

A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis



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The selection and adoption of an effective, research-based core reading program in the primary grades is a critical step in the development of an effective schoolwide reading initiative. The investment in identifying a core program that aligns with research and fits the needs of learners in your school will reap 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 recommendations and procedures for analyzing critical elements of programs. First, we address questions regarding the importance and process of a core program. Following, we specify the criteria for program evaluation organized by grade level and reading dimensions. Further, we offer guidelines regarding instructional time, differentiated instruction, and assessment. We trust you will find these guidelines useful and usable in this significant professional process.

1. What is a core reading program?

A core reading program is the primary instructional tool that teachers use to teach children to learn to read and ensure they reach reading levels that meet or exceed grade-level standards. A core program should address the instructional needs of the majority of students in a respective school or district.

Historically, core reading programs have been referred to as basal reading programs in that they serve as the "base" for reading instruction. Adoption of a core does not imply that other materials and strategies are not used to provide a rich, comprehensive program of instruction. The core program, however, should serve as the primary reading program for the school and the expectation is that all teachers within and between the primary grades will use the core program as the base of reading instruction.

2. Why adopt a core reading program?

In a recent document entitled "Teaching Reading is Rocket Science," Louisa Moats (1999) revealed and articulated the complexities of carefully designed and implemented reading instruction. Teaching reading is far more complex than most professionals and laypersons realize. The demands of the phonologic, alphabetic, semantic, and syntactic systems of written language require a careful schedule and sequence of prioritized objectives, explicit strategies, and scaffolds that support students' initial learning and transfer of knowledge and skills to other contexts. The requirements of curriculum construction and instructional design that effectively move children through the "learning to read" stage to the "reading to learn" stage are simply too important to leave to the judgment of individuals. The better the core addresses instructional priorities, the less teachers will need to supplement and modify instruction for the majority of learners.

3. What process should be used to select a core reading program?

Ideally, every teacher involved in reading instruction would be involved in the review and selection of the core reading program. Realistically, a grade-level representative may be responsible for the initial review and reduce the "possible" options to a reasonable number. At minimum, we recommend that grade-level representatives use the criteria that follow and then share those findings with grade-level teams.

Schools often ask whether the adoption should be K-6 or whether a K-3/4-6 adoption is advisable. Ideally, there would be consensus across grades K-6; however, it is imperative to give priority to how children are taught to learn to read. Therefore, kindergarten and first grades are critical grades and should be weighted heavily in adoption decisions. This may entail a different adoption for grades 4-6.

4. What criteria should be used to select a core reading program?

A converging body of scientific evidence is available and accessible to guide the development of primary-grade reading programs. We know from research the critical skills and strategies that children must acquire in order to become successful readers by grade 3 (National Research Council, 1998; NICHD, 1996, Simmons & Kameenui, 1998). Following, we specify criteria in critical elements of reading organized by grade.

Stage I: Is There Trustworthy Evidence of Program Efficacy?

Prior scientific studies of program efficacy should be a first-level criterion to identify the pool of possible core programs. Your review of programs should determine:

- _____ 1. Does the program have evidence of efficacy established through carefully designed experimental studies?
- _____ 2. Does the program reflect current and confirmed research in reading?
- _____ 3. Does the program provide explicit, systematic instruction in the primary grades (K-3) in the following dimensions:
 - phonemic awareness (grades K-1)
 - phonics
 - decoding
 - word recognition
 - spelling
 - vocabulary
 - comprehension (listening and reading)
 - writing
 - oral and written language
- _____ 4. Was the program tested in schools and classrooms with similar demographic and learner profiles as your school?

If the answers to questions 1-4 are yes, you have evidence to indicate that if adopted and implemented faithfully, there is high probability the program will be effective.

If you can narrow your selection to programs with trustworthy evidence, proceed to Stage II for more comprehensive analysis.

