

Challenge Five: Curricular and Instructional Materials

CURRICULAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

In July 2013, a solutions group of state and local union leaders and state and school district administrators came together to discuss how labor and management can work together to develop or modify structures and policies to ensure that accomplished practitioners participate in the development, selection and ongoing evaluation and improvement of high-quality instructional materials aligned to college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. In examining this question, the group affirmed that the greatest advances in the development of curricular and instructional materials aligned to CCR standards can be made when teacher unions and school and district managers work together to identify or develop them and ensure their effective use. The group emphasized that this collaborative approach takes on greater significance in an era of new and more challenging standards.

Group members noted, however, it is not always easy for labor and management to identify and implement curricular and instructional materials jointly. Complications and gridlock can ensue when a passionate, diverse set of stakeholders—including district and school leaders, but too rarely teachers—gather to make decisions about teaching and learning at the local level. Sometimes, participants take the path of least resistance, and ineffective, short-lived solutions result.

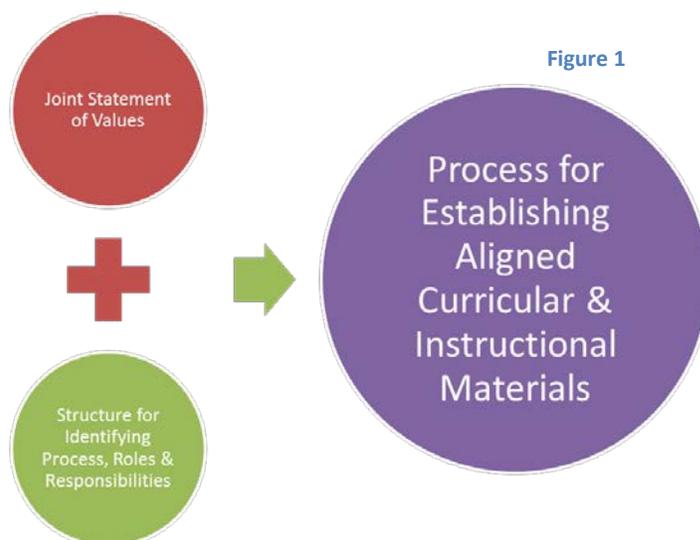
To avoid this outcome, the solutions group zeroed in on two practical ways labor and management can work through issues that might separate them when it

comes to selecting or developing curricular and instructional materials. The group agreed that different perspectives and positions should not impede progress. Rather, healthy debate should improve quality and increase impact. The group asserted that local stakeholders with an interest in curricular and instructional materials also share one binding goal: student success for *all*.

Local school districts and teacher unions can honor multiple perspectives and build on this common ground through the following interrelated solutions:

SOLUTION 1: Labor and management create a joint statement that clearly expresses a school district’s values for curriculum and instruction. This joint statement can serve as a guiding “North Star.”

SOLUTION 2: Establish a collaborative structure comprised of district leaders, teachers and union representatives that works in service of the district’s value statement for curriculum and instruction – ensuring that materials are not only state-of-the-art, but also aligned across grade levels and disciplines and jointly identified or developed.



These two feasible and affordable strategies can be applied by local school districts to ensure that relevant stakeholders inform the selection of appropriate, high-quality curricular and instructional materials. Figure 1 demonstrates the functioning relationship between the solutions.

Solution 1: Labor and Management Unite to Develop and Issue a Joint Statement of Values for Curriculum and Instruction

The solutions group agreed that it is important for labor and management to craft jointly a statement of values for curriculum and instruction. This exercise gives the parties an opportunity to put expectations and goals on the table for discussion. It ensures stakeholders have a collective hand in the development of values that will guide the selection of aligned curricular and instructional materials. This, the group agreed, is the foundation of the work that will follow.

What Does a Successful Statement of Values Look Like?

