

Proactively Addressing Complexities

As with any new curriculum adoption, you can expect complexities and challenges to arise. In the table below are some of the complexities that you and your teachers will likely face. Proactively acknowledging these complexities with teachers is one way to build a sense that you're all working together to overcome challenges. This can go a long way in helping teachers not feel isolated with their struggles. In addition to highlighting several complexities and noting the reasons why they might occur, we also offer language and actions that you might use to support problem solving for this complexity.

Implementation Complexity # 1
Managing Complex Change: You may face resistance from teachers.
Reasons this may occur
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change is hard and some resistance is normal, especially within schools, which are highly complex systems with many moving parts. • Teachers may not have enough information about the curriculum to see its value. • Teachers have not been included in the process and feel that change is happening <i>to</i> them and not <i>with</i> them. • The master schedule has not been adjusted to accommodate the various components of the curriculum and teachers feel squeezed for time. • Teachers don't have enough time to learn the curriculum's practices and structures or to collaborate with each other.
Leadership strategies to support teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Go slow to go fast." In other words, invest time in the process of change so that resistance doesn't slow it down or derail it. Spend time with staff analyzing student needs, learning about the curriculum, and identifying the ways that it can be a solution to a problem teachers are having. Build a vision and a plan for its implementation and hoped for impact <i>together</i> with teachers. • Communicate with staff transparently about the process of adopting and implementing the curriculum. • Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to learn the structures and practices in the curriculum, as well as time for them to collaborate and learn from each other. • Help teachers see that the curriculum is an opportunity for them to learn and grow as teachers—it is not a script to follow but a tool to use. • Ensure that the master schedule supports implementation of the curriculum. • Consider using a model for managing change, such as the Beckhard and Harris Change Equation (Dissatisfaction x Desirability x Practicality > Resistance to change) or the Knoster Model (Vision + Skills + Incentives + Resources + A Plan = Sustainable Change), which can help you identify the key areas that need your attention when embarking on this work.

Implementation Complexity # 2

Pacing: Teachers may struggle to match the curriculum’s suggested pacing.

Reasons this may occur

- Teachers are learning a new curriculum—effective and efficacious implementation takes time.
- Teachers are hanging on to existing practices that are comfortable and feel important to them and sometimes supplement or substitute these practices into lessons. This “mixing and matching” often slows the pacing.
- The curriculum promotes a higher ratio of student talk to teacher talk. Depending on current practices, teachers may need to work at not talking as much because it can slow pacing.
- There is a built-in intensity to the curriculum that requires students and teachers to work at a pace that may seem initially uncomfortable. Students have lots to do! Our experience tells us that in most cases students and teachers rise, over time, to this level of rigor.
- Teachers may stretch one lesson out over multiple days because they are afraid students did not master content.
- Teachers are not prepared ahead of time with the various materials needed in lessons, units, and modules (e.g., anchor charts, note-catchers)

Leadership strategies to support teachers

- Offer empathy and encouragement to teachers. Saying, “Yes, pacing is an issue. You are learning something new,” invites teachers to more safely engage in the productive struggle needed when they are first starting out.
- Remember that teachers are shifting their instructional practice. This happens to varying degrees and at different rates depending on multiple variables (e.g., a teacher’s length of time teaching; the degree to which the curriculum requires teachers to shift their practice). Some teachers will need to unlearn old practices; as they embrace these changes their pacing will improve and their confidence in the curriculum will grow. Newer teachers may not be as challenged by pacing as veteran teachers as they have less to unlearn.
- Encourage teachers to ask, “When will students talk, and when will I talk?” as they prepare for lessons. This will help them be mindful of not talking too much.
- Ensure that teachers have common planning time to discuss pacing and other complexities of practice that emerge in the implementation of the curriculum. Looking ahead through lessons, units, and modules will also support them with materials management.
- Remind teachers that the support blocks (K-2 *Literacy Labs* and 3-5 *Additional Language and Literacy* block) often offer additional time to work with ideas or texts from the *Module Lessons* and have flexible time built into their schedules which can be used to extend lessons that run over time.
- Help teachers understand that the curriculum spirals through reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards over time—they are repeated in multiple lessons and various components of the curriculum. Reassure teachers that if students do not meet standards the first time around, they will have several more opportunities to do so. For this reason, encourage teachers to not stretch lessons over multiple days.
- Encourage teachers to use a timer.
- Emphasize that students are not expected to understand 100% of all complex texts, including every academic vocabulary word. They are refining their understanding of a topic *over time*; as they build content-related vocabulary and background knowledge, students’ understanding of texts will increase.

Implementation Complexity #3

Classroom Management: Teachers may struggle to adapt to managing an increased activity level in their classroom.

Reasons this may occur

- The curriculum depends on students collaborating and becoming leaders of their own learning. This often means an increase in student activity and talk in the classroom.
- There are multiple student engagement strategies used throughout the curriculum, including protocols. Protocols can appear to be messy and unorganized at first.
- There are natural management issues in active classrooms.

