



# **Overcoming challenges facing contemporary curriculum**

Lessons from Louisiana

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## Lessons from Louisiana: how quality curriculum can scale school improvement

*“There is a story, and it’s about curriculum – perhaps the last, best, and almost entirely un-pulled education-reform lever.” Robert Pondiscio, Louisiana Threads the Needle on Ed Reform.<sup>1</sup>*

The history of the state of Louisiana has not been known for educational success. One of the poorest states in the country, its schools have consistently been among the lowest performing.<sup>2</sup> While Louisiana’s reading and mathematics scores are still significantly lower than the US average<sup>3</sup>, improvements on several key measures began to catch the attention of educators and policymakers around the world around 2015. For example:

- Compared with their performance in 2013, fourth-grade students in Louisiana achieved the highest growth of all US states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2015, students in Louisiana gained more points on their composite American College Testing (ACT) college-readiness assessment<sup>5</sup> than students in any of the other 12 participating US states.<sup>6</sup>
- The number of Louisiana high school students taking Advanced Placement (college-level) courses more than doubled between 2012 and 2016.<sup>7</sup>
- Louisiana’s high school graduation rate and the number of students enrolled in college have reached all-time highs.<sup>8</sup>

These developments raise two questions: what changed in Louisiana, and what are the lessons for other school systems?

If you ask the Academic Content team at the Louisiana Department of Education (the Department), they will say that the 2009 introduction of the Common Core State Standards, a set of rigorous standards in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA), along with aligned assessments, were a catalyst for the reform. By 2010, Louisiana had begun to align its own standards, called the Louisiana Student Standards, with the Common Core, becoming one of 47 US states, territories and districts to voluntarily do so.<sup>9</sup>

Remaking the Louisiana Student Standards to align with the Common Core represented a significant shift for school education. Before this, there was no coherent curriculum to inform classroom instruction; instead, “teachers just had access to a bunch of disconnected activities under a framework”.<sup>10</sup> While many states stopped reforming their curriculum once they had simply adopted or adapted the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments, Louisiana kept going. The team at the Department understood the potential of curriculum, more than many other school improvement levers, to truly influence day-to-day teaching and learning in classrooms. As former Assistant Superintendent of Academic Content, Rebecca Kockler, explains: “once we realised the potential of curriculum to see improvements in classrooms at

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<sup>1</sup> Pondiscio, 2017

<sup>2</sup> In the 2017/2018 academic year, more than 700,000 students were enrolled in public schools in Louisiana. 67% of these students were considered economically disadvantaged. See Louisiana Department of Education, 2017b. The state has consistently scored below the national average in the National Assessment of Educational Progress since it was first administered at the state level in 1998. See National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.b, n.d.a.

<sup>3</sup> The Nation’s Report Card, n.d.

<sup>4</sup> Kaufman et al., 2016. The state’s most recent NAEP show that it has not maintained this improvement trajectory.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see ACT, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Kaufman et al., 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Kaufman et al., 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Kaufman et al., 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-d.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

scale, it became the core of our theory of change”.<sup>11</sup> Led by Kockler and state Superintendent John White, the Academic Content team devised a strategy to ensure that all teachers in Louisiana had access to high quality curriculum materials and were supported to use them effectively in their classrooms.

The quality curriculum strategy is changing teaching and learning in Louisiana, and teachers are the first to say so. As one explains, “It’s been a complete shift to an academic environment. Before, it was social, enjoyable – it wasn’t about learning. Now it’s a deep dive on learning. I realise now that I never got below surface level before”.<sup>12</sup> For many teachers, consistently implementing quality curriculum has meant fundamentally transforming their professional practice, which is clearly challenging. Yet teachers are up for the challenge because they can see the payoff: “You need to take the bad with the good. You might have to sacrifice a few of your freedoms, but you’ll see students performing at a level that will make you so happy. It will give you more information about student learning than you had when everyone was doing their own thing – you will see what does and doesn’t work, and you will be a better teacher for it”.<sup>13</sup>

Louisiana is still on its improvement journey. Make no mistake, it is a long-term, comprehensive change strategy that has required political mettle and a lot of what Kockler describes as “stick-with-it-ness”. It’s not just about making sure quality curriculum is available to all teachers, though that is an important first step. It’s about getting teachers on board to create quality curriculum when no curriculum publisher can meet the bar.<sup>14</sup> It’s about aligning professional development and student assessment with curriculum so that teachers are supported and held accountable for implementing it, and about managing stakeholders and controlling communications in and outside schools so that teachers can get on with what matters.

This case study describes the curriculum reforms and change strategy in Louisiana and distills three key lessons for other systems to consider, outlined in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Lessons from Louisiana**

1: Make sure quality curriculum is available and make the best choice the easiest	2: Narrow the gap between the intended and the implemented curriculum	3: Maintain high expectations and meet the learning needs of all students
Identify quality curriculum through a review process	Not all standards are created equal, so make it clear what matters most	Embed key skills and capabilities into the curriculum
Engage teachers to create (and continually revise) quality curriculum	Provide more detailed curriculum materials where it matters	Scaffold student understanding while maintaining high expectations and exposure to grade level content
Focus on coherence to make the best choice the easiest	Connect curriculum with teacher professional development	
	Hold teachers and schools accountable for curriculum implementation	

<sup>11</sup> Interview with former Assistant Superintendent Rebecca Kockler.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>14</sup> In the context of the United States, this is typically no longer necessary given the wide and free availability of EdReports top rated curriculum. However, it is likely to be a necessary consideration for Australian systems reviewing the rigour of available of curriculum for the first time.

## Lesson one: make sure quality curriculum is available and make the best choice the easiest

As school and system leaders in Australia and America know, a large range of different curricula are implemented in classrooms, even within the same school. As Steiner noted in his recent research review of effective curriculum choices, “because the preponderance of instructional materials is self-selected by individual teachers, most students are taught through idiosyncratic curricula that are not defined by school districts or states”.<sup>15</sup> The team at the Department knew that this was the case in classrooms across the state, and that if students were going to meet the learning targets articulated in the Louisiana Student Standards, things had to change. The Department first had to determine which of the curriculum materials available to teachers represented quality, and how to get them into classrooms.

### Identify quality curriculum through a review process

To embed curriculum at the core of its reform strategy, the Department first had to ensure that quality curriculum materials were available and that teachers were using them. Clearing these first hurdles is essential, and harder than it may sound. Surely a system leader in the US is easily able to determine whether there are high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum materials on the market, especially as publishers now advertise their curriculum materials as “Common Core aligned”, and have placed helpful labels on their materials so consumers know what they are getting? Not so. Research has found that some curriculum materials claiming to be aligned with the Common Core State Standards are in fact nothing but.<sup>16</sup> System leaders cannot take these claims at face value – further investigation is required.

Recognising this, the Department implemented a rigorous process for the review of curriculum materials in 2012.<sup>17</sup> Since 2015, The impact of this review process has been two-fold: first, it has given the state confidence that all schools are receiving accurate information about which of the available curriculum materials are aligned with the Student Standards; second, it has encouraged curriculum publishers to participate in the review process and work to ensure their claims of alignment and quality meet the high bar set by the state.

There are three ways districts can meet the requirement to adopt evaluated curriculum materials:

1. Select materials that have been evaluated through the state instructional material review process.
2. Conduct a local review of instructional materials to guide curriculum selection.
3. Adopt a combination of state-reviewed and locally-reviewed materials.<sup>18</sup>

The state review process is led by a committee of educators who use specially designed rubrics to test the alignment of curriculum materials with the Louisiana Student Standards (for more information on the rubrics, see Box 1). Publishers submit their materials to the Department, which then provides them to the review committee. The initial review is conducted by Teacher Leader Advisors (see Box 2), who receive initial training on how to use the review tool. They must determine whether the curriculum materials should receive a “Tier 1”, “Tier 2” or “Tier 3” designation, in which:

- Tier 1 materials *exemplify quality* and meet all criteria on the relevant review rubric.
- Tier 2 materials *approach quality* and meet all non-negotiable criteria on the review rubric.
- Tier 3 materials *do not represent quality* and do not meet all non-negotiable criteria on the rubric.

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<sup>15</sup> Steiner, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Polikoff, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> US states and districts can now choose to refer to curriculum reviews conducted by independent external organisations including edreports.org instead of conducting their own reviews. See: <https://www.edreports.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-g.

Once the Teacher Leader Advisors agree, they advise the Department content team, which is comprised of experienced educators with specialist content knowledge in the relevant curriculum area. The content team reviews the completed rubric, makes a final decision, and advises the publisher of the outcome. The publisher is given some time to respond. The Department posts the review results, along with the publisher response and feedback from the broader community, on their website.

The local review process is similarly structured. If districts opt to engage in a local review process, they establish a committee comprising educators, parents and other stakeholders. The committee must evaluate the extent to which the chosen curriculum materials align with the Student Standards, among other criteria, and they must encourage family and community involvement in the process.<sup>19</sup>

### Box 1: Curriculum review rubrics

The curriculum review rubrics used by the team at the Department are based on the Common Core State Standards-aligned Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool, also used by Edreports.<sup>20</sup> The rubrics specify several criteria, some of which are non-negotiable. Rubrics for different subjects each contain different types of key criteria. For example, the 2017-2018 ELA rubric contains criteria relating to text selection, design, and assessment items; the 2017-2018 mathematics rubric contains criteria relating to focus, coherence, rigour and alignment with content and practice standards.

Reviewers consider each of the criteria and indicators of superior quality in turn, making a judgement as to whether the curriculum being reviewed meets the specified standard and providing a justification. An excerpt from a completed ELA rubric is included below.

CRITERIA	INDICATORS OF SUPERIOR QUALITY	MEETS METRICS (YES/NO)	JUSTIFICATION/COMMENTS WITH EXAMPLES
<b>Section I. Text Selection</b>			
<b>Tier 1 and 2 Non-Negotiable</b> <b>1. QUALITY OF TEXTS:</b> Texts are of sufficient scope and quality to provide text-centered and integrated learning that is sequenced and scaffolded to (1) advance students toward independent reading of grade-level texts and (2) build content knowledge (e.g., ELA, social studies, science, and the arts). The quality of texts is high—they support multiple readings for various purposes and exhibit exceptional craft and thought and/or provide useful information. Materials present a progression of complex texts as stated by Reading Standard 10.	<b>REQUIRED</b> <b>1a)</b> In grades 2-12, materials provide texts that are appropriately complex for the identified grade level according to the requirements outlined in the standards. Measures for determining complexity include quantitative and qualitative analysis. <sup>5</sup> Poetry and drama are analyzed only using qualitative measures.  In grades K-2, extensive read-aloud texts allow sufficient opportunity for engagement with text more complex than students could read themselves.	<b>Yes</b>	Using quantitative and qualitative analysis, texts vary in complexity. Texts in this curriculum include a variety of structures, including, but not limited to, narrative, poetry, and informational texts. In addition, language increases complexity as in <i>Out of the Dust</i> . For example, in Module 1, the novel <i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis is appropriate for this grade level in content and difficulty; The author's use of dialect increases difficulty of this text. Hesse's novel, <i>Out of the Dust</i> , is written in verse, increasing difficulty of text, yet the content and subject matter remain grade appropriate. Supplemental texts include "The Drought" (PBS) and "Hoovervilles" (history.com). Both are well above grade level in terms of syntax and vocabulary, but are appropriate using reader and task considerations for this module. These texts link historical content to the fictional pieces, though, providing background information about a time period grade 06 students would otherwise not have.
	<b>REQUIRED</b> <b>1b)</b> At least 90% of texts are authentic <sup>6</sup> and offer rich	<b>Yes</b>	Texts are authentic and offer opportunities to meet the LSS. Texts include published works, such as <i>Bud</i> .

