



# Navigating to Successful Student Outcomes with Standards-Aligned Instruction

**Learning List, Inc.**

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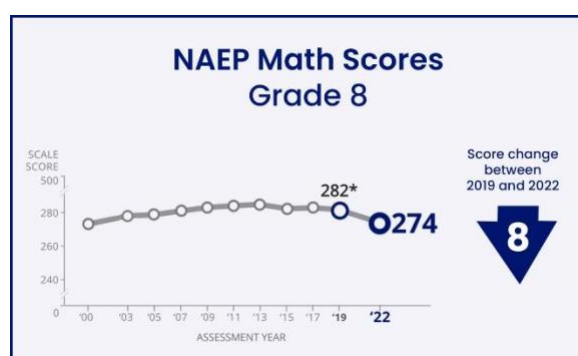
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## Understanding the Imperative

As a society, our communal goal must be to prepare every student to progress academically with the skills he/she needs to be successful in school and life. The Covid-19 pandemic has made this goal immeasurably more challenging as underscored by findings in studies conducted by various researchers, states, and most recently, in the [2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) scores.

In most states, average NAEP scores declined in both math and reading as compared to scores in 2019, the last time NAEP assessments were administered. The average fourth-grade math score fell by five points and the average eighth-grade math score fell by eight points, the largest NAEP math declines ever recorded. Average reading scores fell by three points in both fourth and eighth grade. Declines were most severe among the lowest-performing students.



The pandemic-related learning losses are not just a concern for educators and parents, they are likely to have significant economic repercussions for decades. In a 2021 study of the effects of Covid-19 on education, [McKinsey & Company](#) noted that:

*... unless steps are taken to address unfinished learning, today's students may earn \$49,000 to \$61,000 less over their lifetime owing to the impact of the pandemic on their schooling. The impact on the US economy could amount to \$128 billion to \$188 billion every year as this cohort enters the workforce.<sup>1</sup>*

To mitigate the societal effects of Covid-19, we must remediate students' learning loss as rapidly as possible. Since students' academic progress is most often measured by their performance on standards-aligned assessments, campus and district leaders should focus on delivering standards-aligned instruction, remediation, and tutoring to help all students master state standards.

In this white paper, we distinguish the roles of state standards, curriculum, and instructional materials in the delivery of standards-aligned instruction. Then we discuss building a culture of standards alignment in your district or campus and provide guidance regarding how to use materials most effectively to support standards-aligned instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorn, Emma, et al. (2021) [\*Covid-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning\*](#), issue brief. McKinsey & Company, pp.2.

## Creating a Common Understanding: Standards, Curriculum, and Instructional Materials

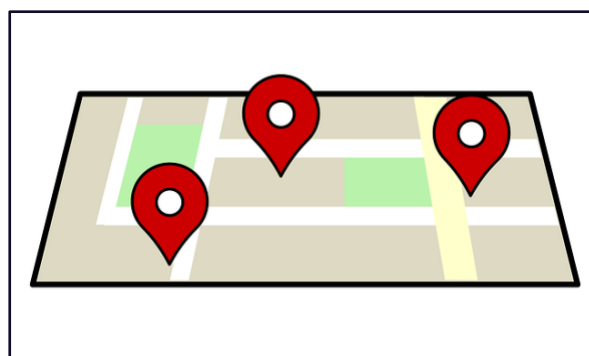
Educators and publishers often use the terms *standards* and *curriculum* or *curriculum* and *instructional materials* interchangeably. Moreover, many educators consider their instructional materials to be their curriculum. As discussed below, each of these terms represents a distinct component of an educational program with successful student outcomes as its goal.

### State Standards

The federal government, through [ESSA](#), requires that each state create learning standards for public schools in three subjects—English language arts/reading, mathematics, and science. Most states have gone beyond ESSA’s minimum to set standards in social studies, career and technical education, world languages, and other subjects. State standards prescribe the *minimum expectations* for what students must know and be able to do by the end of the course.

### District Curricula

Whereas *state standards* are defined at the state level, *curriculum* is developed at the district level and is the product of local policy making. While the standards set forth the learning expectations for each grade level and subject/course, the curriculum is the district’s road map for getting there.



