Reading Guide to Program Selection, Grades 1–2

A core reading program is the backbone of your reading instruction. It provides many of the texts your students will read and the curriculum that will assist their development. This curriculum includes the knowledge, strategies, and attitudes students need to become engaged and skillful readers. To read well students need knowledge of letters, sounds, word meanings, genre, and concepts of the world. Knowledge without strategies, however, is largely inert. So, students need strategies for identifying words, inferring word meanings, comprehending a passage, and monitoring comprehension. A core program should provide lessons so that teachers can teach these strategies effectively. Finally, good reading is more than a set of skills and strategies; it is also the will to plunge into text, engage with it, and enjoy it. A core reading program should help to develop engagement.

In this document you will find a number of activities that will help you evaluate the instruction in core reading programs. *This is not a checklist*. Checklists cause you to look for specific components—phonemic awareness lessons, little books, activities for English-language learners, and progress-monitoring tools. Publishing companies are sophisticated and know what components you are seeking, so they place them in the program clearly labeled. Only by looking deeply and examining critically will you be able to discern the quality of the instruction and the match between the core program's instruction and your school's or your district's curriculum goals.

This document will take you through a series of inquiries about reading instruction in a core program. You will be asked to look at a limited number of features but your examination will require some time and thought. You will be inspecting the core program as if you were about to teach from it, planning a lesson and considering how the instruction in the program will affect your students. Let's use shopping for a car as an analogy. All things considered, you want a car with certain components. Of course, the salesman says, "Yes, this car has cruise control and an antilock braking system." But without a test drive, you cannot know how easy it is to operate the cruise control or how well it maintains the speed of the car on uphill and downhill slopes. Only a similar test drive will enable you to evaluate the components of a core reading program. Keep in mind that you may break the following tasks up among members of your textbook adoption committee, helping everyone to manage their time and efforts in an efficient way.

Rating and Scoring Components of a Core Reading Program

Directions
You will examine five components of a core reading program: its texts; phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word instruction; knowledge and vocabulary instruction; comprehension instruction; and differentiation of instruction. These examinations are organized as a series of inquiries into the programs. At the end of each inquiry you will find a 4-point rating guide. Use the 4-point rating guide to provide a summary rating of each component, using the following rubric. In determining your rating you should consider both the quality of the text or the instruction and how frequently the program meets that level of quality. To earn a high score the program must demonstrate a consistently high level of quality.

4 = Excellent   All of the selections or lesson components examined meet a very high level of quality on a consistent basis.

3 = Strong   Most of the selections or lessons examined meet a high level of quality on a consistent basis, or meet a very high level of quality on an inconsistent basis.

2 = Adequate   All of the selections or lessons examined meet an average level of quality on a consistent basis, or fail to include some important instructional characteristics at all.

1 = Weak   All of the selections or lessons examined fail to meet some important characteristics despite an occasional strong attribute.

The overall rating for each section is important, but so are the impressions you gain from studying the core reading programs.

The last page of the Reading GPS guides you to integrate and summarize all of your impressions of each core reading program. Be sure to comment on the navigation of the program, noting how easy it is to locate and use its various components. Use one complete set of these forms for each core reading program you evaluate.

Part I: Examining Texts for Reading

Student Anthology

Good readers are proficient with a wide range of genres. A strong reading program has a balance of genres because a strong diet of realistic fiction will not develop skill in reading poetry or informational books. Beyond balance, a strong program will provide enough experience with a genre so that students understand the text structure and features of that genre and can study it over several lessons. Finally, the program you select should match the expectations of your state and or district curriculum.

Directions

Read all of the selections in one grade level of the core program and tally the number of each genre. You may want to repeat this analysis by reading the selections in the other grade level. Compute the percentage of selections for each genre, and then compare the results for this program to other core reading programs you are considering.

Grade Level _____

Unit/Theme	Fiction					Poetry and Plays	Nonfiction	
	Historical Fiction	Realistic Fiction	Fantasy	Mystery	Folk Tales and Fables		Expository	Narrative
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
Totals								
Percentage								

Provide an overall rating for the diversity of genre in the first and second grade level of the program by circling one response.

