Leading the Change: Using Improvement Strategies to Adopt Instructional Materials

Ongoing Challenges in Math Materials adoption

Math materials matter. Yet, state- or cities’ math materials do not meet the minimum threshold of quality alignment to state standards.\(^1\)

Though teachers make up a majority of district adoption committee, they have not effectively engaged with publishers, according to our cohort participants. This may contribute to teachers spending time reading and engaging materials on their own, which results in more inferior standards-aligned materials in the classroom.\(^2\)

Ongoing is a part of historically brief district adoption processes, but also a lack of resources and planning opportunities, the adoption of Math materials does not consistently include planning to address teachers’ needs, including the teachers’ learning.\(^3\)

Our Adoption Cohort

During the 2020–21 school year, CaliforniaCurriculum worked with a cohort of 13 California school districts to help management organizations to support informed adoption using a continuous improvement model. This year, we are working with 20 districts and 7,400 schools across the state.\(^4\)

Participating districts learn from each other and external experts to hone the selection and implementation of materials.\(^5\) The goal of the cohorts is to prepare districts to adopt one math instructional materials grades five through eighth.\(^6\)

Our Theory of Improvement

We provide district teams with a new way of thinking about selecting, implementing, and assessing materials and practices as they work with us in collaboration to develop and sustain a high-quality, standards-aligned adoption process.\(^7\)

Through district adoption processes will focus on teacher and student equity and needs of specific students, such as high school students, to maximize opportunities due to publishers, students, students, and administrators, and to ensure quality and high-quality standards-aligned materials.\(^8\)

Adoption-Centric Learning Tools

The resources were designed with the help of the cohort, participants would be able to:

understand how to assess the quality of non-state instructional materials and why it is necessary to also consider the quality of state instructional materials and their materials; and how they might consider adopting in the future.

understand what high-quality adoption processes look like and its importance; and how they can plan for the adoption of standards-aligned, high-quality, non-state instructional materials.

a definition of quality instructional materials, and

à change management strategy for stakeholder engagement/buy-in.

Articulate the role of materials adoption and implementation in an adaptive learning environment, and how these materials can be designed and used to support student learning.

Key Learnings: Data Samples

We learned a number of useful things about adoption through our cohort work in 2020–21. Many of the comments highlight high-quality curricula offering support for diverse groups of learners, such as ES. Additionally, stakeholders have very different experiences engaging in the adoption process: administrators are the most engaged, while teachers, families, and students are not included.\(^9\)

Case Study: A Focus on English Learners

Owing in part to a historically brief and ineffective adoption process, many districts of concern and anecdotal opportunities, the adoption of materials does not consistently include planning to address inequities, including for English Learners. Of the 20 districts in our 2020–21 cohort, participants learned about resources including the English learners’ Success Forum (ESL) and benchmarks of quality for ESL, and resources on equity in the math framework from the CDE. Participants repeatedly voiced their interest in more equity-focused resources and best practices during cohort focus groups and surveys, specifically for ESL. We implemented this feedback by adding intentional support to focus groups in the field. In November 2021, ESL delivered a session focused on using the benchmarks of quality for ESL in materials adoption. This session provided districts with resources and guidance on their implementation. We plan to analyze the survey findings on the success of the session, and detailed outcomes in their district adoption processes.

About CaliforniaCurriculum.org

CaliforniaCurriculum is a partnership among EdReports and Pivot Learning. Since 2011, CaliforniaCurriculum has inspired California schools to improve instructional materials by providing independent reviews of instructional materials, district-wide purchases, and professional development tailored to the local context. Our aim is to change district practices, between districts, around statewide materials in order to increase access to high-quality instructional materials and teaching and learning.

Background

Recent data tells us that students do not have continued access to high-quality instructional materials. At a 25% of math instructional materials market, most students in California are using low-aligned, or no aligned materials (92% of the students).\(^{10}\)

Not only is there a massive imbalance for students, but there are also four states with over 5 million students in California.\(^{11}\)

There have also been recent national gaps in usage of standard aligned instructional materials. Between spring 2018 and spring 2021, the percentage of high schools reporting using actual on curricular materials that are fully aligned to state standards went from 26% to 29.9%.\(^{12}\)

However, a recent study showed that California districts’ adoption processes aren’t always yielding high-quality change.\(^{13}\) Traditionally, textbook adoptions occur once in a five to 10-year cycle, followed by district funding. Districts often wait until the state provides this funding to make adoption decisions, meaning that many districts have not adopted new materials since 2014. Lack of high-quality teacher materials is the biggest obstacle to successful adoption process. Another major take-away of the study was that high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials are lacking.

We sent a survey to all the CaliforniaCurriculum Initiative (CaliforniaCurriculum, 2021) as a partnership between Pivot Learning and CaliforniaCurriculum. 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 completed the most recent cohort (SF 2021–22), designed with continual improvement principles and lessons learned from the previous cohort (SF 2020–21).