The Reading League

Curriculum Navigation Report

Expeditionary Learning (EL) Language Arts Curriculum (2017) for Grades K-5

REPORT 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."*

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

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

- Word Recognition
- Language Comprehension
- Reading Comprehension
- Writing
- Assessment
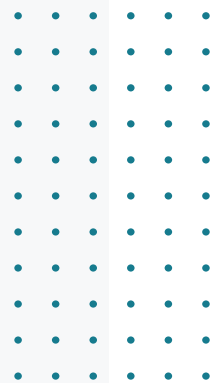
The CEGs have been used by educators, building and district leaders, local education agencies (LEAs), and state education agencies (SEAs) as a primary tool to find evidence of red flags or practices that may interfere with the development of skilled reading. This report was generated after a

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review of the curriculum using the March 2023 *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines*, which have been refined based on feedback, a lengthy pilot review, and an inter-rater reliability study.

While the CEGs have been useful for schools and districts for informing curricular and instructional decision-making, The Reading League recognized the challenge of school-based teams that might not have the capacity for an in-depth review process. Expert review teams engaged in a large-scale review of the most widely-used curricula in the United States in order to develop these Curriculum Navigation Reports.

As you read through the findings of this report, remember that red flags will be present for all curricula as there is no perfect curriculum. The intent of this report is not to provide a recommendation, but rather to provide information to curriculum decision makers to support their efforts in selecting, using, and refining instructional materials to ensure they align with findings from the science of reading.

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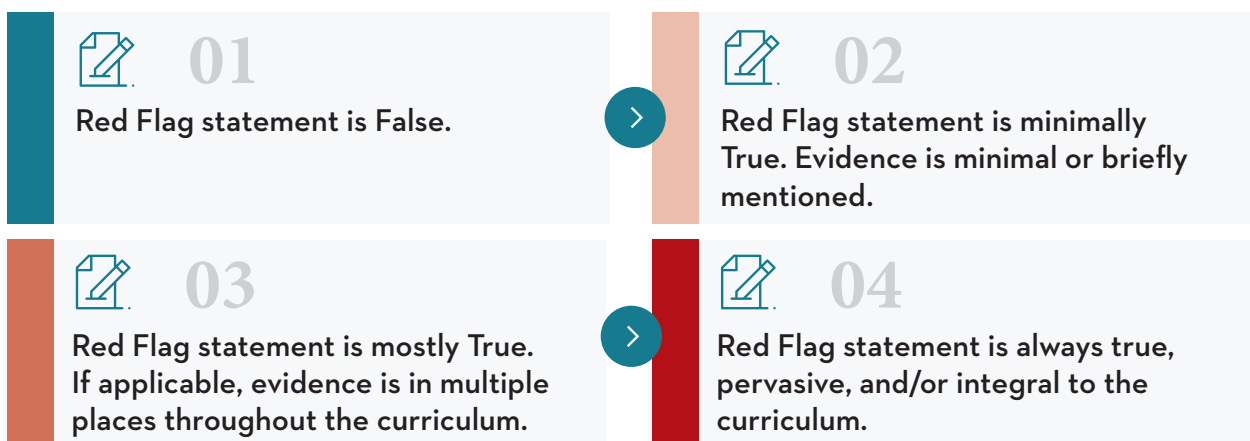
CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION

The following pages feature the review of Expeditionary Learning (EL) Language Arts Curriculum (2017) for Grades K-5. This curriculum, created by educators, is designed to help students achieve college and career-ready standards and offers access to high-quality texts, including literature, non-fiction, and primary sources. The EL Curriculum works to build both student skills and content knowledge in order to help them become confident and competent learners. Content knowledge acquisition is based on authentic and compelling topics related to science, social studies, or literature.

