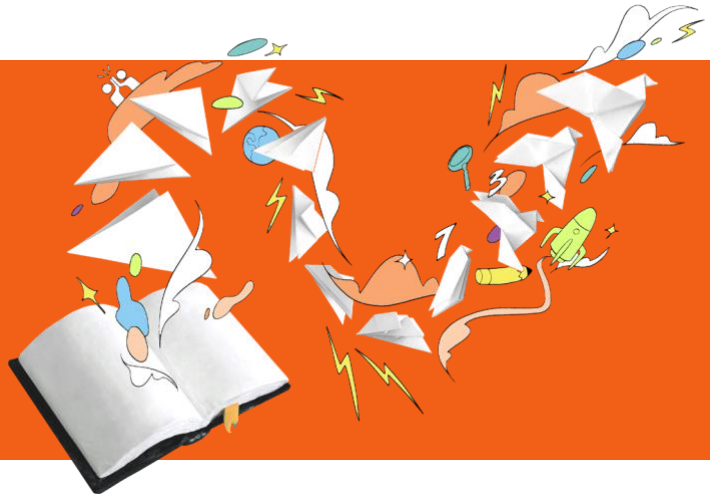
A Step-by-Step Guide to a Quality Curriculum Adoption



Welcome to the Step-by-Step Guide.

We talked to leaders like you and created this guide to help with the complex process of adopting a high-quality curriculum. You can explore our recommended steps and use the downloadable articles and templates to help with your decision-making process.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Plan your process.	**Define the problem.**	**Build requirements.**	**Explore programs.**	**Socialize and evangelize the decision.**	**Prepare for implementation.**

1. Plan your process.

Each step of the process, from assembling a team to preparing materials and socializing the decision, needs to be planned based on your district's unique needs.

Start with the following case studies if you'd like to see examples from small and mid-sized districts. The worksheets that come next should help you plan the steps in your process and schedule, and the articles will provide some ideas for how to assemble your committee.

Case studies:
Mid-size district case study
Small district case study

Worksheets:
Process planning worksheet
Review schedule builder worksheet

Articles:
Five things to consider as you assemble your team
Shaping the future: Participating on an adoption committee

2. Define the problem.

Defining the problem shapes your list of requirements and ensures that all involved parties are focused on selecting the right high-quality curriculum.

Worksheet:
Defining the problem worksheet

3. Build requirements.

Requirements help you prioritize what is most important to your school district and evaluate why a high-quality curriculum adoption would be the best fit.

Worksheet:
Building requirements worksheet

4. Explore programs.

Start with your critical focus areas from step 2 (defining the problem) and select a short list of programs to explore. Next, conduct a thorough review of those programs. If you're a school or district that pilots, a pilot would happen during this step.

Worksheet:
Building a rubric worksheet

Articles:
Getting ready for the review
Important questions to ask publishers up front

5. Socialize and evangelize the decision.

You've done it! But your work isn't over. Now you need to create clear, exciting messaging about the high-quality curriculum you've chosen and why it's a good match for your teachers and students.

Article:
Designing your announcement campaign

Template:
Announcement email template

6. Prepare for implementation.

A lot of things happen between signing a purchase order and kicking off professional learning. You'll want to be organized as you coordinate people, places, and things to get ready for back to school.

Worksheet:
Thinking ahead: Preparing for implementation worksheet

Mid-size district case study

Step 1: Plan your process.

Overview

New Springs School District comprises four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. It serves 2,800 students K–12 and is in a state that has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. The district last formally adopted K–8 ELA materials in 2012 and now feels the materials aren't as aligned to the standards as they thought they were. They budgeted to make a large K–8 ELA purchase in 2019, so they started their review in the fall of 2018.

To support the adoption process, the district curriculum coordinator assembled a team of 12 teachers and building principals, five elementary teachers representing all of the schools, three middle school teachers, one high school teacher, and three building principals.

They agreed to meet four times: once in October to define the problem and build requirements, once in November to pick up short list program materials sent in from publishers and review the rubric they created together, once in February to review findings, and finally, once in March to vote and help prepare materials to take to the board. Four of the team members attended a professional learning conference in October. No publishers were allowed formal presentations during the process.

