Wisconsin Educators' Perceptions of Instructional Materials and Professional Learning

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About the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University

The Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University is a partnership of university-based professional schools that works to revitalize public education while reinventing professional education. CPRL provides talented education, law, management, and policy students with rigorous coursework and skills training and engages them in research and consulting projects to ready them for challenging careers enhancing the education sector's capacity to improve the outcomes and life chances of all children, particularly those of color, from low-income households, or otherwise traditionally underserved. CPRL's highly rated professional services run the gamut from evaluative research to strategic initiatives to enhance organizational learning to content areas such as personalized and socio-emotional learning, teacher preparation and retention, early childhood education, and school integration. To date, CPRL has completed more than 100 research projects; formed partnerships with two dozen professional schools; and prepared more than 325 students, with some 70% of its graduates serving public education and allied organizations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) aims to improve the quality of education all Wisconsin students receive and to address equity gaps that have persisted within the state for decades. In service of these academic and equity goals, DPI and its partner organizations are pursuing several strategies. One of these is to align DPI's academic strategy and work with educators from all system levels and all corners of the state under a coherent approach to ensure all classrooms have access to standards-aligned high-quality instructional materials and all teachers are supported in the use of those materials through aligned professional learning.

DPI seeks to do this in a way consistent with the state's and DPI's organizational values: local control and a recognition of classroom educators' position to best know their own and their students' needs. Thus, DPI has identified that its structure and position within lines of communication allow it to function best as a facilitator to this strategy, ensuring that educators themselves are positioned as the designers and implementers.

As one of its first steps, DPI asked the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University to lead focus groups of teachers and instructional coaches. The goal of these sessions was to learn about (1) how educators define, participate in selecting and developing, and would like to improve their access to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and associated professional learning (PL) systems; (2) what generally resonates with, excites, or concerns educators in these areas; and (3) what steps educators would like DPI to take to support districts, schools, and teachers in these areas.

The ensuing focus groups provided an explicit opportunity for teachers and instructional coaches to discuss instructional materials and professional learning. In total, nearly 80 educators of varying experience levels, grade levels, and subject areas, from five Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) ranging in state geography and population density participated. Conversations with these educators covered: the merits of both content of and selection processes for HQIM and PL; the responsibilities for different stakeholders in supporting the selection and use of HQIM and selection and provision of PL; ideas for how best to discuss HQIM and PL in a commonly understood and respected way; and the extent to which educators see access and effective use of HQIM as a means to addressing equity gaps across the state.

These conversations yielded findings in six areas: instructional materials content, instructional materials selection, professional learning content, professional learning selection, efforts to improve equitable student outcomes, messaging about instructional materials and professional learning, and DPI communications with educators about this and other topics. These findings are listed and detailed in this report.

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) aims to ensure that every child in the state graduates ready for higher education and the workplace. In pursuit of this vision, DPI is investigating how it can better support districts, schools, and teachers in adopting and implementing, high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional learning in all schools in the state.

In November 2018, DPI will bring together approximately 1,500 educators and stakeholders in a one-day blended convening held in 14 regionally run groups connected virtually across the state. The convening will explore and address why high-quality instructional materials and professional learning matters and how Wisconsin schools and districts can determine quality. It will also include opportunities to hear from Wisconsin educators using this equity strategy.

Having and communicating a clear stance on quality curriculum and professional learning, would be different from the way DPI has previously engaged with districts and schools. In anticipation of the November convening, when this new direction will be developed in a collaborative manner with educators across the state, DPI has begun developing an engagement and stakeholder participation plan that establishes systematic and meaningful lines of communication with and between districts, educators, and other stakeholders. The goal is to position DPI as a facilitator of decisions made by leaders and educators throughout the state, rather than as the driver. In preparing for the November convening, DPI is accordingly committed to understanding and incorporating the views and needs of districts and educators, providing a mechanism for receiving and responding to district and educator feedback, and in those and other ways maximizing the success of the November event and of Wisconsin's statewide shift toward standards-aligned high-quality instructional materials and professional learning.

In support of that commitment, DPI engaged the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University to conduct a series of focus groups with teachers and instructional coaches throughout the state. The objective of the conversations was to learn how educators define, participate in selecting and developing, and would like to improve their access to high-quality instructional materials and associated professional learning systems; what generally resonates with, excites, or concerns them in these areas; and what steps they would like DPI to take to support districts, schools, and teachers in these areas.

DPI asked CPRL to assist in this part of the project based on CPRL's neutral perspective and to assure the participating educators that the discussions would be conducted without any preconceived notions about Wisconsin's public education system.

This report presents CPRL's findings in connection with both goals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To organize the research and achieve DPI's goals, CPRL developed five research questions:

1. What do teachers think about the way curricula and PL are currently selected or developed?
    a. What do teachers like about existing curricula and PL?
    b. What needs do teachers currently have related to existing curricula and PL?
    c. What beliefs – positive/negative – do teachers have about high quality instructional material (HQIM) and PL associated with it?
2. What does the decision-making process related to the selection of curricula and PL currently look like? What role do districts, schools, and teachers play?
3. What responsibilities for the selection of curricula and PL do teachers feel should be borne by which levels of the system? (Governor and State Legislature, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI), Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), district leadership/central office, school leadership, teachers)
4. Are their particular words or concepts relating to curricula and PL that positively or negatively resonate with teachers?
5. Does messaging about equity resonate with teachers? In other words, do teachers agree that access to rigorous high-quality instructional materials is an important strategy for reducing achievement gaps?

These questions guided the development of the methodology described below for collecting and making meaning of research and focus group data, as well as the organization of the project's findings.

METHODOLOGY

The study's methodology included three phases: (1) research of publicly available material and due diligence interviews with eight DPI and other Wisconsin education leaders; (2) focus group sessions with 79 educators across the state; and (3) analysis of focus group data to develop findings and develop recommendations.

In the first phase, CPRL conducted interviews with DPI staff members, staff from the Wisconsin RtI Center, and other education partners. Learnings from these initial informational interviews allowed the team to refine the five key research questions described above and design an overall research approach tailored to Wisconsin's local context.

In the second phase, CPRL prepared for and conducted focus groups with Wisconsin Educators. DPI and CPRL determined that in-person focus groups held in locations across the state would be the best way to solicit meaningful feedback from educators. Focus groups were held on-site at five locations:

- CESA 1 in Pewaukee
- CESA 2 in Madison (divided into two focus groups to be responsive to high attendance)
- CESA 5 in Portage
- CESA 10 in Chippewa Falls
- CESA 11 in Turtle Lake

These five locations were selected in order to maximize the total number of focus group sessions conducted over a three-day period while also covering as great a geographical reach as possible. To focus on those stakeholders directly using and impacted by HQIM and associated PL, and to do so while maintaining a safe, low-stakes environment, focus groups targeted teachers and instructional coaches only. Sessions were two hours, and educators were offered a $50 stipend for their participation. CESA staff served an instrumental role in promoting the focus group sessions to educators in their regions and providing space for the sessions. For educators unable to attend one of the six in-person focus group meetings, a series of additional remote sessions were offered in the weeks immediately following.

CPRL drew upon the five research questions above to develop a standard protocol which was used for every focus group session, which allowed the team to ensure some consistency across all sessions. The protocol included open-ended questions related to educators' experience with and recommendations regarding instructional materials and associated professional learning and how DPI might better support teachers in those areas. By implementing a "step up, step back" norm during the discussions, all educators were able to participate, which was a conclusion repeated many times in end-of-session feedback forms. Each focus group session also included an interactive exercise designed to learn about educators' values for different dimensions of HQIM. In this activity, educators were each provided with sixteen notecards with phrases describing various characteristics of high-quality curriculum. Participants were asked to sort these characteristics into three priority groups (high, medium, and low), and then were asked to rank-order just those cards already sorted as high priority. Educators were also encouraged to use guided note forms with questions mirroring the focus group protocol so that the study could capture all perspectives should time run short or individuals prefer not to share aloud with the group.

Nearly 80 Wisconsin educators from across the state participated in the focus groups, representing a balance of instructional roles, years of experience, and grade level (see Figures 1-4b below). Educators represented a variety of subject areas and specialties, including math, ELA, Title I, English Language Learners, and special education. A comparison to all educators statewide shows that in almost every dimension, the focus group was representative of all teachers statewide.

In the study's final phase, CPRL analyzed focus group data to develop the findings detailed in this Report. Again, the study's research questions served as a guiding framework. CPRL used qualitative coding to synthesize the large amounts of data collected during focus groups, identify trends in participant responses (see Findings below).

