

The Imperative of High-Quality Instructional Materials

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Instructional materials are one of the most important tools educators use in the classroom to enhance student learning. With novice and expert teachers alike, instructional materials significantly shape the focus and coherence of their courses. Alignment of those materials to competencies, whether established locally or through the Oklahoma Academic Standards, ensures that students are given every opportunity to learn and be able to do what is expected of them especially when those learning experiences are supported by strong instruction, deep engagement, and consistently high expectations for all students.¹

When any of these features—focus, coherence, and alignment—are weak, the burden often rests upon the teacher to supplement those weaknesses. Teachers are left to create, search for, and sometimes purchase materials on nights and weekends and using their own money. This practice is not equitable, not sustainable, and simply inconsistent with the guarantee public education makes to Oklahoma families and students.

Inconsistent access to high-quality instructional materials impacts student learning in schools across the country.

Though the burden is on the teacher, the harm is done to the student. According to a recent report by *The New Teacher Project*, students spend 581 of 720 available hours each school year on assignments that are not high quality, and students of color and those from low-income backgrounds were less likely to be in classrooms with grade-appropriate assignments. As a result, historically marginalized students continue to show less achievement. The implications are many: access to advanced courses, dropout rates, admissions and scholarships, college graduation rates, and even mental and physical health are all negatively impacted.

This apparent achievement gap is actually an opportunity gap in which access to courses and the learning experiences brought about with high-quality instructional materials are foreclosed to students.² When students do not succeed through key transition points from grade to grade, when they are not given the opportunity to learn in an ambitious, responsive environment, and when targeted interventions and enrichments are not readily available, access to high-quality instructional materials is certainly a critical aspect of the systemic resource deficiencies that cannot go ignored.³

As school leaders and policy makers search for opportunities to improve educational outcomes, a great deal of energy has been placed on rigorous academic standards. Certainly, academic standards are necessary; they serve to articulate high expectations for students and a progression upon which course materials can be built from that ensures deep and comprehensive knowledge and practices. Yet, they are not sufficient; instructional materials that are misaligned, incomplete, or even faulty have a dramatic impact on the experience students have and their likelihood to meet their full academic potential.



With high-quality instructional materials, Oklahoma teachers can bring lessons to life and inspire their students to learn and grow.

In contrast, research shows that having access to high-quality instructional materials helps create new opportunities to strengthen teacher's content knowledge.⁴ When teachers are stronger in their content knowledge, they are able to identify high-quality materials for classroom use, discover ways to adapt lessons for their students, and increase their confidence in classroom instruction. As a result, students gain months of learning when teachers use stronger instructional materials.

Perhaps surprising some, research has also shown that adopting high-quality materials is not only effective, but also cost-neutral.⁵ Given that teachers who are not creating, searching for, and purchasing instructional materials, reports of job satisfaction increase and turnover decreases, the adoption of high-quality instructional materials might actually save districts money as teacher retention improves.

Ensuring Access to High-Quality Instructional Materials Must Be Systemic

The Oklahoma State Department of Education is committed to ensuring that every teacher and every student has access to high-quality instructional materials. With House Bill 3466—passed in 2020—a new model for textbook selection went into effect that communicates to publishers and education stakeholders the expectation that low-quality materials will no longer be tacitly approved for purchase by Oklahoma school districts.⁶

New review committees consisting of subject area experts will carefully review materials within their discipline using a comprehensive rubric that assigns all materials to one of three new tiers that indicate the quality of the instructional materials. Reviewers will apply three gateways sequentially to ensure the evaluations report to the field the extent to which materials are focused, coherent, and usable by educators. An excerpt from HB 3466 below describes the tiers and structure of the rubrics:

“The rubric shall contain a three-tiered rating system in which the first tier shall be labeled ‘Exemplifies Quality’, the second tier shall be labeled ‘Approaching Quality’, and the third tier shall be labeled ‘Not Representing Quality’. The rubric shall also include, but not be limited to, criteria for alignment to subject matter standards such that all standards are present and treated with the appropriate depth to support students in learning the skills and information contained in the subject matter standards, as well as usability for teacher planning, learning, assessment and differentiated instruction.”

In Oklahoma, all districts are able to purchase instructional materials that are best for their local communities since those closest to students are well positioned to decide which instructional



materials are appropriate for their district and classrooms. To support local districts, insights into the materials that raise concerns for aspects of instructional materials that are known to be more equitable and effective will be documented in the rubrics and clearly communicated through the three-tiered rating system.

As support and guidance is developed, district adoption teams will have more actionable information than ever before to ensure the substantial investments into instructional materials are in fact likely to make a positive impact in the lives of students and teachers. To learn more about the review process, statewide adoption, and local adoptions, visit <http://sde.ok.gov/textbooks>.

Endnotes

¹ TNTP. (2018). *The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It*. https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_The-Opportunity-Myth_Web.pdf

² U.S. Department of Education. (2013). *For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*, Washington, D.C. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/equity-excellence-commission-report.pdf>

³ O'Day, J. A. & Smith, M. S. (2019). *Opportunity for All: A Framework for Quality and Equality in Education*. Harvard Education Press. Cambridge, MA.

⁴ National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. (2020). *High-Quality Curriculum Implementation Summer 2020 Connecting What to Teach with How to Teach It*. Retrieved at <https://www.niet.org/assets/1da4c1fbd6/high-quality-curriculum-implementation.pdf>.

⁵ Boser, U., Chingos, M. M., & Straus, C. (2014). *The Hidden Value of Curriculum Reform: Do States and Districts Receive the Most Bang for Their Curriculum Buck?* Washington: Center for American Progress. Retrieved at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2015/10/14/122810/the-hidden-value-of-curriculum-reform>.

⁶ Oklahoma State Legislature. (2020 Regular Session). Retrieved at <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb3466&Session=2000>.