Defining the problem

The team agreed that they could describe the problem as such: *In 2012 we adopted materials that were reportedly aligned to the new ELA state standards; however, we now believe the materials are not fully aligned and that new materials are required to help New Springs SD teachers improve state ELA assessment scores by 5% over the next three years. If we do not adopt new materials this year, we estimate teachers will spend, on average, three hours each week researching and preparing supplemental lessons to fill the gaps.*

Building requirements

The team was largely aligned on their top critical focus areas. The new program needed to:

1. Have a favorable (all-green) report on EdReports.org, or a reputable state review site such as Louisiana, as well as meet 100 percent of the standards as evidenced by a teacher-led review.
2. Include embedded professional learning supports to help teachers transition to the new standards.
3. Offer opportunities for students to build knowledge as they develop strong reading and writing skills.
4. Support teachers in differentiating instruction.

Exploring solutions

Before the team could start exploring programs, they needed to define some parameters for selecting a short list of programs to review. They agreed to spend two weeks reading the all-green EdReports reviews closely and talking to colleagues in other districts to populate a list of five to seven programs. Each team member was responsible for looking at two programs during the deep review period.

Once the short list was compiled, team members were randomly assigned programs to review. The curriculum coordinator made sure each reviewer had physical materials and login information.

Each reviewer was responsible for conducting both a standards review and then a review against the other three critical focus areas. Notes were kept in a shared folder. The team met in February to compare notes and informally decided on Program A at K–5 and Program B at 6–8. The group took a vote to make sure they documented the decision. After the February meeting, each member of the team got access to programs A and B. The team met a final time in March to make their decision and put together a short presentation for the board.

Socializing and evangelizing the decision

Before the curriculum coordinator made the presentation to the board, she sent an email to all building principals and assistant principals announcing the decision and letting them know what communications to expect. The day following the board meeting, she sent a letter to all teachers outlining the strengths of the programs and pointing them to a resource site on their intranet where they could learn more before the first professional learning session. She also collected any questions into a Q&A document and posted them to the intranet.

Preparing for implementation

The publishers did not offer any pre-work materials for teachers to peruse ahead of professional learning, so the curriculum coordinator asked each teacher to put together the top three questions they needed answered before they left their professional learning session.

Small district case study

Step 1: Plan your process.

Overview

Centerville School District comprises one elementary school and one 6–12 secondary school. The district serves 600 students K–12 and is in a state that has adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The district last formally adopted science materials in 2005 and knows the materials are no longer used with fidelity nor do they meet the new standards. They budgeted to adopt new materials in 2020 and started their review in the fall of 2019. This case study will focus on their K–8 search.

To support the adoption process, the district curriculum director assembled a team of three teachers: two elementary teachers and one grade 6 teacher.

They agreed to meet twice: once in January to define the problem, build requirements, and figure out the short list of programs, and again in April to make the final decision. No publishers were allowed formal presentations during the process.

Defining the problem

The team agreed to describe the problem as such: *Centerville has not adopted new science materials in 14 years. In order to meet the NGSS, to prepare our students for high-stakes assessments, and to ensure all CPS students are college and career-ready, we must adopt new science materials. If we do not adopt new materials this year, we estimate teachers will spend, on average, three hours each week researching and preparing NGSS-aligned lessons to meet the new standards, and there would be inconsistency in what students would learn and how well-prepared they were for the new state tests.*

Building requirements

The team was largely aligned on their top critical focus areas. The new program needed to:

1. Have a favorable (all-green) report on EdReports.org, or a reputable state review site such as Louisiana, as well as meet 100% of the standards as evidenced by a teacher-led review.
2. Include embedded professional learning supports to help teachers transition to the new standards.
3. Support teachers in differentiating instruction.
4. Integrate literacy activities in K–8.

Exploring solutions

The team held a meeting in January to define the problem, build requirements, and agree on a short list of programs to review. The teachers came to the meeting with programs they wanted to include in the review, so crafting the short list was not difficult. Each team member was responsible for looking at three randomly assigned programs during the deep review period. The curriculum director made sure each reviewer received physical materials and login information.

