## Selecting the Right Curriculum and Tools for Your District

Significant improvements to the math materials market mean that today, districts have more options than ever before for high-quality math curricula. But selecting materials for your district requires a deliberate and purposeful approach. Districts we spoke with emphasized the importance of clear selection criteria, a broad range of stakeholders in the review process, and committee members who are engaged in thorough evaluation activities against selection criteria and your district's specific context.

### Key Actions for Leading a Successful Math Materials Adoption

#### Establish District-Specific Selection Criteria

- Align criteria with your instructional vision and the needs of educators and students
- Use local data and stakeholder input to identify key indicators for quality
- Ensure equity, rigor, and alignment with grade-level standards

#### Form Diverse, Inclusive Selection Committees

- Include a diverse range of stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, district leaders, and representatives from multilingual learners and special education departments
- Ensure that voices from special programs, such as dual-language initiatives, are included
- Provide comprehensive training to committee members for evaluating materials

#### Lead Meaningful Selection Activities

- Design activities that allow for thorough examination of potential materials
- Pilot materials where possible to assess effectiveness in real classroom settings
- Engage with publishers thoughtfully to learn about materials

## Establish District-Specific Selection Criteria

Establishing math quality indicators or selection criteria is crucial when deciding which math materials to adopt. Many districts start with EdReports' evaluation criteria or Student Achievement Partners' Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET), due to widespread agreement on the importance of grade-appropriate, standards-aligned materials. To ensure math materials address the unique needs of their students and teachers, districts use local data and stakeholder input to further develop and prioritize selection criteria that match their vision and needs.

By auditing their broader systems, practices, and resources, districts also can gain valuable insights into their strengths and challenges—allowing them to further fine-tune selection criteria to align with their district's capacities and overall goals.

At the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, leaders saw adopting high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) as an opportunity to improve math outcomes and create equitable learning experiences for students. They prioritized four key quality indicators during their math materials selection by anchoring their selection criteria in their instructional vision for math and considering the specific needs of their educators and students.

### Partnership for Los Angeles Schools

#### Vision for Math Instruction

1. Amplify the genius and assets of all students.
2. Make math a problem-solving journey rather than a binary sorting mechanism between "math people" and "non-math people."
3. Guide all students to discover the beauty and joy of mathematics.

#### Quality Indicators for Materials

1. Materials that cultivate problem-solving and build critical-thinking skills
2. Materials that offer specific language supports for all students
3. Materials that support intentional instructional shifts toward deeper mathematics learning
4. Materials that support aligned professional learning for teachers

**To learn more about the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools' approach to adopting high-quality math materials, read Local Needs Matter When Selecting a Quality Math Curriculum by Francisco Villegas, Chief Academic Officer at the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools.*

Similarly, Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) in California developed their selection criteria or "toolkit" for evaluating materials from their vision for research-based math instructional strategies and from the needs of multilingual learners, as shown in student data. Prior to launching their selection process, the district dedicated effort to studying research-based pedagogical practices, analyzing district-wide data, and solidifying their understanding of rigor and the Common Core State Standards. They worked closely with the district's Office of Language Acquisition (OLA) to develop selection criteria that focused specifically on support for multilingual learners. According to the district's K-12 STEM Coordinator, Karen Gauthier, **"We did a lot of frontloading, looked at data, and created the toolkit before we ever looked at materials."** This work led to a set of quality indicators that focused on materials' approach to math instruction and included strategies such as mathematical language routines to support multilingual learners.

Several resources exist to support you in identifying your own district's needs and using data strategically to drive your selection criteria and priorities:

- CalCurriculum's Data Discovery Tool helps districts identify equity gaps and surface areas of student need.
- CalCurriculum's Hexagon Discussion & Analysis Tool and Student Achievement Partners' Instructional Materials Landscape Analysis help districts evaluate their overall system's strengths and weaknesses, and leverage those insights to choose the right materials

Additional resources for quality indicators and curriculum reviews specific to multilingual learners include the following:

- English Learners Success Forum's (ELSF) Math Guidelines for curriculum evaluation offer five areas of focus that address the needs of multilingual learners, as well as guidance for understanding each criteria and how to look for it in materials.
- The Multilingual Learner Reports developed by EdReports, ELSF, and UnboundEd, provide detailed reviews of several standards-aligned middle school math materials based on criteria they designed to evaluate materials' success in addressing the linguistic and instructional needs of multilingual learners.

