Choosing a Supplemental Phonics Curriculum

AN EVALUATION GUIDE AND RUBRIC FOR GRADES K-5

Integrating the Science of Reading with Learning Sciences to Enable Equitable Literacy Education

Introduction

Teachers no longer use a single program to meet all their students' needs. In fact, teachers themselves are learning experience designers. They review the available materials, evaluate what will meet their student's needs, and create their own teaching and learning experiences. School leaders supporting teachers transitioning to structured literacy instruction need to assess how well a program aligns with research-based principles from the Science of Reading (systematic, cumulative, explicit, diagnostic) and Learning Sciences (feedback, motivation, differentiation). This guide helps educators choose a supplemental phonics curriculum to support structured literacy instruction in elementary school.

Learning Experience Design (LXD)
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Charles River Media Group's LXD Research team designs and executes studies to provide evidence and insights for educational technology companies to ensure equity in education. With curriculum companies, we improve media-enhanced learning environments to provide opportunities for all students to succeed. LXD Research flexibly works with product leaders to design research plans that include multiple perspectives to provide a deep understanding of program implementation, teaching impact, and learner outcomes.

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Why the **Science of Reading and Learning Sciences?**

This guide supports administrators who know their phonics instruction is lacking but may not know where there are gaps and what they need to fill them. No one program does everything for every teacher or student. This guide uniquely combines research on content and pedagogy from the science of reading with research on the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of learning sciences to support educators in selecting curricular materials that accelerate literacy development and ensure that all students receive what they need to learn to read.

Rubric **Guidance**

The design of the rubric is intentionally flexible to support reviewing curricular materials before use or finding the gaps in materials once implemented. Whether you work at a school or district using this rubric to review a list of supplemental phonics programs under consideration for piloting or purchasing, or you are reviewing supplemental phonics programs already in place, this rubric will give you the information needed to make informed choices about curriculum use and planning.

This rubric builds on the previous experience of educators in reviewing programs and aims to help them identify effective supplemental phonics programs, whether they are already in use at the school or district or whether educators are looking for an additional program to fill the gaps. This rubric document is a compilation of materials that can be used for further learning and is developed on the foundational idea that no one program does everything for everyone - school leaders and educators must design their own toolkits.

While the review process will vary based on individual circumstances and settings, general guidelines for use include designating a facilitator to become familiar with the rubric criteria and scoring, assembling a team to review materials individually, and training the reviewers so that each person interprets the criteria in similar ways (i.e., by reviewing a subset of materials together to build understanding). Team members should study the Sample Evaluation Worksheet (page 14) prior to beginning the review process to ensure they have a comprehensive sense of the elements they will be scoring and ready access to the interactive and collaborative tool. During a review cycle, the facilitator will work with designated reviewers as well as stakeholders from the publisher, including representatives from sales and product development, to understand the program and evaluate whether it meets the needs of students and their teachers.

The specific materials needed to conduct a review will vary based on the goals and depth of the review process. Facilitators may review and choose from available materials provided by educational publishers or develop a specific checklist of items to review. A sampling of items that a facilitator might request from publishers includes a curriculum overview, scope and sequence, lessons, instructor guides, assessment items, standards mapping, digital components, and ancillary materials. Materials may include slide decks, videos, printed documents, classroom materials, and more.

Once the facilitator and reviewers have had sufficient time to review the materials, the facilitator will bring the group together to share results and come to a consensus. As a reminder, curriculum review is time intensive. While the exact amount of time will be determined by the scope of materials being reviewed and the review team's goals and process, best practice requires allocating sufficient time and explicit acknowledgment of the time commitment inherent in the work.

Once a consensus has been reached by the review team, the facilitator will work with school and district leadership to determine the next steps regarding how to use the findings to support their students' engagement with supplemental phonics programs. For example, subsequent tasks may include engaging with the publisher to purchase materials, scheduling initial training, and establishing a communication plan with all stakeholders.

