

How to Articulate an Instructional Vision During a Materials Adoption

A resource to help adoption committees communicate the expectations for teaching and learning that creates a foundation for what the district considers effective instruction in a classroom.

A student's classroom experience is like a puzzle—there are many pieces that must fit together to complete a coherent picture. But how does a district identify all the pieces? Like a puzzle, it must start with the picture. The picture can be described as an instructional vision: the overarching image that provides clarity for the puzzle that focuses on ensuring all students receive an education that prepares them for college and careers. Once the vision is clear, districts, schools, and teachers can focus on the pieces of the puzzle, e.g. professional development, instructional materials, student experiences, that must come together to realize the vision.

What is this resource?

This tool can be used within a broader materials selection process. It walks the adoption committee through the steps necessary to articulate an instructional vision that will serve as an anchor throughout the work.

An instructional vision is the articulation of what teaching and learning should look like in a particular content area. While state content standards name the specifics of what students should know and be able to do, the instructional vision is the district's articulation of what students should experience daily and the overall goals for students' classroom experience. The instructional vision will guide all decisions districts, school leaders, and teachers make about classroom experiences, such as instructional materials adoptions and teacher professional development.

Why is an instructional vision important and how does it support equitable practices?

Research shows that students learn primarily through their interactions with teachers, classmates, and content.¹ This instructional core is the foundation for ensuring all students are college and career-ready and have the skills and knowledge they need to thrive. When teachers have access to high-quality, aligned instructional materials, it makes a difference in their classroom practice and the instruction students receive.²

An instructional vision helps to communicate the expectations for teaching and learning and creates a common language for what effective instruction looks like in a classroom. The vision should guide the instructional materials adoption process and serve as a critical lens through which all potential materials are viewed.

State Education Agencies provide guidance through state standards around what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. However, ensuring all students acquire mastery of the standards is an ongoing challenge. Using an instructional vision helps districts articulate expectations for *all* students' experiences which can serve as a driver for instructional materials adoption.

“Even with higher standards officially in place, too many of our most underserved students’ lessons never move [to the depth of the standards].”³

- Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO of Baltimore Public Schools, and Kati Haycock, founder of the Education Trust

How should this resource be used?

This resource is intended to be used by a district team or adoption committee. Depending on the time available, this process can be either a combination of pre-work and synchronous work, or could be completed in one longer synchronous session, i.e., a 2–3 hour session with follow up. At the completion of this process, the committee should have an instructional vision statement, specific to the content area the adoption committee is focusing on that can be utilized not only to drive the broader adoption process, but to communicate goals for student classroom experience within a content area.

Prior to articulating an instructional vision, we recommend establishing your adoption committee and analyzing your current data. If you have not yet completed these steps, check out the [Adoption Committee Recommendations](#) and the [Data Collection Tool](#) within EdReports' [6 Key Adoption Steps](#).

The Process

1. Gather Documents

Identify documents that impact education in your district and relate to the subject being reviewed. Examples include: current national and international research, state standards, guiding documents from the state department of education on instructional vision, priorities or shifts, Governor’s STEM agenda, district and school mission documents, etc..

Note: This step should be completed by the committee lead or a subset of the broader adoption committee.

2. Review Documents

Have committee members review the gathered documents to build understanding of current research and existing state and district learning goals and mission statements. Depending on the time available and the number of documents, each member can review all documents, or you can divide the documents among committee members.

Vision statements should be discipline-specific and anchored in the context of the content. Page 5 of this resource includes samples of content-specific questions for committee members to use in the review of documents to help frame their thinking. Be sure to share these questions with committee members for them to highlight or note in their document review.

Note: This step can happen as pre-work or as a team during a materials-adoption meeting.

3. Consider Characteristics of Effective Vision Statements

Read [sample vision statements](#) to get a sense of the goal. Review the following characteristics of effective vision statements as a committee to ground your drafting process.

Strong vision statements should:

- Focus on the student experience and details of what student learning looks like in action;
- Be embedded in the specific context of the content;
- Align with state standards, but should not be limited to a review of the standards documents;
- Be research-based and cited;
- Prepare *all* students for college and career-readiness;
- Include instructional implications which lead to critical thinking, problem solving, and transferable knowledge.

