



Curriculum Navigation Report

# Really Great Reading (2023), for Grades K-3



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, 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 inter-rater reliability study with positive results. As you read through the findings of this report, remember that red flags will be present for all curricula as there is no perfect curriculum. The intent of this report is not to provide a recommendation, but rather to provide information to local education agencies to support their journey of selecting, using, and refining instruction and instructional materials to ensure they align with the science of reading.

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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 evaluation on the following pages features the review of Really Great Reading, Grades K–3 (2023). This curriculum features a scientifically-aligned approach to reading instruction. In all lessons, students learn to practice what good readers do naturally, which is to pay attention to every word, read with a high rate of accuracy, and use strategies for attacking unfamiliar multisyllabic words (Really Great Reading, 2024).

For this report, reviewers closely examined the Really Great Reading curriculum materials for Grades K–3. The team reviewed the program’s lessons and materials, including Countdown for Grade K, Blast for Grade 1, and HD Word for Grades 2–3. Team members reviewed their virtual professional development offerings, including the Implementation Training which adopters can purchase for an additional cost as well as a variety of virtual offerings available on the teacher dashboard.

Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and knowledge of 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. Individuals then looked for evidence of red flags within the curriculum materials, including scopes 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” and selected the appropriate rating in the Reviewer Workbook as outlined below.



**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, which are included in this narrative report.

For a more comprehensive description of the review process, visit [The Reading League Compass’s Curriculum Decision Makers page](#).

# Findings:

## COMPONENTS SUPPORTING WORD RECOGNITION

### 1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

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

| WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES                                                                                                                                                                | SCORE |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1.1: 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.                                                      | 1     |
| 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     |

Really Great Reading's **word recognition** non-negotiables are **“met.”** The team found no evidence of the three-cueing system in any curricular materials (i.e., Countdown, Blast, and HD Word). Word reading instruction emphasizes sound-symbol correspondences, with reading practice at the word, phrase, and passage levels without the use of pictures. Reading accuracy is prioritized through the use of decoding, and there is no evidence of guidance to memorize whole words. The curriculum features the Heart Word Magic routine, which is designed to help students to identify and remember the irregular parts of high-frequency words. Heart Word Magic uses a series of animations and practice techniques to make these tricky words stick. Really Great Reading offers their Heart Word Magic video library for free on their website as well as a selection of student practice activities.

Finally, Really Great Reading provides a comprehensive scope and sequence that forms the foundation for instruction across all of its programs, including Countdown (Grade K), Blast (Grade 1), and HD Word (Grades 2-3). The student workbooks and materials align directly to the units and skills taught. Activities featured include word sorts, decoding and encoding practice as well as words, phrases, and sentences to read. Students are provided with decodable passages for practice of targeted skills within connected texts. The program also offers Reading Playground, a game-based digital platform that aligns to skills taught and provides students with additional opportunities for learning and practice. This tool also provides educators with additional assessment data to help monitor student progress.

**1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness**

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

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

Really Great Reading’s **phonological and phonemic** awareness practices are “**met.**” The review team observed a strong emphasis on phoneme level instruction across all three programs. This instruction is applied to both decoding and encoding activities. For example, in the Countdown materials for Grade K, Teacher Guide 1 offers an introductory explanation for educators outlining the program’s goals, including an emphasis on phoneme-level understanding as well as blending, segmenting, and manipulating sounds. These skills are built alongside the alphabetic principle, and students are taught to use knowledge of this pairing to decode and encode words. Furthermore, focus on the larger units of phonological awareness, including syllable and onset-rime, are briefly reviewed during the first few weeks of school, ensuring learners promptly move onto work at the phoneme level.

Reviewers noted a variety of tasks and activities that address phonological and phoneme awareness. For example, in Countdown, Unit 18, Lesson 2 (pp. 37-39), students are taught to use the Finger-Stretch routine to segment words. During this protocol, students use their fingers to segment a one-syllable word into its individual sounds. This activity focuses on sounds only and letters are not written or discussed. Teachers are directed to listen for correct segmentation and articulation of phonemes as well as pose questions targeting the vowel sounds. Examples of this include the following:

- *What is the vowel phoneme?*
  - *What do we call the vowel phoneme?*
  - *How do we know the vowel phoneme is long or short? (featured in Units 2-13)*
  - *How do we know the vowel phoneme is long, short, or r-controlled? (featured in Units 17-20)*
- How do we know the vowel phoneme is called long, short, r-controlled or other?*

Later in Blast, Unit 10, Lesson 2 (p. 377), students are tasked to blend sounds dictated by the teacher. The review team did note that there is an error in the directions for this task. The teacher scripting reads, “For this activity, I am going to give you 3 phonemes, and I want you to blend them together to make a real word /b/ /r/ /u/ /sh/.” However, the word “brush” has 4 phonemes. Then in HD Word, Unit 4, Lesson 2 (pp. 176-179), students are given a word along with an additional sound and are asked to add an initial or final sound to create new words. This activity reinforces phonemic awareness by helping students practice sound manipulation. This progresses cumulatively in later work. Specifically, in HD Word, Unit 12, Lesson 2 (pp. 46-48), students are directed to segment words and substitute short, long, or r-controlled vowels.

