Literacy

TOPICS IN EDUCATION

Literacy Curriculum Evaluation Kit



TOPICS IN EDUCATION

Introduction

Choosing a literacy curriculum is one of the most important decisions your school or district will make. What students read, how they talk about ideas, and whether they can express their thinking on paper all hinges on this choice.

This kit is built to support that decision. It's grounded in research about how students learn to read and write, and in what teachers say works in real classrooms. It's also designed to be practical: a clear, consistent way for your team to compare programs side by side and land on the best fit for your students.

Every school and district is different, with its own priorities and context. This kit works best when your team takes time up front to agree on what matters most, then uses that shared vision to evaluate each program.

Ready to get started? Let's build your evaluation process together.

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Prepare Your Evaluation

- [ ] **Name your goals.** What outcomes matter most and how will you measure success? For example, your goals may be around early decoding, grade-level comprehension, or improvements in writing quality. Record these on the chart below.
- [ ] **Build a cross-role team.** Include teachers from multiple grade bands, instructional coaches, English learner and special education specialists, and school and district leaders.
- [ ] **Gather your data.** Bring assessment results, student writing samples, and teacher feedback on your current program.
- [ ] **Align on your priorities.** Identify which priorities are non-negotiable for your district.
- [ ] **Agree on how you'll score.** Use the same checklist for every program. Score independently first, then compare. Use the Program Screening Tool on page 4.

District Goals	Success Metrics	Programmatic Priorities
What are the key desired outcomes for your school or district?	***How will you measure a successful outcome?***	***What are the non-negotiables that will help you achieve this goal?***
1.		
2.		

Create Your Program Shortlist

Before you invest time in screening, determine which programs are worth a deep review. Check information on the publisher's website and reach out to an educational consultant to quickly assess the likelihood of the program aligning to the priorities defined by your team. Once you've created your shortlist of programs that align with your priorities, use the Program Screening Tool on page 4 to evaluate them against nine research-based domains.

Questions you might consider:

- **Research alignment:** Does the program emphasize phonics, knowledge building, and writing?
- **English learner supports:** Are multilingual supports built into daily lessons?
- **Assessment:** Does the program have formative and summative assessments built in?
- **Data integration:** Does the program integrate with your current assessment system?
- **Professional learning and coaching:** Will the publisher support your implementation with professional learning opportunities?

Complete a Program Screening

Screen the programs on your shortlist by evaluating each one against research-based criteria. This ensures every program you move forward with meets your team's core requirements.

Your screening tool addresses nine essential domains:

1. Foundational reading skills
2. Knowledge building
3. Comprehension and vocabulary
4. Writing
5. Speaking and listening
6. Assessment and responsive teaching
7. English learner instructional supports
8. Learner access
9. Teacher usability and implementation support

How to Use This Tool:

Rate each criterion on the provided scale based on **evidence you can see** in program materials, a sample unit, or in a demo. Add up the total for each domain to see where each program is strongest.

Keep in mind: Structured literacy programs may integrate literacy skills into lessons, rather than having separate workbooks for skills like vocabulary and grammar. This means you may need to look across multiple lesson components to evaluate specific skills.

Program Screening Tool

Use the rating scale provided to support your evaluation of each program.

Note: All domains are weighted equally by default. Based on your district's priorities, you may choose to adjust the weighting of key domains or criteria.

Rating Scale

Score	Meaning
2	**Clear evidence.** You can point to it in the materials.
1	**Partial or unclear.** It's mentioned but not well developed.
0	**Not evident.**
★	**Needs clarification.** Mark with a star and follow up with the publisher before scoring.

Domain 1: Foundational Reading Skills

Look for . . .	0	1	2
A clear **phonics scope and sequence** that moves from simple to complex, with time to practice and master skills.	☐	☐	☐
Explicit instruction with a consistent routine: the teacher introduces and models, and students apply.	☐	☐	☐
Phonemic awareness that connects to the phonics lesson, so students hear sounds before they see the spellings.	☐	☐	☐
Decodable texts that support explicit, systematic foundational skills instruction.	☐	☐	☐
Practice materials aligned to the phonics sequence.	☐	☐	☐
High-frequency words taught with a research-based approach and practiced in connected text.	☐	☐	☐
Regular fluency practice with decodable text.	☐	☐	☐
For upper elementary grades: **multisyllabic word reading and morphology** (e.g., prefixes, suffixes, roots).	☐	☐	☐

Domain 1 score: ___ / 16 × 100 = _____%

Example: A program scores 2 on six criteria and 1 on two criteria, totaling 14 points. To convert to a percentage: 14 / 16 × 100 = 87.5%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
How do students experience foundational skills (e.g., decoding, phonics, phonemic awareness) as tools for understanding the texts and topics they're reading and discussing?