For this report, reviewers closely examined the Language Arts Curriculum for Grades K-5. For specifics connected to word recognition, reviewers utilized the Foundational Skills Block and K-2 materials for gathering evidence. For language comprehension, the team appraised the general lesson directions included within the K-5 curriculum modules. Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and associated terminology, as well as high-quality instructional materials. Once selected, they were assigned to teams of at least three reviewers. The team met regularly to establish reliability in their individual scores and report their findings.

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

01 Red Flag statement is False.	**02** Red Flag statement is minimally True. Evidence is minimal or briefly mentioned.
03 Red Flag statement is mostly True. If applicable, evidence is in multiple places throughout the curriculum.	**04** Red Flag statement is always true, pervasive, and/or integral to the curriculum.

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

FINDINGS:

Components Supporting Word Recognition

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

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

WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES	SCORE
1.1: Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).	2
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

Expeditionary Learning's word recognition non-negotiables are **"somewhat met."** The curriculum does provide a systematic scope and sequence of skills that progress from simple to complex as well as adequate opportunities for practicing decoding and encoding skills. Reviewers noted that the Foundational Skills Block explicitly teaches and assesses the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Reading Foundational Skills and Language Arts standards associated with spelling and letter formation. Students are taught to look at visual cues, or letters and spelling patterns (rather than picture clues) when encountering an unknown word. Furthermore, the Foundational Skills Resource Manual (K-2) specifically states that there is no time set aside for "traditional guided reading," including the use of the three-cueing system. However, the review team found references to all three cueing systems within the Reader's Toolbox, and after the visual cueing system is sufficiently introduced to the whole class, the three-cueing system is introduced as a way to differentiate small group instruction. Additionally, there were places within lessons where teachers were instructed to make use of contextual clues to assist students in pronouncing specific words. For example, during Work Time A in ELA G1:S1:C3:L17, *Setting a Purpose: From Engagement Text to Decodables,* the use of contextual clues is used to help students make sense of how to pronounce the word "look." In this example, students are prompted to notice how the double "o" in "look" resembles the shape of our two eyes and how to then use this association as a reminder.

Regarding the remaining red flag criteria, the reviewers did not find any evidence of whole-word memorization without the use of sound-symbol correspondences. However, it was noted that the approach to teaching "sight words" was unclear. In kindergarten, EL's curriculum refers to sight words as "mystery words" and students practice finding them in text. Learners then participate in some analysis in terms of the number of letters and some sound work. For example, in ELA GK:C18:L93, students complete some analysis with the sight words "with" and "will" which are decodable. When they get to the word "are," the curriculum prompts the teacher to say, "This mystery word has three letters in it. In some of the sentences, it starts with an uppercase letter, and in some, it starts with a lowercase letter. This mystery word has two vowels in it, but neither vowel makes the sound you would expect to hear!" After reading this, teachers acknowledge the mystery word is "are."

In Grade 1, the curriculum replaces the term "mystery words" with "high frequency words." This is described in ELA G1:S1:C2 as "words

that occur most frequently in written material and do not follow phonetic rules or...don't play fair. The curriculum provides five activities for each day of the week that teachers or parents can use to provide practice with high-frequency words. These include:

- Read it, say it, write it, and read it again

- Use high-frequency words in sentences (oral and written)

- Read a list of high-frequency words and time yourself on fluency (keep a running list)

- Search for high-frequency words in sentences/poems and underline them

- Fishing for high-frequency words (one person reads the word aloud, other students find the word in a stack of other high-frequency words)

In Grade 2, the curriculum shifts to the analysis of high-frequency words as "snap" (decodable-regularly spelled) or "trap" (irregularly spelled) words as highlighted in the lesson ELA G2:S1:C4:L19, *Fluency*.

