection and implementation, this knowledge can help you determine what you need from new math materials and how significant a change to new materials will be for educators and students.

[1] "State of the Instructional Materials Market: Use of Aligned Materials in 2022." EdReports, cdn.edreports.org/media/2022/09/EdReports_State_of_the_Instructional_Materials_Market_Use_of_Aligned_Materials_in_2022_102323.pdf?_gl=1*1xafid0*_gcl au*MTg2MzY5NTUyMC4xNzA0MjE0MzA0.

Local Advocacy

In many districts, classroom teachers represent the loudest voices for change. They recognize their math materials are not working for them or their students and advocate for better curriculum. Parents, community leaders, and other local education advocates may also exert pressure on districts to change their materials.

> **"To not wait and adopt early came from the will of the group—the teachers. They were motivated to get HQIM to ensure all students had equitable opportunities to learn math to prepare them for college and careers."**
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> **- Karen Gauthier**
> Stem Coordinator K-12, Capistrano Unified School District (CA)

If local advocacy is driving your decision to transition to new math materials, engaging stakeholders is critical. You may consider administering surveys, convening focus groups, or conducting interviews to gather important information about their concerns, what is and is not working for them, and what they want from new math materials. Not only will you achieve a deeper understanding of their concerns and perspective, but you will build trust and gain the buy-in of your teachers and community.

No matter what drives your decision to transition to new math materials, it's important to be transparent with stakeholders about the reasons behind the change. Consistent communication with administrators, teachers, parents, and other educational partners builds trust and fosters collaboration. As you move forward with your plans, make it a priority to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.

The next article in our series is

3. Leading Effective Adoptions

To learn more about this series, visit:
Driving High-Quality Math Materials: A District Leader's Guide