THE READING LEAGUE

Curriculum Navigation Report

95 Phonics Core Program®

95 Percent Group™

2025 Publication
Reviewed with Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (2nd Edition, 2023)

Introduction

CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES DESCRIPTION

"Decisions regarding curriculum, instructional approaches, programs, and resources are critical and must be informed by more than experience, observations, or even belief systems. If we are to succeed in implementing effective practices, then we will need to embrace learning as a part of our work as much as teaching itself."

Hennessy, 2020, pg. 8.

Due to the popularity of the science of reading movement, the term "science of reading" has been used as a marketing tool, often promising a quick fix for decision makers seeking a program aligned with the scientific evidence base. However, as articulated in The Reading League's *Science of Reading: Defining Guide (2022)*,

> *The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. Over the last five decades, this research has provided a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some students have difficulty; and how educators can most effectively assess and teach, and, therefore, improve student outcomes through the prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties. (p.6)*

The Reading League's *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (CEGs)* are a resource developed to assist consumers in making informed decisions when selecting curricula and instructional materials that best support evidence-aligned instruction grounded in the science of reading.

The CEGs are anchored by frameworks validated by the science of reading. Findings from the science of reading provide additional understandings that substantiate both aligned and non-aligned practices (AKA "red flags") within the CEGs. These serve as a foundation for what to expect from published curricula that claim to be aligned with the scientific evidence of how students learn to read. The CEGs highlight best practices that align with the science of reading. Red flags specify any non-aligned practices in the following areas:



- **Word Recognition**
- **Language Comprehension**
- **Reading Comprehension**
- **Writing**
- **Assessment**



The CEGs have been used by educators, building and district leaders, local education agencies, and state education agencies as a primary tool to find evidence of red flags, or practices that may interfere with the development of skilled reading. While the CEGs have been useful for schools and districts for informing curricular and instructional decision-making, The Reading League recognized the challenge of school-based teams that might not have the capacity for an in-depth review process. In the spirit of its mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction, expert review teams engaged in a large-scale review of the most widely-used curricula currently used in the United States in order to develop informative reports of each.

This report was generated after a review of the curriculum using the March 2023 *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines*, which have been refined based on feedback, a lengthy pilot review, and have undergone an inter-rater reliability study with positive results. As you read through the findings of this report, remember that red flags will be present for all curricula as there is no perfect curriculum. The intent of this report is not to provide a recommendation, but rather to provide information to local education agencies to support their journey of selecting, using, and refining instruction and instructional materials to ensure they align with the science of reading.

Disclaimer: The Reading League's curriculum review is deemed an informational educational resource and should not be construed as sales pitches or product promotion. The purpose of the review is to further our mission to advance the understanding, awareness, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.

Curriculum Description

The evaluation on the following pages features the review of 95 Phonics Core Program® which is created for students in Grades K–5.

For this report, reviewers closely examined grade level specific Teacher Editions, Digital Presentation Materials (which include assessments and implementation resources) and Student Workbooks and Manipulatives. Additionally, the team reviewed corresponding program materials, including the Sound Spelling Cards for learners in Grades K–2 and the Phonics Poster Sets for students in Grades 3–5.



1 Red Flag statement is False.



2 Red Flag statement is minimally True. Evidence is minimal or briefly mentioned.



3 Red Flag statement is mostly True. If applicable, evidence is in multiple places throughout the curriculum.



4 Red Flag statement is always true, pervasive, and/or integral to the curriculum.



A black box indicates that this component is not addressed in this curriculum and must be addressed with other materials.

Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and associated terminology as well as high-quality instructional materials. Once selected, they were assigned to teams of at least three reviewers. The team met regularly to establish reliability in their individual scores based on the Red Flag rubric that follows and to report their findings.

Reviewers used the notes section of each component to capture helpful evidence and notes, such as keywords that described a practice listed within the CEGs, specific examples, and precise locations of evidence. Notes were included in the review of any optional aligned components as well.

For a more comprehensive description of the review process, visit The Reading League Compass's Curriculum Decision Makers page.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING WORD RECOGNITION

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES	SCORE	
1.1: The three-cueing system is taught as a strategy for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).	1	
1.2: Guidance is given to memorize any whole words, including high frequency words, by sight without attending to the sound/symbol correspondences.	2	
1.3: Supporting materials do not provide a systematic scope and sequence nor opportunities for practice and review of elements taught (e.g., phonics, decoding, encoding).	1	

95 Phonics Core Program's **word recognition** non-negotiables are **"mostly met."** The team found no evidence of the three-cueing system and the program focuses on orthographic mapping rather than student use of context clues or guessing as a strategy for reading unknown words. The program's decodable readers feature two versions: one with and one without pictures, reinforcing that students should read the text without the assistance of images. The decodable texts are designed to match the phonics skills students are learning. However, the lesson number on the cover of the book doesn't always match the exact lesson where the skill is taught. For example, in Grade 1, Lesson 4, students are taught /ŏ/ in VC/CVC words, but the review team noted that the corresponding decodable cover page references Grade 1, Lesson 5 instead. While it is conceivable that the decodable text for a previous day's phonics pattern could be incorporated into the following day's lesson, there is no explicit mention of this practice in the Teacher Edition or other instructional resources. Such inconsistencies can create confusion for teachers during lesson planning, potentially impacting the clarity of the lesson.

