



Improving Access to High-Quality Instructional Materials

When teachers have access to engaging, high-quality instructional materials,¹ they can have a greater impact in raising student achievement.² Materials need to present rigorous, developmentally-appropriate, and culturally-relevant content that is aligned to the state's challenging academic standards and assessments and to other initiatives related to social, emotional, and academic development. Too often, there is a wide gap between the rigor of state academic standards and assessments and the quality and alignment of classroom assignments and instructional materials, particularly in schools serving high populations of English Learners (ELs), students of color, and low-income students.³ The opportunity around high-quality instructional materials is maximized when there is a deliberate connection to job-embedded professional learning for teachers, which suggests braiding Title I and II funds to maximize impact.⁴



What's the Opportunity?

In an effort to advance equity, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides federal funds to assist states and districts in meeting the needs of traditionally underserved students, including students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, students with disabilities, and students who are homeless or in foster care. In exchange for robust data reporting, increased transparency, and a commitment to improve underperforming schools, ESSA provides states and districts with the financial flexibility to use federal ESSA funds on a wide range of actions.

¹ High-quality instructional materials should be aligned to the state's challenging academic standards, be culturally-relevant and linguistically-sustaining, and embed rich tasks. For more information, see Ross Wiener and Susan Pimentel, *Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum & Professional Learning in Schools*, The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, April 2017, p. 30, <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/04/Practice-What-You-Teach.pdf>.

² V. Darleen Opfer, Julia H. Kaufman, and Lindsey E. Thompson, *Implementation of K-12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy: Findings from the American Teacher Panel*, RAND Corporation, revised April 2017, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1529-1.html.

³ Sonja Santelises and Joan Dabrowski, *Checking In: Do Classroom Assignments Reflect Today's Higher Standards?* The Education Trust, September 2015, https://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CheckingIn_TheEducationTrust_Sept20152.pdf

⁴ Ross Wiener and Susan Pimentel, *Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum & Professional Learning in Schools*, The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, April 2017. <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/04/Practice-What-You-Teach.pdf>

Traditionally, district leaders have limited federal funds to expenditures that clearly met federal compliance requirements, such as funding additional academic interventions, due to concerns about triggering federal audits or oversight. While the law's requirement to ensure that federal funds supplement, and do not supplant, state and local funds remains, district and school leaders are no longer bound by accounting restrictions that required to them to make cumbersome financial demonstrations.¹ As a result, district and school leaders now possess greater latitude to invest ESSA funds in ways they think are most likely to benefit underserved students, including aligning their use of ESSA funds with the district's existing strategic priorities.

This guide is intended to help district leaders disrupt the compliance mindset and inertia that have characterized traditional implementation of federal grants and leverage federal funding and programs in service of a more equitable education system.



Overcoming Potential Barriers to Equity

- Changing procurement processes and state and local adoption policies to ensure that the quality of instructional materials drives decision making.
- Improving the quality of materials available on the market and their alignment to standards, assessments, and other relevant measures, including increasing the quality and supply of materials focused on the needs of ELs.
- Providing pre-service preparation and in-service professional learning on how to identify and enact high-quality instructional materials.
- Ensuring decisions about instructional material selection include input from students and their families and are culturally-relevant and linguistically-sustaining.
- Addressing the equitable distribution of effective teachers and ensuring that teachers do not need to create or select their own materials in the absence of high-quality instructional materials provided by the district.



Example: Improving Instructional Material Quality through Teacher-Led Reviews

In their first year implementing Florida's new standards during the 2014-2015 academic year, Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) realized that their current curriculum was insufficient to meet the standards' rigor. Rather than using the traditional method of inviting vendors to meet with district personnel and teachers, the school district decided to use the education nonprofit Achieve, Inc.'s Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQUiP) tools. EQUiP is a curriculum evaluation rubric and facilitation process whereby teachers are