Rating Genre Balance			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Leveled and Decodable Books

In addition to the student anthology, most core programs contain a number of little, leveled books. These books help students read at their instructional level and apply decoding skills and allow teachers to differentiate instruction. The leveled books are written for students reading above grade level, on grade level and below grade level. It is important to examine the quality of these little leveled books because they play such a central role in your instruction.

We suggest that you inspect and read the leveled books that accompany at least 5 of the anthology selections. When reading the little leveled books you will examine three characteristics: (1) word count or length, (2) genre, and (3) interest level.

Directions
Word count is important because students reading below level need extensive reading to catch up. They need to read as much as the better readers, or more. Write in the number of words in each book for below-, on-, and above-level texts.

The **genre** of the anthology selection should receive additional focus when students read the accompanying leveled books. Identify genre for the anthology selection and the leveled books with an appropriate one- or two-letter code. Look for some relationship or consistency between the selections.

Interest or engagement should be coded 5 (high) through 1 (low). Consider the following criteria:
Are the ideas important; are the ideas personally, socially, or culturally relevant?
Is there development of an idea, a character, or a theme?
Does the text stimulate thinking and feeling?

Evaluating Leveled and Decodable Texts

Grade Level _____

Unit or Theme and Lesson	Word Count or Length			Genre			Interest and Engagement		
	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									

Provide an overall rating for the quality of the decodable and leveled book in the program by circling one response.

Rating Leveled Books			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Part II: Instruction for Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words

Phonemic Awareness Scope and Sequence

You will need to examine the core program's scope and sequence in the light of best practice. It is important to remember that the sequence of instruction for developing phonological awareness is not rigid, but rather some early knowledge (e.g., letter names), facilitates later learning like awareness of onsets, rimes, and phonemes.

Directions

As you read through parts of the program, place check marks when an element of phonemic awareness instruction appears at the beginning, middle, or end of the year. A strong program should approximately follow the sequence in the left-hand column in chronological order.

Research-Based Sequence of Instruction	First Grade Curriculum		
	Beginning of Year	**Mid Year**	**End of Year**
Alphabet names—perhaps 8 letters before letter sounds are introduced			
Associate letters and sounds			
Segment and blend syllables			
Identifying individual phonemes—begin with continuants (*m*, *s*, *l*)			
Sort and match phonemes at the beginning and end of words			
Onset and rime—segmenting and blending			
Phoneme segmenting and blending			
Deletion and substitution of phonemes			

Phonemic Awareness Instruction

Research has shown that a number of factors are critical to effective phonemic awareness instruction.

Directions

Examine five first-grade lessons across the year. Fill in each column as the criterion is met.
• The program should provide all necessary materials.
• Students should be taught in small groups (S), not whole groups (W) or individually (I).
• The lesson length should be between 15 and 30 minutes.
• The teacher and the students (TS) should model the response, not just the teacher (T).
• The teacher should provide feedback on incorrect (I) and correct responses (C).
• There should be a sufficient number of items so that students can practice the skills thoroughly: sufficient practice (S), insufficient practice (I).
• Phonemic awareness is applied to the spelling and reading of real text.

Unit or Theme and Lesson Number	Materials Provided (Yes, No)	Instructional Group (W, S, I)	Lesson Length in Minutes	Modeling (T, TS)	Feedback (C, I)	Sufficient Practice (S, I)	Application to Real Text (Yes, No)

Provide an overall rating of phonemic awareness instruction by circling one response.

Rating Phonemic Awareness			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Phonics Scope and Sequence—First Grade

You will need to examine the core program's phonics scope and sequence against guidelines suggested by research. Research-based guidelines for an effective phonics scope and sequence are listed in the left-hand column.

Directions

For each unit of the program, check off which skills are taught. During this examination keep in mind how well this core program's scope and sequence match up with the other programs you are considering.