1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS	SCORE
1.7: Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) without moving to the phoneme level (e.g., blends such as /t/ /r/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds).	1
1.8: Instruction is focused on letters only without explicit instruction and practice with the phonemes that letters represent.	1
1.9: Phoneme awareness is not taught as a foundational reading skill.	1
1.10: Phonological and phoneme awareness is not assessed or monitored.	2

Expeditionary Learning's phonological and phoneme awareness practices are **"somewhat met."** Although phoneme awareness is taught daily and instruction moves from larger units of phonological awareness (syllable, rhyme, onset-rime) to the phoneme level in a swift manner, reviewers were unable to find a clear progression of these skills in the grade-level scope and sequences provided in the foundational skills materials. The lack of information regarding which skills are taught at what point makes it difficult to determine if phoneme awareness is considered a skill to be mastered or more of a warm-up activity. Moreover, benchmark assessments for phoneme awareness were optional, and there were limited practice opportunities. Finally, while practice with blends is included, explicit direction of how to apply this skill is typically used with clearer phoneme patterns. For example, Work Time A in ELA G1:S2:C7:L36, *Chaining*, practice with blends focuses on common beginning consonant blends including "l blends" (fly) and "r blends" (cry). Students would still require instruction and practice with more complex combinations like three-letter blends (scrap, strong), blends with digraphs (thrash, shrimp), and final consonant blends (sing, hunt, nest, prank).

1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

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

RED FLAGS 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.	2
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

Expeditionary Learning's phonics and phonic decoding practices are **"mostly met."** Reviewers found that explicit instruction in decoding is emphasized and that students use controlled text to apply and practice their decoding skills. However, the Readers' Toolbox Routine, located within the Skills Block Resource Guide, does include the use of the three-cueing system, which is introduced once teachers have sufficiently "focused on the visual system" in the whole group setting (pg. 6). Students work towards the long term target of, "I can use different tools from my Reader's Toolbox to read words I don't know in a text" (pg. 19). These proposed tools include:

• Look at the pictures(s)	•Use background knowledge
• Look at the sentence (syntax; what would sound right in the sentence)	• Analogy (does it look like a word you know?)

Teachers are also encouraged to recreate The Readers' Toolbox Routine as an anchor chart to display in the classroom for students' reference.

Additionally, the curriculum features some letter sound cards with problematic key images. For example, the keywords for "a" and "u" are *alligator* and *umbrella*. These keywords make it challenging to ensure that sounds are pronounced purely. Furthermore, some of the images featured are unfamiliar or easily confused. For instance, "i" is associated with the keyword/image *iguana*, while "n" is associated with the keyword/image *newt*. Both of the images, however, look like a lizard which may confuse younger learners. Additionally, the keyword for "t" is *tern*, a type of seabird. While this term may be recognizable to some students by region, it may not be widely known by students in grades K-2.

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.	2
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

Expeditionary Learning's fluency practices are **"mostly met."** Fluency instruction provides students with instances of teacher-led modeling and ample opportunities for student oral reading practice with feedback to ensure accuracy and automaticity. Fluency is practiced with both narrative and expository/informational text. One weakness noted by the reviewers is isolated word fluency. Individual words are primarily practiced through blending activities during the decoding portion of the lesson with support from the teacher. During dictation, the teacher practices each word with students before they write independently "from memory." High frequency words are analyzed and practiced in several lessons, but not necessarily as a fluency activity. For example, in ELA G2:S1:C3:L14, *Fluency*, students begin the lesson by sorting "snap or trap" words before reading decodable text. In this activity, "snap words" are high frequency words that should be recognized instantaneously or in a "snap," while "trap words" are high frequency words that are irregularly spelled and can "trap." While students are tasked to sort words into their corresponding categories, this functions more as an identification and analysis activity rather than one focused on high frequency word fluency. While differentiated center activities are also used to practice word-level fluency, there is minimal evidence available to support their effectiveness. Finally, the curriculum does include both word-level and longer, passage-level fluency assessments; however, the word reading portion features real words only and does not include a measure of speed or automaticity.

