

# Embracing Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Instructional Materials



Promising Strategies  
for State and District Leaders

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## About the Author



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# Introduction

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Choosing instructional materials wisely is one of the most important jobs education leaders and teachers have, perhaps now more than ever. Unfinished academic instruction resulting from the COVID-19 crisis demands better ways to reignite student engagement and accelerate learning. At the same time, the disparate impact of the pandemic on students of color and growing efforts to quash discussions about systemic racism in schools reveals an urgent need to approach this work through a racial equity lens. This report argues that embracing high-quality instructional materials that are both rigorous and relevant is crucial to addressing these priorities.

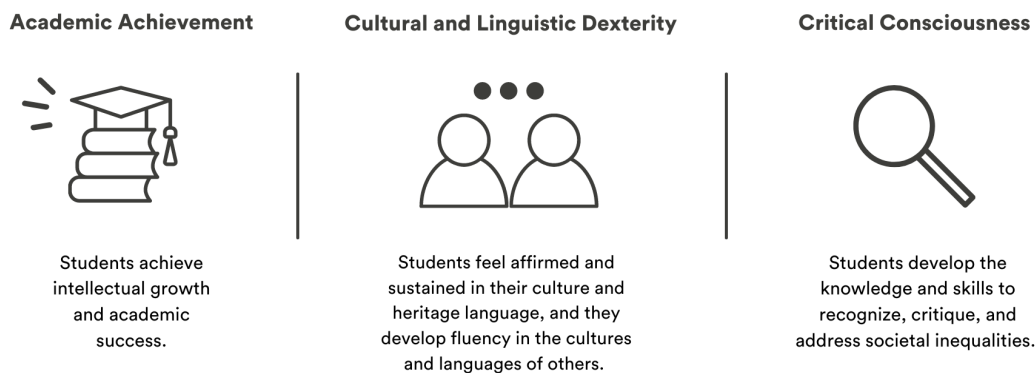
To ensure students fully recover and thrive after the pandemic, we need to re-engage them using strategies rooted in the science of learning. It is impossible to accelerate learning<sup>1</sup> if students are bored, if they do not feel connected to the material, or if they do not feel safe and affirmed. To catalyze the kinds of deep engagement and productive struggle needed to make up for lost time, learners need intellectually challenging work imbued with purpose and meaning. Teachers know, and research demonstrates, that engagement and learning is enhanced when enriching and relevant content is delivered in identity-safe spaces (see **Research Supports Dimensions of CRSE** on page 3).

**Culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE)**<sup>2</sup> advances these goals, ensuring that all students experience learning that is collaborative, joyful, and empowering. Through this

approach, students see their cultural experiences, funds of knowledge, interests, and daily life elevated in all aspects of schooling—from educators’ beliefs and behaviors to the content in the curriculum. This way, students become successful independent learners, they learn to appreciate their own identities and those of others, and they become inspired to address injustice in schools, their communities, and the world (see **CRSE Goals** on page 3).

Many educators want to embrace culturally responsive and sustaining teaching, but they lack the instructional materials necessary to do so well.<sup>3</sup> Learning resources available today rarely meaningfully reflect poignant topics,<sup>4</sup> student experiences and interests,<sup>5</sup> or student backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> Too often, materials feature stereotypes and gloss over, if not completely elide, the history of people

## Figure 1. CRSE Goals



Adapted from the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and Django Paris.

of color, English learners, LGBTQ+ people, and other historically underserved groups.<sup>7</sup> And it is not only representation that is lacking. “Drill and kill” assignments and narrow curriculum prevail above project-based and experiential learning, particularly in under-resourced schools.<sup>8</sup>

This report aims to bridge this gap. It draws on two projects **New America** conducted over the past year to better understand the status of CRSE in the K–12 curriculum landscape. Our team convened a series of roundtable discussions with classroom educators, school leaders, subject specialists, and students to better understand what type of instructional materials they value and have access to.<sup>9</sup> We also spoke to state and district officials about their approach to materials selection and what they see as generalizable lessons for bringing CRSE out of

the margins in materials selection and development processes (see **Methodology** on page 25).

In line with previous research, we find that instructional materials that are culturally responsive and sustaining are highly coveted but scarce. Fortunately, state and local leaders are taking initial steps to ensure materials are developed and delivered from this lens. Two core strategies are essential to their work: (1) strengthening adoption processes to identify stronger instructional materials and push curriculum developers to deliver better options; and (2) enhancing existing curricular options by weaving in relevance without abandoning rigor. The first part of this report explores these strategies and the last section suggests ways for state and district leaders to undertake similar efforts.

### Sidebar 1. Research Supports Dimensions of CRSE

Decades of studies across a wide range of disciplines illustrate the best ways to spur student interest, engagement, and learning—and these insights undergird culturally responsive and sustaining practice. Indeed, the best educators know that students’ perception of their own abilities, perceptions of how their teachers view them, and connection to the material all matter when it comes to engagement and learning. CRSE attends to the importance of student mindsets and engagement, which is perhaps why Gloria Ladson-Billings titled her seminal work on the subject, “But That’s Just Good Teaching!”<sup>10</sup>

That said, more research is needed to deepen our understanding of the impact of specific culturally responsive and sustaining interventions. While a strong body of descriptive studies detail what culturally responsive educators do well,<sup>11</sup> additional longitudinal and quantitative research would help us determine the impact of programs and practices on students’ academic, social, and emotional development over time.<sup>12</sup>

Consider these areas of research:

**Emotional safety.** Research shows that learning processes and academic behaviors are disrupted when we feel anxious or threatened.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, schools often present students of color with emotional perils such as stereotype threat, which can make them feel stigmatized based on their social identity.<sup>14</sup> On the flip side, feelings of belonging and safety enhance academic engagement.<sup>15</sup> For instance, recent work from New Schools Venture Fund demonstrates that students learn more when they feel emotionally and physically safe, especially if they believe their teachers have high expectations for them.<sup>16</sup>

**Engagement and persistence.** Very little learning can take place if students feel bored and do not see value in what they are learning.<sup>17</sup> Yet connecting coursework to students' daily lives can boost performance, particularly for lower performing students.<sup>18</sup> For instance, students who see the meaning of schoolwork and how it connects to self-transcendent goals (a purpose bigger than themselves) are more motivated to persist in assignments and remain focused amidst distractions.<sup>19</sup>

**Brain-based learning.** Connecting new knowledge and concepts to what we already know is the way we all learn.<sup>20</sup> Learning is fundamentally cultural; our background knowledge and ways of learning are all influenced by our cultural contexts.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, tapping into existing funds of knowledge in instruction is critical. One study demonstrated that a mathematics curriculum developed in collaboration with Yup'ik teachers and elders in Alaska, which connected certain topics such as place-value to the community's everyday activities, allowed students to learn these concepts better than a control group.<sup>22</sup>

**Positive identities.** Developing strong racial and ethnic identities and positive self-esteem have been shown to influence academic engagement and even buffer emotional threats that can deter learning.<sup>23</sup> One study showed that a course allowing students to explore ethnic and racial identities,<sup>24</sup> study racial or ethnic groups, and learn about injustice in the United States, contributed to a stronger sense of ethnic identity and academic performance.<sup>25</sup> Additional support comes from a study of Latinx students, which found that culturally responsive practices likely enhanced their academic performance by increasing their self-efficacy and sense of belonging in school.<sup>26</sup>



**Academic outcomes.** A few rigorous, widely cited quantitative studies demonstrate the powerful influence of courses that address the factors described above. Much of this research has looked at ethnic studies courses. For instance, a study of San Francisco high school students showed that students' attendance and GPA benefited from participating in an ethnic studies course.<sup>27</sup> Similar positive results are linked to Mexican American studies courses in Arizona.<sup>28</sup>

## WHAT ARE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND SUSTAINING INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES?

