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# Implementing a High-Quality Early Learning Curriculum: Lessons from Maine

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## Key Lessons Learned

- 1 Leverage state and local readiness for change.
- 2 Adapting curricula to the local context can strengthen implementation.
- 3 Piloting a curriculum first can provide useful feedback before a broader rollout.
- 4 An opt-in, incremental approach can facilitate buy-in and reduce overwhelm.
- 5 Flexible approaches can result in uneven implementation.
- 6 Provide ongoing professional development, prioritize teacher collaboration, and support administrators to facilitate and sustain implementation.
- 7 Plan for common challenges, such as variability in teacher needs, logistical challenges, and insufficient professional development support.
- 8 Anticipate the need for long-term systems support and adaptation.

# Introduction

High-quality, coherent early learning experiences are foundational to children’s optimal learning and development. Yet, in the U.S., even as preschool availability has increased, many children lack access to high-quality learning experiences.<sup>1</sup> Further, children’s Kindergarten through 2nd grade experiences are rarely designed to build on their Pre-K experiences, despite evidence supporting the benefits of curricular alignment across Pre-K through 2nd grade (hereafter: P-2).<sup>2</sup> In particular, Kindergarten to 2nd grade classrooms too often fail to support how young children learn best, through playful, intentional activities.<sup>3</sup>

Some newer research-based, aligned P-2 curricula aim to turn this tide. These curricula follow a scope and sequence; incorporate playful learning; emphasize a balance of whole-group instruction, center-based activities, and small group instruction; encourage child agency; and follow a central question or theme across classroom activities. P-2 alignment also ensures continuity in children’s learning and development across the early grades. Despite their promise, these curricula are not yet widely used.

In our view, the limited scale-up of research-based, aligned P-2 curricula is partially due to a lack of research on *how* these curricula can be implemented at large scale.<sup>4</sup> To help fill this gap, our team, with support from the Gates Foundation, is releasing a series of briefs focused on the experiences of localities that have implemented evidence-based P-2 curricula. In this brief, we summarize Maine’s implementation story in scaling up a new curriculum, *For ME*, in P-2 classrooms. To date, about 10% of local



School Administrative Units (SAUs)<sup>5</sup> implement *For ME* in at least one classroom and over 1,100 educators, administrators, and other staff in the state have been trained in the curriculum.

Drawing on classroom observations and interviews with state and local practitioners, we describe lessons learned in Maine. In doing so, we aim to support other localities considering a pivot to better match leading guidance in the field.

## Maine Early Learning Background

Through a state funding formula, Maine offers a voluntary, public Pre-K program for 4-year-olds, referred to as the Public Preschool Program (PPP). The program began in 1983 and has grown over time, with 10% of 4-year-olds served in 2002, 34% in 2013, and 47% in 2024.<sup>6</sup> Maine’s PPP is a mixed-delivery program, with spaces offered through local SAUs in public school classrooms, partner community-based child care centers, or Head Start agencies.<sup>7</sup> PPP is available to all students regardless of family income and operates a minimum of two hours per day, as determined by local SAUs.<sup>8</sup> The decision to start or expand Pre-K offerings is decided by each SAU. As of the 2024-25 school year, around 91% of SAUs provide a public Pre-K option for 4-year-



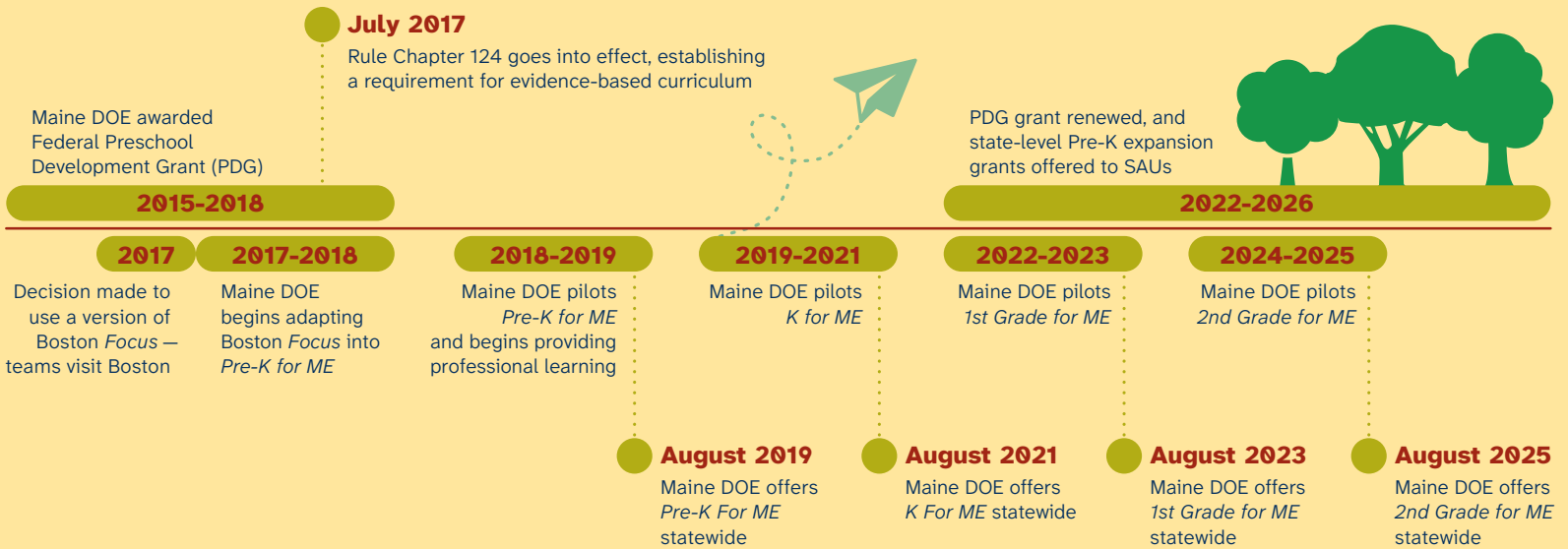
olds. However, only around half of these SAUs have the capacity to serve all eligible four-year-olds in their catchment area.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, Maine’s PPP has strong structural quality. It meets or exceeds nine out of ten of the field’s structural quality benchmarks as defined by National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).<sup>10</sup> For example, lead teachers must hold at least a Bachelor’s degree and have specialized training in early childhood education. Class sizes and staff-to-child ratios are below the recommended levels in the field (the maximum class size in Maine is 16, with a 1:8 staff to child ratio, versus a field-recommended class size of 20 or lower and a 1:10 staff-to-child ratio). PPP teachers in public school settings (but not those in community-based organizations) are compensated at parity with K-2 teachers. However, Maine’s PPP does not meet the NIEER benchmark for professional development, as it requires fewer hours and does not provide coaching.<sup>11</sup>

For elementary grades in Maine, structural quality is similarly strong. In comparison to other states, Maine ranks 16th overall in K-12 spending.<sup>12</sup> Class sizes in the elementary years average around 14 students,<sup>13</sup> with a maximum cap of 25.<sup>14</sup> Elementary certification in Maine requires

that teachers earn at least a Bachelor’s degree, including completion of additional coursework in meeting diverse learner needs.<sup>15</sup> Ongoing professional learning is required to renew professional teaching certificates every five years.<sup>16</sup> On average, elementary and secondary teachers during the 2023-2024 school year earned \$62,570, ranking Maine 30th in the nation for teacher pay.<sup>17</sup> Although Kindergarten is not required for all children in Maine, SAUs must offer at least a half-day Kindergarten program.<sup>18</sup>

According to a recent University of Michigan report, Maine is one of 28 states where the governor’s educational control is categorized as “high.”<sup>19</sup> Maine is one of 14 states where the governor appoints both the State Board of Education and the Chief State School Officer (CSSO), which Maine refers to as the Commissioner of Education. The University of Michigan report suggests that greater gubernatorial control might support alignment of educational priorities and student achievement across the state. In Maine, Pre-K education is overseen by Department of Education (DOE) under the purview of the Early Learning Team. (See Appendix B Figure 1 for additional details on Maine’s educational governance structure.) By housing Pre-K within the Department of Education (as opposed to Pre-K residing in a separate state department, such as the health department, as is the case in nearly half of the states across the U.S.),<sup>20</sup> there is potentially greater opportunity for alignment across grades.<sup>21</sup> Despite this potential, Maine’s history of strong local control puts curricular choice in the hands of local administrators, forcing state administrators to think creatively about how to convince localities to voluntarily choose high-quality curricula that meets legislative requirements.



