

## State of Our Classrooms: Instructional Materials Questionnaire Report August 2017

### About this Report:

High-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and the effective use of those materials by teachers are critical to student achievement (Curriculum Counts, 2017). Since instructional materials are the conduit through which students access content, a teacher's ability to access, understand, and use high-quality materials has a tangible effect on student success (Wiener & Pimentel, 2017). It should also be noted that in a randomized experiment, switching to a better curriculum was found to be almost *40 times* more cost-effective than reducing class size (Boser, Chingos, & Strauss, 2015). Content-focused, integrated professional development on instructional materials centers adult learning on the paramount goal: higher student achievement (Koedel & Polikoff 2017).

In early 2017, Student Achievement Partners (SAP) surveyed over 3,700 teacher-leaders in our Core Advocate network to understand more about the instructional materials in use in their schools and districts, as well as the structures and supports in place that sustain effective use of instructional materials across their schools and districts. SAP received 356 total replies (response rate of 9%) and it should be noted that not every respondent answered all the questions. As a result, insights gained are directional.

The questionnaire was open only to the Core Advocate network (composed of teacher-leaders working to support college- and career-ready instruction in their classrooms) as the objective was to glean information from a population likely to have strong foundational knowledge of college- and career-ready standards. While our respondents are neither a representative nor a randomized set of educators, many of the findings reinforce data coming from studies that do use randomized samples of teachers in their design.

Organizations working to improve the use of adopted instructional materials, to improve knowledge and selection of standards-aligned full-year or supplemental materials, or answer questions of curriculum design may find the information in this report helpful in identifying how their tools and resources can best support teachers.

### Introduction:

Even SAP's Core Advocates, a group that is supportive of and knowledgeable about the Shifts needed to implement college- and career-ready standards, struggle with selecting and implementing high-quality, instructional materials aligned to such standards. Questionnaire results suggest that there is still a lack of expertise about college- and career-ready standards-aligned instructional materials. The results also suggest that school and system factors can prohibit the selection or effective use of adopted standards-aligned materials. This presents valuable opportunities for schools, districts, and any organization working within these systems to address these challenges.

*Finding 1 - Respondents are not clear on what college- and career-ready standards-aligned materials look like or where to find trustworthy information about them.*

Forty-eight percent of respondents believe their district- or school-selected instructional materials are mostly or completely aligned to college- and career-ready standards (Figure 1). Eighteen percent of respondents are unsure if their instructional materials are aligned to college- and career-ready standards (Figure 2).

However, 46% also rely on the evidence for alignment that is self-reported by publishers (Figure 2).

Although only 46% of all respondents teach in states with textbook adoption lists, 52% of respondents said that state lists of approved instructional materials, even if the list did not generated by their home state, influence decisions about instructional materials in their school or district (Figure 3). Publishers also influence the school/district decisions about instructional materials selection, according to 38% of respondents (Figure 3). Thirty one percent 31% of respondents say that independent, expert online reviews such as [EdReports](#) influence instructional materials decisions within their school or district (Figure 3).

Relying on publishers to rate their own alignment to college- and career-ready standards is problematic. Shortly after the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), several publishers branded their products as aligned to the CCSS even though those products pre-dated the release of the standards (Polikoff, 2015). State lists can provide some guidance but they also can be problematic because many are updated infrequently and may not include newer materials developed specifically to align to the CCSS or other comparable college- and career-ready standards (2015 ELA/ELD adoption, 2017). On the other hand, free, timely, teacher-led collections of reviews, like [EdReports](#) and the instructional material reviews conducted by the [Louisiana Department of Education \(and other jurisdictions\)](#), are independent, up-to-date resources available to help teachers, districts, and states decide which materials are best aligned to college- and career-ready standards. Resources like these can also be useful when adopting new materials is not feasible and existing materials fall short of alignment. They can help schools, systems, and teachers identify and understand the gaps so they can seek out or prepare supplemental materials and adaptations to address areas of weakness.

*Action Step(s):*

- Review [EdReports'](#) free, detailed reports of mathematics and ELA/literacy textbooks, [Louisiana Department of Education's](#) materials review webpage, [Student Achievement Partners'](#) work on materials adaptation, and the [Washington State Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction's](#) open educational resource reviews. All are invaluable resources for those involved in selecting or seeking to adapt instructional materials.
- Promote college- and career-ready alignment criteria for instructional materials through evaluation tools like [Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool \(IMET\)](#) and Achieve's [EQIP rubric](#).
- Focus discussions on Core Action 1 of the [Instructional Practice Guide \(IPG\)](#) to drive initial conversations about instructional materials alignment through the lens of classroom practice in addition to providing ongoing content-focused professional development.

