Field Guide: Designing Effective Test Runs

Adapted from *Lessons from the Field: Best Practices for Piloting Curriculum*, EdReports

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE TEST RUN?

Key Takeaway

Effective test runs are **intentional opportunities to gather evidence that cannot be obtained by reviewing instructional materials alone.** Before launching a test run, districts should establish a clear purpose, define the evidence they want to collect, and create structures that support consistent trials and evidence collection.

FIVE RESEARCH-BASED PRINCIPLES

1 Begin with a Clear Purpose

A test run should answer specific questions that cannot be answered through a materials review alone.

Ask:

- What do we hope to learn?
- How will the evidence inform our decision?
- What questions should the test run answer?

Brief for *Lessons from the Field: Best Practices for Piloting Curriculum*, EdReports
https://cdn.edreports.org/media/2021/09/Pilot_Recommendations-v1.pdf

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2 Collect Evidence Intentionally

Participants need common review criteria and a shared evidence collection tool.

Evidence should be gathered around predetermined questions, not personal preference.

Examples include:

- Teacher usability
- Student experience
- Lesson feasibility
- Instructional moves
- Implementation supports

3 Design the Test Run Carefully

A meaningful test run requires thoughtful planning.

Effective districts:

- Choose representative lessons.
- Ensure teachers experience all instructional programs being considered for their grade-level or course.
- Ensure a representative body of teachers and students are involved.
- Prepare teachers before implementation.

4 Support Participants Throughout the Process

Districts should provide:

- Training before the test run.
- Ongoing check-ins.
- Opportunities to calibrate evidence collection.
- A clear point of contact for questions.

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5 Analyze Evidence Thoughtfully

Evidence should be examined collectively and interpreted in light of district priorities.

The goal is not simply to identify a preferred program but to understand:

- What the evidence suggests
- What remains uncertain
- What implementation implications emerge

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

The EdReports guidance also highlights several practices that can weaken a test run:

- **X** Selecting participants with strong biases toward one program
- **X** Using the test run primarily to build buy-in rather than gather evidence
- **X** Judging a program solely by how difficult it is for teachers to implement
- **X** Using student achievement data as the primary measure of success instead of focusing on student learning experiences and implementation evidence

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