Curriculum Support Guide Methodology

We set out to understand the answer to one driving question: **What leadership actions differentiated effective implementation of high-quality instructional materials?** (In more technical terms - what actions taken by school and system leadership teams using high-quality instructional materials led to higher rates of improved instruction and student learning alongside higher rates of support from both teachers and leaders across the effort?)

We committed to sharing the findings with attention to both "what" to do and practical guidance on "how" to do it. We saw this as an action research project (not a formal research study), but we designed the process to be sure the findings were grounded in evidence.

How did we go about this project?

Summary view:
- Step 1: We conducted a literature review on what was known about "implementation" - both implementation of quality materials and implementation of programs of improvement.
- Step 2: We identified seven high-quality (or higher-end quality) sets of materials that were trending in use with our partners.
- Step 3: We found schools that had moved to these materials in the past three years and interviewed them about their experience.
- Step 4: We identified and published the common pitfalls.
- Step 5: We found schools or school systems that had avoided the identified pitfalls for each set of materials and we studied what they did differently.
- Step 6: We developed a starter framework of the key decisions and actions across materials selection, preparation, and support, and we got feedback on this framework from a range of perspectives.
- Step 7: We continuously refined the framework while developing guiding questions and pooling resources.
- Step 8: We worked with a partner to create a website and develop workbooks.

Detailed view:
Step 1: We conducted a literature review on what was known about "implementation" - both implementation of quality materials and implementation of programs of improvement.

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Step 2: We identified seven high-quality (or higher-end quality) sets of materials that were trending in use with our partners.
- The seven curricula studied were: Eureka Math, CPM, GO Math!, Expeditionary Learning, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA), EngageNY/Odell, and LearnZillion.
- We wanted to include materials that we saw trending in use. We measured this by use among our partner systems, feedback from state leaders engaged in curriculum work about what they were seeing in their state, and feedback from peer organizations that were supporting curriculum use (see appendix D - acknowledgements - for a list of those involved).
- We wanted a range of origin stories and license types (proprietary, open-source, publisher developed, state commissioned) to ensure the findings were not reflective of a singular use case, but we deliberately did not include materials that were intended to be used or significantly used in a digital format for this study because we expected those would cause a different range of implementation considerations.
- We wanted the materials to be well regarded for alignment to the standards (or at the higher-end of the range of options). We used the IMET as the instrument to understand alignment and also referenced www.edreports.org to understand the reviews of alignment.

- One resource included was not in the higher-end of alignment on EdReports - i.e. not green - and that is Go Math!. We wanted to ensure we had one set of materials from one of the bigger institutional players that was also trending in use among our partners and Go Math! was the highest-quality reviewed option at the time we started this study in 2017.
- One resource was not reviewed by EdReports at the time (LearnZillion Louisiana Guidebooks), but we did an internal review using the IMET and we selected it for the study because it represented a significant trending product, especially in Louisiana, and allowed us a concentrated sample to study differentiators in implementation.

- We interviewed the curriculum developers to understand their vision and supports for implementation, as well as their sense of the experience of those using their materials and conducted a literature review. See appendix A for the questions we asked publishers.

Step 3: We found schools that had moved to these materials in the past three years and interviewed them about their experience.
- We found these schools through a variety of channels:
  - our own network
  - peer organizations working in the professional learning space
  - the publishers
- We interviewed 52 educators, representing 70 schools across 16 states and the District of Columbia. See appendix B for the list of districts represented.
  - 86% of respondents were from traditional public schools.
  - 12% were from charter schools, public or otherwise.
  - 43% of respondents worked in elementary schools, 34% in middle schools, and 23% in high schools.
  - Most respondents were math and ELA teachers, instructional coaches, specialists, department chairs, or principals.
  - Respondents came from a variety of district sizes.
- See appendix C for a list of the questions we asked all educators interviewed.

Step 4: We identified and published the common pitfalls.
- We reviewed the quantitative data and coded and reviewed the trends in qualitative comments.
- We published the findings from this chapter of work in a white paper.

Step 5: We found school systems (or schools within systems) that had avoided the identified pitfalls and we studied what they did differently.