Resources Used **To Create Rubric**

Each content area includes a list of curated criteria for evidence-based instructional practices. Skill requirements, focus areas, and definitions were drawn from best-practices materials produced by The Reading League, the Florida Center for Reading Research, the International Dyslexia Association, Digital Promise, the International Society for Technology in Education, and the Regional Educational Laboratory housed at the U.S. Department of Education.

Additional **Resources**

Additional resources about literacy accelerators and designing equitable learning environments can be found at AchievetheCore.org and The National Equity Project:

ACHIEVE THE CORE

[The Early Reader Accelerator's Guide](#)

[Equity-Centered Design](#)

Scoring **Criteria**

Criteria for each Focus Area are listed in the Sample Evaluation Worksheet at the end of this guide. Use a three-point rating scale (0-2) to record the extent to which the criteria were met:

0 indicates the criterion was **not met.**

1 indicates the criterion was **partially met.**

2 indicates the criterion was **completely met.**

For each focus area:

- Assess whether or not the criterion was met.
- Decide to what extent the criterion was met and assign a corresponding 0-2 rating number.
- Add a comment to give context to the ratings in each section.
- Use this rating to inform the holistic evaluation of the instructional materials.

Consistent engagement with each focus area will support balanced, standardized, and comprehensive evaluation.

SECTION	FOCUS AREA	POINTS PER FOCUS AREA
CONTENT 34 POINTS	Phonological & Phonemic Awareness	4
	Basic Phonics	10
	Advanced Word Analysis	16
	Other Areas (Print Concepts, Fluency, Knowledge of Language, Handwriting and Spelling)	12
PEDAGOGY 22 POINTS	Explicit	8
	Systematic	6
	Coordinated Instructional Sequence and Routines	4
	Scaffolded Instruction	4
ACCELERATION & EQUITY 30 POINTS	Motivation	6
	Feedback & Assessment	8
	Learner Variability	8
	Deliberate Interactive Practice	8
TOTAL 86 POINTS	**CUMULATIVE SCORE**	**94**

Criteria **Focus Areas**

The next three sections of this document define and operationalize each focus area in the context of K-5 literacy. Once familiar with the criteria, we encourage you to use or modify the Sample Evaluation Worksheet (page 14) for each evaluator to review potential programs. The worksheet uses the sample point system above to weigh and measure the key elements in each rubric section. With your team, you can evaluate your priorities and assign points accordingly.

Content ▶ **"What is being taught?"**

A clear and consistent instructional framework features a comprehensive scope and sequence of foundational skills taught in an explicit system. The system features the application of skills taught in reading and writing. The main areas include:

- Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
- Basic Phonics
- Advanced Word Analysis
- Other Areas: Fluency, Knowledge of Language, Writing, And Spelling

Phonological & Phonemic Awareness

- **Instruction follows a progression** from larger to smaller phonological units: sentences, words (including rhyming and alliteration), syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes.
- **Within each unit, instruction follows a developmental progression** and includes identification, isolation, blending, segmentation, addition, substitution, and deletion, culminating in full phonemic segmentation (first, final, and medial sounds) and manipulation.
  - Awareness of individual phonemes is established using manipulatives and kinesthetic activities (e.g., clapping, counting on fingers) before the introduction of corresponding graphemes (letters), which are gradually integrated into phonemic awareness instruction as students become more skilled.
- Phonemic awareness instruction featuring advanced manipulation is evident beyond K-1 (e.g., review syllable awareness skills in multisyllabic word reading instruction).

Basic Phonics

- **Basic phonics instruction includes alphabet knowledge, letter-sound correspondences, blending, word families, and high-frequency words.** One- and two-syllable words are mainly used to support building basic phonics skills.

- **The initial instructional sequence** includes a mixture of short vowels and consonants, with frequent, consistent, high-utility letter sounds introduced first, enabling students to read words early on. Instruction proceeds to more complex but still relatively consistent letter sounds, including two-consonant blends, final -e spellings of long vowels, single long vowels in open syllables, secondary consonant sounds, doubled consonants, consonant digraphs, more common long vowel digraphs (e.g., "ee", "ea"), and more common r-controlled vowels (e.g., "er", "ar").