able to evaluate the quality of curricular materials and their alignment to state standards and assessments.⁵ With hundreds of teachers using the EQUiP tool, DCPS was able to identify gaps in existing curricula selections, especially as related to alignment to the state's new standards. DCPS ultimately chose to adopt EngageNY, an open-source curriculum and set of instructional materials aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards. What's more, the curricular selection process allowed DCPS to discuss curricular implementation with other school districts across the nation who were also using EngageNY. These conversations led DCPS to develop printed versions of the EngageNY materials in order to alleviate the transition to online materials. In collaboration with TNTP, DCPS also implemented summer teacher academies in the summer of 2015 and 2016 to introduce the district's teachers to the new curriculum. Further, DCPS expanded the number of reading and math coaches in district schools. DCPS is now working with local universities to encourage them to prepare teacher candidates on the new standards and adopted curricula. Largely due to the district's efforts around curriculum, DCPS has outpaced the state's growth in mathematics, particularly in the elementary grades.⁶



What Should I Look for in My State Context?

All states were required to submit state ESSA plans to the US Department of Education (USDOE), so district leaders interested in increasing access to high-quality instructional materials should familiarize themselves with the relevant aspects of their state plan⁷ related to this equity priority. Questions that districts can ask about their state plans and of their broader state context include:

- What is the state role in the procurement and adoption of instructional materials?
- Does the state have a pre-approved list of instructional materials? If they do not, do they have standards or guidance around alignment to state standards?
- Does the state include improving access to high-quality materials or provide a list of pre-approved curriculum providers as an intervention for school improvement?
- Are states using Title II funds and leveraging competitive grants to encourage the use of high-quality materials?

⁵"Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQUiP)," Achieve, Inc., <https://www.achieve.org/EQUiP>.



⁶*Duval and High-Quality Curriculum: A Conversation with Superintendent Nikolai Vitti*, Johns Hopkins School of Education Institute for Education Policy, January 10, 2017, <http://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu/jacksonville-and-high-quality-curriculum-a-conversation-with-superintendent-nikolai-vitti/>.

⁷All state plans submitted to the US Department of Education are available here: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html>



Turning ESSA’s Requirements into Opportunities

This table summarizes ESSA requirements for districts and provides illustrative examples of how district leaders could move beyond meeting ESSA’s requirements to using the law to drive their strategic priorities. Each box includes a reference to the related ESSA statutory provision found in the ESSA Provisions section of this brief (see p. 7) so that district leaders are able to validate any actions that they take to increase access to high-quality instructional materials.

	WHAT DOES ESSA REQUIRE DISTRICTS TO DO?	HOW COULD DISTRICT LEADERS BUILD ON ESSA REQUIREMENTS?
REPORTING AND DATA ANALYSIS 	ESSA requires states and districts to produce report cards that report a variety of data points overall and by subgroup. ⁱⁱ	District leaders can include the adoption of high-quality curriculum/instructional materials on district and/or school report cards. ⁱⁱⁱ
	ESSA requires districts to develop local plans that describe how they will ensure that schools receiving Title I funding will close the achievement gap and help all students meet challenging academic standards. ^{iv}	<p>In their local plans, district leaders can choose to identify how they will use high-quality instructional materials as part of a broader district effort to improve the quality of education and achieve equity.</p> <p>District leaders can conduct a curriculum audit of the stated and enacted curriculum and identify opportunities to improve quality, including through online or personalized learning.</p>
SET PRIORITIES AND MAKE DECISIONS 	Districts are required to conduct resource reviews for schools that are identified for comprehensive support and improvement and additional targeted support and improvement. ^v	Resource reviews of comprehensive support and improvement schools should include an audit of the instructional material quality at identified schools. District leaders may also choose to conduct resource reviews for targeted support and improvement schools (and, in the case of schools identified for TSI due to the performance of English learners, should review the quality of instructional materials designed for English learners).
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WHAT DOES ESSA REQUIRE DISTRICTS TO DO?	HOW COULD DISTRICT LEADERS BUILD ON ESSA REQUIREMENTS?
<p>Districts must use evidence-based interventions to improve student outcomes in schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement.^{v, vi}</p>	<p>Districts can choose evidence-based interventions that focus on improving access to high-quality instructional materials, revisiting the process for the adoption and development of instructional materials in the district and strengthening internal quality controls for material adoption and development, including how to ensure materials are culturally-relevant and linguistically-sustaining. Districts can also adopt curricular materials that have already been vetted (e.g., EdReports, EQuIP).</p> <p>Districts can incentivize the adoption of high-quality instructional materials by targeting funds to schools that have adopted these materials. This can include Title II-funded professional learning for aligned high-quality instructional materials.</p>

Using Flexible Funding

This table provides illustrative examples of the ways that district leaders can use ESSA funding to move toward improving access to high-quality instructional materials. The examples below are meant to elicit creative thinking about braiding funds to accomplish this equity initiative; they are not exhaustive.

