

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

You will examine six components of a core reading program as suggested by *The Essential Guide to Selecting Programs*, and three aspects chosen as a priority in SPSD:

1. its texts;
2. phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word instruction;
3. fluency;
4. knowledge and vocabulary instruction;
5. comprehension instruction;
6. differentiation of instruction;
7. formative and summative assessment;
8. writing instruction; and
9. grammar 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: TEXTS FOR READING BIG BOOKS AND STUDENT ANTHOLOGY 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 _____

	FICTION						NON FICTION	
	Historical Fiction	Realistic Fiction	Fantasy	Mystery	Folk Tale & Fable	Poetry & Plays	Narrative	Expository
Unit/Theme								
Unit/Theme								
Unit/Theme								
Unit/Theme								
Unit/Theme								
Totals								

Provide an overall rating for the diversity of genre in the program by circling one response.

Diversity of Genre Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Leveled and Decodable Books

In addition to the student anthology, 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. It is important to examine the quality of these leveled books because they play such a central role in your instruction.

We suggest that you read the leveled and decodable books that accompany at least five of the anthology selections or Big Book selections. When reading the leveled and decodable 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?

Unit/Theme & Lesson	Word Length/Count			Genre			Interest/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 leveled and decodable books in the program by circling one response.

Leveled and Decodable Books Rating

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	Kindergarten Curriculum		
	Beginning of Year	Mid Year	End Year
Alphabet names—perhaps 8 letters before letter sounds are introduced			
Associate letters and sounds			
Segment and blend syllables			
Identify 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 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 20 minutes.
- The teacher and the students (TS) should model the response, not just the teacher (T).
- The teacher should be directed to 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.

Phonemic Awareness Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Phonics Scope and Sequence – First Grade

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

Directions

Select 1-3 units, 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 ____
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 patters (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)			

Provide an overall rating for phonics scope and sequence by circling one response.

Phonics Scope and Sequence Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Phonics Scope and Sequence – Second Grade

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

Directions

Select 1-3 units, 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 ____
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 phonics scope and sequence by circling one response.

Phonics Scope and Sequence Rating

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.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least 2 lessons within the core program.

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 letter identification and 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 teacher is directed to explicitly model decoding strategies.				
The program provides the opportunity for students to apply their knowledge of letter-sound principles to reading real words in short, decodable text.				
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 different texts to teach phonics to below-level students.				
When the students are reading connected text, the program provides teachers with help or 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 the characteristics of phonics instruction by circling one response.

Characteristics of Phonics Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Sight-Word Instruction

Having considered phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, you now need to evaluate how the program teaches sight words. Sight words are high-frequency words that readers learn to immediately recognize. This page helps you evaluate the characteristics of sight-word instruction.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least six 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 your 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.

Characteristics of Sight-word Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART III: 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 fluency instruction guidelines by circling one response.

Fluency Instruction Rating

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 the Teacher's Manual	Words I would Teach	Words in the Teacher's Manual	Words I would Teach	Words in the Teacher's Manual	Words I would Teach	Words in the Teacher's Manual	Words I would Teach	Words in the Teacher's Manual

Teaching Word Meanings

For this criterion, look at the teacher's edition and examine how the words are actually taught. We have provided a checklist for you to evaluate the quality of vocabulary instruction.

Directions

Place a plus (+) or a minus (-) in the box for each characteristic of vocabulary instruction. When done, total the # +s.

The Vocabulary Lesson Includes the Following:

	Lesson _____	Lesson _____
Definitions of the words		
Contextual information about the words (uses 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		
Discussion of multiple meanings of words		
Direction for the teacher to have 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.

Characteristics of Vocabulary Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Developing Prior Knowledge

Using the 1 of the 2 lessons that you read when studying vocabulary instruction, think about the prior knowledge that your students will need to understand the selections.

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 same knowledge that your students will need to understand the passage.

	Lesson ____	Lesson ____
What ideas, concepts, and experiences will your students need to know to understand the selection?		
What ideas, concepts, and experiences are developed in the teacher's edition?		

