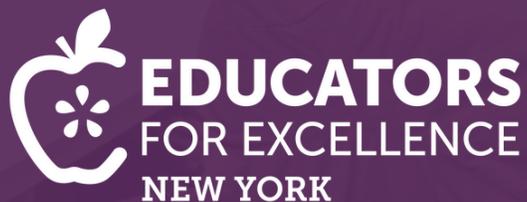


LEARNING IN OUR CLASSROOMS

Educators' recommendations for high
quality, culturally relevant curricula in
New York City



The Problem

New York City Schools' current process for curriculum selection is an inconsistent, decentralized, school-by-school approach that provides thousands of students with low-quality curricular materials that lack cultural relevance. As a result, educators receive uneven support and training to implement the curriculum that is provided and are forced to spend their own time and money to fill the gaps left by substandard curricula. NYC's broken process of curriculum selection creates three significant challenges that make the jobs of teachers more difficult, and negatively impact student learning.

1. Curriculum options are not always high quality or well aligned to learning and grade level standards. Educators need a strong foundation of grade-level, standards-aligned materials to ensure that students aren't left behind, or inequality will continue to increase in a post-pandemic world. Currently, just 38 percent of New York City educators report that curricula are high quality and well aligned to learning standards.

2. Curriculum is not culturally relevant for our student population. Only 22 percent of educators report their curricula are accessible, appropriate, and engaging for all learners. The lack of cultural relevance is concerning, given the clear benefits for students when instruction and learning materials are grounded in their cultural context.

3. Professional learning is not embedded in the curriculum that educators teach. Only 33% of educators say they have received training that enables them to implement their curricula effectively. Teachers often spend time and money creating materials from scratch, since no resources are rendered to them. Educators need fewer, high quality options to ensure that curricula are consistent, aligned with standards, and aligned with training and professional development. Content-focused professional training has been proven to dramatically improve student assessment outcomes.

Recommendation #1

Ensure All Teachers and Students Have Access to High Quality Instructional

Materials: Create a short, pre-approved list of curricula that all schools or local districts must select from and publicly report what all schools choose.

- On at least an annual basis, publicly report the core curriculum that all schools use for at least ELA and math so that families, researchers, and district staff all have access to this information.
- Create a diverse committee of educators and curriculum experts to work alongside district staff to review curricular options currently in use across the district and audit those options to create a narrower approved list.
- The committee should utilize existing rating systems like EdReports to narrow the scope of approved options to those that are high quality and culturally relevant.

Outcome: Superintendents and principals will have a list of vetted, culturally relevant, research-based curricula for all schools to choose from and the general public will have access to information regarding what curriculum is being used in each school.

Research: TNTP's research in the Opportunity Myth demonstrated that, "in classrooms where students had greater access to grade-appropriate assignments, they gained nearly two months of additional learning compared to their peers."

Recommendation #2

Vet All Materials for Cultural Relevance and Build Community Support: Engage all stakeholders in the curriculum selection process to ensure the final approved list has the buy-in and support of educators, parents, and other stakeholders.

- Ensure that the auditing committee is a diverse group that is a representative cross section of NYC educators.
- The committee should use tools like the NYU Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard to support their evaluation.
- Incorporate community stakeholder listening and feedback sessions into this panel's agenda to better understand what parents and communities are looking for in their school's curriculum. Ensure all feedback sessions are inclusive of different languages and provide multiple modalities for delivering feedback.

Outcome: A well-publicized period of community engagement and teacher input through the committee will ensure curricular options are culturally relevant and there is buy-in from students, teachers, and communities for this shift.

Research: Although more research is warranted, a number of recent studies have shown that culturally relevant curriculum can increase student achievement, decrease absenteeism and decrease dropout rates, particularly for BIPOC students.

Recommendation #3

Improve Professional Development by Embedding Curriculum: Local superintendents and principals should ensure that after curriculum decisions are made, all professional learning uses those same materials to improve adult-learning and increase teacher effectiveness.

- Superintendents work with principals, content experts, and teachers to choose the most appropriate district-wide options in each community, narrowing the list of options and increasing continuity.
- Audit professional learning to ensure it is aligned to and utilizes the curriculum that teachers will be using.
- Utilize local district teams to plan out content-based PD sessions to align with the selected curriculum where gaps exist.

Outcome: Educators are afforded more time to focus on intervention and individualized learning.

Research: Carnegie Corporation of New York's recent report highlighted that, "when teachers participated in curriculum-based professional learning, their students' test scores improved by 9 percent of a standard deviation – about the same effect caused by replacing an average teacher with a top performer or reducing class size by 15 percent."

Timeline

NYC public schools have significant one-time federal resources (ESSER Funds) that need to be used by the 2024-2025 school year; this process should begin urgently so that any school that needs to transition to a new curriculum can do so effectively, with the support of the federal dollars. Improving the quality, consistency, and cultural relevance of curriculum is a perfect investment of recovery dollars given the significant research base demonstrating the benefits for student learning and because it is a one time transition cost that won't create ongoing expenses for New York City's budget.

Considerations

- Individual schools should be permitted to request a waiver to use different curricular options, or to create their own units, especially for specific content areas that align to a schools' specific needs or theme (i.e. Harbor School). These decisions should be made by the Chancellor or their designee and only provided to schools that have demonstrated successful outcomes for all student populations.
- Some curricula will need to be modified for individual student groups (English language learners, special education students, etc.), so the district should work urgently to ensure that all students can access these new resources.
- No single curriculum will be perfect, and additional supplemental materials will also be necessary. A similar process should be utilized to audit, approve, and ensure all schools have access to high quality supplemental resource providers (i.e. Newsela).

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