# Maine Curriculum Transition Overview

In 2018, Maine began piloting *Pre-K for ME* in select Pre-K classrooms across the state. Pilots and curriculum launches for subsequent grades, *K for ME*, *1st Grade for ME*, and *2nd Grade for ME*, occurred in later years. (See timeline for further details on curriculum implementation.) The *For ME* curriculum was adapted from the *Focus on Early Learning (Focus)* curriculum, an open-source, evidence-based, aligned P-2 curriculum developed by the Boston Public Schools Department of Early Childhood.<sup>22</sup> *Focus* was designed to be culturally responsive and match how young children learn best with hands-on engaging activities. It has a scope and sequence, and it includes rich vocabulary and content following an area of inquiry that builds across the early grades.<sup>23</sup> As we detail later in this brief, Maine’s Department of Education (DOE) provided support for implementation of *For ME* via a pilot program for initial adopters, summer curriculum training, and monthly professional learning communities (PLCs).

Because *For ME* is an open-source curriculum and Maine did not mandate it across the state, Maine DOE does not have exact numbers for how widespread uptake of *For ME* is. According to most recent estimates, in 2022 there were around 5,500 elementary (K to 6th grade) teachers<sup>24</sup> and 326 Pre-K teachers in the state.<sup>25</sup> The Maine DOE recorded that 217 educators participated in the state’s summer *For ME* curriculum training in 2025 with 1,136 total educators, instructional coaches, administrators, and other staff participating in training on *For ME* over the past 8 years.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Maine estimates that 25-30 SAUs (out of the 211 publicly funded SAUs serving P-2 in Maine<sup>27</sup>) have received some training on the curriculum and may currently have at least one grade or classroom implementing it.<sup>28</sup> Within the SAUs implementing *For ME*, a majority use *Pre-K for ME*, suggesting that the state’s curricular transition is most prominent in Pre-K classrooms.<sup>29</sup>



# Sample Daily Schedule for Pre-K

## Unit 6: Things that Grow<sup>30</sup>

### Week 4, Day 2



#### Read Aloud<sup>31</sup>

Read 2: The teacher fully reads through the book for a second time focusing on extending student vocabulary, digging deeper into understanding plot components, and clarifying questions.



#### Introduce New Centers

The teacher chooses 1 or 2 new centers to introduce today.



#### Free Choice Centers

Students freely choose which centers they would like to work in today. All centers tie back to the read alouds for the week and extend learning. Centers include: Art Studio, Easel, Writing and Drawing, Library and Listening, Dramatization, Blocks, Discovery Table, Puzzles and Manipulatives, and Technology.

#### Optional Outdoor Learning Extension (in place of Free Choice Centers)

Students continue to expand their understanding of the unit by working in small groups and engaging in an outdoor learning component, which for this week focuses on a tree's life cycle.



#### Thinking and Feedback

1-2 students share something from their thematic work in the classroom or during centers. Their classmates offer suggestions on what to do next, following a protocol (i.e., looking, noticing, listening, wondering, suggesting, and inspiring).



#### SWPL (Songs, Word Play, and Letters)

The teacher leads students in whole group activities to address foundational literacy skills through songs, word play, and letter activities.



#### Maine-Developed Pre-K Math<sup>32</sup>

Math is also thematic and continues to build understanding of how things grow. During the whole group lesson, the teacher reads a story about measurement.



#### Small groups

The teacher meets with small groups as needed to focus on literacy, math, or other areas of need.

##### Literacy Small Group

Lessons for this week focus on rhyming games, story sequencing, and writing letters to new Pre-K students.

##### Math Small Group

Students create collages of different things that grow and play a game to practice counting objects.

##### Independent Teacher Choice

The teacher decides between a center of their choice or the outdoor learning small group option from the curriculum, in which students design gardens using the shapes they have learned.



#### Story Acting

Students act out the child stories gathered by the teacher at the beginning of the day.

Note: Only curriculum components are shown. Transitions, lunch, snack, bathroom, recess/gross motor, etc are not shown.



# Sample Daily Schedule for 1st Grade

## Unit 3: Resources in Our Communities<sup>33</sup>

### Week 2 Day 3



#### Storytelling/Acting<sup>34</sup>

Adults and children tell, write, and act out personal stories to support community building and social emotional development.



#### Vocabulary & Language

Students learn and play with specific features of the six new vocabulary words and language components that were introduced on days 1 and 2 using examples from texts they are reading.



#### Text Talk

Read 1: The teacher fully reads the book, engaging students in conversations to highlight the main events and build content knowledge on key themes for the unit, focused on needs versus wants. Text talks usually use a book and once or twice a week use another format (i.e., audio clip, video, quote, photograph, article).



#### Stations

Stations are unit-aligned and first start with a Shared Reading (for example, a song on giving thanks, in which children practice phonological awareness skills). Students then transition into Reading, Listening and Speaking, Vocabulary, Science Literacy, and Word Work stations, participating in activities to build language and literacy through small groups and conversation.



#### Studios<sup>35</sup>

Students freely choose Studios (Art, Building, Drama, Library, Math, Science and Engineering, Writing and Drawing). In their chosen studio, they will dig deeply into the unit's big ideas, with the goal of making new discoveries and developing additional questions. This week's studios focus on how "people make exchanges to obtain goods and services they need and want."

##### Thinking and Feedback

Thinking and Feedback is integrated once per week into studios for children to exchange ideas on each other's work.



#### Science and Engineering<sup>36</sup>

As a whole group, the teacher goes through explicit science instruction connected to the work in Stations and Studios. Students identify how plants grow and change by observing their own planted seeds.



#### Writing

Students write for specific audiences in the context of the unit. As a whole group, they deconstruct a poem written by the teacher or another author and focusing on rhyming. They then write their own poems using what they learned.



#### Math

Teachers use a school- or district-required math curriculum to support foundational math skills (this is not a component that Maine developed for K-2). Content and learning formats are specific to the chosen math curriculum.



#### Phonics Program Foundations or similar program

Teachers follow the lesson plans in the *Foundations* curriculum to support student phonological awareness.

Note: Only curriculum components are shown. Transitions, lunch, snack, bathroom, recess/gross motor, etc are not shown.