The curriculum does provide a scope and sequence for each grade level. At the start of the school year, students engage in a brief review of the previous year's concepts as highlighted in the first volume of the Teacher Edition. The team also observed that 95 Phonics Core Program® provides students with numerous practice opportunities of previously learned concepts embedded in each lesson.

One area identified for growth is the instruction of high-frequency words in kindergarten. The team was unable to locate an instructional routine for high-frequency word instruction within the Teacher Edition or Digital Presentation materials for Grade K. High-frequency word lists combine both regular and irregular sounds, and the approach to instruction varies across the grade levels. For example, in kindergarten, three high-frequency words (e.g., "I," "a," "the") were introduced before students were taught any individual sound-symbol correspondences. Additionally, over the first several weeks of kindergarten, numerous high-frequency words are introduced that contain letters that students have not yet learned. For example, in Week 2, Lesson 3, "see" and "for" were introduced, yet the letters "s" and "f" were not introduced until Weeks 6 and 10, respectively. This prevents students from being able to analyze the regular phonetic components of these words, requiring them to memorize the words as whole units. This approach extends to sentence dictation, as well.

In Grades 1 and 2, students begin this portion of the lesson plan by reading words from a chart. Reviewers also observed that many of the instructional activities for high-frequency words involve counting letters, with no mention of sounds. For example, in Grade 1, Lesson 2, students were tasked to categorize targeted high-frequency words into columns labeled "2 Letters," "3 Letters," and "4 Letters." Later, in that same week's lesson, students are prompted to count sounds and write the words in their student workbooks. Again, there is no discussion linked to sound-symbol correspondences.

In Grades 1 and beyond, students are introduced to the Heart Word routine for high-frequency word instruction. This approach teaches students to spell and map words that don't fit the patterns that have been taught. However, this routine was difficult to consistently locate outside of Grade 2. Additionally, the Teacher Editions are not upfront in identifying which high-frequency words contain regular or irregular parts. Teachers unfamiliar with this concept would need to review the entire week's lessons in advance to identify which words are considered Heart Words before beginning instruction. As a result, teacher knowledge would be needed for thorough and effective planning.

1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS	SCORE	
1.7: Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) without moving to the phoneme level (e.g., blends such as /t/ /r/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds).	1	
1.8: Instruction is focused on letters only without explicit instruction and practice with the phonemes that letters represent.	1	
1.9: Phoneme awareness is not taught as a foundational reading skill.	1	
1.10: Phonological and phoneme awareness is not assessed or monitored.	1	

95 Phonics Core Program's **phonological and phonemic awareness** practices are **"met."** Phonological and phonemic awareness follow a consistent scope and sequence beginning in kindergarten and progressing to Grade 3. During the first eight weeks of kindergarten, the daily Phonological Awareness Warm-Up and Wrap-Up activities focus exclusively on larger units of sound (e.g., syllables and rhyme). Starting in Week 9, students are introduced to onset-rime, which remains the focus until Week 13, when phoneme isolation tasks in the initial position are introduced. In Grade 1, phonological awareness practices initially target phonological sensitivity tasks and larger units of sound (e.g., syllables and onset-rime), progressing to phoneme-level activities such as addition, segmentation, and manipulation. These activities start with single sounds and advance to more complex skills, such as manipulating phonemes within blends. Blending consonants is explicitly taught to ensure students hear and isolate individual sounds (e.g., by finger stretching with one finger for each sound) and then blend the sounds back together in order to pronounce the word. By Grades 2 and 3, instruction immediately focuses on more advanced phoneme manipulation tasks, including addition, deletion, and substitution across initial, final, and medial positions, with words featuring 3–5 phonemes. Additionally, students in Grades 4–5 participate in warm-up activities that feature a word study focus, reflecting an appropriate shift to more advanced literacy skills.

Sound-symbol correspondences are taught prior to the instruction of letter formation, as well. When students participate in the instructional routine for learning new letters, they explicitly name the letter and identify the corresponding sound. In terms of writing and letter formation, the letters are introduced with teacher modeling of stroke formation and the instructional routine for letter formation follows an "I do, we do, you do" model.

