



Curriculum Navigation Report

# PAF Reading Program (PAF) 2017 for Grades K-2



2024 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 (LEAs), and state education agencies (SEAs) as a primary tool to find evidence of red flags or practices that may interfere with the development of skilled reading. 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 an inter-rater reliability study.

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. Expert review teams engaged in a large-scale review of the most widely-used curricula in the United States in order to develop these Curriculum Navigation Reports.

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 curriculum decision makers to support their efforts in selecting, using, and refining instructional materials to ensure they align with findings from the science of reading.

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*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 following pages feature the review of the PAF Reading Program (PAF) 2017 for Grades K-2. This curriculum is a structured language program for teaching reading, spelling, and handwriting. PAF incorporates instructional practices recommended by the National Reading Panel and is grounded in Orton-Gillingham techniques.

For this report, reviewers closely examined the PAF materials for Grades K-2. For specifics connected to word recognition, reviewers utilized the Decodable Chapter Books, Skills Books, and Card Packs, as well as the Teacher Handbooks and Teacher Editions for gathering evidence. For language comprehension, the team appraised the general lesson directions included within the Teacher Handbooks and Teacher Editions. The program is divided into two volumes and is comprised of 200 levels. 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 and report their findings.

For their review, each group member used The Reading League's Curriculum Reviewer Workbook to capture scores and evidence for their decisions. Once they determined which section and grade level of the *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines* to review, they individually conducted a review of that section for red flags. Individuals then looked for evidence of red flags within the curriculum materials, including scope and sequences, modules/units, and lessons, as well as any ancillary Tier 1 curriculum materials (e.g., assessment documents). As each component was reviewed, individual reviewers also noted the extent to which a red flag statement was "true". They selected the appropriate rating in the Reviewer Workbook as outlined below:

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                      |                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>1 Red Flag statement is False.</b>                                                                                            |  | <b>2 Red Flag statement is minimally True. Evidence is minimal or briefly mentioned.</b>  |
|  | <b>3 Red Flag statement is mostly True. If applicable, evidence is in multiple places throughout the curriculum.</b>             |  | <b>4 Red Flag statement is always true, pervasive, and/or integral to the curriculum.</b> |
|  | <b>A black box indicates that this component is not addressed in this curriculum and must be addressed with other materials.</b> |                                                                                      |                                                                                           |

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.

# 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: Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies 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 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     |

PAF’s word recognition non-negotiables are **“mostly met.”** This program is designed to teach the code logically, and materials read by students are directly tied to the skills they have been taught. Explicit phonics instruction is taught following a carefully designed sequence, with select high-frequency words woven into instruction. The team noted that application in aligned decodable text is a part of every lesson, and all texts have limited images. Additionally, the three-cueing systems are not taught, and the curriculum does not feature leveled readers.

Finally, reviewers observed that select high-frequency words, entitled “red words,” are taught in the lessons. These words are spelled, written, and read following a prescribed routine designed to get students to attend to the letter order and the full pronunciation of the word. However, sound-symbol correspondences are not explicitly addressed, and these relationships are only implied when working with high-frequency words. Additionally, within the curriculum, students do not use letter names, with the exception of irregular, high-frequency words, which are taught on a limited basis throughout the program.

## 1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

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

| RED FLAGS 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.                                                                                                                                                                                | 2     |

PAF's phonological and phoneme awareness practices are **"mostly met."** Reviewers observed that blending and segmenting at the phoneme level is the main focus of this program. At the same time, manipulation exercises primarily involve students working with letters rather than engaging in pure auditory and oral exercises. The team also observed that phonemic awareness activities are included in every lesson of Book 1, for seventeen lessons total. Initially, teachers are equipped with scripts to teach these skills; however, this feature fades out early on and reviewers strongly recommend including references to the page numbers where these instructional scripts can be found. This addition would be especially beneficial for educators who are new to the science of reading and rely on these materials to bolster their teaching.

The team also found that initially, phonemes are taught in isolation and then swiftly integrated with handwriting activities to ensure learners secure the sounds. Furthermore, PAF deliberately omits the use of letter names, focusing solely on sounds. While there is some language of first sound and blending included, reviewers suggested that this could be addressed more aggressively and that teacher knowledge is required to strengthen the curriculum.

Finally, the program does not assess phonemic awareness in isolation. Although activities like dictation and word reading allow teachers to observe these skills informally, a comprehensive oral measure solely dedicated to the assessment of phonological awareness is not included in the program.

