

State of the Instructional Materials Market

Teachers Weigh In

How They're Using Instructional Materials
and the Supports They Need



INTRODUCTION

Having high-quality instructional materials in schools is as important as ever. The [significant struggles students have faced](#) in mathematics and reading following the COVID-19 pandemic only adds to the urgency of ensuring teachers have access to content that can support students to learn and grow. Professional learning serves as a primary avenue for schools to enhance teaching and learning, and there is a growing body of evidence that [this learning is most effective when it is curriculum-focused](#).

Implementing high-quality, instructional materials in an environment with supportive leadership—along with ongoing coaching, and professional learning—amplifies the likelihood of the materials [being used with integrity](#). Unfortunately, this is not the experience teachers report having.

[Nearly a quarter of teachers](#) say they have no curriculum-related professional learning at all, and almost a third have access to only 1–5 hours of learning per year. When teachers do participate in professional learning sessions, they often don't feel satisfied with the learning they receive. Half of teachers do not feel that their professional learning prepared them to use their district curriculum. Also, because [nearly one-third of all teachers](#) have only been using their curriculum for three years or less, it's clear that focused professional learning opportunities centered around materials implementation is an urgent need.

Additionally, pre-service preparation programs aren't always setting teachers up for success using high-quality instructional materials. Teachers who completed their teacher preparation programs within the last 10 years indicate that their pre-service training placed greater emphasis on developing their own lessons and unit plans rather than on “skillfully using and modifying provided curricula.” In fact, 60% of these teachers report that their teacher preparation program did not emphasize how to use instructional materials or cannot recall what their program emphasized (see Appendix [Figure A1](#)).

Teachers need a strong understanding of how to use their instructional materials in order to meet their students' learning needs. [When teachers don't have](#) the materials and the foundational understanding of how to leverage them, this can lead them to [create their own classroom materials, to supplement, or replace](#) the provided curricula. Notably, teachers often turn to unvetted online sources which vary in quality. A [Fordham Institute study](#) found that the “majority of these materials are not worth using.”

Further, when teachers spend [7–12 hours a week](#) seeking out materials, they have less time to spend bringing lessons to life and meeting the needs of individual students. It is equally as important for instructional leaders and coaches to have this strong understanding of how to use instructional materials and the data explored in this report makes clear that teachers want and need support with implementation from their district leadership.

In addition, this report underscores the critical need for schools and districts to meaningfully invest in high-quality instructional materials and the necessary professional learning to implement them well. The analyses draw on data from [EdReports reviews](#) and the RAND Corporation's American Instructional Resources Survey (AIRS). The findings delve into the ways teachers are using required materials, the importance of professional learning in supporting teachers to use materials well, teachers' perceptions of their materials, and who they seek and prefer to seek assistance from in addressing perceived inadequacies in curriculum.

USE OF ALIGNED INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

What are “aligned” materials?

For the purpose of this report, “aligned” refers to core comprehensive ELA, math, and science instructional materials that meet expectations for EdReports’ review criteria which aligns to college and career-ready standards and other dimensions of quality, such as supports for diverse learners. [Learn more >](#)

