

3 Ways Educators Can Advocate for Aligned, Coherent Curriculum

Use your knowledge, expertise, and experience to ensure that you have the resources you need to support your students throughout this challenge and beyond.

In this new world of remote learning, most districts are evaluating the resources they'll be using in the fall. There's a sense of urgency amongst school and district leaders right now to make changes and for good reason. What students and teachers need will be dependent on the learning format—students may have multiple teachers over the course of a week or unit. Without standards-aligned materials, students are unlikely to have access to coherent content. Given the possibility of a lack of consistent instructors, ever-changing settings, and an evolving schedule, materials may be the one constant both teachers and students can count on to hold learning together.

“Using a high-quality, aligned science curriculum made a difference in the support teachers had when we transitioned to remote learning. Because of our strong program, we saw less supplementing and students had more access to consistent science instruction each week.” - Renee Belisle, Colorado educator

The choices districts make about instructional materials will impact teachers and students the most. What's more, since teachers use instructional materials daily and are closest to the needs of the students in their classrooms, they have a unique lens into what works and what should be considered when selecting new programs.

Educator voice is too often missing from the areas it is needed most, and curriculum adoption is no exception. Don't wait for decision-makers to come to you. Use your knowledge, expertise, and experience to ensure that you have the resources you need to support your students throughout this challenge and beyond.

Below are three ways to effectively advocate for better curricula.

1. Know the Research

Understanding the data behind the importance of materials, how materials support student learning, and the challenges districts face in getting quality content into the hands of teachers and students is key to making your case to leaders and decision makers. Empowered with information, you'll be able to convey the urgency of investing in new materials as well as begin to offer solutions for how challenges can be addressed.

[Studies have shown](#) that students learn primarily through their interactions with teachers and content. What is chosen matters. Yet [less than 20 percent](#) of teachers are using the standards-aligned curriculum needed to support classroom success. Instead, teachers spend 7-12 hours per week searching for or creating materials, time they could instead be spending planning to support the individual needs of their students.

A RAND survey found:

- **Most digital materials are not curricula. They typically do not include lessons that build upon one another over time and are not necessarily clearly tied to academic content standards for particular grades and subject areas.**
 - **Many materials were no more than practice worksheets.**
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Alas, most digital resources used this spring [fell far short](#) of what students need. The dearth of aligned materials contributes to the [ever-widening opportunity gap](#), with students of color and those living in poverty spending less time on grade-level assignments than their white and higher income peers.

Questions to Ask	Steps to Take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What research confirms your experiences in the classroom? ■ What research surprises you? ■ What data is most important to convey to school leaders? ■ What gaps have you identified in your current instructional materials? ■ What are the top instructional considerations for your district and community? ■ What challenges does your district face in getting quality content to teachers? ■ What were the biggest barriers you faced while implementing your curriculum virtually? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read more about why materials matter and how a lack of access perpetuates inequities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ EdReports: Why Materials Matter ○ EdReports: The State of Instructional Materials Market ○ TNTP: The Opportunity Myth ○ RAND: Implementation of K–12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy ○ Fordham Institute: The Curriculum Bazaar ■ Share what you’ve learned with your colleagues. ■ Identify one or two data points that you can reference in conversations around materials. ■ Ask other teachers in your district about their experiences with your curriculum. ■ Check in with parents about their experiences with the curriculum during remote learning.

2. Know Your Context

Not only is it important to understand why materials matter, it's vital to investigate the specific materials your district is using. It will be natural to ask questions about quality (Are the materials aligned? How easy are they to use? Do they offer support for diverse learners?), but it is equally critical to understand how the materials were selected in the first place. Look into your school's or district's adoption process. Does your state have requirements around curriculum adoption? The more you know about the process, the more likely you are to have a voice in decision making.

Questions to Ask	Steps to Take
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What materials are you or your school using?■ From your experience, what is the quality and alignment of the materials you have?■ When you supplement, why are you doing so?■ How often do you supplement?■ How often does your district select new materials?■ What is the adoption process?■ Who is on the adoption team?■ What is the timeline for adoption?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Research your state's policy on instructional materials.■ Find out who makes instructional materials decisions for your district.■ Reach out to leaders and policy makers.■ Learn how often new materials are selected.■ Ask about the instructional materials budget.■ Offer to be on the next materials adoption team■ Check out EdReports latest resources to guide decision making around materials.

3. Know How to Advocate

Once you learn the research and understand your local context, advocacy will be easier than you think. Educators are natural champions for change but are sometimes intimidated by the scale of the problems they are trying to solve. Try starting small. The first step is to recognize that you are an expert in your field and an authority in the information and experiences you want to share. Then consider the steps below.

Questions to Ask	Steps to Take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Why do materials matter most to you and your students? ■ What stories and experiences can you share with decision makers that illustrate the need for better instructional materials? ■ What research can you include to support your stories and experiences? ■ What does the EdReports review of your current curriculum say? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assume positive intent. ■ Utilize the reports, resources, and services available at EdReports.org. ■ Share the research with your colleagues. ■ Reach out to decision makers. ■ Present yourself as an expert in this field. ■ Share the EdReports review of your curriculum with school or district leaders. ■ Start the conversation. ■ Ask questions. ■ Push for educator voice in the adoption process. ■ Demand excellence. ■ Encourage others to advocate with you.