THE READING LEAGUE

Curriculum Navigation Report

Benchmark Advance Grades K–5 (2026)

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

Introduction

CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES DESCRIPTION

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

Hennessy, 2020, pg. 8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Curriculum Description

The evaluation on the following pages features a review of Benchmark Advance's K-5 curriculum, published in 2026, which has undergone significant revisions from the prior version. The review included a range of teacher and student resources designed to support literacy instruction. Teacher resources encompassed the Foundations & Routines materials, specific unit Teacher Guides, Foundational Skills Slides, Sound Wall Cards, and the Additional Materials Bank for both Foundations (or Review) & Routines for each instructional unit. Reviewers also examined planning and instructional tools such as Benchmark Advance's Graphic Organizers, Whole Group Teacher Resources, Build–Reflect–Write Notebooks, and Constructive Conversation Materials.

Additional materials included the Phonological Awareness Routines and a series of Assessments and Activities designed to measure student progress. In addition, reviewers consulted the Read-Aloud Professional Guide and the Read-Aloud Handbooks for each grade level, which provide detailed guidance for implementing read-aloud experiences. Finally, the team reviewed the Articulation Videos, Decodable Texts, Reproducible Assessments, and Handwriting Materials to gain a full understanding of all the materials Benchmark Advance has to offer.

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

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING WORD RECOGNITION

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

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

WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES	SCORE
1.1: 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.	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

Benchmark Advance's **word recognition** non-negotiables are **"met."** Reviewers found that across all grade levels (K–5), there is consistent evidence that three-cueing is not used as a decoding strategy and that students are not directed to use picture or context clues or to attend to the first letter of a word as the primary cue for word reading. Instead, instruction prioritizes explicit decoding strategies aligned with the science of reading. The table below highlights examples of direct, explicit instruction in word recognition featured across the grades.

LESSON	DESCRIPTION
Kindergarten, Unit 7, Week 1, Day 4, Lesson 2	In this lesson, students are provided with explicit instruction in decoding and high-frequency word practice. They preview the title and cover of We Have Fun to make predictions, and then review the high-frequency words "are" and "have" before reading. During reading instruction, emphasis is on blending decodable words and reading high-frequency words accurately, with choral reading and partner practice reinforcing decoding skills; at no point are students prompted to guess unknown words or use pictures or context clues to decode, confirming that the lesson is not aligned with three-cueing.
Grade 1, Unit 4, Week 2, Day 4, Lesson 2	In this lesson, students are provided with systematic decoding practice integrated with high-frequency word instruction. Students are introduced to the text Cam the Cat by previewing the title and cover illustration to make predictions, and then reviewing high-frequency words "little" and "play" before reading. During reading, the teacher models blending decodable words and supports choral and partner reading, ensuring students rely on phonics and word analysis rather than context or pictures to read unknown words. Again, this lesson is not aligned with three-cueing strategies.
Grade 2, Unit 1, Week 1, Day 2, Lesson 5	This lesson provides students with explicit instruction in blending and building words using systematic phoneme-grapheme mapping. Students begin with the word "rip" and then manipulate sounds and letters to create new words such as "drip," "drop," and "crop," reinforcing both decoding and flexibility with word structures. Corrective feedback directs students back to the specific sound-spelling patterns (e.g., /ī/in "rip") and has them repeat the letter-sound correspondence before reblending the entire word, ensuring accuracy through phonics rather than guessing. This routine demonstrates that instruction is grounded in explicit decoding strategies and corrective practice, not in three-cueing approaches.
Grade 3, Unit 1, Week 2, Lesson 2	This lesson offers students explicit instruction in decoding multisyllabic words with a focus on vowel patterns and syllable division. The teacher models flexible division strategies using words such as "explaining," "replayed," "investigate," and "basically," demonstrating how to try out different syllable divisions until a familiar word emerges. Students identify and circle long "a" spelling patterns (e.g., "VCe," "ai," "ay," "a") and apply them for accurate reading. Learning targets extend beyond decoding to include using context clues to define phrases and consulting reference materials to confirm spelling and meaning, building both word recognition and vocabulary without relying on three-cueing strategies.

LESSON	DESCRIPTION
Grade 4, Unit 9, Week 3, Lesson 2	This lesson provides students with explicit instruction in decoding multisyllabic words using flexible syllable division and vowel pattern analysis. The teacher models with words such as "remains," "reindeer," "breakage," "weighty," "ramble," "tablet," and "sapling," demonstrating how to divide before or after consonants and apply knowledge of long and short "a" vowel patterns. Instruction integrates decoding with meaning by modeling how to read and define the word "fastened," through the use of syllable knowledge, suffix recognition, and context clues to determine that it means "to attach to something." Guided practice continues with the Reading Big Words Strategy as students read words like "fastened," "aided," "beefsteak," "fancied," "temperature," "dismay," "undamaged," and "evacuated." Corrective feedback directs students to return to missed sound-spellings or syllables and reblend.
Grade 5, Unit 2, Week 2, Lesson 2	This lesson provides students with explicit instruction in decoding multisyllabic words using syllable division and closed syllable patterns. The teacher models words such as "hundred," "swallow," "bottom," "instead," and "sandwich," dividing them between consonants and applying knowledge of closed syllables to determine accurate pronunciations (e.g., hun-dred, swal-low, bot-tom, in-stead, sand-wich). Guided practice continues with multisyllabic words like "randomly," "uncomfortable," "confirmation," "marketable," "resubmit," and "dependable," supported by the Reading Big Words Strategy and corrective feedback routines that direct students to missed sound-spellings or syllables before reblending. Instruction extends to connected text in Sky-Glitter, where students use both decoding and context clues to determine word meaning (e.g., "dentures" defined as "fake teeth"), reinforcing the integration of phonics and comprehension.

Again, reviewers noted no use of the three-cueing strategy, but did caution around the phrase "context clues." To ensure this curriculum avoids confusion, team members recommended using clear language to reinforce that context clues are strictly used to decipher the meaning of unknown vocabulary words after decoding has happened.

In all Grades K–5, whole words and high-frequency words are taught through a consistent and explicit "Read, Spell, Write, Apply" routine. This approach emphasizes identifying both regular and irregular sound-spelling patterns and incorporates multisensory practice—including reading aloud, spelling, writing, and oral application—to reinforce orthographic mapping.