Overall, the team observed a speech to print approach consistently applied throughout the curriculum, with no separation between letters and their corresponding sounds. Phonological awareness lessons are designed to seamlessly connect to subsequent lessons, maintaining the focus on speech sounds and then connecting to the associated letters.

Countdown begins phonological awareness instruction in Unit 17, as observed in the unit planner documents. Additionally, Countdown uses Sound Stories as a core instructional feature. Sound Stories are designed to draw student attention to specific sounds within stories. Instructional attention is also given to place and manner of articulation through the utilization of sound walls which feature the use of sound-spelling cards. These cards include the letter, key word image, and a picture of a mouth with the correct articulatory gesture. Teachers are provided with language for showing how these sounds are articulated. In Blast and HD Word, Lesson 2 of every unit always focuses on oral phonological awareness instruction. These lessons are directly connected to Lesson 3, which is when print is connected to speech sounds.

Phonological and phonemic awareness are assessed regularly and teachers are provided with guidance in how to use and deliver assessments in the Introduction of Teacher Guide Book 1 (pp. xv - xvii). This section explains the Foundational Skills Surveys which are “one to one assessments of students’ early reading skills as outlined by the CCSS.” One such skill survey is specific to phonological awareness. On page 29 of the Phonological Awareness Assessment Packet is a chart indicating skill levels for beginning, middle, and end of year in Grades K and 1. Additionally, the student workbook and Reading Playground platform provide educators with progress monitoring data.

Teachers are encouraged to “use the data from the Reading Playground to assess and drive instruction for [their] students,” and educators are able to assign assessments (i.e., baseline, mid-interval, and summative), diagnostics (oral decoding for beginning, middle, and end of year), or progress monitoring measures based on skills connected to completed units. In the Skills Analysis section of the Teacher Dashboard, there are specific sections dedicated for phonological and phonemic awareness where student progress is captured. Furthermore, for each unit, the first three games featured in Reading Playground are used as formative assessment measures.

## 1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

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

| RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR PHONICS AND PHONIC DECODING                                                                                                                                                                                | SCORE |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1.15: Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly during text reading.                                                                                                                                | 1     |
| 1.16: Instruction is typically “one and done”; phonics skills are introduced but with very little or short-term review.                                                                                                           | 1     |
| 1.17: Key words for letter/sound correspondences are not aligned with the pure phoneme being taught (e.g., earth for /ĕ/, ant for /ă/, orange for /ŏ/).                                                                           | 1     |
| 1.18: Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) “mini-lessons” or “word work” sessions.                                                                                                                              | 1     |
| 1.19: The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, short vowels are all taught in rapid succession, and/or all sounds for one letter are taught all at once.              | 1     |
| 1.20: Blending is not explicitly taught nor practiced.                                                                                                                                                                            | 1     |
| 1.21: Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a “What would make sense?” strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding. | 1     |
| 1.22: Words with known sound-symbol correspondences, including high-frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as stand-alone “sight words” to be memorized.                                                          | 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     |

Really Great Reading’s phonics and phonic decoding practices are “met.” Each program (i.e., Countdown, Blast, and HD Word) provides a detailed scope and sequence for instruction which can be found in the Teacher Guide. These documents clearly outline the phonics concepts taught or

reviewed as well as the high-frequency words introduced in each unit. In Countdown, letter/sound correspondences are introduced in Unit 5 and explicitly taught using phoneme-grapheme mapping. These concepts are reviewed throughout the curriculum. Additionally, specific clusters of letters are taught together including consonants and vowels so students are able to begin building and reading words. In Blast, Lesson 3 of every unit introduces students to a phonics concept using multiple modalities. This is designed to help students make connections between letters and sounds, and learners practice these concepts using various instructional routines. This also applies to HD Word as the Teacher Edition indicates Lesson 3 is always Phonics Concept Day 1, and Lesson 4 is Phonics Concept Day 2.

The curriculum also features explicit phonics instruction and follows an “I Do, We Do, You Do” format. These lessons are not considered optional and instead are part of a carefully considered scope and sequence. Teachers are also provided with guidance on the timing and pacing of each lesson. Students only progress onto independent practice after instances of both teacher modeling and guided practice. This includes activities and routines like Detective Work, Word Sorts, and Phrases and Sentences to Read to practice targeted skills. Additionally, within lessons there are review components which reemphasize the lesson’s focus of the day and the Reading Playground platform provides learners with review, practice, and application of targeted phonics concepts as well.

