7 Steps to Selecting the Best Elementary Math Curriculum for Your School/District

Adopting a new elementary math curriculum is a substantial investment and a major change for any school/district. In order for a new curriculum to be transformative, it must not only be pedagogically sound but also closely align to your school's or district's educational goals and philosophy.

With so many programs to consider, how do you ensure that you select the elementary math curriculum that will best support student success? How do you work through the change process thoughtfully to ensure buy-in at all levels? ORIGO has developed the following seven-step process, and accompanying selection tool, to help you evaluate the documentation provided by each elementary math curriculum in a timely, but thorough manner. Our approach is based on discussing and rating (rather than scoring) the key components of each program in a way that allows you to effectively evaluate the differences between programs. In this way, we can facilitate not only your decision-making process but also help ensure effective implementation of your selected curriculum.

1

Build Your Team

To ensure that everyone in your school/district is vested in making your transition to a new elementary math curriculum successful, you'll want to include as many stakeholders as possible in the selection process. However not every stakeholder needs to be part of your selection team. The ideal selection team (team size will vary by school/district size) is large enough to accomplish all facets of the selection process, but small enough to work nimbly. When selecting team members, look for participants who are vested in success and will be ambassadors with their peers to ensure the effective launch and implementation of your selected curriculum.

2

Focus On Mathematics Content

Focus your first review on the mathematics content. First and foremost, any program that you are considering adopting must provide exceptional math instruction. A good math curriculum:

- Builds deep student understanding of mathematics through thoughtfully designed content
- Balances conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and application
- Organizes content so students and teachers can see how ideas build upon one another
- Provides opportunities to apply learning to real-world applications
- Creates occasions for classroom discourse and mathematical language development
- Encourages productive struggle as students grapple with mathematical ideas and relationships
- Addresses state mathematics standards for Pre-K—6th grades

3

Consider the Pedagogical Approach

Once you have reviewed the mathematics content and eliminated programs that don't meet the criteria, the team can explore the pedagogical approach of the remaining programs by addressing the following questions:

- Does the curriculum support a variety of classroom structures — whole class, small group, partnering, and individual work?
- Does the curriculum address different learning modalities to ensure that all students become proficient mathematicians?
- What is the role of mathematical language and multiple representations?
- How are verbal representations — student language, materials language, mathematical language — connected with mathematical symbols and visual models?
- What is the role of technology in the program — does the technology support a teacher's decision making or does it make the decisions for the teacher?
- Is the program flexible enough to support both face-to-face and virtual learning?

4

Determine If the Program Is Equitable

To further narrow your selections, run the material through an equity, diversity, and accessibility screening to determine if the program:

- Reflects a range of experiences and perspectives so students see themselves in the program materials
- Supports a wide range of learning levels, from those who are at-risk to those who are advanced
- Provides scaffolding to develop mathematical language, particularly for students who are also emerging learners of English
- Offers a path to success for all students regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity
- Makes technology accessible for all students at all socio-economic levels and of all abilities
- Holds all students to the same high standards

5

Evaluate The Research

A good math curriculum will be based on solid research and should include research that:

- Informs the pedagogical approach of the program and details how the approach enriches the mathematical content
- Underpins the architecture of the program and explains the methodology behind content roll-out
- Provides evidence that the program, when executed with integrity, leads to increased student achievement
- Supports deep understanding of the math for both teachers and students
- Includes accessible, pertinent background for each module

6

Review Implementation Support

An elementary math curriculum can only be successful if it is implemented with integrity in the classroom. Effective professional development support:

- Offers multiple delivery methods, including face-to-face instruction, virtual training, written and digital materials
- Provides tools to measure incremental success throughout the year
- Models best practices, discusses how to overcome common pitfalls, and supports sustained growth
- Scaffolds and differentiates implementation support to account for teacher experience
- Tailors professional development to school/district needs
- Supports the development of an implementation team to oversee integrity

7

Ensure Support of District's Vision and Initiatives

The goals of each school and district and their portrait of a graduate is unique and curriculum should help advance these distinct initiatives and visions. So, the final step is to consider if the elementary math curriculum matches your school/district pedagogical objectives and helps your students thrive in the 21st century and achieve the qualities of a lifelong learner.

A Final Word

To ensure a thoughtful selection process, remember to schedule adequate time not only for the selection committee to review curriculum materials but also to loop in key stakeholders. By involving all of those who will ultimately be impacted by your new elementary math curriculum, you are not only more likely to select the best curriculum for your school/district, but you have also laid the groundwork for successful implementation. Remember you are going to be using your new math curriculum for several years, so spending time on the front end to conduct a thorough review process is time well spent.

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