Each reviewer was responsible for conducting both a standards review and then a review against the other three critical focus areas. The team was in contact via email to provide progress updates ahead of the April decision meeting.

When the team met in April to compare notes and vote, the director opened the meeting with an opportunity for the reviewers to share any issues they felt disqualified a program. One program was disqualified because the reviewer felt it did not meet the first critical focus area and it had not yet been reviewed by EdReports.org. That team member requested a completed rubric from the publisher, but felt the responses were not strong enough. The group took a vote and one program emerged as the choice for K–8. The purchase would be relatively small, so they did not need to present their decision to the board for approval.

Socializing and evangelizing the decision

One week after the team met in April, the curriculum director sent out an email communication to all building principals, assistant principals, and teachers announcing the decision and outlining the strengths of the programs. He offered to answer questions and included a timeline for when teachers would hear more about the upcoming professional learning day.

Preparing for implementation

The publishers had resources the teachers and administrators could look through ahead of professional learning, and almost all teachers reviewed the materials. Teachers came to the professional learning day with a basic understanding of the program and lots of questions for the facilitator.

Process planning worksheet

Step 1: Plan your process.

Before you communicate with the team you have recruited for your review committee, think through a few logistics to ensure you are using their time effectively.

How many people should be on your team? How will you ensure they represent a variety of interests in the district?

How would you like the team to compile a list of programs? How will you narrow that list to create a short list?

Which third-party resources would you like the team to use to ensure they select a high-quality program?

Note: Examples include EdReports.org, the Louisiana Department of Education Tier 1 reviews, IMET, and EQuIP.

How many in-person meetings will you need to explain the process, check on progress, make a decision, and prepare for implementation?

Where will you hold your meetings?

Note: See our Review schedule builder to put together a detailed schedule.

Will your reviews be 100 percent digital? If not, where should publishers send review materials?

Note: Most publishers can ship to only one address.

Will you need to include leaders from other departments to make a decision?

If you are looking at programs with digital resources, do you understand your district's technology requirements?

Will your decision need to be approved by the Board of Education? If so, when do you need their approval? What will they need to know?

Review schedule builder worksheet

Step 1: Plan your process.

Steps 1, 2, and 3	Step 4a	Step 4b	Step 5
Set up • Plan the process and assemble team • Define the problem • Build requirements	**Short list** • Start general online searches • Narrow the list of programs to a short list of contenders • Request materials	**Deep review** • Conduct thorough reviews • Meet to compare notes and resolve issues • Request quotes • Make a final selection	**Socialize** • Alert the publisher/vendor • Prepare materials to socialize your decision to teachers in the district
Dates			
Total working days			

If you're able to attend a professional learning conference, include those dates in this schedule. Professional learning conferences can help you begin step 3 (Building requirements).

Sometimes during step 5 (Socializing and evangelizing the decision), curriculum and instruction leads need to take the recommendation to the Board of Education. The materials included in this guide can help you prepare for that meeting.

Five things to consider as you assemble your team

Step 1: Plan your process.

Leading a curriculum adoption involves coordinating several groups of people, comparing complex programs, and championing your decision to ensure your community is on board. Selecting the right team of teachers and administrators to support the review can make things easier. When assembling your team, consider people who are:

1 **Insightful**
The first official step is defining the problem. Select leaders in your schools who can articulate their current challenges. Do you know teachers who are spending hours supplementing their core instructional resource because it isn't well-aligned to standards? Do you know building principals who are asking for better data so that they can support their teachers and coaches?

2 **Available**
This work takes time, and most educators don't have a lot of time. You may consider recruiting educators who are teaching fewer courses or K–5 teachers who have aides in the classroom. They might be able to better accommodate working meetings and focused review sessions.

3 **Representative**
The team you assemble will represent a broader group of colleagues. It's important for them to understand the personalities and unique circumstances of your school community. At the end of the process, they should be able to explain how they kept their colleagues in mind while making their decision.

4 **Conscientious**
A review can sometimes take months. During this time, comments, questions, and concerns should still be documented. Make sure the educators you recruit are prepared to take notes and share.