## 1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

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

| RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS                                                                                                                                                                        | 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 /ē/, ant for /ā/, orange for /ō/).                                                                           | 2     |  |
| 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.                                                          | 1     |  |
| 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     |  |

PAF's phonics and phonic decoding practices are **“met.”** The team found that phonics instruction is carefully considered and that letter/sound correspondences are taught with great intentionality throughout. Reviewers noted that the curriculum prioritizes instruction in sounds ahead of letter formation. Furthermore, letter names are not used except with high frequency/ “red words.” The curriculum follows a progressively cumulative approach, and previously taught skills remain integrated into the learning process so students maintain this knowledge. Blending is taught explicitly and practiced throughout lessons. Reviewers noted that the term “blending” was first introduced to students in Level 1, Lesson 3. In this lesson, students have learned the letters “a,” “t,” and “c” and their corresponding sounds (/ă/, /t/, and /k/). Students begin by reviewing the sounds in isolation, followed by opportunities to practice and apply their decoding and encoding skills. Every lesson features word-level fluency work, and students are required to read lists by first sounding out featured words and then reading them with fluency.

As mentioned previously, the curriculum provides learners with explicit instruction in high-frequency words through the use of the “red words” routine. Here words are read, spelled, and written to promote orthographic processing. Most of the “red words” featured are highly irregular; however, there is no attention paid to known sound-symbol relationships. The team felt this was a missed opportunity that could be capitalized on in the future. There are also a limited number of high-frequency words included in the program. Reviewers found that 16 “red words” are taught in Volume 1 (within the first 74 lessons) and 50 “red words” in Volume 2 (within the next 175 lessons). Additionally, the program features “oval words,” which are phonetic but consist of letter combinations that have not been explicitly taught. For example, in each decodable text, there may be one or two “oval words.” These words are directly modeled and taught by the teacher before reading so students do not engage in any guessing.

PAF's curriculum includes decodable chapter books that are sequential and build students' knowledge of phonics over time. It also features keywords for letter/sound correspondences through the use of its keyword picture card deck. While the team found that the majority of the keywords effectively represented these associations, they did identify two keywords as problematic, including:

/ě/ - elephant (short vowel sound followed by a liquid)

/ũ/ - umbrella (short vowel sound followed by a nasal - creates nasalization issues)

However, the phonics strengths of PAF, in comparison to this slight flag, led to the determination that this section would still be **“met.”**

Finally, while PAF's programming appears to be best suited for students in grades K-2, there is some advanced word study work included throughout the program. For example, Volume 2 includes instruction centered on affixes, silent letters, vowel teams, and strategies for decoding big words. Additionally, syllable types and their respective division rules are taught. However, this approach may be lacking for learners who require more advanced instruction in this realm.

## 1D: Fluency

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

| RED FLAGS 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.                                                                        | 1     |
| 1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.                                                            | 1     |
| 1.43: Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.                                                                                   | 1     |
| 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     |

PAF's fluency practices are **“met.”** Fluency instruction focuses on students reading aloud with guidance from their teacher. In Volume 1 (pg. 33), teachers are guided to provide students with “At least 15 minutes of repeated reading of lists...done under your supervision.” Here, learners receive immediate error correction and feedback if they misconstrue a word. Once word list reading in the skills book is complete, students are tasked to read aloud from the PAF chapter books. The goal is accurate, fluent reading to support comprehension, and this is emphasized throughout the program.

Word level fluency is also stressed throughout Volumes 1 and 2. Here the handbook indicates that word lists should be practiced numerous times to achieve automaticity and that the teacher should keep track of the difficult words and weave them into frequent review. Since the program only requires individual responses, the team suggested that the PAF curriculum could adapt this format to provide students with instances of group practice followed by individual turns. In addition to word level fluency, students practice reading at the phrase, sentence, and passage level across both narrative and nonfiction text. Fluency is directly connected to comprehension. For example, Volume 2 states, “...reading and rereading word lists provide an opportunity to reinforce sound symbol associations and develop automatic word recognition crucial for reading comprehension.” Directions tell teachers to monitor that each word is read as it would be “naturally spoken” and that “correct pronunciation” is crucial to acquiring the word's meaning. Finally, like other aspects of fluency instruction, assessment emphasizes accuracy over rate, and the curriculum specifies that all “...errors are corrected as they occur.”