Your review of programs may yield those that lack prior evidence of efficacy but that have components based on research. A lack of program efficacy should not exclude a program from consideration. Your analysis of critical elements, however, assumes greater importance.

A new generation of reading programs is currently finding its way into the market place, a generation of programs that holds great promise yet lack confirmed research. New programs often do not have adequate levels of evidence because large-scale, longitudinal evidence is costly and time consuming. If programs the reading committee considers promising lack established program efficacy, evaluate the program carefully and thoroughly according to following critical elements.

Stage II: A Consumer's Guide to Selecting a Core Program: A Critical Elements Analysis

A key assumption of a core program is that it will (1) address all grade-level standards and (2) ensure that high priority standards are taught in sufficient depth, breadth, and quality that all learners will achieve or exceed expected levels of proficiency. All standards are not equally important. Our critical elements analysis focuses on those skills and strategies most essential for early reading.

For each "cluster" or dimension of reading skills/standards, review the program according to the following criteria. To evaluate the quality of instructional design, we recommend that you sample lessons across the program and that you also review successive lessons to determine how the program builds, reviews, and extends learners' skills and strategies.

Use the following criteria for each critical element:

- = Element consistently meets/exceeds criterion.
- ◐ = Element inconsistently meets/exceeds criterion.
- = Element does not satisfy criterion.

When evaluating individual elements, slash (/) the respective circle that represents your rating (e.g., ◐).

Critical Elements Analysis

Kindergarten

I. Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic Awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sound structure of language. It is a strong predictor of reading success. Phonemic awareness is an auditory skill and consists of multiple components and does not involve print.

Phonemic Awareness Instruction

- ☒ ○ Progresses from the easier phonemic awareness activities to the more difficult—from rhyming and sound matching to blending, segmentation, and manipulation.
- ☒ ○ Teaches skills explicitly and systematically.
- ☒ ○ Starts with larger linguistic units (words and syllables) and proceeds to smaller linguistic units (phonemes).
- ☒ ○ Focuses beginning instruction on the phonemic level of phonological units with short words (two to three phonemes; e.g., *at*, *mud*, *run*).
- ☒ ○ Focuses first on the initial sound (*s*a*t*), then on the final sound (*s**a*t), and lastly on the medial sound (*s*a*t*) in words.
- ☒ ○ Makes students' cognitive manipulations of sounds overt by using concrete representations (e.g., markers, pictures, and Elkonin boxes) or auditory cues that signal the movement of one sound to the next (e.g., claps).
- ☒ ○ Models phonemic awareness tasks and responses orally and follows with students' production of the task.
- ☒ ○ Introduces several continuous sounds first (e.g., /m/, /r/, /s/) before introducing stop sounds (e.g., /t/, /b/, /k/) because stop sounds are more difficult to isolate.
- ☒ ○ Culminates with segmentation or the combination of blending and segmenting.
- ☒ ○ Adds letter-sound correspondence instruction to phonological awareness interventions after students demonstrate early phonemic awareness.
- ☒ ○ Provides brief instructional sessions. (Significant gains in phonemic awareness are often made in 15 to 20 minutes of daily instruction and practice over a period of 9 to 12 weeks.)

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

II. Decoding and Word Recognition

The ability to recognize words accurately, fluently, and independently is fundamental to reading in an alphabetic writing system. For kindergarten students, critical skills include learning to associate sounds with letters, using those associations to decode and read simple words, and learning to recognize important nondecodable words.