The High-Frequency Words Routine is a structured, four-step process designed to help students learn both regular and irregular high-frequency words. It aligns with evidence-based practices and avoids rote memorization or guessing strategies. This routine includes the following:

- **Step 1: Read** – The teacher models the word aloud, guiding students to identify regular and irregular sound-spelling patterns (e.g., in "was," /w/ and /z/ are regular, while /ŭ/, spelled with "a," is irregular).
- **Step 2: Spell** – The teacher spells the word aloud while pointing to each letter, and students chorally spell it to reinforce sound-symbol mapping.
- **Step 3: Write** – The teacher and students write the word while vocalizing each letter sound, supporting motor memory and orthographic mapping.
- **Step 4: Apply** – Students use the word orally in a sentence to reinforce meaning and contextual usage after decoding has occurred.

Reviewers also described the student-facing videos provided for each high-frequency word as exemplary models of practice. Moreover, they offer clear and consistent demonstrations that support high-quality implementation across classrooms. Finally, reviewers found that Benchmark Advance provides a clearly structured scope and sequence, along with weekly spiral review and cumulative practice opportunities. These documents provide coherence within and across grade levels and accompany every unit.

1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

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

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

Benchmark Advance's **phonological and phoneme awareness** practices are **"met."** Phonological awareness is taught explicitly with a strong emphasis on phoneme-level skills, including blending, segmenting, deletion, and substitution. These skills are addressed systematically in foundational skills lessons and reinforced through decodable text routines. While explicit instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness decreases in Grades 3–5, as is developmentally appropriate, this work continues to be strategically reinforced in the multisyllabic word reading routines and intervention supports, particularly through the program's *Reading Big Words* component.

Instruction progresses from the larger units of phonological awareness (e.g., syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) to the phoneme level in an appropriate manner. For example, in Grade 1, Unit 3, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 3, students are provided with explicit instruction that progresses in this manner. In this lesson, the teacher models blending sequentially with words like "frog" and "drop," introducing each letter, connecting it to its sound, and blending the phonemes step-by-step until the complete word is read. Instruction emphasizes that consonant blends, such as "dr" are composed of two distinct sounds (/d/ and /r/), ensuring students attend to the individual phonemes rather than treating the blend as a single unit. Students then practice with words like "trip," "grass," "track," "grab," and "crop," along with a spiral review of l-blends and short vowels, applying their skills to challenge words such as "froglet" and "droplet." This ensures consistent attention to phoneme-level awareness as well as phoneme-grapheme mapping. Similar examples were noted in kindergarten and in Grade 2 lessons, as well.

Although phonological awareness is no longer part of core instruction in Grades 3–5, it is fully supported through the program's intensive intervention and reteaching resources. Teachers can revisit earlier grade-level lessons to address skill gaps and unfinished learning. Each week, targeted reteaching lessons, guided by weekly or unit assessments and teacher observations, provide focused instruction and quick-check assessments to monitor progress. When students need prerequisite skills, lower-level lessons are available in the digital library, ensuring they build the foundation necessary to access grade-level reading successfully.

Additionally, Benchmark Advance's programming consistently emphasizes explicit phoneme-grapheme mapping. Lessons provide clear modeling of sound-symbol correspondences, blending and segmenting routines, and application in both reading and writing. In younger grades, instruction combines sound boxes, dictation, and spelling tasks. For example, in kindergarten Unit 2, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 3, students receive explicit, systematic instruction on the /s/ sound and its spelling. The lesson begins with articulation practice using a Sound Wall Card and video, then connects the sound to its spelling with the Picture Word and Sound-Spelling Cards to show that the letter "s" represents the sound /s/. Students identify and write "s" in words such as "sit," "six," and "sad," then blend letters to read words like "Sam" and "am," with added challenges, such as "ram," "sat," and "mat." The lesson also introduces the generalization that "s" can represent /z/ at the end of words. In the upper grades, lessons extend to morphological analysis and multisyllabic word routines. This structure ensures students see the reciprocal relationship between speech and print at all levels.

Benchmark Advance clearly addresses phoneme awareness as a foundational reading skill. For instance, in Grade 2, Unit 6, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 2, students are provided the opportunity to blend and segment words with vowel teams. Students are directed to identify and work with vowel teams such as /ee/, /ie/, /oe/, and /ue/, and to blend and segment words featuring these patterns. Students practice with high-frequency and decodable words including "point," "clear," "second," "song," "think," "three," "might," "often," and "paper." This lesson targets phoneme awareness through manipulation of vowel sounds and segmentation of more advanced word structures, ensuring that phoneme awareness remains an active, foundational skill in Grade 2.

This emphasis is also evident in the program's assessment framework, which demonstrates that phoneme awareness is taught as a foundational reading skill and carefully monitored throughout the early grades. In kindergarten and Grade 1, students are formally assessed three times a year on key phonological and phonemic awareness skills, such as rhyme, syllable awareness, phoneme segmentation, blending, and sound manipulation. In Grades 2 and 3, assessments are administered at the beginning of the year to confirm mastery, with advanced subtests in differentiating, blending, and segmenting phonemes, ensuring that phonemic awareness remains a monitored component of foundational learning. While phonological awareness assessments are not universally administered in Grades 4 and 5, instructional support remains available for students who demonstrate ongoing needs in this area. Students identified as requiring additional practice benefit from targeted intervention through the program's Intensive Phonological Awareness Routines & Activities. These lessons ensure that critical phonemic skills—such as blending, segmentation, and manipulation—are reinforced as needed, providing essential scaffolding for students to access increasingly complex texts.

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	

Benchmark Advance's **phonics and phonic decoding** practices are **"met."** Reviewers found that the program's instruction provides explicit and systematic teaching of letter-sound correspondences, and lessons are carefully sequenced and reinforced with visual cues, oral practice, and application in decoding and encoding tasks. This begins in kindergarten, where sound correspondences are introduced through teacher modeling of articulation using both the target Sound Wall Card and corresponding Articulation Video. These activities build a solid foundation by pointing out the placement of the lips, teeth, and tongue to ensure accuracy. Students are guided to repeat the sound and receive corrective feedback with tools such as hand-held mirrors to reinforce proper mouth formation. Students then practice connecting specific phonemes to their corresponding graphemes. For example, in Kindergarten Unit 1, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 2, teachers use the Picture Word Card for "astronaut" to illustrate that the first sound is /ă/. Then, students practice connecting the sound to the grapheme "a" in familiar words such as "apple" and "cat."

Another example was noted in Grade 1, Unit 9, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 3, when the vowel diphthong /ou/ is taught. Again, this begins with modeling articulation through the use of the corresponding Sound Wall Card and video. Teachers are instructed to provide students with corrective feedback, followed by opportunities for students to identify the /ou/ sound in words. Instruction continues as students connect the /ou/ phoneme to its spellings "ou" and "ow," write and reread word lists, and highlight the graphemes to reinforce the sound–spelling correspondences. Letter-sound correspondences are not explicitly taught in Grades 2–5. However, the aligned core scope and sequence ensures that instruction in letter-sound correspondences has been systematically addressed in the earlier grades. Additionally, if a student demonstrates unfinished learning, the program provides ongoing access to resources such as the Differentiated Phonological Awareness Routines and Activities and additional intervention materials for extra support.