Source: Louisiana Department of Education 2017

<sup>19</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-g. Other criteria include: "Do the materials accurately reflect the contributions and achievements of people of differing races?"; "Do the materials promote an understanding of the history and values of the people of the United States and Louisiana?"

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see: <https://achievethecore.org/page/1946/instructional-materials-evaluation-tool;> <http://www.edreports.org>.

## Engage teachers to create (and continually revise) high-quality curriculum

A risk of setting a high bar for the quality of curriculum materials is that existing materials might fail to make the grade, especially at first. This is what happened in Louisiana. The initial round of instructional reviews found that only two mathematics curricula received a Tier 1 ranking, with most curricula given a Tier 3.<sup>21</sup> While the state of the mathematics curriculum was poor, ELA was even worse: not a single comprehensive ELA program received a Tier 1 ranking.<sup>22</sup> Through its instructional material review process, the Department had established that none of the available ELA curriculum materials were going to support teachers across all grade levels to adequately convey the state standards to students.<sup>23</sup> This is no longer the case in the United States as there are multiple quality ELA curricula available to states and districts – it is possible, however, that many Australian systems, however, may encounter a similar hurdle as they begin to review the quality of existing curriculum materials.

Having exposed the deficiency of the available ELA curriculum materials, the Academic Content team at the Department decided to fill the void. Tapping into the considerable expertise of teachers across the state, particularly Teacher Leader Advisors (see Box 2 below), they devised a plan to create a comprehensive, high-quality ELA curriculum that was strongly aligned with the Student Standards. The Academic Content team is clear that they would not recommend this labour-intensive approach to any other system with access to quality curriculum materials. However, given the lack of quality ELA materials at the time, the Department did not have a viable alternative.

### Box 2: Teacher leadership in Louisiana

The Louisiana Teacher Leaders are a group of outstanding educators from across the state who work to support the state curriculum strategy and broader school improvement. The Department created the group because it believes:

- Those closest to students are best positioned to make instructional decisions.
- The state has a role in providing resources and training to teachers.
- Teacher Leaders are a powerful voice in training fellow teachers.

A core group of around 100 Teacher Leader Advisors, identified through a highly selective recruitment process that assesses pedagogical content knowledge, work closely with the Department to create curriculum materials and resources. They also provide support for a larger group of around 6000 Teacher Leaders (about two to four per school).

Together, these Teacher Leaders support the quality of classroom instruction by:

- Disseminating high-quality curriculum materials and tools.
- Participating in high-quality professional development provided by the Department and sharing their learning with their colleagues.
- Advocating for high-quality curriculum and professional development in their schools and districts.

*Source: Adapted from Chiefs for Change, 2017*

<sup>21</sup> Wiener & Pimentel, 2017. The two math programs were Eureka Math K-11 and Math Learning Centre K-5.

<sup>22</sup> Core Knowledge K-3 was the only ELA curriculum to receive a Tier 1 ranking.

<sup>23</sup> Note that this is no longer the case in 2018 and there are multiple quality ELA curricula available to US states and districts. See, for example, <https://www.edreports.org/about/materials-under-review/ela.html>



The Department was recruiting Teacher Leader Advisors at around the same time they were beginning to create the new ELA curriculum. Asked why she signed up, one teacher explains:

*As soon as the Common Core State Standards came out, I started writing my own units straight away. I always recognised the importance of complex texts in ELA, and I liked how the standards made this explicit. And, like other teachers who had taken the time to dig into the Standards, I knew that the curriculum materials we were using in schools were not aligned. So when the state decided to create its own standards-aligned curriculum, I knew I wanted to be involved. I had already been working on it, and I knew I'd rather be helping to make these kinds of decisions than being told what to do.<sup>24</sup>*

At the outset of the ELA curriculum development process, the Department contacted the Teacher Leader Advisors: did anyone have any standards-aligned units that had succeeded in the classroom? The ELA specialists in the Academic Content team reviewed the teacher submissions to help put together a strong TLA team. Then the team got to work writing units from scratch. These units were reviewed and revised by multiple groups of teachers and by the content specialists at the Department, and national experts. Eventually printed, they became the ELA Guidebooks 1.0, published in 2014. These materials were distributed to teachers who attended state professional development summits and were introduced into schools through the network of Teacher Leaders.

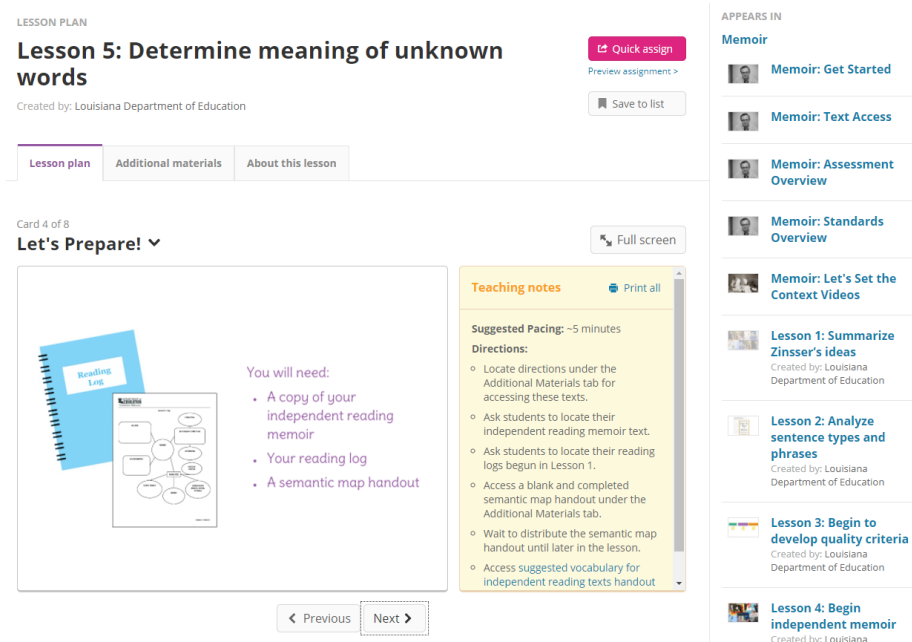
The ELA Guidebooks 1.0 contained unit plans and supporting materials, including some lesson plans. The units were not intended to be totally comprehensive or provide lesson-specific guidance. Instead, the team charged with developing Guidebooks 1.0 wanted to provide teachers with enough direction and information to plan their own highly effective lessons. However, the Department was surprised by the feedback they received: teachers using the materials wanted more specific guidance, including detailed plans for every lesson in each unit. Teachers in Louisiana, like many teachers in different parts of the world, were accustomed to using detailed curriculum materials, such as textbooks, to plan their classes. When the Department instituted the instructional review process that exposed the shortcomings of these materials, they created a void that needed to be filled: teachers were positive about the ELA Guidebooks 1.0, but wanted the next iteration to be even more detailed.

The Department had formal and informal mechanisms to quickly collect feedback about teachers' experiences using Guidebooks 1.0, and version 2.0 was published two years later, in 2016. Guidebooks 2.0 is a more detailed ELA curriculum that provides lesson-by-lesson advice for teachers, including the materials they need to teach lessons and guidance on the teacher-students interactions that will most effectively support student learning (see Figure 2 below for an example of what this looks like). The curriculum was created by the Department in partnership with LearnZillion, a digital curriculum-as-service offering that supported the Department with design thinking and provided the digital platform for Guidebooks 2.0.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with an ELA Teacher Leader Advisor.

<sup>25</sup> For more information about LearnZillion, see: <https://learnzillion.com/p/company>.

**Figure 2: Excerpt from ELA Guidebooks 2.0**


**LESSON PLAN**

### Lesson 5: Determine meaning of unknown words

Created by: Louisiana Department of Education

[Quick assign](#)  
Preview assignment >

[Save to list](#)

[Lesson plan](#) [Additional materials](#) [About this lesson](#)

Card 4 of 8

**Let's Prepare!**

**Teaching notes** [Print all](#)

**Suggested Pacing:** ~5 minutes

**Directions:**

- Locate directions under the Additional Materials tab for accessing these texts.
- Ask students to locate their independent reading memoir text.
- Ask students to locate their reading logs begun in Lesson 1.
- Access a blank and completed semantic map handout under the Additional Materials tab.
- Wait to distribute the semantic map handout until later in the lesson.
- Access suggested vocabulary for independent reading texts handout

**You will need:**

- A copy of your independent reading memoir
- Your reading log
- A semantic map handout

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

**APPEARS IN**

**Memoir**

- [Memoir: Get Started](#)
- [Memoir: Text Access](#)
- [Memoir: Assessment Overview](#)
- [Memoir: Standards Overview](#)
- [Memoir: Let's Set the Context Videos](#)
- [Lesson 1: Summarize Zinsser's ideas](#)  
Created by: Louisiana Department of Education
- [Lesson 2: Analyze sentence types and phrases](#)  
Created by: Louisiana Department of Education
- [Lesson 3: Begin to develop quality criteria](#)  
Created by: Louisiana Department of Education
- [Lesson 4: Begin independent memoir](#)  
Created by: Louisiana

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2018

The ELA Guidebooks have been a vital plank of the Department quality curriculum strategy. Today, over 80 per cent of districts in Louisiana use a top-quality curriculum, up from around 20 per cent just five years ago. One reason for this success has been the fact that the Guidebooks were created by teachers, for teachers, and that the Department was quick to respond to feedback from educators. As one teacher explains: “The best thing about the Guidebooks is that they are created by practicing teachers, and you can tell when you’re reading them. It’s really smart and it’s what makes me want to use them.”<sup>26</sup>

The Department’s ongoing openness to teacher feedback on its curriculum materials underpins its annual Guidebook review process. The caption included on the front cover of every curriculum resource published by the Department states:

*This document is considered a ‘living’ document as we believe that teachers and other educators will find ways to improve the document as they use it. Please send feedback to (e-mail address) so that we may use your input when updating this guide.*

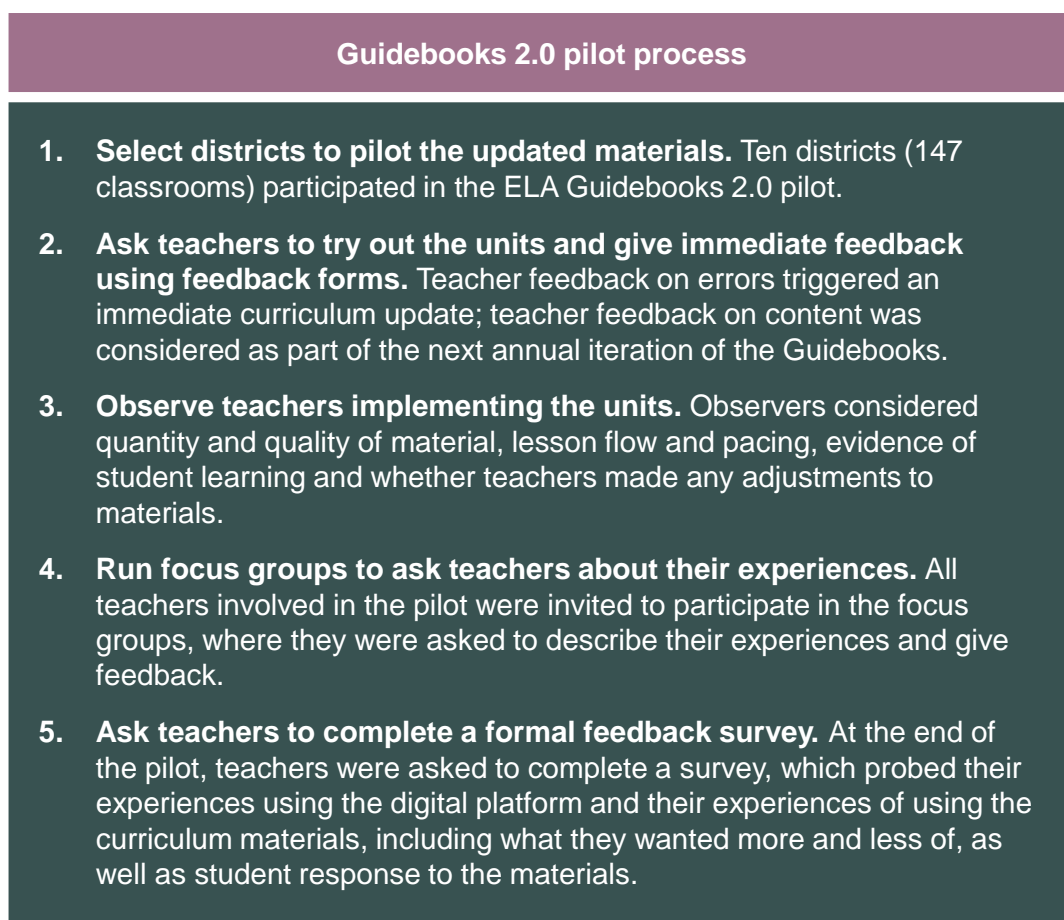
The annual Guidebook review process accommodates both minor and major updates. The first refer to small changes to curricula that do not significantly affect the substance of the material. Minor updates might include fixing typos and clarifying elements of the curriculum to better support teacher understanding. Minor updates are informed by teacher feedback in real time, in response to e-mails or phone calls to the Department, or conversations between teachers and Teacher Leaders that are relayed to the Department.

Major updates refer to more significant changes, such as the inclusion of greater detail in Guidebooks 2.0 in response to the teacher feedback on Guidebooks 1.0. These updates are piloted using the approach described in Figure 3, before being expanded across the system. Major updates are also reviewed by national curriculum and subject experts.<sup>27</sup> Teachers’ associations are involved in the update process, but are not consulted on the detail of specific changes.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with ELA Teacher Leader Advisor.

<sup>27</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e.

Figure 3: The Louisiana Department of Education major curriculum update process



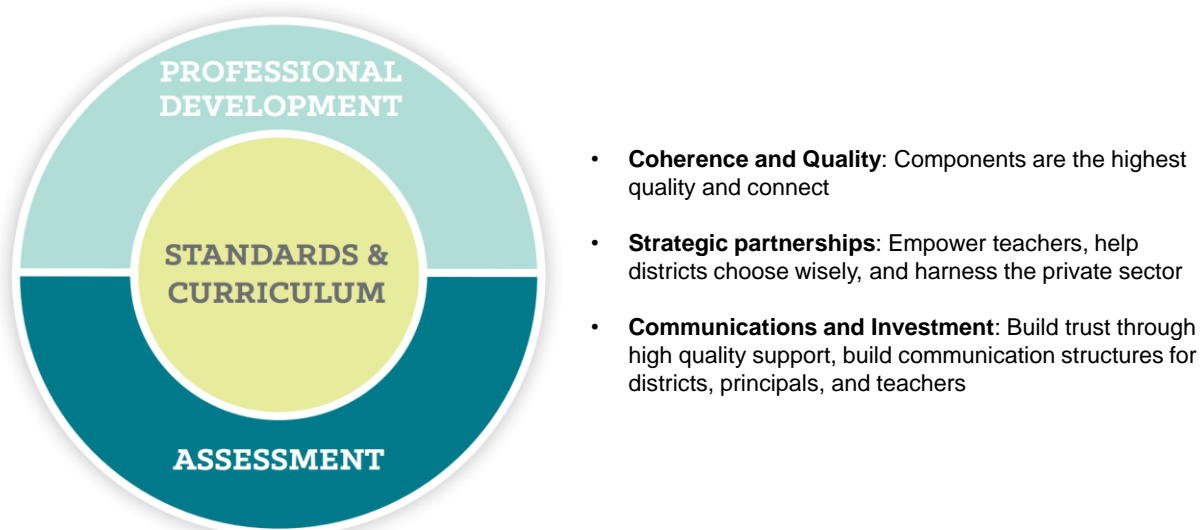
Source: Adapted from Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e. Artefacts including forms and questions included in Appendix 1.

### Focus on coherence to make the best choice the easiest

The increased quality of the curriculum materials available to Louisiana teachers over the last few years has been a big reason for their increased take-up, but not the only one. The Department also maintains a strong focus on the coherence of its overarching Academic Theory of Change. This means aligning key policies such as assessment and professional development policies, so that teachers and school and district leaders are supported to make good decisions about curriculum and held accountable for them (see Figure 4). The Department has focussed on “staying very close to the field” and asking educators about the barriers to making good curricular decisions – then working to overcome these barriers.<sup>28</sup> As former Assistant Superintendent of Academic Content, Rebecca Kockler, explains: “We make the best choice the easy choice”.<sup>29</sup> The Department’s approach to student assessment and teacher professional development are key here, and are discussed in detail later in this case study.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with former Assistant Superintendent Rebecca Kockler.

**Figure 4: The Louisiana Department of Education Academic Theory of Change**

Source: Internal Department presentation

Another component of the Department's Academic Theory of Change is its communications and stakeholder management strategy. As system leaders everywhere know, policy coherence is hard to achieve, and clear and consistent communication is key. The Department has worked to build credibility with districts and schools by maintaining a precise focus on the clarity and consistency of their communications. Nothing – not a single e-mail – is sent to districts or schools unless the entire departmental executive team vets it. An upshot of this painstaking approach to communications management has been increased internal coherence: the executive team has been forced to come together and discuss crossover and integration between their various scopes of work. An example of how this communications approach works in practice is detailed in Box 3.

### Box 3: The Louisiana Department of Education monthly system planning call

Every month, the team at the Department runs a system planning call for representatives from every one of Louisiana's 69 school districts. The call is a cross-portfolio vehicle to disseminate key information from the Department to schools and districts. The materials for the call are made available to districts in advance on the Department website<sup>30</sup> and include a list of suggested participants for each call, ranging from Teacher Leaders, to data and accountability coordinators, and technical supervisors.

The calls cover all aspects of the school system, including early childhood, school teaching and learning, workforce planning, and the roll-out of new curriculum materials and assessments. Different members of the Department executive team will present on their respective areas, when there is something relevant to communicate. One of the key pieces of information districts receive during these calls are dates and deadlines for things like funding submissions and the roll-out of key materials. By clearly communicating key information and deadlines during the monthly district planning calls, and by never missing a deadline, the Department has built credibility and a functional working relationship with each of the districts in the state.

The Department talks regularly and directly with teachers and other educators across the state. Communication with educators is embedded in its approach, and was essential during the early stages of reform, when the Department focused on teachers more than on principals and other stakeholders. As Superintendent John White explains: "You can't have good curricular politics if you don't have teachers on board". Some teachers say that because leadership was not on board at the start, they experienced some

<sup>30</sup> Past presentations available from: <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/classroom-support/school-system-support-toolbox/school-system-planning>.

difficulty with their school and district-level authorising environment when they initially began using and advocating for higher-quality curriculum materials. For many, that didn't significantly impact their ability to implement high quality curriculum because "at the end of the day, we always closed the door to our classrooms".<sup>31</sup>

The Department listened to teachers, engaged them in the work, and worked with them to assume responsibility for the substance of students' academic development. As a result, teachers across Louisiana became advocates for the curricular reforms – and closed the door on detractors elsewhere in the system. Support for the curriculum strategy has come from the classroom up, instead of being imposed from above. The most stunning example of this was in 2015, when the Governor of Louisiana advocated against Common Core aligned standards and associated testing.<sup>32</sup> Teachers across Louisiana who were familiar with the standards, including some who had helped to create the ELA curriculum, wrote opinion pieces, lobbied colleagues, and invited state legislators to see the Louisiana Student Standards at work in their classrooms. The Department curriculum reform strategy had enabled them to understand the Student Standards and how to teach them. These teachers had seen the positive changes in teaching and learning first hand and were willing to defend the new status quo.

Louisiana has had what some systems might consider a smoother pathway to education reform because, unlike many systems, it does not have a strong teachers' union with which it must negotiate. However, Louisiana is a local control state with little direct authority over school systems, and the Department has a diverse and extensive network of district leaders it must keep onside to ensure the success of its reforms. Effective communication has been essential here, too. The Department has effectively prosecuted four arguments to convince stakeholders that its Academic Theory of Change is the best way forward:

- The **research** argument: Quality curriculum has a larger impact on student achievement than many common school improvement interventions, including teacher quality interventions – at a lower cost.<sup>33</sup>
- The **equity** argument: Whole-class exposure to rigorous, content-rich curriculum increases both educational quality and equity.<sup>34</sup>
- The **expertise** argument: The availability of high-quality curriculum supports teachers' practice and helps them to develop subject expertise (content and pedagogical content knowledge).<sup>35</sup>
- The **autonomy** argument: Externally developed curriculum materials support teacher autonomy by freeing them up to focus on effective pedagogy, instead of spending their time developing teaching materials from scratch.