- We identified schools that had experienced higher success rates. We defined higher success rate by the investment of educators as perceived by those we interviewed (qualitative comments from the educators interviewed), change in instructional practice (either evidenced by our own observation or by the leadership team, publisher or professional learning support organization), and by documented change in student growth (both from standardized year over year interim assessment results and from state standardized tests).
- We found some of these through our own networks, some through the interviews, and some through states or peer organizations.
- We sought to find one "bright spot" case study that had avoided the pitfalls for each set of materials.
- We asked them the same interview questions we asked all educators and then we also asked them to document what they did step by step in their actions, and we visited with leaders at multiple levels of the system to understand what they had done and the perceptions about what had worked.
- We identified counterpoint examples of systems using the same materials and documented what they had done differently than the "bright spot" example.

Step 6: We developed a starter framework of the key decisions and actions across materials selection, preparation, and support, and we got feedback on this framework from a range of perspectives.

- We presented the framework multiple times to our Tennessee Leadership Council (representing 12 school systems in Tennessee) and groups of Chief Academic Officers from charter systems in Memphis and Nashville. We also presented the framework to a group of supervisors of instruction of rural systems in Florida.
- We presented the framework and got feedback - both in group and individual sessions - from peer organizations including Leading Educators, TNTP, Achievement Network, New Teacher Center, New Leaders, Teaching Lab, Relay, Aspen Institute, ERS, Student Achievement Partners, and UnboundEd.
- We engaged our own team of Directors of Instructional Support and content leads in multiple reviews.
- We shared it with state leaders engaged in work supporting high-quality instructional materials - specifically Louisiana, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Tennessee.

- We got input from the program committee of our board: Sandra Alberti, David Cohen, and Joanne Weiss.

Step 7: We continuously refined the framework while developing guiding questions and pooling resources. (The work in this step was done iteratively and concurrently as listed below.)
- We started writing the guiding questions for each key action based on the metacognitive work we did with our partners at different places in the journey. We then tested these guiding questions in live settings with partners in that place in the journey. (For example, we had a partner that recently procured materials react to the guiding questions about procurement and we tested the questions about assessment strategy with a partner reviewing their assessment plan for the coming year.)
- We wrote a vignette of the full journey of one system. (This led to some revision of the framework - for example, forming an implementation team was an implicit assumption of the process, but after writing the vignette, we realized this needed to be an explicit step.)
- We simplified wherever possible. (For example, we originally had separate key actions for plans for use and plans to support individual and collaborative planning because they were distinct things for many of the "bright spots" we interviewed; however, this ultimately created some confusion for new users and made the whole framework longer. Instead, we combined the two into one key action while drawing attention to the distinctions in the steps.)
- We collected resources in a number of ways. First, we issued an all-call to peer organizations for resources with attention to each step of the framework. Second, we spent a year watching the field (published journals in education, blogs and social media) for relevant resources. Then, once we knew more about the key differentiators, we sought out districts - both partners and non-partners - that had succeeded in key moments to share their resources.

Step 8: We worked with a partner to publish a website and develop workbooks.
- We found a digital agency (Snapshot Interactive) to help design a website. We completed several rounds of user testing, both with our team and with our Tennessee leadership council.
- We "soft launched" the website with 40 early users beyond our network who were able to give both user experience feedback and final content feedback.
- We updated content, made some design changes, and published the website and workbooks.

Where this goes from here:
- We will gather feedback from users and keep continuously improving these tools. We will add resources that are useful.
- We are exploring methods of capturing data on the choices made by a much broader set of districts, in order to expand our understanding of priority actions and their relationship with student learning over time.
- We are in the early stages of exploring the next topic of focus for this kind of best practice study. We have an eye to intervention practices with specific attention to students with unfinished learning.
- The movie version of the vignette is in the works - we are hoping Viola Davis will play Ms. Walker.
- We welcome feedback and questions or ideas for future study at curriculum@instructionpartners.org.

Appendix A: Publisher Interview Questions

When we interviewed the publishers, we asked the following questions:

- Why were these curricular materials developed/selected and what is the recommended adoption process (or what was the adoption process) for the curricular materials? (Who participated, what evaluation criteria/tools were used, how were the process & results communicated?)
- What is the recommended implementation process for the curricular materials?
- How did you develop the recommended implementation process?
- What onboarding/professional learning was provided (or is still being provided) to educators & who was included in those sessions?
- What ongoing support was provided to educators and who was included in these sessions?
- What are the costs of ongoing support and what (approximate) percentage of schools purchased provided professional learning support?
- To what extent are teachers currently using the materials?
- What is the feedback from the field? What evidence do you have regarding the extent to which teachers are using the materials?
- What big take-aways or implications do you have for other schools and districts implementing these materials?
- What (if anything) does your curriculum offer to prepare students for the increased rigor they will experience?
- What (if anything) does your curriculum offer to differentiate for individual students (specifically those who are learning English or working below grade level)?
- How do the curricular materials provide differentiation or supports for students not on grade level, students with special learning needs, and/or second language learners?
- How do the curricular materials prepare students for the rigor of academics present in the resource? (Habits of mind, character education, etc.)