# 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 (2001) reading rope. Therefore, the 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.                                                                         | 2     |
| 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. | 1     |
| 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 questioning skills.                                                                                            | 1     |

PAF’s language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing comprehension non-negotiables are **“somewhat met.”** Overall, the program is teacher-directed and does not follow a workshop model. However, reviewers did note that the curriculum does mention that small, homogeneous reading groups occur, which is reminiscent of guided reading groups. Books 1–5, which include the titles *Pals*, *Fun in the Sun*, *Let’s Go*, *Camp Hilltop*, and *Stand by Me*, are composed of decodable text. While the sentences featured are appropriate for the K–2 age group, these stories are truly devoted to the application of skills that teach students to master the code as they read relatable stories. As such, the vocabulary and sentence structures are not as rich in these stories. Text complexity increases in books 6, *Are We There Yet?*, and 7, *The Dragons of Wellington*, which are age-appropriate for learners in second grade. *The Dragons of Wellington* features a Lexile level of 620 and includes a greater variety of sentences as well as more complex syntax and vocabulary.

Comprehension activities support the process of understanding text and students are developing the language processes and skills necessary for comprehension. For example, students apply their understanding of literacy knowledge by following the storyline of a chapter book and remembering events within a narrative text. Additionally, students practice retelling and summarizing events from the previous chapter. This taps into student knowledge of sequencing (retelling) as well as how to identify the most essential ideas of a text and integrate them in a meaningful way (summarizing). Students are asked to respond to a variety of questions both orally and in writing, and teachers are encouraged to ask additional questions based on their student's needs and background knowledge.

Additionally, students are required to re-read text for both fluency and meaning, and discussion of readings and related topics is encouraged. Later in the program, beginning at lesson 120, nonfiction passages are embedded both in the student skills books and chapter books. The nonfiction text is related to the fictitious story and these passages are used to build student background knowledge. They use this information to think about the text and its meaning and, in so doing, deepen their comprehension skills.

One area reviewers flagged is the integration of reading and writing. While instruction in syntax is addressed, and students learn to work with words, phrases, and clauses to create sentences, writing instruction beyond this level is not included. The program is upfront about this as the Volume 2 teacher's handbook states, "PAF is a reading program. Reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension are the primary goal" (pg 160). Thus, writing instruction is not emphasized.

## 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).                  | 1     |
| 2.2: Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.                                                                                                                                                                       | 2     |
| 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   |

PAF's background knowledge practices are **"somewhat met."** The program is designed for foundational reading instruction (grades K-2) and includes stories that are appropriate for application with students who are learning to read. Thus, the knowledge-building component is not extensive and, instead, emphasizes topics commonplace in everyday life. As mentioned previously, there are seven books in the PAF curriculum. The first three books, *Pals*, *Fun in the Sun*, and *Let's Go*, include basic language and decodable text and are age-appropriate for students in kindergarten and first grade. The goal is not knowledge building, but learning to read, using realistic fiction that includes relatable situations and experiences. In books 6 and 7, *Are We There Yet?* and *The Dragons of Wellington*, nonfiction is introduced to build more background knowledge. For example, the last book, *The Dragons of Wellington*, is a medieval fantasy story. However, students learn about castles and knights from the nonfiction passages included in the skills book. Thus, PAF uses these nonfiction texts to build context and vocabulary to support a deeper understanding of the story. Furthermore, learners are likely to remember targeted content because it is embedded in a detailed chapter book read across several weeks. That being said, while there are opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge, they would need to be teacher-directed to maximize the program's effectiveness overall.

## 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.                                                         | 2     |  |
| 2.8: Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions out of context.                                                                                       | 1     |  |
| 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.       | 2     |  |
| 2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.                                                                                                                     | 2     |  |
| 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     |  |

PAF's vocabulary practices are **“mostly met.”** Reviewers found that the program gives some attention to vocabulary. While there is some inclusion of Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, this doesn't officially begin until Volume 2 is introduced to students. The curriculum includes varied activities, including those that emphasize homonym use and classification. However, reviewers noted that the depth of word knowledge would depend on teacher delivery, and oftentimes, the program seems to assume learners possess vocabulary knowledge rather than teach words directly. Other activities highlighted in the student skills books include crossword puzzles and completion tasks.