Figure 1

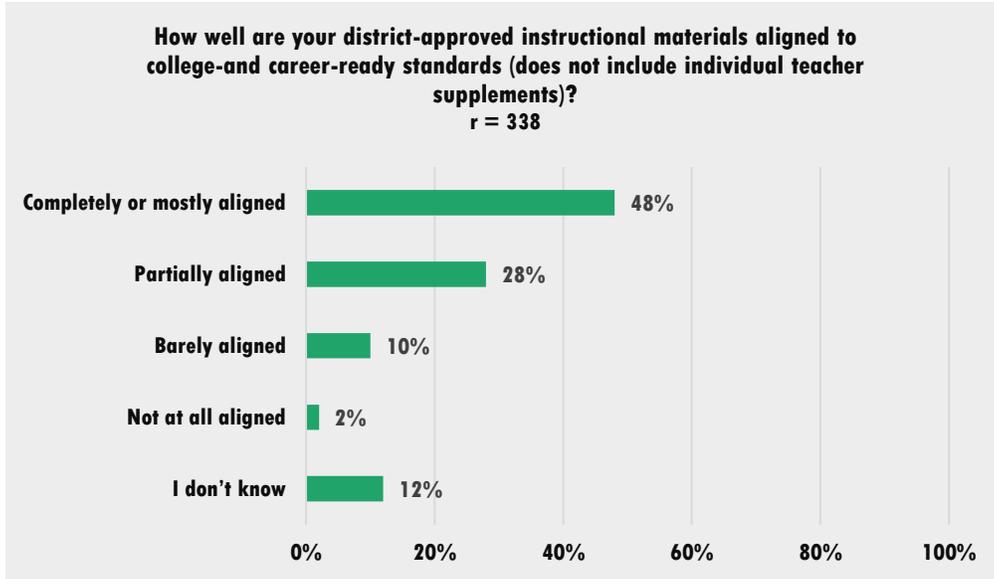


Figure 2

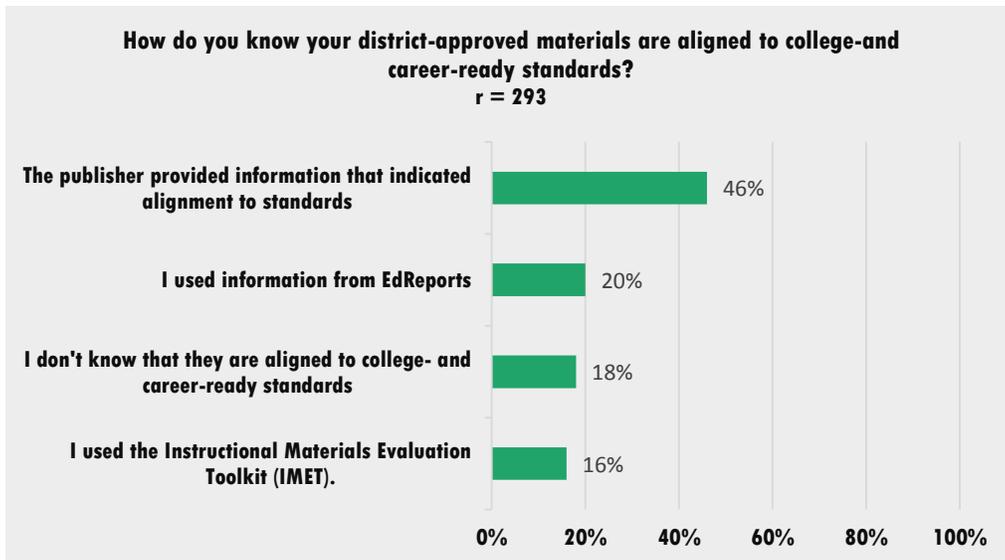
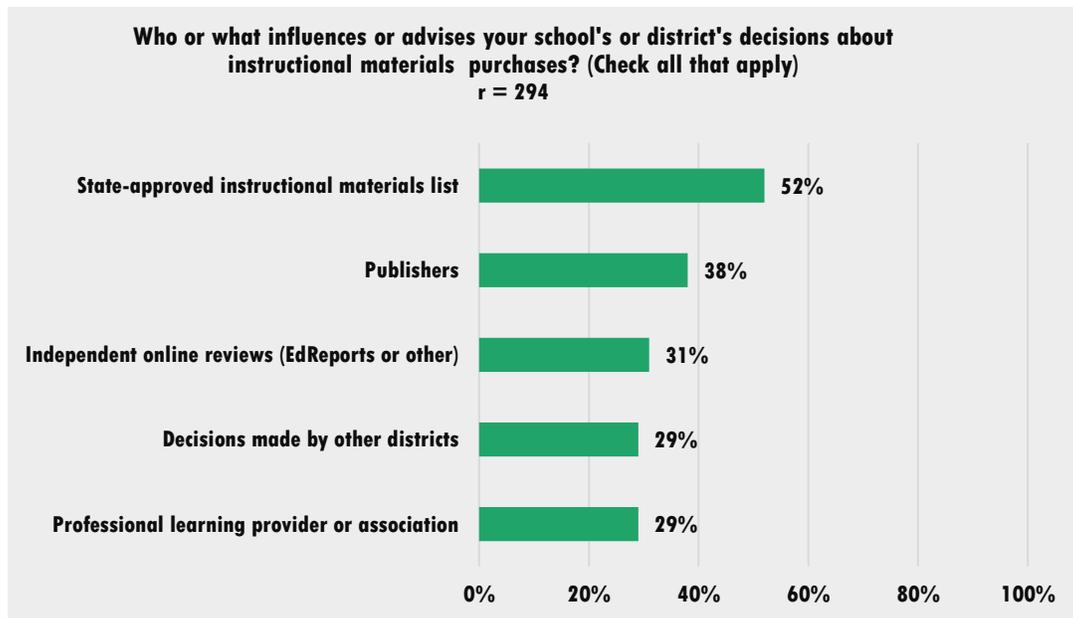


Figure 3



*Finding 2 - The professional development that respondents receive around instructional materials is not sufficient in either quality or duration.*

Respondents to our questionnaire are quite clear that they are not receiving sufficient professional development around instructional materials.

Regarding the support provided by their districts around implementation of newly adopted materials, 20% of respondents selected “1” on a scale from “1 (not useful)” to “4 (very useful)” and 32% selected “2” (Figure 4). These responses reveal a troubling characterization of an investment made by schools and districts for the sole purpose of providing implementation support to teachers. For the professional development that is given, 60% of respondents indicate that the publisher provides some and 41% indicate that schools or districts are involved in the professional development around their instructional materials, exhibiting school ownership of the content professional learning (Figure 5).

Even where professional development on instructional materials is reported as useful, it is scant. Over 30% of respondents report receiving the equivalent of a single day of professional development to support implementation of newly purchased instructional materials over the course of the school year (Figure 6) and 87% of those respondents’ are from schools and districts that adopted instructional materials within the last seven to eight years. These data points line up with the nationally representative American Teacher Panel results, released recently by the RAND Corporation, in which “the vast majorities of both ELA and mathematics teachers reported receiving fewer than eight hours of professional development on their main instructional materials, with about one-quarter of all teachers receiving no professional development on their main curricula at all” (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). This stands in direct contrast to research evidence that indicates that teachers who participate in a minimum of 49 hours of professional learning grounded in high-quality, standards-aligned curricula can have a positive impact on student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). Data from the questionnaire indicate the majority of respondents are not receiving sufficient or effective support for newly adopted instructional materials. Content-specific professional development can “create the conditions in schools through which teachers can become experts at teaching the curriculum they are using and adapting instruction to the needs

of their particular students” but this must happen over time and with practice and content-expert guidance (Yoon et al., 2007).

*Action Step(s):*

- Engage teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, and managers of professional development in the work of focusing professional learning on how to teach the instructional materials and curricula that teachers are working with daily in classrooms. The fastest way to make professional learning relevant for teachers is to put their school’s curriculum and related evidence of student learning at its heart (Wiener & Pimentel, 2016). Ongoing support can maximize the potential of investments in high-quality instructional materials.