Figure 1: Focus group attendees by role

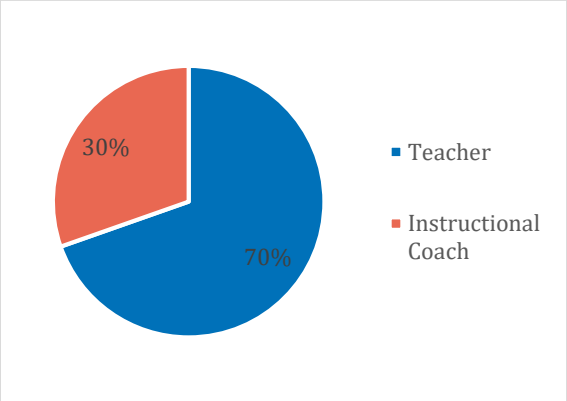


Figure 2a: Proportion of educators' grade levels in the focus groups

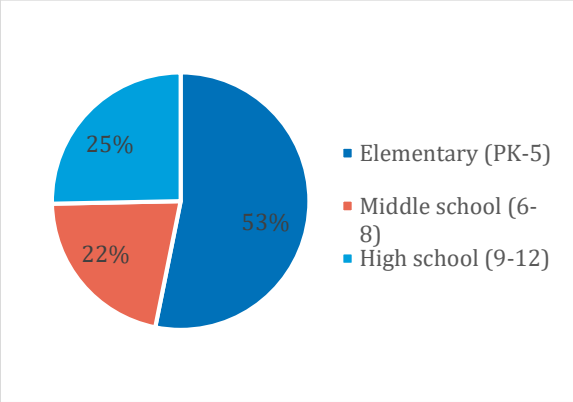
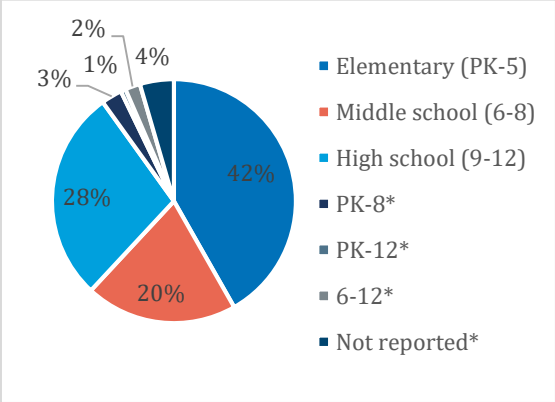


Figure 2b: Proportion of educators' grade levels in the state*



* Focus group participants were asked to select the primary grade level and subject area they teach, whereas statewide data includes all grade levels and subject areas taught by each licensed teacher. Without surveying all teachers in the state to identify their primary areas of focus by grade and subject, this Report uses best available data and data bands.

Figure 3a: Proportion of educators' years of experience in the focus groups

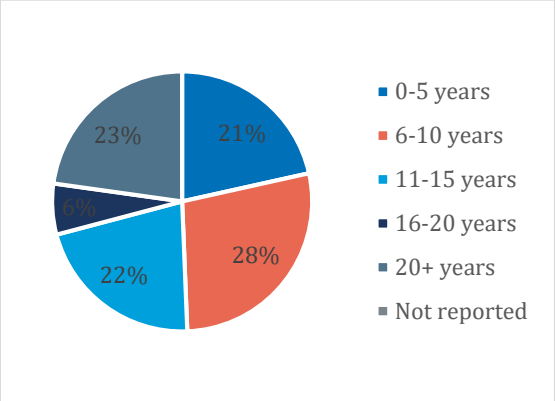
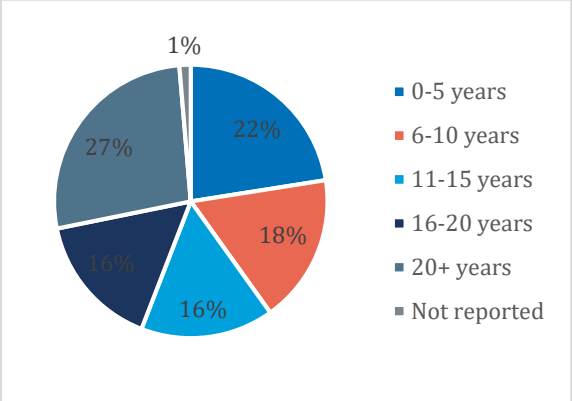


Figure 3b: Proportion of educators' years of experience in the state



** Statewide data on educators' years of experience is self-reported and, in approximately 10% of cases, has been found to be imprecise or incorrect. Because focus group participants also self-reported this (and other) data, CPRL has concluded the data are still helpful for comparing the breakdown of years of experience of focus group participants and statewide educators as a whole.

Figure 4a: Proportion of educators' subject areas in the focus groups

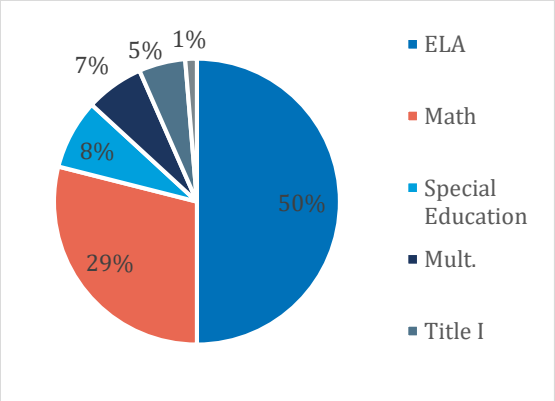
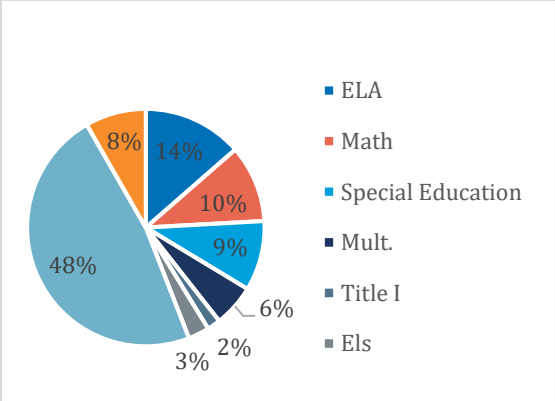


Figure 4b: Proportion of educators' subject areas in the state+



+ Similarly, while the focus groups specifically recruited ELA, math, special education, English Learners, and Title I teachers (and almost all were able to identify a primary subject, and only five participants did not fall into one of these categories), statewide data on educators' experience are categorized by many more subject areas. First, to ensure the comparison to the whole could be made in as parallel a way as possible, teachers teaching other subjects were excluded from the analysis in 4b. Second, statewide educators listed as teaching more than one subject in statewide data were not surveyed for their primary subject and therefore were included as teaching multiple subjects or, in the case of elementary grades, as teaching all subjects.

FINDINGS

Introduction to Findings

The findings that follow represent the collection and synthesis of common themes voiced by educators during CPRL's focus groups and are responsive to the original research questions. Findings are divided into six categories:

- Instructional Materials Content
- Instructional Materials Selection
- Professional Learning Content
- Professional Learning Selection
- Equity
- Messaging
- DPI Communications

For each finding, CPRL has included an explanation that provides greater detail, direct quotations, and, in some cases, nuance or differences of opinions, as well as additional evidence (quotations) to support the finding. Given the goals of listening to and elevating teacher voice as the driver for any future efforts around high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional learning,

In some cases, findings present consensus opinions, and in others, findings aim to represent the balance of educator opinion.

Summary of Findings

Instructional Materials Content 1	Teachers want curricula that cohere and align with Wisconsin Academic Standards and across grade levels.
Instructional Materials Content 2	Teachers are skeptical of the quality of purchased instructional materials, particularly of textbooks. They have greater faith in self-designed curricula, while recognizing difficulties, such as time, effort, and inconsistent content and quality, associated with these self-made curricula.
Instructional Materials Content 3	Teachers seek a balance between having resources available and being able to choose the ones that are most appropriate for their students.
Instructional Materials Content 4	Teachers especially want curricula with resources useful for differentiation among students with different learning levels and styles. Here again, teachers want a balance: structured support for differentiation and the freedom and flexibility to make the choices they feel are best for their students.
Instructional Materials Content 5	Teachers' opinions vary regarding curricula that is particularly directive. Some teachers dislike its restrictive nature, preferring the freedom to design their own instructional materials. Other teachers report liking the consistency that a scripted curriculum provides for students across multiple classrooms within a district.
Instructional Materials Selection 1	Across the state, there is broad variability in how districts and schools select new curricula and in teachers' involvement in the selection process. When involved, teachers' role varies from a limited one (causing frustration) to deeply integrating teachers in the process (generating higher investment in the process and curricula selected).
Instructional Materials Selection 2	School and district instructional materials selection processes operate as a funnel. Consequently, if HQIM are not among the three to 12 options that typically comprise the initial pool of options, they are unlikely to be considered at all as options are narrowed to a single choice.
Instructional Materials Selection 3	Instructional materials selection decisions are affected by factors other than the quality of the curriculum, including the amount and timing of available public funding for curricular materials and a curriculum's consistency with the schedule in use in the relevant district or school.

Professional Learning Content 1	Teachers prefer receiving PL directly rather than secondhand from other teachers.
Professional Learning Content 2	Teachers prefer PL delivered by individuals with real and recent (ideally current) teaching experience so they can have confidence in descriptions about how PL, especially with respect to HQIM, might be applicable in their own classrooms.
Professional Learning Content 3	Teachers prefer PL that is ongoing and revisits the same topic throughout the school year, allowing teachers to try implementing what they have learned, share and debrief results, make adjustments, and spiral learning into more advanced practices.
Professional Learning Selection 1	As with instructional materials selection, there is variability statewide in how districts and schools select PL providers. However, teachers have input in PL selection more often than they do in instructional materials selection.
Professional Learning Selection 2	Teachers want PL that is differentiated based on their amount of experience and instructional or student needs. Teachers believe "one size fits all" PL is low-quality.
Equity 1	Teachers who are more familiar with state and local achievement gap data and have experience talking about issues of educational equity are clearer and more vocal about its importance, the education system's historical role in allowing the persistence of achievement gaps, and in the system's responsibility to address such gaps.
Equity 2	Awareness and understanding of equity issues is highest among educators who received equity-related communication or support directly (from DPI or others). This suggests messaging about equity (again, from DPI or other sources) has been effective.
Messaging 1	Teachers and instructional coaches seem to find certain concepts motivating, whereas others evoke negative reactions. Still others elicit mixed responses.
Messaging 2	Several key phrases and concepts resonate with teachers and instructional coaches as characteristics of high-quality curriculum.
DPI Communications 1	Teachers cite being most influenced by other teachers they know personally.

