



The Path to High Quality Instruction

Aligning Instructional Vision, Teacher Support, and Instructional Materials

Achieving meaningful improvements in student outcomes requires a shift from isolated interventions to a comprehensive, systemic approach. Effective educational transformation is grounded in three interconnected pillars: a shared vision for high-quality instruction, teacher support aligned with best practices, and instructional materials designed to enhance learning outcomes.

This white paper explores how aligning these elements creates a continuous improvement cycle that strengthens teacher efficacy and drives sustainable success for all students.

Changing the Trajectory of Student Success

Step into an elementary school classroom, and you'll see teachers expertly navigating multiple subjects—math, reading, social studies, science, and more. These educators often shift gears rapidly, like athletes switching sports mid-game: “Put down the football, pick up the soccer ball.” Each subject demands unique expertise, strategies, and preparation to teach effectively.

The national emphasis on the Science of Reading offers valuable lessons. Reform efforts in reading instruction demonstrated how systemic changes grounded in evidence-based techniques could lead to measurable improvements. These reforms were challenging, particularly for teachers tasked with transforming their practices. Still, they delivered a critical insight: research-backed methods lead to better student learning. Moreover, training teachers to implement these practices effectively creates demand for and increased use of high-quality instructional materials.

This realization underscores the need to rethink how meaningful classroom change is driven—especially when teachers are expected to excel across multiple subjects.

Reimagining the Traditional Instructional Cycle

Districts have relied on curriculum adoption cycles for decades to drive instructional change. While this approach provides short-term updates to materials, it often fails to deliver lasting improvements in student outcomes. Teachers are asked to adjust to new programs without sufficient training or support regarding the reasons behind instruction shifts or how new resources will be used to make the instructional shift. This lack of clarity leads to resistance, low implementation fidelity, and a cycle of underwhelming results.



Research and experience point to a better path integrating shared vision, capacity building, and evidence-based tools into an ongoing reflection, adaptation, and improvement process.

The Three Pillars of Sustainable Educational Impact

1 Establishing the Foundation for High-Quality Instruction

Sustainable improvement begins with a clear and collective understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like and why it matters. District leaders, school administrators, and educators must work together to define expectations for teaching and learning.

- Collaborative Vision Development: Districts can take inspiration from initiatives like Texas's "Strong Foundations" grant program and North Carolina's "Portrait of a Graduate" as good examples of how to ensure alignment across all levels of the district. Educators are more motivated and equipped to deliver results by linking classroom instruction to overarching goals.
- Establishing a Foundation for Success: Teachers need more than directives—they need support to enhance their content knowledge and instructional practices. Bridging these gaps through professional learning ensures educators feel confident and capable of implementing change.

2 Selecting and Implementing High-Quality Instructional Materials

The effectiveness of instructional materials depends on their quality and how well they align with evidence-based teaching practices and a district's instructional vision.

- Evidence-Based Selection Process: Districts should adopt a structured approach to committee development, material selection criteria, and material review to ensure the selection leads to the selection of a truly High-Quality Instructional Resource that aligns with the district's vision and the needs of the students and educators.
- Integrating Professional Learning: Materials alone are not sufficient without accompanying professional development. Teachers need training to leverage these tools effectively and adapt them to diverse classroom needs.

3 Sustaining and Improving High-Quality Instruction

Continuous improvement requires regular evaluation of both teacher practices and student outcomes. By embedding cycles of reflection and collaboration into instructional planning, districts can ensure strategies remain effective and responsive.

- Job-Embedded Coaching and Collaboration: Ongoing support, such as lesson modeling and professional learning communities, helps educators refine their techniques and share best practices.
- Data-Informed Decision Making: Formative assessments, supported by technology, provide real-time insights into student progress, enabling educators to adjust instruction for maximum impact.

Establishing the Foundation for High-Quality Instruction

Improving instruction requires thoughtful, strategic action rooted in a deep understanding of best practices in specific content areas. To maximize student achievement, educators and leaders must be aligned on what high-quality instruction looks like and how to implement it effectively. With this clarity, efforts to drive improvement may continue, leaving gaps in teaching and learning.

A compelling example comes from districts in Texas, where state-supported grants have facilitated the collaborative definition of high-quality instruction that they called Strong Foundations. These initiatives have established shared expectations for effective grade-level teaching, meaningful classroom discussions, and actionable assessment and data analysis practices. These districts are laying the groundwork for transformative instructional improvements by uniting all stakeholders around a shared vision.

Another example of vision-building is the work we have seen several states and many districts have done to develop a "Portrait of a Graduate." These efforts establish a unified set of outcomes that students are expected to achieve by the end of their K-12 education. However, defining high-quality instruction furthers this concept by embedding those broader outcomes into daily classroom strategies. It combines the what, defined in the Portrait of a Graduate, with the how, defined in the instructional vision. It ensures that every decision and practice—whether in teaching, intervention, or assessment—directly contributes to achieving the district's overarching goals.

