



**INSTRUCTION
PARTNERS**

**CURRICULUM
SUPPORT
— GUIDE —**

Translating Great Materials
into Great Instruction

www.curriculumsupport.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our schools are full of children with amazing potential. We depend on teachers to deliver creative and rigorous lessons that reach all students. But, getting all students excited about learning, especially when they all have different strengths and needs, is hard work, and too often we ask teachers to do it all on their own. Research shows that providing teachers with high-quality instructional materials to support their teaching helps increase student learning. When teachers have great instructional materials, they can focus their time, energy, and creativity on meeting the diverse needs of students and helping them all learn and grow.

However, teachers need much more than a new box of materials, even if the materials are great, to engage all students. The same materials that energized teachers, sparked innovative approaches to instruction, and led to greater outcomes for students in one system have created confusion and frustration without any increase in student learning in another system. So, if the materials cannot guarantee great implementation, we wondered: what choices lead to differences in implementation quality? And, are those choices different for different curricula?

To answer these questions, we set out to learn from the struggles and successes of early adopters of seven math and literacy curricula. We interviewed educators from across the country to understand the challenges they faced, we found systems and schools that had discovered ways to avoid these pitfalls and deeply studied their choices and actions, we talked to publishers and professional development providers that work across subjects and contexts to understand the patterns they saw driving implementation quality, and we tested different approaches with our willing partners. Ultimately, we hoped to learn what typically goes wrong in implementation and how schools and systems had successfully avoided those pitfalls.

The good news is that we found that the difference between materials flying and falling flat appears to be a series of replicable actions. Most of the key actions that differentiated successful implementation are consistent across curricula (with just a few that need to attend to the particulars of that set of materials). And, there are resources that can serve as a starting point for these choices and actions.

So what did we find?

We found five problems accounted for most of the implementation challenges across the curricula we studied:

1. “Nobody asked me.”

Leaders are engaged in curriculum adoption, but teachers are left out - leading teachers to feel like the decision is forced on them and their students.

2. “You are telling me to do different things.”

Teachers are on board and excited, but leaders are not engaged in the process and don't understand the materials, so they end up undermining the materials by giving feedback in tension with the curriculum's design, creating mixed signals about what matters most.

3. “I feel like a robot.”

Teachers are asked to be so strict in their fidelity to the curriculum that they cannot meet students' needs, students struggle, and ultimately everyone rejects the materials.

4. “I use it as a resource.”

Without training or a specific plan for how the materials should be used, teachers' well-intentioned adaptations get out of hand and dilute the materials, so students don't end up mastering the standards.

5. “We'll do it because we have to, but this too shall pass.”

The whole curriculum implementation effort is treated as another exercise in compliance rather than rooted to a meaningful vision for teaching and learning.