- **Phonics skills are introduced and modeled** in an explicit, systematic, and sequential fashion, from simple to complex, with cumulative review spiraled throughout the program.

- Segmenting and blending letter-by-letter, using onset and rime, and using letter combinations are introduced and modeled explicitly.

- **Both decoding and encoding** (spelling) are practiced regularly, first in isolation, and then in context.

- **High-frequency words,** including those with irregular spellings and those with spellings not yet introduced, are taught by drawing attention to both regular and irregular sounds.

- **Decodable texts** that contain previously-introduced phonics elements and high-frequency words are used to secure phonic decoding in context.

- **Explicit instruction** directs students' attention to the structure of the word before using context to confirm accuracy.

Advanced Word Analysis

- **Advanced word analysis builds on basic phonics instruction** to teach the more challenging and less consistent letter-sound correspondences, enabling students to read more complex and multisyllabic words. Advanced word analysis instruction includes three-consonant blends, less common consonant and vowel digraphs and trigraphs (e.g., "ph", "oe", "eau"), diphthongs, variant vowels, more complex r-controlled vowels (e.g., "are", "ore"), silent letters, and spelling patterns (e.g., "ild", "ost").

- **The six written syllable types** (closed, open, VCe, vowel team, r-controlled vowel, and final stable) are taught to help students determine vowel sounds. Syllable type instruction begins with identifying vowel sounds in one-syllable words.

- **Syllable division patterns** (e.g., V/CV, VC/V, VC/CV) are taught to help students break multisyllabic words into manageable parts when reading or spelling. Students are taught to identify syllable boundaries and the six syllable types in written words. Two-syllable compound words are an accessible way to introduce syllable division before moving on to more complex multisyllabic words.
- **The schwa vowel sound**, which can be spelled with any of the five vowel letters, is taught to help students pronounce words containing this sound in unstressed syllables (e.g., "about", "family"). Students are taught to distinguish stressed and unstressed syllables in multisyllabic words and to identify schwa when a vowel letter in an unstressed syllable is pronounced neither long nor short.
- **Students are taught to read and spell words with inflectional suffixes** for verbs, possessives, plurals, and comparative/superlative adjectives and adverbs. This instruction includes the application of spelling changes (e.g., doubling consonants, dropping silent "-e", and changing "y" to "i"), how inflections change a word's meaning, and regular and irregular spellings.
- Students are taught to read and spell words with **contractions** and to understand their meaning and usage.
- **Morphological awareness and structural analysis** are developed to help students recognize meaningful word parts in multisyllabic words with prefixes, suffixes, and roots (i.e., morphemes). Instruction attends to both meaning and spelling to help students pronounce, spell, and understand unfamiliar words that they have never encountered before. Special attention is given to Greek and Latin morphemes, which are commonly used in academic writing and of high utility to older elementary students.
- **Students are taught to distinguish the spellings and meanings of homophones** (e.g., "hear" and "hear") as well as commonly confused or misspelled words (e.g., "your" and "you're").

Other Areas of Skills in k-5

Print Concepts

- Students are taught basic concepts about books and text, including book orientation, book parts, print directionality, and the meaning of basic punctuation.

Fluency

- **Fluency instruction begins when students have developed accuracy with a particular set of phonics skills and start with word-level fluency** practice with immediate corrective feedback, with the goal of achieving automatic recognition by sight.
- Text-based fluency instruction includes teacher-led modeling, repeated oral reading by students, and immediate corrective feedback.

