

New Report Finds Early Curriculum Adoption Missteps Drive Later Challenges

EdReports and The Decision Lab survey more than 250 district leaders and offer guidance to strengthen adoption processes and improve classroom use of high-quality instructional materials.

Raleigh, NC — September 16, 2025 — [EdReports](#), an independent nonprofit that provides free reviews of instructional materials, and The Decision Lab (TDL), an applied research and innovation firm, today released [Beyond Selection: Rethinking How Districts Adopt Curriculum](#), a joint report examining challenges in curriculum adoption and offering actionable steps for improvement.

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Drawing from a national survey of more than 250 district leaders and educators, the report finds that while most leaders express confidence in selecting high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), additional support in earlier stages of the process, such as defining needs and outlining the adoption steps, may be crucial to preventing common downstream challenges with consensus-building, stakeholder buy-in, and implementation.

“The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores highlight the urgent need to improve student outcomes, and high-quality instructional materials are a key ingredient in this work,” said Eric Hirsch, CEO of EdReports. “Curriculum is one of the most powerful tools we have, but its impact depends on how teachers use it with their students. Despite broader access to HQIM, instruction can remain stagnant without strong support and educator buy-in.”

Key Report Findings

- **Confidence in selection does not ensure classroom success.** Seventy-two percent of district leaders report confidence in choosing HQIM, but only 59% have processes to evaluate implementation effectiveness, and just 60% pilot curricula before adoption.
- **Early gaps in the adoption process drive later problems.** Districts report fewer needs for external support with foundational tasks like determining needs and establishing processes, yet later cite their biggest struggles in consensus and implementation.
- **Stakeholder engagement remains a challenge.** Nearly half of leaders cite stakeholder buy-in as their top challenge, yet only 18% express interest in external support in this area—pointing to the sensitive dynamics districts navigate in managing community and educator voices.

- **Districts want targeted support.** While only 14% are open to external help in making final decisions, many welcome support with data analysis (55%), curriculum evaluation (41%), and implementation logistics (40%).

Steps to Strengthen Curriculum Use

The report goes beyond analysis to offer concrete steps districts can act on. It calls for laying strong foundations early by understanding infrastructure and compliance needs, planning for implementation from the start, and centering educator voice while building broad stakeholder consensus.

Recent RAND data back up these priorities. Teachers who used one curriculum without major modifications were more likely to say it met standards, prepared students for tests, and fit their students' needs. They also pointed to principals' active role in selection and implementation—evidence that leadership engagement and early planning are key to making high-quality materials work in classrooms.

“Our report findings give the K-12 field clearer insight into the trade-offs district leaders face when making adoption decisions with limited resources,” said Maraki Kebede, Project Lead at The Decision Lab. “The Decision Lab studies what drives or prevents districts from selecting high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials and has recently launched a K-12 Market Signals Studio to build capacity in ecosystem actors to effect change. By combining our research with district data, this joint report highlights practical strategies that can help educators make decisions rooted in evidence and equity.”

The full report, *Beyond Selection: Rethinking How Districts Adopt Curriculum*, is available here: www.edreports.org/resources/article/beyond-selection

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[About EdReports](#)

With the firm belief that what is taught matters and that all students deserve standards-aligned, research-based materials tailored to diverse needs, including multilingual learners, EdReports publishes free, online, evidence-rich reviews of instructional materials. Since its launch in 2015, EdReports has trained over 1,000 educators to conduct rigorous reviews of instructional materials and has released over 1,200 reviews of math, ELA, and science curricula. The organization's work has been instrumental in helping educators across the country make informed decisions about the materials they use in their classrooms.

[About The Decision Lab](#)

The Decision Lab is an applied research and innovation firm using behavioral science and design to help ambitious organizations create a better future. The Decision Lab provides consulting services to some of the largest organizations in the world, carrying out research in priority areas, and running one of the largest publications in applied behavioral science. In the past, this work has helped organizations such as the Gates Foundation, Capital One, the World Bank and numerous Fortune 500 companies solve some of their thorniest problems using scientific thinking.