The solutions group indicated that there is no one path to success. That is, successful statements will likely include different values specific to the districts developing them. They will be unique. However, the group pinpointed attributes that it believes are essential for successful statements. The group affirmed that an effective statement of values would, at its core, reflect the local needs of its educators, including teachers, management and labor. Values would include commitments to educator voice, creativity and to materials designed to support effective teacher practices, reflect the richness of CCR standards and promote the development of students. The values, group members further affirmed, would capitalize on the common goal that unites labor and

Promising Solutions for Future Exploration

In addition to discussing the joint statement of values for curriculum and instruction and a structure for identifying curricular and instructional materials, the solutions group also identified four additional promising solutions that could promote the identification, development and use of high-quality curricular and instructional materials aligned to CCR standards.

Solution: Identify Demonstration Teachers Who Will Share Instructional Materials

- Working with the district, the union identifies demonstration teachers who will share their instructional materials and encourage other teachers in the school or district to come into their classrooms and observe the instructional materials in use.

Solution: Identify a Core Team of Educators Who Will Lead Professional Development

- The union and district collectively identify a core team of educators who not only develop and revise curricular and instructional materials, but lead professional development on the new materials.

Solution: Designate a Share of Professional Development Time to CCR Standards-Aligned Material

- Labor and management agree to designate a certain share of professional development time to new, CCR standards-aligned curricular and instructional materials to ensure teachers understand the materials and how they will support student success.

Solution: Union and District Reps Issue a Joint “Seal of Approval”

- Union and district representatives populate a joint committee to determine which district materials are highly aligned to CCR standards and issue a joint “seal of approval” for those selected.

management: the success of every child. And, the values would be specific and easy to operationalize in the identification and use of materials. Finally, they would be accessible and easily understood by parents and community leaders.

Ultimately, the solution group decided, the statement of values would articulate and codify a set of clear, agreed-upon responsibilities for both labor and management when it comes to considering and selecting curricular and instructional materials. Equally important, the values would connect and link the work and functions of multiple district departments, including professional development, assessment and accountability. It is important, the group concluded, that the values build from elements already established in the system.

When labor and management craft and publicly adopt a statement of values, it sends a signal that the tenets espoused are together greater than any one leader. As a result, the statement of values, if properly executed, would position the district for curriculum and instruction continuity that will survive well beyond leadership changes.

What Steps Are Necessary to Implement the Statement of Values?

The power of the statement of values lies in its co-development and co-presentation by labor and management, members of the group suggested. This means that both entities must deliberately come together for the sole purposes of discussing, designing and adopting the statement of values. Scheduling and accommodating the meetings will take commitment from both sides. Each must be dedicated to the process.

The solutions group identified another key partner in this work: the local school board. It suggested that the local school board be engaged throughout the process

and approve the joint statement in a public setting to give additional weight to the collaboration.

Finally, enacting the statement of values will likely require the district to update and revise previously adopted documents, such as a mission statement or preamble to contracts.

What Are Possible Barriers to Implementation?

The solutions group identified three primary barriers:

1. **Time necessary to reach a unified, jointly-determined statement of values versus the pace of reform.** It takes time to convene labor and management, discuss the issues and achieve a jointly crafted statement of values for curriculum and instruction. It also takes time to build the trust and relationships necessary to ensure long-term success. Thus, patience and steadfast commitment are essential.

While local school districts might be driving toward achieving a joint statement of values, there is a possibility, solution group members suggested, that the implementation of reforms could outpace that effort. Specifically, the transition to CCR standards might happen faster than a district's ability to create and agree to the joint statement of values. If this happens, group members discussed, the district and union leadership might acknowledge that existing work on CCR standards-aligned curricular and instructional materials will need to continue even though the joint statement of values has not been finalized. And, others suggested, the district should not wait until the joint statement is adopted to start taking actions to engage labor in the issue, including ensuring union representation on curriculum committees, for instance.

2. **Layering on top of formal and informal agreements already in place.** Across the district, department teams and individual schools may already have collaborative partnerships in place to identify, improve and disseminate materials. Thus, the joint statement of values must recognize and build on these partnerships and agreements. They should not, as group members pointed out, cause the work to stop.

3. **Navigating through turf and politics.** Reaching an agreement of this sort will require compromise on all sides. Specifically, district management will likely have to relinquish some of its decision-making authority to teachers. Union representatives, similarly, might face discontentment from membership for deviating from a traditional focus on working conditions. Perceptions that union leadership is “cozying up to the district” could also emerge. Ultimately, all sides must keep an eye toward ensuring that teachers have the curricular and instructional tools necessary to enable student success.