- **Reading accuracy and automaticity are emphasized**, as are prosodic elements that make reading sound speech-like, including phrasing (i.e., pausing at appropriate places), intonation (i.e., modulating volume and tone), and expression (i.e., emphasizing certain words to convey emotion).
- **Students are taught to notice and self-correct errors** they make during reading, prioritizing decoding strategies to read words and attention to context to confirm word recognition.
- **Fluency is practiced using texts at an appropriate level of difficulty**, using books and passages containing spelling patterns and high-frequency words that students have already been taught. Alignment of texts to the program's phonics scope and sequence ensures more efficient practice than using readability formulas alone to determine word reading difficulty.
- **Fluency is practiced using a variety of text types** (narrative, informational, poetry, lists, etc.).
- **Comprehension is always emphasized over speed**, and passage reading for fluency practice is accompanied by comprehension-oriented activities to ensure students understand what they read. Engaging, meaningful texts support fluency development for the sake of comprehension.
- **Fluency is frequently measured** using a normed Oral Reading Fluency assessment.

- **In grades 3-5, students who have achieved grade-level oral reading fluency also work on silent reading fluency skills** through independent reading practice. Silent reading fluency development leads to increased reading speeds relative to oral reading as well as a larger sight word vocabulary, improving reading efficiency.

Knowledge of Language Structures

- **There is explicit instruction in high-utility vocabulary**, including words from oral language as well as academic and domain-specific words. Students learn words in and out of context, with multiple exposures and opportunities to use each word. Vocabulary instruction also includes strategies for learning new words (e.g., reference materials, structural analysis) and understanding word relationships (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, and shades of meaning).
- **Grammar instruction, covering both parts of speech and syntax** (sentence structure), is provided to support students in reading and writing increasingly complex texts.

Handwriting and Spelling

- **There is explicit instruction** related to letter formation, posture, grip, and opportunities for cumulative practice.
- **Handwriting instruction utilizes lined paper** that guides letter formation.
- **Handwriting instruction is integrated into reading and writing instruction** and follows the sequence of letter learning.
- **There is a clear scope and sequence for explicit spelling instruction**, closely aligned with the basic phonics and advanced word analysis scope and sequence. Patterns taught for decoding are also practiced in encoding/spelling lessons.

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Pedagogy

"How is content taught?"

Phonics instruction is conceptualized and built within a specific pedagogical framework and approach. Evaluating the pedagogical merit and effectiveness of a particular phonics program requires unpacking and deeply engaging with the elements of instruction. Definitions for these characteristics are from the Florida Center for Reading Research Glossary of Reading Terms. Pedagogical variables to be looked for and evaluated in a phonics program include:

- Explicit instruction
- Systematic instruction
- Coordinated instructional sequences and routines
- Scaffolded instruction
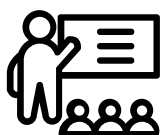
Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction involves **direct explanation**. The teacher's language is concise, specific, and directly related to the objective. Explicit instruction means that the **actions of the teacher are clear, unambiguous, direct, and visible**, and that it is clear what students are expected to do and learn. Nothing is left to guesswork, and students are not expected to deduce concepts on their own. In particular, all letter-sound correspondences are directly and sequentially taught while drawing students' attention to word structure, rather than expecting students to figure out patterns on their own, guiding them to guess based on context, or only providing them with explicit instruction when an error is made. Another characteristic of explicit instruction is a **high level of teacher/student interaction** so that teachers can gauge their students' level of understanding and address misconceptions in the moment.

Systematic Instruction

The program includes a **carefully planned sequence for instruction**, similar to a builder's blueprint for a house. A blueprint is a well-thought-out model of the end goal, and it is designed with step-by-step plans before building materials are gathered and construction begins. Likewise, systematic instruction is **carefully thought out with clear learning objectives** delineated and strategically **designed to follow a developmental sequence** before specific activities and lessons are planned. Instruction covers the five components of reading development in depth (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Systematic instruction is also cumulative: lessons build on previously taught information, from simple to complex, and frequent review and practice is spiraled throughout the program.
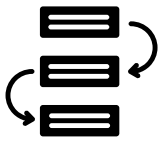
Coordinated Instructional Sequences and Routines

