Evaluation of the High-Quality Instructional Materials Implementation Grant Program

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Grant Program Participants, Methods, and Theory of Change

While the positive influence of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) on student learning is well documented, reform efforts continue to suffer from an "implementation gap." An implementation gap occurs when evidence-based practices are adopted but are not implemented with fidelity nor sustained over time. This in turn, negatively impacts teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the HQIM.

Grant program participants included:

52
districts and local education agencies across Massachusetts

220
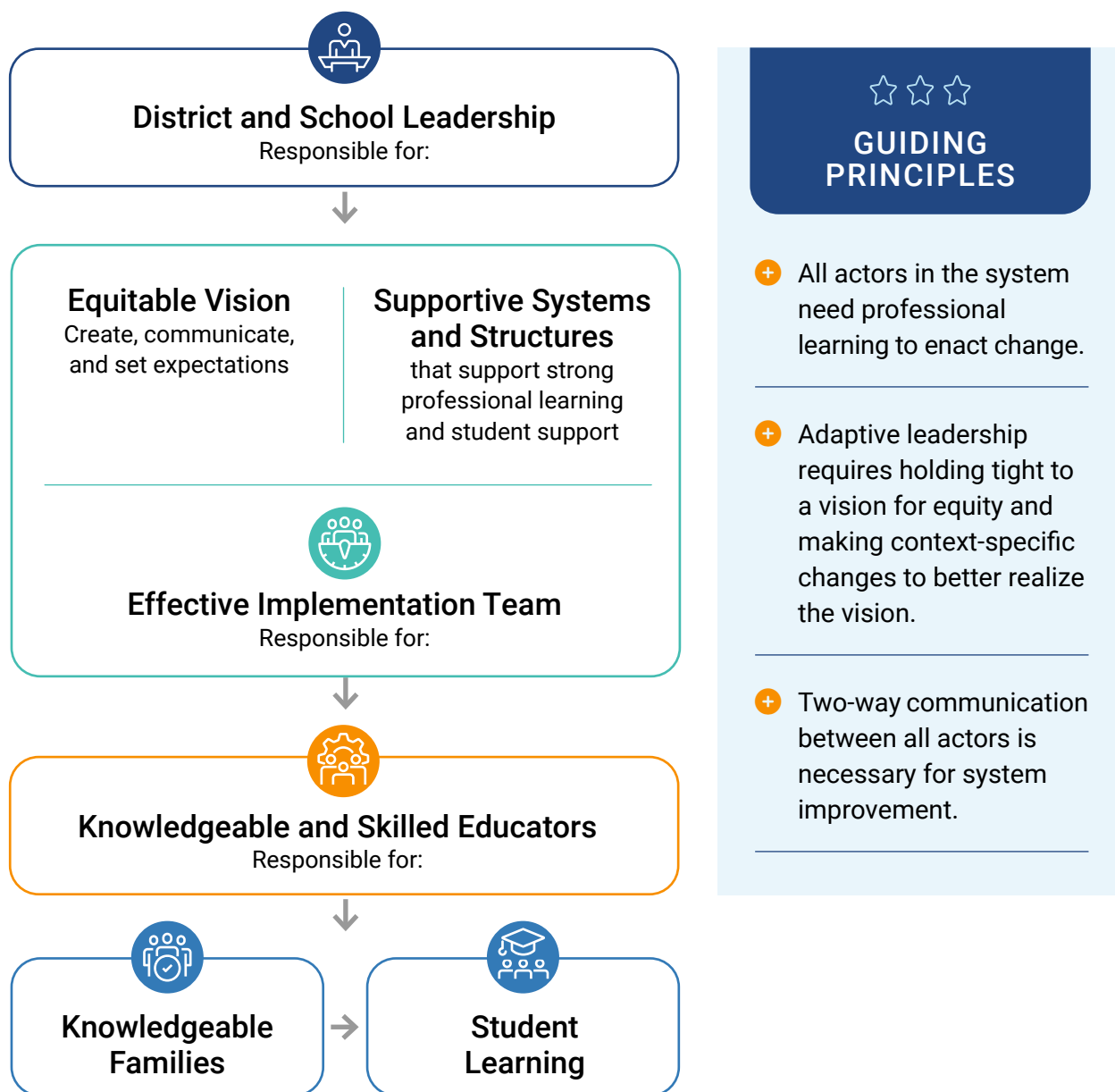schools, with the majority serving elementary grades

3,500
educators implementing selected high-quality math or English language arts (ELA) curricula

Data collected during the evaluation period – February 2023 to June 2024

- Teacher survey
- Survey of school leadership and implementation teams
- Interviews and observations of classroom teachers
- Interviews and survey of implementation consultants
- Document review

The evaluation of the High-Quality Instructional Materials Implementation Grant program tests a theory of change that begins with leadership establishing conditions to support implementation that will, with the support of knowledgeable and skilled educators, lead to changes in student outcomes. This report provides a summary of the main evaluation findings.