	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __
Initial and final consonants (*c*, *b*, *w*)						
High-utility sounds (e.g., /a/, /m/, /s/, /t/, /r/) are taught before low-utility sounds (e.g., /x/, /y/, /z/)						
Initial consonant blends (e.g., *bl*, *st*, *sc*) and digraphs (e.g., *ch*, *sh*, *wh*, *th*)						
Short-vowel patterns (CVC, e.g., *cat*, *pig*, *wet*)						
Complex short-vowel patterns (CCVCC, e,g., *short*, *flash*)						
Affricates (e.g., *tch*, *dge*)						
Final consonant blends and digraphs (e.g., *clock*, *fish*)						
Long vowels (CVCe, e.g., *made*, *rake*)						

Phonics Scope and Sequence—Second Grade

You will need to examine the core program's phonics scope and sequence against guidelines suggested by research.

Directions

For each unit of the program check off which skills are taught. During this examination keep in mind how well this core program's scope and sequence match up with the other programs you are considering.

	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __	Unit __
VCe pattern long vowels (e.g., *made*, *time*)						
R-controlled vowels (e.g., *far*, *fur*, *fir*)						
Other common long vowels (e.g., *rain*, *breed*)						
Complex consonant units (e.g., *str*, *scr*)						
Abstract vowels: Digraphs and diphthongs (e.g., *cow*, *hawk*)						
Larger orthographic patterns (e.g., *ick*, *ade*, *ant*)						

Provide an overall rating for the scope and sequence of phonics instruction in both grade levels by circling one response.

Rating Phonics Scope and Sequence

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Phonics Instruction

Having considered the sequence of phonics instruction, you now need to evaluate the quality of that instruction. In the left-hand column below you will find characteristics of strong phonics instruction.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least five lessons within the core program. For each characteristic rate how often that instructional characteristic is found in the lessons: *Always, Often, Sometimes,* or *Never*.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program provides the materials necessary for conducting the whole-group lesson.				
The program provides the materials necessary for differentiating the phonics instruction in small groups or at learning centers.				
Letter-sound patterns are taught to mastery and reviewed regularly.				
Students are given an opportunity to decode (pronounce) and encode (spell) the sounds that have been taught.				
The students are taught an explicit strategy for decoding words (e.g., sequential blending, decoding by analogy)				
The teacher explicitly models decoding strategies.				
The program provides the opportunity for the students to apply their knowledge of phonics to reading real words in short, decodable text.				

(*continued*)

Phonics Instruction (*continued*)

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program differentiates and gives you the option to teach phonics features based on students' needs or skill levels.				
The program provides additional small-group instructional time for students needing more help with decoding.				
The program provides different materials and texts to teach phonics to below-level students.				
When the students are reading connected text, the program provides teachers with guidelines explaining how to coach students to apply decoding strategies.				
Prefixes and suffixes are taught when the students can apply this knowledge to reading connected texts.				

Provide an overall rating for attributes of phonics instruction by circling one response.

Rating Phonics Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Sight-Word Instruction

Sight words are high-frequency words that readers immediately recognize without word analysis. Below you will find characteristics of sight word instruction.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least five lessons within the core program. For each characteristic, rate how often that instructional characteristic is found in the lessons.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
High-frequency words taught in the program have both regular (*can*) and irregular (*was*) spelling features.				
Sight words typically taught in the school appear in the core program (Dolch or Fry lists).				
Function words are taught in the program (*and*, *but*, *for*, *on*, *in*)				
Highly salient words (important content words) are taught before students read a selection.				
The decodable parts of irregular words are stressed when these words are taught and the irregularities are described. For example, in the word *said*, the *s* and the *d* have regular letter-sound correspondences.				
The program provides opportunities and activities for students to practice sight words.				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of sight-word instruction by circling one response.

Rating Sight-Word Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Part III: Reading Fluency

Oral reading fluency is an important attribute of good reading. When a reader becomes fluent he or she can identify words with little or no attention, and thus concentrate on meaning. Fluent reading requires rate, accuracy, expression, and phrasing. Specific materials are not necessary to become fluent, but some instructional routines are very helpful.

