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61% are using partially

aligned, not aligned at all or

unrated materials, according

to EdReports.6

# Leading the Change: Using Improvement Strategies to Adopt Instructional Materials

### Background

Recent data tells us that **students do not have** consistent access to high-quality materials nationwide. While 31% of In California, roughly 39% of math materials that EdReports reviewed

met expectations for alignment to Common Core state standards, only 29% of teachers nationwide are using at least one aligned program as of 2020.1

Not only is this access inconsistent for all students, but there are also further inequities between subgroups of students, including English Learners (ELs) - over one million students in California.<sup>2 3</sup>

There have also been recent national gains in usage of standards-aligned instructional materials. Between spring 2019 and spring 2021, the percentage of teachers who reported using at least one curriculum material that is fully aligned to state standards went from 24% to 33%.<sup>4</sup>

However, a recent study showed that California districts' adoption processes aren't always yielding high-quality choices. 5 Historically, textbook adoptions occur on a six- to eight-year cycle, followed by district funding. Districts often wait until the state has provided this list to make adoption decisions, meaning that many districts have not adopted new materials since 2014. Lack of high-quality teacher professional development around textbook evaluations was cited as the biggest obstacle in a successful adoption process. Another major take-away of the study was the need for high-quality, reliable, independent information about instructional material quality.

We attempt to meet this need through the California Curriculum **Collaborative** initiative (CalCurriculum), inaugurated in 2017 as a partnership between Pivot Learning and EdReports. The initiative has grown in partnership with the California Department of Education (CDE), and the addition of a cohort of California districts going through a learning series on best practices for adoption and resources for implementation.

We have just concluded the most recent cohort (SY 2021-22), designed with continual improvement principles and lessons learned from the previous cohort (SY 2020-21).

## Ongoing Challenges in Math Materials adoption

- Math materials matter. Yet statewide, many materials in use do not meet the minimum threshold of quality: alignment to state standards.6
- Though teachers make up a majority of district adoption committees, they have not been effectively engaged in adoption processes, according to our cohort participants. This may contribute to teachers spending time seeking out more engaging materials on their own and results in even fewer standards-aligned materials in the classroom.<sup>7</sup>

"With 700 teachers total

across the district, only 25 or

the site administrator needs

to do the work of engaging

with all the teachers," noted a

cohort participant in Norther

California.

Owing in part to a historically brief district adoption process, but also to a lack of resources and training opportunities, the adoption of math materials does not consistently include planning to address inequities, including for English learners.

## Our Adoption Cohort

During the 2020–21 school year, CalCurriculum worked with a cohort of 13 California school districts and charter management organizations to support informed adoption using a continuous improvement model. This year, we are working with a new cohort of 16.

Participating districts learn—from each other and external experts—how to select the highest-quality middle school math curricula most relevant to their students' needs. The goal of the cohorts is to prepare districts to adopt new math instructional materials for grades five through eight.

Greater inclusion will

create even greater

nvestment and buy-in o

materials implementatio

by stakeholders, leading

to better outcomes in

achievement.

student learning and

#### Our Theory of Improvement

IF we provide districts a new way of thinking about selecting materials and concrete resources and tools to help them do so in a collaborative cohort environment,

**THEN** district adoption processes will focus on the equity and needs of specific students, such as English learners; be more inclusive of stakeholder voice, including teachers, students, families and administration; and ultimately result in the selection of high-quality, standards-aligned materials.

## **Adoption Cohort Learning Goals**

The sessions were designed so that by the end of the cohort, participants would be

- Understand how to assess the quality of math instructional materials and why high-quality materials are important in order to assess the quality of their current materials and/or materials that they might consider adopting in the
- Understand what a high-quality adoption process looks like and its importance, and develop their own plan for the adoption of standards-aligned, high-quality math materials, including:
- a math instructional vision;
- a definition of quality instructional materials; and
- a change management strategy for stakeholder engagement/buy-in.
- Articulate the role of materials adoption and implementation as an adaptive change process conducted over time, with multiple stakeholders engaged iteratively and centered on equitable student outcomes.