Educators who are aligned on the importance of high-quality instruction and clearly understand best practices in their content areas are far better positioned to implement strategies that drive student success. This clarity translates into more effective teaching and learning, creating a cohesive and impactful approach to achieving educational goals.

Equally important is understanding the strengths and needs of teachers, who ultimately drive improvement in the classroom. Teachers are at the heart of instructional success, yet many need more content knowledge and familiarity with evidence-based practices. These gaps can undermine confidence, hinder differentiation, and reduce the effectiveness of even the best instructional materials adopted.

To overcome these challenges, leaders must invest in targeted, ongoing professional learning that helps teachers:

- Strengthen their understanding of specific content.
- Gain mastery of evidence-based instructional practices.
- Build the confidence needed to adapt and innovate in their classrooms.

When educators clearly understand best practices and are equipped with the tools to implement them, resistance to change decreases, and momentum for improvement grows. This ensures that instructional materials are adopted and used effectively to meet students' diverse needs.

Selecting and Implementing High-Quality Instructional Materials

Selecting aligned instructional materials is crucial in supporting teachers who already understand the principles of high-quality instruction, but there are other solutions. High-quality materials are powerful tools, but their impact depends on the educators' knowledge, skills, and strategies. Teachers with solid content knowledge and a deep understanding of proven instructional strategies can transform these materials into meaningful student learning experiences.



The goal of high-quality instruction is not just the adoption of excellent resources but empowering teachers to leverage these tools effectively, ensuring that every student benefits from expert teaching and thoughtfully designed materials.

The process begins with a structured and intentional approach to material selection, rooted in rigorous academic standards and local priorities. Districts benefit from forming a dedicated selection committee that includes those who have helped define the district's instructional vision. This committee's first task is to develop a rubric grounded in research and evidence-based practices, which serves as a clear framework for evaluating potential HQIM options. Districts can ensure the selected resources align with their educational goals by anchoring the process in research and shared priorities.

Start by forming a selection committee and developing a rubric. This committee, ideally involving those who helped define the district's instructional vision, creates a rubric rooted in research and evidence-based practices. Many nationally available material option rubrics are available free of charge. However, each district brings its own needs and vision of instruction, and these rubrics should be used as tools to build a materials evaluation rubric specific to the district's needs. To ensure the selection of high-quality instructional materials that fully align with pedagogical best practices, all selection committee members must be trained in the content best practices outlined in Pillar One.

A high-quality selection committee should employ a "long and short list" method to select the most effective instructional materials. This process begins by creating a long list of materials and providers that align with the district's instructional vision. All materials on the long list should be assessed during the review period, with resource providers delivering brief overview presentations. These presentations enable committee members to understand each program's offerings clearly and evaluate its potential alignment with district goals.

Following this initial review, the committee narrows the options to a short list of two or three programs. These shortlisted materials undergo a deeper evaluation, including comprehensive presentations and sample lessons provided by the resource providers. Teachers on the committee should have the opportunity to implement these sample lessons in their classrooms. Piloting the materials in realistic classroom settings is essential for gathering actionable insights, ensuring that the resources meet instructional needs, and determining their impact on teaching and learning.

The final selection should be guided by the district's established rubric, allowing the committee to evaluate the shortlist objectively based on clearly defined criteria. This structured, evidence-based process ensures that the selected instructional materials align with the district's vision and support effective implementation and improved student outcomes.

Finally, Once materials are chosen, focus on training and support. Teachers equipped with more substantial content knowledge and evidence-based strategies can concentrate on effectively using the resources. Ongoing professional development and implementation support ensure consistency and fidelity, fostering long-term success. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive framework for integrating HQIM into classrooms.



Sustaining and Improving High-Quality Instruction

Maintaining instructional quality demands a commitment to continuous improvement, professional collaboration, and regular engagement with data. Like all other professionals, teachers deserve opportunities to refine their practice, observe high-quality examples, and grow through ongoing feedback and support cycles. This approach not only enhances instructional effectiveness but ensures educators remain equipped to adapt to evolving research and the needs of their students.

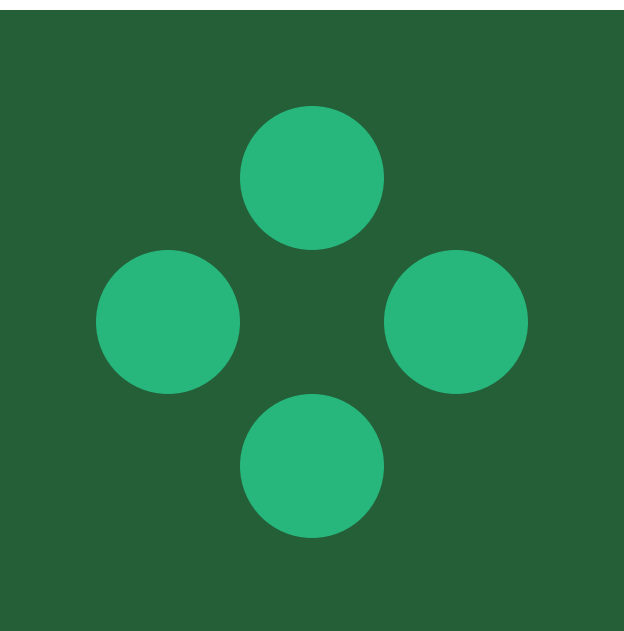
At the heart of continuous improvement is professional learning that prioritizes lesson modeling, job-embedded coaching, and data-informed decision-making. High-quality lesson modeling allows teachers to see effective instructional practices, mainly using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). Individualized coaching addresses specific needs, offering personalized guidance that fosters meaningful growth. AI-supported formative assessments further enhance this process by providing real-time insights into student performance, enabling teachers to tailor their instruction precisely.