Sophisticated communications and stakeholder management strategies have been critical to the Department's rigorous approach to ensuring quality curriculum. This feat has attracted the attention of policymakers and researchers globally. What makes the work even more impressive is the fact that it has not been driven by a large bureaucracy – the Academic Content team only employs about 50 people, including 10 who oversee the specifics of the standards and curriculum. This is a good news story for overstretched state and regional departments in Australia and everywhere. As Superintendent John White explains: "If ten people can drive this change, then it's replicable".

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with a Louisiana educator.

<sup>32</sup> Layton, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Kane, Owens, Marinell, Thal, & Staiger, 2016; Chiefs for Change, 2017; Whitehurst, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Hirsch, Jr., 2016.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Jensen, Roberts-Hull, Magee, & Ginnivan, 2016.

## Lesson two: narrow the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum

Educators and policymakers know that the chasm between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum can be vast. The Travers and Westbury curriculum framework comprises three levels: the *intended* curriculum is the documented curriculum, including “course outlines, official syllabi, and textbooks,” in addition to the rationale and goals for learning.<sup>36</sup> The *implemented* curriculum is what is enacted by teachers in classrooms, and the *attained* curriculum is what students learn.<sup>37</sup> The highest quality intended curriculum in the world is useless unless it is taught and learned. So the next question for the Department became: what strategies should we employ to narrow the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum?

### Not all standards are created equal, so make it clear what matters most

The Common Core State Standards, and the state-level standards based on them, help to narrow the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum by expressing a narrower view of expectations for student learning than has been the case in the past. The Common Core maps a clear progression of student learning from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and the shared responsibility for student learning across grade levels and subjects is clearly stated.<sup>38</sup>

Educators in Louisiana appreciate this clarity. As one explains: “It helps me understand, for example, that my job as a Grade 4 (mathematics) teacher is to help students develop a conceptual understanding of division, but not fluency in division – I know now that’s something they will learn in Grade 6.”<sup>39</sup> This reassures teachers that they are not responsible for teaching whole topics such as fractions or reading from beginning to end – but that their teaching, and that of their colleagues, are essential components of a cohesive student learning progression from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The explicitly stated shifts in practice required by the Common Core (see Figure 5) has further supported and reinforced this role clarity.

**Figure 5: The shifts required by the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and ELA**

Mathematics Shifts	ELA Shifts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.Focus:</b> Focus strongly where the Standards focus</li> <li><b>2.Coherence:</b> <i>Think</i> across grades and <i>link</i> to major topics within grades</li> <li><b>3.Rigor:</b> In major topics, pursue <i>conceptual understanding</i>, procedural skill and <i>fluency</i>, and <i>application</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Regular practice with <b>complex text</b> and its <b>academic language</b></li> <li>2.Reading, writing and speaking grounded in <b>evidence from text</b>, both literary and informational</li> <li>3. <b>Building knowledge</b> through <b>content-rich nonfiction</b></li> </ol>

Source: Achieve the Core, 2013

The “focus” shift in mathematics reflects an attempt by the architects of the Common Core State Standards to move away from a “mile wide, inch deep” curriculum to a significantly narrower scope of content, one

<sup>36</sup> Travers & Westbury, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Travers & Westbury, 1989.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example: Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018a; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018b.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with a Louisiana educator.



that gives teachers and students more space to build strong conceptual foundations.<sup>40</sup> Depth of focus on different standards is expressed by three types of standard clusters: *major*, *supporting* and *additional*. There is vertical alignment between the major clusters of each grade, and teachers are expected to pay special attention to rigour (fluency, and conceptual and procedural understanding) in their teaching of the major clusters. Additional and supporting clusters will connect to the major clusters but are deemphasised because they do not represent essential building blocks of mathematical understanding.

The Department provides detailed materials to enable math teachers to understand the “focus” shift, to narrow the curriculum and, ultimately, to narrow the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum. For example, the Department website provides mathematics curriculum materials on “focus” for each grade level that clearly articulate the major, supporting and additional clusters (see Figure 6). Curriculum materials submitted for review by publishers will not achieve a Tier 1 ranking unless they strongly emphasise the major clusters.<sup>41</sup> The Department website also provides curriculum materials on “rigor” that delineate which aspects of rigour map to specific standards.<sup>42</sup>

Figure 6: Excerpt of the Louisiana Department of Education “focus” document for Grade 6 mathematics

MAJOR, SUPPORTING, AND ADDITIONAL CLUSTERS FOR GRADE 6	
Emphases are given at the cluster level. Refer to the Louisiana Student Standards for Mathematics for the specific standards that fall within each cluster. Students should spend the large majority <sup>3</sup> of their time on the major work of the grade. <sup>2</sup>	
	<div>■ Major Clusters</div> <div>▢ Supporting Clusters</div> <div>○ Additional Clusters</div>
6.RP.A	■ Understand ratio concepts and use ratio reasoning to solve problems.
6.NS.A	■ Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication and division to divide fractions by fractions.
6.NS.B	○ Compute fluently with multi-digit numbers and find common factors and multiples.
6.NS.C	■ Apply and extend previous understandings of numbers to the system of rational numbers.
6.EE.A	■ Apply and extend previous understandings of arithmetic to algebraic expressions.
6.EE.B	■ Reason about and solve one-variable equations and inequalities.
6.EE.C	■ Represent and analyze quantitative relationships between dependent and independent variables.
6.G.A	▢ Solve real-world and mathematical problems involving area, surface area, and volume.
6.SP.A	○ Develop understanding of statistical variability.
6.SP.B	○ Summarize and describe distributions.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-f

Similarly, the ELA shifts have also supported teachers to narrow the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum by narrowing teachers’ focus on which standards matter most in that subject area. For example, the Academic Content team at the Department has used the shifts in the ELA curriculum to shape a “commander’s intent” for the teaching of ELA in Louisiana: “Students should be able to read, understand and express their understanding of complex, grade level texts”.<sup>43</sup> The “commander’s intent” is an overarching vision for ELA instruction in Louisiana, a “flag at the top of the hill” that will help keep

<sup>40</sup> Achieve the Core, n.d.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with the Louisiana Department of Education Academic Content team.

<sup>42</sup> See: <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/k-12-math-year-long-planning>.

<sup>43</sup> Interviews with relevant members of the Academic Content team.

teachers focused on the most important aspects of the Standards. Similar work is underway to more narrowly define the focus of the Louisiana social studies and science curricula.

Readers will notice that most of the analysis in this case study focuses on the mathematics and ELA curriculum in Louisiana and, to a lesser extent, social studies and science. This reflects the focus of the Common Core and Department on these subjects. The Department has made a strategic decision to focus its efforts on ensuring high-quality curriculum in these four subject areas, despite defining academic standards in seven subjects: ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, physical education, and health.<sup>44</sup> Like most governments, the Department has a vision for its students' futures (see Box 4) that guides its resource allocation and decision making. The decision to focus on quality curriculum in four areas has also shifted teacher and school focus to these areas, streamlining the curriculum and, ultimately, narrowing the gap between what is intended, implemented and attained in Louisiana classrooms in these subject areas.

#### Box 4: A vision for all students in Louisiana

I hope that every day, students in Louisiana:

- Read books that matter.
- Practice real and complex problems.
- Explore their curiosity about and build an understanding of the world that came before them, the world outside of them, and the world they live in.
- Form new and complex opinions about themselves and the world.
- Have the confidence and skill to share those opinions and thoughts with others.

Source: Internal Louisiana Department of Education presentation

#### Provide more detailed curriculum materials where it matters

*To narrow the gap between curriculum and teaching, you actually need curriculum – not just Standards.<sup>45</sup>*

Teachers everywhere complain about the “crowded curriculum”. The previous section demonstrates how the Department supports teachers to streamline the curriculum by highlighting which Student Standards they should focus their efforts on. Another – almost paradoxical – strategy the Department uses to streamline the curriculum and narrow the gap between what is intended and what is implemented is to provide *more* detail in key areas. For example, the ELA Guidebooks 2.0 provide teachers with step-by-step lesson plans, instead of the broader unit guides that characterised Guidebooks 1.0. These materials provide minute-by-minute guidance for teachers and have been designed to be rigorously aligned with the Standards, so it follows that they should effectively close the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum. They are: recent research by the RAND Corporation has found that teachers in Louisiana are more likely than teachers in other US states to understand the pedagogical shifts required by the Common Core State Standards, are more likely to adapt their pedagogical practice to accommodate these shifts, and are more likely to use aligned curriculum materials in the classroom.<sup>46</sup>

Since the introduction of the instructional material review process, many examples of high-quality, highly detailed curriculum materials can be found in classrooms across Louisiana (see Box 5 for an example of

<sup>44</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-d.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with a Louisiana educator.

<sup>46</sup> See Kaufman et al., 2016; Wiener & Pimentel, 2017.



one of these materials in practice). Most teachers Learning First interviewed for this case study were positive about the impact of the highly detailed curriculum materials (which they sometimes referred to as a “script”). One teacher in New Orleans explained: “I love the ‘script’. It has helped me to develop my questioning and depth of knowledge. The more goes you have at it, the better you get at teaching.” Another teacher agreed: “Sometimes in the moment the script can seem prohibitive. But I need it. I have a degree in environmental science and I know I don’t know how to teach the elementary science standards.”<sup>47</sup>

### Box 5: Example from a Kindergarten mathematics class in New Orleans, Louisiana

Ms Adams is teaching her Kindergarten mathematics class using the Number Stories protocol from Achievement First, a detailed lesson plan to teach counting. Following the lesson plan, Ms Adams begins the class with a two-minute “Visualization”, in which she reads the problem and asks students to visualise it:

Teacher: “There are nine red lights and 12 green lights shining on the tree.”

Students: “There are nine red lights and 12 green lights shining on the tree.” (Repeated x 3)

Teacher: “Alright friends, we’re going to make a mind movie!”

Students cover their eyes and visualise what nine red lights and 12 green lights shining on a tree looks like.

Ms Adams then moves into the 18-minute “Represent, Retell & Solve” section of the lesson:

Teacher: “Alright friends, we’re going to represent and solve! How many lights are there on the tree altogether? When you write your answer in a box on your whiteboard, I’ll know you’re ready.”

Students begin to draw what they think nine red lights and 12 green lights shining on a tree would look like, and how many lights there would be in total.

Ms Adams then asked students to share their answer and reasoning with a peer, using the model articulated in the lesson plan: “First I did X, because the story said Y, and I solved the problem by...”