Figure 4

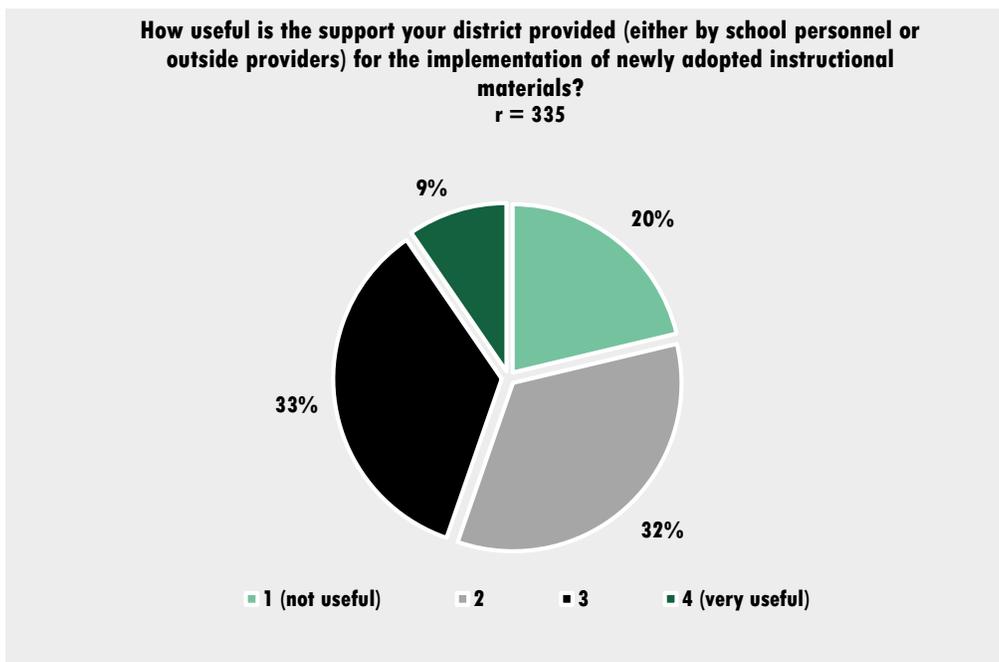


Figure 5

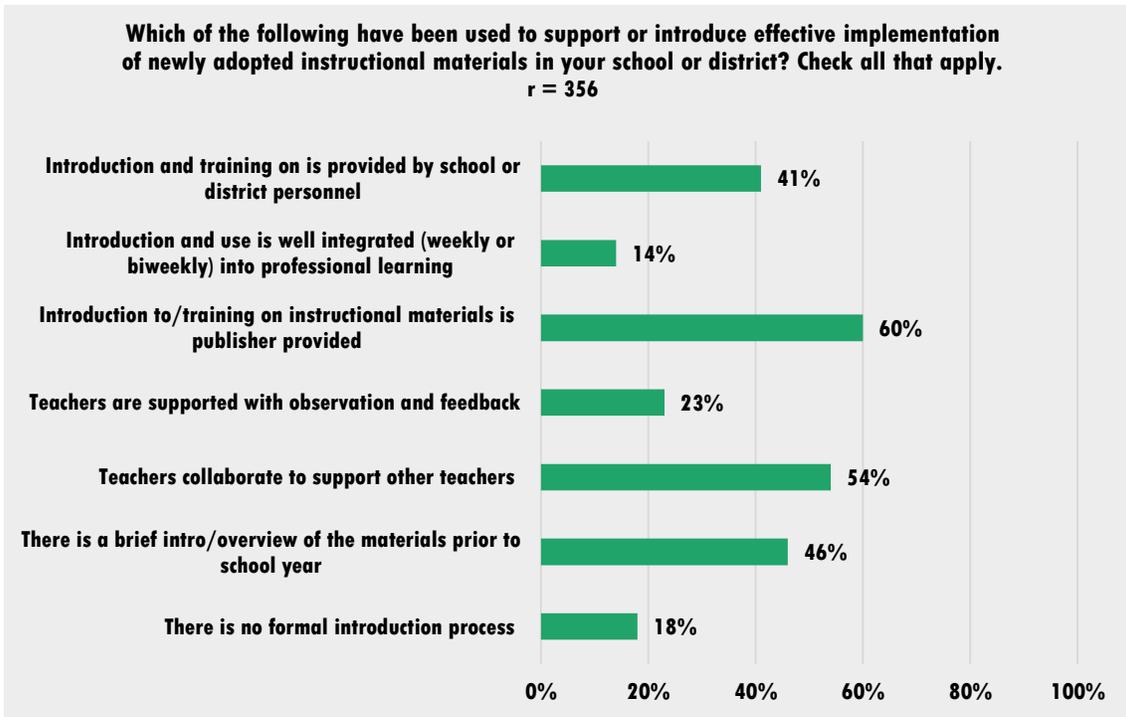
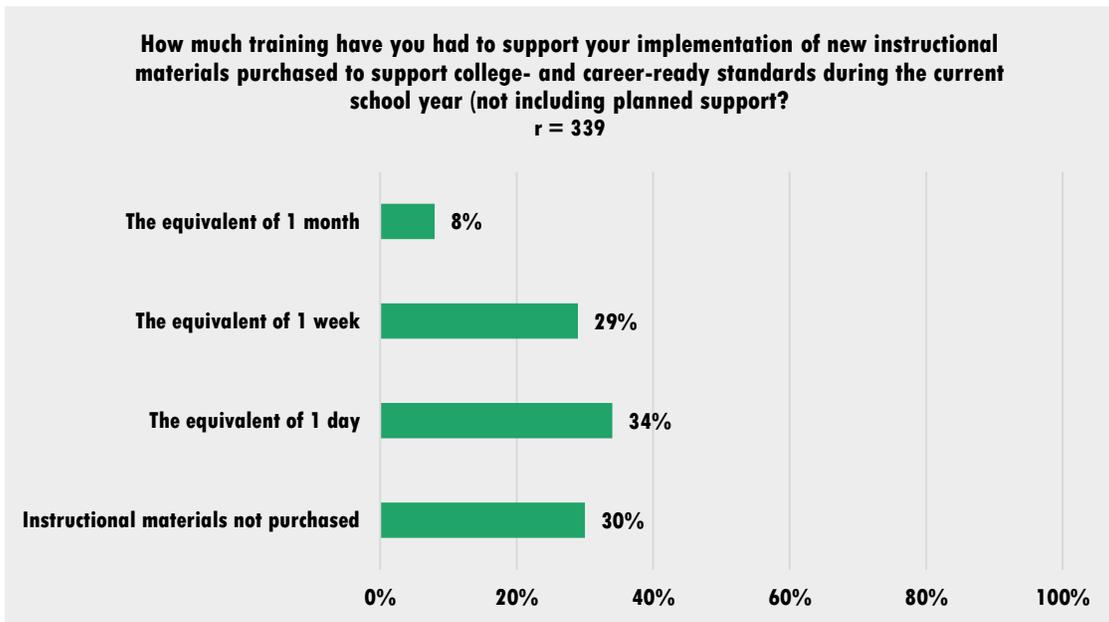


Figure 6



*Finding 3 – Respondents’ approaches to decisions around instructional materials in mathematics and ELA/literacy are different and reflect a potential reluctance to change practice in ELA/literacy that is not as evident in mathematics.*

Respondents are implementing college- and career-ready standards-aligned instructional materials in mathematics (Figure 7). Thirty-three percent of respondents indicate they were using EngageNY materials daily and/or often. Twenty-nine percent indicate the same frequency of use with *Eureka Math* (Figure 7).