FINDINGS:

Components Supporting Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing

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

This section begins with a review of non-negotiable elements for language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing before moving on to the language comprehension strands highlighted in Scarborough's (2001) reading rope. Therefore, 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 questioning skills.	1

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's non-negotiables were **"met."** Each module is built with an expectation of the 4T's: Topic, Text, Targets, and Task. This structure provides a solid framework for the delivery of explicit instructional practices. The curriculum features daily, structured, teacher-directed lessons with limited opportunities for student choice and implicit or incidental learning. When choice is offered, it is provided within an appropriate context (e.g. student selection for reading research topics). Additionally, complex texts are utilized for anchor texts as highlighted in their *Trade Book and Resource Procurement List*. This list features high quality literary and informational anchor texts to be used with students.

Through these texts, learners are exposed to rich vocabulary and offered multiple opportunities for deep processing through varied learning activities. For example, in ELA G2:M3:U1:L2, *Discovering our Topic: Sorting Materials Related to Plants*, students are introduced to vocabulary related to the stages of plant growth and their corresponding parts. Students first engage in a mystery bag activity where they describe the mystery object (e.g., seeds, flowers, plants, fruits, and vegetables) inside. This is followed by an open sorting activity where students group various pictures of plant life based on its attributes. This activity taps into students' ability to understand and name the characteristics of an item, in this case, plants.

EL's curriculum also provides exposure to complex syntax through Language Dives that feature more complex sentence structures and encourage the teacher and students "to have a conversation about the meaning, purpose, and structure of a compelling sentence from a complex text, or from a learning target, checklist, or rubric included in the curriculum" (Language Dives, p. 1). For example, in ELA G4:M3:U3:L5, *Writing Opinion Texts: Analyzing a Model*, students engage in a language dive to understand how opinion sentences can be enhanced through the use of linking words and prepositional phrases. In this lesson, students follow the deconstruct-reconstruct-practice routine to analyze a sample opinion text, "Violence is

Not the Answer." Models of exemplar texts are often used for analyzing and supporting writing instruction and students engage in writing activities tied to information from the texts they read in class. This is demonstrated in ELA GK: M4:U2:L7, where student opinion writing is directly tied to the text they are reading and learning about in class, *Mama Miti*, by Donna Jo Napoli.

Comprehension activities support the process of comprehending texts. Starting in kindergarten, questioning is open-ended and directs students back to the text to find evidence to support their ideas. The questions featured also emphasize a deeper understanding of the characters' and authors' purposes. In ELA G5:M2:U1:L11, *Web Research: What Can We Do to Help the Rainforest*, students gather information from print and digital sources to answer the query. Students summarize their research by collecting relevant quotes and citations and the focus of this end-of-unit assessment is to assess their abilities to summarize, a skill targeted throughout the unit. Another example is the mid-unit assessment in ELA G4:M1:U1:L8: *Analyzing Poetry: Pages 42-45 of Love That Dog and "Love That Boy."* Here students summarize a poem and then compare poetry and prose. The featured rubric and evaluation criteria are tied to the characteristics of poetry (e.g., structure, rhyme and meter, imagery, repetition), not content.

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

Expeditionary Learning's background knowledge practices are **"mostly met."** As mentioned previously, Expeditionary Learning's text selection includes high quality literary and informational texts. Read-aloud opportunities (for students who are still learning to decode) and text reading opportunities (for students who are automatic with decoding) feature a variety of diverse, complex texts to develop background knowledge and vocabulary in a variety of subject areas. Additionally, opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge are present throughout the curriculum. For example, in ELA GK: M2, *Learning Through Science and Story: Weather Wonders,* kindergarten students are asked to relate weather information from texts read in class to their lives in order to create descriptors for varying types of weather. Another example noted by reviewers was in ELA G3:M3:U1:L2, *Reading for the Gist: Peter Pan: The Author and Historical Context.* In this lesson, students use the Literary Classics anchor chart to refresh their knowledge about this genre and then bring in an example of a literary classic from home.

