

Mid-size district case study

Step 1: Plan your process.

Overview

New Springs School District comprises four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. It serves 2,800 students K–12 and is in a state that has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. The district last formally adopted K–8 ELA materials in 2012 and now feels the materials aren't as aligned to the standards as they thought they were. They budgeted to make a large K–8 ELA purchase in 2019, so they started their review in the fall of 2018.

To support the adoption process, the district curriculum coordinator assembled a team of 12 teachers and building principals, five elementary teachers representing all of the schools, three middle school teachers, one high school teacher, and three building principals.

They agreed to meet four times: once in October to define the problem and build requirements, once in November to pick up short list program materials sent in from publishers and review the rubric they created together, once in February to review findings, and finally, once in March to vote and help prepare materials to take to the board. Four of the team members attended a professional learning conference in October. No publishers were allowed formal presentations during the process.

Defining the problem

The team agreed that they could describe the problem as such: *In 2012 we adopted materials that were reportedly aligned to the new ELA state standards; however, we now believe the materials are not fully aligned and that new materials are required to help New Springs SD teachers improve state ELA assessment scores by 5% over the next three years. If we do not adopt new materials this year, we estimate teachers will spend, on average, three hours each week researching and preparing supplemental lessons to fill the gaps.*

Building requirements

The team was largely aligned on their top critical focus areas. The new program needed to:

1. Have a favorable (all-green) report on [EdReports.org](https://edreports.org), or a reputable state review site such as Louisiana, as well as meet 100 percent of the standards as evidenced by a teacher-led review.
2. Include embedded professional learning supports to help teachers transition to the new standards.
3. Offer opportunities for students to build knowledge as they develop strong reading and writing skills.
4. Support teachers in differentiating instruction.

Exploring solutions

Before the team could start exploring programs, they needed to define some parameters for selecting a short list of programs to review. They agreed to spend two weeks reading the all-green EdReports reviews closely and talking to colleagues in other districts to populate a list of five to seven programs. Each team member was responsible for looking at two programs during the deep review period.

Once the short list was compiled, team members were randomly assigned programs to review. The curriculum coordinator made sure each reviewer had physical materials and login information.

Each reviewer was responsible for conducting both a standards review and then a review against the other three critical focus areas. Notes were kept in a shared folder. The team met in February to compare notes and informally decided on Program A at K–5 and Program B at 6–8. The group took a vote to make sure they documented the decision. After the February meeting, each member of the team got access to programs A and B. The team met a final time in March to make their decision and put together a short presentation for the board.

Socializing and evangelizing the decision

Before the curriculum coordinator made the presentation to the board, she sent an email to all building principals and assistant principals announcing the decision and letting them know what communications to expect. The day following the board meeting, she sent a letter to all teachers outlining the strengths of the programs and pointing them to a resource site on their intranet where they could learn more before the first professional learning session. She also collected any questions into a Q&A document and posted them to the intranet.

Preparing for implementation

The publishers did not offer any pre-work materials for teachers to peruse ahead of professional learning, so the curriculum coordinator asked each teacher to put together the top three questions they needed answered before they left their professional learning session.