

Curriculum decisions need a “phone a friend” lifeline

I recently joined my local school district’s new curriculum selection committee for K-5 ELA. At our first meeting, leaders presented information from the state, including the relevant academic standards our materials must address. Given what I do professionally, this was interesting – but to be honest, it would have been a lot more interesting to start by hearing advice and insights from a similar district that had just gone through the same thing.

As I’ve [mentioned before](#), states have far to go in collecting and sharing information on which instructional programs are in place across their districts, let alone how student outcomes match to those choices. Fortunately, the [Center for Education Market Dynamics \(CEMD\)](#) is digging deep into district data to fill the yawning gap in our collective understanding of which materials are actually being used in classrooms across the country. I recently connected with leaders from this powerful organization. Here’s what they have to say about the lifelines they’re looking to offer district decision-makers.

How does CEMD capture data on the “Impact Core”?

CEMD: CEMD collects data on curriculum selection in the largest districts across the US. We intentionally focus our sample on districts that serve a higher percentage of historically underserved students (Black and Latino students, multilingual learners, and students experiencing poverty) than the US population at large. Centering districts in our collection is integral to our theory of change, as district leaders are key decision-makers and buyers of instructional materials.

We collect curriculum selection information on Core, Supplemental, and Assessment materials for ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies across K–12. We refresh our entire data collection on an annual basis, enabling us to paint a picture of the quality landscape of curriculum selection across the nation and to track trends and changes over time.

Our proprietary data collection, the Impact Core, is represented by 934 districts, approximately 5% of all school districts in the United States. This data provides critical insights into the instructional experience of more than half the students in the country, and an outsized number of historically underserved students, including:

- 64% of Black students
- 63% of Latino students
- 31% of Indigenous students
- 68% of multilingual learners
- 56% of students experiencing poverty

What are some of the biggest challenges you hear from district leaders facing curriculum selections?

CEMD: District leaders commonly express challenges in navigating the dynamic process of curriculum selection, highlighting the need for reliable sources of information and insights to guide decision-making. One area of need that we commonly hear is emphasizing the importance of equity, inclusivity, and measurable impact on student outcomes in the selection process. Leaders also frequently emphasize the complexities of curriculum implementation, grappling with issues such as providing adequate professional development for educators, aligning curriculum with pedagogical approaches, and ensuring sustained support to translate selected materials into effective classroom practices. Finally, they grapple with issues such as ensuring alignment with evolving educational standards, managing budgetary constraints, and addressing the diverse needs of student populations.

Essentially, they mostly want to “phone a friend” using the same curriculum.