A high-quality curriculum is culturally responsive and sustaining. In addition to integrating grade-level content and close alignment to college and career-ready standards, high-quality instructional materials represent students' identities and histories; reify the purpose of academic concepts and skills in students' everyday lives; and guide teachers to make home-school connections that are free from bias. Materials that do not address these factors are incomplete and do not fully meet the needs of culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse students. Therefore, they should not be considered high-quality.

### Criteria for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Instructional Resources

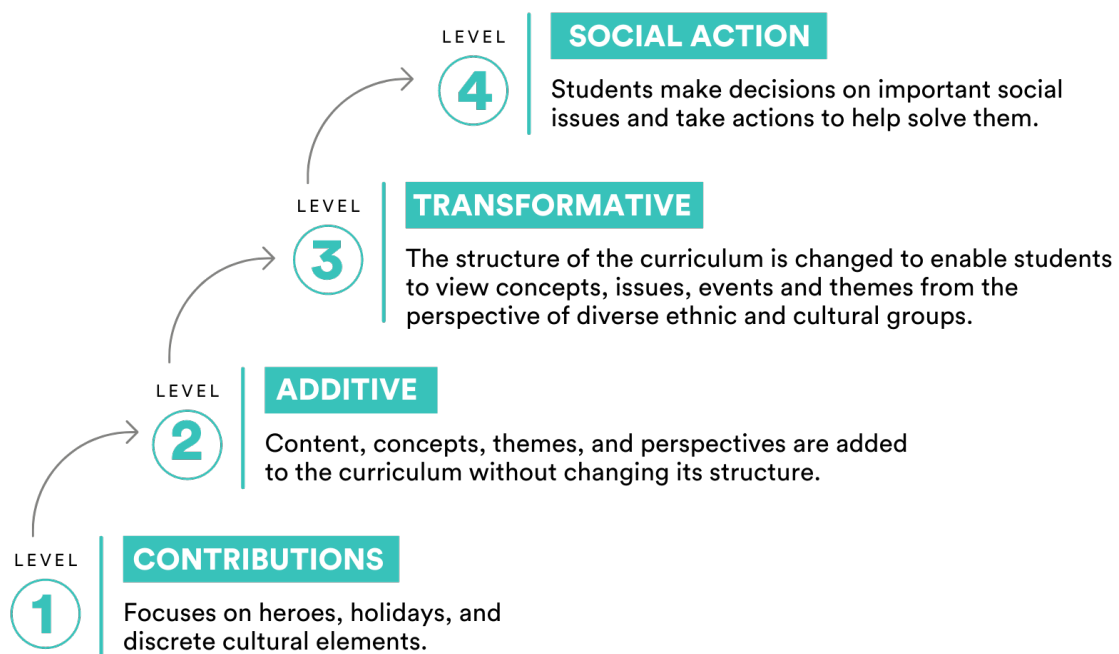
Several scholars and organizations have developed frameworks, rubrics, and tools to better understand how elements of CRSE are reflected in curriculum. These resources offer a useful starting point for state and district leaders, classroom teachers, and curriculum developers aiming to assess and improve cur-

riculum through this lens. Notably, several projects are underway by national organizations and experts that are likely to yield additional guidance in the coming months and years.

A framework developed by James Banks, professor emeritus at the University of Washington, provides a high-level overview of how integration of CRSE can occur within curriculum. In this four-level model, the lowest level focuses on the infusing holidays and heroes into the curriculum and the highest level involves curriculum that pushes students to understand different social issues and take action.<sup>29</sup> Banks stresses that the move from the first step to the last is gradual and cumulative, and daily instruction often integrates several levels.

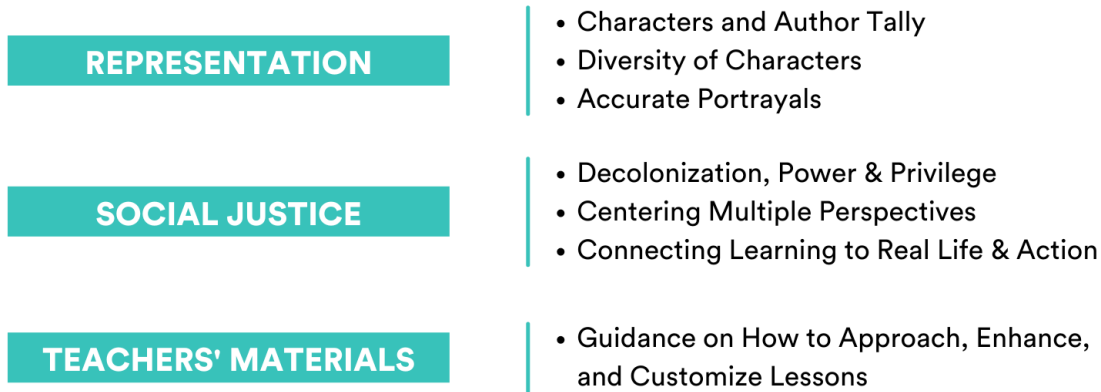
One of the most common tools used to evaluate materials is the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard designed by the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and Transformation of School (NYU Metro Center).<sup>30</sup> This tool articulates CRSE across three areas: representation, social justice, and teachers' materials. A more recent tool scores criteria in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) materials.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 2. Banks' Four Levels of Curriculum Reform**



Source: Adapted from James A. Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Education Reform," *Trotter Review* 3 (Summer 1989): 17–19, [http://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter\\_review/vol3/iss3/5](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol3/iss3/5)

**Figure 3. Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard**



Source: Jahque Bryan-Gooden, Megan Hester, and Leah Q. Peoples, *Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard* (New York, NY: NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, 2019), <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc/culturally-responsive-curriculum-scorecards>

Two other commonly used tools include [Screening for Biased Content in Instructional Materials](#), developed by leaders at the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction,<sup>32</sup> and [Assessing Bias in Standards and Curricular Materials](#), developed by the Great Lakes Equity Center, which gauge a wide range of potential biases in materials.<sup>33</sup>

minimum bar for curriculum. Our review finds that most of these resources have a dual focus on representation and connecting learning to real life action, including giving students the tools to understand social problems and promote social change.

These tools share a few themes:

- **CRSE cannot be measured solely by the numbers.** It can be useful to tally whether instructional materials embody various cultures and perspectives. However, the quality of representation, including the level of accuracy, complexity, significance, and authenticity of representations, is also important. Critical questions include: Do materials promote accomplishments of a few high-profile individuals but not the actions of groups? Is representation tokenistic in nature? Do materials promote tragedies of people of color but not successes?
- **CRSE is more than representation.** Meaningfully including historically underrepresented groups such as people of color, women, LGTBQIA+ people, people with disabilities, and English learners should be a

- **CRSE encompasses both content and pedagogy.** CRE influences not only what is taught but also how it is taught and in what context it is taught. Instructional materials should be assessed for how well tasks and activities demand collaborative and inclusive spaces. Another key area of review includes whether teacher-facing resources provide guidance for promoting student discussions or call on teachers to consider potential biases that might shape their instructional decisions.
- **CRSE should happen in all subjects.** A common misconception about CRSE is that it should happen only in ELA or social studies. Culturally responsive and sustaining teaching should happen in every content area and several tools exist to help incorporate CRSE across disciplines. One example is NYU Metro Center’s newly developed [scorecard for science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics](#)



(STEAM) materials.