Directions
Read five second-grade and five first-grade lessons. Evaluate how often you find the following lesson characteristics.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program guides teachers to model fluent oral reading.				
The program includes practices such as timed repeated readings, peer or partner readings, echo reading, and Readers Theatre.				
The program includes a focus on developing oral reading fluency when teachers meet with small groups of students.				
The program encourages teachers to provide feedback to students on the quality of their oral fluency.				
The program encourages students to reread texts to increase oral fluency when working with a teacher or a partner.				
The program provides directions and ample opportunities for students to practice their oral reading fluency.				

Provide an overall rating for the fluency instruction guidelines in the program by circling one response.

Rating Fluency Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Part IV: Preparing to Study Knowledge and Vocabulary Development

Before you begin to examine the knowledge development and vocabulary instruction in the core reading program, you need to read all of the selections in one unit of the student edition, approximately five lessons. Do not use the teacher's edition for your first reading, because we want you to make your judgments about which words to teach independent of the suggestions in the teacher's edition.

Selecting Vocabulary Words

Directions

There are two critical decisions in vocabulary instruction: what words should be taught, and how the words should be taught. Read five lessons from the core program, concentrating on the anthology selections. In the chart list the words you would teach to your students, the words they need to know. Next look at the teacher's manual and list the words it suggests you teach. Compare the two lists.

Lesson 1		Lesson 2		Lesson 3		Lesson 4		Lesson 5	
Words I Would Teach	Words in Teacher's Manual	Words I Would Teach	Words in Teacher's Manual	Words I Would Teach	Words in Teacher's Manual	Words I Would Teach	Words in Teacher's Manual	Words I Would Teach	Words in Teacher's Manual

Teaching Word Meanings

Read five vocabulary instruction lessons from the student edition to examine how words are taught.

Directions

For each characteristic of a vocabulary lesson simply place a "+" for the presence of the attribute or a "–" for the absence of the attribute. When you are done total the number of pluses and minuses.

The Vocabulary Lesson Includes the Following:	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Definitions of the words					
Contextual information about the words (use of the words in context)					
Encouragement of the teacher to do the following:					
• relate the words to the students' personal experiences					
• give examples and nonexamples of the use of the words					
• discuss similarities and differences between new and old words					
• discuss multiple meanings of words					
• use the words in a variety of contexts					
Direction for the teacher to have the students do the following:					
• put definitions into their own words					
• use the words in sentences					
• recognize appropriate and inappropriate uses of the words					
Words are reviewed and discussed before, during, and after reading					
Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)					

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of vocabulary instruction by circling one response.

Rating Vocabulary Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Developing Prior Knowledge

You are now going to return to lessons and selection that you already read and examine the prior knowledge that your students will need to understand the story.

Directions

Review each of the stories and write down in the chart below which concepts and ideas will be difficult for your students to understand. Then read the knowledge development portion of the lesson in the teacher's edition and note if the program directs you to develop the knowledge that your students will need to understand the passage.

	Lesson 1	**Lesson 2**	**Lesson 3**	**Lesson 4**	**Lesson 3**
What ideas, concepts, and experiences will your students need to understand the selection?					
What ideas, concepts, and experiences are developed in the teacher's edition?					

Provide an overall rating for quality of knowledge development in the program by circling one response.

Rating Knowledge Development			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Teacher Read-Aloud—Storybook Reading
Reading good stories to children is a crucial part of oral language development, vocabulary growth, and comprehension acquisition. All core reading programs should provide this experience. The read-aloud experience should be evaluated for the quality of the literature and the instructional suggestions provided to the teacher.

Directions
Read four teacher read-alouds and evaluate the literature and the instruction.

