



Curriculum Navigation Report

Reading Mastery Transformations (2021), for Grades K-5



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 schoolbased 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 interrater 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 Reading Mastery Transformations (2021), which was created for students in Grades K-5.

For this report, reviewers closely examined the online materials that accompany the program's components, including reading, spelling, and language arts. This includes student-facing materials such as story books, textbooks, and workbooks, as well as teacher-facing materials including instructional lessons for reading, spelling, and language arts, teacher's guides, and assessments. Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and associated terminology and 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. For a more comprehensive description of the review process, visit [The Reading League Compass's Curriculum Decision Makers page](#).



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 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 also included in the review of any optional aligned components.

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).	2	

Reading Mastery's **word recognition** non-negotiables are "**mostly met.**" Reviewers found no evidence of the three-cueing system within the curriculum. There are pictures used in some lessons; however, these are used to reinforce the meaning and language comprehension of words and passages. Additionally, these are used only after students have engaged in decoding by blending letters and sounds.

Regarding instruction of high-frequency words, students are tasked to spell the words, but very little attention is paid to sound-symbol correspondences. For example, in kindergarten, students are introduced to the word "want." The teacher uses this word in a sentence, "Yes, we want to play," and then asks the students to spell the word "want" four times. A similar example was noted in Grade 2 with the words "decide" and "group." Teachers provide a signal to initiate students to the task, and then they spell the words letter by letter (e.g., D-E-C-I-D-E, G-R-O-U-P).

The team also noted that while some spelling lessons reference specific patterns, they do not include guidance for teachers on how to introduce these patterns. Additionally, it appears that some decoding and spelling patterns included are outside of the intended instructional sequence. Reviewers did observe that Reading Mastery provides students with multiple opportunities to practice the elements taught, both in isolation and within sentences. However, in kindergarten, letters and sounds are introduced gradually over the first 158 lessons, meaning students do not fully master them until the final lesson of the school year.

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.	2

Reading Mastery’s **phonological and phoneme awareness** practices are “**mostly met.**” Instruction includes larger units of phonological awareness (syllable, rhyme, onset-rime), but this is introduced after phoneme blending and segmenting in kindergarten. Both blending and segmenting are also addressed within the preprogram materials, which are suggested for students based upon placement test results. Overall, phonological and phonemic awareness practice in kindergarten and Grade 1 is limited. Most of the phonology work involves print, but there is a limited amount of practice without letters.

Finally, regarding assessment, the program directs educators to repeat phonological and phonemic awareness work until mastered. The program does include assessment measures for phonemic awareness in the preprogram materials and within the Grade K lessons. The preprogram materials include the “Say it Fast” assessment, an oral activity where students first say a word slowly, stretching the sounds (e.g., “sssEEE”), followed by saying it fast (e.g., “see”). Preprogram materials also include the “Segmenting” assessment where they are given a word (e.g., “me”), are prompted to say it slowly (e.g., “mmmEEE”), followed by segmenting the word into sounds (e.g., “mmm...EEE”). The “Reading Strand Mastery” assessments in kindergarten also include these measures.

Additionally, Reading Mastery uses the “Individual Turns” portion of the lesson plan to collect data on students’ phonemic awareness skills. Here, after the teacher models an activity (e.g., “Listen: sleep. It has four sounds. sss...lll...EEE...p.”), students are called on to complete individual turns (e.g., “Say the sounds in sleep: sss...lll...eee...p.”). This measure provides opportunities to assess students’ phonemic awareness in an informal way, but additional assessments may be required to gain a complete picture of student skills. And as noted previously, phonemic awareness assessments are not included for students beyond kindergarten.