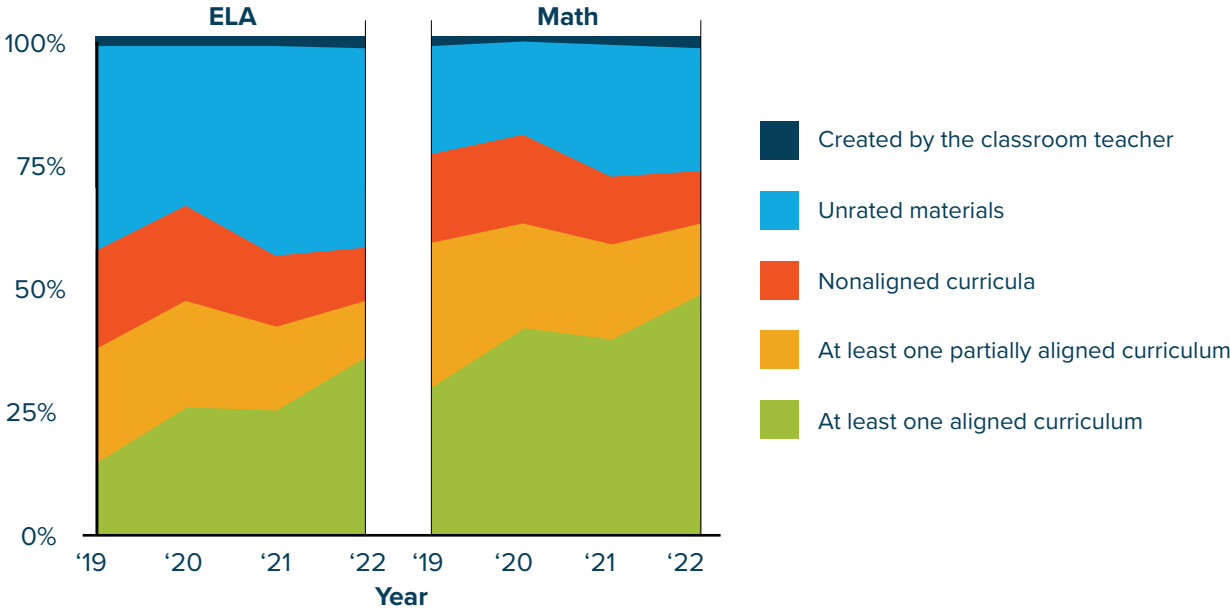
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, [many schools turned to supplemental programs](#) to address the new and unpredictable needs of remote learning. This behavior temporarily interrupted the momentum teachers were showing in using aligned materials prior to the pandemic.

What are “supplemental” materials?

Supplemental materials are instructional resources that do not claim to or attempt to fully address grade level standards and are not fully scoped and sequenced for a year of instruction.

However, in 2022, teachers’ use of aligned ELA and math curriculum at least once a week [grew 10-percentage-points and 8-percentage-points](#) respectively (see Figure 1 and Appendix Table A1). While the use of supplemental programs remained stable, more teachers are using core curriculum and that curriculum is more likely to meet our alignment criteria than in prior years. In fact, the use of aligned ELA materials has more than doubled since 2019.

Figure 1. Use of standards-aligned materials, 2019–2022



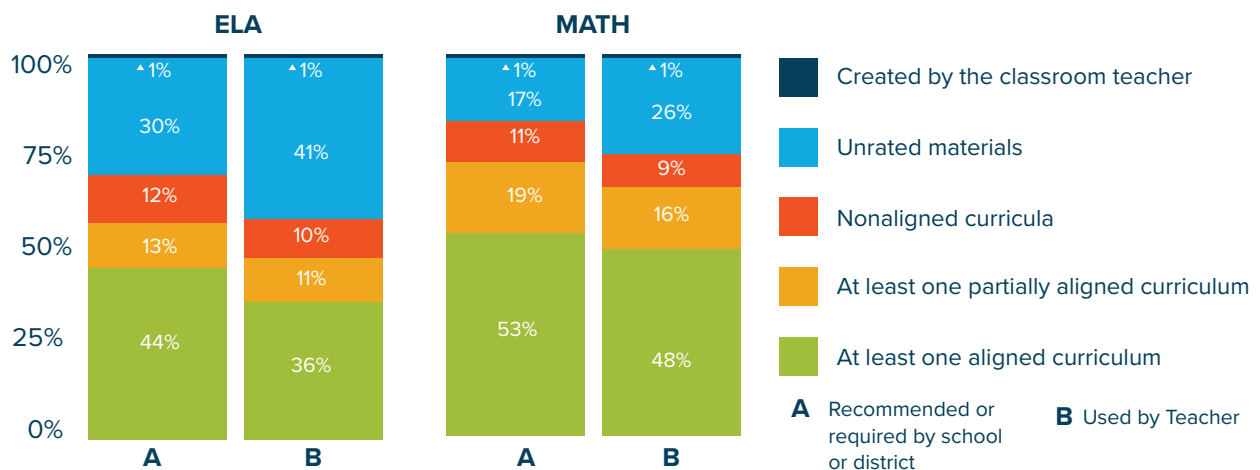
One potential factor contributing to the increase in the use of aligned materials in 2022 can be attributed to districts prioritizing high-quality instructional materials as part of their post-pandemic acceleration efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic brought an influx of funding to education with relief dollars through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). This access to unprecedented funding, a total of almost \$190 billion, likely led states and districts to make purchasing decisions that supported the increase in use of aligned programs.

