



**Executive Summary**

Every teacher in Arkansas needs high-quality standards aligned instructional materials (HQIM) in their classrooms to ensure all students receive rigorous, grade-level learning. Arkansas must ensure every K-12 teacher in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics has a best-in-class curriculum, as well as aligned training and ongoing support.

To do this, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) commits to:

- **Make it easy for districts to adopt HQIM:** Leverage incentive funding, publish district curriculum adoption decisions, and provide ongoing technical assistance to districts to make it easy for every Arkansas school to adopt HQIM across all grade levels in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics.
- **Provide teachers with HQIM training:** Identify an Arkansas marketplace of strong and curriculum-specific professional partners to provide high-quality training aligned to the new materials for every teacher based on evidence and the Science of Reading.
- **Make high-quality literacy and numeracy intervention accessible for all:** Identify barriers, propose specific solutions, and incentivize districts and schools to implement those solutions so all students who persistently struggle receive high-quality literacy and numeracy intervention supports and services tailored to their individual needs.

Overview of LEARNNS Executive Order	1
Background: HQIM	1
Current State	2
<i>Identification of HQIM in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Across K-12</i>	2
<i>Adoption of HQIM in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics in K-12 Classrooms</i>	3
<i>HQIM-Aligned Professional Development for Teachers</i>	5
<i>Literacy and Numeracy Interventions</i>	6
Commitments	7
Conclusion	8

**Overview of LEARNNS Executive Order**

On January 11th, 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders published the Executive Order to prioritize Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety (LEARNNS) in Arkansas. Included in this Executive Order is a call for the Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to establish systems, structures, and processes that incentivize the adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) across the state. This includes high-quality state standards aligned *curriculum* for both academic grade-level instruction for all students and tailored *intervention* programs for struggling students, the foundation for student achievement.

**Background: HQIM**

Teachers rely on instructional materials as the primary instructional tool in their classrooms to ensure every student can access and engage in rigorous, grade-level learning. Research shows that “HQIM matters to student achievement, and



there is emerging evidence to suggest that HQIM has a larger cumulative impact on student achievement than many common school improvement interventions - and at a lower cost.”<sup>1</sup> In Arkansas, curriculum is considered high-quality when it fully aligns to state academic standards—what students are expected to learn and be able to do at the end of each grade level or course—and includes evidence-based strategies and embedded support for teachers. When teachers are provided HQIM, they can use the curriculum to teach the standards and dedicate attention to what matters most: bringing lessons to life and addressing the individual needs of each student.

There is a well-established “playbook” of strategies states use to ensure all teachers have and use HQIM every day. Specifically, states:

- Curate a marketplace of high-quality instructional materials across K-12;
- Incentivize districts to adopt those materials—and stop using unaligned materials—through incentive funding and technical assistance; and
- Ensure every teacher receives training on their specific instructional materials to ensure that lessons are being taught with fidelity.

In 2017, Arkansas passed the Right to Read Act, which laid the groundwork for Arkansas’s early literacy work. In 2019, the revised Right to Read Act directed the ADE to establish an approved list of literacy curriculum aligned to the Science of Reading.<sup>2</sup> To build on this, **in 2021, ADE launched the Arkansas Initiative for Instructional Materials (AIIM) , a statewide initiative to ensure every K-12 teacher has a best-in-class curriculum in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics.** ADE also supports Arkansas educators through training on pedagogical content knowledge necessary to skillfully implement HQIM in their classrooms. To support the AIIM, ADE identified and created an approved list of materials, resources, and HQIM, streamlining the process for districts to select HQIM for their schools.

**Current State**

*Identification of HQIM in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Across K-12*

Over the past several years, ADE, with Arkansas educators, thoroughly vetted and reviewed the ELA/Literacy and Mathematics HQIM for grades K-12 available. The Arkansas educator working group identified the best-in-class HQIM available on the market today, and ADE is bringing those materials to Arkansas educators. Through this, ADE and its partner Arkansas educators play an essential role, saving districts time and effort so that local education leaders can focus on choosing HQIM that meets the needs of their local teachers and students from the best of what is available today.

**NUMBER OF APPROVED HQIM-ALIGNED RESOURCES<sup>3</sup>**

Grades	ELA/Literacy	Mathematics
K-2	20 <sup>4</sup>	15

<sup>1</sup> Research from Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy.

<sup>2</sup> More information on the [Science of Reading](#) can be found in Arkansas’s [Right to Read Act](#).

<sup>3</sup> Based on HQIM aligned resources identified by [EdReports](#) and [ADE](#).

<sup>4</sup> Includes 11 Foundational ELA programs and 9 Comprehension ELA programs.