The district’s curriculum may be reflected in documents titled, *Scope and Sequence*, *Units of Instruction*, or *Pacing Guide*. These curriculum documents generally divide the school year into 6- or 9-week units of instruction. Each instructional unit prescribes the state standards to be covered, instructional guidance for teaching the knowledge and skills required by those standards, suggested instructional materials for teaching those

standards, performance expectations that define mastery of the standards, and methods of assessing student mastery of those standards.

## Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are publisher-created resources designed to help teachers teach and students learn the knowledge and skills required by the standards. The terms *instructional materials* and *curriculum* are often used interchangeably because, like a district curriculum, many instructional materials provide units of study, daily lesson plans, and assessments. Moreover, many teachers rely so heavily on their instructional materials that the materials become the *de facto* curriculum.

However, it is important to keep in mind that publishers design instructional materials to support educators across districts and even states. Thus, the units of study or pacing guide in an instructional material may not be aligned to every state's standards or every district's curriculum. For these reasons, teachers should use instructional materials to support the instruction prescribed by the district curriculum rather than *as* the curriculum.

Working in concert, the district's curriculum and instructional materials help teachers ensure that students receive the instruction they need to master state standards and progress to the next grade level.

## Building a Culture of Standards Alignment

Building a culture of standards alignment will help ensure that everyone is working towards that shared goal. With a clear understanding of the distinction between the

### Practice Tip

A few things to keep in mind about instructional materials:

- Instructional materials are most often created for a broad audience (either state or national)
- Materials created for a national audience may not align with the grade level standards in your state
- No "out of the box" material will ever follow the order of instruction prescribed by a district curriculum exactly.



terms defined above, answer the following questions to determine whether your district or campus has a culture of standards alignment:

- Does the district have a written curriculum to guide the implementation of the standards?
- Does the district curriculum communicate the level of student performance that demonstrates mastery of the standards?
- Does the district curriculum include common formative and summative assessments to inform instruction?
- Do central office curriculum staff provide training and support to help educators understand the standards deeply?
- Do professional learning communities' (PLCs) discussions focus on teaching and assessing mastery of the standards?
- Do teachers use the standards to guide what they want students to accomplish in each of their lessons?
- Do campus and district administrators focus on standards alignment during classroom observations?
- Do campus support staff (i.e., instructional coaches, resource/pull-out-teachers) provide guidance and/or assistance to classroom teachers to support differentiation and intervention?
- Before providing remedial support for struggling students, do campus support staff have planning time with the student's teacher to support the continuity of instruction?
- Is assessment data analyzed to inform instruction, professional development, and curriculum updates?

The goal of preparing all students to progress to the next grade level may sound routine but in reality, it requires herculean effort by teachers and campus and district leaders. Building a culture of standards alignment will ensure that everyone is rowing in the same direction for the next school year. If your campus or district does not have a culture of standards alignment, use these questions to build the infrastructure necessary to support one.

## Identifying Instructional Materials to Use

Most campuses provide teachers with multiple instructional materials to use for each course. With limited planning time, one of the biggest challenges teachers face, is selecting the best resource(s) to support their lessons. If districts have the capacity, mapping the materials to the district curriculum will lighten teacher workloads, facilitate standards-aligned instruction, and support students' mastery of the standards. This section discusses how to select materials to use either when planning a lesson or when mapping resources to the district curriculum.

### Understanding a Material's Intended Purpose

Using a material for its intended purpose is more likely to result in student success; the converse is also true. Thus, it is important to know the purpose of each of your materials.

#### Practice Tip

Using a material in a way that it was not designed to be used is like squeezing an apple and expecting to get orange juice. In both cases, you will not get the results you hope for.

### Core vs Supplemental Materials

Generally, a *core* or *comprehensive* material addresses all, or nearly all, of the standards for a particular grade and subject area. A *supplemental* material typically focuses on fewer standards. However, some supplemental materials address all or nearly all of the state standards for a given course. So, what do the labels *core* or *comprehensive* and *supplemental* really mean?



To clarify, we looked at how states define these terms. For example, California defines comprehensive, or [basic](#) instructional materials to be “instructional materials that are designed for use by pupils as a principal learning resource and that meet in organization and content the basic requirements of the intended course” (Educ. Code § 60010(a)). [Supplementary](#)



[instructional materials](#) are instructional materials designed to serve one or more of the specific purposes listed in the statute, including to address the needs of students with various learning abilities or language deficits, or to support the use of technology to further student engagement in the classroom (Educ. Code § 60010(l)).