We know there are other crucial contributing factors supporting the use of quality curriculum such as access to professional learning as well as ongoing coaching and the support of school leadership. Understanding the supports teachers say they need can provide districts with important information on how to ensure long term use of programs that can make a real difference for students. With almost \$72 billion remaining in unspent ESSER funds, districts and states have access to the funding necessary to provide this critical training and support to their teachers and instructional leaders.

Supporting Teachers through Curriculum-Focused Professional Learning

Many schools and districts recommend or require specific materials, which in turn should encourage teachers to use these materials. But for both ELA and math, teachers are using aligned materials at lower rates than they are being required (see Figure 2). As districts consider strategies to improve student outcomes, equipping teachers with high-quality materials should be a priority. However, requiring quality curricula is only the beginning. Selecting with transparency so teachers are part of the curriculum adoption is a first step in encouraging their use in the classroom. Then, through a comprehensive plan for implementation, professional learning for teachers and leaders on how to implement the materials should come next.

Figure 2. Standards alignment of materials that are recommended and required by schools and districts vs. the standards alignment of the materials regularly used



Are educators getting the support they need when it comes to using their instructional materials? Teachers report participating most regularly in collaborative learning with other teachers, with nearly 40% of teachers participating in this activity at least weekly (see Table 1). Professional development workshops or training follows collaborative learning, with 85% of teachers reporting some frequency of participation. Coaching is the least participated in professional learning activity, with fewer than 50% of teachers receiving any amount of coaching. Most of those who do receive coaching only report doing so one to three times per year.

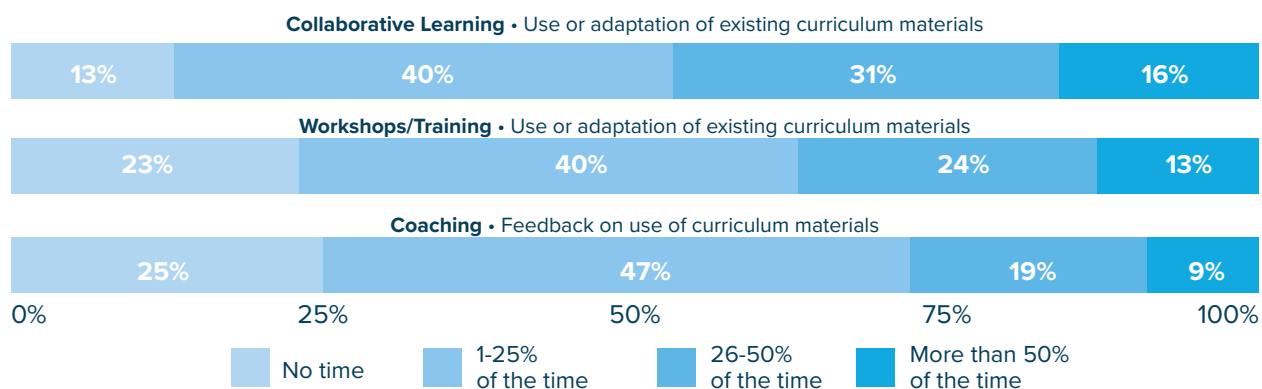
Table 1. How often teachers participated in professional learning activities intended to support their instruction

	Never	1-3 times per year	4-6 times per year	1-3 times per month	Weekly or more often
Collaborative learning with other teachers	6%	20%	14%	22%	39%
Professional development workshops or trainings	15%	43%	26%	13%	4%
Coaching	53%	25%	8%	8%	5%

When participating in professional learning, over 80% teachers indicate that the use or adaptation of their curriculum materials was a top area of focus (See Appendix Table A2). However, while a high percentage of teachers may have engaged in professional learning with some amount of focus on the use of their curriculum, the percentage of time that was curriculum-focused was quite low (see Figure 3). The majority of teachers shared that they spent 25% or less of their professional learning time on this priority. A quarter spend no learning time at all on the use of their instructional materials.

