

Tackling Ongoing Challenges in Math Materials Adoption

A CalCurriculum Report

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The California Curriculum Collaborative is a partnership between Edreports and Pivot Learning (now merged with UnboundEd). CalCurriculum helps districts adopt and implement high-quality instructional materials by providing independent reviews, content specific resources, and adoption and implementation guidance tailored to the California context.

Introduction

All students deserve equitable access to grade-level content, and high-quality instructional materials are a key lever for ensuring that. With more tools, resources, and research on instructional materials available than ever, many California districts and educators are prioritizing the adoption of high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials. At the same time, taking on a time-intensive, thoughtfully planned materials adoption process can be challenging for a district. Our 2022 white paper, [An Opening For Change: Learnings from a Cohort Model for Off-Cycle Math Curriculum Adoption](#), highlighted three challenges that California districts often experience:

Challenge 1: Math instructional materials affect instructional quality [and are increasingly available](#). Yet statewide, many materials in use do not meet the minimum threshold of quality: alignment to state standards.

Challenge 2: While classroom teachers serve on district curriculum adoption committees, they have often not been routinely engaged in discussions on why materials matter, what makes materials high quality, and materials selection best practices, according to CalCurriculum workshop participants. This may contribute to teachers spending hours seeking out materials on their own, which can result in even [fewer standards-aligned materials in the classroom](#).

Challenge 3: Adoption processes have historically been brief. This, coupled with a lack of resources and training opportunities, contributes to math materials adoptions not reliably including a focus on addressing inequities, e.g., supports being present for multilingual learner students.

Support for Ongoing Challenges

Adding to the challenges above, timelines for adopting the [new state math framework](#) and state adoption list have been delayed since the publication of our 2022 white paper. The math framework is now anticipated to be adopted in 2023, pushing the state adoption list to 2025 at the earliest, and making curricular decisions more complex for districts.

We know that statewide, many materials in use do not meet the minimum threshold of quality—alignment to state standards (**Challenge 1**)—and that students need access to higher quality curricula now. To support districts to improve the quality of their instructional materials, CalCurriculum hosted a two-day workshop series in January 2023, designed for California districts planning to adopt new comprehensive math instructional materials [off-list/off-cycle](#) or in the near future.

Eighteen districts and two county offices of education (COEs) attended the workshop, with over 100 participants representing district leaders, classroom teachers, coaches, and other educators planning to serve on their adoption committees. This addressed **Challenge 2: While classroom teachers serve on district curriculum adoption committees, they have often not been routinely engaged in discussions on why materials matter, what makes materials high quality, and materials selection best practices**. The workshops were an important starting point for the ongoing professional learning that is central to adoption committee success.

During the workshops, we focused on addressing the three challenges discussed in our white paper: [An Opening for Change: Learnings from a Cohort Model for Off-Cycle Math Curriculum Adoption](#). The workshops also examined [why materials matter](#) and how to use the EdReports instructional materials reviews found on [CalCurriculum.org](#) to gauge alignment to state standards.

The workshops also focused on tackling **Challenge 3: Adoption processes have historically been brief. This, coupled with a lack of resources and training opportunities, contributes to math materials adoptions not reliably including a focus on addressing inequities, e.g., supports being present for multilingual learners (MLL) students.**

CalCurriculum worked with the [English Learners Success Forum \(ELSF\)](#) to co-design and co-facilitate workshop content on supporting multilingual learner students in the adoption process. These workshops included information on utilizing the new [evidence-based criteria for review](#) and [user guide](#) developed by [EdReports](#), [EdSolutions](#), [ELSF](#), and [Pivot Learning](#) (now merged with [UnboundEd](#)). Participants took a deep dive into the criteria and applied them to sample instructional materials in order to assess how well these materials address these criteria. The information collected could then be applied to a district's individual adoption process to help local communities select materials that better support multilingual learners.

Workshop participants overwhelmingly agreed that they would apply what they learned in the session focusing on multilingual learner students to their work. Participants were most excited about the five criteria and indicators and shared that they appreciated the opportunity to practice and the focus on language and supporting multilingual learner students. District participants offered the following reflections in a survey:

“Multilingual learner best practices should be used as best practices for the entire class, to really encourage engagement, and make students feel supported.”

“[We appreciated] bringing consciousness and awareness in general and how this will impact the classroom as a whole in reaching all students through awareness of needs for our populations.”

Upon reflecting on how the tools and learning could be applied in their districts, cohort participants shared plans for incorporating the criteria into a larger evidence collection tool during the materials investigation process along with other system-wide initiatives:

“We will include these [five criteria] in our process as we pilot two curricula. We will add to our rubrics for grading curriculum’s effectiveness.”

“[We plan to] embed [the criteria] into our literacy and English Language Development (ELD) work that helps establish schoolwide best practices for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.”

The CalCurriculum team looks forward to continuing to learn with districts regarding how they utilized the multilingual learner tool. This feedback will inform any potential future workshop offerings.

Advice for District Leaders

Our January 2023 CalCurriculum workshop surfaced three themes that are relevant to California district leaders tackling the vital challenge of ensuring equity in their classrooms, especially in districts that serve large populations of multilingual learners:

- Using [district-specific data](#) to identify key equity priorities for multilingual learners and other historically disadvantaged groups is critical. This data should inform a district's vision for mathematics instruction.
- Prioritizing your multilingual learner students in your adoption process is essential. This can be done by ensuring that English Language Development (ELD) specialists and those who have been explicitly trained in the research base of multilingual learner instructional best practices are included in district adoption committees.
- Incorporating [evidence-based criteria for review](#) into the materials adoption process, including during the investigation of materials and/or instructional materials field test, helps to ensure that the materials you choose support multilingual learners' linguistic and instructional needs.

We also encourage the Instructional Quality Committee (IQC) and county offices of education to include resources such as [the user guide](#) when offering guidance to districts on their upcoming adoption processes.