

Science of Reading Evidence-Informed Core Criteria Checklist

The selection and adoption of an effective, evidence-informed core reading program in grades K-5 is a critical step in the development of an effective school wide effort to align reading instruction to the Science of Reading (SOR). The investment in identifying a core program that aligns with research and fits the needs of learners in your district/school will yield long-term benefits for children's reading acquisition and development.

A critical review of reading programs requires objective and in-depth analysis. For these reasons, we offer the following criteria and procedures for analyzing critical elements of programs. For clarity, we initially identify the criteria related to essential components of a core program with some specification of elements by grade level. Next, we specify elements in core programs are not aligned with the SOR. Using these guidelines will support this important evaluation process.

Kindergarten through Grade 5

Directions for reviewers using this rubric:

Record your findings based on whether the elements are evident or not using yes or no.

Yes = Element consistently meets/exceeds criterion. Use this rating when the majority of lessons you review meet or exceed the criterion.

No = Element does not satisfy the criterion.

1. Foundational Reading Skills

Print Concepts

1.1 Materials facilitate understanding that sentences can be broken into words and compound words can be broken into separate words.

No

Yes

Support your determination:

Phonological Awareness

1.2 Instruction follows an explicit learning progression to develop phonological awareness (for example, word boundaries, syllables, rhyming, onset-rime, phoneme categorization, blending, segmenting, and manipulation) using multiple models.

No

Yes

Support your determination:

1.3 Following teacher models, provides multiple opportunities for students to respond orally.

No

Yes

Support your determination:

1.4 Students use cognitive manipulation of sounds overtly by using auditory cues or manipulatives that signal movement of one sound to the next.

No

Yes

1.5 Instruction focuses on no more than two phonological awareness skills at a time.

No

Yes

Support your determination:

Kindergarten		
1.6 Incorporates opportunities for students to enjoy and recite rhyming words or alliterative phrases in familiar storybooks or nursery rhymes.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.7 Instruction focuses on segmenting and blending syllables and phonemes and blending onset and rime.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.8 Responses to instruction includes active engagement strategies like counting, tapping, blending, and segmenting a word into syllables.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1st Grade		
1.9 Instruction includes deleting half of a compound word to make a new word.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.10 Instruction includes deleting a syllable of a given word and saying the remaining syllable.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.11 Phonemic awareness instruction follows a learning progression—for example, phoneme isolation (initial, final, and medial sounds), blending, segmentation, and phoneme manipulation.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.12 Graphemes (letters) are integrated with phonemic awareness instruction to support alphabets and phonics instruction within the first month of instruction.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.13 Integrates letter-sound instruction with phonological awareness/phonemic awareness within the first month of instruction.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
Kindergarten		
1.14 Instruction includes identification, isolation, and categorization of initial phonemes (sounds) in words, then final and medial sounds.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.15 Instruction prioritizes segmenting and blending two and three phoneme words, including words that have simple syllables (e.g., VC, CVC).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

1st Grade		
1.16 Progresses from identifying or distinguishing the positions of sounds in words to producing the sound and adding, deleting, and changing selected sounds.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.17 Instruction includes blending and segmenting three and four phoneme words in single syllable word patterns (e.g., CVCe, CCVC, CVCC, CVVC, CVr).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.18 Instruction includes manipulating (deleting, adding, and substituting) phonemes from a word to build new single syllable words (e.g., word chaining)	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2nd Grade		
1.19 Instruction includes deleting initial and final sounds in a word to make a new word, including blends.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
Phonics		
1.20 Introduces high-frequency letter sounds early in the instructional sequence (e.g., /m/, /s/, /a/, /r/, /t/) instead of low-frequency letter sounds (e.g., /x/, /y/, /z/).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.21 Materials provide explicit opportunities for students to recognize, name, associate a sound with symbol, discriminate from other letters in print, categorize (upper/lower), and write letters.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.22 Includes a few short vowels early in the sequence so that students can use letter-sound knowledge to segment and blend words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.23 Explicitly models the introduction of a new sound, name, and symbol prior to student practice and assessment.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.24 Incorporates frequent and cumulative review of taught letter sounds and names to automaticity.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.25 Models instructional routines and processes with each skill (e.g., letter-sound correspondences, blending, reading whole words, high-frequency words).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