Solution 2: Establish a Collaborative Structure for Identifying Progress, Roles and Responsibilities for Key Functions

The group’s second solution aims to create a collaborative structure that animates the statement of values for curriculum and instruction. Crafted by union and district leadership, the structure – or body – should be focused on identifying the processes, roles and responsibilities and functions it will take on to supply teachers with curricular and instructional materials that will help produce student success.

To begin its work, the solutions group suggested that participants in the collaborative structure consider the

following questions to guide identification of functions the body will serve:

- What curricular and instructional materials should be adopted now?
- What can be acquired and what can be created in-house in the interim?
- What content can be sourced and delivered digitally versus through textbooks and printed materials?

Specific functions, the group determined, could include but not be limited to:

- Making decisions on curricular and instructional materials, including determining levels of quality and vetting and adopting materials;
- Overseeing the creation of materials when necessary and appropriate;
- Identifying budgets and resource allocations;
- Providing feedback on and refining materials, when necessary;
- Advising on training and professional learning; and
- Using technology as a tool for promoting and disseminating the curricular and instructional materials.

To be taken seriously by its participants, the solutions group indicated that the structure needs authority – perhaps through a memorandum of understanding – and must also ensure that platforms to disseminate and share materials across the district exist.

What Might a Successful Structure Look Like?

In the short-term, the structure would identify actionable recommendations for its functions, placing a premium on identifying quality materials, aligning them to CCR standards and fostering teacher creativity. The solutions group affirmed that teachers would be engaged deeply in all the work of the

collaborative body and districts would provide incentives for teacher-leaders to participate.

Once in operation, the solutions group recommended that the structure would set its sights on identifying and broadcasting clear and tight expectations for what good curricular and instructional materials are. In conjunction, it would promote flexibility and allow schools to use materials selectively. In the end, the collaborative body would facilitate the delivery of great curricular and instructional materials, not dictate the use of specific materials.

In the long term, the solutions group agreed that success of the structure would be evident when the use of high-quality CCR standards-aligned curricular and instructional materials is widespread. It would also be evident in ongoing authentic, collaborative and positive relations between labor and management, even outside of the collaborative structure.

Although the solutions group was not aware of specific examples of this type of formal collaborative structure operating successfully in a school district, many districts, some members pointed out, informally engage teachers in the development and selection of curricular and instructional materials. For instance, a convening participant from Cleveland noted, “We do some of this already in Cleveland and it’s extremely powerful for making sure the teacher voice is heard, and making sure the people who are going to use the resources validate them.” The structure proposed during the solutions group meeting stands, participants believe, as a practical way to formalize and operationalize the ongoing feedback from educators.

What Steps Are Necessary to Implement the Structure?

The solutions group suggested that establishing and implementing this joint structure requires a collaborative approach from the outset. District and union leaders must create the conditions for ensuring the collaborative body’s success. This means jointly establishing a clear problem definition and agreeing that current practices for addressing the problem might not be sufficient. Reaching this level of honesty and driving toward solutions could require the intercession of a highly-regarded, external facilitator, group members suggested. This facilitator can come from a perceived neutral third party such as the state, a foundation or business.

As it works to establish credibility with its constituencies, the collaborative body should be prepared to share openly preliminary plans for how it will function and the work it will do. This is an important first step in authentically engaging stakeholders, group members suggested. As it engages these stakeholders, some group members thought, the collaborative body should consider conducting a pilot at early-adopter schools to validate the adopted curricular and instructional materials.

What Are Possible Barriers to Implementation?

The solutions group identified three possible barriers to implementing a collaborative body charged with identifying high quality materials:

1. **Labor leadership might lack knowledge of curricular and instructional issues.** A deep understanding of the quality of instructional materials can be outside of the expertise of union leadership, which is usually tightly focused on contract negotiations and working conditions, some solution team members suggested. As a result, labor leaders may need to ask union members with rich expertise to participate in these collaborative bodies.