DPI Communications 2	Teachers view DPI as responsible for licensure, accountability, and data analysis and have very little contact with DPI outside of these areas. Educators are interested in DPI taking a greater role in offering PL, vetting lists of curricula and PL, and providing libraries of resources.

Instructional Materials Content 1

Finding	Teachers want curricula that cohere and align with Wisconsin Academic Standards and across grade levels.
Explanation	Teachers reported that a lack of alignment between curricula across grade levels makes it difficult for students to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in each new grade and for teachers to identify and address gaps in student learning. An elementary teacher commented, "We need to do a better job vertically aligning content so we aren't shorting our kids with comprehension. We need to do a better job of exposing students to topics and spiraling all the way through their educational experience." When curriculum is aligned, to standards and vertically, teachers reported observing greater consistency and continuity in learning for students. In one district that has focused on establishing vertical alignment in math and ELA curricula, teachers reported that their students are making greater progress as they move through the grade levels. Educators understand that coherence and alignment must be built into the initial choice of curricula, because it is too difficult for teachers to create as they piece together otherwise unaligned curricula. As one elementary instructional coach noted, "Trying to get all of our curriculum to align would take hours and hours for teachers."
Additional Evidence	"Right now we have three different [curriculum] resources in three different [school] buildings that do not in any way connect to one another. And that is a tremendous disservice to students who transition from one building to another [for middle school or high school], where they are thrown into completely different ways of thinking." —Middle school instructional coach "In our K-5 math resource, I love the coherence from grade to grade. It's very purposeful and intentional. And it's interesting when you get K-5 teachers in a room and do an activity that they all do in their own grade level and it just looks a little different. You can see how the math grows and the story unfolds from grades K to 5." —Elementary math instructional coach "[In our district in the] middle school [grades], I feel like the 6-8 curriculum we use could incorporate math practice standards more than it does. It meets the content standards but the precision, rigor is something that could be better." —High school math teacher

Instructional Materials Content 2

Finding	Teachers are skeptical of the quality of purchased instructional materials, particularly of textbooks. They have greater faith in self-designed curricula, while recognizing difficulties, such as time, effort, and inconsistent content and quality, associated with these self-made curricula.
Explanation	Teachers and instructional coaches expressed skepticism about the quality and rigor of instructional materials available for district-wide purchase. As reasons for their dissatisfaction with purchased instructional materials, teachers often described misalignment between publishers' claims about their materials and the materials' actual content, and between publishers' motivation to sell curricular materials and the content that is needed to meet teachers' instructional goals. As one high school math teacher noted, "When Common Core was starting[,] everyone was like 'here's the new Common Core edition.' But it was the exact same textbook just stamped with Common Core, and it gave you all the numbers of the standards. Well, that's not really Common Core. That's just the standards. It's not the math practices." In contrast, teachers – most commonly, secondary ELA teachers – have confidence that instructional materials they design themselves are high-quality, rigorous, and well-suited to students' needs. This point emerged most clearly when teachers described their use of PL time for unit and lesson planning and the steps they took (sometimes described vaguely, other times with specific strategies and activities) to understand and meet their students' interests and needs. For example, a high school ELA teacher who designs her own curriculum valued the freedom to design materials around "what students need to know." Similarly, a science teacher commented, "I love our science curriculum because we made it. We had a lot of professional development and we've had classes over the summer that we can take. Everything we do is based on the Next Generation Science Standards and th[e] process of thinking like a scientist. I love designing it and teaching it – [everything] except for the time and effort that goes into it. But it's so worth it." As the latter comment notes, the time and effort required to develop instructional materials is burdensome. That problem led some teachers in the study to source or customize materials of indeterminate quality and rigor from sites like Pinterest or Teachers Pay Teachers. Faced with limited time to prepare, some teachers expressed a desire for more structured curriculum, whether in the form of a textbook or other preplanned materials. Some teachers and instructional coaches recognized that even if purchased instructional materials did not meet the level of quality desired, having a set curriculum in place at least offers "consistency" and a minimum threshold of quality from classroom to classroom.

Additional Evidence	"That's what we see as an issue. We're trying to narrow down and focus specifically on what things we need [but] some of the things put into the curriculums are [intended] to sell the curriculums. We didn't want a heavy worksheet-based [curriculum]. The authors don't write that into their curriculum but that's what some school districts want, so they are things in there that are put in to sell as opposed to necessarily best practice." —Elementary instructional coach "We'll use the textbook [as a text] and we'll craft either guided questions, guided activities to go with it. Very rarely will there be a generated piece from a textbook company that we would use." —High school ELA teacher "I work in districts with [a variety of approaches to curriculum], but prefer if [teachers] create their own so we can be sure it's good." —ELA instructional coach "Since our [curriculum] is scripted but we don't have to adhere to it tightly, a lot of the district members will create resources that go with the curriculum that don't [adhere tightly]. That allows you to not just read directly from the book. I don't know if it's I'm type A, I don't know if it's I don't trust other people, but I haven't been pleased with the product that they make, and so I make my own [materials] for all of the units that fits my style better and that I can ensure is really getting at what I want to get at. So it takes me probably ten hours a week to do these sources." —Focus group participant[1] "But then we have CKLA [Core Knowledge Language Arts], and CKLA is very scripted in teaching of reading. And so the part at my school that we really focus on is the fact that you have to adhere to the Core 1 part of [CKLA] instruction, and if you do Core 1 well, then you have less Tier 2 students [i.e., in need of intervention in a Response to Intervention, or RTI, model]. And so if we know that teachers are well prepared and planned in their teaching and student engagement and knowing students and knowing where students are and what support they can give their kids, then the curriculum works well." – Elementary instructional coach

[1] The role, grade level, and content area of this participant and others similarly attributed throughout this document were not recorded.

Instructional Materials Content 3

Finding	Teachers seek a balance between having resources available and being able to choose the ones that are most appropriate for their students.
Explanation	Teachers want their instructional materials to include a broad range of resources, so they can choose what works best for them and their students. But teachers also worry that curricula with a wide variety of resources can create pressure to cover all of the provided material within a single school year. Teachers also identified the absence of such resources as a disadvantage of self-created materials. Teachers generally express interest in having access to more rather than fewer resources in their instructional materials. Additional resources are valued as a way to share and access best practices, identify alternative instructional approaches to a concept, and reduce the time spent each week searching for the right materials. In the last regard, not all teachers have ready access to the quality instructional materials needed to meet all of the grade level or subject area standards, and some teachers report spending hours each week searching for resources. A high school English teacher who designs her own intervention curriculum described the challenges of searching for appropriate resources: "Going to someplace like the RTI Clearinghouse, which has lists of things – most of which aren't really high school appropriate [and] thinking about what looks right or what can my school afford – it gets to be hard. I hate to say, 'tell me what to do,' but I don't have time to figure it all out for myself." However, teachers also reported that having too many resources can be overwhelming or create additional pressures on limited instructional time. Although only 6% of teachers in the study considered having a curriculum that "can be fully taught within a single school year" to be a high priority for instructional materials, many teachers reported feeling pressure to "cram so many individual pieces into the day."
Additional Evidence	"I love that our components, our reading and our writing, they go together. They're organized in units, and the teaching points all build to the end goals of those units, and there's quite a bit of choice within every day and every unit." — Elementary instructional coach "In the case of [our curriculum, it can seem like] there are so many problems that kids need to practice. I don't think it's about quantity, it's about quality. I would rather have more practice than less, but it feels like [teachers] have to do it all, when really they don't. I would rather have more [resources to choose from] but it makes you feel like [choosing is] not okay sometimes." — Elementary math teacher