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.	2
2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	1
2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.	2

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's practices for verbal reasoning were **"mostly met."** Expeditionary Learning's vocabulary instruction includes opportunities for rich conversations about targeted terminology and vocabulary knowledge is built through the context of texts read. The program allows for optimal exposure to both Tier 2 vocabulary (sophisticated words common across many academic texts), and Tier 3 vocabulary (discipline-specific words). However, despite opportunities to learn both Tiers of vocabulary words, most student exposure to Tier 2 words was through Interactive Word Wall work. While the Interactive Word Wall promotes the use of quick, daily activities to engage students in interactions around words (e.g., categorize and classify, compare and contrast, concept mapping, etc.), its explicit instruction of targeted terms is limited. Reviewers also noted that while some explicit instruction in morphology takes place within the skills block and is embedded within the curriculum, the team could not locate a separate, stand-alone scope and sequence of morphological skills.

2D: Language Structures

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE STRUCTURES	SCORE
2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	2
2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	2
2.20: Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.	1

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's practices for language structures were **"mostly met."** While language structures are addressed across grade levels and within the modules, units, lessons, and assessments to ensure student mastery of skills, reviewers made note of the following red flags. Similar to morphology, the scope and sequence provided for instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, and the team was unable to locate a separate, stand-alone document. Additionally, there is limited direct, explicit instruction around sentence-level skills. As mentioned previously, Language Dives are included as a part of the Close Read Aloud Lessons. During these activities, the teacher guides students through the use of prompts and questioning, but there is minimal teacher modeling/think-aloud or explicit instruction on how to deconstruct sentences. Reviewers noted that the Language Dives activities seem more inquiry-based rather than direct and explicit instruction. Students do, however, learn to work with the parts of speech, phrases, clauses, and sentences, within the context of what they are reading and writing about. For example, in ELA G2:M3:U3:L3, *Speaking, Writing, and Drawing: Adding to Our Oral Presentation Notes and Scientific Drawings and Captions*, students are asked to revise their scientific captions by adding adjectives and adverbs to make them more descriptive. Another example can be found in ELA G5:M2:U3:L9, *End of Unit 3 Assessment (Part 1): Conjunctions, Interjections, and Prepositions*. Here students are tasked to identify conjunctions, interjections, and prepositions and their purpose within the context of given sentences. This was preceded by instances of direct, explicit instruction in the function of these parts of speech and taught with the intent of students then using them to write their narrative. Finally, while the Language Dives do feature minimal direct teacher instruction, they do offer students the opportunity to analyze language and engage in a variety of activities including word sorts and identification tasks based on the job or function of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences taken from texts read in class.

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

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's practices for verbal reasoning were **"met."** Inferencing was taught across grades, modules, units, lessons, and assessments. One example of note was in Grade 3 where students are instructed in the definition of what an inference is and then prompted to make their own using the Infer the Topic Protocol. This tool "offers students a chance to work together to uncover the heart of a larger concept before they begin to study a new topic" (Management in the Active Classroom, pg. 132). Students practice observing various resources (photographs, illustrations, artifacts, etc.) connected to the topic and use "I notice" or "I wonder" language to list details and then infer the topic. It is important to note, however, that despite the use of probing and questioning, examples of direct, explicit instruction and instances of teacher modeling of inference-making were limited.

2F: Literacy Knowledge

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

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGEG	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.	2

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's practices for Literacy Knowledge were **"mostly met."** The curriculum features explicit instruction in a variety of genres including literary, poetry, informational/expository, and opinion/argument. Knowledge of genre is reinforced during writing instruction where students are explicitly taught to write for varying purposes and audiences as well as use the aligned signal words. Reviewers did note that instruction and practice with signal words was not as strong during the reading comprehension block.