Phonics instruction includes cumulative review, with skills revisited and reinforced across multiple lessons. Daily practice keeps previously taught correspondences active in students' working memory, and learners have frequent opportunities to apply them both in isolation and in connected text. Benchmark Advance's materials further support this process by prioritizing decodable texts aligned with the phonics elements being taught, giving students ample opportunities to practice and apply their knowledge in meaningful reading.

In kindergarten through Grade 2, early consonant and vowel patterns are explicitly introduced, then repeatedly practiced and assessed across units. As students move into Grades 3–5, word study builds on these foundations, revisiting earlier patterns (such as vowel teams and r-controlled vowels) while extending instruction to more advanced concepts, including syllable types, prefixes and suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots. Benchmark Advance also provides ongoing practice and assessment through blending, decoding, fluency routines, and connected reading and writing tasks, offering multiple points of review to ensure lasting mastery.

Reviewers observed that the program's key words consistently aligned with the target phoneme, ensuring students practice with accurate sound-symbol associations. Furthermore, teacher materials emphasize clarity in pronunciation and reinforcement of pure sounds. For example, short /ă/ is introduced with "apple" and "cat," short /ĭ/with "itch" and "inch," and short /ŏ/with "octopus" and "dog." Each card offers articulation guidance and clear anchor words, ensuring students see and hear accurate models of the target phonemes.

Benchmark Advance's phonics is taught in full-length, daily instructional blocks, not optional or brief segments. Reviewers noted that each grade provides a 15–20 minute whole group phonics block, followed by 10–15 minutes of small group work and independent practice. Additionally, Benchmark Advance's lessons follow a consistent sequence, beginning with articulation/phonological awareness, followed by spelling–sound correspondences, blending and decoding work, and spiral review.

Skills are revisited and reinforced through multisensory activities, blending practice, and review of previously taught correspondences. The program's phonics routines also connect decoding and encoding with writing and language practice, linking spelling patterns to authentic reading and writing activities.

As students move into Grades 3–5, they also participate in Integrated Fluency and Word Study instruction that progresses from foundational phonics concepts to more advanced word study. This sequence begins with students in Grade 3 moving from short and long vowel review to r-controlled vowels, complex syllable types, inflectional endings, and prefixes/suffixes. Grade 4 builds upon this with instruction focused on open/closed syllables, r-controlled vowels, hard/soft c and g, and a strong emphasis on Greek and Latin roots and affixes. Finally, Grade 5 extends instruction of derivational morphology, Greek/Latin roots, irregular spellings, and homophones. Again, all of these lessons are a part of the core programming and are not considered optional.

Regarding the instructional sequence of consonants and vowels, instruction is carefully designed, with both consonants and vowels introduced in a developmentally appropriate order. Short vowels are spaced out and reinforced before moving on to more complex patterns. Additionally, blending instruction is consistently modeled and practiced in every grade, both orally and in print. Teachers demonstrate blending routines and then provide opportunities for students to practice in connected, decodable text. For example, in Grade 1, Unit 2, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 3, the teacher models blending with direct articulation prompts, such as the following:

> This is the letter b. It stands for /b/. This is the letter e. It stands for /ĕ/. Listen as I blend the two sounds: /bĕ/. This is the letter g. It stands for /g/. Listen as I blend all three sounds: /bĕg/, beg. Say the word with me: beg. (Teacher's Resource System: Grade 1, Unit 2; p. 180)

A similar sequence is followed for "led," guiding students through each phoneme and then blending to form the complete word. Again, scaffolds provide sequential sound-by-sound blending, moving from isolated graphemes (b —> be —> beg; l —> le —> led) to full CVC words. This is reinforced through the Reading Big Words Routine in the upper grades. For instance, in Grade 4, Unit 3, Week 1, Lesson 5, after learning about decoding strategies for multisyllabic, open syllable words, students apply the Reading Big Words Strategy to read and blend rich content words such as "Caribbean," "financial," "inflation," "hurricanes," and "agency."

Instruction across the grades emphasizes decoding through letter-sound knowledge rather than guessing strategies, and students are consistently directed to apply phonics skills when reading unfamiliar words. One resource of note was the Take Home Activity Calendars, which help parents support this process at home. Examples were found in Grades K and 1, providing clear guidance for parents to help children sound out words, spell by segmenting, and build words with letter cards. Furthermore, high-frequency words are taught with explicit attention to both regular and irregular sound-spelling patterns, reinforcing phonics knowledge rather than relying on rote memorization. As mentioned previously, the Read, Spell, Write, Apply Routine ensures that high-frequency words are explicitly connected to phoneme–grapheme correspondences. The approach highlights decodable portions and calls out the irregular element, preventing students from treating high-frequency words as standalone "sight words" to be memorized.

Benchmark Advance's instruction continues beyond single-syllable patterns, incorporating more advanced study of syllable types, vowel teams, and structural analysis. Noted examples are included in the following table.

GRADE LEVEL	EXAMPLE
Grade 3	• Students are taught to divide words into syllables, identify long-vowel patterns (VCe, ea, ee, ey, y), and decode words with unaccented final syllables (-en, -on, -ain, -in). • Students practice spotting prefixes, suffixes, and base words to confirm meaning in context.
Grade 4	• Instruction applies phonics to multisyllabic and morphologically complex words. • Students decode using vowel teams and r-controlled vowels, and work with suffixes (-dom, -ity, -tion, -ment, -ness) and Latin roots (miss, agri, duc/duct, man).
Grade 5	• Word study targets advanced syllable patterns (consonant-le, variant vowels, diphthongs) and morphological analysis (prefixes, suffixes, Greek/Latin roots). • Students integrate decoding strategies with context clues to confirm word meaning.

Additionally, reviewers noted that advanced word study occurs in Grades 2-5. Instruction explicitly addresses multisyllabic decoding and morphological strategies, ensuring students develop these more advanced word recognition skills. This begins in Grade 2, where students are prompted to connect single-syllable to multisyllabic forms, then to compound words and consonant-le patterns. Students in Grade 3 utilize the Reading Big Words Strategy to identify prefixes/suffixes and base words while blending word parts to confirm meaning. Grade 4 expands to r-controlled vowels and Latin roots, applying morphological analysis to decode and understand complex words. Finally, students in Grade 5 tackle advanced suffixes (-tion, -sion, -ment), irregular spellings, and scientific Greek/Latin roots, combining structural analysis with context clues.