Really Great Reading provides educators with articulation guides and key words for use with students. The key words featured for letter/sound correspondences are aligned with the pure sounds of the phoneme being taught. For example, /ă/ is taught with the guideword “apple.” Furthermore, the team observed that the program’s keywords are consistent across the grades. The following table includes a listing of where to find the proper articulation of letter sounds within all programs.

| PROGRAM   | LOCATION                                                |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Countdown | <i>Teacher Guide, Book 2, Appendix, pp. 290-294</i>     |
| Blast     | <i>1 Teacher Guide, Book 1, Appendix B, pp. 442-443</i> |
| HD Word   | <i>Teacher Guide, Book 1, Appendix pp. 500-504</i>      |

Work with vowels is part of every instructional unit, which comprises a total of five lessons. In this instructional sequence, vowels are studied carefully so that syllables and words can be formed. Instruction around syllable types dictates the necessity of the use of vowels and knowledge of their flexibility when making words.

Starting in Countdown, the program introduces letters in clusters which typically include three consonants and one vowel. For example, in Unit 6, “m,” “t,” “p,” and “a” are introduced, and in Unit 7, “s,” “h,” “c,” and “i” are introduced. Units 1–5 are focused solely on phonemic awareness, which is designed intentionally so that kindergarten students are able to understand the alphabetic principle (Countdown Teacher Guide, pp. 10–11). Reviewers also observed that letters are introduced based on their frequency in English, with the most common letters taught first. The program states that “the goal is to provide students with the most ‘useful’ letters first so that they can immediately apply their knowledge of the particular letter sounds learned to decoding and spelling words” (Countdown Teacher Guide, pp. 10–11).

Really Great Reading teaches blending, but approaches like continuous methods, where words are sounded out without stopping or pausing (e.g., maaaap), and/or successive blending, where words are blended in succession (e.g., /m/ /ă/ /mă/ /p/, map) are not modeled. Instead, each phoneme is tapped and sounded out individually and then the whole word is modeled (e.g., /m/ /a/ /p/, map). However, there are ample opportunities for teacher modeling and student practice of the latter method.

Reviewers found no evidence of whole word memorization or guessing words based on context. Students are taught to decode immediately without the aid of pictures, and decodable passages do not include images that would lead students to guess based on picture clues. This approach is also replicated in sentence reading, and learners are never guided to use a strategy like asking “What makes sense?” to decode an unknown word.

Really Great Reading uses the Heart Word method to teach high-frequency words. This includes the Look, Think, Say! routine to build automaticity and fluency. Teachers are prompted to use instructional language to model which phonemes are decodable and which are not. In teacher demonstrations, a heart symbol is used to indicate the word part that must be memorized.

Reading Playground resources, along with student workbooks, offer learners plenty of opportunities for practice, including word-level decoding exercises. For example, in HD Word, Unit 9, Lessons 3–5, students practice reading words with vowel teams. Lesson 4 of this sequence focuses on reading words with the most common vowel team spellings of /ō/ (i.e., oa, ow) and /ī/ (i.e., igh). Then on Day 5, students complete the Phonics Practice: Mark It! routine in their workbooks. Here, a list of words are provided and students are guided to identify the vowels, say each syllable, and then say the complete word. Word-level decoding practice is addressed through word sort activities as well.

Decodable passages aligned to targeted skills are introduced in Countdown at the beginning of Unit 8. Teachers are directed to use these texts in small group instruction. However, the decodable passages are not embedded within the main instruction, and are instead a part of the Supply Room materials found under Instructional Resources. Additionally, while the decodable texts are not part of the explicit, teacher-led instruction components within the Teacher Lesson Guides and Unit Planners, there are suggestions for instruction provided. However, integration is highly dependent on teacher knowledge and use of the Supply Room resources.

While Really Great Reading includes some advanced word study in HD Word, which spans Grades 2–3, this instruction is limited. As outlined in the Teacher Guide, Book 1, p. x, HD Word covers decoding of two-, three-, and four-syllable words, incorporating features like consonants, consonant blends, digraphs, vowel teams, vowel digraphs, and diphthongs. Although some morphology instruction is included, its scope is limited as well. There is some focus on decoding and encoding words with common prefixes and suffixes; however, Really Great Reading remains primarily a foundational skills program.

**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     |  |

Really Great Reading’s **fluency** practices are “**met.**” The program states that fluency is composed of both accuracy and speed, with the first focus on accuracy. In fact, in both the training courses and modules, Really Great Reading clearly states that accuracy is a prerequisite skill required for fluency. It also states that prosody plays a critical role and should be modeled accordingly.