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	2	
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.	2	
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.	2	
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	

Reading Mastery's **phonics and phonic decoding** practices are "**mostly met.**" The curriculum begins with teaching letter names, and their corresponding sounds are introduced later. Regarding keywords, Reading Mastery uses letter names to teach students the letter sounds, emphasizing which part of the letter name corresponds to the sound. For example, in kindergarten, Lesson 22, educators are directed to read the following script: "When you read words, you don't say the names of the letters. You say the **sounds...** The sound for **S** is the last part of the letter name. It's **sss...** The sound for **L** is the last part of the letter name. It's **lll**" (Teacher Display KR, 22:05 A). This approach impacts the program's instructional sequence for vowels, as well, focusing on long sounds first to identify the names of the vowels. For example, in Lesson 26, students are expected to distinguish between the long "i" sound (/i/) and the long "o" sound (/ō/) in five different long-vowel words. Students are also introduced to short vowel sounds later in the instructional sequence. In Lesson 31, when introducing the short "a" sound (/ă/), students are taught the word "an," followed by "ran." The program describes this sound as a spelling sound. It explains its rationale by stating, "This introductory strategy reduces the problems children have with recognition and pronunciation because they are not required to generate the sound from the symbol—they merely identify the symbol from the sound" (Grade K Reading: Teacher's Guide, p. 50). For the short "i" sound (/i~/), students are introduced to the word "sit."

While there are no "optional" phonics lessons, the program intermixes phonics content with short exercises unrelated to that content. Lessons in kindergarten are very brief without much opportunity to practice reading words with the target pattern. For example, in kindergarten, the r-controlled pattern "or" is introduced in four

words ("for," "or," "sore," and "more"), followed by the introduction of a new pattern—the short "a" sound. There is little practice with the previous concept before moving on to the next one. Reviewers also noted that a picture is used as a visual anchor or guide next to handwriting lines, as observed in kindergarten, Lesson 34. Here, students are directed to touch the picture of a shoe and then write the word "me" on the line. Using a graphic or visual cue next to handwriting lines is found throughout Reading Mastery lessons. These visual images are used to help young learners navigate the workbook and locate where to complete specific tasks. Adopters of this curriculum must ensure they clearly follow the intended instructional guidance, using these visuals to support routine-building and avoid any student confusion. Overall, the team had several concerns with the instructional sequence in kindergarten including the initial focus of instruction on letter names (not sounds), the introduction of long vowel sounds prior to short vowel sounds, and the pairing of the short "a" sound (/ă/) with the key word "an."

Blending is explicitly taught in the early phases of kindergarten, starting with phonological blending and then moving to blending with print. However, after Lesson 85 in kindergarten, blending is not practiced with the same level of explicit modeling or direct teaching. The program states,

By the end of the Grade K Reading program, most children do not need to sound out most regular words. Reading Words exercises, in which sounding out is specified, occur throughout the Less-Prompted Reading Phase to ensure that children maintain sounding out as their default strategy for figuring out words. (Grade K Reading: Teacher's Guide, p. 81)

The program does not use picture clues to assist with decoding. Furthermore, when teaching irregular words, the curriculum underlines the irregular parts (e.g., done, who, walked, heard, could, head), but does not teach sound-symbol correspondences. Instead, it emphasizes spelling. For example, Grade 1 Reading states that it “does not treat any word as a ‘sight word’ because children must be aware of the unique arrangement of letters that make up the word. Therefore, children learn to spell irregulars” (Grade 1 Reading: Teacher’s Guide, p. 13). There are practice opportunities for reading new words, but the focus is on whole word reading, without particular attention to blending the sounds in the words or focusing on sound-symbol correspondences—especially with multisyllabic words. For example, after Lesson 85 in kindergarten, blending is not practiced with the same level of explicit instruction. In one Grade 2 lesson, students are provided with the following list of multisyllabic words: “anymore,” “touching,” “promised,” “peeking,” “you’ve,” and “fighting.” Students are instructed to read the underlined portion without any instances of blending before reading the whole word.

Reading Mastery does not offer learners enough opportunities to practice new word patterns. Practice is spread out over time, with each pattern introduced using two words and then revisited days later with just one word. For example, the “ee” pattern is introduced in kindergarten with the word “see,” but additional practice with other words featuring this pattern does not occur until later in the year. There are some opportunities to practice reading words in context.

The featured texts are neither predictable nor leveled. The Teacher’s Guide indicates that “passages that children read are composed completely of words that children have been taught.” Some words, however, have been introduced briefly without sufficient practice. Additionally, some of the words fall outside of the phonics scope and sequence. As a result, they may require additional practice before being able to decode the word outside the context of the controlled text. These texts are also read aloud as a whole class, with individual students reading one sentence at a time. Similarly, students need more time to practice reading texts independently.