Similarly, the New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) defines [core instructional material](#) as “the comprehensive print or digital educational material, including basal material, which constitutes the necessary instructional components of a full academic course of study in those subjects for which the department has adopted content standards and benchmarks” (NMAC, Title 6, Part 2, 6.75.2.7(C)). A [supplementary instructional material](#) is a supporting material used to reinforce, enrich, or enhance instruction driven by core instructional material (Title 6, Part 2, 6.75.2.7(W)).

Both states clarify that a core or comprehensive material is one that supports instruction for a course’s full curriculum and is provided for all students. Such materials include broad, deep discussions of content; remediation and enrichment activities; formative and summative assessments; as well as teacher resources. Although neither state’s definition specifies that a comprehensive resource must address 100 percent of the standards for a course, it seems reasonable that a “principal learning resource” should be highly aligned to the state standards.

#### Practice Tip

Most supplemental materials are not designed to address all state standards. For example:

- Materials that provide intensive skills practice may address very few standards in their entirety.
- Resources for remediation may only address standards students typically struggle with.
- Test prep resources may only address the standards eligible for assessment according to the state assessment blue print.

Both states' definitions of supplemental materials indicate that supplemental resources are not designed to be the primary or sole instructional resource for a course. As such, supplemental materials typically do not address *all* standards and, based on our reviews, vary significantly in the percentage of standards to which they are aligned.

The rigor of supplemental materials also varies, depending on the material's purpose. For example, a supplemental material designed for skills practice may provide less challenging content than one designed to support project-based learning or interdisciplinary connections. Finally, supplemental materials generally have fewer components, such as assessments, monitoring tools, and teacher resources, than core materials and vary significantly in the components they offer.

Therefore, teachers should use their *core* material as their primary resource for instruction. Supplemental resources should be used in a complementary fashion, such as to fill in gaps when the core resource is not aligned to specific standards, to engage students, to help differentiate instruction, to provide skills practice, or to extend learning. Even if a supplemental material is aligned to all of the standards being taught, teachers should not use it as the *primary* resource for the course because it will likely not provide the depth or breadth of instruction (explanations, examples, practice) that a core material would provide.

### Determining Which Standards Your Materials Address

The next step is to determine which materials *address* the standards contained in the lesson you are planning or district curriculum unit to which you are mapping resources. The publisher's correlation or the material's search-by-standard feature can be an invaluable resource. The correlation or search feature identifies which standards the material addresses, and like a map, directs you to specific content in the material that addresses those standards.

#### Practice Tip

If a material does not provide a correlation to *your state standards* it probably will not cover all of the content knowledge and skills your standards require students to learn. It will also cause teachers more work in planning instruction. If you want to use such a material, consider using it for engagement or enrichment rather than as the primary/core resource for the course.

While most core materials have a correlation to the Common Core or Next Generation Science Standards, they may or may not have a correlation to your state standards. Supplemental materials may not have a correlation at all or may only be correlated to national standards.

### Determining Which Materials Are *Aligned to* the Relevant Standards

Once you have identified the materials that address the relevant standards you will be teaching, the last step is to find citations (lessons, activities, quizzes) in the materials that are *aligned to* the **content**, **context**, and **cognitive rigor** of those standards. Our next white papers on *Overcoming the Challenges of Standards Alignment* and *Mapping Resources to Your Curriculum* provide further guidance on this topic.

## Conclusion

Helping remediate Covid-related learning losses is a societal imperative that will require sustained financial investment and focused attention. Federal and state policymakers must provide the financial resources district and campus leaders need to hire the necessary staff and build a culture that supports teachers in delivering standards-aligned instruction. Teachers must understand which materials to use and how to use them effectively to help all students master state standards and progress academically.

### About Learning List

[Learning List](#) offers a suite of curriculum support services, including a subscription-based instructional materials review service. Subscribers get access to all published reviews and the ability to submit additional materials for review at no additional cost. Over the last decade, Learning List has reviewed thousands of widely used PreK-12 instructional materials by almost 200 publishers. Each material is reviewed for alignment to state or national standards, instructional quality, and technology compatibility. [Other services](#)

include a selection facilitation service, customized curriculum alignment services, and online professional development courses.