Domain 2: Knowledge Building

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Units organized around essential questions or big ideas that build coherent, deep knowledge across academic disciplines.	☐	☐	☐
Clear content learning goals alongside literacy goals, so students understand what they're learning about—not just which skills they're practicing.	☐	☐	☐
Grade-level texts intentionally sequenced to support close, analytical reading—from entry points through increasingly complex ideas—building knowledge progressively.	☐	☐	☐
Topics that deepen understanding progressively over time, enabling students to apply knowledge to new contexts within and across grade levels.	☐	☐	☐
Coherence and depth over breadth through units that sustain focus on central ideas, allowing real understanding rather than surface-level sampling.	☐	☐	☐
Opportunities for students to engage in close, analytical reading of challenging, grade-level texts to deepen content understanding.	☐	☐	☐
Explicit instruction in high-value academic language (e.g., vocabulary, phrases, discourse patterns) that's connected to the unit's knowledge-building goals.	☐	☐	☐
Regular discussion and talk grounded in texts and topics to build knowledge and language.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 2 score: ___ / 16 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:

- How do you scaffold challenging, grade-level texts without replacing them with easier versions?
- Describe a structured discussion routine: What is the specific text or topic students discuss and how does it deepen content understanding and connect to writing?

Domain 3: Comprehension and Vocabulary

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Explicit comprehension instruction (teaching students *how* to understand), not just questions after reading.	☐	☐	☐
A small set of repeatable, research-based strategies, such as summarizing a section (gist or retell), unpacking complex sentences, and figuring out word meanings.	☐	☐	☐
Strategic comprehension checks that inform instruction beyond simply monitoring compliance.	☐	☐	☐
Tier 2 vocabulary instruction that includes student-friendly definitions, context sentences, and active use through talking and writing.	☐	☐	☐
Explicit morphology instruction (e.g., word parts: prefixes, suffixes, roots) with planned repetition throughout the program.	☐	☐	☐
Grammar and syntax that's taught explicitly and systematically, with guided practice and application to students' writing.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 3 score: ___ / 12 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:

- How do Tier 2 words spiral and grow in sophistication throughout the unit and across units? How do students demonstrate growing command of these words in their writing?
- What comprehension strategies does your program emphasize? Why these? How do they build on each other across your program?

Domain 4: Writing

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Daily writing tasks that require students to demonstrate comprehension and application of content, not just practice a genre.	☐	☐	☐
Explicit, specific writing prompts that name the genre, focus, and text evidence expected.	☐	☐	☐
Writing that connects to reading, with writing tasks reflecting the knowledge students have built and the texts they have read.	☐	☐	☐
Writing tasks that grow from shorter to longer pieces, such as from sentences to paragraphs to multi-paragraph essays.	☐	☐	☐
Planning tools that help students organize ideas before drafting.	☐	☐	☐
A teachable writing process (i.e., plan, draft, revise, publish) with modeling and written models to analyze.	☐	☐	☐
Rubrics, student checklists, teacher conferencing, and peer review, with explicit guidance on giving constructive feedback, creating multiple opportunities for students to understand what quality writing looks like and receive feedback for growth.	☐	☐	☐
Oral rehearsal and discussion built in before writing, so students practice language and ideas aloud.	☐	☐	☐
Developmentally appropriate writing scaffolds, such as shared writing, drawing, and oral composition, in the early grades to build writing confidence and reduce cognitive load while students develop foundational writing behaviors.	☐	☐	☐
Writing that is used to assess knowledge, comprehension, and writing skills, with clear, actionable next steps to support student growth.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 4 score: ___ / 20 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
What do students need to understand from the unit's reading and discussions to successfully complete this writing task? How do you ensure all students have built that knowledge before they write?

Domain 5: Speaking and Listening

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Structured routines for academic talk, with sentence frames and norms for discussion.	☐	☐	☐
Discussion that is focused on unit content and texts to keep conversations rooted in what students are reading and learning about.	☐	☐	☐
Purposeful talk that connects to reading and writing, with partner talk and oral rehearsal as primary instructional activities.	☐	☐	☐
Participation options that allow all students to engage more deeply than a whole class Q&A session.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 5 score: ___ / 8 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
Show me how discussion prepares students to write and deepens their understanding of unit content. What conversations happen, and how do they directly inform the writing task?