PAF anchors its vocabulary words in either a picture or context; however, these terms frequently lack sophistication. Additionally, PAF provides educators with limited guidance on how to teach target words. For example, in Volume 2, Level 108, students are introduced to the Tier 2 word, “jealous,” which is taken directly from the story. However, there is limited scripting and/or routine information provided, which can pose challenges regarding effective implementation and instruction. This was the case with the majority of Tier 2 words: the terms were highlighted in the story selection; however, how they are taught is left up to the teacher, and only minimal guidance is provided in the Teacher's Edition.

Finally, while explicit instruction in morphology is included, much of this work is relegated to the primary grades. Students using the PAF curriculum learn the six syllable types and syllable division, common roots, prefixes, and suffixes, and how to combine words using four common spelling rules. However, concepts included do not progress beyond late 2nd-grade levels due to program design.

## 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. | 2     |  |
| 2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.                                                                                            | 2     |  |
| 2.20: Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.                                                                         | 1     |  |

PAF's language structures practices are **"mostly met."** Reviewers were clear to specify that PAF is a foundational reading program that concludes at the end of Grade 2. Thus, the curriculum follows a logical flow for the designated age range, and many of the activities are completed orally or through discussion. This includes story grammar reviews and oral retellings and summaries. Discussion is part of every lesson, and educators are encouraged to guide classroom conversations and model responses as needed. To support this, the Teacher's Guide provides educators with questions to drive student discussion; however, the prompts do not need to be followed exactly. Additionally, the Teacher's Edition specifies that learners should be coached to speak in complete sentences.

Conventions of print are taught through completion exercises, and most skills exercises include places for students to write a response. Learners are also expected to correct their errors; however, the teacher would need to study the front matter of the book carefully and remember to complete the numerous steps that support good writing instruction. In many instances, PAF's curriculum assumes that educators have substantive knowledge of how to teach writing effectively. Thus, due to the complex nature of writing, building in more scaffolding to support teacher knowledge and instruction of writing would greatly benefit the curriculum.

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). | 2     |  |
| 2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.                                                                       | 1     |  |

PAF’s verbal reasoning practices are **“mostly met.”** Students regularly practice making inferences based on text and pictures; however, the team was unable to locate instances of explicit teacher modeling to introduce and teach the skill. As such, students are not taught the metacognitive processes for effective inference-making. This is problematic as it leaves students without the necessary guidance and support to develop the critical processes required to consider and regulate their learning. Students use their inference skills in a variety of ways. This includes activities like creating chapter titles, using images/pictures to help students infer, and through the use of inferential questions to promote a deeper understanding. Additionally, categorizing tasks is a regular part of the PAF curriculum’s lessons, and these activities require students to infer, as well.

**2F: Literacy Knowledge**

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

| RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGE                                                                   | SCORE |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--|
| 2.33: Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.                                                    | 2     |  |
| 2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced. | 2     |  |

PAF’s literacy knowledge practices are **“mostly met.”** The review team found some evidence of genre-specific language throughout the program, and PAF includes both narrative and informational text. While informational/nonfiction text is featured in books 6 (*Are We There Yet?*) and 7 (*The Dragons of Wellington*), reviewers found that the majority of PAF materials centered on narrative fiction. This presents a problem as it limits learners’ exposure to diverse genres and impedes the development of the critical reading skills necessary to engage with and comprehend a variety of text types. In the later skills books, there are also opportunities for students to practice the use of signal words. However, like with inference-making, the team was unable to locate explicit instruction in the use of these signal words as it appeared that this skill was assumed and not directly taught.

### 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). | 1     |
| 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.                              | 1     |
| 3.3: Emphasis on independent reading and book choice without engaging with complex texts.                                                                                                                          | 1     |
| 3.4: Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.                                                                                                                   | 1     |
| 3.5: Students are not taught methods to monitor their comprehension while reading.                                                                                                                                 | 2     |

PAF's reading comprehension practices are **"mostly met."** The program is progressively decodable, and students read stories built from taught patterns. Thus, learners do not engage in independent reading, and all instruction is teacher-directed. The stories featured are substantive and engaging for beginning learners, and all comprehension questions are tied directly to the storyline/plot. Additionally, strategies for educator use are embedded within the teacher's guide. Student self-monitoring is taught through the use of self-questioning. However, to teach this effectively, the teacher must guide students back into the text, a practice briefly mentioned in the front matter sections of both volumes. This minimal direction for teachers underscores the importance of this practice, and teachers would need to rely on their own knowledge to teach students to self-monitor effectively.