#### **Preliminary Learnings from This Year's Cohort**

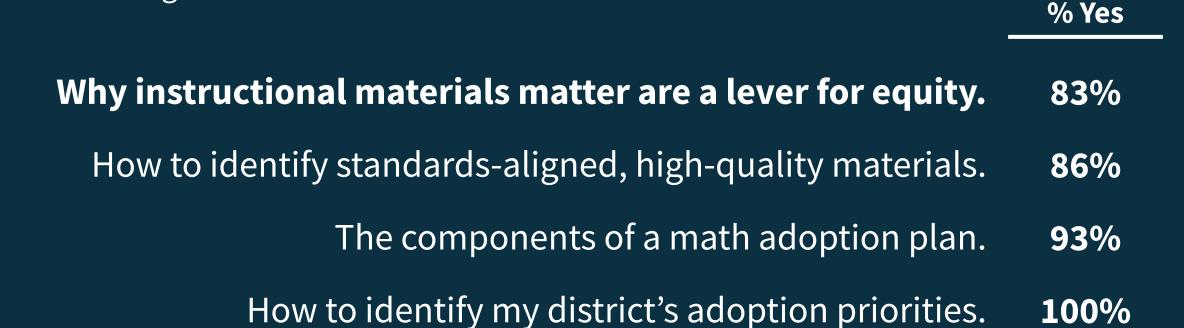
- Recent research findings matched the experience of our cohort participants: historical district practices were often not yielding the desired results from the adoption of high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials.
- District participants care deeply about the California math framework and how it positions ELs and materials.
- 57% of districts mention ELs as a priority in their math adoption.
- Participants need more time to reflect on the best practices and resources learned in the cohort, including best ways to support ELs.

## Key Learnings: Data Samples

We learned a number of things about adoption through our cohort work in 2020–21. Nearly all respondents defined a high-quality curriculum as offering support to a diverse group of learners, such as ELs. Additionally, stakeholders have vastly different experiences engaging in the adoption process: administrators are the most engaged, while teachers, families, and students are less included.