While the resources described above vary in their particulars, they offer common guidance that can help system leaders and educators develop and implement curriculum that is culturally responsive and sustaining. It may seem that these criteria are asking a lot of instructional materials. However, given the central role instructional materials play in shaping instruction, it is appropriate to expect that they offer a strong foundation that helps teachers implement culturally responsive and sustaining practices.

# Reforming Materials Adoption

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## THE PROBLEM

Despite a dizzying array of instructional resources in the market and billions of dollars spent on them each year, system leaders and educators continue to report barriers to identifying resources that meet the needs of culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse students. The system leaders we spoke to said they are often forced to make tradeoffs between materials that are rigorous and aligned to college and career-ready standards and those that reflect students' cultural identities and histories.

While there are many reasons culturally responsive and sustaining instructional materials are not common in classrooms and the market, the impact of materials selections processes is generally overlooked. Arguably, the highly bureaucratic and muddled way instructional materials get into the hands of teachers and students ensures that demand, and in turn supply, cannot coalesce around important priority areas such as cultural responsiveness. At the same time, selection processes could pose challenges to the widescale adoption of more representative instructional resources if they ever become more widely available.

Research demonstrates that materials selection processes are too often influenced by archaic norms

and rules, some as old as 40 years old, according to a recent policy scan by Chiefs for Change.<sup>34</sup> Selections processes can be driven by shortcuts and ceremonial practices such that relationships with vendors and even the size of curriculum can win out above features that matter.<sup>35</sup> What is more, processes can be hidden from view, opaque to all but the most in-the-know educators, with few opportunities for other experts, community members, or students to get involved.<sup>36</sup>

Curriculum selection processes and priorities vary widely from state to state, district to district, and even school to school (see **Role of Federal, State, and Local Leaders in Curriculum Adoption** on page 9). It is only in the last decade that we have seen an uptick in the development and adoption of standards-aligned resources. But even with significant investments by national think tanks, membership organizations, funders, and others, there is a long way to go. A recent estimate by the Center for American Progress found that 40 percent of districts are still not using any instructional materials that are highly aligned to academic standards.<sup>37</sup>

Cultural Responsiveness has received far less attention as an indicator of quality. Only in recent years have a few states begun to consider whether materials embody various identities and cultures (e.g., **Massachusetts**), with a couple now

requiring districts to include such criteria in their own reviews (e.g., **Rhode Island, New Mexico, Washington**).<sup>38</sup> A few states have recently introduced or passed legislation that would bring a greater focus on CRSE in materials and instruction.<sup>39</sup> For instance, **New Jersey** recently amended its legislation related to curriculum to require students in the state to receive instruction about diversity and inclusion.<sup>40</sup> In **Minnesota**, legislators introduced an update to existing legislation that would require school boards to establish strategic plans for aligning teaching and learning to “curriculum that is rigorous, accurate, anti-racist, and culturally sustaining.”<sup>41</sup>

In sharp contrast, school board of education officials in **Florida** recently sent a memo to math curriculum developers, urging them to not embed “unsolicited strategies” such as culturally responsive teaching and social emotional learning into textbooks they pitch this school year.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, governors in **Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee**, and **Texas** have signed bills that mislabel topics as political or divisive, and muddy the waters about what topics teachers can discuss in the classroom.<sup>43</sup>

This chaos translates into confusion for everyone: curriculum developers, district leaders, and

## Sidebar 2. Role of Federal, State, and Local Leaders in Curriculum Adoption

While some federal funds, including COVID-19 relief funds, can be used to purchase or develop curricula, the 10th Amendment (state’s rights) ensures the **federal government** does not have direct influence over the substance of K–12 curricular materials or instruction. This has also been affirmed in multiple provisions of the major federal education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).<sup>45</sup>

ESSA tasks **states** with adopting the learning standards around which curriculum are developed, but few state leaders exert influence over which materials local leaders select to address state standards. According to a state policy field scan by Chiefs for Change, only 21 states have some formal authority over materials decisions and recent changes to policies provide trend toward providing more local autonomy.<sup>46</sup> Those with greater control (so-called “adoption states”) compile lists of vetted instructional materials that are required or strongly encouraged,<sup>47</sup> typically at semi-regular intervals of five to eight years. Other states recommend materials but may allow local systems to opt out of adopting them. How states choose materials for their lists varies in degrees of formality and complexity, with more elaborate processes often involving forming a committee of educators, developing a specific selection criteria and rubric, rating options using criteria, and releasing ratings and recommendations to the public.

**Local leaders** increasingly have the biggest say in what materials teachers and students have access to, but local curricula processes also vary significantly. District leaders sometimes defer to schools and teachers to choose their materials. Other times, they lead more involved processes that include convening adoption committees that evaluate curriculum, winnow down options using district-developed rubrics or checklists, pilot materials, make recommendations, and recommend materials to a policymaking body. This process can result in purchasing comprehensive curricula series across multiple grade levels that apply to all schools or a curriculum that is optional.<sup>48</sup>

teachers. The layering of state and local statutes, regulations, guidance, norms, and political priorities makes it difficult for district leaders and individual teachers to know what they are allowed to develop, adopt, and implement. It also pressures curriculum developers to limit what topics they include in their materials or to create vastly different materials for different states.<sup>44</sup>

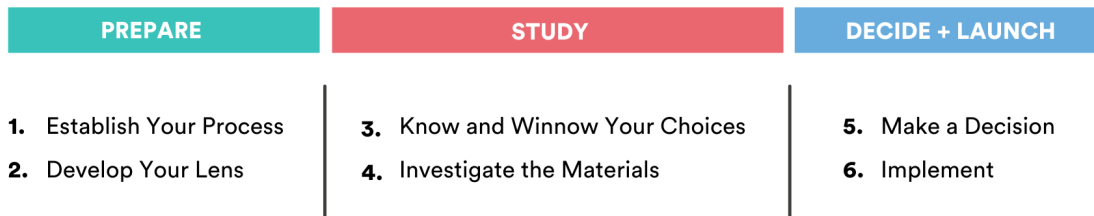
**BUILDING BETTER ADOPTION PROCESSES**

State and district leaders across the country recognize that improvements to materials selection processes are sorely needed. Adopting resources that offer a strong foundation for culturally responsive and sustaining practice necessitates coherent selection plans driven by a sharp instructional vision, substantive input from a broad group of partners, and major investments in professional learning.

A few of the state and district leaders we spoke to have turned to [EdReports](#), an organization that provides publicly available ratings of instructional materials’ college-ready standards and usability, for support in instituting such coherent curriculum adoption processes. EdReports has developed a route map for coherent adoption process that includes six steps, from developing a district lens to launching and implementing curriculum (see **Six Key Adoption Steps** below).

In the short term, more coherent adoption processes help system leaders choose the best possible materials and identify places where supplementation is needed. In the long term, more coherent adoptions push curriculum developers to offer stronger. Indeed, system leaders we spoke to said vetting materials against rigorous CRSE criteria and making this data publicly available is driving curriculum developers to deliver more representative materials.