Grades	ELA/Literacy	Mathematics
3-5	26	19
6-8	32	24
9-12	17	25

*Adoption of HQIM in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics in K-12 Classrooms*

Although identification of HQIM is the first vital step in ensuring educators have access to high quality resources, these materials must reach teachers and students in classrooms across the state. Creating the marketplace is not enough to ensure every educator has and uses HQIM; ADE must incentivize districts and charter schools to adopt the very best materials available for educators and teachers.

ADE has developed a strategy centered around five key priorities to support districts in the selection process of HQIM. Those five priorities include:

- **Communication:** building knowledge through working groups and a network of Arkansas educators and leaders;
- **Signaling quality:** clarifying a state vision for HQIM and providing tools and resources such as the statewide guidebook;
- **Professional learning:** tapping into academic experts, facilitating professional development and working with high-quality vendors including regional specialists;
- **Educator preparation:** clarifying competencies and expectations, and providing professional learning opportunities; and
- **Data and analysis:** using qualitative data and content knowledge of local educator preparation providers and educational stakeholders.

According to an Arkansas study, the majority of Arkansas teachers stated that they have previously spent a significant amount of time creating or researching new curriculum materials to use in their classrooms.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this multi-year partnership between ADE and districts, Arkansas teachers are invested in adopting HQIM, so that moving forward, they can focus their time on classroom instruction based on student needs instead of creating new instructional materials each week.

Across all districts in the state, HQIM adoption has been strongest in elementary grades and in the ELA/Literacy content area. In grades K-2, ADE distinguishes HQIM with two separate strands: language comprehension and foundational skills.<sup>6</sup> K-2 Foundational HQIM access reaches about **93%**, while K-2 Comprehension HQIM access nears **79%**.

**ELA/LITERACY: PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS ADOPTING HQIM PRIMARY AND FOUNDATIONAL CURRICULUM**

<sup>5</sup> ADE’s [Building Pathways to HQIM](#) resource.

<sup>6</sup> To become skilled readers, students need specific instruction in both language comprehension and foundational skills. In Arkansas, districts must purchase curriculum to address both in K-2: the foundational skills strand that teaches students the mechanics of reading, and the language comprehension strand that helps them make meaning of what is decoded.



Grades	Foundational Curriculum	Comprehension Curriculum
K	93%	79%
1	93%	79%
2	93%	79%

In grades 3-5, HQIM access hovers around **84%**, with declining percentages of **79%** in grade 6, and approximately **61%** in grades 7-8. District adoption of ELA HQIM is significantly lower in high school grades 9-12 at around **47%**.

**ELA/LITERACY: PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS ADOPTING HQIM CURRICULUM**

Grade	District Adoption Rate
3	86%
4	85%
5	83%
6	80%
7	61%
8	60%
9	50%
10	47%
11	47%
12	46%

In Mathematics, adoption hits a peak in grade 5 where **three out of four** districts have adopted a HQIM curriculum, but it drops in later grades, including high school where Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry adoption rates are closer to **one out of two districts**.

**MATHEMATICS: PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS ADOPTING HQIM CURRICULUM**

Grade/Subject	District Adoption Rate
K	70%
1	71%

## Incentivizing High-Quality Instructional Materials in Arkansas Classrooms



2	72%
3	72%
4	75%
5	76%
6	72%
7	65%
8	65%
Algebra 1	53%
Algebra 2	47%
Geometry	48%

To incentivize adoption, ADE has committed extensive federal and state funding to help Arkansas districts purchase and implement HQIM and HQIM-connected high-quality professional learning (HQPL).

Content Area	Grant	Description	Amount
ELA/Literacy	Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant	CLSD grant funds support the Successful Outcomes for Arkansas Readers (SOAR) program, funding over 40% of Arkansas districts to purchase high-quality ELA/Literacy curriculum, interventions, and aligned professional learning.	Distributed: \$14M To Be Distributed: \$17M
Mathematics	Walton Family Foundation Grant	The Arkansas Tier 1 Mathematics Curriculum Grant funds 22 districts to purchase high-quality curriculum.	Distributed: \$4.6M

### *HQIM-Aligned Professional Development for Teachers*

To skillfully use HQIM, teachers also need professional development and job-embedded training specific to the new materials.<sup>7</sup> It is simply not enough to purchase HQIM; teachers deserve high-quality training aligned to these new materials so they feel supported and prepared to use these resources effectively in their classrooms. Research shows that curriculum-aligned professional development grounded in concrete shifts in evidence-based instructional strategy is

<sup>7</sup> ADE's [Building Pathways to HQIM](#) resource.

effective for teachers.<sup>8</sup> Arkansas must ensure that every educator receives this critical training so that they can refine their skills and instructional practices, which will significantly improve student learning.