	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4
The program uses interesting and engaging literature.				
The literature contains vocabulary that can expand the students' word knowledge.				
The program provides teaching suggestions that engage students in a rich scaffolded discussion by doing the following:				
• linking text ideas to students' prior knowledge				
• developing word meanings through simple definitions while reading the story				
• expanding on word meanings after reading the story through a discussion of words				
• focusing on narrative structure				
• modeling strategies such as self questioning, making inferences, and summarizing				
The storybook read-alouds are linked topically or thematically to the students' reading selections.				
Total Points				

Provide an overall rating for quality of knowledge development in the program by circling one response.

Rating Storybook Reading			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Part V: Comprehension Instruction

Your study of comprehension instruction in a core program will include an examination of what comprehension skills and strategies are taught and how these skills and strategies are taught. Seven strategies are critical to the growth of reading comprehension: (1) predicting, (2) self-questioning, (3) summarizing, (4) making inferences (also called drawing conclusions or making generalizations), (5) comprehension monitoring, (6) use of narrative story structure, and (7) use of informational text structure.

Directions
Take the teacher's edition of your core program and determine how often these strategies are taught and practiced in each unit of the program. Read the theme organizer for each unit and tally the number of times these strategies are taught, reviewed, and practiced.

Strategy	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
Predicting						
Self-questioning						
Summarizing						
Making inferences						
Monitoring comprehension						
Narrative story structure						
Informational text structure						

Provide an overall rating for the comprehension curriculum in the program by circling one response.

Rating Comprehension Strategy Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Guided Practice in Reading Comprehension

While students are reading they should be actively using strategies to comprehend the selections. Modeling a strategy starts with the teacher but then responsibility is released to the students.

Directions

Read at least five lessons in two different themes in the core program. Pay close attention to the teacher directions before, during and after a reading to determine if guided practice is taking place.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program has the teachers and the students set a purpose for reading the selection.				
The program directs teachers to model strategies and to think aloud during guided reading.				
The program directs the students to model and use comprehension strategies while reading, including multiple strategies.				
The teacher asks questions to prompt the use of strategies. (Was your prediction correct? How does that connect to what you know?)				
The students are encouraged to ask questions while they are reading the selection.				
The teacher is directed to assist students' comprehension by providing hints and encouraging students to reread a passage.				
The teacher is directed to assist students' comprehension by helping them make connections between what they know and what they are reading.				

Provide an overall rating for the quality of the guided reading instruction in the program by circling one response.

Rating Guided Practice Of Comprehension			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Part VI: Small-Group Differentiated Instruction

Directions
Instructions with the core reading program should provide the teacher with the tools to differentiate classroom instruction. Differentiation requires small-group instruction, so that the needs of students can be targeted, and meaningful independent work to keep most students engaged while working with one small group. Evaluate the core program on the following questions. Check off each attribute of differentiated instruction that is provided.

	Advanced	On-Level	Below-Level	ELL
Small-group differentiated lessons are provided for all types of students.				
The manual provides sufficiently detailed lessons so that teachers can target students' needs in the following areas:				
§ Phonemic awareness and word identification				
§ Oral reading fluency				
§ Vocabulary development				
§ Comprehension instruction				
The teacher's manual is organized so that the small-group lessons are easy to locate				
The teacher's manual is organized so that the materials necessary for small group lessons are easy to locate				
The program provides interesting and challenging independent work for students to complete at their seats or at a workstation.				

Provide an overall rating for the level of differentiated instruction in the program by circling one response.

Rating Differentiated Instruction			
Excellent	**Strong**	**Adequate**	**Weak**
4	3	2	1

Summary Findings

Program Name _____ **Publication Date** _____

Publisher _____ **Reviewer** _____

	Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak	Comments and Impressions
Texts for Reading					
Genre in Anthology					
Leveled and Decodable Books					
Word Study					
Phonemic Awareness Instruction					
Phonics Sequence					
Phonics Instruction					
Sight-Word Instruction					
Fluency Instruction					
Vocabulary and Knowledge Development					
Vocabulary Instruction					
Knowledge Development					
Teacher Read Alouds					
Comprehension Instruction					
Skills and Strategy Curriculum					
Guided Practice					
Small-Group Differentiated Instruction					
Navigation and Ease of Use					

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