**Figure 4. Six Key Adoption Steps**



Source: Adapted from EdReports (website) “Selecting for Quality: 6 Key Adoption Steps”, <https://www.edreports.org/resources/adoption-steps>

# State Spotlight: Massachusetts

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Massachusetts's materials review process engages teachers of color and emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive and sustaining practice.<sup>49</sup>

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (MDESE) CURriculum RATings by TEachers (CURATE) initiative is an effort to share reviews and information that help districts make informed decisions about instructional materials. Beginning in 2018, state leaders and partners at the Rennie Center have convened Massachusetts teachers to serve as CURATE panelists and meet several times a semester to conduct reviews of core curricular materials in ELA/Literacy, Math, and Science. Reviews yield a series of user-friendly reports that help inform schools and districts on various programs' alignment to Massachusetts standards and classroom application.<sup>50</sup> Culturally responsive and sustaining criteria are a fundamental element of CURATE rubrics.<sup>51</sup> The central goal is to promote racial equity by ensuring the benefits of higher-quality materials are available to all students.<sup>52</sup>

## **Bringing Teachers of Color into the Fold**

The state's attention to racial equity begins with the recruitment of panelists. Leaders at MDESE partner with the Rennie Center to disseminate a call for teachers to join CURATE through various district,

school, and organizational partners. Noticing a lack of teachers of color among panelists early on, MDESE and the Rennie Center have expanded their list to include regional networks, collaboratives, and organizations that were developed by and for teachers of color.

In addition to expanding where their recruitment messages were heard, the messages themselves have been adapted to attract participation from teachers of color. State leaders have honed outreach language to articulate that high-quality materials are a lever for racial equity:

*Instructional materials can be an important lever for racial equity. The materials that students engage with and learn from matter! CURATE (CURriculum RATings by TEachers) convenes panels of MA teachers to evaluate and rate instructional materials to support district and school decision-making. CURATE is committed to racial equity and we are committed to using this process to help districts make critical shifts towards culturally responsive curriculum materials. If you have a passion and commitment for racial equity, then we are eager to partner with you!*

*Studies have shown that women and people of color are less likely to apply for roles*

*unless they meet every qualification listed. We encourage anyone interested to apply!*<sup>53</sup>

This recruitment strategy has helped to increase the share of teachers of color participating in CURATE. In the first year of CURATE, only 8 percent of panelists identified as teachers of color. That number grew steadily to 25 percent in the 2019–2020 school year and 35 percent in 2020–2021. This upcoming school year, 48 percent of CURATE panels identify as people of color, the most diverse cohort to date. The composition of panels reflects more than the 8 percent of teachers of color across the state and shows parity with the 40 percent of students of color statewide.<sup>54</sup>

### **A Focus on Cultural Responsiveness**

In addition to diversifying CURATE panels, state leaders are eager to recruit teachers who have experience with and interest in culturally responsive and sustaining practice. Interested teachers fill out an application that asks how they implement culturally responsive teaching and adjust instruction for English learners and students with disabilities.<sup>55</sup> One example application question asks: “What is your understanding of culturally responsive instruction and what that looks like in classrooms and schools? What does it look like in your classroom?”

Panelists reconvene four to six times in a semester to collaboratively evaluate, calibrate, and rate curricular materials according to criteria across subject-specific CURATE rubrics.<sup>56</sup> In keeping with a focus on culturally responsive and sustaining practice, CURATE rubrics capture related criteria. The state recently updated their rubrics and supporting components (which include a “notes and tips” and “further reading” sections) to ensure a more explicit focus on representations and real-world applications throughout, rather than including this focus in solely one indicator.<sup>57</sup> For instance, rubrics consider whether materials include guidance that ask teachers to address their own biases.<sup>58</sup> Notably, these updates were catalyzed by the feedback from panelists. State leaders expect

that existing curriculum will not score highly on new criteria. However, they are hopeful that more rigorous expectations will prompt curriculum developers to enhance their offerings.

Panelists consider several resources in evaluating and rating curriculum. In the area of CRSE they consider publisher submissions, since the state asks them to explain how their materials address cultural responsiveness and diversity.<sup>59</sup> Panelists also consider surveys from Massachusetts educators already using the materials. After their review, panelists deliberate to reach consensus on ratings. The Rennie Center compiles ratings and evidence into a user-friendly report that publishers can respond to. By the end of the process, panel teams agree upon quality and alignment designation ratings for each curriculum reviewed.

State leaders say they have a lot to learn. However, their adoption resources are already proving to be useful to local leaders.<sup>60</sup> One local teacher in Springfield Public Schools, who has participated in CURATE for three years, now leads her district’s curriculum adoption process. “The CURATE experience really gave the groundwork for taking a rubric and applying it to a curricular program ... We were able to do our process successfully because of the experience and the work that CURATE has done ahead of us,” she said.<sup>61</sup> This shows the renewed focus on culturally responsive and sustaining practices has the potential to have a significant, positive impact across the state.

# Making Materials Local

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## THE PROBLEM

A culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum cannot be prepackaged. All students come into classrooms with their own interests, funds of knowledge, life experiences, and linguistic heritage, and they deserve to see these assets reflected in the classroom. Across the country, teachers go to great lengths to ensure this happens.

Unfortunately, the work involved in making materials more culturally sustaining is challenging and time consuming, especially during a pandemic. In a roundtable discussion hosted by **New America** in the fall of 2020, teachers reported improving core materials in siloes with little support from school leaders. They also said COVID-19 has put additional strains on their time and capacity to do this work well.<sup>62</sup> Teachers serving students of color may be more likely to shoulder this type of labor: A 2020 survey conducted by the **RAND Corporation** found that 32 percent of teachers report modifying at least half of their main materials to make them more culturally relevant; this number is higher for teachers serving in schools with high numbers of Black and Latinx students.<sup>63</sup>

An additional concern is that rigor can be watered down when core materials are supplemented, even with the best of intentions. State and district leaders we interviewed caution that it is critical to ensure

grade-level content and standards alignment remains present when materials are tailored to student needs. As one state leader in Rhode Island put it,

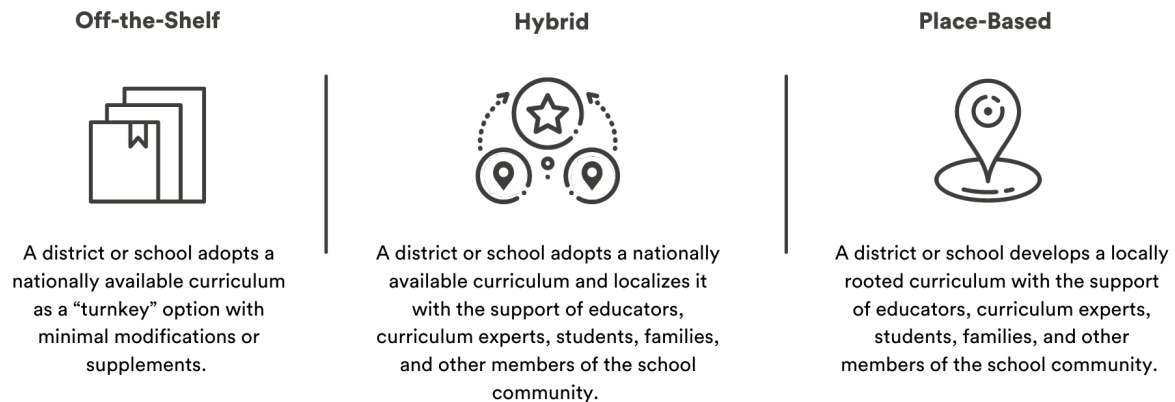
*A lot of materials don't address all of these [CRSE] criteria yet. So, then what? People will say, "Oh, well, we shouldn't adopt that one." But if we do that, we'll quickly get to a place where you couldn't adopt any materials ... We think districts should supplement and continue to work with them. But they need to be careful when they supplement because we don't want to sacrifice grade level standards.<sup>64</sup>*

While CRSE calls on teachers to apply their expertise and knowledge of students when they implement curricula, an approach that leaves this work fully up to them is insufficient. By offering teachers a stronger foundation for successful teaching, system leaders can free up teachers to spend more time directly working with students.