As students were doing this, Ms Adams surveyed student responses to determine what proportion of the class had solved the problem correctly. Her lesson plan provided three different discussion protocols that could be used, depending on the proportion of students who had correctly solved the problem:

- If more than half the class had solved the problem using different strategies, Ms Adams knew to ask two or three students to share their “solve strategies”, and to ask the class about the similarities and differences between the strategies, to elicit a discussion about which might be most sophisticated or efficient.
- If more than half the class had solved the problem correctly but had only used one strategy, Ms Adams knew to share one or two new solve strategies, either by connecting this activity to a previous activity, or by talking about a different solve strategy that she “saw a kid do last year”.
- If fewer than half the students had solved the problem correctly, Ms Adams knew to ask one student with the correct answer to share their approach, and one student with an incorrect answer to share their approach, and then lead a discussion about which strategy leads to the solution.

More than half the students had solved the problem, so the discussion focussed on the comparative benefits of “counting on”, a strategy employed by a student, Yardis, to solve the problem, and “counting all”, a strategy employed by Camila. After a discussion, students agreed that Yardis’ approach was more efficient. To end the class, Ms Adams moved into the two-minute “Finish the Story” section of the lesson, where students express the problem and solution in pairs and then with the whole class.

*Source: School visit in New Orleans, Louisiana. Number Stories protocol provided in Appendix 2.*

<sup>47</sup> Interviews with Louisiana educators.

Some teachers have been told by their district leaders that their day-to-day instruction must closely follow the relevant curriculum. This has caused some backlash in these districts, “not because people don’t like the materials”, but because “they feel rushed to get through them”.<sup>48</sup> To help alleviate this problem, the Department creates supporting materials, including pacing calendars with inbuilt flex time, for the most widely used curriculum. Some of these materials, such as the *Louisiana Guides to Implementing Eureka Math*, have been designed to help teachers to implement curriculum that has not been specifically written for Louisiana (that is, all curriculum except the ELA Guidebooks 2.0). As one member of the Academic Content team explains: “The guides support teachers’ understanding by showing how the Louisiana Standards map to the different lessons (contained in a curriculum like *Eureka Math*), and whether different aspects of lessons are at the standard level, enrichment activity, or optional remediation.”<sup>49</sup>

Not all teachers use the curriculum materials as they are written. Some teachers Learning First interviewed described how they have autonomy to choose which curriculum materials they use, and/or how to implement them. In some districts this autonomy comes with an important caveat: “If you’re not going to use the curriculum the school has adopted, especially as a new teacher, you need to be ready to show how what you’re doing is aligned with the Standards.”<sup>50</sup> One experienced teacher from LaPlace described how she likes to use *Eureka Math*, but chooses not to follow it precisely, instead selecting key questions and activities to incorporate into her planning. She explained: “Curriculum materials aligned to the standards do help to narrow the gap between what is written and what is taught, because they make it clear what ‘what is taught’ should look like. But there should always be a gap to flexibly accommodate good pedagogy.”<sup>51</sup>

Of course, not all teachers appreciate or use detailed curriculum materials like the ELA Guidebooks 2.0, the Achievement First protocols, and Eureka Math. Some teachers have overcome their initial resistance because they’ve seen the difference the implementation of high-quality curriculum can make. One says, “I did push back in my first year. But then I started to clearly see the individual growth of my students over time.”<sup>52</sup> Some teachers are still resistant, but they do not have to use particular curriculum materials unless their district mandates it, as some districts do.

The Department does not mandate the use of any specific curriculum materials, even the ones they create internally. It just makes sure that the materials teachers need are available and high quality, so that if they want to use them, they can do so confident they are making a good choice for their students.

### Connect curriculum with teacher professional development

The key to improving student learning is better teaching, and one of the keys to better teaching is more effective professional development – but this is easier said than done. Millions of dollars have been spent on attempts to improve teacher professional development in the US, but much of it has been ineffective – and overall school performance has not improved.<sup>53</sup> The research is clear that effective teacher professional development is strongly connected to student learning.<sup>54</sup> Teacher professional development is most effective when improvements in teaching are based on analysis of student learning progress, and

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

<sup>53</sup> TNTP, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016a.

then collaboratively trialled and evaluated.<sup>55</sup> In practice, this means professional development is most effective when it interacts with curriculum.<sup>56</sup>

Quality curriculum and professional development are mutually reinforcing. Standards and aligned curriculum materials help teachers monitor and understand how their practice is helping students to learn. Effective professional development, in turn, helps to narrow the gap between the documented and implemented curriculum by focusing teachers' collaborative efforts on both the "what" and the "how" (including the "how will I know?") of teaching.<sup>57</sup> Combining a focus on professional development with a focus on curriculum is more effective than choosing one over the other.

Professional development is a core component of the Department's Academic Theory of Change and fundamentally connected to its curriculum strategy. Many educators across Louisiana have also come to recognise: that "when it comes to school improvement, great curriculum materials will only get you so far – professional development is important to really understand how to teach them well".<sup>58</sup> Indeed, some of the best examples of teaching and learning observed by Learning First were built on a dual foundation of quality curriculum and quality professional development. For example, teachers working at the FirstLine Charter Schools in New Orleans, like Ms Adams from the example in Box 5, routinely look at an Intellectual Preparation Protocol before teaching curriculum materials. This protocol steps teachers through a process to deepen the aim and big ideas of the lesson, and how the lesson connects to the arc of the unit (see Box 6).

#### Box 6: Intellectual Preparation Protocol Steps

1. Content director (subject expert leading the professional development) explains the connection of the lesson to the major work of the grade and building blocks of the unit plan.
2. Teachers review the lesson plan to understand the big idea/concept at play in the lesson and develop their ability to articulate it clearly.
3. Teachers complete the core tasks of the lesson to develop/refine student responses for key questions/tasks with clear criteria for success. They identify questions to complete as a class and those that students should complete independently; the strategies they anticipate most students will use; and the strategy they should be using and note possible misconceptions for specific problems.
4. Teachers create questions and supports to address anticipated student misconceptions.

Source: Achievement First, n.d.

The Department wanted to ensure that all teachers in Louisiana have access to excellent professional development that will help them to be effective in the classroom. As they began to shape their professional development strategy, the Academic Content team asked themselves a few key questions: what is effective, what is sustainable, what is scalable across the teacher workforce? The 10 or so people in the Academic Content team couldn't run training for 40,000 teachers, but they knew that five high-quality academic vendors could. The curriculum material review allowed the Department to determine which professional development vendors were "high quality" and most likely to be effective, and which were not. Through this lens, high-quality vendors are those that:

- help teachers use Tier 1 curricula (and, in many cases, those who developed the curriculum also provide the professional development),

<sup>55</sup> Jensen, Sonnemann, et al., 2016a.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Wiener & Pimentel, 2017; Hawley Miles, Rosenberg, & Quist Green, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> See forthcoming report in this series, *Combining curriculum and best practice teacher professional learning*.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Louisiana educator.

- build teachers' subject expertise to effectively implement the curriculum, and
- provide teachers with the opportunity to practise skills and receive feedback in line with best practice in professional development research.<sup>59</sup>

The Department publishes an annual *Vendor Professional Development Course Catalog* that lists vendors by subject who meet these criteria.<sup>60</sup> It backs up the catalogue with financial heft by only awarding state professional development contracts to vendors who make the cut. The Department invites high-quality vendors to present at the annual state summits and quarterly collaborations attended by Teacher Leaders, who then have the opportunity to experience quality professional development first hand, share their learning with peers, and advocate for higher quality local professional development experiences.

The Department also publishes a *School System Planning Guide*, with advice to districts on how to create a rigorous professional development plan that incorporates high-quality professional development opportunities (see Box 7). These plans are tied to grant applications, in which schools must demonstrate their commitment to implementing high-quality curricula and aligned professional development to be eligible for additional state funding.<sup>61</sup>

#### Box 7: 2017-2018 School System Planning Guide – steps for districts

- **Step 1:** Diagnose: Use the curriculum implementation scale<sup>62</sup> to diagnose where your schools and district are along the path to providing teachers with high-quality curricula and PD that helps them use their curricula effectively.
- **Step 2:** Provide teachers with high-quality curricula: If you haven't done so already, ensure teachers have access to high-quality curricula and all materials necessary to implement those curricula (such as class sets of texts or mathematics manipulatives).
- **Step 3:** Identify specific issues with curriculum implementation: Observe classrooms and interview teachers to determine which elements of the curriculum teachers are having trouble implementing consistently. Create a priority list of content and curriculum-specific issues that, if addressed, would enable teachers to use their curriculum more effectively.
- **Step 4:** Create an intentional sequence of curriculum-based PD: Using the information gathered in step 3, create an intentional sequence of PD topics, starting with more foundational skills and layering on to it, in order to build teachers' skill over time.
- **Step 5:** Identify PD structures and providers: Determine which structures and providers to use to deliver the PD from step 4, considering pre-existing structures (such as professional learning communities) and external vendors.
- **Step 6:** Draft a plan: Use the planning template to describe the focus or objective, facilitator, and audience for each PD structure over the course of the year.
- Refine the plan: Evaluate the strength of the 2017-2018 PD plan using the PD plan checklist.<sup>63</sup>

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2017a

The Department has experienced some success with this systemic approach to teacher professional development but has found that some schools still struggle to take up quality teacher development opportunities. When the Department dug into this finding with districts, they learned together that these schools tend to experience three key barriers:

<sup>59</sup> Jensen, Sonnemann, et al., 2016a.

<sup>60</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-c.

<sup>61</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, 2017c.

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 3.

- they don't know what to focus on,
- they don't trust national vendors, and
- they value the local marketplace.

The next phase of the Department's professional development strategy, therefore, is to seek to influence the local marketplace by training content leaders and mentor teachers. Training for content leaders, who will enable professional development at the school level, and for mentor teachers, who will coach teacher candidates during their initial teacher education, aims to solve two problems: a lack of subject expertise in schools, and the lack of a promotional pathway for instructional leaders. The training is a nine-day fellowship, run in partnership with high-quality providers, that focusses on developing a deep understanding of quality curriculum.<sup>64</sup> The Department will train 500 mentor teachers and 200 content leaders from across Louisiana in the first round of training in 2017-2018, with plans to scale up the program.

### **Hold teachers and schools accountable for curriculum implementation**

The Department also narrows the gap between the documented and implemented curriculum through its approach to accountability. Student assessments are the main accountability mechanism for ensuring teachers implement the curriculum, so it is important that the two align. Student assessments strongly influence teacher behaviour, especially in states like Louisiana, where a value-added model is used to provide teachers with feedback on their performance.<sup>65</sup> Testing regimes can help or hinder teacher practice and student learning, and Superintendent John White believes it has historically done the latter in Louisiana. White explained: "Testing has been guiding teachers to make some very bad decisions. The next question for us is – can we move on accountability to integrate it better with the profession?"<sup>66</sup>

The Department is committed to less – but better – student testing. It has publicly committed to limiting state assessments to less than two per cent of instructional time. It has created a comprehensive assessment system designed to replace the lower-quality assessments previously used by the state and many districts and schools (see Figure 7).