In Grades 2 through 5, the advanced phonics work exists in two separate spaces (i.e., both reading and spelling instruction). Furthermore, the scope and sequence documents for reading and spelling differ, which may cause confusion or gaps in instruction. To support comprehensive advanced word study, both instructional books and their accompanying materials must be aligned—an approach that requires educator knowledge and may present challenges for implementation. Additionally, multiple skills are often introduced simultaneously within sequences, which may be challenging for beginning readers. Finally, work with multisyllabic words is introduced early in Grade 1. In Grades 3 and 4, the reading scope and sequence includes morphology, but it lacks explicit instruction and tends to be overly repetitive.

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.	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	

Reading Mastery's **fluency** practices are "**met.**" Fluency instruction does not emphasize silent reading, and beginning in Grade 1, students utilize Paired Practice where partners take turns reading aloud. Accuracy is prioritized over rate, and the program guides educators to aim for a 98% accuracy rate to assist with learner comprehension and reading with meaning. Wordlevel fluency practice is provided within the daily word attack lessons, both with sets of words and within passages. Fluency work occurs across a variety of text types, so students can apply their fluency skills to a variety of genres and text structures. Finally, fluency assessment does not allow for the acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word.

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.	1	
2-4.4: (RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.	2	
2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level thinking skills.	2	

Reading Mastery’s non-negotiables for **language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing** are “**mostly met.**” Instruction in language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing is direct and explicit, with no opportunities for student choice. Furthermore, students are exposed to rich vocabulary and syntax through the curriculum’s reading and writing materials. Featured comprehension activities emphasize the process of comprehending texts over the product of comprehension, so students are encouraged to engage deeply with the material and develop their comprehension skills over time. Writing, however, is minimal in reading lessons and takes place within a separate block.

In Grade 1, for instance, the writing strand of the lesson plan, including work with capitals and punctuation and writing sentences, occurs at the end of the instructional block after reading comprehension work. Specifically, explicit writing instruction is found within a separate teacher resource entitled “Language Arts.” Reading Mastery attempts to anchor its writing tasks to texts students have read, especially in the upper grades. However, the writing prompts included at the end of each lesson do not provide educators with guidance for explicit instruction. For example, in Grade 4 Reading, Lesson 83, students are asked to respond to the story, *The Golden Touch*, by writing a speech for King Midas to deliver to the stranger. Students are directed to use story details to answer a series of questions in their speech, including:

- *What does Midas want the stranger to do?*
- *How does Midas feel about having the Golden Touch?*
- *What important things has Midas lost?*
- *What lesson has Midas learned about gold?*
- *What objects have more value than gold?*
- *How sincere is Midas?* (Grade 4 Reading, p. 12)

While the prompt encourages text-based responses, it lacks the instructional support required to assist students in developing their writing skills.

Finally, the reviewers found instances of questions that were either not rigorous or not text dependent. While there are a few inferential and higher-level questions, the reviewers observed that most questions are literal, with many falling at Depth of Knowledge (DoK) level one.

In Grade 2 Reading, Lesson 60, the teachers’ directions include many questions that prompt students to “look at the pictures.” This type of questioning comprises the majority of the queries featured, with the last two questions addressing the story elements of problem and resolution. In a Grade 3 lesson about wind and water, the questions are literal and do not promote deeper thinking. For example, the class reads the following text: “The tiny hailstone falls to the bottom of the cloud, where the tiny hailstone gets covered with more water. Then it goes up again and freezes again.” After reading the text, students are asked, “When it gets to the top of the cloud, what’s going to happen to the water that is covering it?” The answer, “it will freeze,” simply restates information from the text rather than prompting analysis or critical thinking. The publisher clarified that students are also asked to tell the steps in the sequence and identify the main idea and details in this passage, which go beyond literal questions. There is still an opportunity to consider additional questions to ask of students, which will require deeper-level thinking and responding.

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.	1
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.	1

Reading Mastery’s practices for **background knowledge** are “**met.**” Read-aloud opportunities do not emphasize simple stories and include knowledge-building expository text; however, there is little connection between the texts in terms of knowledge, and students do not receive multiple exposures to the same content. Before students read the text, they are introduced to facts to build knowledge. For example, before reading “Toby the Kangaroo” and “A Job for Toby,” students learn facts about Australia and kangaroos. But again, the texts are not necessarily connected across the curriculum, and content can be isolated to specific units of instruction. Finally, Reading Mastery does not include leveled text, and the topics featured are aimed to build background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.