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

Characteristics of Knowledge Development Instruction Rating

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. Read-aloud experiences should be evaluated for the quality of the literature and the instructional suggestions provided to the teacher.

Directions

Read 2 teacher read-alouds in the core program and evaluate the literature and the instruction. Use the same 4-point scale for each element as for the overall rating.

Characteristic of Interactive Read-Alouds	Story 1	Story 2
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 stimulating discussion by doing the following:		
• linking text ideas to students' prior knowledge		
• developing word meanings		
• expanding on word meanings after reading the story		
• focusing on text 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 the characteristics of the storybook read aloud by circling one response.

Characteristics of the Storybook Read Aloud Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART IV: 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 a selection of units of the program. Tally the number of times these strategies are taught, reviewed, and practiced.

Strategy	Unit _____	Unit _____
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.

Comprehension Curriculum in the Program Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Guided Practice in Reading Comprehension

While you are reading to the students, they should be encouraged to use strategies to comprehend the selections. Modeling a strategy starts with the teacher but responsibility is gradually released to the students.

Directions

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

Criterion	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.				
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 characteristics of guiding comprehension instruction by circling one response.

Characteristics of Guiding Comprehension Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART V: SMALL-GROUP DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

The instruction in the core program should provide the teacher with the tools to differentiate instruction. Differentiation requires small-group instruction, so that the needs of students can be targeted, and meaningful independent work to keep other students actively engaged.

Directions

Evaluate the core program on the following criteria. Place a check mark for each attribute of differentiated instruction that is provided.

Criterion	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 materials 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 characteristics of small-group differentiated instruction by circling one response.

Characteristics of the Small-group Differentiated Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART VI: FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Assessment

For this criterion, look at the teacher's edition and examine how the program supports assessment for learning and of learning.

Directions

Place a plus (+) or a minus (-) in the box for each characteristic of formative assessment. When done, total the # +s.

The Lesson Includes the Following:

Lesson _____

Lesson _____

Clearly identified spots for formative assessment		
Indications of what to do for instruction based on the formative data		
Suggestions for formative assessment		
Clearly identified spots for summative assessment		
Suggestions for summative assessment		
Summatives are at the rigor level expected in the district		
Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)		

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

Characteristics of Assessment Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART VII: WRITING INSTRUCTION

Writing Instruction

For this criterion, look at the teacher’s edition and examine how the program supports opportunities to support the instruction outlined below.

Directions

Place a plus (+) or a minus (-) in the box for each characteristic of formative assessment. When done, total the # +s.

The Lesson Includes the Following:

Lesson _____

Lesson _____

Establish a positive atmosphere for writing, reading, learning		
Teacher as writer		
Routines and expectations established		
Meaningful/purposeful writing (authentic)		
Variety of types and purposes for writing		
Variety of types and purposes for writing modeled (mentor texts)		
Collaboration opportunities		
Multi levels of feedback (teacher, peers, etc.)		
Mini-lessons		
Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)		

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

Characteristics of Writing Instruction Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

PART VIII: GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Grammar Instruction

For this criterion, look at the teacher’s edition and examine how the program supports opportunities to support the instruction outlined below.

Directions

Place a plus (+) or a minus (-) in the box for each characteristic of formative assessment. When done, total the # +s.

The Lesson Includes the Following:

Lesson _____

Lesson _____

Embraces explicit instruction/mini-lessons		
Uses reading and writing as context for understanding grammar		
Opportunities to practice are in authentic tasks		
Emphasis on learning grammar as how the structure of language works (i.e., connections/inter-relatedness of parts of speech) not isolates topics		
Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)		

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

Characteristics of Grammar Instruction Rating

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	_____	_____		_____	
Vocabulary and Knowledge Development Vocabulary Instruction Knowledge Development Teacher Read Alouds		_____		_____	
Comprehension Instruction Skills and Strategies Curriculum Guided Practice					
Differentiation of Instruction					
Navigation and Ease of Use					
Assessment					
Writing Instruction					
Grammar Instruction					

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