1D: Fluency

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

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

Benchmark Advance's **fluency** practices are **"met."** Fluency instruction in Benchmark Advance is not centered on silent reading; instead, it prioritizes oral practice, modeling, and teacher feedback. Lessons incorporate choral reading, partner reading, and guided oral practice to ensure students develop automaticity while maintaining comprehension. This design aligns with research indicating that oral reading with modeling and feedback is the most effective method for developing fluency, particularly in the early and intermediate grades.

In kindergarten through Grade 2, the program has an emphasis on modeling prosody and practicing with short vowel patterns, high-frequency words, and early decodable texts. For instance, in Kindergarten, Unit 5, Lesson 1, fluency instruction emphasizes characterization and feelings. The teacher models expressive reading of *A Little Piggy Named Bob*, showing how voice conveys emotions such as sadness or triumph. Students then reread chorally and independently, practicing phrasing, pacing, and expression while applying high-frequency words and decodable text routines.

As learners progress to Grades 3–5, fluency integrates timed readings, multisyllabic decoding, morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots), and varied pacing to match increasingly complex texts. In Grade 5, Unit 10, Lesson 1, students review unaccented final syllables (-en, -on, -ain, -in) by reading and spelling multisyllabic words aloud, practicing oral decoding in sentences, and participating in repeated oral reading to build fluency with connected text. Each of these lessons explicitly models reading aloud, requires students to chorally read, and provides guided corrective feedback to ensure accuracy and expression. Additional fluency routines, such as Reading Rate: Speed/Pacing Slow and Reading Rate: Speed/Pacing Varied, further demonstrate the program's emphasis on expressive oral reading, as teachers model passages with different pacing and students reread chorally to match prosody and meaning.

Instruction across grades consistently prioritizes accuracy and expression before rate. Lessons emphasize decoding words correctly, phrasing appropriately, and reading with intonation that reflects comprehension. Teachers model pacing and accuracy, then provide feedback that helps students adjust without sacrificing meaning for speed. This structure affirms that fluency is not simply fast reading, but accurate and expressive reading that supports comprehension, aligning with the science of reading. In the Reading Rate: Speed/Pacing—Slow routine, teachers model how adjusting pacing makes oral reading sound more conversational to convey meaning, while the Reading Rate: Speed/Pacing—Varied routine teaches students to modulate pacing depending on the text (e.g., speeding up during exciting parts and slowing down when giving information). The focus is on aligning pacing with text structure and punctuation to make oral reading more like real speech.

Benchmark Advance integrates word-level fluency routines that build automaticity before students apply those skills in connected text. Students practice decoding words in isolation, participate in timed drills and sorts, and then transfer knowledge into sentences and passages. By structuring fluency at the sound, word, and text levels, the program ensures that students develop both foundational automaticity and applied comprehension. This two-tiered approach reflects best practice by securing decoding accuracy before moving into fluency with extended texts. Fluency instruction also occurs across diverse genres, ensuring that students gain experience reading narrative, informational, poetry, and content-area texts aloud. Lessons incorporate repeated readings, but not only of patterned text—instead, they feature decodable passages, knowledge-building texts, and literature at appropriate complexity levels based on the grade level. This approach allows students to develop fluency while also building vocabulary and background knowledge, a critical connection between word attack, fluency, and comprehension. By engaging with a wide range of genres, students strengthen their ability to read with expression and understanding across contexts.

Finally, Benchmark Advance's fluency assessments require accurate decoding and do not allow substitutions based on meaning or partial visual matches. Teacher rubrics emphasize accuracy, prosody, and comprehension as the hallmarks of fluent reading. Miscues are addressed through feedback that highlights decoding errors and reinforces correct application of phonics knowledge. This ensures that fluency assessments reinforce the connection between decoding and comprehension rather than promoting guessing strategies.

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.	1
2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level thinking skills.	1

Benchmark Advance's non-negotiables for **language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing** are **"met."** Evidence shows that instruction follows an explicit, systematic framework rather than relying on incidental learning. Lessons consistently integrate modeled practice, guided support, and independent application so that key language and writing skills are taught directly. This approach offers teachers and students clear, predictable structures that go beyond the hallmarks of a traditional workshop model. Reviewers highlighted the program's consistent use of gradual release, appreciating how it moves students from teacher-led modeling toward independent application. To further strengthen the program, reviewers recommended making the instructional structure even more explicit in the teacher guidance—particularly for educators who are new to the science of reading or are shifting from a different approach. In addition, linking these practices to the science of learning would reinforce their value and underscore the intentional design of instruction.

The team found that Benchmark Advance's instructional materials provide students with exposure to academic vocabulary and complex syntax. Read-alouds, mentor texts, and writing tasks consistently model the use of complex sentences and academic vocabulary. This exposure helps to ensure that students are immersed in language that stretches their comprehension and supports growth in both reading and writing. Benchmark Advance's instructional routines also emphasize teaching the process of comprehension through strategies such as questioning, monitoring understanding, and summarizing. Students are guided to think about how they make meaning from text, with teacher modeling and scaffolds embedded throughout lessons. This ensures that comprehension is not just thought of as a final product or testing outcome, but as an area requiring strategy and skill instruction. For example, in Grade 2, Unit 1 , Day 1, Lesson 3, the teacher models how to strategically ask and answer questions using the nonfiction text, *Emperor Penguin Habita*t. A later example was noted in Grade 4, Unit 5, Week 2, Lesson 5, where the teacher shows the "hidden" thinking of a skilled reader by breaking the thought process into observable steps. This includes recognizing when something is unknown, searching the text for clues, connecting with background knowledge, and testing an inference. By modeling and then inviting students to practice with a partner, the process of active reading becomes transparent and teachable.

Reviewers also observed that writing instruction is consistently integrated with reading lessons, allowing students to respond to texts through writing, apply vocabulary in context, and use mentor texts as models. While writing is taught explicitly, it is also connected to reading comprehension and content knowledge, strengthening the reciprocal relationship between the two. Finally, read-aloud questioning routines consistently include higher-order prompts that ask students to infer, analyze, and synthesize information. Teachers are provided with scaffolds to deepen comprehension through open-ended questions rather than relying solely on recall. This practice supports critical thinking and builds academic discourse. Reviewers found the read-aloud guidance to be especially helpful, noting how effectively the lessons embed higher-level questioning. The team also wondered if it would be feasible to extend these higher-order queries into the recommended trade book routines, giving teachers additional prompts to elevate these discussions with students as well.