Appendix B: Districts Represented in Surveys

- Boston Public Schools - Boston, MA
- Bradford Academy - Southfield, MI
- Caddo Parish Public Schools - Shreveport, LA
- Capistrano Unified School District - San Juan Capistrano, CA
- Community Roots Academy - Laguna Niguel, CA

- Durham Public Schools - Durham, NC
- Duval County Public Schools - Jacksonville, FL
- Fayetteville City Schools - Fayetteville, TN
- Granite Falls School District - Granite Falls, WA
- Hardee School District - Zolfo Springs, FL
- Highlands County School District - Sebring, FL
- Highlands School District - Sebring, FL
- Lincoln Parish Schools - Ruston, LA
- Mad River School District - Riverside, OH
- Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District - Clifton Springs, NY
- Silver Creek Central School District - Silver Creek, NY
- Trousdale County Schools - Trousdale, TN
- Vermilion Parish School District - Abbeville, LA
- Vernon Parish School District - Leesville, LA
- Washington Leadership Academy - Washington, DC
- Washoe County School District - Reno, NV

Appendix C: Educator Interview Questions

When we interviewed early adopters, we asked the following questions:
- What is your type of school?
- How many students are served in your district?
- How many schools are in your district?
- How many teachers are employed in your district?
- How many non-teaching staff are employed in your district?
- What is the name of the adopted curriculum?
- In which grades is the target curriculum implemented?
- What steps were taken to evaluate the curriculum prior to purchase/implementation?
- Did you review curriculum in advance of adoption? If so, what review did you do?
- How important was the cost of the curriculum in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important was the rigor of the curriculum in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important was the ease of implementation of the curriculum in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important was the background/experience of the publisher of the curriculum in influencing your decision to adopt?

- How important was the recommendation of the State Department of Education in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important was the recommendation of other school districts using the curriculum in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important were the support resources offered by the publisher in influencing your decision to adopt?
- How important was alignment to the standards in choosing the curriculum?
- How important were other sources (EdReports, research, reviews) of information in influencing your curriculum decision?
- How important is the inclusion of digital resources in influencing your decision to adopt?
- What was the single most important factor that influenced your decision making regarding the adoption of the curriculum?
- To whom was the decision to use the curriculum communicated?
- Who communicated the decision to use the curriculum?
- How many days of upfront training were provided to teachers?
- How many days of training were provided for leaders?
- Was upfront training developed "in-house" or provided by publisher?
- If only some teachers were offered training, did they provide support to non-trained teachers?
- Do teachers receive ongoing training? If yes, how frequent?
- Is ongoing training facilitated by an expert or shared by a group of teachers?
- Is ongoing training facilitated in-person, online or blended?
- Is there a specific policy regarding whether teachers are allowed to modify the curriculum?
- What, if anything, are teachers empowered to modify within the curriculum?
- Who decides what teachers can modify in the curriculum?
- Who reviews teacher lesson plans, or preparation routines?
- Do your teachers utilize Professional Learning Communities or collaborative planning sessions? If yes, what is discussed during these sessions and how frequent are they?
- What data is analyzed during PLCs/collaborative planning?
- Who analyzes student work with teachers? How often?
- How often do leaders monitor implementation for each teacher? How do they do so?
- How closely did you follow pacing recommendations?
- How closely did you follow scope and sequence recommendations?

- How did you decide which lessons to omit?
- What did you do about grading?
- What expectations did you have for teachers modifying/supplementing curriculum materials?
- Can you make us aware of any particularly challenging lessons/standards?
- What was the single most important factor which ensured the successful adoption of your curriculum?
- Are there other factors that you would cite as critical to your success? How do you know?
- What would you recommend to a district just starting to implement? What would you do differently?

Appendix D:
We are grateful to the following people who played instrumental roles in this project:
- *Main authors:* Emily Freitag, Elizabeth Ramsey, Karen Babbs Hollett
- *Project team members:* Laura Mann, Sena Townsend, LP Poglitsch, Bonnie Williamson, Colleen Gillian, Erin Walker
- *Interviewers:* Patty Holmes, John Schembari, Kate Crist, Cathy Schmidt, Amy Salgo, Dave Able
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