



2023-2024 Interim Report

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is committed to continuous improvement of Investigating History, its inquiry-based, culturally responsive social studies curriculum. Here's what DESE has learned from the educators who are using it and recommendations for the curriculum's ongoing improvement.

DESE commissioned the Tufts University Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) to evaluate the implementation of Investigating History, the Grade 5-7 curriculum that is currently being used in a variety of schools and settings throughout Massachusetts. The CIRCLE team explored the questions:

1. To what extent are key aspects of the Investigating History curriculum and pedagogy successfully being implemented in the classrooms of teachers using the materials?
2. What are the school and district conditions that are most important in supporting successful implementation of the curriculum?

The goal is for evaluation results to inform recommendations and action steps for schools, districts, and DESE in order to support more successful implementation. DESE remains committed to continuous improvement of the Investigating History materials and pledges to continue to learn from teachers' experiences with the curriculum.



What We Learned

Many educators brought up the need to adapt and scaffold the curriculum for students with special learning needs, especially multilingual learners (MLLs). This was also the area where educators felt least supported by professional development offerings. While observing in the classroom, researchers saw evidence where more than a third, and in some cases, most students were MLLs, but teachers were not always leveraging best practices to support these students' content and language development. For example, a significant portion of classroom time was spent helping students use Google Translate.



Our Commitment

DESE is embarking on a comprehensive revision of the IH curriculum to be completed Summer 2025, centering in part on the needs of multilingual learners. Revised materials will include clearer language goals, strengthened lesson-level supports, and additional guidance and tools in the Curriculum Guidebook.



What We Learned

Among survey respondents who had adopted the IH curriculum, most teachers indicated they participated in multiple full, or half days of training spread throughout the school year; many teachers wanted more Professional Development (PD) time than they received. Less common was evidence of ongoing coaching. External research suggests that coaching is generally the most effective and least widely adopted form of professional learning for teachers.



Our Commitment

As of Summer of 2024, DESE has doubled the number of certified Professional Development (PD) providers, allowing for a greater variety of offerings. Online courses, asynchronous coaching support, district-based workshops, and statewide institutes will all be made available. For the next school year, DESE already awarded over \$300,000 to support 42 districts to assist with PD costs.



What We Learned

In districts where IH is most successful, there is both administrative buy-in to ensure access to structural supports and teacher-driven interest and excitement around the adoption of IH. There is a need to create opportunities to build understanding, excitement, and openness among teachers and administrators where implementation is more one-sided.



Our Commitment

Next fall, DESE will be sharing a series of testimonial and classroom instructional videos featuring teachers, administrators and students speaking to the impact of Investigating History. DESE will continue to offer supports such as these to highlight and share the work of experienced IH teachers and their best practices. Observing IH in the classroom is helpful to leaders and teachers as they consider adopting Investigating History for their own districts and classrooms.



What We Learned

Some teachers have been hesitant to use Investigating History or have struggled to implement the curriculum in their classrooms. Administrators need more effective ways to address teachers concerns and support their efforts.



Our Commitment

There is no “one size fits all” approach to supporting teachers’ adoption of Investigating History. DESE is strengthening the diagnostic and action planning tools within the current adoption and implementation guide to help administrators better address teachers’ unique needs. DESE is also addressing teachers’ lack of confidence in the content. By Spring 2025, each IH units for Grades 3-7 will have an accompanying Background Brief. The brief will address what educators need to know and be able to do to teach the unit and provide other helpful resources.

Conclusion

The adoption of a new curriculum requires time and concerted effort on the part of educators and administrators. Curriculum implementation is successful when the materials, professional learning, mindsets, and structures are all aligned. DESE is committed to support this important work over the long term. Further, DESE will continue to learn from and with districts to ensure all students have access to high quality social studies instruction across Massachusetts for many years to come.