Letter-Sound Association Instruction

- ☒ ○ Schedules high-utility letter sounds early in the sequence (e.g., /m/, /s/, /a/, /r/, /t/) instead of low-utility letter sounds (e.g., /x/, /y/, /z/).
- ☒ ○ Models the sound of letter prior to assessing student knowledge.
- ☒ ○ Sequences the introduction of letter sounds in ways that minimize confusion (e.g., sequence /p/, /b/, /v/; /e/, /i/).
- ☒ ○ Includes a few short vowels early in the sequence so that students can use letter-sound knowledge to form and read words.
- ☒ ○ Incorporates frequent and cumulative review of taught letter sounds.
- ☒ ○ Begins with individual letter-sounds (e.g., *a*, *m*, *t*) and not phonograms (e.g., *ab*, *at*) or sound chunks.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Decoding Instruction

- ☒ ○ Introduces regular word types (CV or CVC) first in the sequence.
- ☒ ○ Includes only words for which students know all letter sounds.
- ☒ ○ Provides explicit strategy for sounding out words.
- ☒ ○ Provides practice in word lists and short, controlled connected text.
- ☒ ○ Provides multiple opportunities within lessons for students to read words.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Irregular Words Instruction

- ☒ ☐ Introduces words of high utility (e.g., I, have, etc.).
- ☒ ☐ Limits # of words introduced within a lesson to 2-3 per week.
- ☒ ☐ Separates highly similar words (e.g., was/saw).

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ☐

III. Listening Comprehension and Vocabulary Development

The ability to listen to stories, answer questions, sequence events, learn new vocabulary, and retell information heard are the foundation of reading comprehension. Because many kindergarten children cannot yet read stories, it is imperative that they have frequent and rich opportunities to listen to and discuss stories and informational text that will extend their current understandings and vocabulary knowledge.

Listening Comprehension Instruction

- ☒ ☐ Models and systematically reviews critical comprehension skills
 - Literal comprehension
 - Retelling
 - Main idea
 - Summarization
- ☒ ☐ Eases into instruction, beginning with stories containing obvious elements and information before moving to more the complex text.
- ☒ ☐ Introduces stories where elements are explicit (e.g., setting is described specifically).
- ☒ ☐ Focuses on only a few important elements and introduces additional elements when the students can reliably identify those previously taught.
- ☒ ☐ Models and guides the students through stories, thinking out loud as the elements are being identified.
- ☒ ☐ Models multiple examples and provides extensive guided practice in listening-comprehension strategies.
- ☒ ☐ Inserts questions at strategic intervals to reduce the memory load for learners when introducing strategies in stories. (For example, have students retell the important events after each page rather than wait for the end of the story.)
- ☒ ☐ Uses both narrative and expository text.

- ☐ ☒ ☐ Provides plentiful opportunities to listen to and explore a variety of text forms and to engage in interactive discussion of the messages and meanings of the text.
- ☐ ☒ ☐ Uses elements of story grammar as a structure for recalling and retelling the story.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ☒ _____ ☒ _____ ☐

Summary of Kindergarten Ratings

Phonemic Awareness Instruction	_____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input type="radio"/>
Letter-Sound Association Instruction	_____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input type="radio"/>
Decoding Instruction	_____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input type="radio"/>
Irregular Words Instruction	_____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input type="radio"/>
Listening Comprehension Instruction	_____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ <input type="radio"/>

Critical Elements Analysis

First Grade

Phonemic Awareness Instruction

I. Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic Awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sound structure of language. It is a strong predictor of reading success. Phonemic awareness is an auditory skill and consists of multiple components and does not involve print.

- ☒ ○ Analyzes words at the phoneme level (i.e., working with individual sounds within words).
- ☒ ○ Works with phonemes in all position in words (initial, final, medial).
- ☒ ○ Progresses from identifying or distinguishing the positions of sounds in words to producing the sound and adding, deleting, and changing selected sounds.
- ☒ ○ Allocates a significant amount of time to blending, segmenting, and manipulating tasks.
- ☒ ○ Works with increasingly longer words (three to four phonemes).
- ☒ ○ Expands beyond consonant-vowel-consonant words (e.g., *sun*) to more complex phonemic structures (consonant blends).
- ☒ ○ Incorporates letters into phonemic awareness activities.
- ☒ ○ Aligns the words used in phonemic awareness activities with those used in reading.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction

- ☒ ○ Progresses systematically from simple word types (e.g., consonant-vowel-consonant) and word lengths (e.g., number of phonemes) and word complexity (e.g., phonemes in the word, position of blends, stop sounds) to more complex words.
- ☒ ○ Models instruction at each of the fundamental stages (e.g., letter-sound correspondences, blending, reading whole words).

