# Curriculum Literacy

A growing body of research indicates that [curricular materials](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/impd/default.html) make a difference in student outcomes and can have a significant impact on ensuring educational equity. High-quality, better-aligned curriculum can prompt improvement in student outcomes that are:

* Comparable to over half a year of additional learning (see [Teaching Higher](https://cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/teaching-higher-report.pdf))
* About 1.5 times the difference between an average teacher and one at the 75th percentile (see [Choosing Blindly](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0410_curriculum_chingos_whitehurst.pdf))
* Greater than the difference between a new teacher and one with three years of experience (see [Never Judge a Book by Its Cover](https://www.brookings.edu/research/never-judge-a-book-by-its-cover-use-student-achievement-instead/))
* Reflective of more equitable access to rigorous schoolwork, high expectations, and effective instruction (See [The Opportunity Myth](https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/))

**Curriculum literacy** is the ability to:

1. Understand that the integration and connections among content expectations, aligned curricular materials, and student engagement are at the core of high-quality, equitable instruction;
2. Discern high-quality curricular materials from low-quality curricular materials; and
3. Skillfully use materials through evidence-based practices that are inclusive and [culturally and linguistically sustaining](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-sustaining/default.html) to ensure the enacted curriculum supports and engages all students to reach their full potential.

**Curriculum literacy** requires educators and educator preparation programs to shift their thinking from exclusively **creating** **curriculum** from scratchto **effectively evaluating curriculum and strategies for skillfully implementing curriculum**. The following definitions will help anchor our understanding of **curriculum literacy**:

* **Curricular materials** are resources teachers use to facilitate sequences of learning experiences (e.g., lesson and unit plans, texts); also referred to as adopted curriculum or written curriculum.
* A **curriculum** is a sequence of student learning experiences that teachers facilitate using curricular materials as a foundation (not a script!); also referred to as enacted curriculum or taught curriculum.

All educators, including administrators, coaches, educator candidates, novice educators, and veteran teachers should understand the following competencies as a means to be curriculum literate:

1. **Understand that the integration and connections** among content expectations, aligned curricular materials, and student engagement are at the core of high-quality equitable instruction.
   * Be fluent with the [state standards](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) and [learning progressions](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/search/) within their content area
   * Be fluent with evidence-based approaches to teaching the content (pedagogical content knowledge)
   * Understand the relationship between equity and challenging tasks outlined in reports such as [*The Opportunity Myth*](https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-opportunity-myth)
   * Understand how materials support knowledge-building and important content-specific instructional practices (such as explicit teaching of phonemic awareness in early literacy)
   * Understand the consequences of the lack of high-quality materials, such as low-quality tasks and low expectations for students
   * Be fluent in the features of high-quality materials, such as:
     + High-quality lessons that support culturally sustaining practices and include rich texts and diverse perspectives and stories, and
     + Providing guidance for supporting multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students working above grade level, and students not yet meeting learning targets
2. **Discern high-quality curricular materials** from low-quality curricular materials in order to advocate for high-quality curricular materials.
   * Understand how to use credible curricular reviews, where available, including those from [CUrriculum RAtings by TEachers (CURATE),](http://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/) [EdReports](https://www.edreports.org/), and [STEM Learning Design](https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/dlcs/curriculum-guide.pdf) as resources for identifying high-quality curricular materials
   * Understand how to use tools such as the [CURATE rubrics](http://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/resources.html) for content areas where there are comprehensive curriculum or the [IMET (Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool)](https://achievethecore.org/page/1946/instructional-materials-evaluation-tool) and [EQuIP](https://www.achieve.org/our-initiatives/equip/equip) tool in content areas that are not being rated by curricular reviews
   * Understand how to use tools such as the [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/atn293/ejroc/CRE-Rubric-2018-190211.pdf) to evaluate the extent to which the curricular materials are culturally responsive and relevant
   * Understand how a curriculum builds student understanding of the content over time by recognizing how lesson goals, scope, sequence, and tasks fit together to support that understanding
   * Understand how curricular materials represent, reflect, affirm, and support many student identities, such as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, language, religion, family structures, ability, gender, and sexual orientation
3. **Skillfully use materials** through evidence-based practices that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically sustaining to ensure the enacted curriculum supports and engages all students to reach their full potential.
   1. Grounding in the materials’ instructional approach
      * Understand the instructional approach of the specific set of curricular materials
      * Understand how the specific curricular materials build student understanding of the content over time through the lessons and units
      * Understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of the materials, and ways that the materials should be supported to address any weaknesses
   2. Navigating the materials
      * Understand how to navigate specific curricular materials and resources, including the teacher’s guide and high-quality resources outside of the curriculum, to plan for a lesson
      * Understand the features of each unit and/or lesson and how it fits with other aspects of the curriculum (e.g., lesson, section, unit)
      * Be able to use the curricular materials effectively to plan a lesson by examining the lesson objectives, tasks, and expectations for student work and determine the preparation or learning teachers need to do to lead the lesson effectively
   3. Enacting curriculum
      * Be able to implement materials effectively and skillfully (what to keep, what to emphasize, what to add, what to adjust, etc.) without undermining the coherence or rigor of the materials and addressing time constraints, specific student learning needs, etc.
      * Understand how to identify supplemental resources and practices needed to address specific student needs
      * Be able to use Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction to support students not yet reaching learning goals
      * Be able to use scaffolding to support students in accessing the curriculum – and removing scaffolds at the appropriate time
      * Be able to use the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to make instructional decisions based on inclusive and culturally sustaining teaching practices
      * Be able to draw upon students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds to enhance curricular materials and inform instructional decision making
   4. Adjusting practice
      * Be able to analyze data from a wide range of sources, including formal and informal assessments and feedback from colleagues, students, and families
      * Be able to use data to adjust practice and implement differentiated supports
      * Be able to engage with families in constructive, asset-based conversations around students’ learning and progress and partner with them to understand, monitor, and improve student learning
      * Be able to identify areas where an educator would benefit from additional professional development or coaching to more effectively use curricular materials