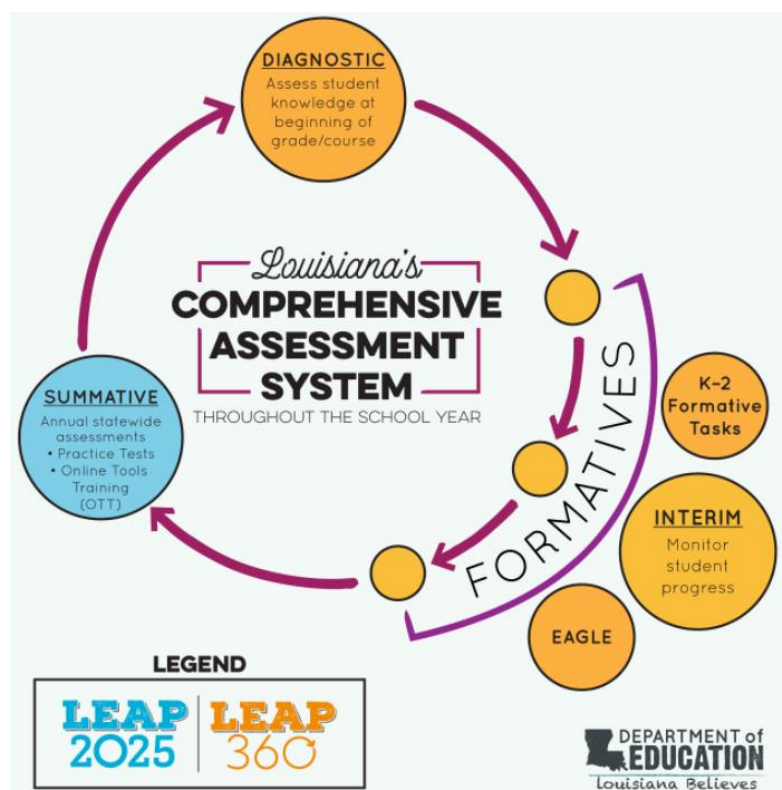
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<sup>64</sup> See Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-j; Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-k.

<sup>65</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-l.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Superintendent John White.

Figure 7: Louisiana's comprehensive assessment system



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-i

The assessment system comprises two initiatives, Leap 2025 and Leap 360. Leap 2025 is a suite of annual, state-wide summative assessments that are aligned with the State Standards. These tests provide the data required for a systemic pulse check of how well the intended curriculum is being implemented by teachers and attained by students in Louisiana schools.

Leap 360 is an optional suite of assessments designed to support effective teaching aligned to the curriculum, including:

- **Diagnostic assessments** that determine student readiness for new course work and help teachers to set meaningful and ambitious goals; delivered at the start of the year or course.
- **Interim assessments** that evaluate student learning and monitor progress toward year-end goals and allow teachers to target and adjust instruction; administered at checkpoints throughout the year.
- **K-2 formative assessments** that provide quality tasks focused on critical student skills in ELA and mathematics.
- **EAGLE**, a program that integrates high-quality questions into day-to-day classroom experiences and curricula through teacher-created tests, premade assessments, and individual items for small group instruction.<sup>67</sup>

While most teachers have welcomed the Department commitment to less but better testing, the transition to the new comprehensive assessment system has had challenges. The main one has been to shift teacher perspectives on the purpose of student testing – from being a simple “stick” to becoming a useful tool to shape and support teaching and learning. For example, some teachers have grown used to having

<sup>67</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-i.



access to testing data that can be broken down by achievement standard, which gave them the opportunity to drill students on isolated standards in an attempt to do better on the next round of tests. The output of LEAP 360 tests, however, display student results broken down by item instead of standard. For example, teachers can see whether students answered specific questions correctly or incorrectly, and the type of question (for example, extended response to an informational text). This approach is consistent with research demonstrating the educational weakness of extensively drilling students on narrow skills, such as “finding the main idea” in ELA.<sup>68</sup> The change has caused some consternation, as one member of the Academic Content team explains: “people are having a hard time getting their head around not being able to break down their testing data into a series of discrete skills they can drill kids on”.<sup>69</sup>

The assessment component of the Department’s Academic Theory of Change has been vital to narrowing the gap between the documented and implemented curriculum. For example, the link between the take-up of quality curriculum and aligned assessment is highlighted when curriculum implementation in Kindergarten to Grade 2 ELA is compared to implementation in Grades 3 to 8 ELA. Implementation of quality curriculum in the later years far outstrips that in the early years, because there has been a lack of curriculum-aligned assessment available to Kindergarten to 2 teachers. The transition to the comprehensive assessment system is a big step in the right direction, but Louisiana still has a way to go. As Superintendent John White explains: “I will believe this wave of reform is complete when the measurement instruments are driving the same teaching and learning experiences that the standards drive. We are not there yet.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Hirsch, Jr., 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with a Louisiana educator.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Superintendent John White.

### Lesson three: maintain high expectations and meet the learning needs of all students

Curriculum is more than just a collection of standards and classroom activities. It is a systemic expression of a society's aspiration for its young people about what they should know, understand and be able to do in order to live a life they have reason to value. A quality curriculum is designed to meet the learning needs of all students while holding tight to its vision for their futures. The Department has sought to create a quality curriculum by embedding into core subjects the key skills and capabilities that students will need in order to succeed in life and work; and by creating supports to scaffold student understanding while maintaining high expectations, and exposure to grade level content.

#### Embed key skills and capabilities into the curriculum

The architects of the Common Core State Standards, and the Louisiana Student Standards and aligned curriculum have taken steps to embed the key skills and capabilities they think students will need to succeed in their future life and work. These skills and capabilities are embedded in content areas, reflecting contemporary research on the domain-specificity of skills.<sup>71</sup> For example, the Common Core Mathematics Standards contain eight *Standards for Mathematical Practice* that “mathematics educators at all levels should seek to develop in their students”.<sup>72</sup> These include:

- Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
- Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
- Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
- Model with mathematics.
- Use appropriate tools strategically.
- Attend to precision.
- Look for and make use of structure.
- Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, the Louisiana Student Science Standards contain a list of eight “science and engineering practices”. These eight practices apply to all grade levels and content areas across the science curriculum, and are described as those skills and capabilities that “scientists and engineers use when investigating real world phenomena and designing solutions to problems”.<sup>74</sup> The mathematics and science specialists within the Department’s Academic Content team describe these practice standards in the two subject areas as an expression of subject-specific 21<sup>st</sup> century skills aligned with the overarching vision Louisiana has for its students. While the team at the Department do not believe they are yet “getting enough traction with the content standards to really focus explicitly on the practice standards”, they explain that “Quality curriculum materials integrate these practices anyway, and the instructional material review process is designed to weed out the materials that don’t.”<sup>75</sup>

Likewise, the ELA specialists within the Department Academic Content team are strongly focussed on how to embed the most important skills and capabilities in the curriculum. The goal of the *Louisiana Student Standards for ELA* is “to produce a literate person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (see Box 8). As described earlier in this case study, the Department encourages teachers to realise this goal by focussing on the “commander’s intent” of the subject: students should be able to read, understand and express their understanding of complex, grade level texts.

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<sup>71</sup> Hirsch, Jr., 2016; Willingham, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018c.

<sup>73</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018c.

<sup>74</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-d.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Louisiana educators.



### Box 8: Goal of the Louisiana Student Standards for ELA

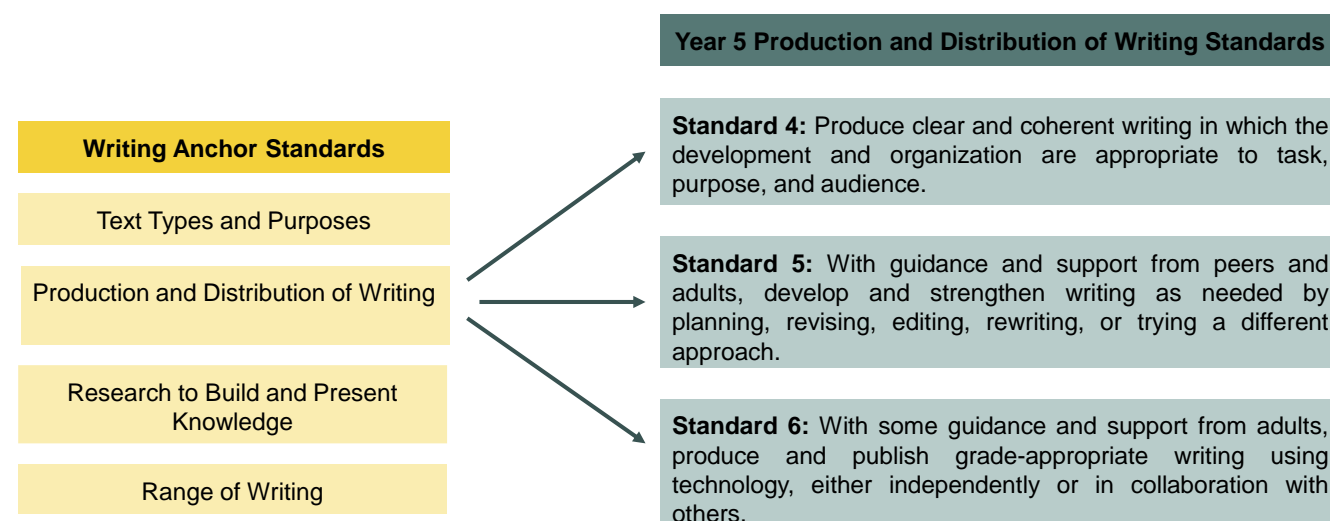
A literate person in the twenty-first century should:

- Demonstrate independence in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use;
- build strong content knowledge through reading and writing;
- adapt to the demands of various audiences, tasks, purposes, and subjects;
- comprehend as well as critique;
- cite specific evidence as well as evaluate others' use of evidence;
- use technology and digital media strategically and capably;
- understand other perspectives and cultures.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-h

The *K-12 Student Standards for ELA* document provides a list of the Standards and a series of resources, such as vertical progressions, to guide teacher understanding of skill development. The vertical progressions are organised using anchor standards, described as the skills “that high school graduates should have in order to be ready for entry into the workplace or postsecondary”.<sup>76</sup> The anchor standards are broad standards that are identical across grades and content areas and house more specific standards at each grade level (refer to Figure 8 for an example). The vertical progressions show how students are expected to develop the knowledge and skills contained under the banner of each anchor standard across their school lives.<sup>77</sup>

Figure 8: How grade level standards are connected to anchor standards



Source: Adapted from Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-h

The Academic Content team recognise the importance of the ELA Standards to students' future lives and work, and the enormous responsibility that rests on the shoulders of ELA teachers. The team is therefore

<sup>76</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-h.