OPPORTUNITY

<p>Train teachers to identify and enact high-quality instructional materials</p>	<p>TITLE I Train and procure high-quality instructional materials^{iv, vii}</p> <p>TITLE II Prioritize PL for implementation of high-quality instructional materials and on related opportunities, like the EQUiP tool^{viii}</p> <p>TITLE III Train and procure high-quality instructional materials^x</p> <p>TITLE IV Use Title IV-A funds for technology (online curriculum)^x</p>
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OPPORTUNITY

Support PD on high-quality instructional materials	TITLE II Invest in distributed leadership with opportunities for teachers to assume leadership positions that could be explicitly focused on facilitating school-based PD using instructional materials ^{xi}
Prepare teachers on the use of high-quality instructional materials	TITLE I Include high-quality instructional materials in any opportunities for teacher preparation ^{xii}

*Title II and Title IV funding can be rolled into any other Titles, expanding the pots of money that can be spent on actions eligible for Title I and Title III funds. Titles I and III cannot be moved.



Resources

- Aspen Education & Society Program, Practice What You Teach
<https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/04/Practice-What-You-Teach.pdf>
- Chiefs for Change, Hiding in Plain Sight: Leveraging Curriculum to Improve Student Learning
<http://chiefsforchange.org/policy-paper/4830>
- Achieve, Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQuIP) Rubric
<https://www.achieve.org/our-initiatives/equip>
- EdReports
<https://www.edreports.org/#!?f=&b=title&o=0>
- Student Achievement Partners, Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool
<https://achievethecore.org/page/1946/instructional-materials-evaluation-tool>
- Louisiana Department of Education
 - Online Instructional Materials Reviews
<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/academics/ONLINE-INSTRUCTIONAL-MATERIALS-REVIEWS>
 - Rubrics
<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/curricular-resources>
- Council of Chief State School Officers, OER Resources for Educators
<http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/oer-resources-educators>



ESSA Provisions

This table provides statutory references for district leaders so that they can draw upon ESSA to validate district changes that promote improving access to high-quality instructional materials in service of equity.

	ESSA STATUTORY LANGUAGE
i	<p>A special rule within ESSA’s supplement, not supplant provision changes the financial accounting methodology as follows:</p> <p>‘(1) In general.—A State educational agency or local educational agency shall use Federal funds received under this part only to supplement the funds that would, in the absence of such Federal funds, be made available from State and local sources for the education of students participating in programs assisted under this part, and not to supplant such funds.</p> <p>(2) Compliance.—To demonstrate compliance with paragraph (1), a local educational agency shall demonstrate that the methodology used to allocate State and local funds to each school receiving assistance under this part ensures that such school receives all of the State and local funds it would otherwise receive if it were not receiving assistance under this part.</p> <p>(3) Special rule.—No local educational agency shall be required to—</p> <p>(A) identify that an individual cost or service supported under this part is supplemental; or</p> <p>(B) provide services under this part through a particular instructional method or in a particular instructional setting in order to demonstrate such agency's compliance with paragraph (1).” [Sec. 1118(b)(1)-(3)].</p>
ii	<p>Districts receiving Title I funds must produce report cards that include the same minimum requirements as the state report card (including information on the numbers of students served, achievement rates, achievement information, graduation rates, etc.) as well as a comparison of achievement data compared to the overall performance of students in the state [Sec. 1111(h)(2)(C)].</p>
iii	<p>Local report cards may include any additional information that they deem “is appropriate and will best provide parents, students, and other members of the public with information regarding the progress of each public school served by the local educational agency, whether or not such information is included in the annual State report card” [Sec. 1111(h)(2)(C)(iii)].</p>