The program **takes into consideration how skills are selected, sequenced, organized, and practiced**. Coordinated instructional sequences occur within each component of reading: in general, easier and higher-utility skills are introduced before more difficult and lower-utility skills so that **skills build progressively**. Coordinated instructional sequences evidence clear and meaningful relationships of instruction across the five components of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. For example, if students are taught to connect the sound /f/ with the letter f during a phonics lesson, we would expect this instruction to be preceded by orally segmenting and blending words with the phoneme /f/ during phonemic awareness instruction. This would be followed by accuracy and then fluency practice in reading words, sentences, and/or passages with the letter-sound f-/f/. Spelling practice would include f-/f/ and other previously learned letter sounds.

Instructional routines that **use consistent language and familiar activities** help students know what to expect and where to focus their attention as they develop skills. Instructional routines include the following sequence of steps: explicit instruction (with modeling); guided practice (student practice, application, and feedback); and generalization (application to a new context).

Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolding refers to the **support that is given to students to help them arrive at the correct answer**. Additionally, **teachers offer immediate, specific feedback during student practice**. For instance, the teacher may break the problem into smaller steps, demonstrate using a graphic organizer, or provide an example the student can relate to. Scaffolding may be embedded in the instructional design by first targeting lower levels of proficiency in a skill and building progressively to higher levels of mastery. Providing students with temporary instructional support assists them in achieving what they could not otherwise have done alone as they work towards the independent execution of a skill.

Ensuring Acceleration and Equity

"How are all of my student's needs being met?"

Supplemental phonics programs have an important role in ensuring student acceleration and equity. It is in this student-specific realm of learning and communication that educators may feel empowered to customize phonics learning for the needs of their students. By supporting the relationship between students and educators, supplemental phonics programs have the potential to recognize teachers as active learners themselves and allow them to leverage knowledge about their students to foster acceleration and equity. Evaluating how well a supplemental phonics instruction program promotes and ensures acceleration and equity for students requires an examination of the following teacher-informed and teacher-customized features:

- Motivation
- Feedback and assessment
- Learner variability
- Deliberate interactive practice

Motivation

Reading motivation refers to an individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs about the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading. Reading motivation contributes to reading achievement across grade levels and cultures, and it can come from internal and external sources. For instance, an elementary-aged student may read books about how to train a dog to learn when their family agrees to adopt a puppy. A high schooler may carefully read each school-assigned novel, even if they don't enjoy them, to earn a high grade. To foster intrinsic motivation, focus on a student's sense of autonomy (by giving them choices), sense of competence (by supporting their skill mastery at the right level of difficulty), and sense of belonging (by offering materials that make them feel that "this is for me"). Motivation supports are particularly important for older elementary students who are struggling readers and may have experienced a decline in self-efficacy and motivation to read.

Feedback and Assessment

Feedback that focuses on the process of developing skills and conveys the importance of effort motivates students to persist when learning. When students believe that their skills can be developed through dedication and hard work instead of innate abilities, they can apply a growth mindset to learning. Having students explain their thinking process aloud helps them recognize and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies they use and solidify their understanding. Research has shown that this type of feedback is particularly supportive of marginalized students.

During learning, all levels of phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency are assessed and monitored regularly using assessments sensitive to small amounts of growth. For students performing at grade level, formative benchmarking assessment can be conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, while for students who are struggling, additional progress monitoring assessments relevant to the skills they are working on can be administered every 1-4 weeks to ensure progress is being made.

Setting overall goals, as well as smaller, interim goals, encourages consistent, achievable progress and helps students feel confident in their skills and abilities. When students create reading-focused goals, plan out steps to achieve them, and check their progress against these steps, they strengthen their self-efficacy as they build their capacity to successfully tackle difficult challenges. The frequent assessment also gives teachers a view into their students' progress, creating a data-feedback loop in which teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction, provide differentiated support to students who need it, and plan instructional next steps that are responsive to their students' learning paths.