District and School Leadership
Responsible for:

↓

Equitable Vision
Create, communicate, and set expectations

Supportive Systems and Structures
that support strong professional learning and student support

Effective Implementation Team
Responsible for:

↓

Knowledgeable and Skilled Educators
Responsible for:

↓

Knowledgeable Families

→

Student Learning

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- All actors in the system need professional learning to enact change.

- Adaptive leadership requires holding tight to a vision for equity and making context-specific changes to better realize the vision.

- Two-way communication between all actors is necessary for system improvement.

HQIM implementation drove improvements in key teacher outcomes from fall to spring

What Did We Learn?

- As teachers spent more time implementing the HQIM, their satisfaction with it increased. There were positive shifts in teachers' expectations of students, their beliefs about student capabilities, and their perception of equity in HQIM implementation.

HQIM Implementation Drives Fall-to-Spring Improvements in Teacher Outcomes

FALL-TO-SPRING (6 MONTHS)

Teacher Satisfaction + High Expectations + Perceptions of Equity + Beliefs about Students

POSITIVE SHIFTS FOR TEACHERS
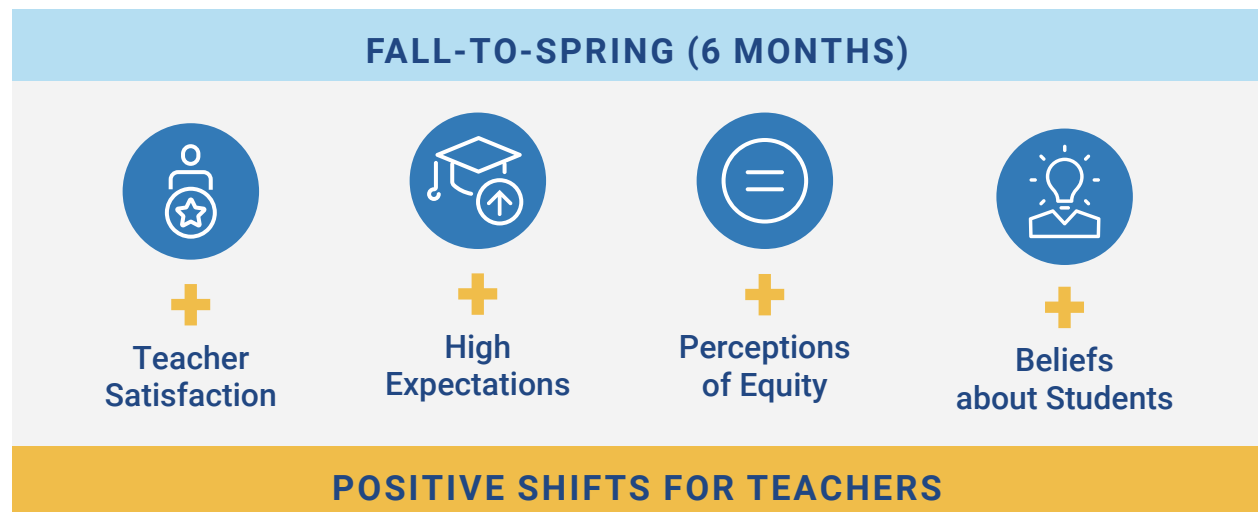
- The outcomes of interest were positively correlated with three teacher practices: observing other teachers' classrooms, working collaboratively to review student data, and engaging in professional learning (PL) responsive to classroom needs. Evidence from the analysis of teachers' responses suggest that as teachers developed experience with the HQIM, they felt more confident in their use of the curriculum. Students also developed familiarity with the new routines introduced in the HQIM. These aspects helped teachers address issues that impacted their initial perception of HQIM, such as the pace of instruction being too fast.

- However, in classes with more English learners, teachers became less satisfied with the HQIM over time, and their beliefs about student capabilities also decreased.

Core Considerations and Challenges

- The supports and structures for HQIM implementation that focus on classroom instruction (e.g., opportunities to observe peers teach) need to be strengthened to see positive changes in HQIM implementation.