Equally important is embedding cycles of reflection and collaboration into instructional planning. Professional learning communities (PLCs) allow educators to share best practices, support one another, and adapt their methods based on shared insights and student performance data. These collaborative environments encourage adaptability, ensuring instructional strategies evolve alongside changing classroom needs and district goals.

Regular reflection and data analysis are crucial in sustaining this improvement cycle. By identifying trends in student learning through formative assessments and quarterly reviews, teachers can refine their instructional approaches and celebrate progress. Shared learning opportunities—focused on content-specific strategies and deepening understanding of HQIM—drive collective improvement and create a culture of innovation.

This ongoing modeling, coaching, and reflection process ensures that instructional quality is achieved and continuously enhanced, providing every student with the best possible education.

Districts can empower educators to deliver impactful, responsive teaching that adapts to their classrooms' diverse needs by deliberately focusing on professional growth.



Transforming education to maximize student achievement requires a deliberate commitment to increasing teacher efficacy. At Carnegie Learning, we understand that achieving meaningful improvement starts with a clear vision for high-quality instruction bolstered by research-backed instructional materials, professional learning, and continuous support through coaching and collaboration. We are not just a provider of high-quality instructional materials—we are the high-quality instruction partner districts need, and teachers want to partner with.

As the science of reading movement demonstrates, systemic change is possible when educators have the right tools, aligned strategies, and support to implement evidence-based practices. This alignment ensures that teaching is effective and responsive to students’ diverse needs. Teaching subjects like reading, math, and world languages demands specialized knowledge and approaches, and every teacher deserves the resources and training necessary to excel in their practice.

Carnegie Learning’s model reimagines traditional curriculum adoption cycles by focusing on building teacher capacity as the cornerstone of instructional success. Our approach moves beyond simple material adoption, embedding professional learning, real-time data analysis, and job-embedded coaching into every implementation stage. This ensures that educators use high-quality materials and transform them into impactful learning experiences for students.

By uniting shared goals, data-driven decision-making, and sustained support, Carnegie Learning empowers districts to break free from ineffective cycles and create continuous improvement systems. The result is lasting gains in teacher efficacy and student achievement, with classrooms that inspire and foster success at every level.

All Students Deserve 60 Minutes of Grade Level Instruction Everyday



Establish the Instructional Foundation

Set a strong foundation throughout the system, with all stakeholders, to create the vision and demand for HQIM so that the implementation sticks



Select and Implement an HQIM

Guarantee equitable access to high quality instructional materials and practices for ALL students through a systems-wide HOIM adoption and implementation



Sustain High Quality Instruction

Deepen content knowledge and expand pedagogical skills, supporting system and building leaders, instructional coaches, and classroom educators

Checklist for Transforming Education Through Teacher Efficacy and High-Quality Instruction

1. Establish the Foundation for High-Quality Instruction

- ☐ Define a clear vision and mission for high-quality instruction across the district.
- ☐ Develop a best practices framework to align all educational tiers.
- ☐ Engage teachers and administrators in onboarding sessions to ensure alignment with the vision and mission.
- ☐ Build teacher capacity through professional learning that deepens content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

2. Select and Implement High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)

- ☐ Rubric Development: Create a district-specific rubric selecting and or criteria that match the district's instructional vision and needs.
- ☐ Long and Short List Method:
 - ☐ Identify a long list of potential providers through overview presentations and sample reviews.
 - ☐ Narrow to 2–3 programs for in-depth evaluation, including sample lessons and/or classroom piloting.
- ☐ Data-Driven Selection: Analyze shortlisted programs against the rubric to guide the final decision.
- ☐ Comprehensive Training: Develop a plan for implementation training and ongoing professional learning to ensure fidelity and practical use.

3. Sustain High-Quality Instruction with Continuous Improvement

- ☐ Provide job-embedded coaching to support teachers in applying HQIM effectively in their classrooms.
- ☐ Use AI-supported formative assessments to gather real-time insights on student learning and instructional impact, allowing for adjustments per classroom and per student.
- ☐ Analyze trends through quarterly data reviews, refining instructional practices and celebrating progress.
- ☐ Facilitate professional learning communities (PLCs) to encourage collaboration, sharing of best practices, and adaptability to evolving needs.
- ☐ With ongoing coaching, model high-quality lessons to demonstrate effective strategies and use of HQIM.