Concerning assessment, measures of phonological and phonemic awareness are included in the end of unit assessments. There are also embedded assessment opportunities within the weekly lessons. However, the team was unable to locate a resource that explicitly supports teachers in understanding how to monitor student progress and identify opportunities for formative assessments (e.g., sound-spelling mapping, daily warm-ups, etc.). While page 2 of the product guide suggests this is feasible, it does not provide educators with specific guidance to help them determine how and when to maximize formative assessment and corrective feedback opportunities, especially with the limited time allocated for these activities. Reviewers suggested that additional teacher guidance would be beneficial in helping educators implement these suggestions.

1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR PHONICS AND PHONIC DECODING	SCORE	
1.15: Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly during text reading.	1	
1.16: Instruction is typically "one and done"; phonics skills are introduced but with very little or short-term review.	1	
1.17: Key words for letter/sound correspondences are not aligned with the pure phoneme being taught (e.g., earth for /ĕ/ ant for /ă/, orange for /ŏ/).	1	
1.18: Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) "mini-lessons" or "word work" sessions.	1	
1.19: The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, short vowels are all taught in rapid succession, and/or all sounds for one letter are taught all at once.	1	
1.20: Blending is not explicitly taught nor practiced.	1	
1.21: Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a "What would make sense?" strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding.	1	
1.22: Words with known sound-symbol correspondences, including high- frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as stand-alone "sight words" to be memorized.	2	
1.23: Few opportunities for word-level decoding practice are provided.	1	
1.24: Early texts are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts which include phonic elements that have not been taught; decodable texts are not used or emphasized.	1	
1.25: Advanced word study (Grades 2–5): Instruction in phonics ends once single syllable phonics patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) are taught.	1	
1.26: Advanced word study (Grades 2–5): No instruction in multisyllabic word decoding strategies and/or using morphology to support word recognition is evident.	1	

95 Phonics Core Program's phonics and phonic decoding practices are "mostly met." The team found evidence that sound-symbol correspondences are explicitly taught to automaticity throughout the program. Each unit includes a final review; however, the team struggled to identify an explicit, systematic review of phonics skills over time. They observed that the weekly lesson plans incorporate an "Other Skills" component, which is embedded into instruction and appears to contribute to skill building and review. Nonetheless, reviewers remained uncertain about the intended sequence, as it was not clearly articulated.

Key word lists are available for review within the teacher resources. The anchor words remain consistent across grade levels, with slight adjustments by grade level when new words are introduced. Reviewers found the key words to be appropriate overall. The team did note that the program's ancillary tools include some different keywords, and they suggest the curriculum developers revise this approach in order to strive for alignment of keywords across all components of the program.

The program features daily lessons designed to take 20-30 minutes per day, and the scope and sequence aligns with what is being taught in these lessons. Phonics instruction builds from simple sound-symbol correspondences to complex phonic patterns. For example, in kindergarten, the short "a" sound (/ă/) is introduced right after the consonants "t," "p," and "n," offering students multiple opportunities to practice decoding and encoding words right away (e.g., Nat, pat, pan, nap, etc.). Blending is explicitly taught at the beginning of kindergarten. This instruction is paired with teaching directionality and reinforced during handwriting instruction when students practice stroke formation.

In kindergarten, high-frequency words are taught as whole words with an apparent assumption that students cannot decode the sounds in words that have not been taught. Reviewers suggested that using a pre-assessment could help determine which of these words learners already know. From Grade 1 on, the program delineates what is regular or not and follows a Heart Word routine. However, the words are read as whole words first, and the Heart Word routine isn't applied until later in the week. The placement of high-frequency words within the program presents an opportunity for improvement, as well. For example, aligning high-frequency word instruction with weeks when similar phonics or spelling patterns are being taught could reinforce connections between word recognition and the targeted skills.

Daily opportunities to decode at the word and passage level are provided, and all early text is decodable aside from some previously taught high-frequency words. Finally, advanced word study continues through Grade 5 and includes both morphology and routines for multisyllabic decoding. For example, in Grade 4, Lesson 27, Day 1, students practice reading multisyllabic words with r-controlled vowels. Using the word "parlor," students underline the -ar and -or to highlight the vowel sounds (parlor), followed by drawing a line between the syllables (par/lor). Then students read each syllable before reading the entire word.