The story is different in ELA/literacy, however. The data suggest respondents are less likely—either of their own volition or by district instruction—to abandon their pre-Common Core instructional materials, particularly those who have adopted Balanced Literacy teaching methods. With the reported use of *Journeys* (33%), Fountas and Pinnell *Word Study* (25%), and Teacher’s College *Reading and Writing Workshop* (24%), the majority of respondents are using instructional materials that are not fully aligned to college- and career-ready standards (Figure 8) and have some significant gaps. This lines up with the findings of the American Teacher Panel study, conducted by the RAND Corporation, which suggest that “it is possible that state standards for mathematics are having a greater impact on what teachers do than state standards for ELA/literacy” (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016).

Although ELA/literacy respondents do not always have full-year college- and career-ready standards-aligned materials from which to teach, they are supplementing with materials to address components such as complex text (64%) and sequences of text-dependent and text-specific questions to build students' understanding (57%) (Figure 9). Respondents also report supplementing materials with standards-aligned, open educational resources from [achievetheCore.org](https://achievethecore.org), [EngageNY](https://www.engageny.org), and [Readworks](https://www.readworks.org) (Figure 10). The rationales provided for supplementation indicate an awareness of the shortcomings of adopted materials. While there is work to be done to ensure teachers are provided with standards-aligned instructional materials from the outset, aligned practice can be supported through the promotion of standards-aligned supplemental materials that address major gaps in the adopted programs.

In mathematics, the most in-demand resources for supplementation are open educational and standards-aligned. When asked about materials that they used occasionally or rarely, 35% of respondents indicate [EngageNY](https://www.engageny.org) and 14% indicate *Eureka Math*, suggesting that respondents are supplementing with college- and career-ready standards-aligned materials (Figure 11). The primary reasons cited to supplement math instructional materials were to address conceptual understanding (33%) and to focus on the Major Work of the grade (27%) (Figure 12).

Regardless of materials used, 54% of respondents report collaborating with one another to support the use of instructional materials. Forty-one percent report that professional development on instructional materials is being done by school or district personnel (Figure 13). If collaboration and training are focused on content, ongoing, and sanctioned and supported by the school and district, teachers will be better positioned to select and use college- and career-ready, standards-aligned instructional materials effectively.

#### *Action Step(s):*

- Introduce teacher-leaders to valuable tools with the explicit purpose of strengthening understanding about instructional materials and, ultimately, classroom practice. Schools, districts, and organizations would benefit by sharing open educational resources broadly with teachers. This includes:
  - Tools and resources available that can help identify standards-aligned instructional materials, including full-year curricula reviews conducted by [EdReports](https://www.edreports.org) and [Louisiana Department of Education](https://www.louisiana.gov/Portals/0/images/stories/about-louisiana/Louisiana-Department-of-Education).
  - Open educational resources reviewed by the [Washington State Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction](https://www.wa.gov/Portals/0/images/stories/about-wa/Washington-State-Office-of-Superintendent-and-Public-Instruction).
  - Tools that can help start or continue discussion on aligned materials such as the [introduction](#) to EdReports on Student Achievement Partner’s [Aligned](#) blog.
  - Using college- and career-ready, standards-aligned programs or parts of programs as supplements to instructional materials.

- Promote materials that can increase the alignment to college- and career-ready standards. If schools and districts are not in the position to completely change all instructional materials, use full-year resources such as [EngageNY's Foundational Skill Strand](#) and [Listening and Learning](#), [CKLA](#) or supplemental resources like Dan Meyer's [Three-Act Math Tasks](#) on his [dy/dan](#) blog in math and [Readworks](#) in ELA/literacy.