This resonates with the need for professional learning that teachers have expressed. According to a [recent study led by Rivet Education](#), “96 percent of teachers believe that the number one factor leaders should consider when planning professional learning is whether it will help teachers effectively use their instructional materials.” Additional studies confirm this as well. While generalized professional learning in a subject area can be beneficial for a teacher’s knowledge of the content, [instructional improvement efforts have the best chance of impacting student learning](#) when they help teachers learn to use their curriculum materials.

Figure 3. Professional learning time focused on use or adaptation of curriculum



The experiences educators report regarding access to professional learning connected to instructional materials suggests considerable room for improvement. Teachers clearly need more hours of curriculum-focused professional development and districts should invest in more capacity for curriculum implementation expertise.

In addition, [teacher preparation](#) programs need to prioritize learning about, identifying, and using high-quality materials so new teachers are entering classrooms with the necessary knowledge to leverage their curriculum. [Innovative efforts](#) to address curriculum literacy within [teacher preparation programs](#) are just beginning, with the aim to equip teachers with the skills to critically assess materials, determine quality, and understand how to skillfully utilize their provided curriculum rather than create their own curriculum lesson by lesson. While curriculum-literacy is an exciting and welcomed addition to educator preparation programs, the provision of quality curriculum-focused professional development for practicing teachers remains paramount.

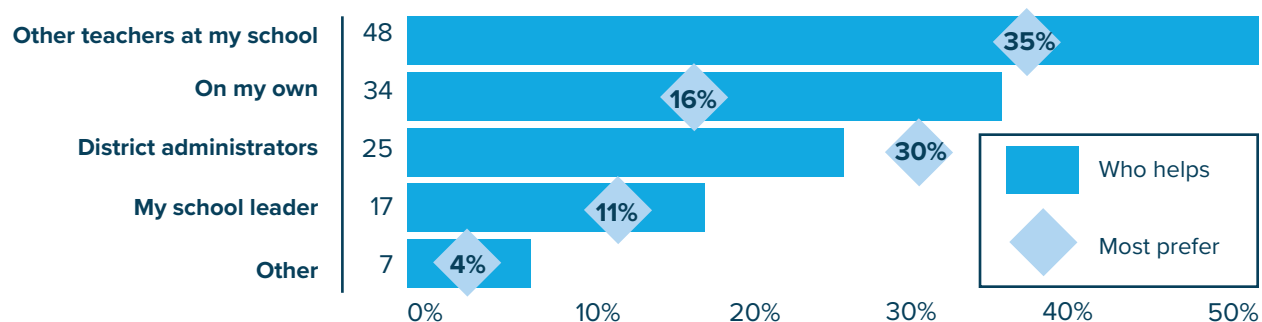
A LOOK AT TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF MATERIALS AND THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE

At EdReports, we recognize that not all materials are the same, which is why we work to provide [reports offering evidence-rich, comprehensive information](#) about a program's alignment to standards and other indicators of quality. Even when a set of materials is high-quality, there can still be a need to adapt to local priorities and students' needs, and teachers are keen at spotting potential gaps within their materials.

When asked to reflect on how well ELA and mathematics instructional materials supported a variety of purposes, teachers reported materials were most inadequate when it came to meeting the needs of diverse learners, and helping teachers provide culturally responsive instruction (see Table A3). These data reported by teachers are [echoed in a recent study](#) that found when people of color are included in materials, they are often portrayed in limited ways. When books include groups and cultures of color, they often use stereotypes, disconnect culture from individual people, or portray groups as less than or unequal to others. These perceived inadequacies may account for the discrepancy between what materials are recommended or required by the school or district and what teachers actually use regularly in their classroom as teachers attempt to provide more culturally responsive content for students (Figure 2).

Teachers receive the most help in addressing gaps in their curriculum from other teachers at their school or address these gaps on their own (see Figure 4). Only 25% of teachers report receiving help from their district leaders to address inadequacies in the provided curriculum. Yet, nearly a third of teachers indicate that district administrators are who they would prefer to receive this kind of help from—nearly twice the amount of teachers who prefer to do it on their own. These data illustrate that there is a space for districts to step in and provide more support helping teachers implement their curriculum, alleviating some of the excess burden currently being shouldered by teachers on their own and with the support of their colleagues.

Figure 4. Who helps teachers address perceived inadequacies in the curriculum they are provided by their school or district and who would the teachers most prefer helps



As we navigate the evolving challenges of post-pandemic learning, access to high-quality materials and sustained, meaningful professional learning for teachers and leaders will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping students' educational experiences. It is essential for districts to not only identify existing gaps—where teachers are not equipped with standards-aligned content—but also prioritize curriculum literacy for both leaders and teachers to build the necessary foundation to support the use of quality materials. Only then can we move closer to our shared goal of providing each and every student with the education they deserve, ensuring a brighter future for all.

CALLS TO ACTION

1. Align high-quality instructional materials with evidence-based practices.

In response to a growing [trend of states passing laws](#) mandating [evidence-based practices in education](#), it is imperative that we recognize the pivotal role of high-quality instructional materials. These laws emphasize the significance of instruction aligned with evidence-based reading and math instruction. To ensure that these policies translate into meaningful outcomes, we must urge schools and districts to integrate high-quality instructional materials as a core component of their strategy. High-quality instructional materials and ongoing professional learning are the bridge that connects policy intentions to meaningful classroom impact.

2. Follow a comprehensive materials adoption process that includes diverse stakeholders and considers meaningful implementation support, and aligned professional learning.

How districts select and implement instructional materials impacts the way curriculum is used in the classroom. At EdReports, we work with teams across the country to [support comprehensive selection processes](#) so that districts can choose the right materials for their teachers and students. In our work, we recognize the importance of including educator voice and expertise to inform decision making. Meaningful inclusion of teachers in the final selection [builds buy-in](#) and can lead to deeper engagement with the selected materials, especially when [teachers are brought in from the start](#).

It is also critical to plan for professional learning and implementation support throughout the selection process. Selecting high-quality materials is only the beginning. [Successful implementation](#) requires careful planning and adequate resources. Schools and districts must develop comprehensive implementation plans that encompass professional learning, curriculum-aligned training, and [ongoing supports](#) for educators. These plans ensure that teachers can integrate the materials into their teaching practices, and decrease the need to seek alternative resources online or make substantial modifications.

3. Select and implement materials that are high-quality and provide support for diverse learners.

During the selection process, decision making should be driven by careful consideration for local context and [instructional vision](#). This includes ensuring that materials are aligned to college and career-ready standards, while also including supports for diverse learners. Teachers want materials that offer [support for multilingual learners and provide culturally relevant content and approaches](#). But, as the data above indicates, teachers report inadequacies in their materials for attending to culturally responsive needs and for supporting multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Comprehensive and well planned adoption processes can help ensure that these critical supports are present in the chosen materials meaning teachers will spend less time searching for unvetted resources online or modifying the curriculum they have.

4. Provide Instructional Leaders Ongoing, Curriculum-Aligned Professional Learning so They Are Equipped to Support Teachers.

Ongoing, curriculum-aligned professional learning is crucial for the successful implementation of high quality materials. This investment should extend to instructional leaders, such as [principals and coaches](#), as their engagement increases the chance of materials being used with integrity. [Recent data suggests](#) that when teachers have the encouragement of school leadership, they are more likely to use high-quality, aligned materials and use them well. Professional learning should have objectives that extend to building content-specific expertise and support for diverse learners.

When asked about who helps them address inadequacies in their curriculum materials, teachers report self-addressing issues at much higher rates than they would prefer. In addition, teachers indicate they prefer to receive help from their district leaders. Hearing this call from teachers is an opportunity for districts to take charge and use their ESSER III funds to do so. The U.S. Department of Education recently extended the deadline through March 2026. The [Education Stabilization Funds Transparency Portal](#) shows just under \$72 billion remains in [unspent ESSER funds](#). We urge districts and states to utilize this unprecedented funding to adopt high quality materials and provide ongoing, aligned professional learning for teachers.

By investing in aligned materials, creating comprehensive implementation plans, and valuing the input of educators, we pave the way for a brighter future where all students have access to the resources and opportunities they deserve. Together, we can transform the educational landscape and ensure that every student is equipped for success in college, career, and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

Analyses of materials available drew upon information on the [EdReports website](#). Data for curricula series reviewed by EdReports were based on all reports published between February 11, 2015 and June 2, 2023, for 2022 copyright edition or older materials. Each high school math and middle grades science report is counted as three reports, corresponding with a traditional or integrated three-course sequence. All other reports are counted as one report each, corresponding with the specific grade-level of the report.

Analyses of materials used drew upon microlevel data from the RAND Corporation American Instructional Resources Survey (AIRS) for years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, completed by the American Teacher Panel in the spring of each year [superscript 1, 2, 3, 4]. Technical documentation is available for the [AIRS 2019](#)¹, [AIRS 2020](#)², [AIRS 2021](#)³, and [AIRS 2022](#)⁴. All analyses on AIRS microlevel data used the RAND sampling weights to produce estimates that reflect the national population of public school teachers in the United States.

For Figures 1 and 2, estimates are based on responses to two survey questions, then filtered through EdReports rating data. The survey questions are: “Among the [subject] curriculum materials in this list, select any materials you use regularly (once a week or more, on average) for your [subject] instruction this school year and any materials provided by your school or school district this school year, either as a requirement or recommendation, whether you use them or not.”

The method for calculating the percentage of teachers that use standards-aligned materials based estimates on the highest-rated curriculum teachers reported to use regularly. The categories of materials reported (at least one aligned curriculum, at least one partially aligned curriculum, nonaligned curricula, unrated materials, created by the classroom teacher) are rank ordered, whereby teachers were designated into a lower category only if they did not report using materials at a higher-order category.

1 RAND American Educator Panels, American Teacher Panel, “American Instructional Resources Survey.” RAND2019_05may_AIR0519T, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, May 5, 2019.

2 RAND American Educator Panels, American Teacher Panel, “American Instructional Resources Survey.” RAND2020_05MAY_AIR0520T, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, May 5, 2020.

3 RAND American Educator Panels, American Teacher Panel, “American Instructional Resources Survey.” RAND2021_05MAY_AIR0521T, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, May 5, 2021.

4 RAND American Educator Panels, American Teacher Panel, “American Instructional Resources Survey.” RAND2022_04APR_AIR0422T, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, April 4, 2022.

APPENDIX

Figure A1. Emphasis in teacher preparation programs completed in the past 10 years

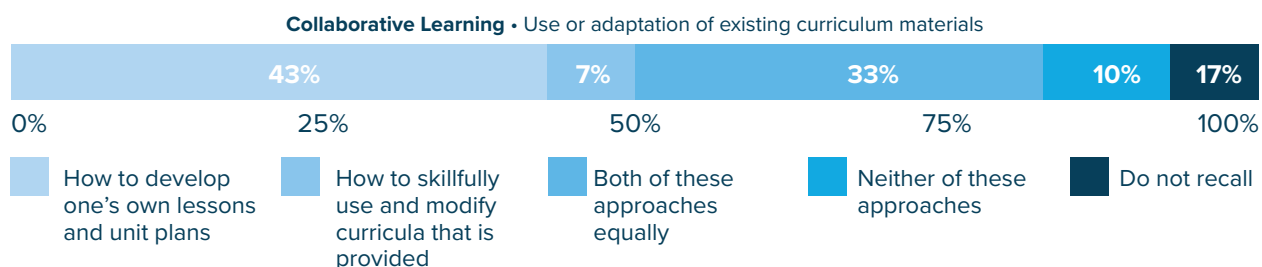


Table A1. Use of standards-aligned materials, 2019–2022

	ELA				Math			
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
At least one aligned curriculum	15%	26%	26%	36%	30%	42%	40%	48%
At least one partially aligned curriculum	23%	22%	17%	11%	29%	21%	20%	16%
Nonaligned curricula	20%	19%	14%	10%	18%	17%	13%	9%
Unrated materials	41%	33%	43%	41%	22%	19%	27%	26%
Created by the classroom teacher	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%

Table A2. Approximate proportion of professional learning time been spent on different activities

	Did not participate in this type of PD this year	No Time	1-25% of the time	26-50% of the time	More than 50% of time
Collaborative learning with other teachers					
Use or adaption of existing [subject] curriculum materials	7%	12%	37%	29%	15%
Analysis or use of student assessments	7%	12%	39%	29%	14%
Creation of [subject] curriculum materials	7%	19%	36%	25%	13%
Learning about [subject] standards, content, or pedagogy	7%	20%	44%	20%	9%
Student behavior or classroom management	7%	30%	39%	16%	8%
Supporting students' mental health	7%	33%	41%	15%	5%
Attending to the diversity of identities within my classroom	7%	40%	37%	12%	4%
Professional development workshops or trainings					
Analysis or use of student assessments	15%	16%	34%	24%	11%
Use or adaption of existing [subject] curriculum materials	15%	19%	34%	21%	11%
Learning about [subject] standards, content, or pedagogy	15%	18%	37%	19%	11%
Creation of [subject] curriculum materials	15%	30%	33%	16%	7%
Supporting students' mental health	15%	27%	38%	16%	5%
Student behavior or classroom management	15%	36%	31%	12%	6%
Attending to the diversity of identities within my classroom	15%	37%	33%	12%	4%
Coaching					
Feedback on my [subject] instructional practices	52%	9%	23%	11%	5%
Observations of my [subject] instruction	52%	10%	22%	10%	5%
Feedback on my use of my [subject] curriculum materials	52%	12%	23%	9%	4%
Feedback on my classroom management	52%	14%	22%	8%	4%

Table A3. Extent to which the ELA or math curriculum materials provided by the district or school as recommended or required to use are adequate for given purposes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not sure or N/A
Helping all students master my state’s (subject) standards	2%	3%	5%	36%	15%	17%	14%	1%
Covering content addressed by benchmark assessments	2%	3%	6%	26%	18%	20%	15%	3%
Covering content addressed by my state-mandated assessment	2%	4%	6%	25%	18%	20%	14%	4%
Providing a manageable number of topics to teach in a school year	5%	6%	9%	21%	16%	18%	15%	1%
Providing digital instructional materials for use by all students	8%	7%	9%	21%	14%	16%	16%	3%
Providing lessons that are easy for me to implement in the classroom	4%	6%	8%	23%	18%	19%	13%	1%
Provide multiple means of representation (e.g., ways to display information or aid in comprehension)	4%	7%	11%	23%	16%	17%	15%	1%
Provide multiple means of expression (e.g., ways for students to communicate)	4%	7%	13%	23%	16%	16%	14%	2%
Making learning engaging for students	5%	8%	13%	25%	17%	15%	9%	1%
Providing me with strategies to improve my instruction	5%	9%	11%	27%	16%	14%	9%	2%
Providing real-world tasks that have applications outside of school	5%	9%	13%	26%	16%	14%	9%	1%
Helping me provide culturally relevant instruction	8%	9%	14%	24%	14%	11%	10%	4%
Reflecting students’ interests or experiences	7%	10%	15%	26%	14%	12%	8%	1%
Meeting the needs of students with IEPs or 504 plans	7%	12%	14%	26%	12%	10%	10%	2%
Reflecting the diversity of identities within my classroom	8%	11%	13%	22%	14%	11%	9%	5%
Accelerating the learning of students who are performing below grade level	7%	10%	13%	31%	13%	9%	8%	1%
Meeting the needs of English learners	8%	12%	14%	23%	11%	9%	7%	9%
Helping my students identify their own biases or biases of others	13%	15%	13%	19%	10%	7%	6%	10%
Supporting students’ social and emotional learning	14%	15%	17%	20%	10%	7%	6%	5%

Note. Response categories: 1 (Completely inadequate), 4 (Adequate in some ways and inadequate in others), 7 (Completely adequate). Values do not sum to 100% due to rounding error and 7% non-response for teachers who did not indicate that their school or district recommend or require any particular curricula.

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