- ☒ ○ Sequences words strategically to incorporate known letters or letter-sound combinations.
- ☒ ○ Provides initial practice in controlled connected text in which students can apply their newly learned skills successfully.
- ☒ ○ Includes repeated opportunities to read words in contexts in which students can apply their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences.
- ☒ ○ Uses decodable text based on specific phonics lessons in the early part of the first grade as an intervening step between explicit skill acquisition and the students' ability to read quality trade books. Decodable texts should contain the phonics elements and sight words that students have been taught. However, the text should be unfamiliar to students so that they are required to apply word-analysis skills and not simply reconstruct text they have memorized.
- ☒ ○ Begins instruction in word families and word patterns (i.e., reading orthographic units of text, such as *at, sat, fat, rat*) after students have learned the letter-sound correspondences in the unit.
- ☒ ○ Teaches students to process larger, highly represented patterns to increase fluency in word recognition.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Irregular Words Instruction

- ☒ ○ Selects words of high utility.
- ☒ ○ Controls the number of irregular words introduced so that the students will not be overwhelmed.
- ☒ ○ Strategically separates high-frequency words (e.g., *was, saw; them, they, there*), that are often confused by students.
- ☒ ○ Points out irregularities while focusing student attention on all letters in the word.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Passage Reading Instruction

- ☒ ○ Introduces passage reading soon after students can read a corpus of words accurately.
- ☒ ○ Contains only words comprised of letter-sounds and word types that have been introduced.
- ☒ ○ Contains only irregular words that have been previously taught
- ☒ ○ Includes passages in which the majority of high frequency irregular words are from list of commonly used words in English.
- ☒ ○ Uses initial stories/passages composed of a high percentage of regular words (minimum of 75-80% decodable words).
- ☒ ○ Contains a small number of low frequency irregular words.
- ☒ ○ Teaches explicit strategy to move from reading words in lists to reading words in sentences and passages.
- ☒ ○ Introduces fluency practice after students read words in passages accurately.
- ☒ ○ Builds toward a 60 word per minute fluency goal by end of grade.
- ☒ ○ Includes sufficient independent practice materials of appropriate difficulty for students to develop fluency.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Reading Comprehension Instruction

- ☒ ○ The text for initial instruction in comprehension:
 - begins with linguistic units appropriate for the learner
 - uses familiar vocabulary
 - uses a topic with which the learner is familiar
 - uses simple syntactical structures.
- ☒ ○ Ensures that students have a conceptual understanding of beginning, middle, and end.
- ☒ ○ Introduces text where the components of text are explicit (beginning, middle, and end being obvious).
- ☒ ○ Begins with short passages to reduce the memory load for learners.
- ☒ ○ Guides students through sample text in which teachers think out loud as they identify the components.
- ☒ ○ Has students discuss the elements orally and make comparisons with other stories.
- ☒ ○ Requires students to determine which strategy to use and why and provide extensive opportunities for students to read and apply the strategies throughout the year. For example, instruction designed to teach children to answer *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* questions would consist of determining which type of question to ask first. *Who* and *what* questions are typically easier to answer than *when* and *where* questions. For *when* and *where* questions, instruction in how to identify the when and where in text may be necessary.
- ☒ ○ Uses both narrative and expository text.
- ☒ ○ Provides plentiful opportunities to listen to and explore a variety of text forms and to engage in interactive discussion of the messages and meanings of the text.
- ☒ ○ Uses elements of story grammar as a structure for recalling and retelling the story. Models retelling, using the setting, characters, and important events as recall anchors. Provides picture cues to help students learn the essential elements.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Summary of First Grade Ratings