Instructional Materials Content 4

Finding	Teachers especially want curricula with resources useful for differentiation among students with different learning levels and styles. Here again, teachers want a balance: structured support for differentiation and the freedom and flexibility to make the choices they feel are best for their students.
Explanation	A common barrier teachers cite, which keeps them from differentiating instruction for different learning levels and styles, is the absence of curricular materials and resources suited to these different student needs and of the resulting time needed to research and create them. Although teachers acknowledge the difficulties associated with creating such resources themselves, they also criticize purchased curricula for taking a "one-size-fits-all" approach that fails to account for student's different needs. As one instructional coach described it, "I also understand from the teacher's perspective if I have to do all this prep for all these different curricul[a] that are really heavy, and analyze [students'] writing, and prep every single night, get ready for these conferences . . . [I] feel overwhelmed." Finding appropriate materials and supports for certain categories of students is especially challenging. For example, one high school ELA teacher noted, "As our district becomes more diverse, we have EL [English-Learner] students joining us at middle or high school level, and they haven't had that chance to get ramped up to [grade] level [in English fluency] yet. It makes it harder for us. We want to help, but the materials and the supports are hard to find." Teachers do not feel that purchased curricula solve these problems. As one ELA instructional coach remarked, "I work in a lot of schools, and what I find is that at the elementary level, teachers aren't able to be responsive to their students. They are following prescribed, scripted curriculum, and they have to follow it to fidelity." Even in cases when curricula might provide resources for differentiation, teachers express interest in having more guidance and support in the actual work of differentiating learning opportunities. For example, one teacher commented that while she appreciates the flexibility she has in deciding how to differentiate instruction, "[I would like] a little bit more direction in terms of what does it look like to scaffold the curriculum, to differentiate, to support what's provided."
Additional Evidence	"[A]s a coach, one of the things that I know teachers struggle with is creating those supports that are going to help students. In those supports. I'm talking about above-level students, on-level students, and below-level students, so having materials for all of them in intervention or in academic time. [I]f I could, I would be the person to help, since we work on the data together, the teacher and I, but teachers don't have enough time unless they're there until eight

	o'clock at night creating those. And that has paid off in our school data when I do those things." -Elementary instructional coach "So I guess it's more the growth for all students, and then providing the differentiation piece because I think that's sometimes where we get stuck because there's so many levels of kids in every single class to differentiate and it's really difficult to differentiate. If you're an 8th grade teacher and you have kids performing at a seventh grade level and a twelfth grade level in your class, how are you meeting all of their needs? So I guess that's kind of trying to put more focus on the differentiating piece and looking at the growth of all students." - Elementary Title I instructional coach "Access to good, solid curriculum materials, especially for ELs is a problem]. We're really excited because Expressions Math is coming out with a Spanish version, not an EL] version, and there is a difference. For example, we had a fourth grader come in who could read and write in Spanish, however could not read and write in English, and we had no comparable materials for that child. We were giving her fourth grade tests in English, because there were just no good curriculum materials. If we could get some good resources, that would be very helpful." -Elementary instructional coach

Instructional Materials Content 5

Finding	Teachers' opinions vary regarding curricula that is particularly directive. Some teachers dislike its restrictive nature, preferring the freedom to design their own instructional materials. Other teachers report liking the consistency that a scripted curriculum provides for students across multiple classrooms within a district.
Explanation	Teachers express differing opinions regarding scripted curricula, which provides teachers with structured lesson plans that often include timing allotments and wording to use, and prescriptive curricula, which teachers used to define expectations or requirements that dealt with content and pedagogy more broadly. Some teachers feel that a scripted curriculum limits their creativity and responsiveness to student learning needs. For example, one elementary teacher expressed dissatisfaction that "[I]n English Language Arts . . . we were told this year that we had to do the protocol, which is basically scripted, and we were told how many minutes we had to do each piece." Additionally, most teachers and instructional coaches believe that a scripted curriculum can limit the effectiveness of veteran teachers with a significant depth of experience in a specific subject. Other teachers spoke favorably about the use of scripted curricula, at least in certain circumstances. One such circumstance is when teachers believe the curriculum to be of high quality. Teachers report observing significant student growth when teaching such a curriculum with fidelity. Teachers also tend to favor scripted curricula when the teachers using them are new to the profession, new to the subject matter, or struggle with the subject. In these circumstances, teachers see scripted curricula as a means to increase the likelihood that all students receive high-quality instruction and to achieve better alignment among teachers and more consistent student mastery (see Curriculum 1 above). Even experienced teachers recognized value in having scripted curricula available as long as they have the flexibility to supplement or deviate from it in order to accommodate their own and their students' needs. One such teacher described spending time each week creating supplementary materials in order to bring her personal style into her otherwise scripted lesson plans. Similarly, a special education teacher welcomed the availability of scripted curricula, as long as teachers have the opportunity to decide whether to use them, but [he] was less sanguine about mandating the use of scripted materials. Capturing many of these views, an elementary instructional coach stated, "For me, it's always how do you get the highest quality resources that both build capacity of the teacher and quality of the instruction design in the classroom without tying [a teacher's] hands, stifling or dimming the art, because

	ultimately a curriculum is a piece of paper. Sometimes it's not for me about having the right curriculum, but the right message with the curriculum – that this is a resource to lift your talent and your capacity and if it's not [a content area] you feel that you have the strength in, here's how this [curriculum] is going to help you build it." Many educators, regardless of their personal preference, acknowledge conditions in which a scripted curriculum has benefits (such as for new teachers as they learn the grade-level content and prepare daily lesson plans) and other conditions under which a scripted curriculum has disadvantages (such as for more accomplished teachers).
Additional Evidence	"I think that many of us, maybe all of us, are in teaching because we have some creative side where we like to create, we like to explore different options. And it has just been grueling for me to teach a curriculum that has a black and white textbook, this is what I do on this day, this is what I do on this day. And it's just boring me. Boring, boring me. And I'm just looking for different ways to change it up a little bit because I'm bored. Exactly. I mean no one's in our classroom saying this is what you need to do today, this is what you need to do tomorrow. And this is the test you need to give. They're not telling us that. As soon as they do, I'm out of there." – High school math teacher "Thinking about the breadth of many hundreds of teachers that you're trying to provide materials for . . ., something quite scripted is really restrictive to a veteran teacher, to a master teacher who has lots and lots of tools. And at the same time, [a scripted curriculum] is sometimes very necessary for someone brand new who doesn't have the depth of knowledge. If you have that master level of skill, if you can create your own, you love it, you learned from it, it's going to be great. If you don't have that knowledge, you're probably not going to meet your kids where they are and provide them with what they need." — Focus group participant

Instructional Materials Selection 1

Finding	Across the state, there is broad variability in how districts and schools select new curricula and in teachers' involvement in the selection process. When involved, teachers' role varies from a limited one (causing frustration) to deeply integrating teachers in the process (generating higher investment in the process and curricula selected).
Explanation	Instructional materials selection processes vary, as do teachers' involvement in those processes. In some districts, one person, such as the curriculum director, selects the curriculum. In these cases, teachers have little input in the selection process and describe the process as a "sore subject" and "frustrating, just being given a curriculum and not having the time to figure out how to teach it and [not even] just having the input on what we thought we would want better." In other schools, the administrative staff involve teachers in the selection process, often through their participation in curricula selection committees or piloting curriculum in their classrooms. Teachers and instructional coaches who feel that they play an active role in the instructional materials selection process tend to describe their experiences positively, even when their top choice for curriculum is not ultimately selected. One math teacher described the practice in her district, which created a committee that comprised one representative from every grade level and every building. "[Each representative] says what they want and what they see as the vision for the district in [the relevant subject]. Based on that, they looked at different curriculums and piloted [them]." In another district, teachers and instructional coaches visited other schools and districts to observe different curricula in action as part of their due diligence process. In processes where teachers are more involved, educators' descriptions implied that greater involvement also requires greater pre-planning, more time, and more resources, the latter often to pay either teachers for their time or substitutes to allow teachers to participate during the school day. When discussing teachers' involvement in curricula selection processes, some educators raise the need for more communication between different school levels to ensure that students have a strong foundational base as they progress from elementary to middle to high school. One math instructional coach noted that in her district, "There's not a lot of understanding across the different buildings about what's happening. . . . Elementary does their thing. Middle school does their thing. High school does their thing. The [different curricula selected] don't always connect well [across grade levels], so I think that's an issue."
Additional Evidence	"We just went through this process this last June so we only had our new curriculum, K-12 for math and ELA for one year. So last spring, we had days

where we got [substitutes], and we poured through three different sets of curriculum. And we matched it to standards, and also kind of how teacher-friendly we thought it was, how good for students. It was a really nice collaborative teacher-leveled decision. So what we did is we gave our suggestion, our first, second, and third choice, and why - our support for that, and we wrote that up and gave to our administrator. And unless there was some other reason why they wouldn't take our suggestion, they actually did. So they went with what we suggested. So I was happy with that process."

— Middle School ELA teacher

"We were part of a curriculum adoption purchase in 2012, it was probably a 15-month [process]. We started at the end of one school year. We had guiding questions, we had district leadership, our directors led the teams, all the math coaches. We have two high schools, they each have their own instructional coaches for mathematics, and each elementary school has a coach, so we were part of those teams, and then we had teachers at each grade level. We were part of those teams for several different days of pull-out [when our classes were covered by substitutes]. We met with textbook [representatives] and we met with a lot of different companies and then narrowed down to different pilots for elementary, for middle, and for high school. After the pilots, there were more questions, focus groups and basically our director guided the decision."

— Elementary math instructional coach

"No we don't have the input that use used to. . . . I think in some areas, [we still do,] but there [have] been years where decisions were made [for us] . . . we have a very good curriculum team and we have teacher leaders within the school at various different grade levels, and as of more recently, [they are] just not listening to us as much as they were in the past possibly."

— High school math teacher

"And [the science team] had meetings, they were taken places, they went to different districts and watched and [the ELA team] didn't have any of that. We were told that we had to teach the way that the book told us which was very prescriptive and a little bit of that came over into literature, but not a lot."