1D: Fluency

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR FLUENCY	SCORE
1.40: Fluency instruction focuses primarily on student silent reading.	1
1.41: Rate is emphasized over accuracy; priority is given to the student's ability to read words quickly.	3
1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	2
1.43: Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.	2
1.44: Fluency assessment allows acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word (e.g., assessment based upon the cueing systems, M/S/V).	1

95 Phonics Core Program's **fluency** practices are **"somewhat met."** The program's materials include opportunities for students to engage in fluency activities, such as listening to a teacher model fluent reading, as well as repeated, choral, and whisper reading activities without teacher monitoring. Additionally, students practice fluency through the use of word lists and reading aloud. The team did note that the practice of silent reading is also utilized, and students participate in both silent reading and whisper reading without intentional modeling. However, silent reading is not emphasized or used as the primary means of fluency instruction. The curriculum does feature the use of Fluency Packs, a supplemental add-on, for practice and progress monitoring; however, it was not clear to reviewers when and how these passages should be used. Furthermore, in these Fluency Packs in Grades 1 and above, rate was observed to be emphasized over accuracy, and the curriculum does not provide explicit feedback to students on fluency progress. When collecting fluency data, the program only records the date and number of words read correctly, without accounting for errors or percentage of accuracy. Additionally, while the team was able to locate some examples of best practices for fluency instruction for Grades 1 through 5 in their Reviewers' Guide, they were unable to locate similar items for kindergarten. The team did note that the Reviewers' Guide refers to the binder of materials the team utilized for their review, and this may differ from the program's official Teacher Editions.

In Grade 1 and beyond, word-level fluency practice is at the passage level for charting purposes. There are sound and word lists provided within the weekly lessons, which support fluency; however, these materials are not explicitly tied to fluency instruction and assessment. Access to fluency practice with both narrative and informational texts varies across the grade levels. In kindergarten through Grade 3, passages are decodable, but vary in text type and genre based on content. For instance, in Grade 3, two decodable passages are provided each week: one literary and one informational. Third grade students are primarily asked to whisper read these fluency passages after identifying and marking the new pattern featured. As students advance to Grades 4 and 5, they engage with authentic narrative and informational texts.

95 Phonics Core Program's built-in fluency scoring primarily focuses on charting Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) and tracking student progress through the use of aimlines, which represent the expected rate of growth for students. While the program does not allow for the acceptance of incorrectly decoded words, fluency assessment was observed to emphasize rate, and there is no tracking of student accuracy when reading the fluency passages. Interestingly, the teacher resources mention common fluency assessments, such as oral reading fluency measures like the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). However, there is no caveat or guidance provided regarding the effectiveness or appropriateness of these assessments for gathering fluency-related data. Simply listing assessments without specifying which align with best practices for fluency instruction can lead to poor implementation and misunderstandings among educators. Overall, the team observed that although fluency is noted in the program, it seems to be addressed superficially, and additional programming would be required to support students in developing fluency.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING

SECTIONS 2–4: Non-Negotiables for Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing

This section begins with a review of non-negotiable elements for language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing before moving on to the language comprehension strands highlighted in Scarborough's reading rope. Therefore, identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING	SCORE
2-4.1: (LC, RC, W) In early grades, the instructional framework is primarily a workshop approach, emphasizing student choice and implicit, incidental, or embedded learning.	1
2-4.2: (LC, RC, W) Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.	1
2-4.3: (RC) Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts.	n/a
2-4.4: (RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.	n/a
2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level thinking skills.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's non-negotiables for **language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing** are **"not applicable."** 95 Phonics Core Program® was created as an explicit, systematic program to address students' foundational word-reading skills. As such, the curriculum focuses mainly on word recognition, including phonological awareness, decoding, and encoding. The team did observe that the curriculum's instructional framework features direct, explicit instruction that follows an "I do, we do, you do" structure. While the program introduces students to rich vocabulary and complex syntax through the use of connected texts across the grade levels, the minimal time allotted for this exposure limits students' opportunities to deeply engage with these features. Finally, when adopting this curriculum, decision-makers must ensure that student language comprehension skills are adequately addressed to support the development of a comprehensive literacy program.

2B: Background Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE	SCORE
2.1: Read-aloud opportunities emphasize simple stories or narrative texts. Read-aloud text is not sufficiently complex and/or does not include knowledge-building expository texts (i.e., topics related to science, social studies, current events).	n/a
2.2: Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.	n/a
2.3: Advanced (Grades 2-5): For students who are automatic with the code, texts for reading are primarily leveled texts that do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **background knowledge** are **"not applicable."** The curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, and as such, practices for building background knowledge are not emphasized. The team did note that the curriculum features the use of diverse, complex texts on a variety of topics. However, the primary focus of this program is to build foundational literacy skills and the knowledge building elements receive minimal focus. Instead, the purpose of including these texts is to ensure that foundational skills instruction is linked to meaningful content, preventing the teaching of skills in isolation. This seemed like a missed opportunity to integrate these texts more fully in order to develop student background knowledge and help learners make connections between new ideas and concepts to those that are already known.