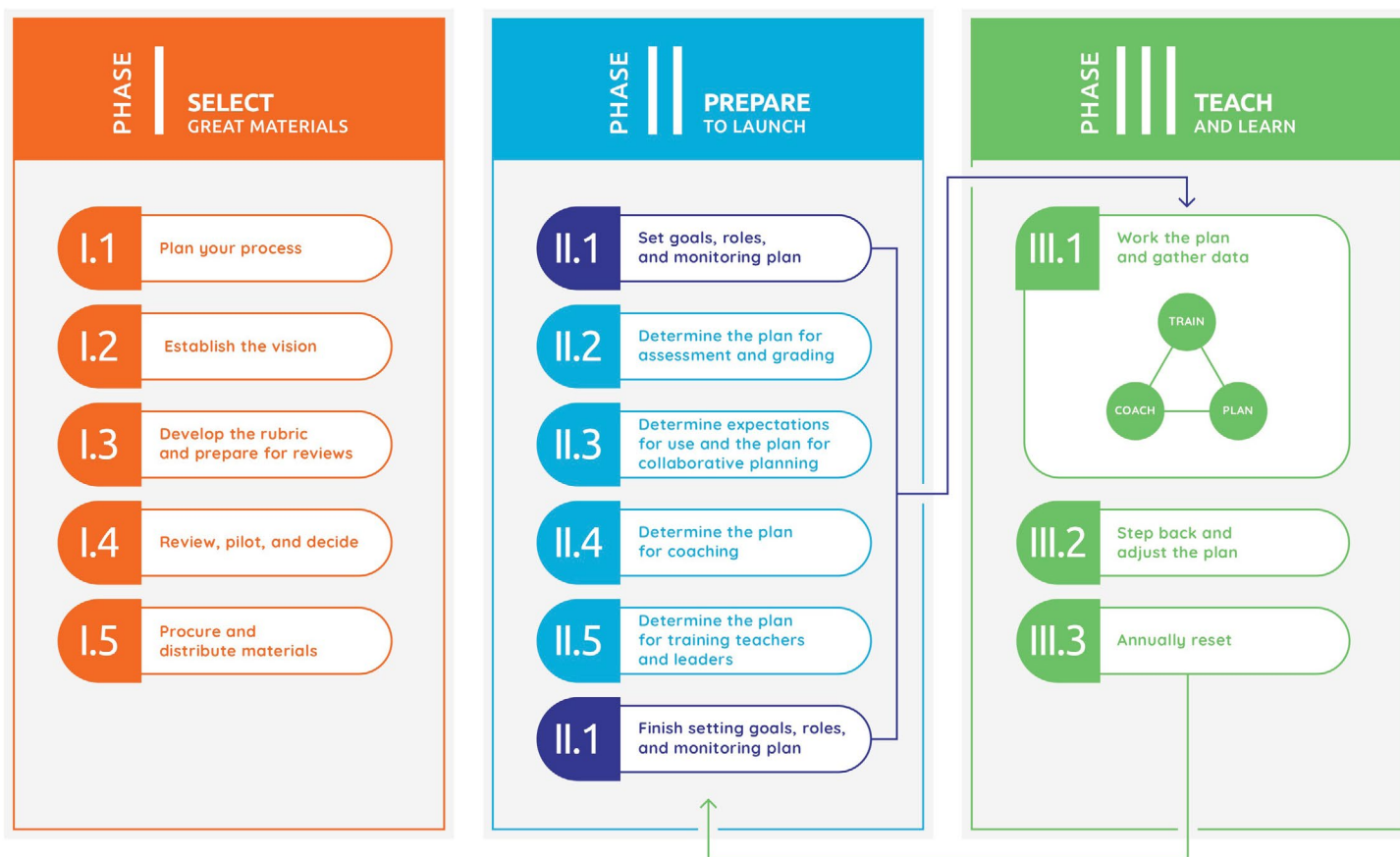


We learned that the common pitfalls are avoidable. The districts who succeeded engaged in a comprehensive series of replicable actions that made the difference.

We organized these differentiating actions into a framework, a kind of mental model for the different elements of the curriculum selection and implementation process.

There are three distinct phases: selecting great materials, preparing to launch materials, and teaching with the materials and learning how to use them well.

Curriculum Implementation Framework



PHASE 1 SELECT GREAT MATERIALS

The goal of **Phase I** is to select materials that support a clear and common vision of great instruction for the subject, with key stakeholder participation in the process. Teachers are central to every great selection story and reported learning from the process when it was done well.

There are five key actions in this phase:

- I.1 – Plan your process:** identify the selection team and leader, determine how a final decision will be made, map the schedule of events, form the review committee, and communicate the plan.
- I.2 – Establish the vision:** train the selection team and review committee on the fundamentals of instruction and articulate the vision and core beliefs that will drive the process.
- I.3 – Develop the rubric and prepare for reviews:** gather stakeholder engagement in what matters in the materials, establish the criteria for review, determine what options will be reviewed, and train reviewers on the process.
- I.4 – Review, pilot, and decide:** conduct the reviews and gather feedback, pilot materials, make the final selection, and communicate the decision.
- I.5 – Procure and distribute materials:** understand procurement options, place and track orders, communicate a realistic timeline, and distribute materials.