2C: Vocabulary

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

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR VOCABULARY	SCORE
2.7: Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	1
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.	1
2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	1
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.	2

Reading Mastery’s practices for **vocabulary** are “**mostly met.**” The curriculum does not emphasize memorization of isolated words and aims to develop a deeper understanding of targeted vocabulary terms. Tier 2 words are explicitly taught and practiced; however, reviewers noted that students would benefit from additional opportunities to use these words in writing. Students are also exposed to and taught Tier 3 words. For example, in Grade 4, students learn Tier 3 words like “photosynthesis,” “rhizome,” and “flog.”

Regarding morphology, Reading Mastery does include explicit instruction, but it is confined to the language arts block, despite numerous opportunities to integrate instruction into the reading block. The meaning of morphemes is relegated to language arts only, limiting reinforcement across contexts. Furthermore, while the curriculum includes a scope and sequence for instruction, it is broad (e.g., affixes, roots, etc.) and lacks a clear, sequential progression. As such, many of the morphemes appear to be introduced in a random order.

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

Reading Mastery’s practices for **language structures** are “**met.**” The lesson routines are very explicit, and concepts are taught following a scope and sequence. However, one complicating factor is that conventions of print, grammar, and syntax appear in two distinct and separate scopes and sequences: one in language arts and one in writing. Reviewers observed that on a day-to-day basis, grammar instruction within the language arts block does not align with what is taught in writing. The curriculum provides many opportunities for teacher modeling and student response. For example, while teaching a lesson on subject-verb agreement, the teacher models sentences that tell what one animal does (e.g., “The cat sleeps.”) followed by sentences that tell what more than one animal does (e.g., “The dogs eat.”). Students then answer a series of questions focusing on the function of the verb (e.g., Which word tells what the cat does? “sleeps”). Yet, the team was only able to locate minimal opportunities for students to apply what they’ve learned in class discussions.

Students are often exposed to parts of speech in context but are not immediately taught their function or purpose. This was especially noted in kindergarten, where the form and function of various parts of speech are not explicitly introduced. The publisher clarified that the reason for this was that form and function are not a kindergarten standard. Furthermore, while the curriculum’s instructional scripts include numerous examples, they lack the structured routines necessary for directly explaining these concepts. Additionally, there is significant oral repetition of sentences to convey meaning, but without clear, systematic instruction.

2E: Verbal Reasoning

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

RED FLAG 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).	1
2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.	1

Reading Mastery's practices for **verbal reasoning** are "**met.**" Although picture clues are incorporated throughout the curriculum to support inference making, they are not the primary method for teaching this skill, nor are they used as a substitute for explicit instruction. Additionally, students are offered opportunities to practice inference as a discrete skill.

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.	1
2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	1

Reading Mastery's practices for **literacy knowledge** are "**met.**" Genre types and features, along with genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words, are explicitly taught and practiced. For example, in Grade 3, Lesson 1, students review the text features of chapter books by examining the list of chapters in the story, Old Henry. Later in Grade 3, Lesson 9, students learn about the signal word "because" which authors use to signal cause and effect thinking. Knowledge about cause and effect is built upon in Grade 3, Lesson 10, where students work to identify sentences that signal cause and effect thinking versus compare and contrast. Additionally, students review the story elements of setting, character, and plot within this same lesson.

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.	1

Reading Mastery's practices for **reading comprehension** are "**met.**" Students are not asked to independently read texts they are unable to decode accurately or apply reading comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, predicting, summarizing, visualizing) to short, disconnected readings. Furthermore, reviewers found no mention of independent reading and book choice in any of the Teacher's Guides. Finally, the program does emphasize comprehension monitoring by providing students with multiple opportunities to pause and process their understanding while reading.

4A: Writing – Handwriting

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

RED FLAG 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	

Reading Mastery’s practices for **handwriting** are “**met.**” Starting in kindergarten, the curriculum provides students with direct instruction in handwriting. Educators receive specific scripting to guide instruction, ensuring consistency in letter formation, spacing, and stroke. The program includes lined paper for handwriting practice, and handwriting instruction is integrated into reading and writing instruction.