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     |

PAF’s handwriting practices were **“met.”** Handwriting is an essential component of PAF’s lessons and curriculum. Students are taught to pair the letter sound with a “motor pattern,” and specific verbal cueing is used to guide them through the process. Additionally, after teacher modeling has been provided, students engage in many opportunities for guided practice. The curriculum includes its own handwriting paper with structured, well-spaced lines with reference points (i.e. the flower, cloud, and sun lines). This paper also features an intentional empty space below each line to show students where the tail of letters clearly goes. Finally, reviewers noted that PAF’s handwriting instruction is highly intentional and an integrated part of the curriculum. The team especially appreciated the curriculum’s explanation regarding the “why” and “how” of skywriting, finding the description to be both helpful and practical.

## 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 for spelling, 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 grapheme/phonemes.  | 1     |

PAF's spelling practices were **“met.”** Reviewers found that spelling is taught explicitly and follows the scope and sequence provided in the back of the teacher's handbook. Students are taught targeted graphemes explicitly, and instruction of syllable patterns is used to aid in both decoding and encoding. Additionally, the team noted that reading and spelling occur in every lesson, and teachers can expand upon the spelling routine to have learners tap each sound before writing as needed. Finally, spelling by memorization is not emphasized, and students are introduced to spelling patterns systematically and cumulatively.

## 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.                                                                                                                                           | 2     |  |
| 4.18: Writing is primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.                                                                                                                                                                 | 2     |  |
| 4.19: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically. | 2     |  |
| 4.20: Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.                                                                                                                                                                       | n/a   |  |
| 4.21: Students are not taught the writing process (i.e., planning, revising, editing).                                                                                                                                                         | n/a   |  |
| 4.22: Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.                                                                                                                                                      | 2     |  |

PAF's composition practices were **“somewhat met.”** PAF's writing instruction is structured and incorporates various tools like graphic organizers, sentence frames, completion tasks, and dictation. However, the focus primarily lies on narrative writing, and students do not engage in informational/expository writing until Lesson 120. The program's approach to writing instruction is designed to support learner comprehension of the story through the use of written responses to story questions and prompts. As such, the writing process isn't emphasized. Consequently, revisions and edits to student writing are primarily made to enhance story understanding and content, with less emphasis on grammar and syntax. Nonetheless, correct spelling is expected in all student writing tasks.

# 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). | 1     |
| 5.2: Assessments include miscue analysis in which misread words that have the same meaning are marked as correct.                                                                                                                                                        | 1     |

PAF's assessment non-negotiables were **"met."** The team observed measures of decoding at the word level, passage reading for fluency, spelling through dictation practice, and basic comprehension through questioning. While PAF specifies that all "...errors are corrected as they occur," assessments do not include a formal miscue analysis. This diagnostic tool would need to be added by the teacher to gain additional insight into a student's reading.

| 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.                                                                                                                                                                               | 1     |
| 5.11: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.                                                                                                                                                                              | 1     |
| 5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).                                                                                                  | 2     |
| 5.13: Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.                                                                                                                                                                    | 4     |

PAF's assessment practices were **"mostly met."** PAF's assessment suite is designed to address foundational skills development and includes measures connected to phonic decoding and encoding, fluency, and basic comprehension skills through questioning. However, the program lacks a comprehensive oral measure dedicated to the assessment of phonological awareness. Assessments do not result in leveled text gradient, and reviewers specified that fluency assessment emphasizes accuracy over rate, and the curriculum specifies that all "...errors are corrected as they occur." Educators would also need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that Multilingual Learners are assessed in their home language. 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 PAF's Curriculum were found to **“meet”** or **“mostly meet,”** or **“somewhat meet”** most criteria for Grades K-2. This means there was minimal 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

*PAF's curriculum places a significant emphasis on the development of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle. A strong understanding of the alphabetic principle is critical for developing reading and writing skills as it allows students to read both fluently and accurately. This frees them up to focus their attention on making meaning of the text, the ultimate goal of reading.*

*PAF's texts are progressively decodable and students read stories built from taught patterns. By presenting text in this manner, PAF's curriculum creates a supportive environment where students can apply their knowledge of taught concepts while building their confidence and fluency at the same time.*

*PAF's fluency instruction focuses on students reading aloud with guidance from their teacher. Learners receive immediate error correction and feedback if they miscue a word and are offered practice opportunities at the word, phrase, sentence, and passage level across both narrative and some nonfiction text. Additionally, the program stresses accuracy over speed as well as the connection between fluency and comprehension.*