Learner Variability

Lessons are crafted to support the full diversity of students. Students may become marginalized when systems do not consider learner variability. For example, a student who is slower to decode but has a high level of listening comprehension needs different support than a student who is a fluent decoder but has a lower level of vocabulary. All students differ, and learning sciences research shows that these differences, based on factors related to student background, social and emotional skills, cognition, and language and literacy, matter for learning. Learner variability may be defined as any student struggling with a learning difference that rubs up against the expectation of sameness of students. Learner variability can be addressed through differentiated instruction delivered in small groups or during an individualized intervention.

Specific strategies that support a wide range of student profiles for K-3 readers include:

- Multimodal/Multisensory Instruction: Instruction in multiple formats allows students to activate different cognitive skills to understand and remember the steps they are to take in their reading work.
  - Gestures: Adding motions to complement learning activates more cognitive processes for recall and understanding.
  - Manipulatives: Providing physical representations of concepts makes mental processes more concrete.
  - Word Sorts: Word sorts are multisensory activities that help students identify patterns and group words based on different categories.
- Verbal Repetition: Having students verbally repeat information such as instructions ensures they have heard it and supports remembering.
- Explaining Their Thinking: When students explain their thinking process aloud, they recognize the strategies they use and solidify their understanding.
- Model Assignment or Skill: By talking through their thinking during each step of a process, teachers can model what learning looks like.

Deliberate Interactive Practice

Practicing a targeted skill or subskill until achieving several error-free attempts is critical for retention, particularly in the foundational skills of literacy, which must be learned to automaticity to achieve a level of fluency required for comprehension. Interactive practice is hands-on, engaging, and often multimodal, such as moving tiles into sound boxes as words are analyzed, using hand gestures to support memory for associations, building and manipulating words with letter tiles, assembling sentences with word cards, or acting in a reader's theater play to facilitate repeated readings.

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are often paired with one another to foster multimodal language learning (adapted from International Dyslexia Association). Effective, guided practice is deliberate in its targeting of skills to a student's stage within the developmental progression and selection of activities that provide an appropriate level of challenge to a student that is just beyond their current level of understanding, and it is interactive through its provision of timely corrective feedback and relevant strategies.

Totaling and **Using Program Scores**

Sample Total Table

TOTAL	MAX	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
Content	42		
Pedagogy	22		
Acceleration & Equity	30		
TOTAL 86 POINTS	94		

How to Use Program Scores

Congratulations! You've completed the careful and hard work of evaluating the components of one or more supplemental phonics curricula. Now that you have tallied points in hand for each section and the overall scores for two or more programs, the evaluation team can use this vital data as part of a larger discussion about district learning goals, priorities, and requirements. Note that the overall scores you've carefully tallied are not to be considered grades but rather information about how well the programs match your district's needs. For example, if a program scores higher in Acceleration & Equity but has a lower score overall, your evaluation team might still consider using it if your district is prioritizing equity-informed learning programs.

The table below presents a sample points system for a district to use in weighing and measuring the key elements in each section of the rubric. With your team, you can weigh your priorities and assign or adjust points accordingly. Each section does not have to be weighted equally and the total does not have to equal 100. In this example, up to two points are assigned per item listed under each topic.

CONTENT SECTION	MAX	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness • Instruction follows a developmental progression from larger to smaller phonological units and culminates in full phonemic segmentation and manipulation.	4	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Advanced phonemic instruction that features manipulation is evident beyond K-1, with relevant skills reviewed based on the skill targets of phonics instruction.		0 1 2	0 1 2
Basic Phonics • Instruction includes alphabet knowledge, frequent, consistent, and reliable letter-sound correspondences (e.g., consonants, single short vowels, final -e long vowels), blending, word families, and high-frequency words.	10	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Phonics skills are introduced and modeled in an explicit, systematic, and sequential fashion, from simple to complex, with cumulative review spiraled throughout the program.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Segmenting and blending are taught explicitly and practiced regularly, in both decoding and encoding.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students first practice decoding words in isolation.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students apply letter-sound knowledge in decodable texts that match the phonics elements taught, securing phonic decoding.		0 1 2	0 1 2