Domain 6: Assessment and Responsive Teaching

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Assessments that provide clear, valid data on both skill development and understanding of unit content.	☐	☐	☐
Frequent, varied formative checks (e.g., exit tickets, weekly and unit assessments, discussions, writing, performance tasks) that provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate their understanding.	☐	☐	☐
Clear next steps for reteaching and differentiation tied to assessment results.	☐	☐	☐
Reports and data that support teachers in using evidence to adjust instruction.	☐	☐	☐
Student self-assessment and feedback that students can act on.	☐	☐	☐
A plan for tiered support, from whole class instruction through small group and intervention connections.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 6 score: ___ / 12 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
Show me a formative assessment from your program. What does it measure? How do teachers use the results to adjust instruction immediately?

Domain 7: English Learner Instructional Supports

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Content and language learning that is integrated: students listen, speak, read, and write every day to make meaning and share ideas about visual and written texts.	☐	☐	☐
Unit and session language goals that are connected to text and task demands, with language revisited across lessons.	☐	☐	☐
Scaffolds that "scaffold up," keeping grade-level rigor while responding to students' language needs (i.e., models, sentence frames, language routines).	☐	☐	☐
Metalinguistic awareness instruction that helps students notice how language works, including crosslinguistic comparison of sounds, words, and sentence structures.	☐	☐	☐
Asset-based use of home languages and cultures, with texts where students see themselves.	☐	☐	☐
Formative checks of language growth, aligned to language goals, with clear look fors, targeted feedback, and instructional next steps.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 7 score: ___ / 12 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
How does language instruction build across a unit to support understanding of core texts and completion of key tasks? How do students practice that language with peers, and how do teachers assess their progress and determine next steps?

Domain 8: Learner Access

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Options for engagement such as relevant, high-interest topics and varied collaboration opportunities.	☐	☐	☐
Options for accessing information, including providing texts digitally and in print, along with visuals, anchor charts, and graphic organizers.	☐	☐	☐
Options to interact with instructional content in accessible formats, and options to express learning, such as through speaking, writing, and drawing.	☐	☐	☐
Responsive instruction and flexible grouping based on formative assessment data, so that groups change over time and the support targets specific skills while all students keep working with grade-level content.	☐	☐	☐
Clear learning goals and success criteria students can understand.	☐	☐	☐
Grade-level expectations for all learners, with scaffolds that can be gradually released and options to deepen thinking available to any student.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 8 score: ___ / 12 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:

- How does the program let students with different strengths and needs, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students still building foundational skills, access the same text or task and show what they know?
- What options are built into the lessons to support learner variability, and which does the teacher have to create?

Domain 9: Teacher Usability and Implementation Support

Look for . . .	0	1	2
Manageable pacing that a real teacher can complete in your literacy block.	☐	☐	☐
Consistent lesson structure that simplifies planning, highlights lesson essentials, and offers support tailored to teachers' experience.	☐	☐	☐
Professional learning and coaching supports at launch and over time.	☐	☐	☐
Planning, pacing, and implementation guidance for teachers and leaders.	☐	☐	☐

Domain 9 score: ___ / 8 × 100 = _____%

ASK THE PUBLISHER:
Describe your approach to professional learning and service across the school year. Beyond launch training, what ongoing support do teachers access—coaching, collaborative planning, digital resources—and how frequently can we expect to connect with your team?

Your Total Score

Use the chart below to calculate the total score for one program. Set aside dedicated time for scorers to discuss their findings and talk through where they disagree. Treat this as your conversation starter. The patterns you see across domains may matter more than the total. For example:

- Does the program excel at foundational skills but treat writing as an add-on?
- Is knowledge building strong while foundational skills instruction feels isolated?
- Are all domains working together to support literacy development, or do some feel siloed?

Domain	Raw Score	Convert to %	Your Score
1. Foundational Reading Skills		÷16 × 100	%
2. Knowledge Building		÷16 × 100	%
3. Comprehension and Vocabulary		÷12 × 100	%
4. Writing		÷20 × 100	%
5. Speaking and Listening		÷8 × 100	%
6. Assessment and Responsive Teaching		÷12 × 100	%
7. English Learner Instructional Supports		÷12 × 100	%
8. Learner Access		÷12 × 100	%
9. Teacher Usability and Implementation Support		÷8 × 100	%
Average of all nine domains*	**Score =**		**%**

**Be sure to update your maximum totals if you choose to weight any domain(s) to reflect your district's priorities.*

Which programs advance to the next phase of your evaluation?