*PAF's curriculum offers students opportunities to practice encoding through daily dictation practice. Thus, students apply taught sound-spelling patterns with great frequency, and spelling by memorization is not emphasized.*

*PAF's handwriting instruction is an intentional and integrated part of the curriculum. Students are taught to pair the letter sound with a “motor pattern,” and specific verbal cueing is used to guide them through the process. This structured approach ensures that students develop both their letter sound AND formation skills in tandem, laying a strong foundation for writing success. However, it is important to note that scripting for letter formation is not a part of the Teacher's Handbook. Educators are left to locate these resources independently from the program's ancillary materials. Reviewers strongly recommended including these resources within the main Teacher's Handbook to streamline PAF's instructional practices and ensure accessibility for all educators.*

PAF's knowledge-building component is not extensive; instead, it emphasizes topics that are commonplace in everyday life. This limited scope means teachers will need to integrate other resources to expose students to a diverse range of subjects.

PAF's composition instruction places a heavy emphasis on the narrative genre, and students do not participate in informational/expository writing. Additionally, since the curriculum focuses on reading and responding to text, there is a lack of exposure to the writing process. As such, other resources will need to be leveraged to engage students in the recursive steps of planning, drafting, revising, and editing, all essential components used by skilled writers to navigate the writing process and create high-quality compositions effectively.

Like with written composition, PAF's instruction of literacy knowledge and text structure primarily emphasizes narrative text. Additionally, while the team found some evidence of genre-specific language included in the program, there is limited explicit instruction in the text types, their corresponding features, and signal words. This lack of direct, explicit instruction may hinder students' ability to comprehend and analyze varied text types and genres both in class and independently.

PAF's curriculum has a specific focus on foundational reading skills and concludes at the end of Grade 2. That being said, certain areas of instruction have limited scope. For example, advanced word study instruction and work with complex language structures are limited as activities are tailored to learners of this particular age and grade level. As a result, while the program does target essential early literacy skills, it may not meet the needs of learners requiring more advanced instruction.

PAF's curriculum and materials assume teachers' knowledge of the science of reading. There is limited information and scripting provided, which may pose challenges for educators who require more explicit guidance on how to implement evidence-based reading instruction. For example, to effectively teach student self-monitoring, the teacher must guide students back into the text, a practice briefly mentioned in the front matter sections of PAF's curricular materials. However, this minimal direction for teachers underscores the importance of this practice, and teachers would need to rely on their own knowledge base.

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# PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



READING  
PROGRAM

**PAF Reading Program (PAF)  
2017 for Grades K-2**

May 1, 2024

Dear Educators,

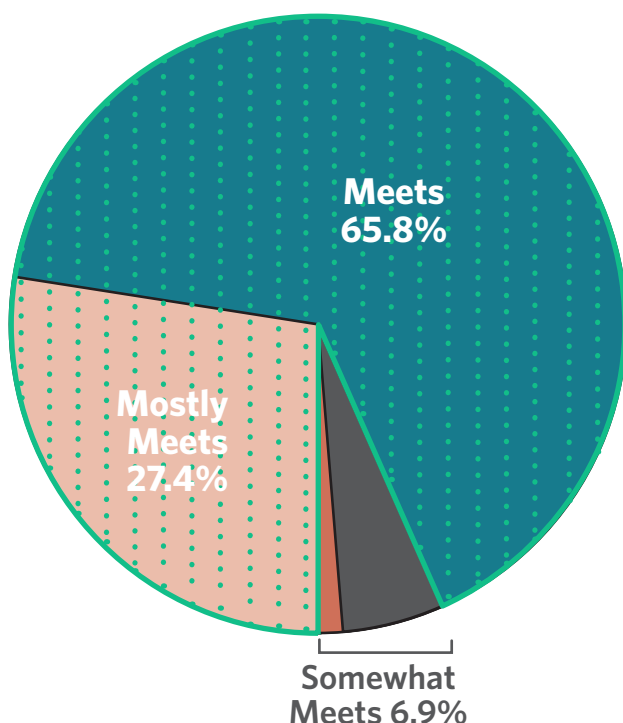
The **PAF Reading Program** is committed to advancing best practices in reading instruction. PAF appreciates the thoroughness of The Reading League’s process and goals in conducting this review to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.

In this letter, the PAF Reading Program will present additional context for and clarification of some of the findings in the review to provide a more complete description of the program.