5 **Ready to learn**
Your team will need to be trained on the process and on how to help message their final decision to the broader community. Select people who are open and eager to learn.

The next article in this plan, Shaping the future: Participating on an adoption committee, is designed for you to distribute to your team.

Shaping the future: Participating on an adoption committee

Step 1: Plan your process.

Studies suggest that implementing high-quality curriculum can positively impact student learning.[1] Check out this EdReports.org resource to learn more about why materials matter. You're being asked to participate in the work of finding the right high-quality instructional materials that will help you, your colleagues, and your school community meet important goals. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you begin the review process:

1 Have a vision.
It's important to begin with the end in mind. Developing a vision for high-quality teaching and learning in your district is just as critical as combing through units and lessons. If you don't know where you want to go, you'll never get there.

2 Make time to explore.
Navigating new programs in print or online can be challenging. They're all designed differently, and you probably won't get any formal training before your review. Set aside time to flip through, click around, and figure out the structures of the program, units, and lessons.

3 Take notes.
As you review content, take notes so you can make sure your findings address the problem you are solving and the standards your state uses. Aspects such as great digital design or beautiful books should be documented, but they probably won't matter as much in the rubric you develop with your team.

4 Be realistic.
It is likely no single curriculum will meet your needs and common to customize materials. Keep this in mind to minimize frustration as you discuss your findings with colleagues.

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1. Matthew Chingos and Grover "Russ" Whitehurst, "Choosing Blindly: Instructional Materials, Teacher Effectiveness, and the Common Core," Brookings Institute, 2012.

   C. Kirabo Jackson and Alexey Makarin, "Simplifying Teaching: A Field Experiment with Online Off-the-Shelf Lessons," National Bureau of Economic Statistics, Working Paper No. 22398, 2016.

Defining the problem worksheet

Step 2: Define the problem.

Use this worksheet to create consensus about the problem you are solving and how you will weigh various program features. Individuals can complete this worksheet and a master version can be drafted by the team following a discussion of individual responses.

Subject:

Grades:

The key factor driving this curriculum adoption is:

Key factors are usually related to standards coverage or funding (e.g., “We’re due for a social studies adoption and have funding next year.”).

What would happen if the problem were not solved this year, both for teachers and students?

Discussion guidelines

Step 2: Define the problem.

After all team members have completed the worksheet, talk through the responses and compile a common language describing the problem you are solving.

We agree the key factor driving this curriculum adoption is:

It is imperative that we conduct a thorough review and make a selection this year because:

Defining the problem worksheet [sample]

Step 2: Define the problem.

Use this worksheet to create consensus about the problem you are solving and how you will weigh various solution features. Individuals can fill out this worksheet and a master version can be drafted by the team following a discussion of individual responses.

Subject:

Science

Grades:

6–8

The key factor driving this curriculum adoption is:

The rollout of the NGSS necessitates the adoption of new materials and professional learning. If our teachers and students are going to meet higher standards, we must implement new materials starting in the fall of 2020.

Key factors are usually related to standards coverage or funding (e.g., “We’re due for a social studies adoption and have funding next year.”).

What would happen if the problem were not solved this year, both for teachers and students?

If we do not adopt new materials and offer more professional learning, our teachers will spend an estimated 6–7 hours each week researching free resources. There will be no consistency from classroom to classroom and students will likely not excel on high-stakes assessments.

Building requirements worksheet

Step 3: Build requirements.

Use this worksheet to define and prioritize your district or school requirements.

Critical focus areas

Use language that is specific and related to classroom experiences or student outcomes, such as: “Improve average high-stakes assessment scores by 10 percentage points within three years for our large English language learner (ELL) population” or “Support teachers in introducing rich mathematical tasks in every lesson.”

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Consensus building

Discuss each team member's responses. Make note of recurring themes. When all team members have contributed to the discussion, agree on which critical focus areas will form the basis of your review. There are no rules about how many critical focus areas you should have, but it is a good practice to be precise with language.

Agreed-upon critical focus areas

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Building requirements worksheet [sample]

Step 3: Build requirements.

Use this worksheet to define and prioritize your district or school requirements.