Phonemic Awareness Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Irregular Words Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Passage Reading Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Reading Comprehension Instruction	_____●_____●_____○

Critical Elements Analysis

Second Grade

Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction

- ☒ ○ Teaches advanced phonic-analysis skills explicitly, first in isolation, then in words and connected text, and when students become proficient, in trade books.
- ☒ ○ Avoids assuming that learners will automatically transfer skills from one word type to another. When introducing a new letter combination, prefix, or word ending, models each of the fundamental stages of blending the word and then reading the whole word.
- ☒ ○ Separates auditorily and visually similar letter combinations in the instructional sequence (e.g., does not introduce both sounds for *oo* simultaneously; separates *ai*, *au*).
- ☒ ○ Sequences words and sentences strategically to incorporate known phonics units (e.g., letter combinations, inflectional endings).
- ☒ ○ Ensures that students know the sounds of the individual letters prior to introducing larger orthographic units (e.g., *ill*, *ap*, *ing*).
- ☒ ○ Provides initial practice in controlled contexts in which students can apply newly learned skills successfully.
- ☒ ○ Offers repeated opportunities for students to read words in contexts where they can apply their advanced phonics skills with a high level of success.
- ☒ ○ Uses decodable texts, if needed, as an intervening step between explicit skill acquisition and the student's ability to read quality trade books.
- ☒ ○ Incorporates spelling to reinforce word analysis. After students can read words, provides explicit instruction in spelling, showing students how to map the sounds of letters onto print.
- ☒ ○ Makes clear the connections between decoding (symbol to sound) and spelling (sound to symbol).
- ☒ ○ Teaches explicit strategy to read multisyllabic words by using prefixes, suffixes, and known word parts.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Irregular Words Instruction

- ☒ ○ Selects words that have high utility; that is, words that are used frequently in grade-appropriate literature and informational text.
- ☒ ○ Sequences high-frequency irregular words to avoid potential confusion. For example, high-frequency words that are often confused by students should be strategically separated for initial instruction.
- ☒ ○ Limits the number of sight words introduced at one time (five to seven new words).
- ☒ ○ Preteaches the sight words prior to reading connected text.
- ☒ ○ Provides a cumulative review of important high-frequency sight words as part of daily reading instruction (two to three minutes).

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Vocabulary and Concept Instruction

- ☒ ○ Provides direct instruction of specific concepts and vocabulary essential to understanding text.
- ☒ ○ Incorporates exposure to a broad and diverse vocabulary through listening to an reading stories and informational texts.
- ☒ ○ Provides repeated and multiple exposures to critical vocabulary.
- ☒ ○ Integrates words into sentences and asks students to tell the meaning of the word in the sentence and to use it in a variety of contexts.
- ☒ ○ Reviews previously introduced words cumulatively.
- ☒ ○ Teaches strategy for word meanings based on meaning of prefixes and suffixes.
- ☒ ○ Introduces the prefix or suffix in isolation, indicating its meaning and then connecting it in words.
- ☒ ○ Illustrates the prefix or suffix with multiple examples.

- ☒ ○ Uses examples when the roots are familiar to students (e.g., *remake* and *replay* as opposed to *record* and *recode*).
- ☒ ○ Separates prefixes that appear similar in initial instructional sequences (e.g., *pre*, *pro*).