— Middle school ELA teacher

"When we did our last K-5 math adoption, we changed the way [we conducted the curriculum selection process]; that was the first time we did a new model for adopting curriculum. We had representatives from every grade level and every building - so teacher representatives, at least two from every grade level, and all buildings were represented. All the principals were required to participate and engage in all our meetings so they were part of the decision-making process. And we also had a sixth grade teacher come from the middle school and be a part of this team so that they can see what we were doing. And he was a part of the decision also. We started with training on how to use the

	[Student Achievement Partners Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool] tool for analyzing curriculum and then we went into actually doing it…It took us a long time…There [were] at least 25 people on this team and we ended up with a unanimous decision. So I think it's the best way we've done it so far and I think we'll continue probably to use that." — Math instructional coach

Instructional Materials Selection 2

Finding	School and district instructional materials selection processes operate as a funnel. Consequently, if HQIM are not among the three to twelve options that typically comprise the initial pool of options, they are unlikely to be considered at all as options are narrowed to a single choice.
Explanation	In the curriculum instructional materials process, most schools or districts begin with a list of at least three and up to as many as twelve different resources to evaluate. From there, schools and districts use a variety of strategies to narrow down the list, often selecting one to two or three resources to evaluate more thoroughly, and one to two to pilot in classrooms. New resources are rarely, if ever, added for consideration partway through the adoption process. Thus, if high-quality instructional materials are not included on the initial list of resources, they will not be selected for adoption. This is especially problematic since processes used to identify the initial list do not always inspire confidence that HQIM will be included in the initial list of curricula. Developing the initial list of candidate curricula can be a difficult and time-consuming task for school and district staff members, including classroom teachers who fulfil that responsibility in some places. Teachers and instructional coaches report using a variety of methods to create the initial list of possible resources, including online research, consultation with CESA staff, conversations with staff in nearby districts and schools, and at times, personal relationships with vendors. Further, in this process, districts and schools do not always draw from a wide or diverse enough range of resources and may exclude high-quality resources that would be the optimal choice. As one middle school instructional coach asked: "How do you find resources that are really good quality and where should I go? I don't know where to look. I could contact all the companies with

	all the big names, but I don't know if they're really going to meet all the standards and what they're asking our students to know and be able to do and prepare them for life after school." To avoid the possibility of excluding strong options, one instructional coach suggested that DPI provide a list that schools and districts could use as a starting point if they wished to do so: "One of the things that would be helpful is to have DPI give us a list of contact information for the top companies and the top textbooks (like Expressions or CPM Math). If they could do that initial sort for us and have a one stop shop."
Additional Evidence	"We came up with important criteria and a rating system and first looked at 10-12 different resources and went through a scale to narrow it down to our top three. We brought in the three [representatives] from those companies and had them do an overview, and then narrowed it down. We piloted two programs, and had classrooms doing two programs. Then we met throughout the year and looked at assessment scores." — Elementary instructional coach

Instructional Materials Selection 3

Finding	Instructional materials selection decisions are affected by factors other than the quality of the curriculum, including the amount and timing of available public funding for curricular materials and a curriculum's consistency with the schedule in use in the relevant district or school.
Explanation	Factors other than quality influence the selection of curricula by districts and schools. Cost, irrespective of quality, is one such factor, especially in rural districts. Teachers report that limited funding for curriculum limits the options among which they may choose. On the extreme end, one high school ELA teacher shared, "I'm in a small, rural school, and I can pick whatever curriculum I want as long as it's free because we have no money to spend on curriculum." To help spread out the cost of new curricula across a number of years, some districts stagger the selection of curricula by subject matter or grade levels. This phased

	approach can mean, however, that budget resources may not be equally available for all subjects and grades if budgets fluctuate year to year. Budgetary cycles also affect the selection of curriculum. Teachers reported, for example, that, when confronted with budget crises or other reasons to fear that money originally earmarked for curricula might be diverted to other needs, districts adopted a "use it or lose it" policy: if curriculum purchases were not made within an allotted time, the funds would be used for other purposes. For example, a high school math teacher described being told by her principal that she "had three months to pick a textbook because the money was going to disappear, so let's have at it." To the extent that such policies diminish the time available to identify and study available curricula, they can supersede effective consideration of curricular quality. Another teacher noted that the structure of the daily schedule at her school influenced its selection of CPM for its new math curriculum because CPM fit best with the schools' new daily schedule: "we were switching from block schedule that year to a 50-minute period, and the CPM curriculum [provided] 50-minute [lessons]. You can do this lesson in 50 minutes, you can go the next day and do this lesson for 50 min. So that also was a highlight in our curriculum director's eyes that this was totally built for the schedule that we're going to have."
Additional Evidence	"It got to the point where the superintendent and the board [were] like, 'Oh, you gotta spend this.' They came to us in September and said we really need to know [our curricular choice] by January, and we said, okay. We had the new books in the spring. They sent us the class set. We couldn't really pilot it at that point. It was kind of all or nothing." — High school math teacher "In my experience helping districts adopt [curricula], it comes down to [budget deadlines]. We have money sitting in this pot, and if you don't use it this year, it's gone. Unfortunately, I don't understand that budgeting process." — Elementary instructional coach

Professional Learning Content 1

Finding	Teachers prefer receiving PL directly rather than secondhand from other teachers who have attended trainings but not received their own PL in how to turnkey what they have learned.
Explanation	Teachers are more positive when speaking about their experiences receiving PL directly rather than experiences in which PL opportunities are offered to small groups who are expected to bring learning back to the district. In describing their experiences, teachers are not opposed to "train the trainer" models, but rather are opposed to receiving PL from someone who attended a training as a learner rather than someone explicitly prepared to deliver the PL. Teachers note that receiving the PL directly allows them to ask questions to individuals well-versed in the PL content. Additionally, it ensures control of quality in the delivery of the material. As one teacher put it, "If we're going to be implementing something, bring in the professionals to show us how to do it. Not just another teacher that went to a conference, may have gotten a packet, [and now has to] photocopy it off and give it to you and call it professional learning." This sentiment is echoed by others who note it would be more helpful to their practice to meet with and engage with the PL vendors and presenters directly. Several teachers cite the opaqueness of district- or school-level decisions about which teachers are identified to attend external PL opportunities and share that, at best, this decision-making process is unclear, and at worst, represents administrators' personal preferences and inequity. However, there are certainly barriers to having more educators attend PL opportunities and conferences, and therefore some districts selecting this approach may be doing so out of necessity rather than preference. In such cases, altering the method of PL delivery may not be an option. The most commonly cited reason is lack of funding: schools and districts are not able to offer funding for all teachers to participate, leading to only a small number able to attend. With respect to this, one teacher expressed the wish that the state could "reduce costs by not having these workshops at expensive resorts and overnight costs" or offering stipends for attending.

Additional Evidence	"Since my job is a split between teaching English and [being an] instructional coach, I attend a lot of professional development. And as a result, I find myself as the sifter of what's going to apply to whom and that's hard because what I might feel is important is not what someone else might [find important]. And yet districts don't have the money to send people to these professional development [sessions]. Our district, we have it in the budget that each teacher can have about $100 and that doesn't even cover a sub for a day. So it's getting really hard to get teachers outside of the district because they should be doing these things too - that's how you get new ideas." — High school ELA teacher "This is kind of a touchy subject too... we have four different buildings in our district and I think certain people are given the opportunity to have professional development versus other people." "I would love to go to the math conference down in Lake Geneva, but I haven't been since I was a student teacher. I'm sure there's a million good things I could learn, but it's an overnight thing, you have to fill out three forms. If anybody's going with you, you need multiple rooms, etc. It all adds up. It's part timing, part paperwork, you know." — High school math teacher "And it goes back to funding of your district too. There's a kindergarten conference I would like to go to and I've not had a chance to go to because I know that I don't have the funding out of my own pocket and district to get it either. And then sub plans and everything else. There's a lack of funding for teachers to go to some of these things that could be very beneficial." — Elementary teacher "Wouldn't it be great to if we could all go to the Kohl Center and bring all the teachers there, and have instead of sending five teachers like they do, to come back and tell us?" —Focus group participant

Professional Learning Content 2

Finding	Teachers prefer PL delivered by individuals with real and recent (ideally current) teaching experience so they can have confidence in descriptions about how PL, especially with respect to HQIM, might be applicable in their own classrooms.
Explanation	Teachers express that it is more helpful to receive PL and development from active teachers because it is more applicable and relevant to their day-to-day experiences. This preference for those delivering PL includes teachers who have mostly left the classroom but still teach one period or occasionally, or teachers who have only recently left the classroom. An elementary math teacher explained how "One of the best conferences I went to was the RTI conference led by teachers across the state" and that it was meaningful to "hear something from someone who's doing it every day versus this is what you should be doing and in this idealistic world it's going to work great." Along similar lines, a high school teacher shared that PL is often unhelpful when it is delivered by "Someone who is so far removed from teaching that they have all kinds of wonderful ideas that aren't going to work in real life or [are] going to take forever." She noted that hearing from active, successful teachers gives more weight to the PL sessions as it is grounded in relevant practices rather than "idealistic" viewpoints. A special education teacher also emphasized this point: "It really varies by district based on budget. More and more [within district] literacy and math coaches provide [PL] to schools. Which can be really good if it's a person who is still a teacher at heart and not a quasi-administrator." Additionally, teachers value hearing from other teachers as a means to learn about other schools and districts in the state. This is especially important to teachers in small or rural districts, who may be the only teacher in their grade and content level in their local settings. Finally, teachers draw a distinction between product training versus professional training. Educators describe value for each, but note that they have different goals, and each should be offered explicitly and with purpose. And, product training again differs from product sales pitches, which educators describe as spending a significant portion of time on the merits of adopting certain curriculum or materials, rather than time spent developing the teachers' skill in using it.
Additional Evidence	"When it's someone who is so far removed from teaching that they have all kinds of wonderful ideas that aren't going to work in real life or going to take forever…No experience, years, or they've forgotten what it's really like to teach

	and they have all kinds of idealistic views about how it should be, [it's not helpful]." — High school math teacher "I think the part that's so important is that it's someone that's still teaching that's delivering the PL. It's one thing to go see the 'gold-key' teacher from 20 years ago who hasn't taught a modern child, who has really great ideas, but you can't apply it. Whereas you go to see [PD provider] and [PD provider], because they still have, even if it's one class, they have students that they're working with, so they understand the challenges that students are coming with and how you can overcome that with whatever resource." — High school ELA teacher