1.26 Provides explicit strategy for blending and segmenting sounds of letters to read and write words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.27 Lessons provide multiple opportunities for students to blend and read words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.28 Supports brisk pacing to maximize guided practice items in word lists and daily reading of short, decodable connected text for students to develop automaticity.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.29 Materials support instruction that teaching how to segment letters to write/spell.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.30 Materials support instruction that teaching how to write/spell and decode common sound-spelling patterns of English in an explicit, sequential fashion (for example, CV, CVC words containing digraphs, trigraphs, vowel teams, r-controlled vowels).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.31 Materials support instruction that progresses from simple to more complex sound–spelling patterns and word analysis skills (for example, CVC words before CVCC, CCVC CVVC, and CVe words in single syllable words before multisyllabic words).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.32 Materials support instruction that teaches students how to decode multisyllabic words by looking for pronounceable word parts within them (for example, compound words and syllables).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.33 Materials provide instruction in simple, frequently used prefixes and suffixes, including inflected endings and contractions.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.34 Materials provide sufficient amount of practice in decoding words in isolation and in decodable text to allow practice of phonic skills.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.35 Materials include instruction to provide opportunities for students to read both regular and irregular high frequency words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

1.36 Materials introduce students to non-decodable words essential to the meaning of a passage as whole words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.37 Provides ample practice and review of words and contextual reading and writing to develop automaticity.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.38 Incorporates and integrates spelling to reinforce phonics and word analysis.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

2nd Grade and up

1.39 Uses explicit instruction to provide strategies to read multisyllabic words by using prefixes, suffixes, Greek and Latin roots, syllabication patterns, and known word parts.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.40 Uses explicit instruction and provides opportunity to process larger, highly frequent spelling/orthographic patterns (e.g., -ight, -ing) to increase fluency in word recognition.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
1.41 Offers repeated opportunities for students to read and spell words in contexts where they can apply their advanced phonics skills with a high level of success.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

2. Fluency Instruction

2.1 Materials provide teachers opportunities to model fluent reading and to scaffold and give feedback as students read orally in order to foster accurate and fluent word identification.	No	Yes								
Support your determination:										
2.2 Texts for each grade band align with complexity requirements and instructional goals.	No	Yes								
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Text Complexity Grade Band</th> <th>Lexile Level</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>K-1</td> <td>N/A</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2-3</td> <td>450-790</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4-5</td> <td>770-980</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Text Complexity Grade Band	Lexile Level	K-1	N/A	2-3	450-790	4-5	770-980
Text Complexity Grade Band			Lexile Level							
K-1			N/A							
2-3	450-790									
4-5	770-980									
Support your determination:										
2.3 Materials provide texts that support frequent review of previously taught concepts and words, extended practice, and independent application of phonics skills.	No	Yes								
Support your determination:										

2.4 Materials included sufficient number of texts that allow students to read a variety of texts daily with and without feedback to support accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.5 Materials include texts for students to learn and practice self-monitoring as they read and to self-correct reading errors when they occur.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.6 Materials provide a balance of texts and instructional time for literary and informational texts.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.7 Once students are able to read independently, materials provide additional text for regular independent reading that appeals to students' interests to develop both knowledge and love of reading.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.8 Texts provide opportunities to build knowledge through reading specific informational and narrative text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.9 Materials cultivate students' abilities to ask and answer questions based on the text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.10 Materials use scaffolding and stimulating questions to engage students in high-quality discussions.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.11 Scaffolds decoding skills at the word level, moving to the phrase/sentence level, and culminating in connected text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.12 Introduces fluency practice (e.g., repeated reading) after students read words from the passage accurately.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.13 Uses initial stories and text composed of a high percentage of regular words and pre-taught irregular words, including the use of an instructional routine for teaching irregular words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
2.14 Materials build toward established accuracy and rate goals (e.g., WCPM, expression).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

3. Writing Development and Skills		
3.1 Materials include opportunities to practice writing words introduced in reading instruction and use them to write a response to what students have read.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3.2 Materials are designed with activities for students to write about what they have read in both literary and informational text (e.g., summaries, reactions, analysis or interpretation of text, notes, ask/answer questions).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3.3 Materials include opportunities and prompts for students to write opinion, information/explanation, or narratives in response to texts.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3rd and up		
3.4 Materials include extensive practice with short, focused research projects that allow students to have multiple experiences with the research process throughout the year and facilitate development of the ability to conduct research independently.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3.5 Materials include activities that require students to analyze and synthesize text sources and present the analysis using well-defended claims and clear information.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3.6 Materials provide instruction in different text structures (e.g., sequence, comparison, contrast, cause/effect) and place a focus on argument and informative writing based on these text structures.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
3.7 Materials include activities that provide opportunities to write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (single sitting or day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
4. Vocabulary and Language Development and Skills		
4.1 Materials include opportunities to continue to build oral language and listening skills as students develop the ability to read independently (e.g., exposure to fiction and informational text read aloud, discussions to compare/contrast, analyzing and synthesizing information in response to text read aloud, paraphrase, summarize)	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
4.2 Materials use multimedia and technology to support and engage students in understanding and verbally expressing details and themes in the text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