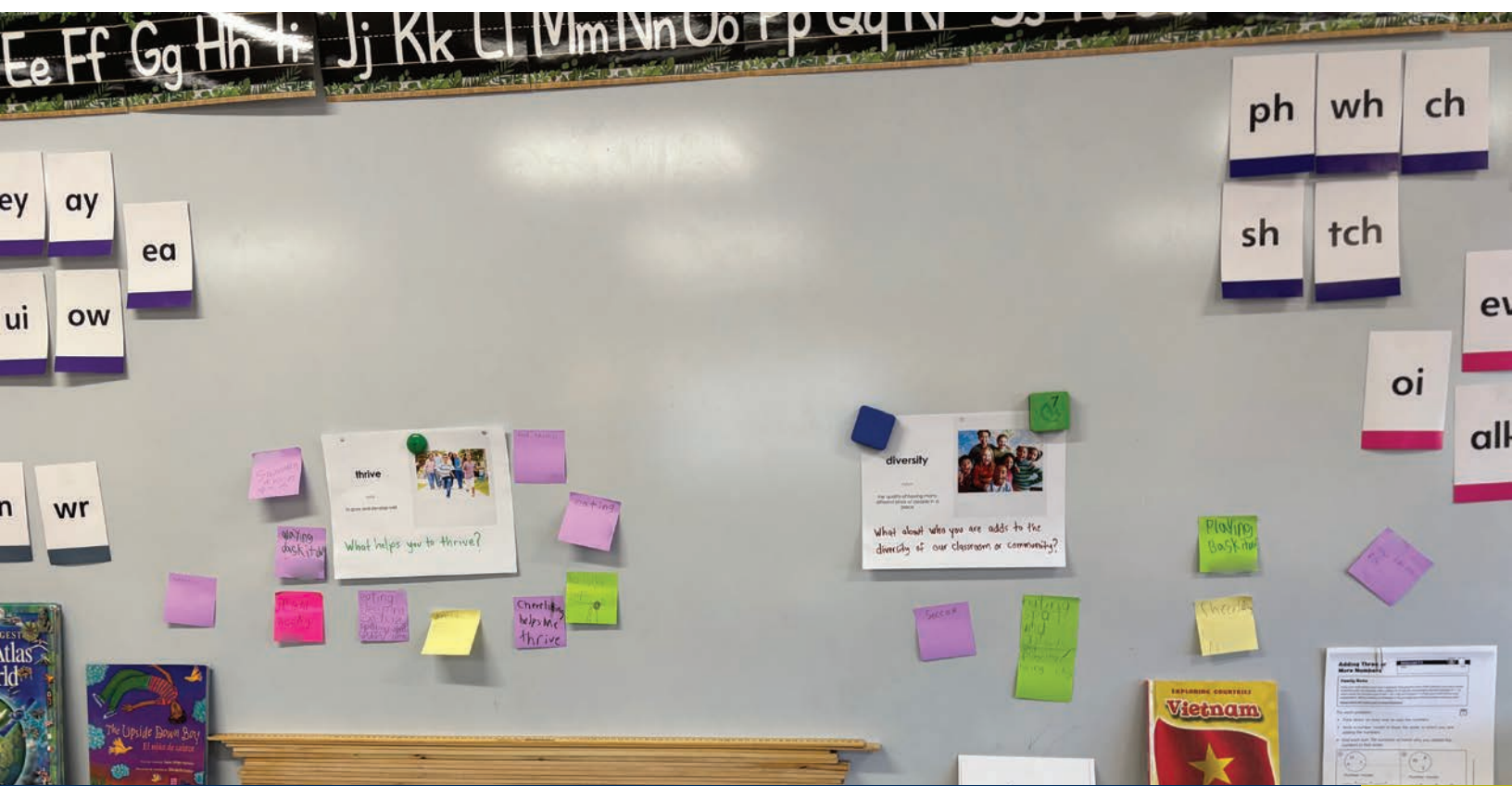
# Methods

This brief is focused on public elementary schools in Maine that implement the *For ME* curriculum in one or more grades across P-2. The dataset includes 20 interviews with P-2 teachers, special educators, school administrators, state administrators from the Maine DOE's Early Learning Team, and an external curriculum consultant. (See Appendix B Table B1 for additional details about interviewees.) Prior to meeting with interview participants, we invited them to complete a brief online survey about their educational attainment, teaching experience, age, race/ethnicity, languages spoken. We also asked them to rank the most helpful and unhelpful supports when implementing the *For ME* curriculum. (See Appendix B Table B2 for demographics of survey respondents.) Interviews took place in person and online from April-October 2025. Most interviews with P-2 teachers were preceded by classroom observations. We

analyzed interview data using a thematic coding approach, with interrater reliability checks to ensure consistency and validity.

To understand implementation in this context, we collaborated with Maine DOE to purposefully select four schools in three SAUs with the aim of sampling schools in different geographic settings (e.g., rural and urban). One SAU was located outside a large city, one in a town, and one in a rural area. We also selected schools to understand educators' experiences at various points in implementation. As shown in Table 1, implementation timelines varied across schools and, in some cases, across grades or classrooms within schools. (See Appendix B Table B3 for additional details on SAUs and schools in the sample.)

Importantly, these data do not allow for generalizable claims across all schools and classrooms in the state. More methodological details are included in Appendix A.



**Table 1. Implementation timelines**

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT (SAU) AND SCHOOL	GRADE	USING FOR ME IN 2024-2025	FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION BY GRADE	FULL OR PARTIAL USE OF FOR ME WITHIN A GIVEN GRADE	ADOPTION DECISION (OPT-IN OR REQUIRED)
SAU A (School 1)	Pre-K	Yes	2019-2020	Full	Teacher opt-in initially, now required by school
	Kindergarten	Yes	2021-2022	Full	Teacher opt-in initially, now required by school
	1st Grade	Yes	2024-2025	Full	Required by school
	2nd Grade	Yes	2024-2025	Full	Required by school
SAU B (School 2)	Pre-K	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Kindergarten	Yes	2023-2024	Full	Teacher opt-in
	1st Grade	Yes	2024-2025	Full	Teacher opt-in
	2nd Grade	Yes	2024-2025	Partial	Teacher opt-in
SAU C (School 3)	Pre-K	Yes	2020-2021	Full	Required by district
	Kindergarten	Yes	2020-2021	Full	Teacher opt-in
	1st Grade	Yes	2023-2024	Full	Teacher opt-in
	2nd Grade	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
SAU C (School 4)	Pre-K	Yes	*	*	Required by district
	Kindergarten	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
	1st Grade	Yes	2024-2025	Partial	Teacher opt-in
	2nd Grade	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: \* indicates limited information on implementation.

## Lessons Learned

Key findings from our research are presented below as lessons learned. We begin by describing how state-level administrators at the Maine Department of Education and school-level administrators leveraged a growing desire for curricular change. We then detail how these administrators and teachers built buy-in for opting in to implementing the curriculum, as well as the supports necessary for implementation. Finally, we close by addressing areas of sustainability and growth for Maine in an ever-changing education landscape.

## Leverage state and local readiness for change.

Policy windows create opportunity for change.<sup>37</sup> In Maine, momentum for curricular change came from new legislation that placed constraints on districts’ choices for Pre-K curricula. In 2015, the Maine state legislature adopted Rule Chapter 124, which required that all state-funded Pre-K programs adopt evidence-based curricula tied to the state’s Early Learning and Development Standards by 2017.<sup>38</sup>

The Early Learning Team at Maine DOE wanted to support districts in meeting this new requirement by offering a Maine-specific option at low cost, since many schools could not afford to purchase

a new commercial curriculum. In 2017, Maine’s Early Learning Team reached out to other states and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to identify potential curricula that met state criteria that emphasized key tenets of Maine DOE’s approach (e.g. whole child focus, interdisciplinary, and play-based), and could be implemented at minimal cost. After an initial visit to the Boston Public Schools, a Maine state-level administrator explained how *Focus*, Boston’s evidence-based and open-source curriculum, inspired the state team to create *For ME*: “it [*Focus*] gave us a chance to look at something that would ultimately be open source and maybe would lead to high quality at a reduced cost for some of our programs in the state. So it was sort of that connection that had been made with Boston that got us going.” Important in the

Maine context as well, many Pre-K classrooms, including Head Start, had experience and success using the *Opening the World of Learning (OWL)* curriculum, which was the starting point for developing *Focus*.

Educator demand for curricular change further facilitated the *For ME* transition. Most interviewees (11 out of 17, 65%) expressed feeling that the curricula they were using in the early grades prior to *For ME* was lacking. These teachers shared that past curricula were not developmentally appropriate or lacked authentic activities for students. According to one Kindergarten teacher, “I’m a big advocate of learning through play. That was another piece we really like [about *For ME*] because we didn’t really have that in Kindergarten before. We thought that [*For ME*] was more age appropriate and more hands-on [than] some of the things we were doing.” Another teacher described how the curricula he used prior to *For ME* “always felt very, I don’t know, disconnected. Not authentic to the students... and the kids didn’t really seem to enjoy it.”

In addition to concerns about developmental appropriateness and student engagement, momentum was shifting nationally from a “balanced literacy” approach towards greater emphasis on the “science of reading” in the early grades. A national conversation about reading instruction had been sparked by Emily Hanford’s reporting on early reading instruction, which had circulated widely among Maine parents.<sup>39</sup> One administrator at a school that had previously adopted a “balanced literacy” approach through the use of Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study described how she was “inundated with parent phone calls, and they wanted to meet. Like what are



*you going to do about this?”* Parental advocacy sparked this principal to conduct an internal review of the school’s literacy curricula, leading to further support for curricular change that aligned with the “science of reading.” Ultimately, state policy change, educator interest, and parent demand dovetailed together to create an opening for *For ME*.

## **Adapt the curriculum to the local context.**

Research suggests young children tend to be more engaged when they can see themselves and their world reflected in classroom materials and activities.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, after selecting Boston’s *Focus*, the Maine Early Learning team sought to adapt it specifically for Maine. In 2017, the Maine DOE contracted with a curriculum consultant who had previously worked as a *Focus* curriculum coach for Boston Public Schools. The Maine DOE formed an initial adaptation committee with the *Focus* curriculum consultant and Maine-based curriculum specialists, Head Start teachers, and public school teachers. The committee was charged with familiarizing themselves with the *Focus* curriculum (starting first with Pre-K only) and identifying texts and concepts that needed to be reframed for the Maine context.