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Passage Reading - Fluency Instruction

- ☒ ○ Contains only words comprised of phonic elements and word types that have been introduced.
- ☒ ○ Contains only irregular words that have been previously taught.
- ☒ ○ Selects majority of high frequency irregular words from list of commonly used words in English.
- ☒ ○ Introduces fluency practice after students read words in passages accurately.
- ☒ ○ Builds toward a 90 word-per-minute fluency goal by end of grade 2.
- ☒ ○ Includes sufficient independent practice materials of appropriate difficulty for students to develop fluency.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Reading Comprehension Instruction

- ☒ ○ Teaches conventions of informational text (e.g., titles, chapter headings) to locate important information.
- ☒ ○ Teaches explicit strategy to interpret information from graphs, diagrams, and charts.
- ☒ ○ Teaches the importance of reading in locating facts and details in narrative and informational text and recognizing cause-and-effect relationships.
- ☒ ○ Organizes instruction in a coherent structure.
- ☒ ○ Teaches information or strategies to increase a student's understanding of what is read.

- ☒ ○ Teaches skill or strategy explicitly with the aid of carefully designed examples and practice.
- ☒ ○ Continues skill or strategy instruction across several instructional sessions to illustrate the applicability and utility of the skill or strategy.
- ☒ ○ Connects previously taught skills and strategies with new content and text.
- ☒ ○ 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.
- ☒ ○ Teaches analyzing elements of narrative text and comparing and contrasting elements within and among texts.
- ☒ ○ Uses story grammar structure as a tool for prompting information to compare and contrast, organize information, and group related ideas to maintain a consistent focus.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Summary of Second Grade Ratings

Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction	_____ ● _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ ○
Irregular Words Instruction	_____ ● _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ ○
Vocabulary and Concept Instruction	_____ ● _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ ○
Passage Reading - Fluency Instruction	_____ ● _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ ○
Reading Comprehension Instruction	_____ ● _____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> _____ ○

Critical Elements Analysis

Third Grade

Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction

- ☒ ○ Separates word parts that are highly similar (e.g., *ight* and *aight*).
- ☒ ○ Introduces word parts that occur with high frequency over those that occur in only a few words.
- ☒ ○ Teaches the word parts first and then incorporates the words into sentences and connected text.
- ☒ ○ Emphasizes reading harder and bigger words (i.e., multisyllabic words) and reading all words more fluently.
- ☒ ○ Extends instruction to orthographically larger and more complex units (e.g., *ight*, *aught*, *own*).
- ☒ ○ Teaches strategies to decode multisyllabic words using the structural features of such word parts as affixes (e.g., *pre-*, *mis-*, *-tion*) to aid in word recognition.
- ☒ ○ Provides explicit explanations, including modeling, "Think-alouds," guided practice, and the gradual transfer of responsibility to students.
- ☒ ○ Relys on examples more than abstract rules. (Begin with familiar words. Show "nonexamples." Use word parts rather than have students search for little words within a word. *Examples*: depart, report.)
- ☒ ○ Makes clear the limitations of structural analysis.
- ☒ ○ Uses extended text in opportunities for application.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Vocabulary and Concept Instruction

- ☒ ○ Teaches dictionary usage explicitly with grade-appropriate dictionaries that allow students to access and understand the meaning of an unknown word. Uses words in context and that are encountered frequently.
- ☒ ○ Uses context to gain the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Context includes the words surrounding the unfamiliar word that provide information to its meaning. Because not all contexts are created equal, however, initial instruction must be designed carefully to enable learners to acquire this important vocabulary strategy.
- ☒ ○ Extends the understanding of concepts and vocabulary of the English language through (1) learning and using antonyms and synonyms; (2) using individual words in compound words to predict the meaning; (3) using prefixes and suffixes to assist in word meaning; and (4) learning simple multiple-meaning words.
- ☒ ○ Emphasizes direct instruction in specific concepts and vocabulary essential to understanding text and exposure to a broad and diverse vocabulary through listening to and reading stories.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Passage Reading - Fluency Instruction

- ☒ ○ Contains only words comprised of phonic elements and word types that have been introduced.
- ☒ ○ Contains only irregular words that have been previously taught.
- ☒ ○ Selects majority of high frequency irregular words from list of commonly used words in English.
- ☒ ○ Introduces fluency practice after students read words in passages accurately.
- ☒ ○ Builds toward a 120 word-per-minute fluency goal by end of grade 3.
- ☒ ○ Includes sufficient independent practice materials of appropriate difficulty for students to develop fluency.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Reading Comprehension Instruction