- Progress over time is not linear, and especially in the beginning, HQIM implementation is difficult. Leadership should anticipate this difficulty and communicate it to teachers, educators, and others.

- Districts and schools need to exert a concerted effort to ensure that HQIM implementation meets the needs of English learners. Focused, continuous supports embedded into the school day (e.g., common planning time, meeting with coaches and instructional specialists) help teachers to adequately support learning for English learners.
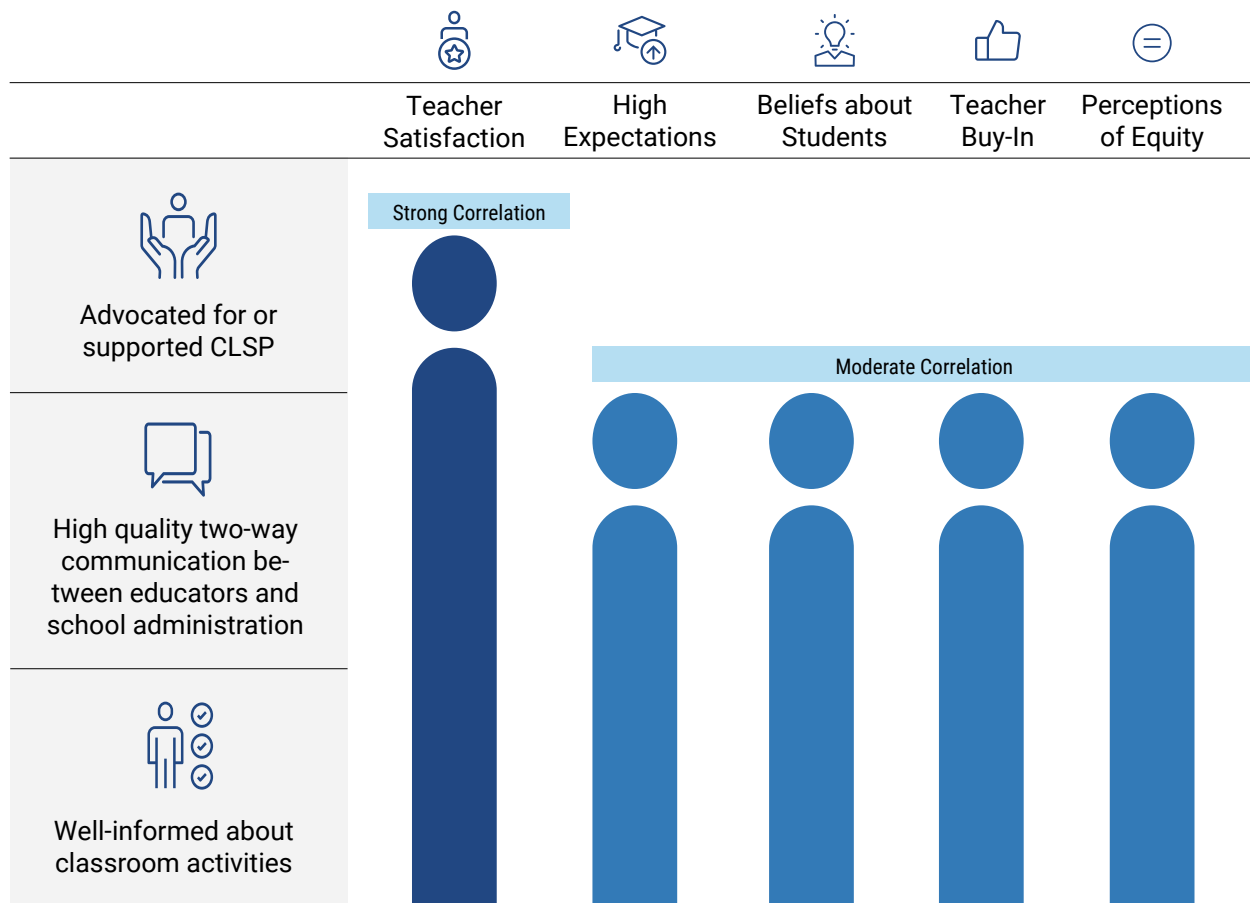
Leadership involvement was found to make a difference in teacher attitudes about the implementation of curriculum, with three specific practices highlighted.

What Did We Learn?