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

Benchmark Advance's practices for **background knowledge** are **"met."** Reviewers observed that read-aloud selections include a deliberate balance of narrative and expository texts that often exceed grade-level complexity. These read-alouds are designed to develop content knowledge alongside literacy skills, with frequent inclusion of science and social studies topics. Each grade level features a Guide to Text Complexity which considers the purpose, language conventions and clarity, structure, and knowledge demand of each text. This teacher-friendly roadmap helps educators anticipate and plan for students' background knowledge needs as each text entry highlights the kinds of prior experiences or concepts that will support comprehension. In kindergarten, for example, students are exposed to a rich mix of informational, narrative, fantasy, folklore, poetry, opinion, and biographical texts. This exposure to diverse genres and disciplines is consistent across grade bands, and instruction broadens knowledge-building opportunities and ensures access to rigorous material.

Benchmark Advance also offers consistent opportunities for students to connect what they already know to new content, supporting both comprehension and retention. Teachers activate prior knowledge before reading, guide students in linking experiences to the text, and extend learning across units for continuity. These practices reinforce student engagement and strengthen the construction of new knowledge on top of existing foundations. Additionally, Benchmark Advance aligns its unit topics and essential questions across all grades. The following table highlights the first unit of the year, which connects to the knowledge strand Government and Citizenship.

GRADE LEVEL	UNIT	ESSENTIAL QUESTION
Kindergarten	Rules at Home and School	Why do we have rules?
Grade 1	Being a Good Community Member	Why do people get involved in their communities?
Grade 2	Government at Work	Why do we need a government?
Grade 3	Government for the People	Why do people participate in government?
Grade 4	Government in Action	How can government influence the way we live?
Grade 5	The US Constitution: Then and Now	Why do laws continue to evolve?

By revisiting big ideas through its essential questions across grade levels, students are offered repeated, varied opportunities to activate what they know and to weave new concepts into their existing knowledge network, which is central to strong comprehension and lasting learning.

Finally, for students in Grades 2–5, Benchmark Advance features materials that include diverse, content-rich text sets intentionally designed to build background knowledge across subject areas. Students read both narrative and informational selections that deepen vocabulary, extend comprehension, and promote knowledge transfer. This approach ensures that all students are challenged with rigorous material and supported in making cross-disciplinary connections.

2C: Vocabulary

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VOCABULARY	SCORE
2.7: Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	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.	1

Benchmark Advance's practices for **vocabulary** are **"met."** Reviewers consistently noted that vocabulary instruction is embedded within rich, text-based lessons rather than relying on isolated worksheets. For example, in Grade 2, Unit 6, Week 1, Day 1, Lesson 1, students build vocabulary knowledge of the topic "Tales to Live by," including the words "cultures," "storytelling," "folktale," and "message." A similar approach was noted in Grade 4, Unit 1, Week 1, Lesson 1, where students build vocabulary connected to the topic "Observing Nature" through the words "observe," "nature," "interact," "encounter," and "appreciate." This context-driven approach helps ensure students develop flexible, transferable knowledge of words rather than limited recall of definitions. Students encounter new words in the context of anchor texts, apply them through oral and written language tasks, and revisit them across multiple days to deepen understanding. Instructional routines support students in developing knowledge of meaning, usage, and connections to other words, ensuring vocabulary instruction is purposeful and extends beyond rote practice or emphasis on memorization.

Additionally, the team observed that Tier 2 words are taught explicitly, practiced across modalities, and reinforced over time. Benchmark Advance classifies these words as General Academic Speaking and Listening Words. For instance, in Grade 4, Unit 9, students learn the words "crippled," "agricultural," and "union" while studying resources and their development and reading poems about revolutionary leader Caesar Chavez. Teachers model their use, provide sentence stems for oral practice, and guide students in integrating new words into writing tasks. Students see these words in print during reading, rehearse them in oral discussions, and apply them in authentic written products. Furthermore, reviewers documented consistent exposure to Tier 3, content-specific words that were explicitly introduced in lessons tied to science, social studies, and research units. Benchmark Advance classifies these words as Domain Specific Speaking and Listening. In Grade 4, Unit 9, students learn the Tier 3 word "profitable" while exploring the topic of resources and their development. Instruction supports students in both decoding and applying domain-specific vocabulary in reading and writing. These opportunities help ensure that Tier 3 words are not only introduced but also practiced and connected to broader knowledge-building tasks.

Finally, the review team noted that morphology instruction is explicit, systematic, and sequenced from simple to complex as students progress through the grades. In the primary grades, lessons focus on high-utility prefixes and common inflectional endings that build decoding and spelling skills. These include "-s," "-ed," "-ing," "-ful," "-less," and "-ly." In later grades, students expand their study to roots, affixes, and multisyllabic word analysis, applying this knowledge to both reading and writing. The following are examples of morphology content in Grades 2–5:

- **Grade 2:** comparative and superlative endings (-er, -est); prefixes (un-, re-, dis-); irregular plural nouns (townspeople, housewives, children); possessive nouns (e.g., children's, people's, buildings')
- **Grade 3:** derivational suffixes (-ing, -ment, -ness); prefixes (un-, dis-, pre-, re-); suffixes (-able, -ful, -less)
- **Grade 4:** adverb suffixes (-ly, -ily, -ways, -wise); adjective suffixes (-ful, -ous, -ible, -able, -some); prefixes (trans-, pro-, sub-, super-, inter-); negative prefixes (de-, un-, in-, im- dis-); noun suffixes (-dom, -ity, -tion, -ment, -ness); Greek and Latin roots (geo-, archae-, rupt-, mis, agri, duc/duct, man, ven, migr, graph, mit, aud)
- **Grade 5:** prefixes (re-, pre-, dis-, mis-, bio-, im-, ex-, micro); noun suffixes (-ology, -ant, -er, -or, -ery); Latin roots (spec, liter, vent, struct, aud, vis, form, cede); adjective suffixes (-y, -ent, -ive, -ic, -ful); prefixes that describe where (pro-, em-, en-, per-, im-); science roots (se, mech, cycle, phys, chem)

This consistent attention to morphology across K–5 builds word-learning strategies that extend into content-area vocabulary and independent reading.

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	

Benchmark Advance's practices for **language structures** are **"met."** Instruction in conventions of print, grammar, and syntax is explicit, consistent, and follows a simple-to-complex progression. In Grades K–2, modeled writing, sentence stems, and mini-lessons develop foundational print and grammar knowledge. Students progress from identifying and writing complete sentences to applying punctuation, capitalization, and subject-verb agreement. Grammar is also taught in the context of what students are reading and learning about. For example, in Grade 2, Unit 1, Week 1, Day 3, Lesson 11, students learn about how apostrophes function with contractions and possessives in the context of the story, *Emperor Penguin Habitat*. They then work to identify apostrophes and how they are used within the story. In Grades 3–5, students engage in more sophisticated instruction, including sentence combining, editing, and grammar analysis, which continues to be tied to authentic texts. Scope and sequence documents, daily practice routines, and integrated writing tasks demonstrate clear planning and cumulative instruction.