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.	2	
4.8: No evidence of phoneme segmentation and/or phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.	2	
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.	2	
4.10: Students practice spelling by memorization only (e.g., rainbow writing, repeated writing, pyramid writing).	2	
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	

Reading Mastery’s practices for **spelling** are “**mostly met.**” The curriculum includes explicit spelling instruction. In the earlier grades, some spelling words correspond with the phonics scope and sequence, while others are separate from the decoding words. In the later grades, they are organized into distinct books. Additionally, there are separate word lists for reading and spelling. For example, in Grade 1, Appendix 3 contains word lists for reading, while Appendix 4 includes word lists for spelling. The publisher clarified that these lists are only presented in the Teacher’s Guide as a reference to the sequence of introduction. It will be important for schools to adhere to the activities that support the alignment of decoding and spelling according to the scope and sequence.

The curriculum employs phoneme segmentation and phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling. For example, in Lesson 85 of kindergarten, students are prompted to say target words one sound at a time prior to writing to assist them with spelling (e.g., Say the sounds in tap: t...aaa...p. Now spell the word tap.) A similar approach was noted in Grade 1. In Grade 2, phoneme segmentation is primarily an oral task where students are given words and asked to segment them into their corresponding sounds (e.g., say the sounds in grape: g...rr...A...p.). Activities such as these strengthen students’ awareness of how spoken words are made up of individual sounds, but do not explicitly connect those sounds to letters.

Spelling instruction follows a “say the word, spell the word aloud, write the word, check the word, and correct the word” approach. The publisher clarified that there are three approaches to spelling strategies that include whole-word, phonemic, and morphographic strategies, which differ depending on grade level.

The spelling lists in Grade 1 are organized by pattern. However, the scope and sequence is not aligned with the phonics progression, nor does it progress from easier to more complex patterns. Lesson 87 introduces closed syllables and vowel-consonant-e syllables (e.g., “sat,” “sit,” “ate”), followed by a vowel team in Lesson 88 (e.g., “rain,” “aim,” “sail”). In Lesson 132, students learn closed syllable words with two-letter blends (e.g., “slip,” “stop”), followed by more vowel teams in Lesson 133 (e.g., “beat,” “boat,” “lean,” “loan”).

In practice, some activities encourage whole-word memorization. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 1, students engage in a whole-word matching activity. Students must match the words “book,” “look,” “good,” “stood,” and “took” to words in the second column that they identify based on a given prompt (e.g., book matches with b _ _). This method encourages memorization of words as whole units, using the provided letters to support visual recognition rather than phonetic decoding. In another spelling exercise, students have three minutes to complete a word search, again reinforcing visual recognition over the application of spelling rules.

Finally, the spelling patterns are not taught all at once—at most, there are two spelling patterns per spelling list in Grades K–2. In Grades 2–5, spelling shifts to a focus on morphology.

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.	1
4.18: Writing is primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.	1
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.	1
4.20: Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.	1
4.21: Students are not taught the writing process (e.g., planning, revising, editing).	1
4.22: Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.	2

Reading Mastery’s practices for **composition** are “**mostly met.**” Writing composition takes place with the language arts portion of the lesson plan. Writing prompts are accompanied by dedicated time for modeling, planning, and brainstorming. Writing activities follow a structured approach, incorporating exemplars and graphic organizers to support learning. Explicit instruction in conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is provided and includes interleaved practice over time. Lesson directions also include guidance for teachers on providing corrective feedback. Students explore various genres, including narrative, expository/informational, and opinion writing. Additionally, they are taught the writing process—planning, revising, and editing—and engage in targeted practice to develop their skills at each stage.

While some reading passages are connected to writing, they are not the same passages used during the reading portion of the instructional block. As a result, writing is taught as a standalone component, with some connections to reading comprehension focused on separate, unrelated texts. For example, in Grade 5, Lesson 25, students engage in separate writing activities in the reading and language arts blocks. In the reading block, they practice note-taking and paraphrasing after reading about types of travel during Westward Expansion. Meanwhile, in the language arts block, they are tasked with writing a ten-line poem about their favorite season. This disconnection between reading and writing activities limits opportunities for integrated learning. Writing assessments are also embedded within the language arts block and remain separate from the reading strand. Again, this separation limits the opportunity to reinforce the reciprocal relationship between reading comprehension and writing development.