Advanced Word Analysis • Advanced word analysis builds on basic phonics instruction to teach the more challenging and less consistent letter-sound correspondences in both reading and spelling.	16	0 1 2	0 1 2
• The six syllable types are taught to help students determine vowel sounds.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Syllable division patterns are taught to help students break multisyllabic words into manageable parts when reading and spelling.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• The schwa sound is taught to help students pronounce unstressed syllables in multisyllabic words.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students are taught to read and spell words with inflectional suffixes, including the application of spelling changes and regular/irregular spellings.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students are taught to read and spell words with contractions.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Morphological awareness and structural analysis are developed to help students recognize meaningful word parts when reading, spelling, and understanding multisyllabic words.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students are taught to distinguish the meanings and spellings of homophones and commonly confused words.		0 1 2	0 1 2
Other Areas (Print Concepts, Fluency, Knowledge of Language, Handwriting and Spelling) • Students are taught basic concepts about books and text.	12	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Word- and text-level fluency practice are provided with immediate feedback.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• There is explicit instruction in high-utility vocabulary.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Grammar instruction is provided to support reading and writing increasingly complex texts.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• There is explicit instruction related to letter formation, posture, grip, and opportunities for cumulative practice.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• There is a clear scope and sequence for explicit spelling instruction, closely aligned with the basic phonics and advanced word analysis scope and sequence.		0 1 2	0 1 2

TOTAL	34

COMMENTS:

PEDAGOGY SECTION	MAX	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
Explicit • The instructional language is concise, specific, and related to the objective. • There is direct explanation and modeling of rules, patterns, concepts, and terms. • Explicit instruction directs students' attention to the structure of the word. • Instruction is interactive, giving students multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding during each learning experience so misconceptions can be addressed in the moment.	8	0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2	0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2
Systematic • Skills are taught systematically and sequentially, from simple to complex. • Lessons build on skills that have been taught in previous lessons. • Frequent, cumulative review is spiraled throughout the program.	6	0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2	0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2

Coordinated Instructional Sequence and Routines • Instructional routines include the following sequence of steps: explicit instruction (with modeling); guided practice (student practice, application, and feedback); and generalization (application to a new context).	4	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Instruction is meaningfully coordinated across the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).		0 1 2	0 1 2
Scaffolded Instruction • Students are provided with temporary instructional support to assist them in achieving what they could not otherwise have done alone.	4	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Guidance is provided to teachers on how to provide instructional support, such as breaking the problem down into smaller steps, using a graphic organizer, or providing an example.		0 1 2	0 1 2
TOTAL	**22**		

COMMENTS:

ACCELERATION & EQUITY	MAX	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
Motivation • A sense of autonomy is developed by providing students with choices.	6	0 1 2	0 1 2
• A sense of competence is developed through activities with options to adjust the level of difficulty to the student's level of skill.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• A sense of belonging is developed by incorporating students' personal goals, values, and beliefs about the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading.		0 1 2	0 1 2
Feedback & Assessment • Techniques such as having students explain their thinking process aloud are present, allowing teachers to understand the strategies students use and help solidify their understanding.	8	0 1 2	0 1 2
• During learning, all levels of phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency are assessed and monitored regularly.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Teachers and students create reading-focused goals, plan out steps to achieve them, and check their progress against these steps.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Information shared with students focuses on the process of developing skills and conveys the importance of effort in order to support a growth mindset.		0 1 2	0 1 2
Learner Variability • Small-group or individualized options for differentiation are provided.	8	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Lesson strategies include multimodal instruction such as using gestures, manipulatives, and word sorts.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students are prompted to verbally repeat information, which ensures they have heard it and supports remembering the steps.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Students are prompted to explain their thinking process to help them recognize the strategies they use and solidify their understanding.		0 1 2	0 1 2

Deliberate Interactive Practice			
• Lessons include multiple, focused opportunities to achieve several error-free attempts at a specific skill or subskill.	8	0 1 2	0 1 2
• Interactive practice is hands-on, engaging, and multimodal.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are often paired with one another to foster multimodal language development.		0 1 2	0 1 2
• Practice is delivered at a level just beyond the student's current level of understanding and includes timely corrective feedback.		0 1 2	0 1 2
TOTAL	**30**		
COMMENTS:			

Copy the totals from the worksheet and make note of any additional overall comments.