- ☒ ○ Explicitly teaches comprehension strategies.
- ☒ ○ Provides a range of examples for initial teaching and practice.
- ☒ ○ Provides independent practice activities that parallel requirements of instruction.
- ☒ ○ Begins with linguistic units appropriate to the learner; for example, uses pictures and a set of individual sentences before presenting paragraph or passage-level text to help students learn the concept of main idea.
- ☒ ○ Uses text in which the main idea or comprehension unit is explicitly stated, clear, and in which the ideas follow a logical order.
- ☒ ○ Uses familiar vocabulary and passages at appropriate readability levels for learners.
- ☒ ○ Uses familiar topics during initial teaching.
- ☒ ○ Uses familiar, simple syntactical structures and sentence types.
- ☒ ○ Progresses to more complex structures in which main ideas are not explicit and passages are longer.
- ☒ ○ Teaches skill or strategy explicitly with the aid of carefully designed examples and practice.
- ☒ ○ Continues skill or strategy instruction across several instructional sessions to illustrate the applicability and utility of the skill or strategy.
- ☒ ○ Connects previously taught skills and strategies with new content and text.
- ☒ ○ 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.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Summary of Third Grade Ratings

Decoding and Word Recognition Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Vocabulary and Concept Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Passage Reading - Fluency Instruction	_____●_____●_____○
Reading Comprehension Instruction	_____●_____●_____○

Critical Elements Analysis — All Grades

Assessment

Program Assessment Components

- ① ○ Include assessment items for each major reading skill/strategy that can be used to determine what students need to learn and what teachers need to teach.
- ① ○ Provide indicators of critical skills and strategies to identify students at risk of difficulty and in need of specialized instruction.
- ① ○ Allow teachers to determine the effectiveness of their instruction by:
 - conducting assessments at strategic point of instruction (entry, monitoring of progress, and summative).
 - monitor student progress at the end of each unit of instruction.
- ① ○ Link closely the instruction and curriculum activities to school-, district-, and state standards.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ① _____ ○

Critical Elements Analysis — All Grades

Instructional Programs and Materials

Materials and Programs

- ◐ ○ Prioritize essential skills and strategies.
- ◐ ○ Sequence skills and strategies in a logical, coherent manner.
- ◐ ○ Demonstrate and build the relationships between fundamental skills leading to higher order skills.
- ◐ ○ Address or reinforce content area standards in mathematics, science, and history-social science.
- ◐ ○ Focus on activities that relate directly to the learning objectives.
- ◐ ○ Provide specific suggestions for learners with special needs.

Tally the number of elements with each rating.

_____ ● _____ ◐ _____ ○

Critical Elements Analysis — All Grades

Differentiated Instruction**Instructional Materials**Instructional Grouping

- ☒ ○ Provide a range within the instructional materials which allows flexibility to start students at different entry points in the materials depending on student performance.
- ☒ ○ Suggest appropriate grouping based on students' performance
- ☒ ○ Recommend and accommodate flexible groupings to maximize student performance.

Tally the number of elements with each rating. _____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Learners with Special Needs

- ☒ ○ Present comprehensive guidance for teachers in providing effective, efficient instruction for students with special needs.
- ☒ ○ Provide explicit and systematic instruction and practice materials to accelerate reading achievement for students who are reading significantly below grade level.

Tally the number of elements with each rating. _____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○

Advanced Learners

- ☒ ○ Includes enrichment and acceleration options for advanced students who demonstrate mastery of information.
- ☒ ○ Provides suggestions to help students study a particular theme or concept in greater depth or perspective.

Tally the number of elements with each rating. _____ ● _____ ☒ _____ ○