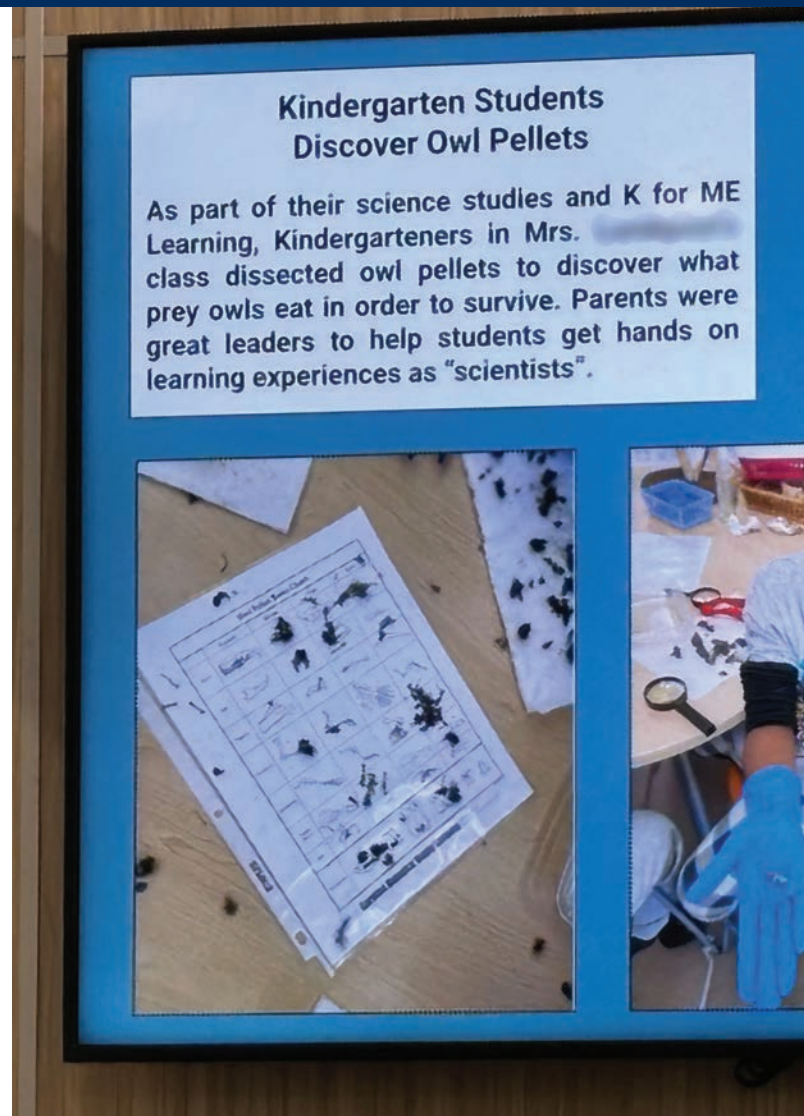
To adapt Boston’s *Focus*, the DOE made changes to curricular content and schedules to better represent children and families in Maine. (See Appendix B Table B3 for school demographics.) Namely, the team made adjustments to some activities embedded in *Focus* that were designed for Boston’s urban environment, which did not reflect the reality of Maine’s more rural population. Additionally, given that Maine’s geography affords ample opportunities for nature-based learning, the DOE integrated outdoor learning into various

components and created additional optional outdoor learning extension lessons. (These nature-based adaptations for Pre-K are complete, and they are continuing this work for K-2.) Instead of using the math curriculum *Building Blocks* as Boston Pre-K does, the Maine DOE created a Maine-specific math curriculum for Pre-K. This curriculum integrated the math content of the Maine Early Learning and Development Standards (MELDS) developmental pathways (mathematical practices, counting & cardinality, operations and algebraic thinking, geometry, and measurement and data) into unit goals and objectives, ensuring that each unit contained MELDS indicators from all pathways and emphasized learning math through play. It also incorporated nature when possible and ensured structural and thematic alignment with the rest of the curriculum. Finally, since not all Pre-K programs in Maine are full-day, the DOE developed sample schedules to accommodate multiple structures (i.e., 2.5 hours, 3 hours, 3.5 hours, and 5.5 hours).



While many of these initial adaptations came from the state-led committee, Maine's DOE solicited ongoing feedback from teachers and incorporated that feedback into the curriculum. For example, a school principal shared, *"We're looking to incorporate more Wabanaki [Indigenous inhabitants of Maine] studies because that's such an important part of our Maine social studies curriculum, and there hasn't been a lot of that in that."* School feedback resulted in the state working with a Wabanaki specialist to look for opportunities to integrate Wabanaki concepts and instructional resources into the units, including in outdoor learning activities and supplemental text lists (work that is ongoing). Additionally, one second grade teacher described how he felt empowered to adapt *For ME* further to the local context so as to build student interest and connections: *"we're looking at immigration maps of Boston... But now it's [the curriculum is] for Maine. So what we'll do next is...[look] at immigration maps of Portland. So there's a huge immigrant population. So it's like the connection of, we saw Boston and what did we talk about? Yes, okay, now in Portland, what do you think? Is there an immigrant population in Portland? And they know, they're like, yes. Okay, so who is it? So then it's tied in more closely to where they live and what that means. I love that."*

Across interviews, the enthusiastic uptake of *For ME* stemmed in part from careful work by the Maine DOE in consultation with teachers to ensure the curriculum was relevant to the local context.



# An afternoon in a *2nd Grade for ME* classroom

A classroom of 2nd graders gathers cross-legged on a colorful rug, bodies leaning in as they wait to be dismissed for small-group work time, also known as Studios. Mr. Bell sits in a small wooden chair on the rug and reminds students of the big question of the week, “How are people connected in and across communities?” This lesson is part of a broader unit called Connecting Places, Connecting People, in which students learn about how people and places shape communities. A few students shift their gaze from the teacher to the big papers around the room, where they have been documenting their thoughts to the question “what does home mean?” Student responses are handwritten in various colors and sizes, emphasizing the importance of safety and community.

Mr. Bell reminds students that, in the Art Studio (which for this week is also combined with the Writing & Storytelling Studio), they will continue working on replicas of places that help connect members of their community. He asks students about their plans for Studio time and how they are connecting the idea of community to their projects. Roger raises his hand and says, “My family will be at my playground.” Mr. Bell nods and echoes, “Roger’s family is going to be at his playground,” As Mr. Bell explains how students should expand their replicas to include spaces where community members can connect, there is a visible shift in the energy in the room. Two children sitting closest to the teacher start

moving from their cross-legged position to kneeling. As the teacher dismisses them, 20 children quickly and quietly transition from the rug to five different studios around the room.

At the combined Art and Writing & Storytelling Studio, five students eagerly begin working on their community projects around a small rectangular table. Molly tears open a pack of small black pompoms and says, “I’m going to use the pompoms to make a soft chair in my house.” She carefully dabs glue on each one and places them on a piece of furniture in her house. Georgia takes a piece of cardboard out of the recycling bin and explains that she wants to use it to build a bridge, along with a forest that includes a fallen tree. She talks about going to this bridge with her family. Mr Bell walks by and asks if the bridge connects two different neighborhoods in Maine as Georgia starts to construct her bridge. Meanwhile, Jack uses blocks to make a dam, where he says a friend will visit, and then he takes a photo with the iPad.

Behind the Studio table, a large white poster board hangs on the wall displaying the question, “What are you curious about in our community?” A student has placed a light blue Post-it note on the poster that reads, “Why are there so many stores? Why do they make malls next to malls?” The students continue to work as the sounds of scissors clipping, children talking softly, and paper rustling echo throughout the classroom.

## Start small with a pilot.

Past research has found that piloting in a small number of classrooms can be an effective way to test, adapt, and refine curricula while also building capacity and teacher leadership.<sup>41</sup> In the 2018-2019 school year, Maine began implementing *For ME* through a voluntary, state-funded pilot program in select Pre-K classrooms. This pilot year began with 14 Pre-K classrooms across 5 SAUs. The pilot represented a chance for the state to test the new curriculum and receive on-the-ground feedback prior to launching *For ME* online for the entire state.