Fluency is practiced and monitored through a variety of activities using both choral reading and individual oral reading. The following table highlights activities featured to develop learner fluency within each program.

| PROGRAM                              | ACTIVITY                                    | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Blast<br>(Appendix A, pp. 472-475 )  | Letter Sound and Heart Word Fluency         | Students practice letter sound fluency and Heart Word fluency in a variety of activities within the explicit instructional routine. This includes Pop-Up, 3-Up, and Read a Row. In these activities, students engage in both choral reading with positive error correction as well as opportunities for individual oral reading in the Read a Row activities paired with positive error correction. |
| Blast<br>(Appendix A, pp. 489-491 )  | Phrase and Sentence Reading Fluency         | In the workbook practice activities during Lessons 4 and 5, students read phrases and sentences orally using the Read a Row or Sentence procedure with positive error correction provided. Within these activities, a student reads individually while the other learners are checkers for accuracy. Again, accuracy is emphasized first.                                                           |
| Blast (Supply Room Resources)        | Decodable Passages With Fluency Instruction | Additional fluency practice is offered through decodable passages with controlled text. These passages are introduced after Lesson 3 once the weekly phonics concept has been taught. Students are then assessed for both accuracy and reading rate.                                                                                                                                                |
| HD Word<br>(Appendix A, pp. 472-478) | Oral Reading                                | Students are provided with opportunities to apply the skills they have learned with non-controlled text. With oral reading, the students' goal is to read with 98% accuracy. During oral reading practice, individual students read orally, while another learner, along with the teacher, acts as checkers.                                                                                        |
| HD Word<br>(Supply Room Resources)   | Decodable Passages With Fluency Instruction | Additional fluency practice is offered through decodable passages with controlled text. These passages are introduced after Lesson 3, once the weekly phonics concept has been taught. Students are then assessed for both accuracy and reading rate.                                                                                                                                               |

Accuracy is prioritized over rate in all programs. For instance, in Countdown and Blast, the Read a Row activity allows teachers to track the number of correct responses out of the total number read, with “time” listed as optional. Really Great Reading also directs teachers to external oral reading fluency (ORF) assessments, such as AIMSweb and DIBELS, to determine whether students are meeting expected benchmarks for reading rate.

The review team observed that patterned texts are not utilized in Countdown, Blast, or HD Word, but the decodable texts used for fluency practice in all programs are largely narrative. HD Word does include informational passages for use with the oral reading routine. Titles include The Lungs, The Moon, The Siblings, and Stingrays. For example, The Siblings provides students with practice reading information that compares and contrasts various family members, and The Beach offers students exposure to persuasive text as they read about various beach activities designed to convince the reader to visit.

Finally, in terms of fluency assessment, the review team found no indication of accepting incorrectly decoded words or guidance to use strategies beyond accurate decoding and sight word automaticity in assessment, instruction, or practice activities. As stated in the Blast Foundations Passages supplemental resource (2024),

when children read accurately, their comprehension improves because they are correctly decoding the words on the page. Helping your child identify incorrectly read words as they read aloud helps them understand how important it is to read each word correctly. The two most important pieces of fluency are accuracy and speed. The focus should always be on accuracy first, and then speed can be addressed. (p. V, 2024)

# 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.                | n/a   |
| 2-4.2: (LC, RC, W) Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.                                                                         | n/a   |
| 2-4.3: (RC) Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts. | n/a   |
| 2-4.4: (RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.                                                                                                     | n/a   |
| 2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level thinking skills.                                                                                               | n/a   |

Really Great Reading’s non-negotiables for **language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing** are **“not applicable.”** Really Great Reading focuses on foundational reading skills, and, as such, each lesson follows a structure of explicit, systematic instruction in these foundational skills. However, language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing are not the prime focus. Although some writing is incorporated, it serves only to support word, phrase, and sentence level transcription, with no in-depth composition instruction included. Additionally, while HD Word passages for oral reading fluency expose students to some rich vocabulary, the syntax and sentence structures included within student workbooks remain simple. Comprehension activities are also limited to activating prior knowledge and locating text evidence for literal questions. Finally, reviewers noted that read-alouds are not included as a part of the curriculum. When adopting this curriculum, decision-makers must be mindful of these factors to ensure that student language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing skills are fully addressed.

Really Great Reading’s non-negotiables for language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing are “not applicable.” Really Great Reading focuses on foundational reading skills, and, as such, each lesson follows a structure of explicit, systematic instruction in these foundational skills. However, language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing are not the prime focus. Although some writing is incorporated, it serves only to support word, phrase, and sentence level transcription, with no in-depth composition instruction included. Additionally, while HD Word passages for oral reading fluency expose students to some rich vocabulary, the syntax and sentence structures included within student workbooks remain simple. Comprehension activities are also limited to activating prior knowledge and locating text evidence for literal questions. Finally, reviewers noted that read-alouds are not included as a part of the curriculum. When adopting this curriculum, decision-makers must be mindful of these factors to ensure that student language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing skills are fully addressed.

**2B: Background Knowledge**

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

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

Really Great Reading’s practices for **background knowledge** are “**not applicable.**” Reviewers noted that Countdown, Blast, and HD Word are considered programs that address accurate decoding, encoding, and fluency. Consequently, read-alouds are not included within the program and educators must seek external resources to expose students to knowledgebuilding texts. Due to the nature of the program and its emphasis on foundational skills, students primarily engage with decodable stories that align with the phonics skills and Heart Words taught in each unit. Thus, while texts are not “leveled,” they do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop learner background knowledge across subject areas. Adopters of Really Great Reading must be aware of these limitations and supplement with additional resources to address students’ needs in building knowledge and comprehension.