iv	<p>The local plan must include information on how the district will monitor students' progress in meeting challenging state academic standards by "developing and implementing a well-rounded program of instruction to meet the academic needs of all students" and "identifying and implementing instructional and other strategies intended to strengthen academic programs and improve school conditions for student learning" [Sec. 1112(b)(1)(A),(D)].</p>
v	<p>For all schools that the state identifies as needing comprehensive support and intervention (CSI) in a district, the district must work with "stakeholders (including principals and other school leaders, teachers, and parents)" to develop a plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "(ii) includes evidence-based interventions; (iii) is based on a school-level needs assessment; (iv) identifies resource inequities, which may include a review of local educational agency and school-level budgeting, to be addressed through implementation of such comprehensive support and improvement plan; (v) is approved by the school, local educational agency, and State educational agency; and (vi) upon approval and implementation, is monitored and periodically reviewed by the State educational agency." [Sec. 1111(d)(1)(B)(ii)-(vi)] <p>For schools identified for additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI), school districts must also "identify resource inequities (which may include a review of local education agency and school level budgeting)" [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(C)]. Targeted support and improvement (TSI) schools where the performance of any subgroup of students on their own would lead the state to identify the school for CSI must also conduct a resource review [Sec 1111(d)(C)]. If these TSI schools are Title I schools, they can become CSI schools if they do not exit TSI status (exit status for TSI schools is determined by the local educational agency). And in the first year of identification (2017-2018), states "shall notify local educational agencies of any schools served by the local educational agency in which any subgroup of students, on its own, would lead to identification under [the lowest-performing 5 percent of all Title I schools] even without having those schools be identified as TSI schools first [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(D)].</p>
vi	<p>For all schools that the state identifies as needing targeted support and intervention (TSI), the school must develop a plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "(ii) includes evidence-based interventions; <p style="text-align: right;">Continued on next page</p>

	<p>(iii) is approved by the local educational agency prior to implementation of such a plan;</p> <p>(iv) is monitored, upon submission and implementation, by the local educational agency; and</p> <p>(v) results in additional action following unsuccessful implementation of such plan after a number of years determined by the local educational agency.” [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(ii)-(v)]</p>
vii	<p>Any schools implementing schoolwide programs under Title I must develop a plan that includes a description of the “methods and instructional strategies that strengthen the academic program in the school, increase the amount and quality of learning time, and help provide an enriched and accelerated curriculum” [Sec. 1114(b)(7)(A)(ii)]. For dual or concurrent enrollment programs, secondary schools implementing schoolwide programs may use Title I funds for instructional materials [Sec. 1114(e)(2)(B)].</p>
viii	<p>Districts may use Title II-A local funds for a variety of professional development and school personnel support activities, including activities that can support educators to improve the quality of instructional materials. For example, districts can provide “training, technical assistance, and capacity-building in local educational agencies to assist teachers, principals, or other school leaders with selecting and implementing formative assessments, designing classroom-based assessments, and using data from such assessments to improve instruction and student academic achievement” [Sec. 2103(b)(3)(H)].</p>
ix	<p>School districts can use Title III funds for a variety of activities, including “improving the instructional program for English learners by identifying, acquiring, and upgrading curricula, instructional materials, educational software, and assessment procedures” [Sec. 3115(d)(2)].</p>
x	<p>Districts can use Title IV local funds for “developing or using effective or innovative strategies for the delivery of specialized or rigorous academic courses and curricula through the use of technology” [Sec. 4109(a)(3)] to increase access to existing high-quality instructional materials.</p>
xi	<p>Distributed leadership models are a critical way for school-based instructional teams to enact high-quality instructional materials. School districts can use Title II-A funds for “carrying out other activities that are evidence-based, to the extent</p>

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	<p>the State (in consultation with local educational agencies in the State) determines that such evidence is reasonably available, and identified by the local educational agency that meet the purpose of this title” [Sec. 2103(b)(3)(P)].</p>
xii	<p>Districts may use local Title II-A funds to support “new teacher, principal, or other school leader induction and mentoring programs that are designed to improve classroom instruction and student learning and achievement” [Sec. 2103(b)(3)(B)(iv)(I)], which could be leveraged to focus on instructional material selection and implementation.</p>