Benchmark Advance provides students with frequent and intentional teacher modeling of language structures and ample opportunities for student discussion. In early grades, oral language routines, think-alouds, and call-and-response activities model correct sentence structure and vocabulary use. Students practice responding in full sentences and discussing content-rich texts. In Grades 3–5, modeling continues through mentor sentence analysis, writing exemplars, and teacher-led editing demonstrations. In Grade 4, Unit 1, Week 1, Lesson 3, the teacher reads aloud a writing prompt and demonstrates how students might tackle the activity. This transparency supports student learning by making the cognitive steps of approaching the prompt explicit, thereby providing a clear model students can follow and internalize. Additionally, discussions that support student knowledge of grammar and syntax are embedded in comprehension work, grammar application, and peer feedback, promoting both oral language development and metacognitive reflection.

Finally, reviewers found no evidence that students are asked to memorize parts of speech in isolation. Instead, instruction on parts of speech occurs in context and through applied practice. In K–2, students learn nouns, verbs, and adjectives during shared reading and writing, using sentence frames and sorting tasks that allow them to apply understanding. In Grades 3–5, grammar instruction includes identifying and applying parts of speech within real texts and students' own writing. Editing exercises, sentence expansion, and revision tasks reinforce parts of speech as tools to enhance communication, rather than isolated vocabulary to be memorized.

2E: Verbal Reasoning

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VERBAL REASONING	SCORE
2.26: Inferencing strategies are not taught explicitly and may be based only on picture clues and not text (i.e., picture walking).	1
2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.	1

Benchmark Advance's practices for **verbal reasoning** are **"met."** Throughout each grade level, evidence showed that inferencing strategies are explicitly taught using textual clues rather than relying solely on illustrations. Examples include prompts such as, "What can you infer based on what the text says?" and explicit references to identifying character feelings or motivations through written details. These practices confirm that inferencing instruction is based on text and not limited to picture support. For example, in Grade 1, Unit 1, Week 3, Day 1, Lesson 3, educators are prompted to use a strategy called "Creating Mental Imagery" to support students in understanding how the Ugly Duckling character felt. Later, in Grade 4, Unit 2, Week 1, Lesson 2, the teacher creates a "Draw Inferences" anchor chart to support students in making inferences about a character or setting in a drama to help them understand characters' actions. Additionally, students are routinely asked to make inferences through modeled think-alouds, guided questions, and written response prompts. The materials treat inference as a distinct comprehension strategy, rather than something that's simply embedded within other tasks.

2F: Literacy Knowledge

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGE	SCORE
2.33: Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.	1
2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	1

Benchmark Advance's practices for **literacy knowledge** are **"met."** There is clear and consistent evidence that genre types and their features are explicitly introduced, modeled, and applied in lessons. Lessons incorporate genre anchor charts, genre introduction slides, teacher modeling of features, and guided practice. Instructional routines guide students to identify genre-specific characteristics, such as realistic fiction, folktales, and biographies, and to use these features to support comprehension and build knowledge. The following table provides an overview of the various genres and text structures that Benchmark Advance teaches by grade.

GRADE LEVEL	EXAMPLE
Kindergarten	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Narrative & Free Verse Poetry Folktales Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion
Grade 1	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Narrative & Free Verse Poetry Folktales & Fables Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion
Grade 2	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Technical Text Narrative & Free Verse Poetry Folktales Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion
Grade 3	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Technical Text Narrative & Free Verse Poetry Folktales, Fables, Myths Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion Biography & Autobiography Drama
Grade 4	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Structures of Informational Text (e.g., description, sequence, cause and effect) Technical Text Narrative & Free Verse Poetry/Structural Elements of Poetry Folktales, Fables, Myths Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion Biography & Autobiography Drama
Grade 5	Informational Science, History, and Social Studies Structures of Informational Text (e.g., description, sequence, cause and effect) Speeches Technical Text Narrative & Free Verse Poetry/Structural Elements of Poetry Poetry Collections Folktales & Myths Fantasy Realistic Fiction Opinion Biography & Autobiography Drama

Benchmark Advance also provides explicit instruction in identifying genre-specific text structures and signal words. Students are taught how different genres follow unique organizational patterns and are introduced to signal words that support their understanding of those patterns. Instruction often includes modeling with anchor texts, shared reading, and guided annotation of signal words within texts.

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	

Benchmark Advance's practices for **reading comprehension** are **"met."** The review team found that students were not asked to independently read texts beyond their decoding ability. Instead, Benchmark Advance maintains text accessibility through scaffolded read-alouds and whole-group shared reading of complex texts. Instructional supports, such as vocabulary previews, oral reading with teacher modeling, and partner reading, are consistently embedded before students engage independently with grade-level texts, ensuring decoding accuracy is prioritized. Additionally, the curriculum structures each unit around essential questions and knowledge-building text sets as referenced in Section 2B: Background Knowledge. Comprehension strategies are taught within the context of these rich, interconnected texts rather than through isolated passages.

Benchmark Advance emphasizes interaction with grade-level complex texts through structured whole-group instruction, with scaffolded supports such as partner reading, teacher read-alouds, and discussion routines. There is no evidence that students are asked to engage in unsupported independent reading, and the team found no evidence of leveled texts. Finally, students are taught strategies for monitoring their comprehension while reading. These include making connections to prior knowledge, asking questions, visualizing story events, identifying important ideas, making inferences, and synthesizing new information with what they already know to generate original insights.

4A: Writing — Handwriting

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

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

Benchmark Advance's practices for **handwriting** are **"met."** The review team observed that Benchmark Advance includes clear and consistent direct instruction in handwriting. In Grades K–2, handwriting is embedded in daily instruction through modeled letter formation routines that emphasize directionality, posture, and correct grip. The curriculum provides a clear routine for educators to follow, including reviewing the letter name, sound, and articulatory features in the early grades as a way to get ready for writing. Teachers then guide students through letter strokes using arrows and verbal prompts, followed by structured student practice using lined paper. In Grades 3–5, handwriting instruction transitions to cursive, which is explicitly taught through modeling, guided practice, and independent application during spelling and writing tasks. The program clearly moves from foundational print formation in the early grades to fluent, legible cursive writing in the upper grades, indicating that direct handwriting instruction is intentionally and systematically integrated into the curriculum. Additionally, it provides an ongoing review of manuscript letters through Unit 10 of Grade 2, ensuring students have sufficient practice to develop automaticity with manuscript.