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.       | 3     |  |
| 2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.                                                                                                                     | 4     |  |
| 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. | 4     |  |

Really Great Reading’s practices for **vocabulary** are “**somewhat met.**” While the primary focus of Countdown, Blast, and HD Word is on developing student decoding, encoding, and fluency, and words are taught to support the comprehension of the connected texts, there is also an acknowledgment that true word-level proficiency requires a deeper understanding of vocabulary. As a result, all programs include Vocabulary Playground activities to be completed by students independently and feature target words that students decode, encode, speak, and write in sentences. The Vocabulary Playground includes a scope and sequence of word meanings to be taught in each grade. This resource teaches vocabulary through the use of visual representations and pictures, making inferences, and building words. For an additional cost, Really Great Reading also offers InferCabulary, which is designed for students in Grades 3-12. This program has students infer the meaning of Tier 2 vocabulary words through semantic reasoning (InferCabulary, 2024). Educators can select Tier 2 words from their curricula to utilize within this platform. These words are taught for deep understanding through the use of semantic mapping. Students use pictures, paired synonyms or adjectives, and varying contexts to develop a deep knowledge of words featured.

There are no Tier 2 words featured within Countdown and Blast curricula, and while HD Word includes words of this type, there is limited focus or practice opportunities for students. The words are included as a part of the oral reading passages. For example, in Unit 32, targeted terminology includes tragedy, avid, representative, and federal. The routine for previewing these words instructs teachers to read the word, have students point to and read the word, read the definition, and have an individual student read the example sentence. However, this routine does not tap into the depth of word knowledge. HD Word also exposes students to some Tier 3 words through non-fiction passages featuring a variety of topics. For example, in Unit 22, the word Pangaea is listed as a term to preview in Oceans, Continents, and the Equator.

Finally, Really Great Reading features some limited instruction on morphology in Blast and HD Word; however, this is only introduced in the final few units. For example, in Unit 23, Blast teaches the suffix -ed. Students are explicitly taught how this suffix changes the meaning of a word to past tense which is then reinforced through questioning. Yet, the primary focus is on the three sounds this suffix can make and when to use each when spelling. Later in Unit 24 of Blast, students are taught the suffix endings -er, -ed, -s, -es, and -ing. However, they are only taught to read and spell words with these suffixes, without explicit instruction on their meanings. The same applies to HD Word, which introduces some Latin and Greek prefixes and suffixes, but doesn't directly address their meaning. Additionally, Latin and Greek root words are not taught in either program.

## 2D: Language Structures

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

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

Really Great Reading's practices for **language structures** are **"not applicable."** Conventions of print are taught including instruction of directionality, recognition of upper and lowercase letters, and word boundaries. Discussion of grammar and syntax are not a part of this instruction. Furthermore, reviewers observed that Really Great Reading includes a strong scope and sequence that covers skills in a consistent, explicit manner with ample instances of teacher modeling and opportunities for student practice. However, the scope and sequence does not include instruction of language structures. If educators use the Really Great Handwriting materials, students are introduced to the concept of a sentence, including subjects (e.g., who or what?), verbs (e.g., is/was doing?), capitalization, and punctuation.

Students practice writing sentences in different ways across all three programs. For example, students participate in editing exercises for correct capitalization and punctuation. Additionally, students are asked to write complete sentences that match a given picture. Students in the Blast component of Really Great Handwriting are provided with an image of a dog on a surfboard and asked to write a complete sentence that matches the image. Later in the HD Word segment of Really Great Handwriting, Unit 11, students are given two pictures: one of a gymnast on the pommel horse and one of a gold medal. They first discuss the subject and words to use (e.g., athlete). Learners then discuss verbs related to the first photo, including twists, perform, rotate, and spin, and are tasked to write a complete sentence describing the image. Finally, students write a sentence for the second image of the gold medal and combine them using the conjunction "so."

## 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). | n/a   |
| 2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.                                                                       | n/a   |

Really Great Reading's practices for verbal reasoning are "not applicable." Inferencing strategies are not taught within the curriculum because they are not the primary focus of this curriculum, which is designed to develop students' decoding, encoding, and fluency skills. HD Word does offer the Investigate the Text routine, which includes inference practice; however, this is an optional instructional component and is not consistently integrated into the core lessons. Reviewers noted that adopters of this curriculum will need to supplement with additional resources to provide explicit instruction in inferencing as well as other higher-order comprehension skills.