Figure 7

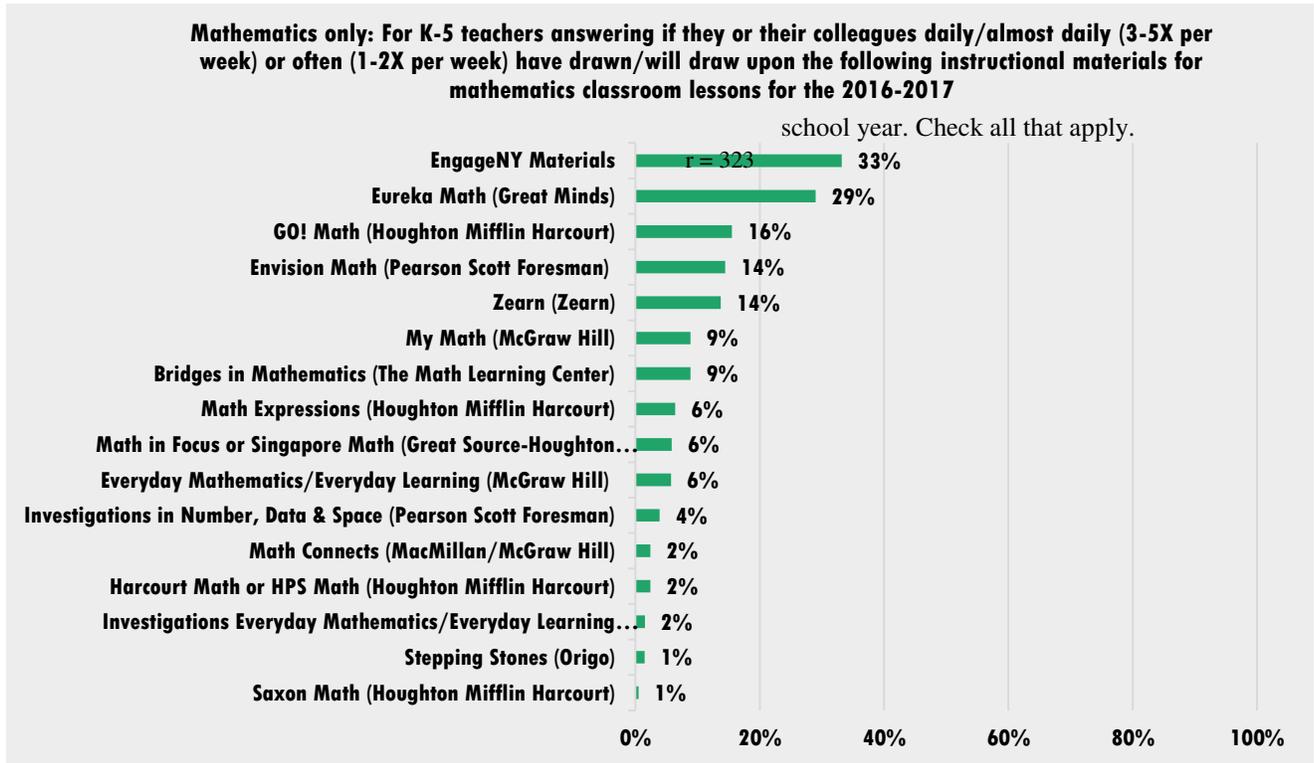


Figure 8

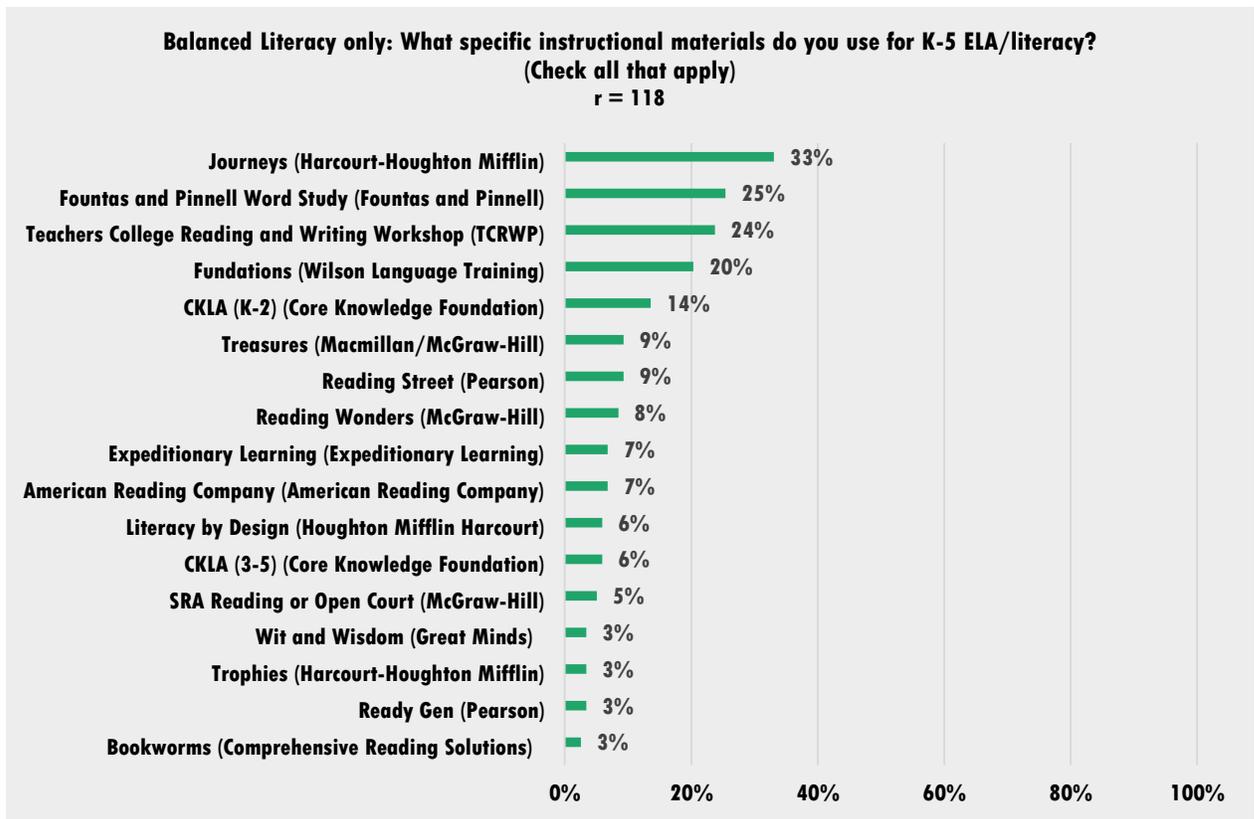


Figure 9

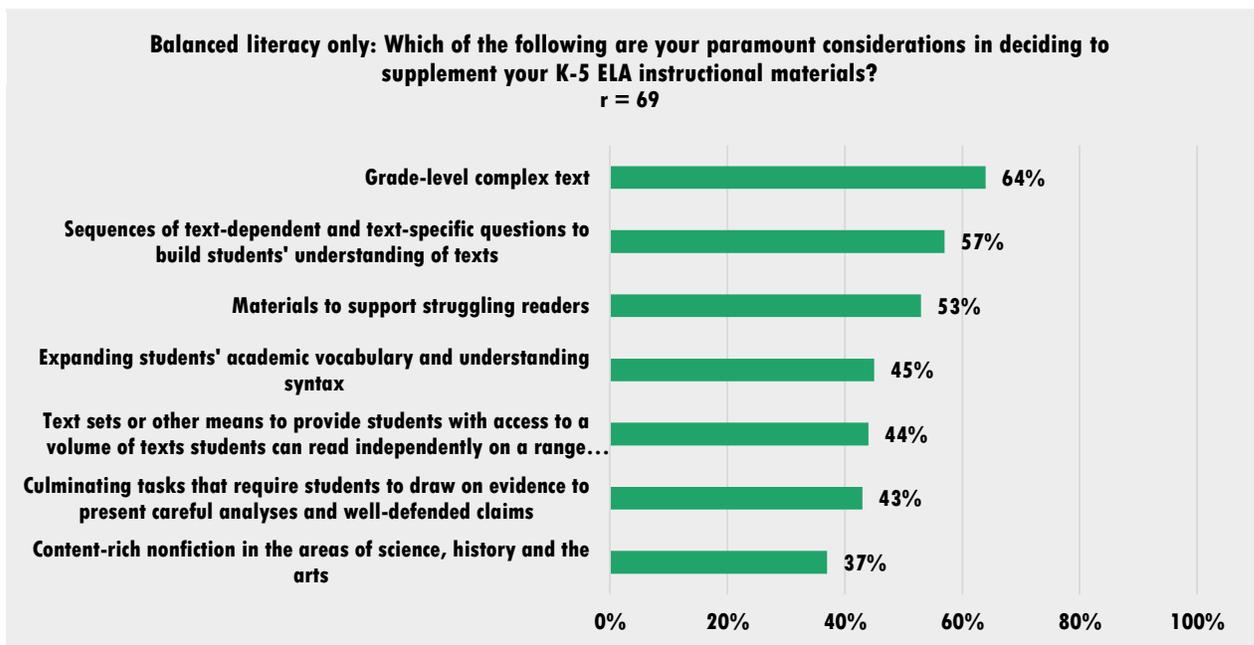


Figure 10

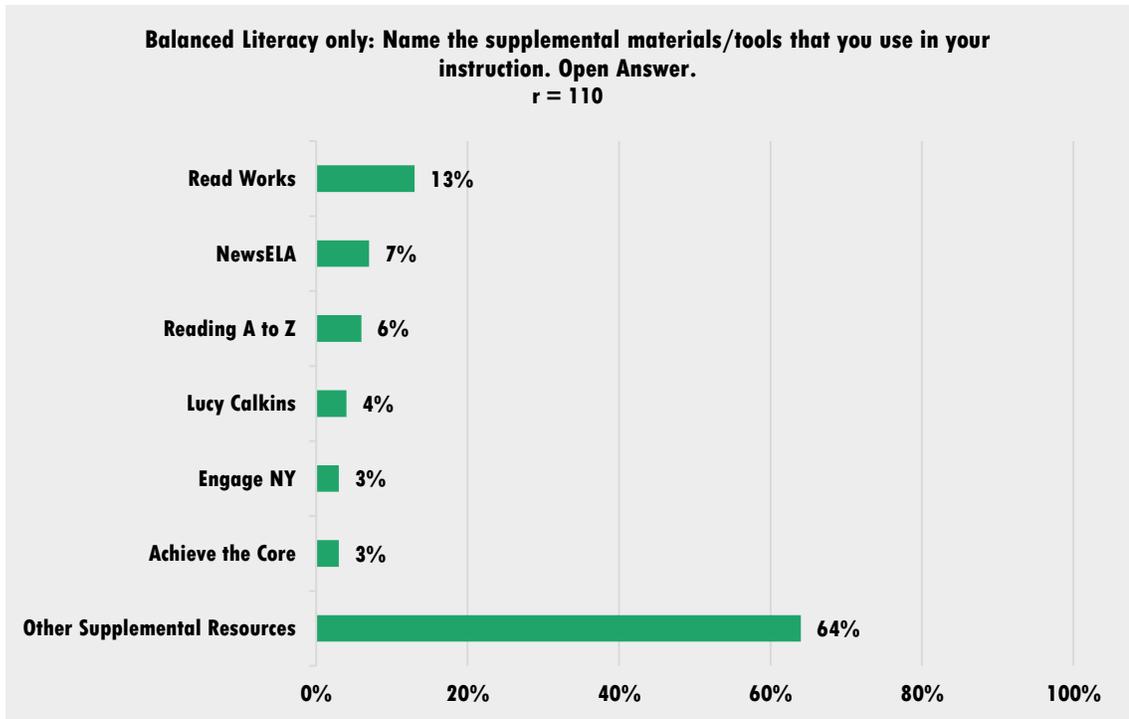


Figure 11

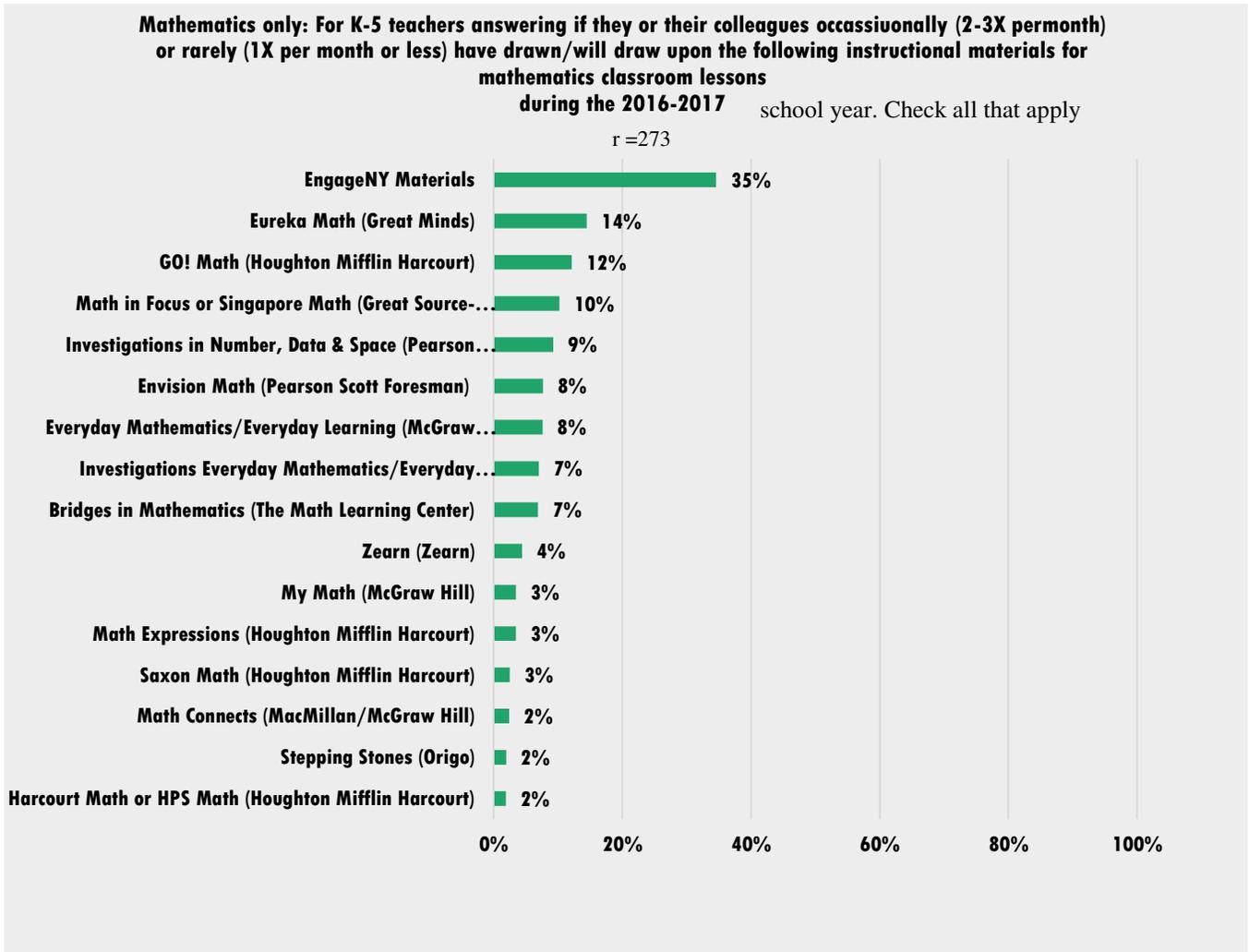


Figure 12

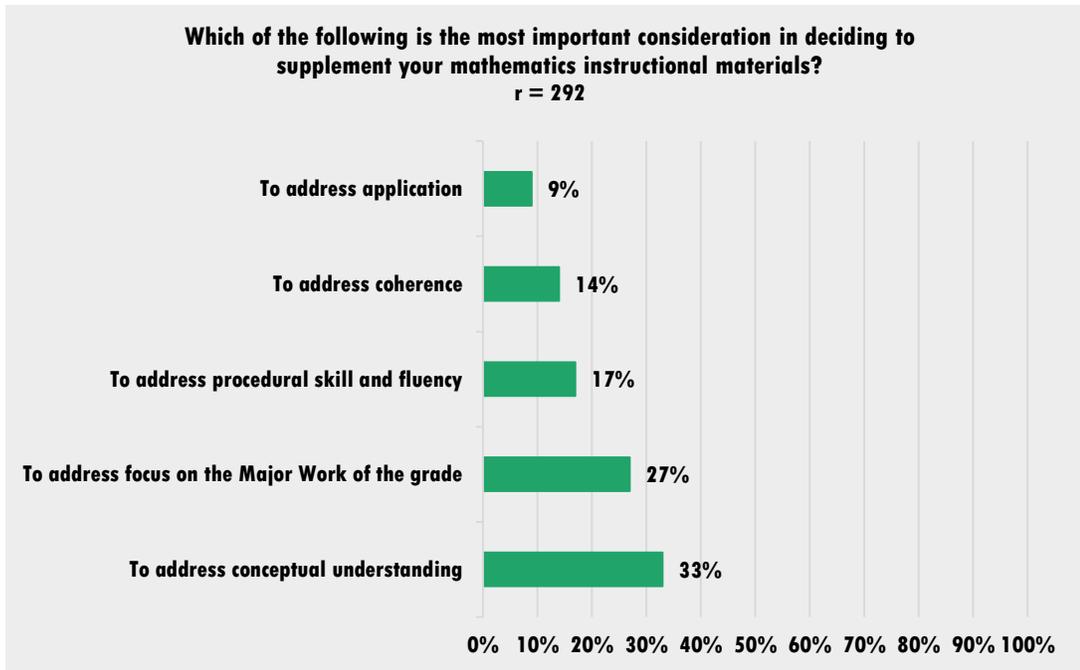
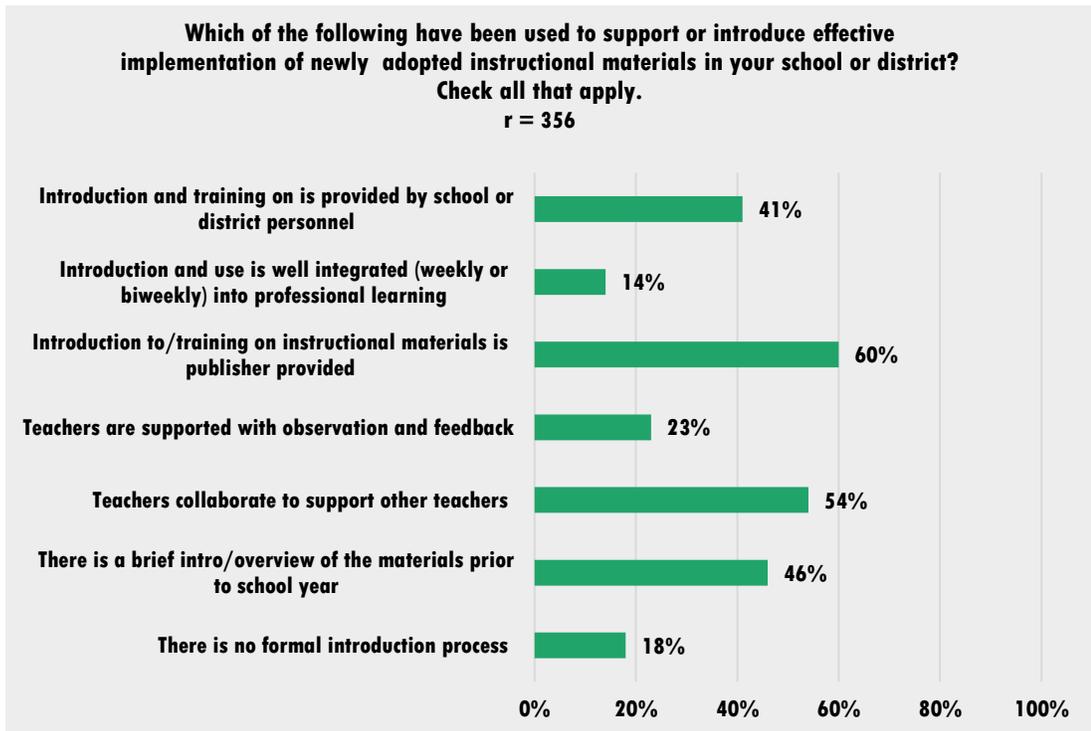


Figure 13



*Finding 4: Regardless of what is adopted by their school or districts, teachers retain a huge influence over the instructional materials used daily in their classrooms.*

Forty-nine percent of math-focused respondents (Figure 14) and 58% of respondents in ELA/literacy (Figure 15) are not required to use school- or district-adopted instructional materials, although there might be a recommendation to do so. The American Teacher Panel study conducted by the RAND Corporation also shows high numbers of teachers responding that their district does not require and only recommends use of adopted instructional materials (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). While they don't hold the purse strings, teachers hold considerable power when it comes to choosing to use standards-aligned classroom materials. With the right information and supports, they could become adept both at choosing standards-aligned materials and inspiring their schools and districts to make wise resource investments.