- The following set of specific leadership actions and responsibilities were statistically significant predictors of teachers' satisfaction, buy-in, perceptions of equity, expectations for students, and beliefs about students' capabilities to succeed in learning the curriculum:

  - Administrator support for culturally and linguistically sustaining practices
  - Two-way communication between administration and classroom teachers
  - Administrators being well-informed about activities occurring in teachers' classrooms

- The extent to which leaders were involved in HQIM implementation was a major factor in establishing teacher expectations in the adoption of HQIM and contributing to the quality of implementation. Leadership involvement was representative of whether or not the leaders were knowledgeable of HQIM and, therefore, well-prepared to understand and provide feedback to teachers.

Three Essential Leadership Practices for Influencing Teacher Outcomes: Advocacy for CLSP, High-Quality Communication, and Instructional Awareness

	Teacher Satisfaction	High Expectations	Beliefs about Students	Teacher Buy-In	Perceptions of Equity
Advocated for or supported CLSP	Strong Correlation	Moderate Correlation			
High quality two-way communication between educators and school administration					
Well-informed about classroom activities					

- Teachers valued seeing their leaders present at HQIM-related workshops and professional development (PD) offerings. Leader attendance communicated the importance of implementation and built confidence that the leader understood what was being asked of teachers.

- Involvement contributed to the capacity of leaders in supporting core functions, such as understanding the shifts in pedagogy proposed in the HQIM, participating in and being capable observers in classroom walkthroughs, and being able to interpret and use the data on implementation.

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The more our principals and assistant principals are able to understand how the curriculum is meant to be implemented, the more they can support teachers in that implementation.

−District-Level Administrator

Our assistant superintendent has been supportive throughout the year. And we had a fabulous coach and another out of district math coach. I am very pleased with the support from them all year.

−Lead Teacher

Core Considerations and Challenges

- Leadership plays a key role in setting the conditions for a successful HQIM implementation by ensuring that the school schedule has adequate instructional time for HQIM lessons and units and that teachers have access to the materials they need.

- Many things rest on leadership involvement, and time is a scarce commodity for administrators. The strategic use of an implementation team may help mitigate this limitation by distributing leadership roles for HQIM implementation across multiple people.
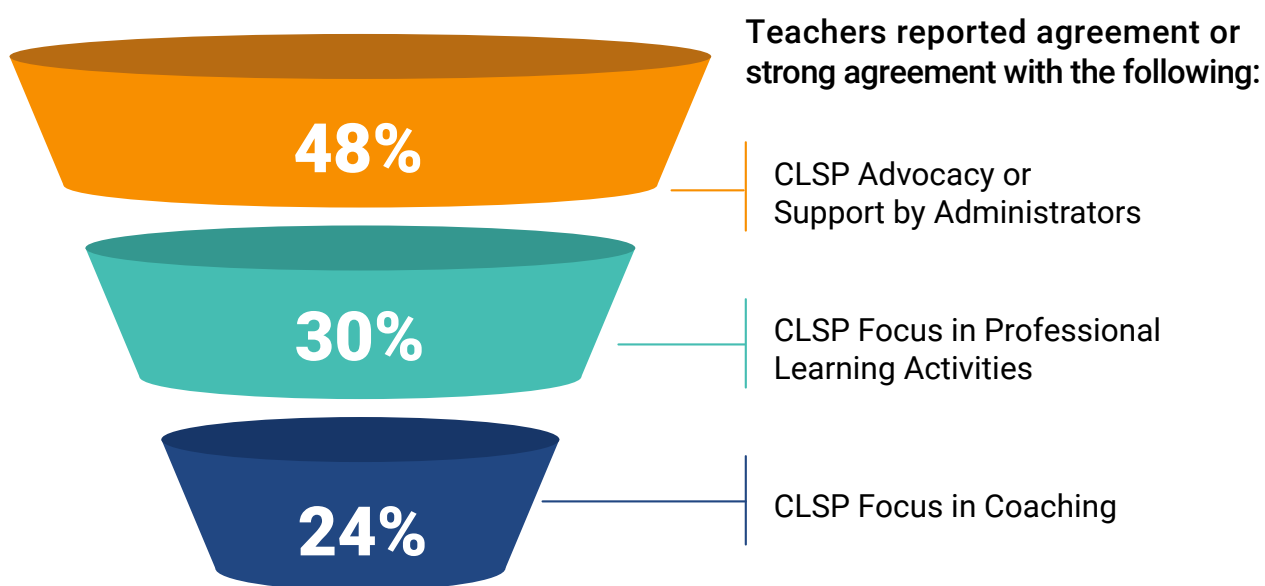
Focus and supports for culturally and linguistically sustaining practices (CLSP) lag behind other areas of HQIM implementation.

What Did We Learn?