## 2F: Literacy Knowledge

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

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

Really Great Reading's practices for **literacy knowledge** are "**not applicable.**" Students primarily encounter narrative text within decodable passages with exposure to informational text limited to HD Word. Genre types and text structures are not explicitly taught within any of the programs. Again, Really Great Reading's main focus is teaching students word recognition skills, so educators must keep this in mind to ensure that explicit instruction on genre, text types, and their corresponding features and signal words is provided, helping students develop an awareness and understanding of these different types of text.

### Section 3: Reading Comprehension

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

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

Really Great Reading’s practices for **reading comprehension** are “**not applicable.**”

Reviewers observed that instruction is mainly teacher directed, and students are not asked to independently read as a part of Countdown, Blast, or HD Word. In fact, students are only asked to read controlled text that includes decodable words aligned with targeted phonics skills. Thus, adopters of this curriculum would need to ensure aligned practices for reading comprehension are explicitly taught, including instruction of comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, summarizing) as well as self-monitoring skills. As discussed previously, read-alouds are not a part of Really Great Reading’s materials, so educators would need to include these resources to build comprehension skills for students unable to read independently. Once learners are automatic with the code, complex literary and knowledgebuilding informational texts would need to be introduced as well.

## 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     |

Really Great Reading’s practices for **handwriting** are “**met.**” Reviewers found that Countdown, Blast, and HD Word all include Really Great Handwriting as an optional supplement as it is not explicitly required in the Teacher Guides. Really Great Handwriting in the unit planner documents, within the teaching slides, and in all its related materials (e.g., teacher and student workbooks) can be downloaded from the teacher dashboard at no extra cost. The letter sequences/spelling patterns align with those of Countdown, Blast, and HD Word, though there is also an alternative scope and sequence available. Reviewers did note that if adopters are planning to use Really Great Handwriting, they would need to adjust the time frames provided within each program since the times listed specifically address the phonics portion of the program only. Additionally, because Really Great Handwriting is an optional component, adopters could substitute other handwriting programs if desired.

Really Great Handwriting features direct instruction that aligns with letters taught in each unit and offers an alternative scope and sequence for handwriting instruction based on stroke formation. Reviewers noted that educators must access the Supply Room resource to find both the Teacher Guide and student practice pages. Schools can download and print these materials for free; however, if adopters opt for preprinted materials, Really Great Reading charges an additional fee. Furthermore, reviewers strongly suggest that adopters consult the Unit Planners and view all available Virtual Implementation Courses, including the Handwriting Webinars, to fully understand and implement the program effectively. Since handwriting lessons are not part of the primary Teacher Guides, educators must seek out these resources to ensure proper instruction and integration of handwriting into their teaching. Handwriting instruction features the use of lined paper paired with verbal pathways to guide letter formation. This occurs as early as Countdown Unit 1, Lesson 3, where students are introduced to lined paper with lesson objectives focusing on correct positioning, posture, and handwriting form.

## 4B: Writing – Spelling

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

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

Really Great Reading’s practices for **spelling** are “**met.**” Spelling instruction is aligned directly to the patterns and high-frequency words in the phonic decoding scope and sequence. Due to its integrated manner, Really Great Reading does not include a separate spelling scope and sequence. Spelling instruction is included as a core part of all three programs and begins in Unit 6 of Countdown where it occurs as a regular part of instruction on Days 3 and 5. On Day 3, students engage in the Build a Word routine. This routine tasks learners to say the word, stretch the phonemes in the word, use colored tiles to represent each phoneme, spell the word with letter tiles, and read the word aloud. Learners then hold up their tile boards so teachers can check their spelling and provide positive error correction as needed. On Day 5, instruction includes the Spell It! routine. Here students say the word, segment and map its sounds, and then write its corresponding graphemes in the boxes provided. Both of these routines use phoneme segmentation and phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction. Reviewers also observed that Countdown, Blast, and HD Word all include spelling lists that correspond to the phonic decoding patterns taught within each unit. Occasionally these lists may feature more than one grapheme/phoneme correspondence for less frequent spelling patterns.

## 4C: Writing – Composition

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

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

Really Great Reading’s practices for **composition** are “**not applicable.**” For the majority of this curriculum, learners are not asked to engage in written composition beyond the dictation of words and sentences. The review team found that sentence structure is taught within the Really Great Handwriting materials, beginning with simple sentences in Countdown that identify the subject (e.g., Who or what?) and the verb (e.g., What are they doing?). Students then learn to generate sentences that match these patterns in response to picture cues. Additionally, learners are taught to use beginning capitalization, ending punctuation, and adequate spacing. As mentioned previously, while Really Great Handwriting comes with Countdown, Blast, and HD Word, it is optional, and educators would need to access and utilize these resources accordingly. Furthermore, adopters of the curriculum must incorporate composition instruction to ensure that students learn about the writing process and engage in opportunities that connect what they are reading about to written expression.