## TAKING ON LOCALIZATION

To deliver culturally responsive and sustaining resources to teachers, system leaders are implementing several strategies. These approaches lay on a spectrum, with leaders on one end adopting “off the shelf” materials and charging teachers with

**Figure 5. Curriculum Localization Spectrum**



Source: Developed by New America based on insights from interviews with system leaders.

adapting them to student needs (see **Curriculum Localization Spectrum** above). On the opposite end, leaders are supporting the development of locally rooted curricula through community input and co-creation. In the middle, leaders are adapting and supplementing commercial core curricula. Because culturally responsive and sustaining content cannot always travel between communities, expanding the process by which districts and schools develop and supplement curricula can be a useful way to increase its reach.<sup>65</sup>

### **Off-the-Shelf Materials**

Many districts adopt off-the-shelf core curricula and leave customization up to individual teachers. While the district may identify curricula that embody representation broadly, teachers are largely responsible for making any necessary changes and updates to localize instruction. This option requires less up-front time and investment from local leaders, but it places a heavy burden on teachers who may not have access to professional learning that helps them reshape their biases and adapt materials while retaining rigor. This approach also limits how many students can be reached by materials.

### **Hybrid Materials**

After selecting core curricula, some leaders take the additional step of enhancing materials by weaving in additional lessons, texts, and resources with the support of local partners. This work is often animated by educational organizations and initiatives such as **Teaching for Change**, the **Zinn Education Project**, **Black Lives Matter at School**, the **Pulitzer Center 1619 Project Curriculum**, and others that offer free student and teacher-facing resources.

Materials that use an open content license, also known as open educational resources (OER), can help leaders realize the full potential of culturally responsive and sustaining curricula. Because these resources are in the public domain and adaptable, it enables materials to be modified to fit any group of interests and backgrounds. For example, the **Highlander Institute** has suggested incorporating localized anchor problems into Eureka Mathematics as one way to make it responsive and sustaining while retaining the rigor.<sup>66</sup>

In Mississippi, one school undertook a similar effort. A recent report by **Center for Public Research and Leadership** shares how **Clarksdale Collegiate** revamped a nationally available core



ELA curricula, Wit & Wisdom, to be more locally responsive.<sup>67</sup> In collaboration with educators and their professional learning provider, portions of the “A New Home” unit on immigration were enhanced with a focus on the Great Migration to provide greater connections to Black students, which make up 90 percent of their student population. The authors note that the inclusion of professional development provider ensured changes remained aligned to standards and grade-level content, and were implemented consistently across classrooms. Additionally, high-quality materials catalyzed deeper involvement of families, expanding the instructional core from a three-pointed relationship (instructional materials, students, and teachers) to a four-pointed one that includes families.

In **Chicago Public Schools**, leaders collaborated closely with curriculum developers to localize materials. Leaders felt that off-the-shelf materials would not capture the full diversity of their student body nor the creativity, energy, and pedagogical expertise of their educators so they contracted vendors to adapt their curriculum offerings to the Chicago context. This involved changes that were both big and small. For instance, teachers took issue with Chicago’s downtown sculpture Cloud Gate (“The Bean”) serving as one of the few local connections in their ELA curriculum, so they asked developers to infuse a reference to the Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic, the largest African American parade in the United States, which takes place every year on Chicago’s South Side. Notably, CPS’s process requires complex relationships with multiple vendors that will not apply to smaller districts.<sup>68</sup>

A slightly different approach is provided by **Buffalo Public Schools**, where a group of teachers, specialists, and district leaders developed the Emancipation Curriculum, a series of ELA lessons that teachers are required to use to supplement their core curriculum, from Pre–K through 12th grade.<sup>69</sup> These lessons are aligned to NYS Common Core Curriculum Standards in English Language Arts and Social Studies and bring together resources from **The New Jersey Amistad Web-based Curriculum**, the **Library of Congress**,

**National Coalition of Black Lives Matter at Schools**, among other tools.<sup>70</sup> For the past several years, the district has provided training on culturally responsive and sustaining practices. Leaders will ramp up training on implementing the Emancipation Curriculum in this upcoming school year.<sup>71</sup>

### **Place-Based Materials**

Some district leaders have taken a build-it-yourself path by developing locally rooted curriculum. For instance, a well-known effort in **Baltimore City Public Schools** involved convening teachers and community leaders to develop BMore Me, a series of social studies lessons for middle and high school students that tackle the history and modern reality of Baltimore, asking questions on issues such as redlining, monuments, lead paint concerns, and civic action.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond district-led efforts, states are also making investments to develop curricula that reflect the histories and experience of their Indigenous communities. In **Washington** state, Tribal Leaders Congress on Education, the Washington State School Directors Association, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction developed the Since Time Immemorial tribal sovereignty curriculum which is endorsed by all 29 federally recognized tribes.<sup>73</sup> Rooted in commitment to tribal sovereignty, the curriculum includes lesson plans that facilitate learning with Native people rather than about them. In **Oregon**, state legislature recently enacted a bill that charges the Office of Indian Education with creating K–12 Native American Curriculum for inclusion in public schools along with professional development to educators. The law also provides funds to each of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon to create place-based curriculum.<sup>74</sup>

## **THE ROLE OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS**

While culturally responsive and sustaining instructional materials cannot be standardized, this does not obviate the need for those who develop and sell instructional resources. Quite the contrary: curriculum developers must play a key role by offering materials that invite and allow localization, ensuring offerings come with a strong baseline of relevance, and providing professional learning.

As noted above, curriculum developers can work more closely with schools and districts to forge stronger materials in this area and provide aligned professional learning opportunities. Additionally, developers can integrate into their instructional materials the basic conditions that allow CRSE to prosper. For instance, developers must include texts and characters that represent wide range of experiences and backgrounds. Nationally available curricular options can also explore topics that have resonance with students across the country such as experiences with the pandemic, protests that happened last summer and continue today, climate justice, how to tackle social concerns such as discrimination and prejudice, and how to communicate across lines of difference.

# Promising Strategies for State and District Leaders

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Over the past year, many students,<sup>75</sup> families, educators, and dozens of prominent organizations (e.g., Chiefs for Change,<sup>76</sup> WestEd,<sup>77</sup> and Aspen Institute<sup>78</sup>) have called for more enriching, representative, and accurate instructional materials. State and local leaders are beginning to answer this call by bringing a CRSE lens to the materials selections processes, engaging a broad range of partners in adoption decisions, and addressing gaps in the market through supplementation. The eight promising strategies listed below distill lessons from these efforts and incorporate useful recommendations and resources from the field.

## 1. Develop a Shared Instructional Vision Rooted in CRSE

CRSE cannot be an afterthought in instructional materials review processes. It should be baked into the instructional vision that drives selection. **EdReports** recommends that leaders begin selection processes with an instructional vision that describes what they consider to be excellent instruction.<sup>79</sup> This vision should influence not only materials selection, but other important decisions made about instruction. Culturally responsive and sustaining practices should be integrated into this aspirational vision, as well as the driving theory of

change behind adoption decisions.