Professional Learning Content 3

Finding	Teachers prefer PL that is ongoing and revisits the same topic throughout the school year, allowing teachers to try implementing what they have learned, share and debrief results, make adjustments, and spiral learning into more advanced practices.
Explanation	Educators find it most helpful to receive ongoing PL on the same topic throughout the year, providing them with opportunities to learn from their experiences and make the necessary adjustments. Teachers find these opportunities valuable because it allows them to make real-time adjustments and better implement the new practices in their classrooms. Teachers reported this desire for revisiting content whether the PL being discussed was provided by someone in the district or an external individual or vendor, coming back into schools throughout the year. In fact, teachers especially express this opinion about support on the use of curriculum. One elementary ELA teacher shared "With the writing curriculum, to have someone come in again as like a follow up I think is just crucial, versus just seeing someone at the beginning of that new year of that new curriculum, helping train you, and then you never see them again. It's like you have to walk it and live it, and then you have more questions and more needs. So I feel like having someone come in multiple times."

	The preference for ongoing PL on the same topic was also described in conjunction with having sufficient time to collaborate with peers during the workday to consider how new approaches considered as a result of the PL might be best put into practice. Additionally, teachers like spiraling sessions because it provides opportunities for them to ask follow-up questions to the PL providers after efforts to implement.
Additional Evidence	"We have a lot of opportunities where we bring people in and send people to workshops for different professional development. One of the shifts that we've made in [our district] is more of a long-term commitment. For instance, a year ago, I brought [PD provider] for a full day of training with my 6-12 math department - that was like in May. And then throughout the entire next school year, which was this year, he met with us virtually so that we could do tasks in between for a few months, and then we would meet up and discuss them and he'd give us more tasks to do and then we would meet up and discuss it with him. So we're thinking more of, instead of one and done, that's one of the powers of CPM, is more of a you don't just go and then it's finished, it's more of a long-term approach." — Elementary math instructional coach "I think our writing institute, after we taught for a year where we had weeklong in-service before we started the program, and then after teaching it for a year, we went back and did like a nonfiction portion. And I feel like that helped me a ton the following year teaching it. So kind of being exposed, and then teaching for a year, and then coming back and having a whole week long… I saw things that I could have done differently and that I did do differently this year." — Elementary ELA teacher "We had our [vendor] and our math curriculum people come in. So we had our in-services at the beginning of the year before school started to get us up and running with it. And then mid-year, they came back and spent half a day with us to answer any questions and give us a refresher. Once we were starting to use it, that helped." — Middle school ELA teacher "I would say it's the ongoing piece of the professional development and support of what we're actually using in the classrooms that is probably the best that I've seen. And also with ELA, we did something similar: this is what you need to get going, you don't know what this curriculum looks like, ok now we're going to come back in a couple months and so some more follow-up training. So I think it's just not a we hit you and now you're done, good luck for 20 years kind of thing. It's more of an ongoing thing." — Elementary instructional coach

Professional Learning Selection 1

Finding	As with instructional materials selection, there is variability statewide in how districts and schools select PL providers. However, teachers have input in PL selection more often than they do in instructional materials selection.
Explanation	The process for selecting PL varies across districts and schools. In some locations, teachers describe having very little input and either the school administration or curriculum director selects the PL opportunities for teachers. In other districts and schools, teachers have much more input in driving the PL selection process. In these cases, teachers typically participate in structured choice, such as by using menus or surveys. Finally, in some cases teachers have complete ownership over their PL opportunities by selecting their own to receive outside of their district and school, either because this is the district's policy or because the district simply lacks a policy or consistent PL opportunities. For example, a high school math teacher shared that in her school, "The administrative team picks and they tell us where to go." This account is quite different from another teacher's experience, who described that "[The] curriculum director sends out, in the spring, a Google Form to all staff asking for what their needs are. So then he collects that data, and then the next year's professional development for the district is planned based on what the teachers want. . . . So it's really based on what the teachers feel they need in our district."
Additional Evidence	"I've never had any input. It's always been, this is what you were told was [available], if you want to get some of your own professional development – that you could choose." — Focus group participant "We have curriculum facilitators at every grade level, one or two teachers per grade that meet with district curriculum director. They meet monthly and talk about what needs are. That team plans professional development, but mostly led by one curriculum director that we have. She makes all the choices. Would be nice if there were more people involved." — Focus group participant "We have a form and you have so many points each year, and your points total up...." — High school math teacher

Professional Learning Selection 2

Finding	Teachers want PL that is differentiated based on their amount of experience and instructional or student needs. Teachers believe "one size fits all" PL is low-quality.
Explanation	One of the ideas raised primarily by more experienced teachers is the need for differentiated PL based on teachers' experience, as well as their instructional needs or their students' needs. These sentiments echo those expressing teachers' value for differentiating curriculum and pedagogical strategies for their students. One elementary instructional coach explained, "I think it just depends on the level of our teachers. With a newer teacher, [advanced PL on content could be] overwhelming, but the teachers that have taught that scripted curriculum for a couple of years or those teams that have worked together, they're able to pull out the target skills and pull out the things that their students need and they see as a year to year need [for their own PL]." Some schools already have mechanisms in place to allow for more differentiated PL experiences. For example, one teacher mentioned at her school, they are provided with a survey where they can identify areas and skills they wanted further development. This model provides the school and district the necessary data points to offer PL opportunities more aligned to teachers' needs.
Additional Evidence	"Ideally, it could be differentiated. If you're a first year teacher, you should have a different professional learning than someone who's already taught that for two years. Let those experienced teachers meet together to discuss how they use it, how they deliver it." — Elementary teacher "We kind of talk a lot about we're supposed to give kids choice. Adults, we don't get a choice, you know, we're all sitting there and learning the same thing where you don't really need that." — Focus group participant "That'd be great if there could be like some kind of a tiered approach to PD. So I've been teaching for 32 years and I got to the point where I couldn't really go anywhere, go anywhere because I kinda, not that I knew it all, but it was somewhere along the line I'd already heard it. So it was like trying to find those PD opportunities that were really for somebody who'd been in the field for 32 years." — Focus group participant

Equity 1

Finding	Teachers who are more familiar with state and local achievement gap data and have experience talking about issues of educational equity are clearer and more vocal about its importance, the education system's historical role in allowing the persistence of achievement gaps, and in the system's responsibility to address such gaps.
Explanation	The level of understanding of student equity and a shared sense of its importance is not uniform across educators in the state. There are two trends correlating to higher awareness of student equity needs that emerge, one relating to geographic location of an educator's district and the other relating to an educator's role. First, the location of the school and district seem related to whether an educator is familiar with student equity issues (or, further, initiatives to address gaps) in their context. Generally, educators from more urban, densely-populated districts indicate that equity is a necessary and worthwhile goal of educators, and the clearest and strongest voices for equity generally come from the Madison area. This is rarer from educators working in less urban environments. One ELA teacher shared that to be high-quality, curricula should be culturally responsive, because this allows teachers to be "responsive to what our students say and what our students need. . . ." Additionally, the level of understanding of student equity and expressed importance of pursuing equity varied during focus groups depending on educator role. As a group, instructional coaches speak with greater familiarity with student equity data, gaps, and initiatives and are more forward about the need for educators to address these topics than are teachers. However, to the extent that the interactive exercise (see description above in Methodology), touched on this topic by asking educators to rank the importance of cultural responsiveness as a quality of curriculum, there was not a discernible difference between the importance instructional coaches or teachers gave. Among all educators better versed with student equity topics, discussion is solutions-oriented about the importance of equity in their districts and schools. For example, one middle school instructional coach described how her district "made an effort to look at our data with a lens of proportional representation. So looking at AP classes, if we have 15% minorities, then 15% of minorities should be enrolled in AP classes hypothetically, right? And they're not. So then [we are] looking at: what are the barriers for minority students from being in AP classes?" Despite these general trends, one potential barrier that both instructional coaches and teachers mention is the impact of a lack of buy-in from the staff and the school administration in pursuing equity-focused work, resulting in the

	issue becoming deprioritized. One teacher described that rolling out equity initiatives requires a philosophical shift, and yet "The buy-in was still not there with building leadership" and their response was, "There's no way, we can't do this [in five years]."
Additional Evidence	"One of the discussions we had in our middle school this year was we pulled the demographics for our accelerated classes and we looked to see if the demographics of the kids in our accelerated classes matched the demographics of the school building and matched the demographics of our district - and it was a huge eye opener and we knew when we saw that it was the white kids with the big houses in the accelerated classrooms, we knew we had to make some changes, and we have made huge changes for the next school year in a very short amount of time." — Elementary instructional coach "Sometimes our conversations about inclusion will bring up what is appropriate and equitable for our kids that have IEPs versus kids that are low without IEPs versus kids who are strong readers or have strong math skills. I think SPED, those kids with special needs, I think that conversation might come up when it comes to that: what does that look like and how is that implemented with inclusion." — Middle school ELA teacher "So equity, in our school, we like to make sure not only time is equitable, resources are equitable, but we started towards the end of the year we did a deep look at foundational skills. In developing the PD with [vendor], I wanted it to be relevant and experienced for third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers as well. In the PD that we did, we made sure that the very basic print-rich things, and letter identification, those types of activities that we did for kindergarten, first, and second grade, there were resources available for third, fourth, and fifth. You may, in third, fourth, and fifth, get a student that is still functioning on a first-grade level. The equity part of that professional development was critical to make sure that it was applicable to everybody so that they can pull their own weight. Instead of saying, 'well that's a kindergarten and first-grade teacher's job' — no, it's all of our jobs." — Elementary instructional coach "One of the things we've done at the middle school level in our literature circle offerings is really work to ensure that there's a wide diversity of representation, whether that be LGBTQ, minority, just really worked hard to diversify the titles that we offer. To make sure kids see themselves be represented in literature and we found that it has done a better job of engaging our readers." — Middle school ELA instructional coach