To this end, ADE is piloting supports for districts to provide curriculum-aligned professional development. Through the SOAR grant, approximately 20% of districts are purchasing HQPL specific to teachers' literacy instructional materials. Districts may elect to partner with a third party to provide HQIM-aligned training. ADE has defined the characteristics of high quality professional learning (HQPL) as learning that is **specific, relevant, ongoing, and engaging**. In a recent study, 97% of teachers want "effective, ongoing, and relevant professional learning," and 84% of teachers show "strong interest in professional learning that is tailored to their needs."<sup>9</sup>

### *Literacy and Numeracy Interventions*

Students who continue to not meet grade-level standards in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics may need intervention to accelerate their grade-level learning. Intervention supports should bolster – not replace – grade-level instruction through a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model with progress monitoring that helps teachers tailor instruction to meet students' individual needs. As ADE has advanced its HQIM strategy for curriculum in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics, the agency is exploring opportunities to help districts and schools scale intervention practices that accelerate student learning.

Similar to the progress in HQIM, ADE has identified high-quality intervention programs in ELA/Literacy. For example, ADE has identified 25 high-quality literacy intervention programs for grades K-12<sup>10</sup> and 11 supplemental programs for grades K-5, and provided this information to support local leaders, should local leaders be seeking such programming. To build on this progress, ADE is creating a plan to strengthen secondary literacy, including intervention options for schools. Across grades 7-12, this plan identifies ELA/Literacy high-quality intervention programs and supports, and trains teachers to implement these supports alongside whole class instruction.

In Mathematics, there is an emerging urgency and focus on numeracy and providing math intervention plans for struggling students, particularly for upper elementary and middle school students. On February 27, 2023, the Arkansas legislature passed Senate Bill 294, which calls for expanding access to numeracy intervention in upper elementary and middle school numeracy.

Senate Bill 294 furthers ADE's work of increasing access to intervention plans for students requiring additional support. Specifically, this legislation calls for development of a math intervention plan for students in grades 3-8 not performing at or above grade level on the state assessment. The intervention plan may include:

- High-dosage, targeted math tutoring (three or more sessions a week in a 1:1 or small group setting);
- Specific assignment to a high impact teacher; and
- Written notification to parents describing the student's math intervention plan and progress made throughout the year.

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<sup>8</sup> Research from the [Research Partnership for Professional Learning](#) shows that, on average, professional learning can be directly connected to an increase in teachers' knowledge and significant improvement in their practice, in turn producing higher-quality instruction for students.

<sup>9</sup> ADE's [Building Pathways to HQIM](#) resource.

<sup>10</sup> These 25 intervention programs serve various grade bands, and not every intervention program is appropriate for students in each grade.



By the 2024-2025 school year, schools will report to ADE around the types of math interventions used, as well as the number of students receiving each type of intervention.

ADE has outlined the strategy to ensure that every student has access to high-quality, grade-level curriculum. The next phase is to expand the strategy to address the needs of students who persistently struggle by requiring districts to develop individualized intervention plans that will accelerate learning with research-based support such as high-dosage tutoring. This allows students to use additional supports to access grade-level material.

**Commitments**

ADE continues to build on the Right to Read Act and AIIM initiative to identify and expand adoption of high-quality curriculum in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics, and begins to implement new legislative requirements around intervention support for students in Mathematics.

Current Challenges	Legislative Requirements	Commitment
Not every district has adopted HQIM for curriculum in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics. This is increasingly true for upper grades.	N/A	<b>Make it easy for districts to adopt HQIM:</b> Leverage incentive funding, publish district curriculum adoption decisions, and provide ongoing technical assistance to districts to make it easy for every Arkansas school to adopt HQIM across all grade levels in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics.
Not every teacher has received HQIM-aligned professional development from a strong professional learning partner specific to the new curriculum materials.	N/A	<b>Provide teachers with HQIM training:</b> Identify an Arkansas marketplace of strong and curriculum-specific professional partners to provide high-quality training aligned to the new materials to every teacher.
Not every teacher in upper elementary and middle school (grades 3-8) has an <b>intervention plan</b> to support students who are struggling to master grade-level learning in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics.	Develop a Mathematics intervention plan for students in grades 3-8 not performing at or above grade level on the state assessment.	<b>Make high-quality literacy and numeracy intervention accessible for all:</b> Identify barriers, propose specific solutions and incentivize districts and schools to implement those solutions so that all students who persistently struggle receive high-quality literacy and numeracy intervention supports and services tailored to their individual needs.



### **Conclusion**

Research shows that HQIM is vital for student success, and Arkansas has paved the way for HQIM to be the most effective resource in classroom instruction across the state. Moving forward, it is necessary that these instructional materials are implemented in schools that have not yet adopted HQIM, and that teachers are trained to effectively and skillfully implement these curriculum materials to yield positive outcomes for all students. Additionally, the specific focus on secondary literacy and numeracy will ensure students requiring additional support are able to receive intervention parallel to on-grade level, full group instruction. The three commitments outlined above solidify these vital next steps in HQIM adoption, aligned instruction and intervention for students.