2C: Vocabulary

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VOCABULARY	SCORE
2.7: Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	n/a
2.8: Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions out of context.	n/a
2.9: Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	n/a
2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	n/a
2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K–5 instruction.	1

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **vocabulary** are **"not applicable."** The curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, and as such, practices for developing student vocabulary knowledge are not emphasized. The team did note that instruction in morphology is a major focus in Grades 3 through 5. Students in these grades are taught affixes and roots to discover the meaning of unknown words. However, there is little emphasis on morphological analysis in Grades K–1. Additionally, many of the decodable passages include Tier 2 as well as some Tier 3 words, but the words are not identified as such nor are they explicitly taught and practiced. This represents another missed opportunity to enhance 95 Phonics Core Program® instructional programming. By integrating these vocabulary words into lessons, class discussions, and activities to build student understanding, the curriculum would better support students in developing their vocabulary knowledge.

2D: Language Structures

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE STRUCTURES	SCORE
2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	n/a
2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	n/a
2.20: Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **language structures** are **"not applicable."** The curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, and as such, practices for developing student knowledge of the conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are not emphasized. The team did observe that print concepts are taught beginning with Day 1, Lesson 1 of kindergarten. However, there was no evidence of instruction in grammar and syntax. Thus, adopters of this curriculum must make certain to incorporate direct instruction and targeted practice with language structures into their teaching practices to support the development of students' language comprehension skills. adequately support the development of writing skills.

2E: Verbal Reasoning

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VERBAL REASONING	SCORE
2.26: Inferencing strategies are not taught explicitly and may be based only on picture clues and not text (i.e., picture walking).	n/a
2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for verbal reasoning are "not applicable." The curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, and as such, inference strategies are not taught. Educators and decision-makers adopting this program should be aware of this limitation and must be mindful to integrate supplementary resources and instructional strategies to ensure higher-order comprehension skills are addressed.

2F: Literacy Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGE	SCORE
2.33: Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.	n/a
2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for literacy knowledge are "not applicable." The curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, and while it incorporates narrative and informational texts, students are not explicitly taught genre-specific text structures, their corresponding features, or signal words. Educators and decision-makers adopting this program should be aware of this limitation and incorporate explicit instruction in literacy knowledge into their instructional programming to help students develop awareness and understanding of various text types.

SECTION 3: Reading Comprehension

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR READING COMPREHENSION	SCORE
3.1: Students are asked to independently read texts they are unable to decode with accuracy in order to practice reading comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, predicting, summarizing, visualizing).	n/a
3.2: Students are asked to independently apply reading comprehension strategies primarily in short, disconnected readings at the expense of engaging in knowledge-building text sets.	n/a
3.3: Emphasis on independent reading and book choice without engaging with complex texts.	n/a
3.4: Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.	n/a
3.5: Students are not taught methods to monitor their comprehension while reading.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **reading comprehension** are **"not applicable."** While students are encouraged to read decodable texts independently, the program does not provide explicit comprehension strategy instruction. As such, students are not taught to make inferences, predict, summarize, visualize, or self-monitor their comprehension while reading. Again, the curriculum's main focus is teaching students to acquire word recognition skills, so educators and decision-makers adopting this curriculum should be aware of this limitation to ensure that students receive comprehensive literacy instruction.

4A: Writing — Handwriting

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR HANDWRITING	SCORE	
4.1: No direct instruction in handwriting.	1	
4.2: Handwriting instruction predominantly features unlined paper or picture paper.	1	
4.3: Handwriting instruction is an isolated add-on.	1	

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **handwriting** are **"met."** Handwriting instruction is explicit and direct, starting on Day 1, Lesson 1 of kindergarten. Students learn stroke formation and then letter formation as letter sounds are introduced, and they practice both within their student workbooks. Handwriting instruction utilizes lined paper that features a bottom, mid, and top line. Reviewers did note that handwriting could be better integrated into other portions of the daily lesson so students have more opportunities to practice and reinforce these skills within meaningful contexts.