## Form Diverse, Inclusive Selection Committees

Another key aspect of the selection process is planning the composition of selection committees and preparing them to evaluate math materials effectively. As more districts prioritize instructional materials to improve student outcomes, they are expanding the makeup of selection committees to include more stakeholders impacted by the choice of materials. This includes members from multilingual learner, special education, and technology departments, leads from special programs like dual language, and parents or other members of the community.

Including a diverse range of stakeholders is essential, as broader involvement leads to broader investment in the selected materials. EdReports' Adoption Committee Recommendations provide guidance on selection committees' composition and scope of responsibility.

> **"Make sure that you have as many different stakeholders as possible for a variety of educational and political reasons. We had representatives from Special Education, Multilingual Services, the office of African American Achievement, math coaches, the director of curriculum, and a couple of site principals. It's super important to have all these different folks be aware of what's happening and to be invited to any and all meetings. They didn't pilot the curriculum like the teachers did, but at the very least they had a say and could ask questions."**
>
> **- Mark Lobaco**
> Math Coordinator, West Contra Costa Unified School District (CA)

For selection committees to be effective, they must also be adequately prepared to evaluate materials against your district's selection criteria. Investing in professional learning helps ensure committee members understand the criteria and how to apply them.

For example, committee members in CUSD engaged in professional learning around NCTM effective teaching practices and research-based instructional supports for multilingual learners in math. Teachers who then piloted the materials also received support on how to assess the materials against the specific quality indicators aligned with these priorities as they used them with students.

Depending on the needs of your committee members, training for an effective math materials evaluation process may include:

- Learning about state/district standards and grade-level benchmarks for learning
- Learning about math instructional strategies addressed by selection criteria
- Marking up units and lessons to calibrate specific indicators
- Experiencing model lessons and unpacking selection criteria from the perspective of teachers and students

## Lead Meaningful Selection Activities

It is essential to strategically plan selection activities that result in a thorough understanding of materials options and how they measure up against your district's prioritized quality indicators. As Karen Gauthier of CUSD notes, "If they're all green on EdReports, they're comparable at that level as a starting point. You really have to dig deeper into [the materials] to understand what sets them apart." To dig deep, districts recommend working differently with materials providers and piloting materials in classrooms.

While it is standard practice for publishers to meet with selection committees, you can make these interactions more effective by sharing targeted questions in advance. Focusing the conversation on how materials address your specific priorities and needs helps avoid flashy sales pitches. The Kentucky Department of Education's Sample Vendor Questions for Mathematics offers a useful template, covering topics such as alignment with your instructional vision, pedagogical approaches, educators' capacity-building, and support for diverse student needs.

Piloting a narrow set of materials with teachers and students allows you to evaluate the materials in action against your selection criteria. A typical pilot consists of educators trying each set of materials for six to eight weeks. During and after the pilot, feedback from administrators and educators on how well each curriculum meets the selection criteria is collected. Piloting also provides an opportunity to gather data on the systems that support implementation, such as teacher collaboration, instructional coaching, and classroom observations. Early lessons from the pilot can be applied to strengthen implementation plans and professional learning.

> **"The purpose of piloting is not just to pilot the materials, but also to pilot your systems for implementation.**
>
> **- Dr. Alfonso Romero**
> Senior Director of School Transformation, Math, Partnership for Los Angeles Schools (CA)

The following resources can support you in effectively piloting materials in your district:

- EdReports' Lessons From the Field: Best Practices for Piloting Curriculum provides step-by-step considerations and lessons on structuring and executing a pilot.
- Instruction Partners' Curriculum Support Guide Workbook, Key Action 1.4: Review, Pilot, and Decide assists districts in structuring materials pilots and using results to inform final decisions.

Engaging families and the broader educational community in the selection process is another strong practice to consider. Some districts we spoke with made materials available to families during pilot periods and gathered their input alongside input from administrators and teachers. Other strategies for engagement include hosting family review nights, organizing public vendor fairs, and establishing a public review window.

Approaching your selection process with intention and deliberate action is a crucial step toward improving student outcomes. By beginning with a deep understanding of your district's needs and engaging in meaningful, collaborative explorations of options, your district can select the tools that will best support high-quality math instruction and drive meaningful educational progress.