# Findings:

## COMPONENTS SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT

### SECTION 5: Assessment

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

| NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR ASSESSMENT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | SCORE |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 5.1: Assessments measure comprehension only without additional assessment measures to determine what is leading to comprehension weaknesses (e.g., phonics, phoneme awareness, nonsense word fluency, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension). | 1     |
| 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.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1     |
| 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).                                                                                                  | n/a   |
| 5.13: Multilingual learners are not assessed in their home language.                                                                                                                                                                    | 4     |

Really Great Reading's non-negotiables and practices for **assessment** are “**mostly met.**”

The review team observed that assessments include a wide array of diagnostics across all three programs related to word recognition. For example, in Countdown and Blast reviewers found measures of concepts of print, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, sight word surveys, letter formation and writing foundations assessment. Then in HD Word, assessments of student decoding, letter knowledge, phonological awareness and sight word surveys were found. Schools that adopt this curriculum would need to look to outside sources for norm-referenced assessments and assessments of reading and listening comprehension. Assessments also include a testing protocol that utilizes accurate miscue analysis.

There was no evidence of assessments tied to benchmarks based on a leveled-text gradient. Similarly, the team found no evidence of running records being used to assess foundational skills. Phonics skills are assessed informally on Day 5 of each lesson, with benchmark assessments conducted three times per year. They include both real and pseudoword reading.

Additionally, phonological and phonemic awareness are assessed regularly. The curriculum includes phonological awareness surveys that are designed to be given at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. These assessments measure a student's ability to hear, identify, and produce sounds.

Skills assessed include:

- *Rhyming (recognition and production)*
- *Blending compound words*
- *Blending onset and rime*
- *Beginning sound identification*
- *Blending phonemes*
- *Segmenting phonemes*
- *Adding phonemes*
- *Deleting phonemes*
- *Substituting phonemes*

Phoneme awareness is also assessed through the Reading Playground games.

Really Great Reading tracks students' oral reading fluency on a weekly basis using controlled passages. This begins in Unit 17 of Countdown where kindergarten students who achieve 95% or higher accuracy are provided with decodable passages. To support student growth, teachers use Fluency Tracker Charts to help students monitor their progress. Teachers are instructed to utilize this data to monitor both accuracy and reading rate (Countdown Passages, p. xi). Teachers are also directed to administer a nationally normed ORF assessment three times a year in all programs.

Finally educators would need to look to outside assessment measures to monitor language comprehension skills. Additionally, since Really Great Reading is focused on developing word attack skills in English, students are not assessed in their home language. Thus, educators would 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 Really Great Reading's curriculum were found to “**mostly meet**” or “**meet**” most criteria for Grades K–3. 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

*Really Great Reading offers its adopters a robust curriculum for foundational skills. This includes phonological and phoneme awareness, decoding and encoding, and fluency.*

*Really Great Reading's instructional routines help reduce students' cognitive load by breaking down learning into manageable steps. This allows learners to focus on key skills, making targeted concepts more accessible and easier to apply.*

*Really Great Reading focuses on direct, explicit instruction to ensure students have clear guidance on how to apply foundational reading skills. Teachers also benefit from its systematic scope and sequence which provides a clear roadmap for instructional planning and is designed to assist students in building new skills on existing ones.*

*Really Great Reading's Heart Word Magic approach clearly delineates a studentfriendly way to help learners identify and remember the predictable parts of irregular high-frequency words. Heart Word Magic uses a series of animations and practice techniques to make these tricky words stick, many of which are available at no cost on their website.*

*Really Great Reading goes beyond using reading rate as the sole measure of fluency. The program prioritizes accuracy as the foundation of fluency, emphasizing that speed should be developed only after a strong grasp on accuracy is achieved.*

*While HD Word offers learners some exposure to nonfiction text, the review team felt the topics failed to develop student knowledge over time. The topics presented do not appear to be part of a coherent sequence that would allow students to build on their prior knowledge. This presented itself as a missed opportunity as students aren't given the chance to revisit and expand their understanding of important concepts.*

*Really Great Reading offers its adopters a wealth of curated online resources. However, effective use is dependent upon teacher knowledge and the ability to select and implement these tools effectively. Teachers must understand how to integrate these resources into their instructional practices in order to improve learner outcomes. Thus, novice teachers, those new to the science of reading, or new adopters of the curriculum may find it challenging to effectively organize each lesson's content, determine appropriate time allocation, and select the types of practice to incorporate.*

*Really Great Reading's vocabulary programming lacks opportunities for meaningful engagement with Tier 2 and Tier 3 words. In fact, there are no Tier 2 words in Countdown or Blast and minimal exposure in HD Word. Additionally, the routine utilized in HD Word—where the word is simply read aloud, defined, and used in a sentence—does not promote active engagement or deep comprehension. Furthermore, limited examples of Tier 3 words were observed, and when subjectspecific terms (e.g., Pangaea) are introduced, simply previewing the term doesn't help students integrate these specialized words into a larger framework of content knowledge.*