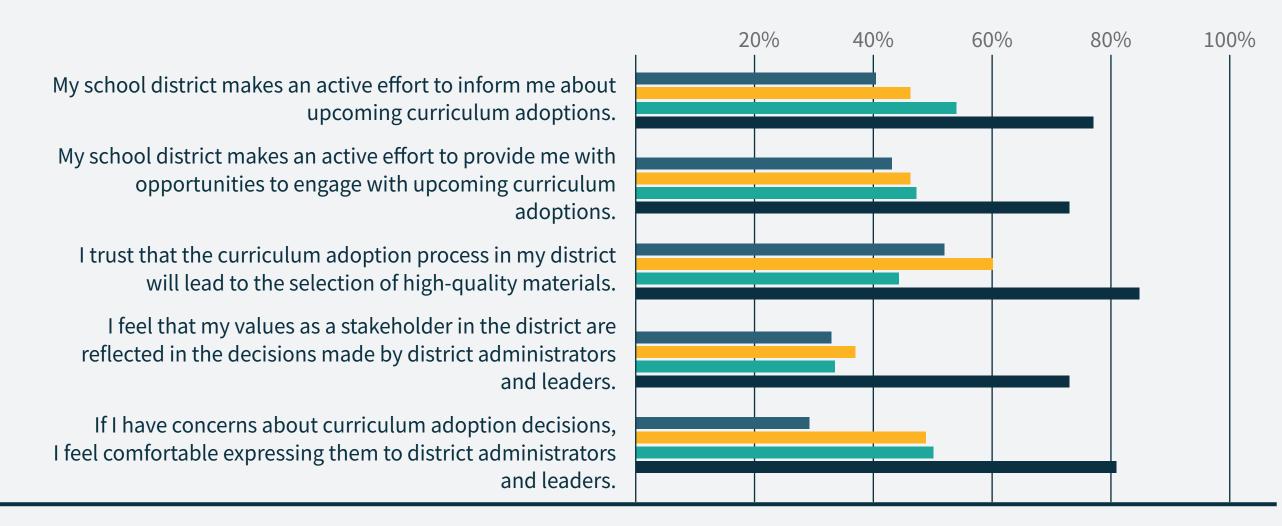
#### **Cohort Learning**

The Decision Lab, a research firm that focuses on decision-making, based in Montreal, Canada, partnered with CalCurriculum to collect and analyze data from eight cohort districts. Each district represented more than 2,500 students. The survey responses below are from teachers, administrators, and other leaders who participated in the cohort, and point to cohort learnings, with percentages of participants indicating that they learned the following in the cohort:



#### Stakeholder Engagement

The Decision Lab also helped to gather stakeholder engagement data from the same 8 research districts. Through a survey of 1,182 stakeholders, representing administrators, math teachers, parents, and students, we were able to learn more about the degree to which stakeholders are effectively engaged in the adoption process in their district.



■ Students ■ Parents ■ Teachers ■ Admin

#### Adoption Timelines, 2020-21 SY

Cohort Participant | Planned Adoption Year CMO A 2021-22 CMO B 2021-22 District A 2021-22 District B | 2021-22 or 2022-23 CMO C 2022-23 COE supporting districts 2022-23 District C 2022-23 District D 2022-23 District E | 2022-23/2024-25

District F | 2024- 25 District G Next few years COE supporting districts | Next few years COE supporting districts | Next few years

## Case Study: A Focus on English Learners

Owing in part to a historically brief and ineffective adoption process, but also to a lack of resources and training opportunities, the adoption of math materials does not consistently include planning to address inequities, including for English Learners - 18% used to think selecting

In the 2020-21 cohort, participants learned about resources including the English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) rubric and benchmarks of quality for ELs, and resources on equity in the math framework from the CDE.

of California's students.

Participants repeatedly voiced their interest in more equity-focused resources and best practices during cohort focus groups and surveys, specifically for ELs. We implemented this feedback by adding intentional support from experts in the field. In November 2021, ELSF delivered a session focused on using the benchmarks of quality for ELs in materials adoption. This pilot session provided distinct resources and tools, as well as training and

We plan to analyze the survey findings on the success of the session, and ultimate outcomes in their district adoption processes.

guidance on their implementation.

After a deeper analysis with ELSF, we plan to act and make changes in upcoming I used to think EL nponents in materials wer add-ons by publishers to check off a box. Now I think, with the benchmarks of quality **our** district can be better equipped and informed to evaluate the usefulness and quality of the **EL components** in the mater that we review.

and external pressures,

heighted by the COVID-19

pandemic. We know that

the support we provide

needs to be inclusive and

flexible to accommodate

challenges.

I used to think al curricula included an emphasis on language, but now I think that if a publisher is **intentional** about its inclusion, then vill be an important pied of the materials

curriculum was as simpl

as solely considering cost

Now, I think there are so

many more layers,

including the

consideration of differen

opulations of studer

(namely, ELs).

sessions to determine the best course of action to better support ELs in instructional materials adoption and implementation processes.







#### About CalCurriculum.org

CalCurriculum is a partnership among EdReports and Pivot Learning. Since 2017, CalCurriculum has supported California districts to adopt and implement quality instructional materials by providing independent reviews of instructional materials, actionable resources, and guidance tailored to the California context. We aim to change district practices, behavior, and mindsets around selecting new materials in order to increase access to high-quality instructional materials and teaching and learning.

Education. (2021). 2020–21 enrollment by subgroup for charter and non-charter schools state report. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrCharterSub.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=state&year=2020-2 Polikoff, M., & Dean, J. (2019). The supplemental curriculum bazaar: Is what's online any good? Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved 2022, from https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/resear