To incentivize teachers to join the pilot program, the Maine DOE offered participating teachers funding for classroom materials (according to 76% of our interviewees, funding is essential for successful implementation). Maine DOE also offered teachers ongoing professional learning opportunities, including in-person summer training, monthly PLCs that met virtually, state-run technical assistance, and classroom-level implementation support from external coaches hired by the state. Coaches met monthly with each pilot teacher to provide individualized technical assistance and model lessons.

Positive results and reactions from the pilot prompted the Maine DOE to consider expanding *For ME* beyond Pre-K. Every one to two years, the DOE released a new pilot for a subsequent grade, gradually expanding *For ME* across P-2 (see implementation timeline on page 4 for specifics). According to a state leader, *“in that second year of the Kindergarten pilot is when we [said], we got to do this. We’ve got to figure out how to get this through second grade and at least take what Boston’s developed and help bring it into Maine.”*

*“And what felt really good is my teachers were able to make recommendations for changes to the program and they [the DOE] were responding to it. So then my teachers really felt empowered, like they were part of the curriculum.”*

— School-level administrator

By piloting *For ME* in a subset of classrooms before a wider rollout, Maine’s DOE learned whether their adaptations of Boston’s *Focus* worked in their local context and gathered feedback on what supports were needed for successful implementation. This strategy also allowed the DOE to create a pool of teacher experts who could champion *For ME* and support others through the implementation process. One administrator pointed to the importance of elevating pilot teachers as leaders in the state: *“what ended up happening was our Pre-K teachers became leaders in DOE too, that really DOE listened to the classroom teachers who were piloting the program. And what felt really good is my teachers were able to make recommendations for changes to the program and they [the DOE] were responding to it. So then my teachers really felt empowered, like they were part of the curriculum.”*

## An opt-in approach can facilitate buy-in.

Teacher buy-in is critical to successful implementation.<sup>42</sup> In Maine, the state's opt-in approach facilitated buy-in and enabled interest in the curriculum to grow organically over time. Two teachers remarked feeling particularly invested in *For ME*, precisely because they were given the choice to implement it. A Kindergarten teacher reflected on how she was drawn to *For ME* and chose to try it, "So our buy-in was there. We weren't being told we had to do something." A Kindergarten teacher at a different school compared her experience of opting into the *For ME* curriculum to that of first and second grade teachers who were required to implement it, explaining, "they weren't even given a choice... I think there's a big difference between wanting something and being told you have to do something." While opt-in facilitated initial buy-in, teachers who were required to implement *For ME* were still able to see successes. One second grade teacher reflects on her school requiring all second grade teachers to implement *2nd Grade for ME*, "Some of the second grade teachers were quite doubtful. I think most of them have really come along. One person, a good friend of mine, who was like, I don't know about this, you know, just said to me yesterday, I cannot believe one of the kids actually made a link to the big question of the week. And I was just about to fall out of my chair, and I was like, this is actually working. I shouldn't have been so doubtful."

Besides e-newsletters that highlighted *For ME* updates and training opportunities, Maine's DOE largely relied on word of mouth to spread interest in the curriculum. Student success stories helped sustain excitement, and teacher champions

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— Second grade teacher in Maine

encouraged additional teachers to try the new curriculum. A first grade teacher explained how interest in the curriculum spread naturally across grades in the school, "I had second grade teachers coming to me and saying, how do you produce, how are your kids so good at writing? I'd say it's not me, it's the curriculum. It's the curriculum. And that group of teachers actually went to our administrator and said, we know that there's a 2nd Grade for ME program out there. We'd like to take a look at it...I think that that's also kind of a way sometimes that things have to spread. And it's not always the fastest way, but it may be the most effective way." One teacher described how she made her practice visible in the hallway and responded to colleagues'

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— First grade teacher in Maine

questions as they arose, “I never went out in either of my buildings and said, hey, look at what I’m doing...I sat back, and I put my kids’ work on the bulletin board in the hallway...and then I let them come and ask me questions....”

## **Flexible implementation within classrooms can reduce teacher overwhelm.**

Even when buy-in is high, changing curriculum is challenging and can be overwhelming.<sup>43</sup> Most interviewees (11 out of 17, 65%) expressed feeling overwhelmed by *For ME*. Their overwhelm stemmed mainly from managing and prepping the large amount of materials needed to implement a comprehensive, interdisciplinary curriculum with many connected components. Maine mitigated this challenge by allowing

teachers to implement *For ME* at their own pace and by selecting which component(s) to implement first.

Messaging from some school-level administrators mirrored those from the state, emphasizing the importance of starting small and building incrementally. Similar to how the state rolled out *For ME* one grade at a time, teachers were often encouraged to implement the curriculum one component at a time. This gradual approach allowed teachers to implement changes at their own pace, helping to reduce feelings of overwhelm and, ultimately, supporting a more sustainable adoption for these teachers.

Most of the interviewees found this level of flexibility to be helpful. One teacher described how this approach allowed her to feel like she could, “go in and know that I was not going to be able to do the entire program or be expected to do it perfectly or implement every single piece of the program at once. That I could go in and start doing, say, the read-aloud and then say, OK, now I can put in the stations. Now I need to link the studios, so I really got to sort of get different pieces under my belt in a way that made sense to me.” Multiple teachers mentioned a similar experience, starting with components that they felt more comfortable with, and later adding other components. This process of gradually implementing curriculum pieces helped teachers avoid overwhelm and supported sustainability of implementation.

## **Opt-in and flexible approaches can result in uneven implementation.**

Although a flexible opt-in approach has benefits, it can lead to uneven implementation and lower curriculum fidelity. It can also raise tensions for teachers and administrators due to



inconsistencies across classrooms within the same school.<sup>44</sup> In turn, research highlights that lower curriculum fidelity can lead to instructional incoherence and reduced effectiveness.<sup>45</sup>

In Maine, the opt-in approach to *For ME*, combined with incremental implementation of components within classrooms, supported teacher buy-in and reduced teachers' overwhelm. However, some interviewees cautioned that a culture of teacher autonomy could lead to misalignment within and across grades. One teacher noted that voluntary adoption of *For ME* reduced opportunities for collaboration because not everyone used the same curriculum. For example, at one school in a team of ten first grade teachers, two adopted *For ME* while the other eight used other curricula. As a result, only ~20% of first graders in that school received instruction based on *For ME*. Such variation affected not only teachers' opportunities for collaboration but also students' learning environments and families' experiences of schooling. Several teachers worried that *For ME* might confuse students if they encountered markedly different instructional approaches in the year before or after, especially in schools

where implementation was limited to a small number of classrooms.

Gradually implementing a new curriculum piecemeal also posed inherent challenges for curriculum fidelity, especially given that *For ME* is an interdisciplinary curriculum. One teacher stated that she appreciated the interconnectedness of the curriculum, but that teachers needed to “*be really careful... what they edit out and what they don't edit out. Because, you know, if you're not doing the writing component, then maybe some of the reading components might not ring as true...or if you're not doing the science, then some of the read-alouds might not make as much sense. They might not be as engaging. But when you say, we're reading this book because we're going to learn about light and this book teaches us about light, and we're going to need that information to do an experiment on light, you know, then that becomes the motivator, right, for the learning.*”

## Ongoing professional development is critical for strong implementation.

Research shows that curriculum implementation is higher when professional development opportunities for teachers are high-quality and more intensive.<sup>46</sup> To support implementation, Maine DOE provided summer training and monthly PLCs related to *For ME*. While individualized coaching was available to teachers during the pilot year, the state team was unable to sustain coaching for all teachers in subsequent years. Instead, the state encouraged districts to offer coaching.

The state contracted with an external consultant to lead summer training that lasted two days for Pre-K and three days for grades K-2. After

the first year of training for each grade, teacher leaders who had participated in their respective grade's pilot program co-led subsequent summer training with the curriculum consultant. This strategy helped the relatively small Early Learning Team — eight members total with three supporting *For ME* — to scale up implementation despite the team's limited capacity.