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).	2	
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.	4	
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).	1	
5.13: Multilingual learners are not assessed in their home language.	4	

Reading Mastery's non-negotiables and practices for **assessment** are "**somewhat met.**" The curriculum's placement and mastery tests do not encompass all areas of reading. For example, in Grades 2 and 3, placement tests only consider error rate and comprehension with minimal word reading. Additionally, unit mastery tests are curriculum measures and are designed to test student mastery of unit materials and content. Mastery tests occur after every tenth lesson. The Grade 4 Language Arts Teacher's Guide states:

Each mastery test consists of two types of items: ones that are scored automatically, such as multiple-choice and matching, and items that need to be scored by the teacher, such as fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and passage writing. The passages are scored with the assistance of a detailed rubric that describes how to assess each aspect of the passage. (p. 37)

The same section provides general guidance on implementing Remedy Lessons when 25% or more of a group fails a given section. While it offers some recommendations for grouping and additional practice, the guidance lacks specificity, making it difficult for educators to effectively plan and deliver targeted interventions. If students are performing "well above criteria in the assessments, the data may indicate that you can increase the pace of instruction" (Grade 4 Language Arts Teacher's Guide, p. 38).

Fluency checkouts are included and miscue procedures do not accept misread words that have the same meaning as the given word as correct. These assessments are administered to individual students during independent work activities. Students orally read from a "specific passage from the main story of the preceding lesson." These checkouts are designed to take about 90 seconds per student.

There is no evidence that assessment results are used to establish benchmarks using a leveled-text gradient or that foundational skills assessments primarily rely on running records. While reviewers could not locate a diagnostic assessment for phonics, the lesson assessments do provide measures of phonics skills. The curriculum also provides teachers with prompts to "repeat until firm" in regard to various skills and measures within its lessons. Phonemic awareness skills are assessed in the placement test at the beginning of kindergarten only. Phoneme awareness is not systematically assessed and monitored consistently. Additionally, reviewers observed that decoding skills are assessed using real words only and that no nonsense words are used in the program's assessments.

Finally, since Reading Mastery focuses on developing word attack skills in English, students are not assessed in their home languages. Thus, educators would also need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that multilingual learners 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 the Reading Mastery's curriculum were found to **“meet”** or **“mostly meet”** most criteria for Grades K-5. 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

Reading Mastery Transformation's teacher scripting offers clear, explicit guidance for instruction, which can support consistent lesson delivery. Additionally, the streamlined nature of the program supports both teacher delivery and instructional fidelity as lessons are clearly structured and easy to follow.

Reading Mastery Transformation's pacing allows for ample opportunities for skills practice. In addition, frequent review sessions are embedded throughout the curriculum, reinforcing target skills through intentional repetition to support long-term retention.

Reading Mastery Transformations provides educators with consistent instructional routines. This benefits both teachers and students as the routines enhance lesson delivery by making it more efficient and foster a sense of predictability for learners, freeing them up to focus on learning new skills.

Reading Mastery Transformations incorporates effective scaffolding, gradually increasing complexity from simple to more complex. This approach helps to build student confidence as it ensures learners experience success at each stage before moving on.

Reading Mastery Transformations addresses all the elements of literacy instruction in its components, including reading, spelling, handwriting, oral language, and language arts; however, the separation of these components impacts the overall comprehensiveness of the program.

Reading Mastery Transformation's scopes and sequences lack clarity—particularly in how the individual components (e.g., reading, language arts, and spelling) are designed to complement and build on one another. Additionally, the sequencing, distribution, and repetition of skills for practice is difficult to trace without extensive understanding of the program's structure and design features.

There is a lack of emphasis on writing skills within Reading Mastery Transformations. Furthermore, while Reading Mastery Transformations does address all of the components of literacy instruction within its components, it fails to capitalize on the meaningful integration of its reading and writing elements.

While Reading Mastery Transformations includes its placement test as a starting point for differentiated instruction, it lacks explicit guidance on how to use placement results to tailor instruction effectively. The majority of the curriculum's guidance for students who struggle is to repeat portions of the lesson or to create groups for the "Remedy Lessons," with little room to scaffold or differentiate beyond these recommendations. For students performing above level, the curriculum suggests adjusting placement or pacing, which the team noted is difficult to do in a whole-group setting. However, the publisher noted that they find schools are able to differentiate and group students using an efficient path based on the placement results.