<p>4.3 Materials include activities to engage students in conversations that support comprehension of inferential and narrative language and word knowledge using narrative and informational text.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.4 Materials provide the opportunity to explicitly teach words or grammatical rules that support content that students are reading or learning.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.5 Materials provide the opportunity to explicitly teach vocabulary by making connections between a new word and other known words, by relating the word to their own experiences, differentiating between correct and incorrect uses of the word, and by generating and answering questions that include the word.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.6 Materials include activities for students to acquire and use grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or state of being (e.g., quizzed, whined, stammered) and that are basic to a particular topic (e.g., wildlife, conservation, and endangered when discussing animal preservation).</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.7 Materials include instruction for students to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple meaning words and phrases based on grade-appropriate reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.8 Materials include instruction for students to understand word relationships and nuances in word meanings (shades of meaning).</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.9 Materials select words that are highly useful for passage understanding and later learning.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.10 Materials provide multiple exposures of different types to support vocabulary acquisition.</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		
<p>4.11 Materials engage students in processing word meanings at a deeper level (e.g., associating new words with known words).</p>	No	Yes
<p>Support your determination:</p>		

4.12 Materials review previously introduced words cumulatively.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
4.13 Materials incorporate exposure to a broad and diverse vocabulary through listening to and reading a wide range of narrative and informational texts.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
4.14 Materials extend the understanding of concepts and vocabulary through explicitly teaching antonyms and synonyms, using individual words in compound words to predict meaning, using prefixes and suffixes to assist in word meaning, and learning simple multiple meaning words.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
4.15 Materials support an explicit teaching strategy for deriving word meanings based on prefixes, suffixes, and roots.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5. Reading Comprehension		
5.1 The text and text complexity are appropriate for the skills of the students based on their current instructional needs.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.2 Materials provide students extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.3 Materials incorporate texts that require careful and purposeful reading and re-reading.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.4 Specific texts are included in materials for teaching various text structures (e.g., sequence, comparison, contract, cause/effect) to support comprehension and careful reading of narrative and informational text.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.5 Materials contain questions and tasks that require students to use text-based evidence (including making inferences).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.6 Material cultivates student engagement in reading text carefully.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

5.7 Texts provide opportunity for students to build knowledge through reading and extended discussion.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.8 Materials include questions and tasks that require students to analyze information and evidence focused on the meaning of texts.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.9 Materials support instruction that provides opportunities for students to identify and describe or explain ideas for narrative (e.g., main idea, theme) and informational texts (e.g., connections between ideas and concepts) in a progressively more complex manner.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.10 Materials support instruction that provides opportunities for students to use text features to gain meaning from narrative text (e.g., how chapters and scenes are used in types of literature) and information text (e.g., use of illustrations and graphs, structural elements).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.11 Materials support instruction that provides opportunities for students to understand and analyze various points of view for narrative (e.g., author, narrator, characters) and informational text (e.g., what the author wants to explain, multiple accounts of the same event) with increasing complexity).	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.12 Materials support instruction that provides opportunities for students to compare or analyze information within and across narrative text (e.g., compare two versions of the same story) and informational text (e.g., identify similarities between two texts on the same topic) with increasing complexity.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.13 Materials provide a sequence or series of texts that build knowledge and vocabulary systematically through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.14 Materials support instruction that provides background information when needed or activates prior knowledge to increase students' understanding of what is to be read.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		
5.15 Provides guided practice and systematic review of evidence-based comprehension skills and strategies.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

5.16 Cumulatively builds a repertoire of skills and strategies that are introduced, applied, and integrated with appropriate texts and for authentic purposes over the course of the year.	No	Yes
Support your determination:		

