

Defining Curriculum-Based Professional Learning: A Pocket Guide

Teacher professional learning (PL) is most effective when the field shares a common language, allowing for consistent program design, implementation, and evaluation. RPPL collaborated with the nation's leading teacher PL organizations and researchers to develop "[Defining Curriculum-Based Professional Learning](#)," a paper that provides a clear definition of CBPL and a shared vocabulary for describing what effective CBPL looks like. Use this pocket guide as a glossary to align on key terms before designing PL or as a resource to strengthen your programs.

High-Quality Professional Learning (HQPL):

Provides educators with evidence-based and relevant learning opportunities that directly improve teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM):

Are vetted and organized around a clear scope and sequence that includes specific learning goals and sets of standards-aligned, detailed lessons and unit plans that provide teachers with clear guidance and content to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

Curriculum-Based Professional Learning (CBPL):

Is HQPL that supports the implementation and sustained use of specific HQIM to ensure that teachers can effectively use these materials in their classrooms.

CBPL is HQPL that is anchored to HQIM.

On the following pages, we define the 10 qualities specific to CBPL that are critical to creating the types of learning opportunities that teachers and students deserve.

Formats and Structures

CBPL is Collaborative

By “collaborative,” we mean:

Intentionally structured non-evaluative processes where teachers work together to engage in shared cross-teacher learning grounded in HQIM.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
- Collaborative Learning
- Communities of Practice
- Peer Observation and Feedback Conversations
- Collaborative Learning Teams

CBPL is Supported by Instructional Coaches

By “instructional coaching,” we mean:

Personalized, job-embedded support, responsive to teachers’ individual needs and instructional contexts, that provides teachers with ongoing guidance, modeling, and feedback on using HQIM and instructional approaches effectively.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- 1:1 Coaching
- Collaborative Coaching
- Peer Coaching

CBPL is Intensive and Sustained

By “intensive and sustained,” we mean:

Providing recurring support that includes practice, implementation, and reflection mechanisms to guide deep instructional shifts alongside flexible, shorter opportunities tailored to immediate and more contextual needs.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Sustained and Ongoing PL
- Career-Long Learning
- Continuous Improvement Programs
- Continuous Professional Development
- Extended Learning Opportunities
- Long-Term Professional Learning
- Persistent Development

💡 Check Your Terms:

Across the field, we use a variety of terms to describe similar concepts. Use this guide to understand how overlapping terms and concepts align with the provided definitions.

Characteristics and Content

CBPL Supports Teachers in Meeting Individual Student Needs

By “attends to student and teacher individual needs,” we mean:

PL promotes high expectations for all learners, supports teachers in differentiating instruction and effectively using HQIM to meet the needs of all students intentionally, regardless of background, and creates classroom environments where all students can learn. PL is designed to be accessible to and inclusive of a broad range of teacher learning needs.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Inclusive Practices
- Design for Belonging

CBPL is Grounded in Practice

By “grounded in practice,” we mean:

CBPL should be built around teachers’ day-to-day work, offering systems, tools, and HQIM that draw on practice, can be incorporated into classrooms, and are communicated in ways that allow teachers to learn through direct application and receive feedback to refine their practice.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Experiential Learning
- Hands-On Learning
- Inquiry-Based Learning
- Interactive Learning
- Practice-Based Learning
- Transformative Learning
- Constructivist Design

Implementation

CBPL is Staged Over Time

By “staged over time,” we mean:

Building and shifting across distinct implementation phases to take into account teachers’ evolving needs as they use and deepen their familiarity with new materials.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Exploration
- Launch
- Unit Internalization
- Adaptation
- System Design

CBPL Balances Fidelity and Adaptation

By “fidelity and adaptation,” we mean:

A balanced approach to instructional decision-making where teachers adhere to the core components and instructional strategies of their curriculum with integrity while making necessary adaptations to meet the diverse needs of their students.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Modifications
- Adaptations
- Tailoring
- Implementation with Integrity

Supporting Conditions

CBPL is Supported by Measurement for Improvement and Impact

By “measurement for improvement and impact,” we mean:

CBPL programs should focus on using specific data (e.g., impacts on teacher learning, coaching success, student experience and academic outcomes) grounded in rigorous criteria and evidence-based measures to inform improvement and impact. These data should assess both immediate and long-term outcomes tied to professional growth, curriculum implementation, and teacher and student learning.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Data-Informed Decision Making
- Evidence-Based Decision Making
- Data Literacy
- Evidence-Guided Practice

CBPL is Driven by Effective Leadership

By “effective leadership,” we mean:

The active engagement of leaders at both school and district levels in setting a clear PL strategy, creating a coherent approach aligned with school goals and practices, and providing ongoing support to teachers throughout the implementation process.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Leadership
- System Leaders
- System Transformation
- School Leaders
- Adaptive Leadership
- Change Management
- Support for Leaders

CBPL is Anchored in a Shared Instructional Vision

By “anchored in a shared instructional vision,” we mean:

Alignment of PL with school and district curriculum, goals, policies, and practices to create a cohesive approach to high-quality instruction and outcomes for all students.

💡 Overlapping Terms and Concepts

- Coherence
- Standards-Based Alignment
- Coherent Professional Learning
- Strategic Alignment
- Goal-Driven Alignment
- Values Aligned
- School Leaders