<sup>77</sup> Full set of ELA vertical progressions available here: Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-h. An example is included in Appendix 4.

constantly grappling with how to embed skills in other relevant curriculum domains, such as social studies, in order to better support skill development and take the load off ELA teachers.

Teachers in Louisiana, like other US teachers, can look to the Common Core ELA Standards for guidance on how to embed literacy skills into some other content areas. For example, the national standards contain a set of standards for *Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects* for Grades 6 to 12. The Academic Content team is considering how to take this guidance further and make it more explicit. For example, during a recent meeting, the team discussed how to embed a sub-section of the writing vertical progression<sup>78</sup> into the teaching of social studies and science. They decided that trying to embed the full progression into another subject area would be too much, but a prioritised list of writing progressions might be appropriate (this work is ongoing). The team agreed that a useful interim structure might be a writing progression for social studies and science based on The Writing Revolution, an evidence-based instructional methodology that “enables students to master the skills that are essential if they are to become competent writers” (see Box 9).<sup>79</sup> Planning to date represents steps towards embedding into the curriculum key English language skills and capabilities that students in Louisiana need in order to thrive in their future life and work.

### Box 9: The Writing Revolution

The Writing Revolution is an approach to teaching writing based on the Hochman Method, named for its inventor Dr Judith Hochman. The method has six key principles:

1. Students need **explicit instruction** in writing, beginning in the early elementary grades.
2. **Sentences** are the building blocks of all writing (the foundation for outlines, paragraphs and compositions).
3. When **embedded in the content of the curriculum**, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.
4. The **content** of the curriculum **drives the rigour** of the writing activities.
5. **Grammar** is best taught in the **context** of student writing.
6. The two most important phases of the writing process are **planning** and **revising**.

In a 2012 article, *The Atlantic* described the Writing Revolution in practice in a turnaround public high school in Staten Island, New York:

*“Students are explicitly taught how to turn ideas into simple sentences, and how to construct complex sentences from simple ones by supplying the answer to three prompts – but, because, and so. They are instructed on how to use appositive clauses to vary the way their sentences begin. Later on, they are taught how to recognize sentence fragments, how to pull the main idea from a paragraph, and how to form a main idea on their own. It is, at least initially, a rigid, unswerving formula.”*

The article also described the impact on the learning of one student, Monica, who, like many of her peers, had developed rapidly as a result of the Hochman Method:

*“I always wanted to go to college, but I never had the confidence that I could say and write the things I know...Then someone showed me how.”*

Source: Adapted from *The Writing Revolution*, 2017; and Tyre, 2012

<sup>78</sup> Available here: <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/teacher-toolbox-resources/k-12-ela-standards.pdf?sfvrsn=8>

<sup>79</sup> The Writing Revolution, 2017.

## Scaffold student understanding while maintaining high expectations and exposure to grade level content

The Academic Content team at the Department maintains high expectations for all students. As one member explains: “Our best value-add as a state is to hold the bar high – no excuses – and then help translate what this means for teachers’ daily practice.”<sup>80</sup> Holding the bar high means emphasising the importance of grade level curriculum implementation in order to maintain the rigour of systemic expectations about what students should know, understand, and be able to do through to the classroom. The team at the Department believes that at-level curriculum implementation and whole-class instruction is essential to adequately support the learning of all students. As one of the team explains:

*If you don’t expose students to grade level material, they are never going to get there. The first line of defence against poor academic outcomes is quality instruction using quality curriculum materials – if you don’t do this, you’re putting yourself in a position where there will be students on the margins and you’ll need to be thinking about them.*<sup>81</sup>

By emphasising the importance of whole class, grade level instruction, however, the team at the Department is not ignoring the students already “on the margins” in classrooms across the state. They know there are students whose learning is outpacing that of their peers, as well as those who are slipping behind. One thing they have frequently heard from teachers is that available curricula do not always help teachers to meet the learning needs of all students, particularly those who are struggling. As one teacher explained: “The Guidebooks are pitched more towards the stronger students – they don’t seem to support the weaker students as much.”<sup>82</sup> Although teachers report a growing appreciation of how best to meet the learning needs of all students the more often they implement high-quality curriculum materials in their classrooms, they know this does not help those students on the receiving end of their early attempts.

In response to this feedback, the Department has taken steps to support teachers to better meet the needs of struggling students. A major initiative underway is the creation of “diverse learners’ guides”. The Department has once again harnessed the expertise of its Teacher Leaders network to create these guides, which aim to further support teachers working to build the learning of struggling students towards grade level standards.

The “diverse learners’ guides” for ELA include sets of supporting materials for each “section” of the Guidebooks – around three lessons. To create these sections, Teacher Leaders review the Guidebooks and identify places they can provide additional support for knowledge demands, structure, language, foundational skills, or meaning. For example, for the Year 7 unit on *A Christmas Carol*, the Teacher Leaders focus on providing supports that will scaffold student understanding towards the unit goal:

*Students read literary and informational texts about the meaning and redemption found through selflessness and valuing people over material possessions. Students understand how writers use stories to teach us these lessons and how characters’ choices affect the plot and build the theme of a story. Students express their understanding by exploring how literature resonates with readers and has “staying power”, becoming a part of our language, culture, and moral code.*

These supports may include some “additional lessons about what Christmas is, so students understand the context of the story”, and “materials, including supplementary texts, that help students understand unfamiliar words and phrases”.<sup>83</sup> The Teacher Leaders will also review materials to confirm that tasks are appropriately pegged to the standards of the relevant grade; if they find that activities are pitched slightly

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Academic Content team.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Academic Content team.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Academic Content team.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Academic Content team.

higher, which is sometimes the case, they will provide some additional supports. The ELA “diverse learners’ guides”, due for release at the end of the 2017/2018 school year, will complement guides such as the *Eureka Math Remediation Guide* that some publishers have already made available to teachers. The *Eureka* guide “takes the lesson teachers are working on and matches it with the standards from the year below, to help teachers move students up the progression”.<sup>84</sup>

The Department also helps teachers to meet the learning needs of all students by providing suggested teaching calendars with inbuilt flex lessons for targeted remediation and reteaching. These teaching calendars also help schools plan to incorporate the Federal *Response to Intervention* initiative by including dedicated time to provide evidence-based interventions to support students at risk of falling behind.<sup>85</sup> In practice, every school meets this requirement in different ways. Several of the schools Learning First visited did so by identifying student ability on the relevant learning progressions and placing students in ability-level groups for discrete blocks of instruction.

The Department stresses the importance of grade level instruction, holding tight to the aspirational vision they have for all students, irrespective of race or socioeconomic status. Development of the “diverse learners’ guides” and teaching calendars reflects the state’s commitment to creating a curriculum that maintains high expectations, while striving to meet the needs of all students.

The rigour and strong vertical alignment of the Louisiana curriculum opens up an exciting possibility: that one day soon, a cohort of students from Louisiana high schools will graduate, having benefitted from the implementation of high-quality curriculum from their first day at school. These students, unlike many before them in Louisiana and across the world, will have experienced a consistently cohesive, high-quality curriculum. If the Louisiana Department of Education Academic Theory of Change is realised, far fewer of these students will be on the margins, and far more will be embarking on a life and career they have reason to value.

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Academic Content team.

<sup>85</sup> American Institutes for Research, 2018.

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## Appendix 1: artefacts from Louisiana major curriculum update process

### Teacher feedback form<sup>86</sup>

**Guidebooks 2.0 Pilot Feedback Form**

Your feedback is important so that we develop units that lead students to understand, talk, and write about complex texts.

Capture your thoughts on this form as you pilot the unit. You do not have to answer all the questions. You can use this form multiple times.

**\*Required**

**Give feedback on a specific lesson.**

Be sure to indicate the lesson number.

**Provide general observations.**

**Check the ELA Guidebook unit you are piloting. \***

- ☐ Grade 3 – Louisiana Purchase
- ☐ Grade 4 – American Revolution
- ☐ Grade 4 – Lightning Thief
- ☐ Grade 5 – The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe
- ☐ Grade 6 – Hatchet
- ☐ Grade 7 – Memoir
- ☐ Grade 8 – Tell-Tale Heart
- ☐ Grade 8 – Flower for Algernon
- ☐ Grade 9 – Romeo and Juliet
- ☐ Grade 10 – Metamorphosis
- ☐ Grade 11 – Our Town
- ☐ Grade 12 – Hamlet

Other:

Submit

*Never submit passwords through Google Forms.*

<sup>86</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e.

Teacher observation guide<sup>87</sup>

Observation Sheet	
ELA Guidebook 2.0 Unit _____	
<b>Observer's Comments</b>	
<b>Lesson Logistics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the materials seem adequate for the classroom? Consider the quantities and quality (e.g., suggested number texts, way text is delivered, etc.)</li> <li>Were the materials easily/smoothly facilitated? Consider logistics (e.g., transitions, locating and distributing materials, etc.)</li> </ul>	
<b>Lesson Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the lesson "flow" and make sense to teachers, students, observers?</li> <li>How adaptable was the lesson content (e.g., directions, questions, prompts, handouts) when necessary?</li> <li>Was the pacing right and were adjustments made when necessary?</li> <li>What evidence of student learning is demonstrated in the lesson? Does it meet intended expectations of the lesson content?</li> </ul>	
Note any adjustments made, if any.	

<sup>87</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e.

## Teacher focus group questions and process<sup>88</sup>

### Focus Group Questions

1. Describe the overall process you used to implement the pilot unit you are teaching.
  - a. After first getting access, what did you do to prepare?
  - b. Once you were implementing the lessons, what process did you follow the week before/the night before?
2. At what points in the unit did you find yourself adjusting/adding/filling in gaps because something didn't work for the students or your context?
  - a. What evidence did you use to determine the need to adjust/add/fill in gaps?
  - b. Is that something you'd like to see added to the guidebooks? Anything else you want added?
  - c. Did anything not "work" for the students? Did anything not "work" for you? How would that best be fixed? Is there anything you would have deleted? Why?
3. Were the sections of the teacher notes useful?
  - a. Were the directions clear?
  - b. Did Guiding Questions and Prompts help you meet the specific needs of your students?
  - c. Did Student Look-Fors support your daily assessment of student learning?
  - d. Is there any other type of information or support you would like to see in Additional Notes?
4. Would you recommend the guidebook to a colleague? Why or why not?
5. What was your overall experience with the guidebooks? What was your students' overall experience with the guidebooks?

### Focus Group Process

Pilot districts selected teachers to participate in the Focus Group Discussion. A staff member from the Department asked the questions while another staff member transcribed the conversation. Due to the number of pilot teachers, some districts had two focus groups.

