

High-Quality Instructional Resources



What are High-Quality Instructional Materials?

The Kentucky Department of Education defines High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs) as materials that are:

- Aligned with the *Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS)*;
- Research-based and/or externally validated;
- Comprehensive to include engaging texts (books, multimedia, etc.), problems and assessments;
- Culturally relevant, free from bias; and
- Accessible for all students.

Why Are They Needed?

Teachers deserve to have access to HQIRs that increase their content knowledge, provide guidance to inform strong instruction and support implementation of grade-level appropriate assignments. Access to comprehensive, HQIRs enables teachers to adapt lessons to meet the diverse needs of students and to focus their time, energy and creativity on bringing lessons to life and engaging students with the content.

Instructional resources are not just for teachers; they are critical for student success. Students deserve access to standards-aligned instructional resources and grade-level assignments to help them reach the intended learning outcomes within the *KAS*. They also deserve HQIRs that are engaging, accessible and inclusive of the cultural diversity and perspectives of their communities. Students are entitled to HQIRs to use, learn from and guide their practice.

What Does the Research Say?

- HQIRs that are aligned to state standards can reduce variability in the quality of instruction across classrooms and help boost student achievement, but teachers often do not have resources that are aligned to their state's standards ([SREB, 2017](#)).
- When teachers don't have access to HQIRs, they spend 7-12 hours per week searching for them online often leading to inconsistent quality that impacts low income students of color the most ([Goldberg, M., 2016](#)).
- Research shows students of color, those from low-income families, English learners, and those with mild to moderate disabilities are less likely to have access to strong grade-level instruction and HQIRs in the classroom than students who are in classrooms with mostly white students and in higher income communities ([The New Teacher Project, 2018](#)).
- Another study found that the average cost-effectiveness ratio of switching to HQIRs is almost 40 times that of class size reduction ([Koedel, C., & Polikoff, M., 2017](#)).
- Students in classrooms that used one HQIR for four consecutive years outpaced comparison students by a margin of 38 percentile points—equivalent to four additional years of learning ([Steiner, 2018](#)).
- Providing teachers with a set of instructional resources without also providing them with professional learning focused on how to implement those resources effectively to meet the needs of all students will not impact student achievement ([Blazar, D., et al., 2019](#)).

Characteristics of High-Quality Professional Learning



Research demonstrates a positive link between high-quality professional learning (HQPL), teaching practices and student outcomes. Effective professional learning not only has the potential to improve both classroom instruction and student outcomes, but also it can be effective in recruiting and retaining teachers. When designing and/or selecting HQPL at the local level, it is important to ensure alignment with the characteristics below.

Aligned with state academic standards, school and/or district goals, and other professional learning activities:

Professional learning is more likely to be effective if it is part of a coherent program. Alignment helps build common goals and shared vocabulary to sustain instructional improvements. It reduces confusion and uncertainty about what to teach and how to teach using evidence-based practices to support instruction.

Is content-focused: Professional learning that focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific content curriculum supports teacher learning within their classroom contexts. This includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in areas such as reading and writing, mathematics, science and social studies.

Incorporates active learning: Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same learning experiences they are designing for their students. It should utilize authentic artifacts, interactive activities and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning. This approach moves away from traditional learning models and environments that are lecture-based and have no direct connection to teachers' classrooms and students.

Uses models and modeling of effective practice: Models and modeling of instruction provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like. Models may include, but are not limited to, lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching.

Supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts: HQPL creates space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in a job-embedded context that relates new instructional strategies to teachers' students and classrooms. By working collaboratively, teachers can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school and/or district. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) offer a collaborative, job-embedded model that can be a source of efficacy and confidence for teachers and result in widespread improvement within and beyond the school level.

Provides coaching and expert support: Coaching and expert support involve the sharing of expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused directly on teachers' individual needs.

Offers feedback and reflection: HQPL frequently provides built-in time for teachers to intentionally think about, receive input on and make changes to their practice by facilitating reflection and soliciting feedback.

Is sustained and continuous: HQPL provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice over time.

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