Overall, the state-funded summer training was well-received by teachers, with the vast majority (80%) of interviewees describing it as positive. Elevating teacher leaders' experiences provided attendees with real examples and nuanced insights into implementation. One teacher explained that hearing from both the Maine DOE and teacher leaders was uniquely comprehensive, *“So we got both kind of the design-level understanding and the practical, practicum-level understanding...”* Another teacher described the training as particularly useful, *“I think the biggest thing for me has been the professional development that the state has done...what they're doing, it's just been just outstanding, honestly. Like, I just feel like, sometimes I go to professional development and I feel like, the people delivering it are trying to convince me that their program is great, and that's like the whole purpose of it. Or sometimes I feel like they're just throwing so much at me that it's like overwhelming. And this is one of those ones that was... I mean, it's just open source. It's there for everybody... It's literally just all about the kids and the teachers. Yeah, so you feel that when you're at the training.”*

In addition to summer training, the curriculum consultant led monthly hour-long virtual PLCs throughout the school year, with teacher leader involvement increasing over time. These teacher



leaders were compensated by the state for their work helping to lead the PLCs. Monthly PLCs provided teachers with the opportunity to learn from each other and share implementation experiences. One administrator emphasized that the virtual PLCs provided their small staff with a larger learning community, *“I think it [virtual PLCs] was also helpful for people who were doing it totally on their own. You know, we have a lot of ...small schools in Maine where there's only one first grade teacher.”*

Taken together, Maine's DOE provided professional learning opportunities that supported teachers and administrators prior to and during implementation, while also building a community of teachers as leaders and curriculum experts.

### **Prioritize teacher collaboration.**

Teachers value peer-to-peer learning.<sup>47</sup> In our sample, teachers emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer collaboration for both support and motivation. Teachers who implemented *For ME* alongside colleagues described how implementing with a cohort at their school reduced feelings of overwhelm, built confidence, and motivated teachers to try new approaches.

Sharing materials and resources was a concrete way that teachers supported each other.

According to one teacher, *“what my second grade team did was we realized that we just couldn’t teach all of it well. So we split it up and every week we taught, we made the slides for a different section... and then we shared those.”*

Teachers also emphasized the benefit of having other teachers as thought-partners. According to one teacher, *“Now that I actually am in a building where there are other people, even though they may have adopted it after me and I have more experience with the program, it’s really great to have those conversations about, oh, I’m really struggling with fitting this in. Or gee, I did this experiment and how are you going to approach this, you know, end of unit project? So absolutely having others, the benefit that I have in my situation now is having those people as sounding boards.”* While more than half of the teachers interviewed stated that preparation time was a challenge, many teachers described that working together and sharing resources helped ease some of the burden.

Additionally, teacher leaders and early adopters often served as informal coaches for novice colleagues. A first grade teacher in her first year of implementation credited her more experienced colleague with her readiness to implement studios (a form of centers used in 1st and 2nd grade) for the first time. *“If it wasn’t for the fact that my next door neighbor teacher has been doing this for so many years, I probably would be giving it my best, but I probably wouldn’t have implemented it to the level that I have... studios especially... [were] really hard for me in the beginning. The first two units, I was just like, I don’t even, like, what materials am I supposed to even put in this studio?”*

*“Now that I actually am in a building where there are other people, even though they may have adopted it after me and I have more experience with the program, it’s really great to have those conversations about, oh, I’m really struggling with fitting this in. Or gee, I did this experiment and how are you going to approach this, you know, end of unit project? So absolutely having others, the benefit that I have in my situation now is having those people as sounding boards.”*

— First grade teacher in Maine

Since Maine’s DOE only funded monthly and summer training after the initial pilot, many teachers wished there was more time allocated for teacher collaboration, noting how important it was to learn from their peers on a more regular basis. Peer-to-peer learning played a central role in supporting curriculum adoption and ongoing implementation. As mentioned earlier, schools with variable uptake of *For ME* across and within grades had limited opportunities for this peer-to-peer support. Teachers in these schools recommended ensuring that teachers have

*“I think the administrator needs to be fully on board...and really understand what it is. So I immersed myself in the curriculum. I went to all the trainings prior to my teacher going and then went to the summer training. I’ve continued to go through the trainings. I try to go to as many PLCs as I can. I embed [For ME] into our PD, into our staff meetings. So it’s just like a focus. I try to live it as much as possible getting into classrooms.”*

— Second grade teacher in Maine

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When school administrators were invested in *For ME*, their teachers tended to agree that they were able to foster a more conducive environment for curricular change. Administrators who prioritized *For ME* ensured that their school’s schedule and professional development offerings reinforced the curriculum. At the school in SAU A, a combination of administrator and teacher enthusiasm for the curriculum enabled the adoption of *For ME* across P-2. The principal recalled a staff meeting where *For ME* teachers shared their positive experiences with the curriculum. She explained, *“So the more we started talking about that, the more I was in those classrooms seeing what happened, I just thought, this is what we’re looking for. This is such a match for what we value...we’re gonna do the whole thing.”*

Teachers echoed the importance of administrator support. A Pre-K teacher leader in her fifth year implementing *For ME* recalled that her administrators have *“always been so supportive of everything...if we had questions or we wanted to learn more with certain PD, you know, we’d go up to them and say, Hey, I would love to do this. They let us know about opportunities available for professional development. And they really try to make sure that if it is on a school day, that we would be able to attend.”*

appropriate training and professional learning opportunities focused on *For ME*, including having the ability to observe other teachers teach.

## **Administrator buy-in and support is critical.**

Research has long shown that effective and supportive school leadership is critical to instructional quality.<sup>48</sup> To boost administrator investment in curricular change efforts, the Maine DOE encouraged school administrators to attend state-led summer training, to participate in ongoing professional learning opportunities, and to observe schools that were already implementing *For ME*. One administrator

Contrastingly, some administrators struggled with competing priorities, such as district requirements to use a separate math and/or phonics curriculum. One school leader emphasized that it was challenging to fully commit to *For ME* because she received directives from the district to use different curricula. Competing priorities from district and school leaders were often felt by teachers. For instance, a second grade teacher explained that the multiple curricula she was expected to implement “*didn’t mesh well at all.*” Another second grade teacher mentioned that elements of the science curriculum they were required to implement did not “*necessarily align*” with the *For ME* components.

Collectively, Maine’s experience highlights the challenges introduced by inconsistent district policies and flexible, opt-in systems. However, even in decentralized systems, these findings show that policymakers and practitioners can intentionally engage school leaders in curriculum-specific professional learning that facilitates their ability to support teacher buy-in and implementation.

## **Plan for common challenges.**

Across Maine, teachers and administrators identified a consistent set of challenges associated with implementing the *For ME* curriculum. These challenges mirror those documented in other research on curriculum adoption and instructional change; they also echo Boston’s experience with *Focus* and Mississippi’s experience with their adaptation of *Focus*.<sup>49</sup> These challenges include: (1) variation in teacher needs based on prior experiences; (2) logistical challenges, and (3) insufficient professional learning opportunities, particularly coaching. Maine’s DOE anticipated

some of these challenges proactively; others have emerged over time, requiring intentional responses and ongoing work.

**Variation in teacher needs based on prior experiences.** Maine’s DOE anticipated that transitioning to a new curriculum would prompt some resistance to change, particularly given the personal nature of teaching practice. While some teachers struggled with particular pieces of the curriculum, all but one of the interviewees expressed positive views of *For ME*, citing its developmental appropriateness, thematic structure, and play-based nature as being key to their positive assessment.

Despite this overall positive perception and enthusiasm for the curriculum, there was variation in teachers’ need for support based on their prior experiences with particular curricular components, specifically facilitating centers or teaching within play-based instructional frameworks. One first grade teacher described *For ME* as requiring “*a really huge mind shift,*” explaining that it represented a change in philosophy toward student choice and guided play, which were approaches that “*were not being practiced*” previously. She noted that some teachers and administrators initially perceived the curriculum as “*just play time,*” underscoring the importance of shared understanding of the curriculum’s instructional intent and the research basis underlying play-based approaches.

Relatedly, many teachers struggled to adjust to the curriculum’s approach to writing because it differed from more familiar models. One teacher reflected, “*I think what made it more challenging is it’s just like a different perspective or way to approach it or view writing in general.*” Teachers with prior experience using other writing

curricula noted that unlearning established practices required time and intentional support, further underscoring the importance of professional development.