Leadership strategies to support teachers

- Promote active classrooms where students are collaborating, talking, and moving. Celebrate and honor teachers who are courageous in implementing new strategies—it can take multiple tries to feel comfortable.
- When teachers ask, “Can I just skip the protocols?” encourage them to keep at it. Protocols need to be rehearsed and reinforced multiple times; they are worth the effort because during protocols students are challenged, engaged, and empowered to learn more deeply. Protocols ensure equal participation and accountability in learning.
- Encourage teachers trying a new protocol with students to be very clear initially with their expectations by:
 - providing a model and unpacking success criteria with students
 - giving students real time feedback during the protocol, based on success criteria
 - facilitating student reflection and goal setting around success criteria for subsequent uses of the protocol
 - Consider viewing together the video “Back-to-Back and Face-to-Face Protocol” to see how students learn to effectively use a protocol (<https://vimeo.com/164447189>). Debrief the video with teachers and help them plan for how to model, practice, and reinforce protocols in their classrooms.
- Encourage teachers to work together with their students to develop classroom norms. As the activity level increases in the classroom, student behavior will be guided by the norms. More on norms can be found in Chapter 3C: Classroom Culture and Environment.
- Use protocols in staff meetings and professional learning so you and your staff become more accustomed to them.
- For additional reading, see Chapter 3 of this book and the K-5 Appendix: Protocols and Strategies. You may also wish to purchase the EL Education book *Management in the Active Classroom (MAC)* or view its accompanying videos, which can be found at vimeo.com/channels/managementactiveclass.

Implementation Complexity #4

Mindset: Teachers and/or students may describe the curriculum as “too hard”

Reasons this may occur

- Students and teachers are often engaging in new and unfamiliar tasks. Students are reading text that is complex in language, structure, and content. It is hard!
- Students are asked to write for multiple purposes, with higher expectations, and in higher volumes than they may be accustomed to.
- Students may be asked to embrace greater levels of independence, perseverance, and personal ownership of learning than they are used to.
- The curriculum moves slow in places to build deep conceptual understanding and encourage higher-level thinking.

Occasionally teachers may feel that the curriculum is “easier” than what they have done in the past because some components don’t move as fast as what they are accustomed to. In these cases the hard work for teachers may be trusting the process of slowing down and going deeper.

Leadership strategies to support teachers

- Remind teachers that getting used to the rigor of the curriculum will take time. Implementing the curriculum is a process of change that all are engaging in together over the course of the year.
- Remind teachers that as they raise expectations students may find tasks and texts “too hard.” Teachers will need to coach students around the habits of character such as perseverance, collaboration, and productive struggle.
- Provide reassurance to teachers that they will begin to grow more confident and comfortable with each module.
- Talk to teachers about having a growth mindset about themselves as professionals and about their students as learners.
- Unify teachers around a central message that curricular choices are made in order to support students in building stronger literacy skills and more word and world knowledge and, ultimately, for preparing them for the world that awaits them. The curriculum is designed to compel and support students to work together to tackle challenging materials and solve difficult problems.
- Remind teachers that the support blocks (K-2 *Literacy Labs* and 3-5 *Additional Language and Literacy* block) offer students additional time and practice to build skills and content knowledge.
- Highlight that this curriculum is a core curriculum for *all* students. Students should not be given less complex text as a replacement for grade-level text. More on scaffolding texts and task for students is provided in subsequent chapters of this book, and plenty of guidance is offered in the lessons themselves.

Implementation Complexity #5

Grading: Leaders and/or teachers seek guidance on grading student work and reporting on student progress.

Reasons this may occur

- The curriculum does not specifically provide guidance on how to assign grades on individual components of the curriculum (e.g., point value, letter grades)
- Student work is often assessed using standards-aligned rubrics, rather than letter grades (which may be more familiar for many teachers).

Leadership strategies to support teachers

- Provide time for grade level teams to calibrate regarding grading practices.
- Give teachers specific time to examine the Assessment Overview and Resources document (one per module for K-5) and the benchmark assessments (for K-2 *Reading Foundations Skills Block*). These assessments include sample student responses and scoring guidance (e.g. rubrics, checklists). These show teachers clearly what proficiency looks like for a given standard or set of standards at a particular grade level.
- Give teachers time to analyze and calibrate the Writing Rubrics (opinion, informative/explanatory, and narrative) as well as various checklists (for speaking and listening standards, language standards, and some ongoing assessment of reading) that are used in K-5 module lessons.
- Use a process or protocol that promotes looking at student work as a way to assess student progress on standards.
- Remind teachers that every lesson includes “ongoing assessment.” Teachers need not collect or record all this data but there are strong specific suggestions for formative assessment.

- Promote conversations about using learning targets for students to self-assess progress toward standards. (Note: Learning targets are “I can” statements that are an important part of daily lessons. Learning targets are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3B: Understanding the Curriculum’s High-Leverage Instructional Practices.)
- Ensure that time is spent creating a common vision for how student achievement is measured. See the EL Education Dimensions of Achievement in Figure 1.2.