The curriculum also embeds handwriting meaningfully within the context of core reading and writing instruction. In Grades K–2, handwriting lessons are integrated into phonics and foundational skills routines, particularly during letter-sound instruction and encoding practice. Students write letters as they learn grapheme-phoneme correspondences, reinforcing decoding and encoding simultaneously. In Grades 3–5, cursive instruction is applied during word study, vocabulary, and writing responses, helping students internalize fluent handwriting habits within purposeful academic tasks. The program design ensures handwriting is practiced in context, reinforcing its utility in real reading and writing scenarios. Overall, reviewers identified Benchmark Advance's handwriting instruction as a clear strength of the program.

4B: Writing — Spelling

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

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

Benchmark Advance's practices for **spelling** are **"met."** Reviewer evidence across Grades K–5 confirms that Benchmark Advance includes explicit spelling instruction that aligns with the program's phonics scope and sequence. Each week's spelling words are carefully selected to reflect the phonics patterns taught during whole-group instruction, ensuring integration across decoding and encoding. Weekly spelling routines consistently follow a systematic progression, reinforcing sound-symbol relationships.

Across Grades K–2, Benchmark Advance emphasizes phoneme segmentation and phoneme-grapheme mapping within spelling instruction. Lessons include oral practice, sound-by-sound spelling routines, and Elkonin box-style activities that support orthographic mapping. These foundational routines help students internalize how sounds map to letters when spelling. As students progress to Grades 3–5, spelling instruction shifts toward larger word parts, with an emphasis on syllables, morphemes, and affixes.

Spelling instruction in Benchmark Advance is consistently tied to phonics instruction. Spelling lists are not based on thematic content or frequency; instead, they are designed to reinforce decoding patterns from that week's phonics focus. Students engage with decoding and encoding routines using the same target patterns. Additionally, the program introduces spelling patterns in a systematic and cumulative sequence. Multiple spelling patterns for a single phoneme are not introduced simultaneously. Instead, instruction targets one pattern at a time to build automaticity, and alternate spellings are introduced in future units. Spelling instruction is not rooted in rote memorization techniques. Instead, students analyze word structure, engage in dictation and sentence writing, and apply phonics patterns through encoding routines. The lessons emphasize understanding over repetition.

Finally, reviewers suggested that the publishers consider incorporating grapheme cards to better support segmentation and encoding, as this tool could serve as a valuable scaffold by making phoneme–grapheme relationships more explicit and accessible to students.

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 is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically.	1	
4.20: Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.	1	
4.21: Students are not taught the writing process (i.e., planning, revising, editing).	1	
4.22: Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.	1	

Benchmark Advance's practices for **composition** are **"met."** The program provides consistent opportunities for modeling, planning, and brainstorming before students begin to write a draft. Teachers are offered explicit guidance through think-alouds, oral rehearsal activities, and graphic organizer routines to support student idea generation. Writing prompts are connected to unit texts and always include preparation steps rather than asking students to write without support. Benchmark Advance's writing instruction is also highly structured, and models and graphic organizers are frequently provided. Teachers are given mentor texts and sample student models to share with the class. Graphic organizers such as sequencing charts, T-charts, Venn diagrams, and planning templates are embedded in lessons to scaffold composition. For example, in Grade 1, students use a sequencing graphic organizer to illustrate the steps in a frog's life cycle, then transfer their ideas into a written response, reinforcing both content knowledge and writing skills. In Grade 3, students complete a T-chart to record what they see and hear, which supports brainstorming for a prompt explaining how camouflage helps animals survive. These tools serve as scaffolds that make the writing process more manageable, guiding students from initial idea generation to more developed compositions.

Grammar and conventions are explicitly taught through a systematic progression across grades, moving clearly from simple to complex. For example, in kindergarten, students learn to use question words—who, what, where, when, why, and how—to ask questions about a text. This helps them to first develop their understanding of how parts of speech function, rather than focusing solely on form and labels. Later, in Grade 3, students build on prior knowledge by studying comparative and superlative adverbs, making connections to earlier lessons on comparative and superlative adjectives. Daily grammar instruction is consistently linked to writing tasks, giving students opportunities to practice conventions in isolation and then apply them in their own drafts. Cumulative practice is also embedded to ensure students develop fluency and automaticity.

Benchmark Advance provides explicit instruction in multiple writing structures, including narrative, informational, and opinion/persuasive. Students have repeated opportunities throughout the school year to engage with these different structures, as units are organized around specific text types to ensure balanced exposure and growth across genres, rather than focusing exclusively on narrative or choice writing.

The writing process (e.g., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) is explicitly taught and reinforced across grades, with increasing sophistication over time. For example, in kindergarten, students are introduced to opinion writing by brainstorming their opinions and supporting reasons before drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. In Grade 1, this foundation is extended as students are expected to include an opinion, reasons, and corresponding evidence. By Grade 4, opinion writing requires students to present a clear claim supported by logical reasons and evidence drawn from multiple sources. Additionally, teacher modeling and scaffolds consistently support students as they learn to revise for content and clarity, edit for grammar and conventions, and share their final products.

Writing instruction in Benchmark Advance is integrated with reading. Prompts are tied directly to anchor texts and unit themes, requiring students to cite evidence, summarize, and extend understanding of what they've read. Thus, writing tasks serve as comprehension reinforcement rather than being isolated activities.

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

Benchmark Advance's non-negotiables and practices for **assessment** are **"mostly met."** Benchmark Advance assessments report scores, not leveled-text placements. Weekly and Unit Assessments provide percentage bands (i.e., 0–39%, 40–59%, 60–79%, 80–100%) that reflect student mastery of standards and skills, rather than placing students on a gradient of leveled texts. Additionally, Benchmark Advance uses skills-based assessments rather than running records or cueing strategies. Skills-based assessments include phoneme awareness, phonics (including nonsense word assessments which supplement real-word decoding checks), and oral reading fluency (ORF) measures, which are utilized in Grade 1 and up. Educators are provided with Benchmark Advance's Foundational Skills Screener as well as Skill Area Specific Quick Checks. Additionally, language and comprehension assessments are present through the program's Language and Comprehension Quick Checks. Benchmark Advance includes Reader's Theater Self-Assessments that guide students to reflect on their oral reading skills—such as expression, phrasing, and pacing—and make explicit connections between fluency and comprehension. This tool encourages metacognitive awareness by helping students recognize how fluent reading supports understanding of the text. Finally, Benchmark Advance's assessments are provided in English only. Thus, educators would need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that multilingual learners are assessed in their native language. However, the team also noted that this would most likely be the case with most core curricula programs.