	"If I wasn't a white upper class kid, I would have no idea what you're asking me in this question. I can't get through the wording to know what you want me to do mathematically, because they don't have the background knowledge or they don't have the exposure to that… you're not assessing them on their math, you're assessing them on what they've been given in their life, and that's not equitable at all." — High school math teacher "We did that with assessment, when we looked at math and reading, we looked at equity for the students and looked at socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students and where they fell in that." — Elementary teacher "We target our students with disabilities and low socioeconomic groups. Our students with disabilities right now - the achievement gap is out of control so that is becoming a pretty large focus for our district. Looking at structures, and processes, and systems from that view. There's a real problem with 'mine and yours' vs 'ours', in terms of everyone owning all students and a belief in high-levels of learning for all and how we can achieve that and using universal design. Those understandings haven't permeated the system so just discussing how to make that a focus and how to change the conversation and philosophy, a much more philosophical view on that." — Middle school Instructional coach

Equity 2

Finding	Awareness and understanding of equity issues is highest among educators who received equity-related communication or support directly (from DPI or others). This suggests messaging about equity (again, from DPI or other sources) has been effective.
Explanation	Another factor that contributes to the awareness and understanding of equity issues is whether educators have received equity-related communication, training, or support. In particular, instructional coaches who cited receiving such guidance from DPI and Wisconsin RTI Center are among those who are more well-versed with equity-related issues and more familiar with DPI initiatives and resources for improving equity than instructional coaches who had not. Additionally, teachers more fluent during focus group equity discussions described discussions and training in their districts and schools. While it is clear that DPI is not the only source of effective equity-related communication and support for focus group participants, DPI's efforts do seem to have created meaningful differences for educators when compared to those who have received no support on the topic. For example, talking about herself and her colleague, one elementary math instructional coach stated: "Work with DPI on the coaching leadership team, and one of the things we've been working on in the last two years is equitable access to content, to core instruction basically. And so we've brought that back to our districts and... our superintendent created a committee about equity."
Additional Evidence	"Equity for students is, right now, intended [by our district leadership] to be the core of instructional planning. And making sure teachers feel like they have the time to understand how to do that." — Focus group participant "[Our district has] some strategic plan goals focused around equity and social emotional learning. So we've had [some] PD strategies, pull-outs on that. . . . It has led though to the creation of new jobs and new positions that we didn't have before, which is a good step in the next direction." — Secondary ELA instructional coach

Messaging 1

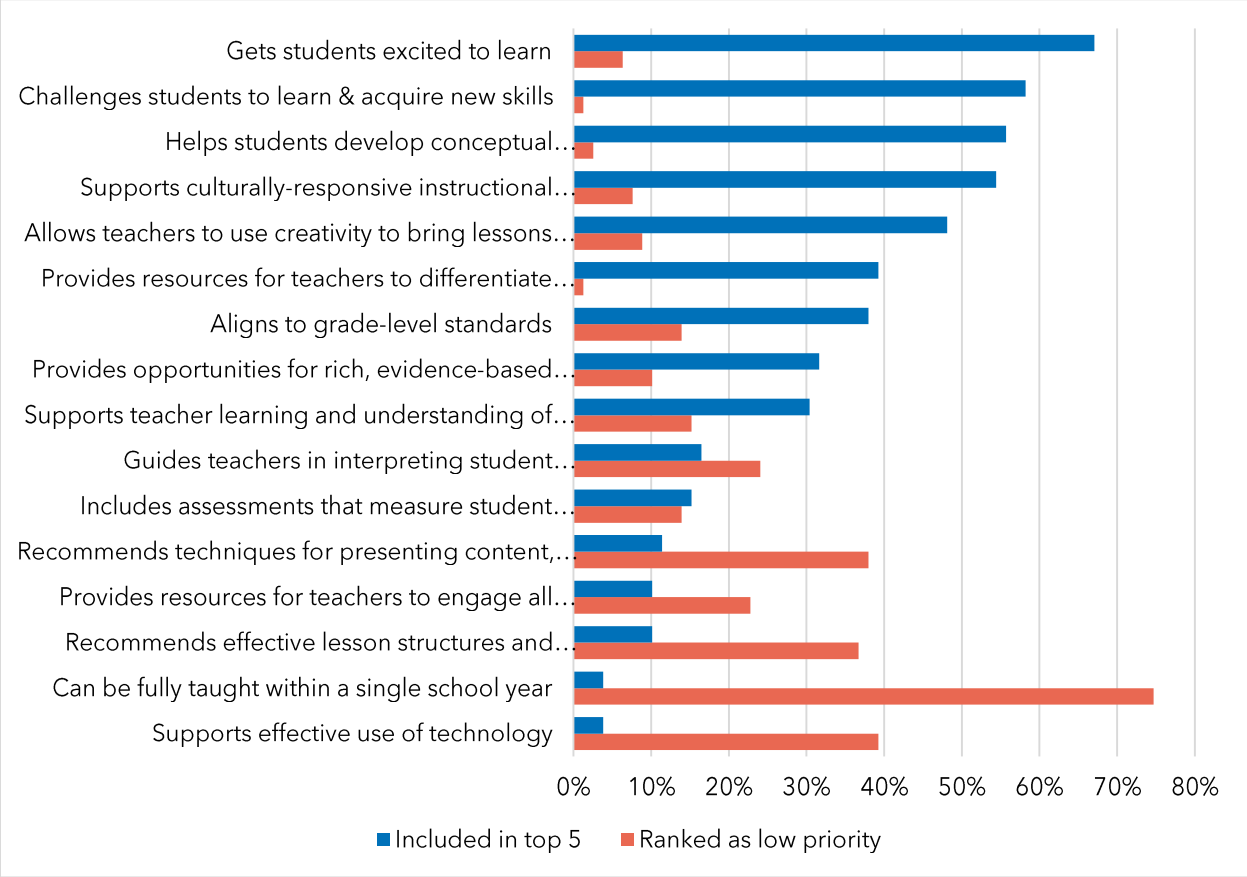
Finding	Teachers and instructional coaches seem to find certain concepts motivating, whereas others evoke negative reactions. Still others elicit mixed responses.
Explanation	Both teachers and instructional coaches often use similar words and phrases when describing aspects of their jobs they found motivating. Educators positively describe the opportunity to build strong relationships with students and contribute to their development. For example, "connecting with students," "seeing students grow," and "getting students excited to learn" are all phrases that evoked positive reactions from educators. Educators similarly describe valuing their personal professional development and interactions with colleagues. Words and phrases such as "collaborating with colleagues," "growing as a professional," "feedback," "reflection," and "coaching" hold positive connotations for educators. For instructional coaches, "co-teaching" also positively resonates. In contrast, and consistent with general opinion across the country, phrases and concepts which evoke negative reactions from educators include "paperwork," "testing," and "top-down approach." Other words and concepts garner mixed reactions from educators, and, depending on the specific context in which they are raised, elicit connotations that are either positive, negative, or in some cases dissonant within a single response, in which teachers recognize competing reactions. Such words and concepts include "data," "flexibility," and "local control."
Additional Evidence	"Aside from the goofiness of the kids, which is fantastic and . . . my favorite thing, I think [my favorite part about teaching is] when they have a moment where something clicks and you can see it. I think that's just wonderful." — Middle school ELA teacher "My favorite part is being in classrooms, collaborating and coaching teachers, and supporting them in every and any way to be successful with their kids." — Elementary instructional coach "I don't think any of us are anti-goals or anti-improvement, but sometimes it gets wrapped in paperwork and duplication of efforts. We want to make sure we spend most of our time teaching and working and helping students get better, and not necessarily filling out eight different forms to show we did that." — High school ELA teacher

Messaging 2

Finding	Several key phrases and concepts resonate with teachers and instructional coaches as characteristics of high-quality curriculum.
Explanation	Teachers and instructional coaches commonly use certain phrases and concepts when describing positive aspects of their curricula. For example, concepts such as "consistency" and "alignment" resonate positively, as did words and phrases such as "problem-solvers," "develop independence," "engaging," and "small group." A middle school ELA teacher described, "I think the biggest thing that we like about [our curriculum] is that kids are becoming more independent and focusing more on steering their own learning." In contrast, concepts such as "direct instruction" and "scripted curriculum" often carried negative connotations (see Curriculum 5). As described above in Methodology, during the focus group sessions, educators also participated in an interactive exercise designed to learn about educators' values for different dimensions of HQIM. In this activity, educators were each provided with sixteen notecards with phrases describing various characteristics of high-quality curriculum. Participants were asked to sort these characteristics into three priority groups (high, medium, and low), and then were asked to rank-order just those cards already sorted as high priority. As participants could sort any number of characteristics into the high, medium, and low priority categories, many chose to include ten or more characteristics in the high priority category. In order to distinguish the characteristics of curriculum that participants find to be the most important, the results below and in Figure 5 are reported based on the characteristics that participants first sorted into the high priority category and then ranked as the top five most important. Outcomes included the following: ● Four characteristics were ranked by more than half of participants as one of the top five most important in a curriculum: "gets students excited to learn" (67%), "challenges students to learn and acquire new skills" (58%), "helps students develop a conceptual understanding of content" (56%), and "supports culturally-responsive instructional practices" (54%). ● Only one characteristic was ranked as low priority by more than half of participants: "can be fully taught within a single school year" (75%). Three additional characteristics were ranked as low priority by more than a third of participants: "supports effective use of technology" (39%), "recommends techniques for presenting content, including directions, explanations, and questions" (38%), and "recommends effective lesson structures and pacing to support student learning" (37%).