### The Review Team’s Findings

PAF “meets” and “mostly meets” most of the criteria in each section for Grades K-2. The Reading League’s review of the PAF Reading Program reflects a thorough understanding of the program as a comprehensive beginning reading program (K-2) that integrates reading, spelling, and handwriting. PAF “meets” and “mostly meets” all the criteria in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, handwriting, spelling, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

PAF “somewhat meets” a few criteria, mainly pertaining to writing. PAF lays the foundation for teaching expository writing. Capitalization, punctuation, different sentence types, and the use of conjunctions are explicitly taught and practiced in sentence activities related to the reading. Children are asked to write both original sentences and sentences that answer comprehension questions. However, PAF is not a writing program; schools that use PAF seamlessly supplement a writing program into their literacy block.



### PAF MEETS OR MOSTLY MEETS 93.2% OF THE GUIDELINES

- Guidelines Rated 1 (Meets)  
48 out of 73
- Guidelines Rated 2 (Mostly Meets)  
20 out of 73
- Guidelines Rated 3 (Somewhat Meets)  
1 out of 73
- Guidelines Rated N/A (Somewhat Meets)  
4 out of 73



## Other Important Components of PAF

In addition to the PAF materials that were reviewed by The Reading League, important elements of the program that are crucial for successful implementation were not reviewed:

**Professional Development:** Professional development is an essential component of PAF which includes coursework, ongoing support with a coaching model, and workshops to deepen teachers' understanding of the program. The goal of PAF's professional development is to build teacher knowledge in the science of reading and to explain the rationale for each component of the program. It also ensures effective instruction by teachers and successful reading outcomes for students.

The courses are taught by master teachers with years of experience teaching PAF in both public and independent schools. The comprehensive teacher training and ongoing support can be tailored to the needs of individual schools and districts.

**PAF Website:** Additional resources are available on the PAF website. Online resources include curriculum-based tests, placement tests, lesson plan forms, homework, and additional reinforcement activities.

In closing, the PAF Reading Program is always striving to incorporate additional instructional practices that are based on the latest research. The PAF team appreciates the valuable feedback from The Reading League and will consider the suggested recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

*Magdalena Zavalia*

Magdalena Zavalia  
**PAF Reading Program**

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## What The Reading League's Reviewers Are Saying

### Phonemic Awareness

"Blending and segmenting at the phoneme level is the main focus of this program."

### Phonics

"Phonics instruction is carefully considered and letter/sound correspondences are taught with great intentionality throughout."

### Fluency

"Fluency instruction focuses on students reading aloud with guidance from their teacher."

"Learners receive immediate error correction and feedback."

"The goal is accurate, fluent reading to support comprehension, and this is emphasized throughout the program."

### Handwriting

"PAF's handwriting instruction is highly intentional and an integrated part of the curriculum."

### Spelling

"Spelling is taught explicitly and follows the scope and sequence of the program."

"Students are taught targeted graphemes explicitly, and instruction of syllable patterns is used to aid in both decoding and encoding."

"Reading and spelling occur in every lesson."

### Comprehension

"All instruction is teacher-directed."

"Comprehension questions are tied directly to the storyline/plot."

"Strategies for educator use are embedded within the teacher's guide."

### Vocabulary

"Explicit instruction in morphology is included."

"Students learn common roots, prefixes, and suffixes."



In addition to teaching higher level vocabulary in context, PAF also explicitly teaches concepts that will broaden students' vocabulary and improve reading comprehension. These concepts include multiple-meaning words, synonyms and antonyms, figurative language, categorization, and cohesive ties, as well as a morphology strand that begins with the suffix -ing and ends with the introduction of the Greek roots.

### Decodable Chapter Books

"PAF's curriculum includes decodable chapter books that are sequential and build students' knowledge of phonics over time."

"The stories featured are substantive and engaging for beginning learners."



PAF has a coordinated comprehensive reading series: a series of seven chapter books that are beautifully illustrated. They contain coherent and entertaining narratives that have all the basic elements of good storytelling — character, setting, plot, conflict and resolution. All of these elements support instruction in comprehension and reading strategies. Nonfiction selections are included in the series as well.



For more information or questions, contact us at  
[info@pafprogram.com](mailto:info@pafprogram.com)  
[www.pafprogram.com](http://www.pafprogram.com)

Check out PAF's sister Spanish reading program