Reading Mastery Transformations suggests that students should be at a specific readiness level before beginning the curriculum, and they provide pre-lessons for kindergarten. It recommends that students remain in those lessons (either 20 or 40 lessons) until they have achieved the mastery required to enter the core program. However, this expectation may not be realistic for many schools—particularly given the constraints of instructional time and the availability of necessary personnel.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



**Reading Mastery
Transformations (2021),
for Grades K-5**



Publisher Response to The Reading League Review

Introduction

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to The Reading League for conducting a thorough review of *Reading Mastery Transformations*. Your commitment to advancing evidence-aligned reading instruction is deeply appreciated, and we value the opportunity to receive constructive feedback on our program.

We are pleased to see that the review highlighted several strengths of *Reading Mastery Transformations*, including its clear instructional guidance, consistent routines, effective scaffolding, and comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. These features reflect our dedication to providing educators with tools that support student success in reading and literacy development.

Response to Identified Strengths

The review commended *Reading Mastery Transformations* for its teacher scripting, which offers clear and explicit guidance for instruction. We are proud of this feature, as it ensures consistency in lesson delivery and supports educators in implementing evidence-aligned practices. The streamlined nature of the program was also noted as a strength, and we believe this design helps educators maximize instructional time while fostering predictability for students.

Additionally, the review highlighted the program's pacing and embedded review sessions, which reinforce target skills through intentional repetition. This approach is rooted in research on long-term retention and skill mastery, and we are pleased to see its effectiveness recognized.

The scaffolding provided in *Reading Mastery Transformations* was another area of strength, as it gradually increases complexity to build student confidence. This design ensures

learners experience success at each stage, which is critical for developing foundational literacy skills.

Finally, we are encouraged by the recognition that *Reading Mastery Transformations* addresses all elements of literacy instruction, including reading, spelling, handwriting, oral language, and language arts. While the separation of these components was noted as a challenge, we believe this structure allows educators to focus on specific skills while maintaining flexibility in their instructional approach.

Response to Identified Challenges

We acknowledge the challenges outlined in the review and appreciate the opportunity to address them.

Scope and Sequence Clarity

The review noted that the scopes and sequences for reading, language arts, and spelling lack clarity in how they complement one another. While the program's design allows educators flexibility in tailoring instruction, we recognize the importance of ensuring alignment across components. We will continue to refine the support materials provided to educators to help them better navigate and integrate these elements.

Writing Skills Integration

While Reading Mastery Transformations includes writing instruction, the review identified a lack of meaningful integration between reading and writing elements. We value the feedback and will explore ways to further emphasize connections between reading and writing tasks, ensuring students can deepen their comprehension and apply their learning across literacy domains.

Differentiated Instruction and Placement Guidance

The review highlighted challenges with tailoring instruction based on placement test results and providing differentiated support for struggling or advanced learners. We are committed to supporting educators in using placement data effectively and will continue to enhance the guidance provided for grouping, pacing, and scaffolding to address diverse student needs.

Pre-Lesson Expectations

The review noted that the expectation for students to complete pre-lessons before entering the core program may not be realistic for all schools. We understand that schools operate

under varying constraints, and we encourage educators to adapt the pre-lessons to fit their instructional time and resources while maintaining the integrity of skill development.

Assessment Limitations

The review identified gaps in assessment, including limited phonemic awareness measures beyond kindergarten and the absence of nonsense word decoding assessments. While the program's assessments are designed to support foundational skill development, we will continue to evaluate opportunities to expand assessment tools to provide a more comprehensive view of student progress.

Conclusion

We deeply value The Reading League's feedback and are committed to continuously improving *Reading Mastery Transformations* to better serve educators and students. Your insights will guide our efforts to refine the program and ensure it aligns with the science of reading while addressing the practical needs of schools and districts.

Thank you again for your thoughtful review and for your dedication to advancing literacy education. We look forward to continuing this important dialogue and working together to support student success.

For more information regarding the *Reading Mastery Transformations* program, its research basis, and its history of success, please visit www.mheducation.com/RMT-brochure