Successful early implementers:

- Were clear on the vision of instruction first, so it could inform every step of the process
- Trained the team on the vision and the standards - not only the review process
- Identified non-negotiables and used them to prescreen the list of options, so that reviewers had fewer materials to review and could go deeper into each
- Involved educators throughout the process in a meaningful way
- Communicated the process and decision transparently to the community
- Ordered materials for arrival before summer break, or at least before training

Once the materials are selected, but before they are used, there is a series of conversations that create clear expectations for use and a clear plan for training. In so many cases, this phase is rushed through, but it made a critical difference to the success of the implementation effort. The goal of **Phase II** is to develop an intentional implementation plan, thinking through what it will take to use and support the materials well.

Phase II includes five key actions:

- II.1 – Set goals, roles, and monitoring plan:** identify the implementation support team and leader, map out the implementation planning process, and draft the goals for successful implementation.
 - II.2 – Determine the plan for assessment and grading:** study the assessments in the curriculum, conduct an inventory of all currently used assessments for purpose, frequency, and quality, determine the plan for common assessment and what you will do with the data, establish grading guidance for the new materials, and organize next steps and communicate the plan.
 - II.3 – Determine expectations for use and the plan for collaborative planning:** study the design of the materials, ensure every school has appropriate time in the schedule, determine the yearlong pacing schedule, establish guidance for common use and customization, determine how you will support collaborative and individual planning, and organize next steps and communicate the plan.
 - II.4 – Determine the plan for coaching:** understand your current coaching practices, establish your observation and coaching tool, determine how you will support those responsible for coaching, and organize next steps and communicate the plan.
 - II.5 – Determine the plan for training teachers and leaders:** understand available training time and current plans, study the training and PD resources that come with your materials, determine training needs for each group, determine the plan and preparing the facilitators, and organize next steps and communicate the plan.
- Finish II.1 – Revisit goals, roles, and monitoring plan:** finish setting goals and defining the monitoring plan and roles and responsibilities.

Successful early implementers:

- Named a clear team responsible for implementation success
- Spent time with the materials to understand the kind of planning it would require in a practical way
- Had a plan for what they wanted all teachers to use within the materials (including assessments) and how they would support planning and use
- Got ahead of mixed signals that might come from evaluation structures, grading policies, and old lesson planning requirements
- Developed a clear picture of what everyone at the system level and school level needed to do in order to support implementation and communicated those responsibilities clearly
- Knew their plan would not be perfect and set time to step back and adjust the support structures

The work of using new curricular materials boils down to great support for teachers –specifically training, planning support, and coaching. Along the way, some things will work and others will need adjustment. The goal of Phase III is to support teachers as they use the curriculum to inspire great instruction and increase student learning.

Phase III does not end after the first year; instead, it is a continuous improvement journey.

Phase III includes three key actions:

III.1 – Work the plan and gather data: see the work in action, listen to questions and concerns, and check in to track the trends and solve quick problems. Invest time in supporting teacher use of materials by:

A - Training teachers and leaders: on the instructional vision for the subject, the design of the materials and rationale, and showing teachers what choices they would need to make in planning and implementation.

B - Supporting individual and collaborative planning: help teachers prepare for lessons by identifying the key outcome, key task, critical moments in the lesson, and what questions to ask to help students identify and correct misconceptions. Help teachers come together to review student work and reflect on instructional decisions within the curriculum.

C - Coaching teachers: provide clear feedback on instructional choices that affect student learning, rooted in a deep understanding of the curriculum.

III.2 – Step back and adjust the plan: prepare data for the stepback, step back to reflect on progress and challenges, and adjust the plan and communicate the changes.

III.3 – Annually reset: prepare data for the annual stepback, step back as a team to reflect on progress and challenges, adjust the goals and plan for the coming year, celebrate wins, and invest the team in the next level of work.