### STATES

- Develop a unifying vision, with partners, of high-quality teaching that gives direction not only to adoption processes but instructional decisions more broadly. Ensure this vision is rooted in culturally responsive and sustaining practices. A useful example developed in **New York**, the [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#), intends to help educators and system leaders create student-centered learning environments and equitable policies.<sup>80</sup>
- Strengthen central office expertise around the instructional vision and racial equity. For example, **Wisconsin** has its own statewide vision for CRSE, the [Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practices](#). The state provides professional learning opportunities on this model and training to SEA staff on equity, some of which is freely available online.<sup>81</sup>

### DISTRICTS

- Develop an instructional vision to guide materials adoption and instructional decisions with teachers, students, families, and others.

District selection teams can use a useful guide developed by **EdReports** to walk through how to articulate an effective vision, [How to Articulate an Instructional Vision During a Materials Adoption](#).

- Design requests for proposals (RFPs) that demand alignment to CRSE. RFPs should contain guidelines about what is expected in materials and professional learning. For example, **Chicago Public Schools'** recent curriculum review process included an RFP with clear must-haves around representation. It required materials and assessments pitched by developers to be “free from bias; fair across race, religion, ethnicity and gender; and culturally relevant with the mindful integration of diverse communities, cultures, histories and contributions,” including “attention to African American, Latinx, Asian, indigenous people, women, LGBTQ, religious minorities (including Muslims), working class people and youth.”<sup>82</sup>
- Give curriculum developers guidance about the district’s instructional vision. This may include the RFP, webinars, and other opportunities for curriculum developers to ask questions about CRSE.

## 2. Plan for Transparent and Inclusive Selections Processes

Achieving a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum requires respecting and centering the knowledge, ideas, and solutions of students and families. Adoption processes should substantively involve students, families, and other members of the school community, especially those whose voices have been historically excluded from such processes. Selection committees must comprise of members with content expertise, surely, but also members who reflect student demographics, who work in under-resourced schools, and who have a track record of culturally responsive and sustaining practice. The more inclusive the review process at the start, the more likely it is to yield greater buy-in

and stronger implementation.

### STATES

- Release practical guidance and resources to LEAs about how to engage students and community members in review processes equitably, including how they can share power with those historically left out of the process. Many resources exist that support equitable community collaboration, including tools to guide community conversations by **Great Schools Partnership**.<sup>83</sup>
- If your state conducts materials reviews, model inclusive engagement by bringing together a selection committee that involves educators of color, educators with an established track record of culturally relevant and sustaining practice, and educators who teach students who are the least well-served. For example, **Massachusetts** revamped its recruitment and selection processes to ensure the inclusion of candidates of color and those with experience in culturally responsive and sustaining practice (see **State Spotlight: Massachusetts** on page 11)

### DISTRICTS

- Establish a review committee with membership that reflects diversity of experience, content expertise, racial and ethnic backgrounds, among other factors.
- Work collaboratively with educators, students, families, and other members of a school community (including local museum and library leaders), from beginning to end of the selection process. Practice power-sharing and address barriers to participation, including issues of community trust. For instance, **Baltimore City Public Schools** conducted surveys and public sessions that gave educators, parents, and students opportunities to contribute to decision-making. Looking to the future, district leaders seek to improve

communication processes by engaging partners both during and after selection, offering more time for community feedback, and investing in building trust.<sup>84</sup>

- Ensure the selection process signals that families and community members are cherished partners who are encouraged to participate. This includes making all timelines and documents public and offering multiple, flexible opportunities to give input.

### 3. Evaluate Materials with a Focus on CRSE

Increasingly, curriculum developers label their instructional materials as culturally responsive. While independent reviews of standards alignment and rigor can be found on [EdReports](#) and [Louisiana's tiered curricular review system](#), there is no one place to find robust evidence on whether materials live up to their claims when it comes to cultural responsiveness. Developing a review tool and vetting materials against it is the best way to determine whether materials are truly culturally responsive. However, it should not come as a surprise if most materials on the market today fail to meet expectations. These failures should be used by publishers and local leaders to help plan for supplementing and enhancing materials.

#### STATES

- If the state conducts materials reviews, integrate widely recognized CRSE criteria into instruments used to vet materials. Adopt criteria to suit your context but retain expansive indicators that include a focus on representation, social justice, and teacher guidance across subject areas. As a starting point, consider our overview of popular rubrics and tools for ideas (see **What are Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Resources?** on page 5). Encourage district leaders to use or adapt the state-developed rubric to foster a unified voice across the state about the best

criteria to use.

- If the state conducts materials reviews, choose materials for review that meet evidence of alignment with college- and career-ready standards before turning to CRSE. In addition to alignment evidence, **EdReports** offers a helpful starting point for identifying which materials warrant a deeper examination in CRSE. In its latest reviews, this organization had provided narrative evidence on how materials encourage teachers to draw upon student cultural and social backgrounds to facilitate learning.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, reviews now consider whether materials provide a balance of images or information that represent various demographic and physical characteristics.
- If the state conducts materials reviews, make outcomes of reviews public to motivate publishers to improve existing materials and help districts make choices about supplementation. For instance, **New Mexico** gives a badge to materials that meet a few indicators of representation.<sup>86</sup> Even with only a limited number of indicators, most materials reviewed have not earned a badge. However, leaders in the state have noted a willingness among curriculum developers to earn a distinction. At least one vendor pulled its materials from consideration until it could meet representation criteria, according to state leaders.

- Share clear data from evaluations publicly so that publishers understand the strengths and limitations of their materials in the area of CRSE, if the state conducts materials reviews. Developers are more likely to integrate CRSE criteria into their resources if the market demands it.

#### DISTRICTS

- Identify key district priorities for materials adoption, including by analyzing data and feedback about limitations in current

instructional materials options. Incorporate these priorities into rubrics used during selections processes. Consult state rubrics and widely recognized CRSE criteria to ensure materials review embeds an expansive view of CRSE (see **What are Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Resources?** on page 5).

- Build capacity among raters to recognize CRSE elements through professional learning and resources. For instance, offer examples and non-examples and allow reviewers to resolve questions and misconceptions that might emerge.
- Use data about gaps to identify opportunities to supplement materials or develop place-based materials in a way that better reaches expectations (see **Making Materials Local** on page 14). Do not wait for perfect materials.
- Collect data about teacher and student experience in the area of CRSE and use it when selecting materials. For example, the **Aspen Institute** recommends that states add cultural responsiveness as an element of climate surveys.<sup>87</sup> It points to [Village of Wisdom’s Culturally Affirming School Climate Survey](#) as a tool that can help to gauge the experiences of young people of color in school and highlight opportunities to better address their well-being and engagement.
- Share data from evaluations publicly and ensure information about the strengths and limitations of existing curricular options reaches curriculum developers.

#### 4. Prioritize Materials that Invite Modification and Localization

Culturally responsive and sustaining materials demand localization. District leaders and educators must be able to revise and remix materials to address the funds of knowledge, needs, and interests of the students sitting in their classrooms.

Flexible materials with licenses that permit their free use, modification, and sharing can help realize the potential of CRSE. In 2018, **New America** conducting research into leading OER districts and found that adoption of open resources led to more participatory classrooms, where teachers use input from students to decide what topics to incorporate into learning materials.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, because open licenses allow for free distribution, these materials reach students in less resourced schools.