**Expect logistical challenges.** Time-related issues were among the most persistent challenges for teachers implementing *For ME*. Teachers consistently reported needing more time to learn the curriculum, prepare materials, collaborate with colleagues, and understand how daily lessons fit within longer instructional arcs. Many struggled to fit all curricular components into an already constrained school day, particularly when schedules were predetermined by operational factors such as transitions or transportation. The integrated and sequential nature of *For ME* further complicated implementation, since disruptions to the schedule made it difficult to maintain continuity.

Materials also posed barriers. Teachers described the curriculum as materials-intensive and time-consuming to prepare, particularly during early stages of implementation. Limited funding for materials and lack of compensation for preparation time heightened frustration, especially for teachers who implemented *For ME* after the pilot period and therefore were not privy to the additional supports extended to early adopters. Interviewees also noted tensions arising from classroom space constraints, especially for organizing and storing materials. Teachers emphasized that having materials readily available was essential for implementing the curriculum with fidelity, further stressing the need for upfront planning and resource allocation.

**Insufficient professional learning opportunities.** Although many teachers felt positively about state-led professional development (54%

surveyed teachers ranked it as “very helpful” and 38% ranked it as “somewhat helpful”<sup>50</sup>), ten interviewees (around 50%) expressed wanting more support to implement the curriculum. Several teachers emphasized that summer training sessions and PLCs were insufficient to support the depth of instructional change required by *For ME*. Teachers expressed a particular need for ongoing coaching, opportunities to observe the curriculum in practice, structured collaboration time, and open communication among teachers, administrators, and district leaders. As one first grade teacher reflected, “[*The summer PD*] really helped me a lot... I just, I don’t know if that was as helpful as just like having other people doing it with me.” Administrators similarly noted that they would benefit from additional embedded professional learning opportunities to fully understand the curriculum and support teachers effectively.



## Anticipate the need for long-term systems support and adaptation.

Sustaining a new early learning curriculum is a complex, multi-systems effort that requires flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions.<sup>51</sup> Since Maine began implementing *For ME* in Pre-K, the state's Early Learning and Development Standards for Pre-K have changed, necessitating alignment of the curriculum to new standards. In addition, the curriculum consultant who has supported Maine DOE's adaptation and implementation efforts for the past eight years will be gradually transitioning out of her role, shifting greater responsibility to the DOE and the teacher leaders it has cultivated.

At the same time, adoption of *For ME* remains voluntary, resulting in a continually evolving pool of implementers that is difficult to track. In the absence of legislative authority to recommend or require a specific curriculum, Maine's DOE has limited ability and capacity to monitor implementation fidelity or systematically assess outcomes. As a result, data on implementation quality and effectiveness remain limited, complicating efforts to evaluate effects on teaching and learning and to target supports. As one Maine DOE staff explained, *"we try to keep a pulse on... [implementation] through like the PLC in particular that we run on an annual basis where we're hearing what teachers are saying, but it's different being this far removed from the day to day workings of a school."* Additionally, while Maine continues to see an increase in attendance at state-sponsored summer trainings, the growing interest in *For ME* presents new capacity challenges for Maine's DOE as it works to support more teachers and develop systems to monitor implementation.

*"With every curriculum, with every change, time is always key...sometimes you just have to swim through it and then it's better on the other side."*

— Second grade teacher in Maine

Monitoring data can also be used to guide long-term investments and decision-making. Multiple interviewees noted that many of the challenges they experienced could be mitigated proactively through intentional planning, training, coaching, and sustained administrative support. Teachers and administrators consistently emphasized that high-quality implementation takes time, with comfort developing gradually through practice and reflection. As one teacher explained, *"When you're adopting a curriculum that is so inclusive of all of that...you need to give teachers time to synthesize all of that and to hone your practice."* Another reflected, *"With every curriculum, with every change, time is always key...sometimes you just have to swim through it and then it's better on the other side."* Teachers and administrators viewed preparing for common challenges and recognizing implementation as a multi-year process as critical components to long-term success.

# Conclusion

Large-scale curriculum change is complex and challenging. Maine's *For ME* implementation experience offers lessons for other localities weighing a curriculum change in their P-2 programs.

In contrast to some states that tie implementation to funding or use other centralized policy levers to mandate the use of a specific curriculum, this case study illuminates how implementation can look in a state that emphasizes district and teacher autonomy. While Maine's flexible approach to voluntary adoption of the *For ME* curriculum likely improved teacher buy-in and localized ownership, it may have limited widespread uptake and consistency in implementation across the state. Amidst this decentralized approach to implementation, high-quality adaptation, professional development opportunities, and administrative support were key facilitators of positive change.

Future briefs in this series, alongside a previously released brief on Mississippi's experience,<sup>52</sup> will similarly identify themes that can help inform other contexts.



# Appendix A: Methods

This focal case centered on Maine is part of a larger study. Below, we provide more details on the study design, rationale, methods for data collection, and approaches to analysis for the Maine case.

## Research design

We conducted this study to understand how high-quality, open-access curricula have been introduced to Pre-K and early elementary grades in schools implementing *For ME* in Maine. By focusing in-depth on one state's experience, our study provides insights into how educators and leaders initiated, communicated, and navigated curricular reform. Our research questions were:

1. How did state actors approach large-scale curricular reform?
2. What are the conditions in which districts and schools are implementing the curriculum?
3. How have educational actors at all levels of the system responded to this shift?

These questions allow for understanding the process of implementation as planned, enacted, and experienced, highlighting contextual factors that have supported and challenged this process.

## Data collection and sampling

**Sampling.** Our purposive sample included four elementary schools located in three districts in the southern region of Maine. To select districts, we had conversations with state educational leaders, with a focus on identifying schools implementing the *For ME* curriculum at different stages and scales. State leaders identified locations and supported our connection with district leads to coordinate the visits. Sites were chosen to be within a practical traveling distance (about a two-hour radius) to optimize

data collection logistics. We included teachers with a range of experiences implementing the curriculum, rather than focusing exclusively on exemplary cases.

The participant pool totaled 20 individuals, encompassing members of the Maine Department of Education's Early Learning Team, school administrators, and teachers in Pre-K, Kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade, as well as in special education and support roles. Of these, 17 completed a short survey.

**Consent and incentives.** All research activities were reviewed and approved under an exemption by the University of Michigan IRB. Participants received a concise summary of the project and their role. We obtained informed oral consent before each interview began. All participants consented to audio recording. We informed interviewees of the voluntary nature of participation and the assurance of confidentiality; all identifiers in reports are limited to state-level descriptors and job titles. Interview participants were offered a \$50 gift card as appreciation for their involvement.

**Survey.** Prior to interviews, we invited participants to complete an online survey that captured demographic data and background information, including educational and teaching experience, age, race/ethnicity, languages spoken, and perspectives on helpful supports during curriculum adoption. Interviewees at the state level were not surveyed.

**Observations.** Initial school visits and classroom observations were carried out in April 2025 as the Maine Department of Education was piloting *For ME* in second grade and continuing to support implementation across Pre-K through 1st grade. We observed 12 classrooms across 4 schools in 3 SAUs, with 2-3 observations per grade, enabling us to see the curriculum implemented across the early grades.

Observations focused on instructional practices, relationship-building with stakeholders, and contextual factors shaping curricular uptake. The goal was to document an array of curriculum components across different classrooms to gain a holistic view of implementation across grade levels. Additionally, observations helped us tailor interview questions to delve deeper into particular instructional choices, as well as the strategies teachers employed for classroom organization and management.

**Interviews.** Between April and October 2025, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews either face-to-face or virtually with a range of education professionals. Interview participants included staff from the Maine Department of Education (n=2), a curriculum consultant (n=1), school administrators (n=3), Pre-K (n=3), Kindergarten (n=3), 1st grade (n=3), and 2nd grade teachers (n=4), as well as one Special Education teacher working in a self-contained classroom. Interview questions centered on the context, rationale, and approaches to implementation, tailored to the role of each educational actor. We used interview data to surface facilitators and barriers to curriculum implementation from multiple vantage points.

## Data analysis

All interview recordings were transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software platform, to facilitate collaborative coding and theme development. We drafted an initial codebook following a broad reading of the data and refined it iteratively through ongoing analysis and team discussions. Early coding was performed collaboratively to ensure agreement. As coding advanced, thematic categories became more focused and were organized to reflect levels of the education system (state, district, school) and stages of implementation (preparation, rollout, response). Codes also identified emotional responses, such as enthusiasm and apprehension, as well as initial and evolving attitudes and practices.

