

CALL TO ACTION

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Focus adult learning on high-quality instructional materials

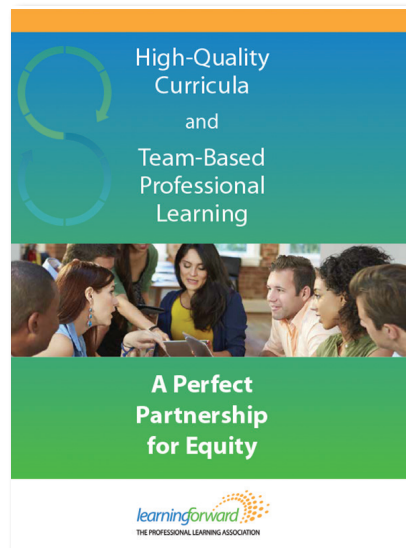
At Learning Forward, we are embracing an emphasis on the implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

As always, our work centers on building the capacity of all educators to ensure all students experience excellent teaching and learning. Because research has helped to clarify precisely *where* teachers need to increase their capacity for maximum impact, we are making an emphasis on instructional materials more explicit in our work.

We are making this commitment for the same reason we are making equity more explicit in our work: We want to prioritize and be explicit about the strategies and values that have the most potential to help students.

Two compelling concepts drive Learning Forward's emphasis on the importance of high-quality instructional materials as the most critical content for professional learning.

First, a growing body of evidence underscores the importance of teachers using highly rated instructional materials. You'll see various impact studies highlighted throughout this issue. We were excited to showcase



the evidence in our recent paper, *High-Quality Curricula and Team-Based Professional Learning: A Perfect Partnership for Equity*. (To access the paper, visit www.learningforward.org/perfectpartnership.)

Second, effective professional learning is classroom-focused, job-embedded, sustained, and collaborative.

NEED FOR DEEP LEARNING

While we sometimes call our emphasis on instructional materials

a pivot, there is nothing new about focusing educator professional learning on content knowledge or aligning learning with a district's instructional framework, scope and sequence, or college- and career-ready standards. Learning Forward has published volumes of tools and practical insights on how to support educators in the implementation of student standards.

In fact, the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) include an entire standard — the Outcomes standard — centered around the belief that educator professional learning, to be effective, needs to focus on the content students are learning and the materials in use in a system.

However, this kind of meaningful focus on what teachers teach still isn't the norm in every district. In our recent work with mentor teachers, we found educators hungry to offer deep learning tied to the instructional materials teachers are charged with teaching.

School systems expect new teachers to have content expertise and convey it effectively, yet the knowledge and skills can take time to develop. In fulfilling

our obligation to support all teachers in having the capacity to teach content to every student, selecting high-quality instructional materials is an easy step to take.

High-quality educative materials offer built-in support. Not only do they provide teachers with guidance for semester and yearlong planning, but they also provide the sequence for teaching key standards, concepts, and skills. Such materials provide the rationale as well as the explanations behind those content areas where writers anticipate students may struggle or educators may benefit.

The support built into great materials is by no means sufficient, however. Our vision for the processes that educators use to study and discuss the materials and content they use with students has similarities to Japanese lesson study. This process of deep and collective study and revision takes weeks.

Over the course of a year, educators may complete a small number of these cycles, leaving plenty on the agenda for the following year. Data and student needs guide educators in deciding where to invest learning time. It could conceivably take five to six years to work through every unit or lesson and, at that point, staff change, context shifts, and expectations may be adjusted and the cycle repeats itself.

This is why we can't imagine a time when the instructional materials would not be the focus for educator learning. Leaders who embrace this process — and support it with sufficient resources — recognize how incredibly complex teaching is and the expertise it requires.

There are certainly other priorities that surface when systems and schools prioritize learning needs. Some schools seeking to leverage research on social



and emotional learning may decide that investing in restorative practices is essential as part of their curriculum implementation efforts. Others may identify differentiated instruction as a high priority.

If mastery of standards and content is the goal, a sole focus on instructional materials isn't the only ground to cover. Districts may recognize the need, for example, to address culturally responsive teaching with educators in order to meaningfully select and implement materials and offer support to educators.

TAKE ACTION

As you and your colleagues consider in what ways your team or district might need to shift how you prioritize adult learning in your context to focus more explicitly on instructional materials, here are three suggested actions:

Learn more. If this information is new to you, familiarize yourself with the research — this issue of *The Learning*

Professional and the sources referenced give you a great start to develop your knowledge base.

Assess. Examine the professional learning you plan or choose and assess the degree to which it aligns with these recommendations. Also, explore the materials you use with students and how they align with quality criteria available from multiple sources, such as EdReports (www.edreports.org) and EQuIP (<https://achieve.org/our-initiatives/equip/equip>).

Discuss. The integration of curriculum and professional learning is an optimal opportunity for educators in what are often separate departments to join hands to strengthen the coherence of teaching and learning. Together, look at your system, school, and classroom impact data to decide if there are smart moves you can make to address your most pressing student learning challenges.

When teachers invest ongoing, dedicated time to studying high-quality materials, they establish the foundation for transferring their learning into powerful lessons that can be differentiated and personalized to address individual student success. High-quality lessons that motivate, engage, and challenge students enable them to achieve the success we desire for them.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

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