4. Brainstorm Ideas and Identify What to Include in the Vision Statement

We recommend dedicating time for the committee to brainstorm ideas for what components should live in the vision statement. Depending on the number of committee members you can accomplish this in multiple ways. Examples include:

- Use a piece of chart paper or create a Google document for each question. Have committee members add their responses to each question page. Have a facilitator look for common themes among questions.
- Have each committee member write down their top 3–5 ideas on individual sticky notes and stick them on shared chart paper or a [Jamboard](#). Have a facilitator organize each idea by category.
- Have each committee member share their top three ideas.

Once all committee members have shared their thinking, identify areas of significant overlap and/or disconnect. Chart these so that the full group can see them and come to final consensus around what points should be included in the vision statement.

5. Articulate the Vision Statement

Once you have identified what is most important to include, your committee should draft the statement. This can be done in multiple ways. Examples include:

- Have each committee member draft a statement and share it with the group. Decide on one statement to move forward with and edit together.
- Assign one member (or a small subset of the committee) to draft the statement. Share with the full group for editing.

Once you have the draft statement, determine which stakeholders outside of your adoption committee you will ask for feedback. Identify a process for sharing the statement and receiving feedback. Determine how you will reconcile feedback (*will one person be the final editor, will a smaller subset of the committee edit, etc.*). Finalize the language of the vision statement and use it to guide the next steps of the instructional materials adoption process.

Content Resources

Content-specific research and understanding should drive the development of an instructional vision. These questions are only samples of what the adoption committee should review when considering the overall goals for student learning.

English Language Arts

English language arts education should develop students' ability to read, write, and discuss. Across their education, students must learn to read and write, to become critical consumers of what they read, and be able to express themselves through writing and discussion.

Questions to consider during document review:

- What is our overarching goal for ELA instruction?
- How does literacy instruction need to evolve across grade bands?
- What is the district or state philosophy on literacy? How does this philosophy impact classroom experiences?
- What does research tell us about how students learn to read? What are the implications for instruction when students are learning to read and write and how will that change once students have mastered decoding and encoding?
- What types of texts are students reading, writing about, and discussing? How are the texts organized over the course of the year and across grade levels?
- What types of topics are students learning about through the texts they read? How are the topics organized to build knowledge over the course of the year and across grade levels?
- How are students engaging with those texts and topics?
- How are students developing their ability to communicate effectively in writing and discussion?

Mathematics

Mathematics education should support students in building understanding and sense-making and in applying mathematics to create solutions for various situations. Students' mathematical development is promoted by focusing on important, grade-level concepts and skills, connecting the concepts and skills within and across grade levels, and applying the concepts and skills within various contexts.

Questions to consider during document review:

- What are our overarching goals for mathematics instruction?
- What is our philosophy for how students learn mathematics? What are the implications for the type of student experiences in math classrooms?
- How should students engage and demonstrate proficiency with the Standards for Mathematical Practice?
- What connections do we want to see students make between the Standards for Mathematical Practice and content?

- How does mathematical understanding build over time? How do students understand the coherence between mathematical concepts and skills?
- How are students applying mathematical skills and concepts in novel and open-ended ways?

Science

Science education should help students experience science as it is practiced and experienced to make sense of phenomena in both the natural and designed world, with a focus on building understanding and application of content through engagement with the three dimensions of science: Disciplinary Core Ideas, Crosscutting Concepts, and Science and Engineering Practices.

Questions to consider during document review:

- What is our overarching goal for science instruction?
- What mechanisms should drive student learning? (e.g. *Is student learning anchored in explaining phenomena and/or solving problems?*)
- How should students engage with science and engineering practices? What do we want to see regarding practices designed to integrate with content and how those are experienced over time?
- How should students engage with cross-cutting concepts? What do we want to see regarding cross-cutting concepts designed to integrate with content and how those are experienced over time?
- How should students engage in “doing” science? (collaboratively, making thinking visible, revising thinking together, etc.) How do students’ ideas play a role in instruction and the classroom experience?
- How important is it that science integrates with other content areas? (Examples: *math, engineering, technology, computer science, ELA*)

References

¹ Chingos and G. Whitehurst. Choosing Blindly: Instructional Materials, Teacher Effectiveness and the Common Core. (Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, April 2012)

² TNTP. (2018). The Opportunity Myth. Retrieved from: <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>

³ Santelises, S. B., & Haycock, K. (2017, May 18). The Window of Assignments. Retrieved from <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/the-window-of-assignments/>