*Action Step(s):*

- Highlight existing standards-aligned, open educational resources by using tools that demonstrate aligned materials. Since teachers often choose instructional materials for themselves, introducing teacher-leaders to tools that help them select standards-aligned materials is key. Organizations interested in working with teachers on selecting aligned materials should work to introduce them to tools such as the Publishers' Criteria for [mathematics](#) and [ELA/literacy](#), which pinpoint what aligned materials should look like, and the [Washington State Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction](#) website, which has reviews of open educational resources. Tools mentioned elsewhere in this report ([EdReports](#), [IMET](#), and [Louisiana Department of Education](#)) as well as [Aligned](#) also offer valuable information to help schools and districts make informed decisions about materials. [Open Up Resources](#), [UnboundED](#), [Illustrative Mathematics](#), and [EngageNY](#) are all viable full-year OER resources that can be used to supplement or replace instructional materials.
- Highlight examples of specific, tangible classroom resources that can be used to supplement instructional materials such as the [Coherence Map](#), the [Academic Word Finder](#), [Text sets](#), and [lessons](#) in math and ELA/literacy for grades K–12, all of which can be found on [achievetheore.org](#). [Illustrative Mathematics](#) exemplar tasks for [grades K–12](#), including tasks for high school on algebra, fractions, and geometry are also valuable mathematics resources.

Figure 14

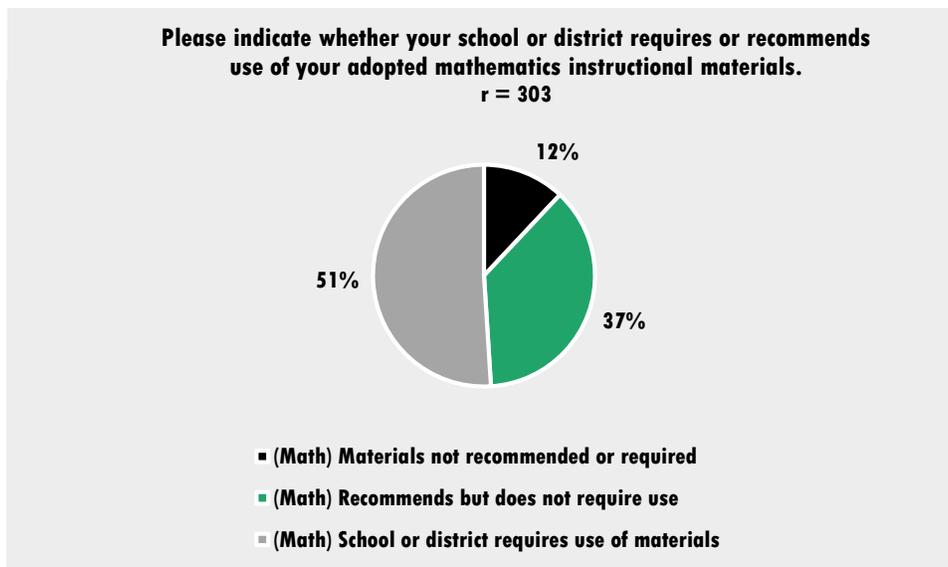
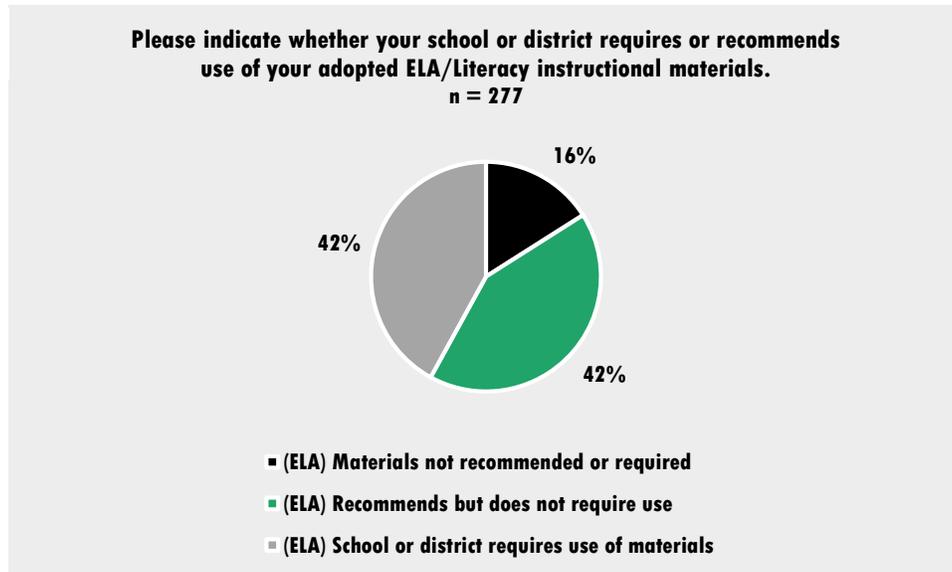


Figure 15



Conclusion:

The research tells us that curriculum materials have a profound effect on what happens in classrooms and how much students learn (Koedel & Polikoff, 2017). Helping teachers gain clarity about high-quality materials aligned to college and career-ready standards, promoting sources of reliable alignment information, and providing sufficient, curriculum-focused professional learning are key levers in ensuring that teachers, schools and districts are aware of the potential power of aligned instructional materials to drive student achievement.

Notes:

1. 2015 ELA/ELD Adoption (November 2015; Last Reviewed February 2017). <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/im/sbeadoptedelaeldprogs.asp>.
2. “Curriculum Counts,” StandardsWork, <https://standardswork.org/core-beliefs/curriculum-counts/>, (Accessed June 1, 2017).
3. Boser, U., Chingos, M., and Strauss, C. (2015) *The Hidden Value of Curriculum Reform: Do States and Districts Receive the Most Bang for Their Curriculum Buck?* Center for American Progress. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/06111518/CurriculumMatters-report.pdf>
4. Koedel, C., and Polikoff, M. (2017) *Big Bang for Just a Few Bucks: The Impact of Math Textbooks in California*, Evidence Speaks Reports 2, no. 5. [https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/es\\_20170105\\_polikoff\\_evidence\\_speaks.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/es_20170105_polikoff_evidence_speaks.pdf)
5. Opfer, V., Kaufman, J., and Thompson, L. (2016) *Implementation of K–12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy: Findings from the American Teacher Panel* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation). [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1529-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1529-1.html)

6. Polikoff, M. (2015) *How Well Aligned Are Textbooks to the Common Core Standards in Mathematics?* American Educational Research Journal 52, no. 6.  
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