4B: Writing — Spelling

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR SPELLING	SCORE
4.7: No evidence of explicit spelling instruction; no spelling scope and sequence, or the spelling scope and sequence is not aligned with the phonics / decoding scope and sequence.	1
4.8: No evidence of phoneme segmentation and/or phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.	1
4.9: Patterns in decoding are not featured in encoding/spelling; spelling lists are based on content or frequency of word use and not connected to decoding/phonics lessons.	1
4.10: Students practice spelling by memorization only (e.g., rainbow writing, repeated writing, pyramid writing).	1
4.11: Spelling patterns for each phoneme are taught all at once (e.g., all spellings of long /ā/) instead of a systematic progression to develop automaticity with individual graphemes/phonemes.	1

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **spelling** are **"met."** Explicit spelling instruction, as well as spelling practice and assessment, occur throughout the grade levels. The program also utilizes phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction across the grade levels. Spelling patterns are taught systematically, and spelling assessments are based on recently taught patterns. For example, in Grade 1, Lesson 15, Day 5, students take a spelling test on words with digraphs (e.g., ch, sh, th, wh) after they've received instruction on how to read and spell words that feature this pattern. There was no evidence of spelling by memorization. Instead, spelling patterns are taught one at a time and paired with ample practice opportunities to ensure students develop a strong understanding and can apply them accurately in both their reading and writing.

4C: Writing — Composition

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR COMPOSITION	SCORE
4.17: Writing prompts are provided with little time for modeling, planning, and brainstorming ideas.	n/a
4.18: Writing is primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.	n/a
4.19: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure are not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity; instead they are taught implicitly or opportunistically.	n/a
4.20: Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.	n/a
4.21: Students are not taught the writing process (e.g., planning, revising, editing).	n/a
4.22: Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.	n/a

95 Phonics Core Program's practices for **composition** are **"not applicable."** While students are tasked to use writing to answer questions by referring back to the text (i.e., text-dependent questions), this is the extent to which the curriculum addresses writing. As mentioned previously, 95 Phonics Core Program® is designed to teach students to acquire word recognition skills as well as transcription skills, including handwriting and spelling. Text generation and composition are not included. Thus, educators and decision-makers adopting this program must incorporate comprehensive composition instruction in addition to the programming provided. This ensures that students learn about the writing process and engage in opportunities that connect what they are reading about to written expression.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT

SECTION 5: Assessment

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE
5.1: Assessments measure comprehension only without additional assessment measures to determine what is leading to comprehension weaknesses (e.g., phonics, phoneme awareness, nonsense word fluency, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension).	n/a
5.2: Assessments include miscue analysis in which misread words that have the same meaning are marked as correct.	1

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE
5.6: Assessments result in benchmarks according to a leveled-text gradient.	1
5.7: Foundational skills assessments are primarily running records or similar assessments that are based on whole language or cueing strategies (e.g., read the word by looking at the first letter, use picture support for decoding).	1
5.8: Phonics skills are not assessed.	1
5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed.	2
5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	3
5.11: Oral reading fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	2
5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	n/a
5.13: Multilingual learners are not assessed in their home language.	4

95 Phonics Core Program's non-negotiables and practices for **assessment** are **"somewhat met."** 95 Phonics Core Program® is designed to teach students to acquire word recognition skills, and as such, the suite of assessments provided do not address language comprehension; however, reviewers noted that this would be anticipated based on the focus of this curriculum. The team did observe that recently taught phonics skills are informally assessed every few lessons. However, these informal progress checks should not serve as a replacement for universal screening and progress monitoring tools like General Outcome Measurements (GOM). There are also informal opportunities to assess phoneme awareness, yet these assessments are designed to be delivered to the whole group, and reviewers noted that it would be difficult to parse out challenges for individual students. Additionally, the curriculum features fluency packs, which support assessment of fluency, but it is not clear on when or how these tools are used. In fact, at times, this resource appears to be very informal as it is used for student practice in some grades.

95 Phonics Core Program's standalone assessment, the Phonics Screener for Intervention (PSI), appears to be the only tool within the program that assesses decoding using nonsense words. However, the Reviewer's Guide does not reference this tool as an integral part of the program, and a user manual for the most current version is unavailable. In fact, the team only had access to the PSI assessment through the online portal. If this tool were to be used, its role within the program remains unclear, as there is no explicit guidance on how assessment results should inform daily instruction or program structure. Finally, multilingual learners are not assessed in their home languages, and educators would need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that they are assessed in this manner. However, the team also noted that this would most likely be the case with most core curricula programs.

Final Report Summary

Overall, the **reviewed components** for 95 Phonics Core Program® were found to **"mostly meet"** or **"somewhat meet"** most criteria for Grades K–5. This means there was some evidence of red flag practices. While an evidence-aligned core curriculum is a critical part of any literacy program, it is no substitute for building a solid foundation of educator and leader knowledge in the science of reading as well as a coaching system to support fidelity of implementation.

STRENGTHS

95 Phonics Core Program's instructional framework features direct, explicit instruction that follows an "I do, we do, you do" structure. This structure provides students with clear teacher modeling and numerous opportunities to practice and master target skills.

95 Phonics Core Program's transcription instruction, including both handwriting and spelling, provides students with a strong foundation for written communication skills. By fostering automaticity in spelling and handwriting, this approach allows students to shift their focus to higher-level composition skills as they progress through the grades.