2. **Delayed decision-making may stall implementation.** Ultimately, the collaborative structure will make recommendations to district leadership about what curricular and instructional material to adopt. It is up to the district leadership to act upon and advance the recommendations. Inaction could undo or erode the collaborative consensus and, worse, send a signal that the work of the collaborative structure is not regarded or appreciated. To avoid this, group members determined, the structure must include district-level decision makers. From a practical perspective, the work should also be driven by clear timelines, deadlines and checkpoints to ensure appropriate progress.
3. **District decision-making driven by the tyranny of the urgent.** The interlocked process of developing a joint statement of values and establishing a collaborative structure to drive the selection and development of curricular and instructional materials can be designed to achieve long-term success through stable and thoughtful processes that prevent decision-making based on what are perceived to be urgent needs that arise on a weekly basis in school districts. The structure, however, should also maintain the ability to be nimble and responsive to immediate demands, but ensure that over the long haul teachers have what they need for student success.

The Inseparable Relationship Between the Two Solutions

Combined, the two solutions create a collaborative process for ensuring ongoing creation and selection of aligned curricular and instructional materials. While it may seem counterintuitive, group members suggested that districts can pursue both solutions

simultaneously. And, others pointed out; a local school district should not delay moving forward with one solution because it is working to complete the other. For instance, if a local school district is struggling to gain consensus on its statement of values, but has broad agreement on the general direction, then it should move forward with the creation of the collaborative body that will oversee the identification and development of curricular and instructional materials. Solution teammates argued that the perfect cannot become the enemy of the good when labor and management work together to develop solutions to these challenges. Local school districts might have to pursue the solutions simultaneously to accelerate efforts or shift the order completely if unexpected gridlock has occurred in one solution. The parties can apply quick calibrations and adjustments later to synchronize the implementation of each solution.

Defining Curricular and Instructional Materials

It is important to understand how the solutions group defined curricular and instructional materials. It started by identifying more traditional local- and state-developed curriculum maps, scope and sequence tools and exemplars that might be generated by teachers at the state level. It then recognized the importance of teacher-developed long-range plans, daily lessons, lesson plan templates, instructional calendars and graphic organizers, which can assist with lesson implementation. The group also noted the significance of formative assessments and samples of student work as helpful curricular and instructional materials.

But the solutions group ventured beyond these materials, acknowledging that technology gives teachers the flexibility to select tools outside of a formal textbook or curriculum. Group members suggested that curricular and instructional materials

might be selected in a similar fashion to buying music from iTunes. One might buy the entire album. One might choose to purchase a single song. The same can be said for selecting curricular and instructional materials. The local school district might choose to purchase and implement an entire unit or a single lesson. The bottom line, the solutions group determined, is that technology has changed how curricular and instructional materials are delivered and disseminated and local school districts should fully benefit from this new flexibility.

Reflections from the Convening Co-sponsors

Successful implementation of CCR standards will call for aligned instructional and curricular materials, from model units and related materials that permit them to be adapted to a wide range of learners, to excellent formative assessments that incorporate the types of challenging tasks students will be expected to master. Together all stakeholders—parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and community members—must take responsibility for the academic and social well-being of the students in our charge and engage in the strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration critical to making improvement possible.

A Word about This Brief

In late July 2013, as an extension to its 2011 and 2012 convenings to maximize labor-management collaboration, the U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with numerous national organizations, hosted state and local education leaders at GE Foundation's *Summer Conference for Educators*. Specifically, convening organizers asked participants to consider how structures and systems of collaborative labor relations—including collective bargaining and other agreements, joint committees and structures, and policies and practices—could be harnessed to better support teachers and leaders in implementing college- and career-ready standards. Convening organizers grouped participants in one of five teams each charged to consider one of five distinct CCR standards implementation challenges: *Professional Development, Instructional Teamwork, Access to Quality Instruction in High-Need Schools, Student Time* and *Curricular and Instructional Materials*.

This brief represents the best thinking of the *Curricular and Instructional Materials* solutions group, which investigated the following questions:

- How can collaborative structures and policies be created or modified to ensure that the voices of accomplished practitioners are heard in the development and/or selection of excellent, well-aligned materials, as well as the ongoing evaluation and improvement of those materials?
- How can they support the faculty and leaders as they make the transition to using those new tools, thereby encouraging wider ownership of them?