We assessed inter-coder reliability (ICR) twice during the coding process ( $\kappa > 0.7$  required for single coding), with disagreements resolved through team discussion. These reliability checks informed further adaptation of the codebook for clarity and rigor. We wrote analytical memos throughout to capture emergent themes and connect data across sources.

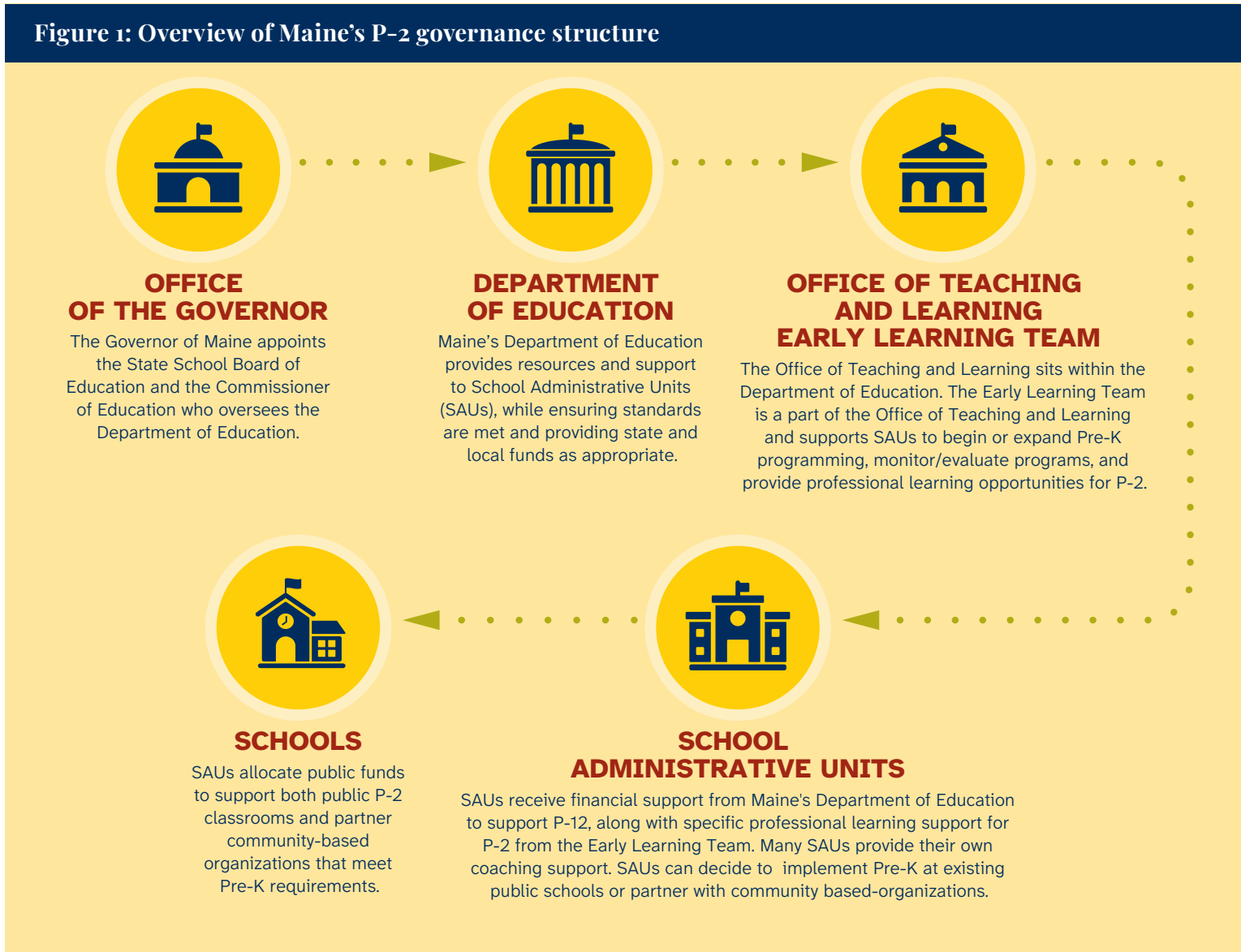
Stakeholder profiles were composed from interview transcripts to capture important themes that fell outside of our codebook, and to support comparative analysis across individuals, schools, and districts. To contextualize the evolution of the *For ME* program over time, we reviewed key documents, such as legislative bills, independent reports, and resources from the Maine DOE. We pursued opportunities for participant validation with Maine's Early Learning Team, ensuring accuracy in representing official processes and timelines.

## Limitations

The scope of direct observations and interviews was limited to four schools in the state of Maine. This purposeful sample afforded the opportunity to examine implementation under different contextual arrangements. However, findings cannot be generalized to all schools across the state, and the study does not allow for a thorough comparison of the unique conditions present in each district. Given that teachers and schools in this context have significant autonomy in choosing curricula, our sample likely includes individuals who are particularly supportive of or have positive experiences with the curriculum, potentially introducing selection bias into our findings. This was unavoidable especially given the opt-in approach to the curriculum in Maine districts and schools. Finally, since data collection took place after the initial selection and adoption phases by the state and during the final pilot phase for 2nd grade, the study benefits from participants' reflective insights, but offers less direct access to decisions or actions at the earliest stages. As such, the study relies on retrospective accounts from those involved in early planning.

# Appendix B: Additional tables and figures

Figure 1: Overview of Maine's P-2 governance structure



**Table B1: Summary of interview participants**

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT (SAU)	SCHOOL	ROLE	N
N/A	N/A	DOE State Administrator	2
		DOE State Curriculum Consultant	1
SAU A	School 1	School Administrator	1
		Pre-K Teacher	1
		Kindergarten Teacher	2
		First Grade Teacher	1
		Second Grade Teacher	3
SAU B	School 2	School Administrator	1
		Second Grade Teacher	1
SAU C	School 3	School Administrator	1
		Pre-K Teacher	2
		Kindergarten Teacher	1
		Special Education Teacher	1
	School 4	First Grade Teacher	2
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>20</b>

**Table B2: Demographics of survey respondents**

		TEACHERS (N=14)	ADMINISTRATORS (N=3)
Highest degree	Bachelors	3	0
	Masters	11	3
	Other: Specialist	0	0
Race/Ethnicity	White	13	3
	Black or African American	0	0
	Hispanic	1	0
Gender	Female	12	3
	Male	2	0
Years in current role	Mean	8.4	5.3
	Range	1-25	2-8

Note: State-level administrators and curriculum consultants were not surveyed.

**Table B3: School demographics in 2023-24**

	AVERAGE PUBLIC SCHOOL IN ME GRADES P-6 <sup>53</sup>	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3	SCHOOL 4
SAU	N/A	SAU A	SAU B	SAU C	SAU C
Grade levels offered	Varies	P-2	P-4	P-4	P-5
Economically disadvantaged	38%	30%	<1%	20%	20%

Note: SAU enrollment ranged from 2,000-3,000 students in our sample (rounded to the nearest thousand to protect anonymity). School enrollment ranged from 300 to 700 (rounded to the nearest hundred to protect anonymity). Across focal schools, race/ethnicity varied from 5-10% Hispanic or Latino, 75-90% White, 0-5% Black, 0-5% Asian, 5% two or more races, and less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (rounded to the nearest 5 to protect anonymity). Economically disadvantaged is defined by the Maine Department of Education. Percentages for this field were rounded to the nearest 10% to maintain anonymity. Data obtained from Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse (<https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-warehouse/reporting/enrollment>).

## Endnotes

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- 5 School Administrative Units (SAUs) can take on a variety of different forms, including regional school districts, school administrative districts, community school districts, and municipal school districts. In short, SAUs act as local governing bodies for the education of students in their communities.
- 6 In recent years, Maine has used funding from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to fund further expansion. According to the Maine Department of Education webpage at <https://www.maine.gov/doe/node/4235>, the percentage of 4-year-olds served in 2024 was 57%. However, for consistency within reports for this series, we have chosen to use the percentages according to NIEER data. Friedman-Krauss, A., Barnett, W.S., Hodges, K.S., Garver, K.A., Duer, J.K., Weisenfeld, G.G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The state of preschool 2024*. Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
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# **M** | EDUCATION POLICY INITIATIVE

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