95 Phonics Core Program's phonological awareness instruction progresses from phonological sensitivity tasks to phoneme-level activities in a reasonable progression. This deliberate approach ensures that students develop the ability to work with individual sounds in words—a critical skill for successful early reading.

95 Phonics Core Program's instructional materials are recognized for their high quality. Reviewers specifically highlighted the student manipulatives, as well as the program's keywords, which were thoughtfully designed to support student learning.

95 Phonics Core Program® requires minimal teacher preparation, provided educators have a strong understanding of the science of reading. This approach allows teachers to focus on their delivery of instruction without the need for extensive planning time.

CHALLENGES

95 Phonics Core Program's high-frequency word practices in kindergarten rely heavily on memorization. Additionally, the placement of high-frequency words in Grades 1–5 presents an opportunity for revision and improvement. For example, aligning high-frequency word instruction with weeks when similar phonics or spelling patterns are being taught could reinforce connections and help students to make more sense of the patterns for these words.

95 Phonics Core Program's fluency instruction is another area that represents an opportunity for growth and revision. The approach places a greater emphasis on the rate of reading rather than the accuracy, and reviewers felt that additional materials would be required to support the development of fluency.

95 Phonics Core Program® has some resources that lack direction on when and how to use them. This includes its Fluency Packs for use with practice and progress monitoring as well as the Phonics Screener for Intervention standalone assessment. These do not include clear guidance on how assessment results should inform daily instruction or program structure.

95 Phonics Core Program's pacing does not seem realistic. While the curriculum includes daily lessons designed to take 20–30 minutes, teachers may need to extend this time—especially when incorporating corrective feedback or teacher explanations, such as "incidental-on-purpose" vocabulary instruction.

95 Phonics Core Program® lacks clarity regarding who has access to the online resources. This presents challenges for educators in fully utilizing the program's materials and delivering the curriculum with fidelity.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



95 Phonics Core Program®

95 Phonics Core Program®

Introduction

95 Phonics Core Program® (**95 PCP®**) is an engaging Tier 1 foundational skills curriculum that is built on the science of reading. The instruction in 95 Phonics Core Program is explicit, systematic, and cumulative and is based on a gradual-release model. 95 PCP provides everything an educator needs to teach phonics, including explicitly written instructional dialogue, repeatable and replicable routines, opportunities for teacher modeling, and independent practice and purposeful application to help students achieve proficiency.

95 Percent Group is deeply committed to third-party efficacy research to ensure our products lead to positive student outcomes. Evidence of 95 Phonics Core Program's effectiveness, including an ESSA Level 1 study, can be found here.

95 Percent Group's Publisher's Response

95 Percent Group is grateful for The Reading League's (TRL) evaluation of 95 Phonics Core Program and their recommendations for enhancements. Overall, we are pleased with the results of the review and TRL's recognition of 95 PCP's alignment to the science of reading. There are some criteria for which we'd like to provide additional clarifying information.

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

1.2: Guidance is given to memorize any whole words, including high frequency words, by sight without attending to the sound/symbol correspondences.	2

95 Percent Group Response:

95 Phonics Core Program employs sound-symbol correspondence, a methodical research-based approach for teaching phonics skills. Sound-symbol correspondence is a routine within every lesson and is used for all words, including high-frequency words.

The Dolch word list categorized by grade level and organized in frequency order was used to select the high-frequency words for all levels of 95 PCP. Regularly spelled high-frequency words are utilized throughout the curriculum as pattern words and introduced in the same order as their respective phonics patterns. For the limited set of high-frequency words that do not follow a distinct pattern, these words are taught as "heart words," words where some portion of the spelling is not decodable and must be learned by heart. In 95 PCP, high-frequency words, regardless of their regularity, are taught using a similar process so that they can be orthographically mapped. 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.

1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

1.22: Words with known sound-symbol correspondences, including high frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as standalone “sight words” to be memorized.	2

95 Percent Group Response:
The score of 2 was given for kindergarten only. To provide additional clarity, kindergarten students become responsible for decoding and encoding all high-frequency words with a regular pattern once all the letter-sound correspondences for the word have been taught in the program. Because students receiving instruction from 95 PCP learn letter-sound correspondences and blending to automaticity in kindergarten, they will be able to decode and encode 40 regularly spelled HFW from the Dolch list.