Successful early implementers:

- Took the work of training, supporting planning, and coaching seriously as the central instructional work
- Had a plan (see Phase II)
- Listened carefully, with openness to adjusting the plan
- Watched the work in action at every level to understand what was working and what was not
- Gathered together to step back and adjust the plan
- Shared the adjustments transparently in the spirit of continuous improvement

Attending to Equity

This work is built on the fundamental conviction that every student is capable of achieving at a high level when given the opportunity and support, every student deserves the opportunity that comes with a great education, and we as a country need the best contributions of every student. Providing every student with access to quality materials is in itself an expression of the commitment to equity. In addition, there are a few key places that this Guide explicitly seeks to elevate attention to all students:

- Who is on the selection team and the implementation team – with attention to more frequently marginalized student champions and advocates (I.1 and II.1)
- The criteria for materials review and rubric development needs to attend to the needs of all students (I.3)
- Plans for assessment and use (II.2 and II.3)
- Coaching, with attention to equity (II.4)
- Who gets trained and on what (II.5)
- Progress monitoring and which student groups are elevated (III.2)

Timeline

There are a variety of timelines that can work, largely driven by different approaches to piloting and the depth of the vision-setting process. We compiled timeline options here: <https://bit.ly/2APOWAm>

Who Needs to Be Involved

The size of the district will change the composition of the team (or involvement of multiple teams) and the scope of training considerations. Across district sizes, some of this work tends to be system-level work (i.e., ensuring alignment to the system assessment plan, often procurement) and other work is school-level work (i.e., ensuring the school schedule has the right amount of time, determining what teachers will get coaching support). Some of this work can transcend all grades (i.e., the rubric for materials review) while other work has to be done for each grade (i.e., determining plans for pacing and unit selection).

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This website has four key elements:

The Framework: The framework is designed to help leaders who are selecting and implementing new materials – whether they’re doing so because the adoption cycle says it’s time or because they know they need something different – find more success in their implementation journey.

The Resources: The guiding questions and resources come from studying the successes and struggles of schools and systems that have walked this journey. They are designed to be used flexibly and serve as a starting point that you can adapt for your context. Download them, adjust them to meet your needs, and use them as works best for you. Resources are referenced and can be searched easily on the website.

The Workbook: The workbook includes the framework, guiding questions, notes, and planning templates. The workbook is the most tangible entry point for a team doing this work together. Every team will have its own methods and habits of planning and organizing work. This workbook is designed to help ensure those plans, however they are managed, attend to the key questions that differentiated effective implementation. **In addition to the full workbook, with all the guiding questions and notes for each key action in each phase, you can also download one key action workbook (with resources) at a time.**

The Vignettes: The vignettes tell the full story of one district’s experience going through this process (and one teacher’s experience in that journey). The District Vignette represents one approach toward curriculum selection and implementation that worked for one system. It is a case study for teams to use and learn from in order to imagine what the work could look like in different phases. It is only one approach and will, of course, need to be done differently based on the structures, beliefs, norms, and capacity of each unique school district.

We know instructional materials can save teachers time, spark teacher innovation, boost rigor while meeting all students’ needs, and increase learning. We hope these tools can help leaders, teachers, and community members work together to avoid common pitfalls and navigate the process of curriculum selection and support, so that teachers have the support they need to inspire their students to learn and grow.

Instruction Partners works shoulder to shoulder with small school systems to support great teaching and accelerate student learning. We go into classrooms together and work through a collaborative process to understand the current state of instruction and help our partners develop a strategy to support and strengthen instruction. In that strategy, we leverage great materials, sound data practices, training, and ongoing support for teachers and those who coach teachers. We also target common needs across district lines and provide deep-dive, content-specific support for teachers, coaches, and principals. In the 2018-2019 school year, we are serving 91 partners across four states, reaching more than 120,000 students. Learn more at www.instructionpartners.org

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