	Although teachers and instructional coaches tended to sort the characteristics similarly overall, there were a few points of difference between the two groups. ● Whereas 64% of participating teachers ranked "allows teachers to use creativity to bring lessons to life" in their top five, only 13% of instructional coaches did. ● Two-thirds of teachers ranked "challenges students to learn and acquire new skills" compared with 38% of instructional coaches. ● Though only 29% of teachers ranked "aligns to grade level standards" in their top five, 58% of instructional coaches did. See Figure 5 for an overview of outcomes from the activity.
Additional Evidence	"I teach middle school math, and we use [vendor]. It's all inquiry-based, it's team-based. It's directed by the teacher, but is definitely not direct instruction. I just love the way it helps kids focus on the interactions with each other and not be afraid to talk about math. I love the curriculum itself because it gives you more than you need, study strategies, a way to build your assessments." — Middle school math teacher "I love that our components, our reading and our writing, [that they are aligned and] go together. And they're organized in units, and the teaching points all build to the end goals of those units, and there's quite a bit of choice within every day and every unit." — Elementary ELA and Title I instructional coach

Figure 5: Overall results from HQIM sorting and ranking exercise



* As participants could sort any number of characteristics into the high, medium, and low priority categories, many chose to include ten or more characteristics in the high priority grouping. In order to highlight the characteristics of curriculum that participants find to be most important, the results are reported based on the characteristics that participants ranked as the top five most important, all of which were also considered high priority characteristics.

DPI Communications 1

Finding	Teachers cite being most influenced by other teachers they know personally.
Explanation	When asked who could spark new thinking or change their minds about curriculum and instructional choices, educators report being most influenced by other teachers they have met in professional settings. Within this category, teachers report a mix of individuals: co-workers at their school and teachers they hear present at conferences. A smaller number also included individuals they follow on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Other influencers named by educators included professional organizations (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Wisconsin Math Council), conferences more generally, and people they refer to as "gurus" like [PD provider] and [PD provider].
Additional Evidence	"My professional Twitter account is probably one of my best forms of professional learning. The people that I'm following that are saying and teaching me things every day." — Elementary instructional coach "For math, [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics] and Wisconsin Math Council. And I also hang on every word that [PD provider] says, and [PD provider]." — Elementary math instructional coach "I've used the EdReports website. That's been my go-to place. How did I hear about that? At a conference, talking with other educators. Another example of just showing up and starting to have conversations with people." — Middle school instructional coach "I was part of the greater Madison Writing Project, which is part of the National Writing Project. I did the summer institute two years ago. I just finished a yearlong institute. It was by far the best professional and personal development I've ever done in that it's focused on writing but also focused on writing through the curriculum and that you as a teacher don't have to be perfect writer to be able to work with kids write." — Elementary Title I teacher

DPI Communications 2

Finding	Teachers view DPI as responsible for licensure, accountability, and data analysis and have very little contact with DPI outside of these areas. Educators are interested in DPI taking a greater role in offering PL, vetting lists of curricula and PL, and providing libraries of resources.
Explanation	As a group, teachers currently have very little interaction with DPI. When they do, it is typically related to traditional state functions, such as licensure, summative testing and accountability, or accessing guidance for special education services. Overall, instructional coaches note they have more interactions with DPI than teachers and are more familiar with the type of resources and materials DPI makes available. One potential explanation for this is that communication from DPI often does not make its way to teachers because it goes through many layers, a point that was made during one of the focus groups. In this case, a high school ELA teacher stated that "[DPI communication is through administration and seems very sterile." This sentiment was echoed by another who recommended that DPI should "Skip e-mails to superintendent and send directly to me for better communication." It is important to note that an educational leader in the state suggested the opposite of these trends in requests, suggesting that the current approach should be maintained with regards to communication, noting that teachers already receive too many e-mails. One explanation educators cite for the lack of interaction they have with DPI is the emphasis in Wisconsin on local control. As one instructional coach explained, "It makes it messy for DPI to put [opportunities] together because they can't dictate" what curriculum or PL to use. However, she went on to say, "Sometimes would be nice if they would [be directive], especially [for educators] in our role, because if you would just tell us what we need to tell districts, that would be so helpful." In fact, this sentiment is shared by other instructional coaches as well as teachers, one of whom remarked, "I think there are states that have done a whole lot more work around developing resources, like North Carolina and Florida. I wish that our state would take more of a lead in developing resources in connection to the standards for our state." Educators who previously engaged with DPI's materials describe finding them helpful and express interest in wanting more resources from them. When hearing about these educators' positive experiences with DPI direct support and resources, educators who had not previously engaged with DPI express an interest in receiving this kind of support and getting more information about these resources. For example, an elementary special education teacher shared

	that "[I would] love to have more interactions with [the] DPI about training special education staff in the area of the foundational skills needed to succeed in reading." There is also great interest in receiving more materials from DPI on a recurring basis. One middle school ELA teacher mentioned how she receives a lot of information from bloggers and other professional organizations and how "[She would] love to get something like that once a week from DPI telling me what I don't know, communicating what those resources are, to give me at least a seed of an idea of where to go, because I don't know what I don't know." A couple of educators also noted that they had been participants in previous DPI conferences and spoke very positively about their experiences. This led those educators to suggest that "[DPI should] advocate with administrators for meaningful, respectful, ongoing professional development including conferences." When discussing what type of DPI supports teachers were looking for, one suggested example was for DPI to play a more active role in bringing school districts that are in the same CESA together more often: "I'm just in Oregon, which isn't that far away [from here], and I couldn't tell you anything that any other school districts [in my CESA] are doing, and they might be doing really great things." She went on to suggest PL opportunities coordinated across the different districts in the CESA.
Additional Evidence	"Our district no longer has a budget for personal professional development. I look for economical professional development and more leadership from DPI." — Elementary ELA teacher About DPI's strengths: "Their numbers. Their data. Their data analysis has always been fantastic." — Instructional coach "I think the only thing I really look [for now from the] DPI is when I need my test modifications and accommodations for the [Wisconsin Forward Exam] for my IEPs, otherwise I never remember. I looked at their little chart." — Elementary ELA teacher "I think there's an overwhelming amount of information and resources available that I'm not typically aware of, and I get the emails that come out about what's happening statewide, and that sort of thing, but then even when we were just at the Title I training, I - and maybe I missed something along the way, obviously we get tons of emails - but I didn't know about DPI shorts, the little videos and they're so useful! You know I took them back and used those when I communicated with the Title I staff but how did I not know they were

	there other than just going on a regular basis and seeing what's out there and available." — ELA Instructional coach "And I would say as a classroom teacher, I have zero emails, zero interaction - I mean I could do it myself and I realize I probably should [do it myself], but I go there if I need to renew my license. I wouldn't even know that there are any resources." — High school math teacher "I would like more direct contact via emails on updates and DPI resources available. If I don't actively seek out the resources, I don't know what's there or what's new. I know district-level administration receive updates, but if that's not passed along to teaching staff, we don't know unless we seek it." — Middle school instructional coach

NEXT STEPS

As mentioned above, the conversations with educators during these focus groups, and the development of this Report, represent an early part of what DPI has committed to be a process of engagement with educators across the state on instructional materials and PL that will be both broad and deep. DPI's expressed desire is that this will allow educators to drive the state's efforts to increase and improve the use of high-quality instructional materials and the provision of aligned PL. This approach will put the state's value for local control at the front of strategy development and implementation.

The immediate next step will be on November 9, when approximately 1,500 educators will take part in a convening in each of the state's 13 CESAs. At that convening, educators will determine how the state will define and set standards for instructional materials and professional learning and determine what should happen next – and by whom – to deliver on the promise of the convening's conclusions. The findings contained in this report can be confirmed and then used as a basis for these statewide conversations.

Ultimately, due to the efforts by educators at all levels in all corners of the state, students across the state will have greater access to high-quality instruction and, as a result, will demonstrate improved academic outcomes and be demonstrably closer to the achievement of DPI's vision for every child in the state to graduate ready for higher education and the workplace.