1D: Fluency

1.41: Rate is emphasized over accuracy; priority is given to the student's ability to read words quickly.	3
1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	2
1.43: Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.	2

95 Percent Group Response:
95 Phonics Core Program emphasizes reading accuracy, phrasing, intonation, expression, and automaticity as the hallmarks of fluent reading. Our instructional design and approach to fluency is informed by the understanding that:

1. Fluency occurs when the reader recognizes nearly all the words in a text.
2. Readers achieve fluency when they not only have a sufficient word bank of known words but also have the skills to decode new words efficiently.
3. Mastering the alphabetic code is foundational to word recognition automaticity, which in turn is critical to becoming a fluent reader.
4. Phonics decoding is the fundamental prerequisite for developing skill and fluency in reading and comprehension.

To help students accurately and fluently read connected text, 95 Phonics Core Program follows a structured, step-by-step approach. Fluency development begins at the word level, progresses to phrases, and then advances to sentences and paragraphs. Instruction emphasizes accuracy over speed, using a process called “Transfer to Text” to help students recognize pattern words within a text. Words Per Minute (WPM) is intentionally excluded from these activities, as the primary focus is on building accuracy.

In kindergarten, explicit instruction on blending sounds into words begins in Lessons 5 and 6, with students practicing with the teacher before reading words independently by the end of Lesson 6. Word reading for accuracy is explicitly embedded throughout the program. In grades 1–3, students work on fluency at the word and phrase levels using 1-minute timed readings and fluency grids that include both high-frequency and pattern words. In grades 4 and 5, fluency practice continues with weekly word lists.

Optional Additional Fluency Practice: 95 Fluency Packs (with weekly practice) are included as an **optional** additional resource on the One95 Literacy Platform, which houses ancillary instructional resources that are available to teachers online. The Fluency Packs are designed to be used ***after students achieve accuracy***, and they also provide additional practice and review opportunities. 95 Fluency Packs are optional tools teachers can use and are not recommended to be used during the 30-minute 95 PCP lesson.

Assessment

5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed.	2

95 Percent Group Response:
Phonemic Awareness is assessed in the kindergarten Unit Assessments. In addition, all teachers who use 95 Phonics Core Program have access to 95 Phonemic Awareness Screener for Intervention™ (PASI) to pinpoint gaps in skills mastery. Information about how to access these assessments is provided during our product launch training that is recommended for all clients.

Assessment

5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	3

95 Percent Group Response:
95 PCP formative and summative assessments monitor students' progress on the weekly or unit skill focus. While these assessments include real words, they are specifically designed to measure how well students generalize learned phonics patterns rather than memorize words. Instead of traditional spelling lists for memorization, students are taught strategies such as finger-stretching, sound-spelling, and syllable mapping. They also learn to recognize syllable pattern attributes to support both spelling and reading of pattern words.

When teachers must investigate why a student may be performing below expectations, they can administer the 95 Phonics Screener for Intervention™ (PSI). This free assessment is available to all 95 PCP users and provides data that pinpoints specific skill gaps. ***The PSI includes nonsense words as part of its evaluation process.***

Assessment

5.11: Oral reading fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	2

95 Percent Group Response:
For educators who don't have a state- or district-mandated oral reading fluency (ORF) measure in place already, 95 Phonics Core Program includes 95 Fluency Packs. The packs include weekly practice and reading passages and are included as additional resources on the One95 Literacy Platform.

95 Fluency Packs provide guidance on how to use Words per Minute exercises to monitor student progress on learning fluency skills. In the exercises, the teacher assigns the student a text to identify how many words per minute the student can read accurately during a "cold read." Then, the teacher creates a goal for the student.

For educators already using a state- or district-mandated ORF measure, 95 Phonics Core Program's unit assessments provide additional data points. 95 PCP's unit assessments include comprehension questions. Students' answers to them provide insight into a student's reading fluency, as the ability to demonstrate text understanding is connected to reading fluency.

Assessment

5.13: Multilingual learners are not assessed in their home language.	4

95 Percent Group Response:
95 Phonics Core Program instruction is intended to teach all students the sound-spelling correspondence of words in English to facilitate the development of reading and writing. Because 95 Phonics Core Program is taught in English, its assessments are presented in English.

While the program does not explicitly teach phonics in languages other than English, multilingual learners benefit from the phonological structure 95 Phonics Core Program teaches. English learners require acquisition of the 44 phonemes and their corresponding graphemes in order to become proficient in decoding and encoding.

95 Phonics Core Program follows the best practices of effective, guided instruction for all students including but not limited to students who are struggling, English learners, and advanced students. Accessible via the One95 Literacy Platform, 95 Phonics Core Program educators also have access to knowledge-building on cross-linguistic similarities and differences. This ancillary resource includes each letter of the alphabet and, depending on their native language, what educators might expect students to know or need additional support with for the associated phoneme(s). The knowledge in this ancillary resource should be kept in mind when instructing and assessing multilingual learners as they learn the English language.