TOTAL	MAX	PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
Content	34		
Pedagogy	22		
Acceleration & Equity	30		
TOTAL 86 points	**86**		
COMMENTS:			

About **the Authors**

Rachel Schechter is the founder of Learning Experience Design (LXD) Research and an Edtech Trendsetter Award honoree for her contributions to the edtech industry. An international speaker and writer on the topic of literacy product efficacy, Dr. Schechter has published research for companies including Lexia, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Engage2Learn, Hatch Early Learning, Labster, and 95 Percent Group. At Lexia, she led their research team for eight years and contributed towards Lexia being the second-most used ELA product in the United States (under Google Classroom).

Leading LXD Research, her team's guidance boosts the capacity for education leaders to buy research-proven products and gives the sales teams leverage to assure the investment will accelerate learning for students of all abilities. Dr. Rachel Schechter is shaping the national discourse about what "research-based" and "evidence-proven" really mean. Dr. Schechter has a Master's in Education from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in Child Development from Tufts University.

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Glossary

Adapted from [Reading League Curriculum Evaluation Tool, June 2023](#)

assessment: Using a measure to evaluate the nature, quality, efficacy, or impact of a person, thing, or process.

automaticity: Performing a reading task without conscious effort. For example, reading connected text with automaticity means that there is no conscious attention paid to decoding words.

background knowledge: A specific subset of knowledge needed to comprehend a particular situation, lesson, or text.

differentiation: Tailoring instructional methods and content to meet the individual needs of students.

explicit: Explicit instruction involves direct explanation. The teacher's language is concise, specific, and related to the objective. Another characteristic of explicit instruction is a visible instructional approach which includes a high level of teacher/student interaction. Explicit instruction means that the actions of the teacher are clear, unambiguous, direct, and visible, which makes it clear what students are to do and learn. Nothing is left to guesswork.

feedback: Information about performance provided to a student or educator.

implicit: Implicit instruction does not provide direct or specific guidance on what is to be learned.

irregular high-frequency words: Words that are BOTH highly frequent in text and not spelled phonetically (e.g., said, of, one).

learner variability: The understanding that variety in learners is the norm. All learners come with unique circumstances, histories, and resources that necessitate different learning approaches and cadences.

metacognition: Thinking about thinking.

morpheme: The smallest meaningful unit of a word.

motivation: Impetus for beginning or continuing a behavior.

normed: A normed assessment results in scores that are norm-referenced; test takers' scores can be compared to how others in that same age/grade group performed. It allows results to have meaningful interpretation and it allows educators to understand if a student is performing below, at, or above expectations.

phoneme: The smallest unit of sound within our language system. A phoneme combines with other phonemes to make words. Grapheme: A letter or letter combination that spells a phoneme or phonemes; it can be one, two, three, or four letters in English (e.g., i, ou, igh, ough).

phonemic awareness: The ability to notice, think about, or manipulate the individual phonemes (sounds) in words. It is the ability to understand that sounds in spoken language work together to make words. This term is used to refer to the highest level of phonological awareness: awareness of individual phonemes in words.

phonological awareness: One's sensitivity to, or explicit awareness of, the phonological structure of words in one's language. This is an "umbrella" term that is used to refer to a student's sensitivity to any aspect of phonological structure in language. It encompasses awareness of individual words in sentences, syllables, and onset-rime segments, as well as awareness of individual phonemes.

systematic: The material follows a sequence beginning with the easiest/most basic elements and proceeding to the most difficult.

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