#### STATES

- Eliminate legacy policies and procedures that make it difficult to adopt openly licensed materials and ensure OER developers, especially new entrants, can fairly compete against larger vendors in the marketplace. For instance, reduce submission costs and onerous submission requires. New entrants, particularly those that provide OERs, have shown to be nimble in the move toward more culturally responsive and sustaining materials but they can be at a disadvantage in the market.
- Provide technical assistance and incentives for OER use. **New America**, in collaboration with **ISTE**, has suggested providing professional learning opportunities, vetted OER options, and outreach efforts such as OER summits, webinars, and presentations to districts. For more details and ideas see [Creating Systems of Sustainability: Four Focus Areas for the Future of PK–12 Open Educational Resources](#).
- Leverage federal funding to develop full-course, open curricula. For instance, the **New York State Education Department** leveraged federal Race to the Top federal funding to develop curricular materials for grades PreK to 12. EngageNY is now used by large numbers of teachers across the country.<sup>89</sup>

## DISTRICTS

- Negotiate with developers and request that any materials that vendors develop for your district be flexible and openly licensed to the extent possible.
- Adopt curriculum more frequently. More frequent curriculum cycles increases competition and provides more opportunities for developers to improve their products.

## 5. Optimize the Use of Supplementary Materials

Nearly all teachers supplement their core curriculum with self-created or acquired resources.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, popular hubs for supplemental materials can offer subpar choices when it comes to rigor and relevance. One scan published by **Thomas B. Fordham Institute** found that over two-thirds of the most downloaded materials from three of the most popular supplemental websites (Teachers Pay Teachers, ReadWriteThink, and Share My Lesson) did not include racially diverse authors or cover culturally relevant topics and roughly the same share were not aligned to academic standards.<sup>91</sup> Teachers value their role as curriculum curators, but there are significant steps state and local leaders can take to reduce their burden.

## STATES

- Create a state-based, searchable repository for CRSE supplementary resources or offer funding for districts to develop their own. For instance, **Washington** offers project grants for districts to develop a curated and annotated collection of openly licensed resources in areas with limited OER options, including culturally relevant teaching practices, ethnic studies, and social emotional learning.<sup>92</sup>

## DISTRICTS

- Develop a district-based repository or list of

supplementary materials that meet CRSE criteria and are standards-aligned. Convene educators to modify or weave together supplemental resources with core options in a way that better meets expectations.

- Vet supplementary materials that are well-regarded in the CRSE space (e.g., **Facing History and Ourselves, Learning For Justice, CommonLit, NewsELA**) against standards-alignment and rigor criteria. Leverage materials from free, public repositories such as libraries. **The New York Public Library**, for example, has curated materials to integrate Black history resources into instruction.<sup>93</sup>

## 6. Invest Heavily in Professional Learning and Coaching

Instructional materials are only as culturally relevant and sustaining as the educators that implement them. Teachers need ongoing opportunities to reflect on their biases. They need training and coaching that strengthens their ability to enact and modify their instructional materials in ways leave their rigor intact. Additionally, **New America**'s roundtable discussions found that teachers want support and guidance navigating complex conversations and topic areas of student interest, including anti-racist and LGBTQ+ inclusive content.<sup>94</sup>

## STATES

- Facilitate statewide service agreements and subsidize teacher and leader training to help teachers make the instructional and dispositional shifts necessary to be culturally responsive and sustaining.<sup>95</sup>

## DISTRICTS

- Develop and execute a plan to roll out up-front and ongoing curriculum-connected learning opportunities that help teachers implement and adapt materials and explore their own biases.

- Gather and synthesize data on teacher and student experience on a regular basis. Do not wait until the next adoption to collect data to gauge the impact of the curriculum. This information will allow districts to identify places where additional professional learning is needed in the area of CRSE.

## 7. Incentivize the Adoption of Rigorous and Relevant Materials

Most state leaders do not have formal authority over district curriculum decisions and districts do not all control school adoption decisions. Therefore, system leaders need to make adopting culturally relevant and sustaining materials an attractive voluntary option. This may involve offering professional learning, technical support, and funding opportunities. Federal relief funds provide opportunities to promote the use of culturally responsive and sustaining practices and curriculum (see **Using Covid-19 Relief Funding to Support Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum** on page 23).

### STATES

- Make curriculum coordinators, coaches, and professional learning leaders with expertise in CRSE available to districts. **WestEd** recommends creating pathways for expert culturally responsive and sustaining educators to move into these positions.<sup>96</sup>
- Leverage funding, including federal COVID-19 relief funds, to invest in strategies that accelerate learning through culturally responsive and sustaining instruction.
- Negotiate statewide contracts with vendors that deliver rigorous materials and professional learning with a strong CRSE focus to streamline and encourage procurement of these resources statewide.

### DISTRICTS

- Create positive messaging around CRSE by identifying and recognizing schools using culturally responsive and sustaining materials.
- Make professional development available, prioritizing schools that also adopt rigorous and responsive instructional resources.

## 8. Foster a Supportive Policy Environment

It has become obvious in the last year that school and state policies can significantly help or hinder the adoption of culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and instruction. State legislation that make CRSE a priority in the materials adoption processes encourage local leaders and educators to consider this lens in curriculum decisions. On the other hand, state laws that limit teaching about systemic racism foment a culture of fear and confusion.<sup>100</sup> Ensuring local leaders and teachers feel supported and encouraged to adopt CRSE has never been more critical.

### STATES

- Develop a communications strategy with partners, including leaders, superintendents, unions, and other organizations. Undertake a public information effort to help legislators and the general public understand the benefits of CRSE.
- Amend state laws and regulations to define high-quality resources in ways that encompass cultural responsiveness. Pursue legislation that makes the review of this area a required portion of the local instructional materials review process, but only if states have the capacity and mechanisms to help districts identify such options.
- Provide implementation-oriented guidance with concrete examples of how teachers can



implement culturally sustaining practices within existing laws and regulations. Teachers can misinterpret or be overly cautious in the face of new legislation and state leaders are the best positioned to provide clarity and support.

- Align all instruction-related policies to CRSE expectations, including student learning standards, teacher and leader standards, classroom observations, and professional development. For ideas on strengthening teacher standards with a focus on CRSE, see **New America**'s report, [Culturally Responsive Teaching: A 50-State Survey of Teaching Standards](#).<sup>101</sup>

## DISTRICTS

- Prepare for potential pushback from educators, families, and school boards, including by routinely collecting and sharing data that demonstrates the positive impact of culturally responsive and sustaining practices and curriculum on students in your district.
- Align all instructional decisions and systems such as classroom observations, teacher evaluations, and coaching to CRSE expectations.
- Ensure all district policies create a supportive climate for CRSE work, including hiring and supporting more teachers of color, adopting equitable discipline policies, and equitably distributing resources.

### Sidebar 3. Using Covid-19 Relief Funding to Support Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum

While Covid-19 relief funds provide only a one-time injection of funds, they can be used to support culturally responsive and sustaining strategies and instructional materials. According to spending plans for the latest federal relief package, American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER), a few states intend to promote accelerated learning by making investments in culturally responsiveness materials or professional learning.

Out of 17 approved plans (as of July 2021), we found four (**Massachusetts, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oregon**) that intend to focus on this area.<sup>97</sup> **Oregon**'s approved plan for their use of ARP ESSER funds says the state aims to make investments in “culturally responsive and representative instructional materials” to accelerate learning.<sup>98</sup> The plan says, “in order to increase student engagement and accelerate learning in response to the pandemic, students need access to high-quality, culturally sustaining and revitalizing instruction.”<sup>99</sup> Like most plans, Oregon's plan is high-level and does not detail how many dollars will be allocated in what areas, or whether they will target strategies for students most in need.

# Conclusion

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While the COVID-19 crisis has made the work of schools immensely more challenging, it has also provided a catalyst for embracing stronger materials and practices. As the new school year begins, educators and system leaders should break from traditional approaches to teaching and learning and embrace opportunities to affirm students' backgrounds, reignite students' passion for learning, and empower students as agents of social change. Culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and practices can help system leaders and educators reimagine schools as places where all students reach high standards and thrive.