Final Report Summary

Overall, the **reviewed components** for Benchmark Advance's curriculum were found to **"meet"** or **"mostly meet"** 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

Benchmark Advance's alignment with Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and the LETRS lesson plan template is a notable strength of the program because it directly connects daily instruction to evidence-based practices. The alignment documents clearly highlight where lesson components correspond to LETRS content, ensuring that teachers can see how phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are systematically addressed.

Benchmark Advance's Research and Inquiry Projects are a notable strength because they cross and connect multiple areas of student learning. These projects culminate in written products including fact sheets, posters, and charts, which are supported by scaffolds like Read, Interpret, Jot and Read, Design, and Create that build students' written expression, organization, and evidence use. Oral language is strengthened through regular sharing, presentations, and structured discussions, with supports such as Talk, Jot, Choose and Plan, Present, and Ask, promoting collaboration and modeled syntax. Finally, by embedding research projects across units, the program deepens content knowledge in science, social studies, and literature, reinforcing the essential connection between background knowledge, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Benchmark Advance includes comprehensive support for multilingual learners. The program explicitly nurtures metalinguistic awareness by teaching how English works in context and by giving students multiple opportunities to practice and apply new learning. The sidebar scaffolds in the lessons align directly with the linguistic demands of each task, promoting a gradual release of responsibility through modeling, guided practice, and independent application. Importantly, this design fosters positive multilingual learner identities, recognizing students' linguistic assets and supporting them in expressing their ideas effectively across academic tasks. These scaffolds also serve as universal supports that elevate outcomes for all students, making this an integrated feature that enhances writing, speaking, language development, and knowledge building across the curriculum.

Benchmark Advance's Interactive Read-Alouds and their accompanying supports are a noteworthy feature, as they cross multiple areas of student learning. Interactive read-alouds are positioned as a core instructional practice that builds comprehension, models metacognitive strategies, and makes text accessible to all students. Teachers are guided to model how "good readers" think through texts by using strategies such as questioning, determining importance, monitoring comprehension, making connections, making inferences, summarizing/synthesizing, and visualizing. These materials also provide explicit scaffolds for multilingual learners, such as simplified prompts, sentence frames, gestures, role-play, and drawing. These supports reflect universal design principles that benefit all students by clarifying meaning, supporting oral language use, and reinforcing comprehension through multiple modalities.

CHALLENGES

One area where reviewers sought further clarification was Benchmark Advance's treatment of digraphs. In the visual cards used as part of the program's blending routines, digraphs are represented as two separate letters rather than single grapheme units. Reviewers recommended either incorporating grapheme cards that present digraphs as single sounds (e.g., /th/) or, if the current approach is intentional, providing an explanation in the teacher materials. Clarifying the rationale behind this design choice would help teachers understand the instructional reasoning and ensure consistent implementation.

Another area where reviewers sought further clarification from Benchmark Advance is the use of teacher prompts. While the curriculum's professional development video resources make it clear that the phrase "Does that make sense?" refers to comprehension rather than decoding, reviewers noted that adding a short note or an asterisk within teacher-facing materials could prevent misinterpretation and ensure consistent application in classrooms.

While Benchmark Advance generally integrates reading and writing activities, the curriculum misses some opportunities to more fully connect writing with language comprehension. In certain cases, tasks feel disconnected. For instance, students may read about one topic but write about another, limiting the potential to reinforce knowledge and vocabulary through the reading and writing connection. An example of this is in Grade 3, Unit 10, where students are asked to write poetry (Haiku) while they learn about force and interaction. Brainstorming during the initial writing lessons involves generating ideas connected to nature, which is disconnected from what they are reading about.

While very comprehensive, Benchmark Advance may feel overwhelming for new teachers or challenging to implement fully within limited instructional time. However, the team noted that this is not unique to Benchmark Advance and may arise with any comprehensive curriculum that requires teachers to balance depth and instructional pacing.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE

Benchmark Advance, Grades K–5 (2026)

PUBLISHER RESPONSE

We appreciate The Reading League's thoughtful review and recognition of Benchmark Advance's alignment with the science of reading and evidence-based literacy practices. We value the time, expertise, and professionalism dedicated to the evaluation. The review demonstrates how Benchmark Advance "met" the criteria in all but one area.

CRITERIA MET

- Word Recognition
- Phonological & Phoneme Awareness
- Phonics & Phonic Decoding
- Language Comprehension
- Background Knowledge
- Verbal Reasoning
- Fluency
- Writing
- Vocabulary
- Reading Comprehension
- Language Structures
- Handwriting
- Assessment (mostly met)

The evaluation identifies key program features that consistently reflect high-quality instructional practices reflected in The Reading League's Curriculum Rubric. Following are some key highlights from the report.

Word Recognition

- Reviewers praised the student-facing videos provided for each high-frequency word, describing them as exemplary models of practice.
- Clearly structured scope and sequence, along with weekly spiral review and cumulative practice opportunities.

- Taught explicitly with a strong emphasis on phoneme-level skills. Phoneme awareness is taught as a foundational reading skill and carefully assessed and monitored throughout the early grades.
- Lessons provide clear modeling of sound-symbol correspondences, blending and segmenting routines, and application in both reading and writing.

- Instruction provides explicit and systematic teaching of letter-sound correspondences, and lessons are carefully sequenced and reinforced with oral practice and application in decoding and encoding tasks.
- Phonics routines connect decoding and encoding with writing and language practice, linking spelling patterns to authentic reading and writing activities.

Fluency

- Fluency instruction prioritizes oral practice, modeling, and teacher feedback.
- Lessons incorporate choral reading, partner reading, and guided oral practice to ensure students develop automaticity while maintaining comprehension.

- Alignment with Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and the LETRS lesson plan template is a notable strength of the program because it directly connects daily instruction to research-based practices.
- Vocabulary instruction is embedded within rich, text-based lessons with Tier 2 words taught explicitly, practiced across modalities, and reinforced over time.

- Clear and consistent direct instruction in handwriting and integrates practice within authentic reading and writing contexts.
- Writing instruction is integrated with reading, prompts are tied directly to anchor texts and unit topics, requiring students to cite evidence, summarize, and extend understanding of what they have read.

- Weekly and Unit Assessments provide percentage bands that reflect student mastery of standards and skills.
- Includes Foundational Skill Screener as well as skill-area specific Quick Checks.

Benchmark Education Company extends its sincere appreciation to The Reading League for its thorough review of Benchmark Advance and the important work The Reading League continues to do in supporting educators and improving literacy outcomes for all students. We also remain committed to continuous improvement and innovation to ensure educators have access to comprehensive, high-quality resources.