Align your advancement strategy with your team's priorities. Some districts may advance only programs scoring 70% or higher across all domains. Others prioritize which domains matter most to their students and advance programs strong in those areas. Most move forward two to three programs for further consideration. Choose the approach that fits your timeline and resources.

Red flags to watch for:

- Skills are taught in isolation, with no connection to the texts or topics students are learning.
- Writing appears only as an occasional task or is not directly tied to reading.
- Comprehension "instruction" consists mainly of questions after reading.
- Leveled texts instead of scaffolded access to grade-level reading.
- Small group differentiation only for students in need of intervention.
- English learner supports are not embedded and/or not customized to daily lessons.
- Assessment results don't meaningfully impact instruction.
- Professional learning is a one-time training or generic, not connected to the actual program.

Program	Publisher	Notes

Narrow Your Recommendation

Questions to Bring to Every Publisher Presentation

Use these questions to explore how each program connects research to practice, supports student growth, and works within your real classroom constraints.

Number	Topic	Question
1	**Research and Design**	Is the program aligned to reading and cognitive sciences, and does this research inform daily lessons?
2		How do foundational skills connect to the knowledge-building texts and topics in each unit?
3	**Foundational Reading Skills**	How are decodable texts and practice materials sequenced to support the phonics scope?
4	**Comprehension and Vocabulary**	How does the program teach comprehension (not just assess it)?
5		What strategies, resources, and instructional routines support vocabulary development?
6		What comprehension strategies does the program teach, and how does it scaffold students' understanding of challenging, grade-level texts?
7	**Writing**	How are writing prompts written and scaffolded?
8		How does the program teach sentence-level skills, planning, and revision?
9		How does writing connect to discussion and oral rehearsal?
10		How is student writing assessed, and what does a teacher do with the results?
11	**Speaking and Listening**	What do oral language development and discussion look like in a typical lesson?
12	**Knowledge and Texts**	What roles do the different texts play in a unit?
13		How do topics build within grades and across grade levels?

Number	Topic	Question
14	**Assessment and Responsive Teaching**	What data will teachers have, and how does it connect to next steps for instruction?
15		How does the program support small group instruction and intervention?
16	**Language and Access**	Where do English learner supports appear in a daily lesson?
17		How does the program support biliteracy or crosslinguistic connections?
18		How does the program ensure students can access grade-level content?
19	**Learner Access**	What built-in options and supports does the program offer for students with different learning needs and abilities?
20	**Teacher Usability and Implementation Support**	What does a typical lesson look like in the time block we have?
21		What professional learning and coaching are included? What is available after launch?
22		What do pilot teachers typically find hardest in the first month?
23		How does the program support planning?
24		What does a successful pilot look like, and how can we set one up?

Side-by-Side Comparison Worksheet

Use this worksheet to record your team's scores for each program across all nine domains, note strengths and concerns, and identify remaining questions. Look for patterns to support your final recommendation.

	Score		
Domain	**Program A:** _____	**Program B:** _____	**Program C:** _____
Foundational Reading Skills			
Knowledge Building			
Comprehension and Vocabulary			
Writing			
Speaking and Listening			
Assessment and Responsive Teaching			
English Learner Instructional Supports			
Learner Access			
Teacher Usability and Implementation Support			
Cost/Budget			
Total out of:			
Biggest strengths	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
Biggest concerns	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
Questions still to answer	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3

Team Recommendation:

Explore a Connected Approach to Literacy

You've done the hard work of defining what great literacy instruction looks like and can now apply it to your program search protocols. Use this kit with any program, including ours.

At Curriculum Associates, we believe literacy instruction should empower students to read, write, speak, and think with confidence. We designed *Magnetic Literacy* with that goal in mind.

Magnetic Literacy is a Grades K–8 core literacy program grounded in reading and learning sciences. It integrates foundational skills with knowledge building through text sets, includes daily opportunities for writing and discussion, provides English learner supports in lessons, and pairs seamlessly with *i-Ready Inform*™* to give teachers data to guide instruction.

To begin your exploration:

- Read the Research Base to see how the program applies research-based practices for literacy instruction.
- Connect with an expert to explore how *Magnetic Literacy* meets your district's priorities.
- Explore the Extraordinary Educators™ blog for more literacy resources.

**i-Ready Inform*™ is the new name for the adaptive assessment previously named "*i-Ready Diagnostic*."

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Evaluated your options?

Let's discuss your findings and explore how *Magnetic Literacy* aligns with your priorities.

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