Red Flags Indicating Lack of Alignment to the Science of Reading

When reviewing curricula, it is very important to prioritize looking for elements not aligned with the Science of Reading. The table below provides red flags that indicated misalignment with the Science of Reading. If these elements are present in the program reviewed, yet the program doesn't have enough of these elements to be removed from consideration, it is important to identify how educators will be educated or coached to not perpetuate this non-aligned practice in their instruction.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness		
Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) without moving to the phoneme level (e.g., blends such as /t//r/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds).	No	Yes
Instruction is focused on letters only without explicitly instructing on and practicing blending, segmenting, and manipulating the phonemes that letters represent.	No	Yes
Phoneme awareness is not emphasized as a foundational reading skill.	No	Yes
Phonological and phoneme awareness are not assessed and monitored.	No	Yes
Phonics		
Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words (except for high-frequency, non-decodable words), guess at words in context, or use picture clues rather than decoding the word first (three-cueing system).	No	Yes
Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) "mini-lessons" or "word work" sessions.	No	Yes
Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly versus systematically and explicitly.	No	Yes
The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, or short vowels are all taught in rapid succession.	No	Yes
Segmenting or blending are not explicitly taught or practiced.	No	Yes
High-frequency words with regularly spelled sound-symbol correspondences are taught as whole-word units, often as stand-alone "sight words" to be memorized.	No	Yes
Few opportunities for word-level decoding practice are provided.	No	Yes
Phonics instruction is typically "one and done"; decoding/encoding skills are taught at a slow pace and reviewed infrequently.	No	Yes
Early texts are predominately predictable and leveled texts without sufficient time and attention to decodable texts.	No	Yes
Advanced word study (Grades 2-5), instruction in phonics ends once single syllable phonics patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) are taught.	No	Yes
Advanced word study (Grades 2-5), no instruction in multisyllabic word decoding strategies and/or morphology to support word recognition is evident.	No	Yes

Fluency		
Fluency instruction focuses primarily on independent student silent reading.	No	Yes
Rate is over emphasized at the expense of accuracy and expression.	No	Yes
Word-level automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as connected text-reading fluency.	No	Yes
Fluency assessment allows acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word.	No	Yes
Comprehension		
In early grades, the instructional framework is primarily a workshop approach, emphasizing student choice and implicit, incidental, or embedded learning.	No	Yes
Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.	No	Yes
Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts.	No	Yes
Writing is not taught or is taught without making deliberate connections to reading and texts.	No	Yes
Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level questioning skills.	No	Yes
Read aloud opportunities emphasize simple stories or narrative texts only. Read-aloud is not sufficiently complex and/or knowledge building.	No	Yes
Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.	No	Yes
Advanced (Grades 2-5): For students who are automatic with codes, texts for reading are primarily leveled texts that do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.	No	Yes
Inferencing is not taught explicitly and may be based only on pictures clues and not text (i.e., picture walking).	No	Yes
Reading and writing of genre types and use of specific text features are not explicitly taught.	No	Yes
Text structure and signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced in reading and writing.	No	Yes
Comprehension strategy instruction is taught without equal emphasis on knowledge-building.	No	Yes
Emphasis is on independent reading and unconstrained book choice without exposure to complex texts.	No	Yes
Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.	No	Yes
Vocabulary		
Vocabulary instruction does not include opportunities for rich conversations; worksheets or activity sheets are used heavily instead.	No	Yes
Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions only.	No	Yes
Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly, and students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	No	Yes
Students are not exposed to Tier 3 words knowledge and domain specific words in expository texts.	No	Yes
Explicit instruction in morphology is not apparent.	No	Yes

Summary of Criteria

Reporting Category	# of No's	# of Yes's	% of Yes's	Meets Threshold
Foundational Skills: Print Concepts and Phonological Awareness	/19	/19	%	Yes/No (90%)
Foundational Skills: Phonics	/22	/22	%	Yes/No (90%)
Fluency	/14	/14	%	Yes/No (80%)
Writing Development and Skills	/7	/7	%	Yes/No (80%)
Vocabulary and Language Development and Skills	/15	/15	%	Yes/No (80%)
Reading Comprehension	/16	/16	%	Yes/No (80%)
Overall Threshold	/93	/93	%	Yes/No (80%)
Number of Red Flags Identified	0-3	4-6	7 or more	

Interpreting Results: Upon completing the review, there are three possible outcomes:

Recommended Primary: If the program meets the expected thresholds in 5-6 of the reporting categories, the overall threshold, and has 0-3 red flags, then the program is recommended primary and may be used without the need for supplemental supports (if meeting all reporting category thresholds) or may potentially need one supplemental program to support where the program did not meet expected thresholds. The program would be considered evidence-informed and meets the criteria set forth in SB 127 for core curriculum.

Recommended Supplemental: If the program has some reporting categories that meet the established threshold and has 0-3 red flags, then the program is recommended supplemental and not primary. The program as a whole would not be considered evidence-informed, but the individual components that met the thresholds would be.

Not Recommended: If the program does not meet the expected thresholds in at least 5 of the reporting categories, the overall threshold, and has 4 or more red flags, then the program is not strong enough to be recommended for primary and does not meet the criteria set forth in SB 127.

Adapted from:

Foorman, B., Smith, K., Kosanovich, M. (2017). Rubric for evaluating reading/language arts instructional materials for kindergarten to grade 5. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2017219.pdf

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The Reading League (2022). Curriculum evaluation guidelines. Retrieved from: <https://www.thereadingleague.org/>