- A consistent focus on CLSP as part of HQIM implementation is lacking in three key areas that have the potential to impact instructional practice:
  - Advocacy or support provided by administrators

- Professional development offered
- Coaching provided during the school year

- Teachers who felt supported by leadership to implement the HQIM made progress in integrating their instructional practices with these two key areas of CLSP: high expectations and support and partnership with students and families. The areas lagging behind were, asset-based teaching, cultural competence and community building, and sociopolitical awareness.

- A majority of teachers were not offered CLSP-related PD during implementation. Further, there was lower teacher satisfaction around CLSP-focused PD compared to other aspects of implementation.

- The HQIM, by design, are student-centered curricula, making "high expectations" and "support and partnerships with students" foundational to these curricula. In turn, these two key areas are reflected in the supports offered to implement the HQIM.

- The remaining key areas of CLSP are absent or not explicit in the HQIM. Therefore, they require specific PL opportunities and ongoing support (e.g., through coaching, observations, collaborative planning time) to build teachers' expertise around effectively using CLSP in instruction.

Trickle-Down Effect of Focus on CLSP Falls Short, Underlining the Need to Strengthen this Area

Teachers reported agreement or strong agreement with the following:

48% — CLSP Advocacy or Support by Administrators

30% — CLSP Focus in Professional Learning Activities

24% — CLSP Focus in Coaching

Core Challenges and Considerations

- Take steps to build a shared understanding of CLSP among school staff, in particular how the implemented HQIM addresses CLSP.

- Ensure that any coaching and PD providers' work aligns with the resources and CLSP framework of DESE.

Planful implementation of HQIM that included well-designed PD contributed to improved teacher practice and higher teacher buy-in and satisfaction with the curriculum.

What Did We Learn?

- The majority of teachers reported that their participation in the grant program had a substantial and positive influence on their teaching practice.

A majority of teachers reported the HQIM had "substantial" positive influence on their instruction

11%
Limited/
No Influence

59%
Substantial
Influence

30%
Moderate
Influence

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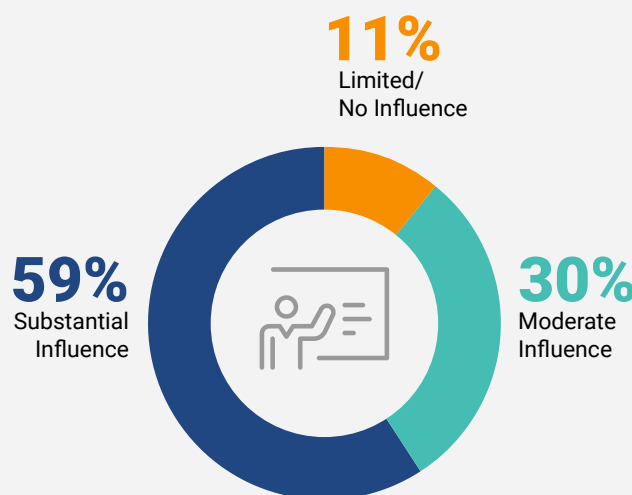
Year 2 is going so much better. The training we received this year and the experience we gained from last year will help us to implement this year. Our schedule allows us to plan collaboratively with our team members daily and with our administrator and building coach biweekly.

—Classroom teacher

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This year's guidance and coaching has really opened up my teaching—the productive struggle, and communication skills of the students have increased greatly. I am so pleased with the guidance and support from our rep and coach this year. Our assistant superintendent worked with *[our technical assistance provider]* to help support us.

—Classroom teacher

- The presence of PD in HQIM implementation was not sufficient to influence teacher attitudes and understanding of the curriculum. The design of the professional development opportunity mattered. PD that was responsive to teachers' needs and aligned to the specific HQIM was significantly more likely to lead to improved teacher outcomes.

- To be effective, PD should be situated in a broader system of professional learning that provides teachers with opportunities to collaborate with peers who are involved in HQIM implementation and with job-embedded coaching. Teachers who worked collaboratively to review student data were more satisfied with HQIM, pointing to the benefits of collaborative learning when instructional decisions around learning were based on student data. Similarly, teachers who observed their peers' classes significantly improved their satisfaction.

Core Considerations and Challenges

- The availability of high-quality PD and coaching varied within schools and districts and not all teachers involved in the grant program received these supports, risking uneven and inequitable implementation.

- Creating and protecting teacher and administrator time for professional learning is essential. Teachers need support and systems to ensure that collaboration time is organized with clear goals and intended outcomes.