Critical focus areas

Use language that is specific and related to classroom experiences or student outcomes, such as: “Improve average high-stakes assessment scores by 10 percentage points within three years for our large English language learner (ELL) population” or “Support teachers in introducing rich mathematical tasks in every lesson.”

1.	Build teacher capacity for teaching to new three-dimensional standards by considering only materials that are 100% built for the NGSS and by offering both introductory and ongoing professional learning in partnership with the provider of the materials.
2.	Remain committed to our focus on equity by considering only materials based on research into how students learn science, as well as those that include robust differentiation and pedagogical supports.
3.	Equip dual immersion teachers to be successful through an abundance of Spanish-language materials (student- and teacher-facing), both in print and online.
4.	Increase the number of students scoring "proficient" on the 8th-grade state science assessment by 10% over 2019.
5.	Ensure all students are prepared for high-stakes assessments by administering and analyzing various formative and summative standards-aligned assessments throughout the year.

Building a rubric worksheet

Step 4: Explore programs.

Use this worksheet to build a rubric based on standards, minimum technical requirements, and your critical focus areas. Give a copy to your team members so they can record their observations.

We recommend you and your team take a detailed look at standards coverage. This worksheet will not walk through that because almost all standards reviews will be different, based on your state. Also, third-party review sites, such as EdReports.org, can help make standards reviews easier. In addition, some schools or districts may conduct a standards review or review a publisher correlation ahead of finalizing the short list.

The program aligns to our state standards.				
	Insufficient alignment			**100% alignment**
Standards alignment				
The program meets our technical & other requirements.				
	No evidence	**Define what minimal evidence looks like**	**Define what acceptable evidence looks like**	**Define what strong evidence looks like**
Minimum technical requirements				
Critical focus area 1				
Critical focus area 2				
Critical focus area 3				
Critical focus area 4				
Subtotals	**x0**	**x1**	**x2**	**X3**

Scoring
You can score this rubric by multiplying each column by a rating multiplier (0 for the left-most column, 1 for the second, 2 for the third, 3 for the fourth) and then adding up the scores.

Getting ready for the review

Step 4: Explore programs.

Review: round one

First, compile a short list of programs. We suggest using the critical focus areas identified in step 2 (Define the problem) to guide a general search of websites and materials. If you can, attend a professional learning conference with your team. You'll be able to learn more about the programs and potentially take home samples and marketing materials.

You might need to assign team members specific programs to review if there are a lot of programs available. Another approach is to have team members do searches based on your critical focus areas and see what they find. For example, one search could be: "ELA program, complex texts."

Things to look for

Some evidence that the program meets all of the critical focus areas outlined in step 2 (Define the problem).

Review: round two

The second review is where you go deep. Before this review begins, reach out to publishers to request sample boxes or review sets and digital access. Be sure to also ask questions that will make your review easier. (See the article Important questions to ask publishers up front).

Once you have materials in hand and logins ready to go, use a rubric to score each program. You may assign each team member to a single program or, if time allows, to multiple programs. You can make this decision based on your specific short list of programs.

The rubric, which you'll create using the Building a rubric worksheet, should be based on the things that are important to your teachers and students. We've been calling these your *critical focus areas*.

Preparing for the deep review

- Decide how many programs each team member is reviewing. Remember, this work can be time consuming.
- Prepare the rubric with your team ahead of starting the review. That's where team members should take notes.
- Use a shared drive to make organizing files easier.
- Agree on milestones to avoid pressure right before deadlines. A milestone might be "one unit reviewed by X date" or "60 minutes spent in the program by Y date."

Important questions to ask publishers up front

Step 4: Explore programs.

You've done your online research and have selected your short list of programs to review. Next, it's time to get full access to those programs. Publisher representatives are often well-versed in the complex programs they carry, but sometimes they share information that isn't relevant to your critical focus areas. How do you engage with a publisher representative to get the materials you need and the information that will make your review easier? Here are some questions to get you started.

Could you please send representative print and digital samples?

You'll be focused on the content, but it's also important to see the quality of the manufactured resources.

Are any materials not included in the sample you'll be shipping me?