# Methodology

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The author interviewed seven state leaders and eight local leaders (including teacher leaders) who have recently been involved in a curriculum adoption or development process in the states of California, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Mexico, Rhode Island, New York, and Washington. One-hour interviews were conducted over Zoom or telephone and were anchored by the questions below. New America narrowed down interviewees through a snowball approach. We sought to interview those who serve a significant number of students of color as well as those who had considered cultural relevance and sustaining practices during their curricular adoptions. For this reason, our sample is limited and not representative of the nation.

## **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

*What is your state's/district's role in the adoption of curricula?*

*Who is involved in your adoption processes and how?*

*Are OER a part of your recommended materials?*

*What are your priorities for adoption? Do you consider CRSE? OER? If so, why?*

*Have there been any challenges in considering CRSE/OER in your adoption processes?*

*Have you engaged in any efforts to supplement adopted curricula?*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rather than remediate the goal of instruction post-pandemic should be to accelerate learning. To learn more, see: *Accelerate Don't Remediate: New Evidence from Elementary Math Classrooms* (New York, NY: TNTP, 2021), <https://tntp.org/publications/view/teacher-training-and-classroom-practice/accelerate-dont-remediate>

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, we use this umbrella term that brings together the research and theory behind concepts such as *culturally relevant pedagogy*, *culturally responsive teaching*, and *culturally sustaining pedagogy*. These concepts are covered on New America's "Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching," topics page, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/topics/teachers-and-leaders/culturally-responsive-education/>

<sup>3</sup> We define instructional materials or resources as the resources that help teachers address a set of content standards, including student textbooks, teacher guides, and sets of lesson plans. The term is used interchangeably with *curriculum* and *curricular* resources.

<sup>4</sup> For example, one nationwide review of middle school literacy assignments found few include choice and relevance. See Joan Dabrowski and Tanji Reed Marshall, *Motivation and Engagement in Student Assignments: The Role of Choice and Relevancy* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2018), <https://edtrust.org/resource/motivation-and-engagement-in-student-assignments/>

<sup>5</sup> Dabrowski and Reed Marshall, *Motivation and Engagement in Student Assignments: The Role of Choice and Relevancy* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Consider a review of characters in children's books using computer vision tools which finds that Black and Latinx people are underrepresented in the images and text, relative to their share of the US population: Anjali Adukia, Alex Eble, Emileigh Harrison Hakizumwami Birali Runesha Teodora Szasz, *What We Teach About Race and Gender: Representation in Images and Text of Children's Books* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021), Working Paper No. 29123, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3825080](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3825080)

<sup>7</sup> For example, one analysis of history textbooks found that those in Texas downplay critical issues such as slavery. See Dana Goldstein, *Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories*, New York Times, January 13, 2020, [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html)

[texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html)

<sup>8</sup> To learn more, read the following discussion: Linda Darling-Hammond and Channa Cook-Harvey, *Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2018), <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-brief>.

<sup>9</sup> See [Bridging Digital Equity and Culturally Responsive Education in PreK-12](#) and [What Inclusive Learning Could and Should Look Like](#) for in-depth findings from these discussions.

<sup>10</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, *But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, *Theory into Practice* 34 (Summer 1995): 159–165.

<sup>11</sup> Brittany Aronson and Judson Laughter, *The Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Education: A Synthesis of Research Across Content Areas*, *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 1 (2016): 163–206, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>

<sup>12</sup> Jenny Muñiz, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Promising Approach—But 'Evidence-Based'?* EdCentral (blog), New America, January 22, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/culturally-responsive-teaching-promising-approach-evidence-based/>

<sup>13</sup> Duhita Mahatmya, Brenda J. Lohman, Jennifer L. Matjasko, and Amy Feldman Farb, "Engagement Across Developmental Periods," in *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, eds. Sandra L. Christenson, Amy L. Reschly, Cathy Wylie (Boston, MA: Springer, 2012), 45–63.

<sup>14</sup> Claude M. Steele, "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance," *American Psychologist* 52 (1997): 613–629.

<sup>15</sup> Mahatmya et al., *Engagement Across Developmental Periods*.

<sup>16</sup> Frances Messano, Stacey Childress, and Jason Atwood, *How to Meet Students' Social-Emotional and Academic Needs When Schools Reopen* (Oakland, CA: New Schools Venture Fund, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Research affirms that the perceived meaningfulness of learning activities has an impact on whether students choose to engage in learning tasks. See: Mary Aingly,

- “Students’ Interest and Engagement in Classroom Activities”, in *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, eds. Christenson S., Reschly A., Wylie C. (Boston, MA: Springer, 2012): 283–302; and Erika A. Patall, Ariana C. Vasquez, Rebecca R. Steingut, Scott S. Trimble, and Keenan A. Pituch, “Daily Interest, Engagement, and Autonomy Support in the High School Science Classroom,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 46 (2016): 180–194.
- <sup>18</sup> Chris S. Hulleman and Judith M. Harackiewicz, “Promoting Interest and Performance in High School Science Classes,” *Science* 326, no. 5958 (2009): 1410–1412.
- <sup>19</sup> Carissa Romer, *What We Know About Purpose & Relevance from Scientific Research* (Mindsets Scholars Network, 2019), 2.
- <sup>20</sup> John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1999); and Zaretta Hammond, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2014).
- <sup>21</sup> Revathy Kumar, Akane Zusho, and Rhonda Bondie, “Weaving Cultural Relevance and Achievement Motivation into Inclusive Classroom Cultures,” *Educational Psychologist* 53, no. 2 (2018): 78–96.
- <sup>22</sup> Ellen Eliason Kisker, Jerry Lipka, Barbara L. Adams, Anthony Rickard, Dora Andrew-Ihrke, Eva Evelyn Yanez, and Ann Millard, “The Potential of a Culturally Based Supplemental Mathematics Curriculum to Improve the Mathematics Performance of Alaska Native and Other Students,” *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 43, no. 1 (2012): 75–113.
- <sup>23</sup> Colette Boston and Susan R. Warren, “The Effects of Belonging and Racial Identity on Urban African American High School Students’ Achievement,” *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research* 13 (2017): 26–33.
- <sup>24</sup> Christy M. Byrd, “Does Culturally Relevant Teaching Work? An Examination from Student Perspectives,” *Sage Open* 6, no. 3 (2016): 1–10.
- <sup>25</sup> Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, Sara Douglass, Kimberly A. Updegraff, and Flavio F. Marsiglia, “A Small-Scale Randomized Efficacy Trial of the Identity Project: Promoting Adolescents’ Ethnic-Racial Identity Exploration and Resolution,” *Child Development* 89, no. 3 (2018): 862–870.
- <sup>26</sup> Heejung Chun and Ginger Dickson, “A Psychoecological Model of Academic Performance Among Hispanic Adolescents,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40, no. 12 (2011): 1581–1594.
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas S. Dee and Emily K. Penner, “The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum,” *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1 (2017): 127–166.
- <sup>28</sup> Nolan L. Cabrera, Jeffery F. Milem, and Ronald W. Marx, “An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of Mexican American Studies Participation on Student Achievement within Tucson Unified School District” (report to Special Master Dr. Willis D. Hawley on the Tucson Unified School District Desegregation Case, Tucson, AZ, 2012).
- <sup>29</sup> James A. Banks, *Approaches to Multicultural Education in Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, 1997, [https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Banks\\_James.pdf](https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Banks_James.pdf)
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