*Really Great Reading's morphology resources are limited. Although some instruction is included, its scope is limited. While students learn to decode and encode words with common prefixes and suffixes, more advanced concepts are not included. Reviewers felt this was a missed opportunity which the curriculum could build upon to broaden students' exposure to and awareness of morphology.*

*While HD Word does include some informational texts for student practice, Really Great Reading's fluency passages are largely narrative. Its developers should consider expanding the fluency passages to include a more balanced mix of informational and narrative texts.*

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# PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



**Curriculum Navigation Report  
Really Great Reading,  
for Grades K-3 (2023)**



## Really Great Reading Publisher's Response to The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation of Countdown, Blast Foundations, and HD Word

Really Great Reading is thrilled to have been reviewed by The Reading League (TRL) using their 2023 Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines. Per the TRL Curriculum Evaluation, Really Great Reading's Countdown, Blast, and HD Word programs were found to have **no red flags** in the areas of **Word Recognition, Phonological and Phoneme Awareness, Phonics and Phonic Decoding, Fluency, Handwriting, Spelling,** and 6 out of the 7 **Assessment** practices evaluated.

The reviewers' scores reflect our commitment to improving foundational reading skills for all learners since 2005. This review reaffirms our expertise and dedication to providing top-tier foundational literacy instruction. We wish to thank the TRL reviewers for the time and effort they have dedicated to reviewing our materials, and we will use this review to continue to improve our offerings.

### Really Great Reading's Countdown, Blast Foundations, and HD Word

Really Great Reading's programs have a unique design that allows for fast-paced, sequential delivery of vital foundational reading skills instruction and practice. These programs are essential supplements to any core grade-level reading program. We believe that high quality Tier 1 foundational skills instruction in the primary grades is the best way to set students up to become proficient and automatic orthographic mappers. In addition, these skills enable students to become strong comprehenders who can learn from rich, knowledge-building texts in all subject areas.

### Morphology & Vocabulary Support

RGR knows that pulling the words off the page is only one step to successful reading comprehension. To help students develop true word-level literacy, we weave morphology and vocabulary instruction throughout our foundational skills programs. Like our decoding and encoding instruction, our vocabulary solutions are firmly rooted in the Science of Reading.

Our Vocabulary Playgrounds, which are built into our popular Reading Playgrounds, provide teachers with access to premade assignments that showcase the meaning of many words that students encounter in Countdown, Blast, and HD Word. Students experience words in a way that helps them understand all aspects of the word: the phonology, the orthography, the morphology, and the meaning. This explicit exposure drives orthographic mapping and rich word-level literacy. Morphology units are also embedded within each of our programs to help students analyze and break down words into both syllables and morphemes, aiding both with learning word meanings and decoding. You can find these resources and much more in the Vocabulary section of the Countdown, Blast, and HD Word Online Supply Rooms.

### Supports for Multilingual Learners

Really Great Reading prides itself on providing explicit, systematic, engaging, multisensory, and developmentally appropriate instruction that teaches multilingual learners (MLLs) the key skills they



need to become efficient and accurate decoders of English. Our approach ultimately leads to their success, not only in word identification, but also in comprehending what they read.

At RGR, supports for MLLs are woven throughout our materials. This is because many of our supports for MLLs, including scaffolding, visual reinforcement, and multisensory learning, benefit *all* students. Countdown, Blast, and HD Word Online also contain a variety of resources specifically and intentionally designed to support MLL students and their families who speak Spanish, as well as speakers of other languages. These include videos that clearly show mouth positioning and movement during English phoneme articulation, culturally responsive and highly visual animations that present concepts, such as Heart Words, in a way that MLLs can connect to and easily comprehend, anchor charts and videos to help any MLL student to develop confidence in the English classroom with clear and simple strategies, and instructional routine animations that break down our key instructional routines in a very visual and clear way.

RGR is aware that English learners are learning the meanings of words at the same time they are learning their structure. Because of this, we provide EL students with additional vocabulary exposure with images in our materials and teacher presentations to facilitate meaning and purpose for reading instruction.

As we continue to refine our offerings, we plan to incorporate native language assessment so that MLLs can more effectively and accurately demonstrate what they know and teachers can make more appropriate data-driven instructional decisions.

### **Striving for Exceptional Student Outcomes**

Really Great Reading is a responsive organization that constantly strives to improve our materials and our teacher and student user experience. We plan to continue enhancing our product offerings to meet the ongoing needs of districts, teachers, and most importantly, students. Our research portfolio continues to grow, and our library of ESSA II and ESSA III research studies reaffirm the incredible results that schools are seeing with Really Great Reading instruction. Learn more about the positive impact our programs are having on students across the nation at <https://www.reallygreatreading.com/successes>.

We are incredibly proud that The Reading League has reviewed our exceptional programs and tools, and we can't wait to share more information with you. If you'd like to learn more about how Really Great Reading's Countdown, Blast, and HD Word programs could fit into your school or district, visit [www.reallygreatreading.com](http://www.reallygreatreading.com) or contact us at 866-401-7323.