For science and math programs, manipulatives might not be a part of the standard sample. Ask about ancillary resources like assessments and potentially even oversized resources like big books.

Could you please send your standards correlation?

An important step will be checking the publisher's citations and deciding whether they meet your standards.

Are there any materials that will help me navigate your platform as I conduct my review?

Most publishers will be able to send you steps outlining how to log in and navigate the content. Some publishers can even offer interactive walkthroughs.

Are there any materials that might help me review the print materials?

Some publishers have created resources to help you navigate print resources. Ask if there is a guide to efficiently reviewing teacher resources.

Is there a research base I can review?

In the age of ESSA, it's important that the programs you consider are built from a solid research base and are being studied for efficacy. Publishers should be able to explain the research behind their program development and reference any studies they are currently engaged in.

How can your current customers get answers to questions about materials, technology, and pedagogy?

The publisher's commitment to customer service should be important to you as a reviewer. After materials are shipped and logins are set up, how are you going to get timely answers to questions as you prepare to stand in front of students?

How are updates communicated to customers?

Not all publishers update their technology or content, but some do, and it is important to understand how that information is communicated to administrators and teachers.

Do you have a user community or reference sites I could talk to about the program?

Many teachers enjoy opportunities to connect with other program users to share tips and ideas on how they've taken the materials and made them their own

Designing your announcement campaign

Step 5: Socialize and evangelize the decision.

Congratulations—you've selected a program! Now it's time to get the word out. It's important to lead with a message that includes why you made your selection and what teachers can expect for onboarding. Following are a few suggestions:

1. Craft an email that includes a headline, a few reasons the program was chosen, and perhaps a piece of marketing from the publisher or a link to their website. You need to communicate two things: how teachers' lives will improve because you conducted a thorough review based on the unique needs of the district, and how excited they should be about this new curriculum. (Here's an announcement email template you can use.)

   If you're ready to share details about the first professional learning opportunity, great. If not, ask whether the publisher has a website educators can access in advance. Here's an example of one from Amplify. Either way, let your team know when to expect the next communication.

2. Consider setting up an internal website (e.g., a simple Google site) where you can post details about next steps. Some site builders will let you add a form where you can collect questions and feedback.

3. Think about parents. A short letter outlining many of the details you share with teachers could help families understand why you made your decision.

4. Stay in close contact with your publishing representative. Start talking about professional learning dates, technology access, shipping logistics, common mistakes made by implementers in the first year, and what data you can review together after school starts to make your implementation smooth.

Announcement email template

Step 5: Socialize and evangelize the decision.

Dear teachers,

I'm excited to announce that the instructional materials committee has made the decision to adopt [program name].

The committee started meeting on [date] to conduct a thorough review that would enable us to select a core curriculum to help us meet our district goals, specifically [name two or three of the critical focus areas]. [Program name] will be a large part of our plan to meet these goals.

Supporting success in the classroom is the only way we will continue to lead as a strong educational institution in our community. That's why we made sure to keep you in mind as we built and executed our plan.

To ensure a base level of quality, we started with programs that [had been rated all-green on EdReports.org (or whatever third-party sources you used)]. We shortened the list of contenders from [number] to [number], and I assure you that when we conducted our deep review of the finalists we left no stone unturned.

I want you to be as excited as we are about this program. Please see the attached marketing materials and visit [program website] to learn more.

Our first professional learning date will be [date]. In the meantime, the publisher has put together this website to help you get familiar with the program: [link to pre-professional learning website, if available].

You will hear from me again on [date] with more details about professional learning. Please join me in thanking the instructional materials committee for their work, and I look forward to connecting with you soon!

[Signature]

Thinking ahead: Preparing for implementation worksheet

Step 6: Prepare for implementation.

A lot of things happen between signing a purchase order and kicking off professional learning. You'll want to be organized as you coordinate people, places, and things to get ready for back to school. Use this worksheet to stay on top of it all.

Our professional learning dates:

Link to the communication sent to teachers:

Address materials should ship to:

Link to parent letter:

Date materials are distributed:

If teachers have questions, they should:

Our publisher contact info:

Sales representative:
Professional learning lead:
Technical support: