

The Power of **ENGAGING**
ALL EDUCATORS
During an Instructional Materials Adoption



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The first time eighth grade math teacher Brad Hoyt was a part of an instructional materials adoption, he was surprised at what the experience was like. “I was on the materials adoption committee and district leadership essentially said, ‘Hey, you’re part of the curriculum team—we’ll let you know when we pick the curriculum,’” Hoyt said.

Rather than taking an active role in the decision-making process and being able to share his own expertise from the classroom, Hoyt found that he was a messenger at best. He communicated to colleagues what had already been decided and felt little ownership of the materials selected.

When Hoyt joined the instructional materials review team for the Fife Public Schools K-8 mathematics adoption in 2016, he was skeptical about what the process would be like, but he was also hopeful that this time things could be different.

A New Way

Fife Public Schools is a small school district 35 miles south of Seattle with a growing population of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch. In August 2015, when Jennifer Burrus came on board as the Fife K-12 math facilitator, the district had not selected new math materials in a decade.

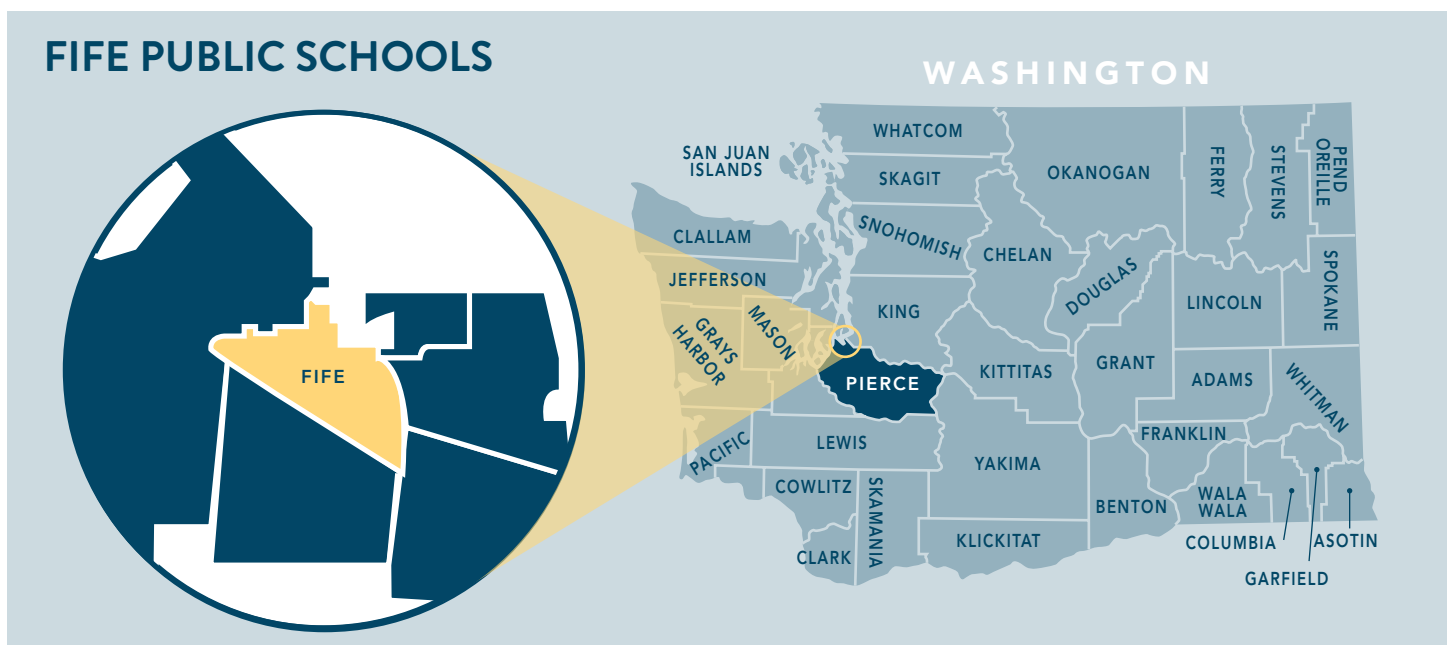
Burrus and other leaders in the district knew it was past time to choose new materials that could support teachers in meeting the demands of college and career-ready standards, but they also knew that the process of choosing those materials would be integral to classroom success. Burrus said, “We didn’t want a situation where new materials just showed up at schools out of nowhere.”

“We wanted to ensure that we not only chose the best materials for our students but that the teachers who would be using those materials had a real say in what was chosen.”

—Jennifer Burrus
K-12 MATH FACILITATOR

Burrus wanted to think about this adoption in a new way, departing from past selection processes that claimed to consider teacher perspectives but did not necessarily offer clear avenues for those perspectives to be shared and valued. She also wanted to involve as many voices as possible and knew this would require being innovative about the way educators across the district were engaged.

Burrus said, “Too many times I’d seen materials adoptions that brought in teacher voice at the end of the process or only engaged a handful of educators. I saw how this inhibited the ability to make sure the materials reflected local priorities and impeded buy-in from the teachers who would be implementing the new materials.”



Fact-Finding First

Engaging teachers in Fife Public Schools began long before an adoption committee was formed, before potential materials were ordered, and before it was even decided which grade-levels would select first. Jennifer Burrus knew the importance of placing data and evidence front and center. As she liked to say throughout the process, “We’re not in an adoption cycle. We’re in a materials review cycle.” The focus was not on the decision itself but on the information and values that would guide that decision.

Before putting together the adoption committee, Burrus spent a year reading, researching, and visiting the schools in her district to talk to teachers about the core math materials they were using, the additional resources they had access to, how they were supplementing, and what the assessments were like. Burrus was particularly interested in how teachers were making decisions based on support, and the way they were incorporating differentiation into their lessons.

First grade teacher Lisa Matson remembered sharing her thoughts during this phase: “I was relieved that the district didn’t want to dive in to such a big decision without a really clear picture of what was happening in schools and what our needs were.”

The fact-finding mission proved invaluable in identifying the biggest challenges students and teachers were facing and the design of the adoption process moving forward. Burrus learned that there was a need for additional professional learning around the standards. She also learned there were misconceptions about the role standards play in the classroom with content and practice, which helped to narrow down the technical assistance needed.

As fact-finding continued, the district also put together an instructional materials review team to lead the adoption process. The team was made up of grade-level representative teachers, instructional coaches, and principals, Burrus reached out to the state of Washington’s [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#), [Student Achievement Partners](#), and [EdReports.org](#) to work with the selection team and to support them moving forward.

Burrus’s discussions with teachers provided insight into their needs. For example, she learned about the amount of supplementing they were doing (a lot) and from where (all over: Google, Pinterest, Open Education Resources). These conversations informed the district’s understanding of the gaps teachers were trying to fill and what new materials needed to address.

The biggest takeaways from engaging teachers and principals included that the materials being used across the district varied widely from classroom to classroom and that only a few programs implemented by teachers were



About Fife Public Schools

Students:

3,600

Teachers

180

Schools

6

Free and Reduced Lunch:

46%

aligned to standards. The time spent in the schools also solidified Fife’s commitment to finding a way to engage all teachers—not just ones that were grade-level leaders or those who were leaders on the review committee. The district and the adoption committee was focused on engaging every single teacher working with math materials to prepare students to be college and career-ready.

Jennifer Burrus said, “We wanted to create as many avenues as possible for teachers to voice their wants, needs, and expertise. We thought we’d make a stronger selection choice by taking those insights into consideration, and we also believed teachers would feel a deeper investment in the materials we ultimately chose.”

Engaging Everyone

After the fact-finding work, the materials review team designed a survey to be sent out to all building-level teachers across the district in October of 2016. It had only three questions:

1. What are your needs?
2. What are your wishes/wants?
3. What math curriculum would you like us to review?

While simple, the broad, open-ended nature of the survey gave teachers space to identify what mattered most to their instruction, the qualities that would ease usability, and the need to meet the specific challenges of the students they taught. Not only that, teachers were able to highlight specific programs for the district to explore further.

The instructional materials review team (made up of teachers from each grade level and each school, including special education and interventionist representatives) poured over the results. Lisa Matson, the first grade representative from Discovery Primary School, noted how informative and revealing the feedback was. “What was powerful about the survey is that we saw how much universality there was across the district,” Matson said. “We didn’t get 100 different responses; instead we really saw the same five common threads with standards-alignment front and center.”

Standards-alignment was the most important non-negotiable that both district leaders and teachers identified for the new K-8 math materials. Working closely

Fife Public Schools Materials Adoption Timeline



October 2016

First meeting of Instructional Materials Review Team



October 2016

Surveys sent to K-5 teachers



Nov - Dec 2016

Professional learning for Review team on math standards and shifts including EdReports reviews



January 2017:

Professional learning focused on sample rubrics for evaluating instructional materials



February 2017

Review team evaluate programs for alignment and applies the Fife Filter



March 2017

Review team presents recommendations to Fife Public Schools



March 2017

District presents recommendations to the school board

with Student Achievement Partners and EdReports, the instructional materials review team received additional training in the standards and instructional shifts before diving in to prospective programs.

Instructional materials reviews from [EdReports](#) and [Louisiana Believes](#) as well as the [EQulP rubric](#) were critical external resources for the review committee as they narrowed down the potential choices based on alignment to college and career-ready standards. In addition, any specific program that a teacher had requested the committee review was also evaluated for alignment and given the same consideration as other programs the district found.

Through this process, the district narrowed a wide pool of materials down to six choices, but evaluating for alignment was only beginning.

The Fife Filter

Collecting feedback from teachers was an important step in engaging educators. However, what made the process stand out was that the district incorporated the results throughout the adoption process in a real and meaningful way. This included the creation of the “Fife Filter.”

The instructional materials review team knew the importance of standards-alignment, but as teacher Lisa Matson said, “There are things that matter in my math instruction that go beyond alignment to the standards. There are needs unique to my district and my students that I want to be certain programs address.”

In determining how to incorporate local priorities into the decision making process, the instructional materials review team turned to the expertise and knowledge of the teachers who work with students every day.

To ensure all voices were equitably weighted, the committee coded every single survey result they received. Responses that pertained to standards-alignment were set aside given that the team had already reviewed for alignment. Responses concerning professional learning were also removed but not discarded. They were kept to inform professional learning sessions for implementation. All other pieces of feedback were categorized and became the Fife Filter—a rubric built on the voices of teachers across the district.

Examples of the priorities teachers called out included: differentiation supports, a balance of whole class, small group, and independent tasks, a variety of technology

integration components, and English language learner resources and considerations.

Using the Fife Filter, the field of programs was narrowed from six down to two. “The Filter was an invaluable tool in helping us choose materials that would speak to Fife needs,” Lisa Matson said. “But it was more than just a resource to pinpoint local priorities. It was a way of ensuring teachers’ opinions were truly valued. As a teacher it’s important to me that I’m not simply having choices made for me. It’s important that when I’m asked questions, my answers actually matter.”

“There are things that matter in my math instruction that go beyond alignment to the standards. There are needs unique to my district and my students that I want to be certain programs address.”

—Lisa Matson
TEACHER

What makes the Fife Public Schools process exceptional is that not only were educators involved long before the adoption process even began (through the district’s fact-finding conversations), but the district found creative, comprehensive ways to integrate as many experiences and perspectives as possible with tangible effects on the program selected.



Impact on Implementation

The approach the instructional materials review team took made a difference in how the new materials were received and implemented across the district. Jennifer Burrus went to every school to talk to teachers and principals about how the survey results were used to inform the decision. Honoring teacher voice helped build excitement for the new program. Rather than seeing the materials as imposed from outside, educators saw it was a choice made from within their own ranks.

While the teacher survey of the initial K-8 math adoption had a 50 percent response rate, response rates on surveys for subsequent adoptions in ELA sky-rocketed to 80 percent. Once teachers saw the degree to which their feedback was used, they were more willing and eager to share their thoughts and experiences.

What's more, Fife Public Schools didn't stop engaging educators once new materials had been chosen. They continued engagement throughout rollout and into

implementation. Changing curricula is never easy for anyone: principals, teachers, or students. The district understood that the investment it made in adopting quality instructional materials would matter little if the new program was not implemented well in classrooms.

Fife put together a series of ongoing professional learning sessions to help support educators in the new program and conducted regular surveys to gauge where educators felt they needed more training. Lisa Matson said, "It made a huge difference that the district continued to be responsive even after we received the materials. They made a point to understand not just that we needed support, but to put together the kind of support we said would help the most."

According to teacher Brad Hoyt, continuous engagement is a big part of the reason that teachers are actually using the new materials and using them well. "We feel invested in the program not just because our opinions were valued, but because our knowledge of our students and our classroom expertise is reflected in the materials that were selected," said Hoyt. "I really feel like the choice was a stronger one because we were involved and we continue to be involved."

