

## Reading Guide to Program Selection, Grades 3-6

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: PHONICS AND WORD STUDY INSTRUCTION

Even in the upper grades students benefit from instruction in prefixes, suffixes, and word roots. Older struggling readers still need strategies for decoding words.

### Directions

Read the characteristics of word study instruction 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 on phonics and structural analysis.				
The program provides instruction in structural analysis—prefixes, suffixes, and word roots.				
Prefixes and suffixes are taught when the students can apply this knowledge to reading connected texts.				
The program provides instruction for decoding longer words by chunking them into syllables.				
Students are given an opportunity to decode (pronounce) and encode (spell) the sounds that have been taught.				
The teacher explicitly models decoding strategies.				
The students are expected to apply their knowledge of new phonics patterns to new examples in and out of context.				
The program differentiates and gives teachers the option to present phonics features based on students' needs or skill levels.				
The program provides materials to teach phonics to below-level students.				
When the students are reading connected text, the program provides teachers with guidelines that enable them to coach students to apply decoding strategies.				
Struggling students are taught an explicit strategy for decoding words (e.g., sequential blending, decoding by analogy)				
The program provides the materials necessary for differentiating the phonics instruction in small groups to meet the needs of struggling readers.				

Provide an overall rating for phonics or word study instruction provided for older students by circling one response

**Phonics or Word Study 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 a few lessons at a grade level. 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 VOCABULZRY 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**

Use the following criteria to select the words: The words are important to the meaning of the story, the words can be used in many contexts outside of the core reading program; and it is unlikely that students can use the context to determine the words’ meanings. Read five lessons, 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 teachers’ manual and list the words it suggests you teach. Compare the two lists.

<b>Lesson 1</b>		<b>Lesson 2</b>		<b>Lesson 3</b>		<b>Lesson 4</b>		<b>Lesson 5</b>	
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		
The words are 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

## PART V: COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

Study the core program to determine what comprehension skills and strategies are taught, how these skills and strategies are taught, and how thoroughly they are practiced. 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 and the use of (6) Narrative and (7) Informational text structure. Teaching these skills and strategies means that the program offers a clear explanation of how to perform the skills with teacher modeling. Practice means that the student is encouraged to use the skill or strategy while reading and guided practice helps the students try out and become proficient with the skill.

### What Skills are Taught

#### 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 skills are taught, reviewed, and practiced. To examine the frequency of practice you will need to look at the guided reading portion of the lessons.

	Theme/Unit 1		Theme/Unit 2		Theme/Unit 3	
	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching
Predicting						
Self-questioning						
Summarizing						
Making inferences						
Monitoring comprehension						
Narrative Story Structure						
Info Text Structure						

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

#### Comprehension Curriculum Rating

Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

## Teaching Comprehension Skills and Strategies

In this exercise you will evaluate the explicitness of comprehension skill and strategy instruction. Good teacher modeling and instruction requires that the teacher identify the skill or strategy being taught, explain the mental process underlying the skill, discuss why the skill or strategy is important, and specify when it should be used.

### Directions

Locate three skills or strategies and evaluate the characteristics of the instruction. At the top of each column write the names of skill or strategy that you are studying. Then find the lesson in the teacher's edition where those skills and strategies are first introduced. Read the lesson and rate the instruction on a three-point scale: 2 = done well, 1 = done poorly, and 0 = not mentioned or included. Total the results when you are finished.

	Skill or Strategy 1	Skill or Strategy 2	Skill or Strategy 3
The program clearly describes the skill or strategy the students will be learning.			
The program explains how to perform the strategy including a focus on the text features necessary to use the strategy.			
The program discusses why it is important to use the strategy.			
The program explains when the students should use the strategy.			
The program provides opportunities and text materials for the teacher to model the use of the strategy.			
The program provides support so that the teacher can think aloud while modeling the use of the strategy.			
Totals			

Provide an overall rating for the quality of direct instruction in comprehension skills and strategies in the program by circling one response.

### Quality of Direct Instruction in Comprehension Skills and Strategies 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 teacher directs 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 selections.				
The teacher assists students' comprehension by providing hints, directing students to re-read a passage.				
The teacher guides comprehension by helping students 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		
<b>Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)</b>		

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		
<b>Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)</b>		

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

**Characteristics of Grammar Instruction Rating**

<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Weak</b>
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 Phonics Instruction Instruction in prefixes, suffixes & root words	_____	_____		_____	
Fluency Instruction					
Vocabulary and Knowledge Development Vocabulary Instruction Knowledge Development		_____			
Comprehension Instruction Skills and Strategies Curriculum Skills and Strategies Instruction Guided Practice Question & Response					
Differentiation of Instruction					
Navigation and Ease of Use					
Assessment					
Writing Instruction					
Grammar Instruction					