



The New Jersey High-Quality Instructional Materials Ambassador Program

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic upended school systems. Across the country, educators raced to find ways to ensure student learning could continue in-person, remotely, or in hybrid learning models.

At EdReports, we had a hypothesis that a cohort of educator-leaders could drive grassroots initiatives to elevate the role of high-quality instructional materials to support teachers and prepare students for college and career regardless of the learning environment.

We identified New Jersey as an ideal opportunity to test our hypothesis. It has strong educator networks and a large representation of EdReports educator reviewers throughout the state. Furthermore, our data revealed that a [majority of districts across the state](#) do not have access to aligned mathematics programs, and we wanted to learn more about what educators were using and why.

New Jersey*

≈ **1.3M**
public school students

≈ **130K**
full time teachers

≈ **2.5K**
public schools

*Source: <https://www.nj.gov/education/doedata/fact.shtml>

About the Ambassador Program

2 cohorts with **22** educators

3 months of training

330 hours of collective learning

2,800 stakeholders reached

Empowering Educator Ambassadors



No one knows the curriculum better than teachers. It's important for us to be advocates for high-quality instructional materials and be a part of the decisions being made that will directly impact us and our students.

Rabia Nawaz, New Jersey Ambassador

EdReports reached out to educator reviewers in the state who in turn recruited other educators with an interest in learning more about high-quality instructional materials and materials adoption processes. We brought together an initial cohort of 11 educators representing a diversity of experiences including instructional coaches, curriculum directors, teachers, parents, principals, and school board members. The cohort participated in advocacy training focusing on three goals:

- 1) Increasing awareness of why high-quality instructional materials matter for New Jersey students and teachers;**
- 2) Celebrating and sharing how strong materials help teachers to inspire all students to learn and grow; and**
- 3) Supporting smart adoption practices that are intentional and inclusive across the state.**



When it comes to choosing curriculum, the most powerful stakeholders don't always have all the information needed to do what's best for educators and students. That's why it's so important for teachers to be engaged and advocate for quality materials.

Carri Strunk, New Jersey Ambassador

In order to meet these goals, the inaugural program was divided into three phases with learning activities connected to each phase.

PHASE 1: LEARNING

Understanding why materials matter

Detailed training on the growing body of research that demonstrates how high-quality instructional materials increase access to grade-level content and preparation for college and careers for all students. Ambassadors shared information and research within their professional networks and on social media platforms, leading to lots of engagement and follow up conversations about the importance of quality materials.

PHASE 2: EXPLORING

Knowing your local context

An in-depth look at the role of the state and school districts in supporting the selection and implementation of high-quality curriculum as well as strategies for engaging state and district stakeholders. Ambassadors built their understanding of their context by investigating district selection policies, learning about adoption budgets and timelines, and completing stakeholder analyses.

PHASE 3: CONNECTING

Identifying your voice

Hands on learning to develop personal leadership and advocacy skills in support of driving more awareness around the role of materials. Ambassadors engaged decision makers on questions about curriculum practices, shared concerns or solutions, and connected districts considering materials adoption with resources such as EdReports.

Over the course of three months, the ambassadors worked collaboratively to learn more about the factors and policies influencing materials adoption and implementation and how to use their voices to engage others in the state. They took a deep dive into curriculum research, and built advocacy and leadership skills that could help transform their communities.

Lessons Learned

Every school district has unique opportunities and challenges, but the collective conversations from this cohort of New Jersey Ambassadors surfaced some key learnings that resonated across all contexts:

1) Teachers know what a difference high-quality instructional materials can make in their classroom but are often not engaged in the decision-making process or have access to deeper learning opportunities.

[Research shows](#) that students learn primarily through their interactions with teachers and content. This instructional core is the foundation for ensuring all kids have the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in school and beyond. Through their day to day work, teachers are extremely close to the content in their classrooms and deeply passionate about inspiring all of their students to learn.

However, what is often lacking for educators is the opportunity to receive in-depth professional learning about the research behind why materials matter, how to identify quality materials, how material selection processes work in their district, or how to best advocate for the materials their students need. In fact, a Harvard study found that, on average, teachers receive less than one day a year of curriculum-focused professional learning.



I never had a model of curriculum adoption and was always on my own to develop my practice. Now, with the research and reviews that EdReports has made available, I feel more invigorated to continue advocating for high-quality instructional materials. I hope I'll be able to assist in an adoption with the current educators in my district and state.

Mary Steinhauer, New Jersey Ambassador

The New Jersey Ambassador Program sought to address this gap by providing targeted training and resources for teachers to be more effective in their curriculum advocacy efforts. Educators reported that it's not enough to know the status quo isn't working.

To tackle real challenges, educators must have an understanding how to select for quality, be able to participate in a materials adoption, and have the tools to engage administrators and district leaders on why a different program is needed.

Professional learning doesn't just benefit educators and students in the classroom; learning also better prepares educators to be involved in selection decisions. Including educator voice in an adoption process is much more effective if educators have the tools and training to contribute not only classroom expertise but a thorough understanding adoption best practices and the components of aligned curriculum.

2) Educators who understand their local context and adoption processes can be invaluable advocates for quality instructional materials.

Developing a cohort of educator leaders to advocate for high-quality materials and model best practices for selection at the grassroots level is powerful. The New Jersey Ambassador Program gave educators the space and training to dive deeply into their own communities and investigate instructional materials policies and selection practices. This was especially valuable because educators were able to engage the decision makers that could have a real impact on their classrooms and their students.



Through my work with EdReports, I gained a better perspective on curriculum and textbook adoption in New Jersey. Within my district, I am now aware of different organizations and stakeholders that I can reach out to. I learned how important it is for educators at every level to get involved and support leaders in charge of this work to create an inclusive, comprehensive selection process.

Denise Rawding, New Jersey Ambassador

For example, one educator arranged a webinar for district leaders in four New Jersey counties so that educators could be introduced to resources and research while navigating their own materials selection processes.

States and districts play distinct roles and have unique approaches in the instructional materials selection process. That means learning the local landscape is critical to being an effective advocate. The more educators know about the process and stakeholders involved and the more tools they have to guide outreach and engagement—the more powerful they can be in pushing for change.

3) The ability to partner and collaborate with other educators strengthens learning and increases impact.

Educators noted that being able to collaborate with other New Jersey educators made a difference in what they learned and their ability to spread the message of why materials matter and the importance of comprehensive selection practices. We saw that it was possible to maximize impact by encouraging educators to share ideas and experiences. Along with the training EdReports provided, the New Jersey educators were their own sources of expertise for each other.

Two educators worked together to connect with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) that has over 200,000 members across the state. This led to an opportunity for teacher leaders to give a presentation about why materials matter at NJEA's annual conference.

High-Quality Instructional Materials Ambassadors in Your State or District

The success of the New Jersey Ambassadors Program confirmed our hypothesis that targeted training with committed educator leaders could move the needle on high-quality instructional materials awareness. If you believe your state or district could benefit from an EdReports Ambassador Program, get in touch with us by emailing contact@edreports.org.



I have gained an understanding of how different districts in New Jersey operate and select materials. I have especially grown from the chance to connect with other educators to discuss real issues in our districts and celebrate our successes.

Shanita Rapatalo, New Jersey Ambassador