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<sup>88</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e.

## End-of-pilot survey questions<sup>89</sup>

### Survey Questions

1. In which SRCL Pilot district do you teach? (*Open ended*)
2. Check the ELA Guidebook unit you piloted.
3. How easy was the platform to use? (*1, not easy and 5, very easy*)
4. How useful were the teaching notes for classroom instruction? (*1, not useful and 5, very useful*)
5. How useful were the handouts and graphic organizers in this unit? (*1, not useful and 5, very useful*)
6. Tell us more about the handouts and graphic organizers. (*Open ended*)
7. How well did the assessments measure students' understanding? (*1, did not measure and 5, measured accurately*)
8. Tell us more about the unit assessments. (*Open ended*)
9. How engaged were students with the presentation of the lessons? (*1, not engaged and 5, very engaged*)
10. How interested were students in the selected unit texts? (*1, not interested and 5, very interested*)
11. Tell us more about the unit texts. (*Open ended*)
12. How well did the unit lessons help your students understand the unit texts? (*1, did not understand and 5, completely understand*)
13. How well did the handouts/graphic organizers help students build knowledge and skill? (*1, not helpful and 5, very helpful*)
14. Would you recommend the ELA Guidebooks 2.0 to a colleague? (*1, wouldn't recommend and 5, highly recommend*)
15. The pacing for the unit was \_\_\_\_\_. (*Fill-in-the-blank*)
16. In this unit, I wanted more \_\_\_\_\_. (*Fill-in-the-blank*)
17. In this unit, I wanted less \_\_\_\_\_. (*Fill-in-the-blank*)
18. My greatest success using this unit was \_\_\_\_\_. (*Fill-in-the-blank*)
19. My biggest concern using this unit was \_\_\_\_\_. (*Fill-in-the-blank*)

<sup>89</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-e.

## Appendix 2: Number Stories lesson plan

Number Stories K-2 Later Agenda Overview

Visualize (2 minutes)

- WG- read the problem
- S- visualize the problem

Represent, Retell & Solve (18 minutes)

- (4 min.) S- Represent and Solve on whiteboard or paper
  - Early finishers: tell your turtle how you represented: write to explain how you represented
- (3 min.) TT- Share your representation ("first I...because in the story...I solved by...")
- (11 min.) WG- Decision (with a focus on calculation strategies...not representations)  
Based on data, teacher does ONE of the following:

Share 2-3 Solve Strategies	Introduce a New Solve Strategies	Misconception Discussion
More than $\frac{1}{2}$ correct	More than $\frac{1}{2}$ correct, but only one strategy being used	Less than $\frac{1}{2}$ correct
<p>Protocol:</p> <p>-2-3 students share their solve strategies in order from least to most sophisticated or efficient (student shows work; teacher recreates clean version). Students say, "First I...b/c in the story...then I...b/c in the story...I solved by..."</p> <p>Teacher asks a specific discussion question (could be "what's the same/different about these solve strategies?").</p> <p>-TT- discuss discussion question</p> <p>WG- 1 strong student share their answer to discussion question</p>	<p>Protocol:</p> <p>If it's something students have learned in class:</p> <p>-Share 1-2 solve strategies that will connect to the solve strategies being introduced</p> <p>-"Let's see if we can come up with another way to solve this. I'm thinking of something I've seen you do in math class when working on _____. Anyone have ideas?"</p> <p>Students share intended solve strategy</p> <p>All students try using solve strategy.</p> <p>-1 student shares with the group-- successfully using the solve strategy</p> <p>-"Cool. So now you have another rep. You could use!"</p> <p>If it's something totally new:</p> <p>-Share 1-2 solve strategy that will connect to the reps being introduced.</p> <p>-"Let's talk about this solve strategy. I saw a kid do last year." (Show solve strategy)</p> <p>-TT: How does this solve strategy show the same thing as the rep you guys used?"</p> <p>-1 student shares</p> <p>-"Cool! So now you have another solve strategy you could use!"</p>	<p>Protocol:</p> <p>-1 correct student shares</p> <p>-1 incorrect student shares</p> <p>-TT: which solve strategy works to find the solution?</p> <p>-WG discussion: what is incorrect? Why doesn't xxx work?</p> <p>-Individual "fix-it" time for any students that need to</p> <p>-1 previously incorrect and now correct student shares his/her correct work</p>

Finish the Story (2 minutes)

- (1 min.) TT- Finish the story
- (1 min.) WG- 1 student shares their Finish the Story



## Appendix 3: artefacts from Louisiana School System Planning Guide

### Curriculum implementation scale<sup>90</sup>

<b>LEVEL 0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not consistently meet criteria for Level 1 across site/school/system</li> </ul>
<b>LEVEL 1</b> <i>Teachers have access to high quality curricula</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose a high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum (e.g., <a href="#">Tier 1 curriculum</a>, <a href="#">ELA Guidebooks</a>) Provide Tier 1 curriculum and materials to teachers and principals with adequate time for them to prepare for the upcoming school year.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminate Tier 3 or standards-unaligned materials from classrooms.</li> <li>Ensure principals can articulate 1) the name, tier and approach of the chosen curriculum; 2) the next steps they will take to ensure a quality implementation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>LEVEL 2</b> <i>Teachers have basic training that equips them with the knowledge and skill to use the curriculum “as written”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet criteria for Level 1 and...</li> <li>Provide 100% of teachers with quality training on how to implement the chosen curriculum “as written” (includes content pedagogy training); curriculum-centered PD should constitute the majority of PD teachers receive.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that any professional development above and beyond that which is directly related to the curriculum does not contradict the curriculum (i.e. the instructional approach and strategies in the PD corroborate the instructional approach and strategies in the curriculum.)</li> <li>Create and implement a plan to train new teachers on the curriculum each year.</li> <li>Ensure principals adjust school policies, schedules, etc. to facilitate curriculum training for teachers.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>LEVEL 3</b> <i>Instructional staff facilitate and support the process of teachers modifying the curriculum to better meet students’ needs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet criteria for Level 2 and...</li> <li>Instructional staff guide decisions about how to make thoughtful modifications to the curriculum to improve student learning.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide 100% of teachers with ongoing and differentiated training on the curriculum.</li> <li>Ensure 100% of teachers participate in structures that facilitate them using student work to modify the curriculum to better meet students’ needs.</li> <li>Ensure principals focus post-observation conversations on the curriculum, especially teachers’ choices about how they are modifying the curriculum to meet students’ needs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>LEVEL 4</b> <i>Teachers take full ownership for using information about performance to drive modifications to the curriculum and instruction.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet criteria for Level 3 and...</li> <li>Ensure teachers take full ownership for maximizing student learning, including using information about gaps and progress in learning to modify the curriculum.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure teachers give frequent, meaningful, and relevant feedback to children/students based on their work from the curriculum.</li> <li>Ensure teachers describe the ways in which each child/student has or has not yet met the learning goals and what adjustments they will make to the curriculum to improve learning.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>90</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, 2017a.

PD planning checklist<sup>91</sup>

	CRITERIA	YES	NO
PD plan focuses on what matters most	Does your PD plan focus on helping teachers use a <a href="#">high quality curriculum</a> ?		
	Does your PD plan explicitly state the instructional change it is driving toward with teachers and school leaders?		
PD plan provides coherent, cohesive and ongoing professional development	Does the PD plan have an intentional arc that builds skill over time and in a logical manner, starting with more foundational skills and layering on?		
	Do teachers who are new to the system and/or new to the curriculum receive additional support and on-boarding?		
	Do teachers and leaders get the opportunity to practice what they've learned in PD and receive actionable feedback? Is PD part of observation feedback loops between supervisors and principals and between principals and teachers?		
	Do external and internal PD providers complement each other and provide a consistent message?		
	Are PD structures consistent in format and approach? For example, is the vision and framing similar across PD sessions so that there is a consistent feel? Are there common protocols for planning that are used across PDs?		
	Are opportunities for everyone across the system – instructional supervisors, coaches, principals, etc. – to learn concurrently so each educator can reinforce the prioritized teacher learnings?		
PD plan leverages pre-existing structures and local educators and <a href="#">vendors</a> with proven track records of success	Does your PD plan clearly identify the existing structures that will be leveraged (district-wide PDs, school-based PDs, collaborative planning structures, data days, co-observations, etc.)?		
	Does your PD plan leverage local educators and <a href="#">vendors</a> who have a proven track record of success and who are willing and able to provide curriculum-based professional development?		
	Are there opportunities for those leading PD for teachers – Teacher Leaders, consultants, vendors, school and school system administrators, etc. – to receive training on key district messages and priorities? On the content and curriculum? On best practices in facilitating adult learning?		
Additional Criteria	Does your PD plan clarify what PD is required/expected vs. optional and have a thoughtful rationale for why?		
	Does the PD plan allow for meaningful opportunities for collaboration so that educators develop stronger peer connections instead of focusing solely on improving individual performance?		
	Does the PD plan help build a strong adult culture?		

<sup>91</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, 2017a.

## Appendix 4: Louisiana writing vertical progression excerpt<sup>92</sup>

<b>Writing - Text Types and Purposes</b>	
<b>Anchor Standard W 1:</b> Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.	
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade-Specific Standard</b>
<b>Kindergarten</b>	Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g., <i>My favorite book is...</i> ).
<b>Grade 1</b>	Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.
<b>Grade 2</b>	Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., <i>because</i> , <i>and</i> , <i>also</i> ) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.
<b>Grade 3</b>	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.</li> <li>Provide reasons that support the opinion.</li> <li>Use linking words and phrases (e.g., <i>because</i>, <i>therefore</i>, <i>since</i>, <i>for example</i>) to connect opinion and reasons.</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section.</li> </ol>
<b>Grade 4</b>	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose.</li> <li>Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.</li> <li>Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., <i>for instance</i>, <i>in order to</i>, <i>in addition</i>).</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.</li> </ol>
<b>Grade 5</b>	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.</li> <li>Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.</li> <li>Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., <i>consequently</i>, <i>specifically</i>).</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.</li> </ol>
<b>Grade 6</b>	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</li> <li>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</li> <li>Establish and maintain a formal style.</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</li> </ol>
<b>Grade 7</b>	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.</li> <li>Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among</li> </ol>

<sup>92</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.-h.



	<p>claim(s), reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>d. Establish and maintain a formal style.</p> <p>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</p>
<b>Grade 8</b>	<p>Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</p> <p>a. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.</p> <p>b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</p> <p>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>d. Establish and maintain a formal style.</p> <p>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</p>
<b>Grades 9-10</b>	<p>Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <p>a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.</p> <p>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</p> <p>d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</p> <p>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</p>
<b>Grades 11-12</b>	<p>Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <p>a. Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.</p> <p>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</p> <p>d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</p> <p>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</p>