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

Reviewers found that Expeditionary Learning's practices for reading comprehension were **"met."** Before children are able to read independently, the foundation for reading comprehension is built through rich read-aloud experiences. For example, in ELA GK:M4:U1:L3, *Reading, Asking Questions, And Writing: A Tree for Emmy and Enjoying Trees Journal*, kindergarten students make meaning of a poem, "The Many Meanings of Words." which is read aloud by the teacher. Then during the close read-aloud of *A Tree for Emmy*, students answer questions connected to story character(s), setting, and major events. Another example can be seen in ELA G2:M1:U1:L4, *Focused Read Aloud*. Here students participate in a read aloud of the story, *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds. In this lesson, students are asked about story setting, key events, and character feelings/development. Students are presented with complex texts for reading comprehension that are not predictable or leveled.

Expeditionary Learning's curriculum also includes sufficiently complex literary and knowledge-building informational texts to help build students' world knowledge. Each module presented includes a text set that aligns to a specific topic. For example, the related text set in ELA G2:M1, *Learning through Science and Story: Fossils Tell of Earth's Changes*, includes the following titles connected to the study of fossils and paleontology:

Curious About Fossils, by Kate Waters

Fossils, by Ann O Squire

Paleontology: The Study of Prehistoric Life, by Susan Heinrichs Gray

Stone Girl, Bone Girl, by Laurence Anholt

The Dog That Dug for Dinosaurs, by Shirley Raye Redmond

Fossils Tell of Long Ago, by Aliki Brandenberg

When students are asked to read independently, independent reading is primarily emphasized through research on a topic and "fluency experts" work (found in Grades 1 and 3). When researching a topic, students demonstrate comprehension by writing in their independent reading journal. "Fluency experts" is one of the rotation of partner activities during the skills blocks. During this time, students are placed into groups based on Ehri's phases of word learning. Overall, the team found that Expeditionary Learning's curriculum does not emphasize independent book selection for pleasure reading and independent reading is tied to a specific task.

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

Expeditionary Learning's practices for handwriting instruction were **"met.'** First, explicit instruction related to handwriting (e.g., letter formation, posture, grip) is present throughout the curriculum as well as opportunities for cumulative practice. *The Letter Formation Guidance* document provides educators with step-by-step guidance on the formation of lowercase and uppercase letters. Additionally, EL's curriculum includes its own lined handwriting paper to guide students' letter formation. To describe the top, middle, bottom, and lowest line of the paper, students are taught to use the language of "head line," "belly line," "feet line," and "tail line" (K-2 Skills Block Resource Manual, 2016; pg. 32). For example, in ELA GK: S1:C1:L3, *Setting Purpose: Words and Handwriting*, students warmup for the lesson by skywriting curved and straight lines, before an introduction to the handwriting paper is provided by the teacher. Here students are taught to reference the various types of lines on the page using the language described above. Then in ELA GK:S1:C4:L22: *Getting to Know Letters (Part Two)*, students practice writing the lowercase letter "m" using their handwriting paper. The lesson includes explicit directions on how to form this letter and the use of the language of "belly line" to begin letter formation. Letters chosen for writing follow the sequence of letters introduced for letter recognition, which are highlighted during reading comprehension, and then used for writing.

4B: Writing — Spelling

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

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

Expeditionary Learning's practices for spelling were **"met."** Reviewers found that spelling instruction is explicit in nature, and while there isn't a separate scope and sequence for spelling, encoding instruction is directly tied to each grade level's phonics scope and sequence document. In fact, EL's Guidance Document states that within the curriculum, "decoding and encoding go hand-in-hand, each skill strengthening the other. The ability to write the letters that represent sounds in words helps the writer commit the pronunciation of the word to memory (p. xii)." Additionally, these spelling-sound patterns are then reinforced in the decodable texts that students read. The team also found evidence that the curriculum follows a systematic progression and uses both phoneme segmentation and phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.

Spelling is taught through a variety of methods including word building, word sorts, working with word parts, chaining, segmenting, and through dictation practice embedded in lessons. For example, in a lesson that features r-controlled vowels, specifically -ir, students work to spell the word "bird". First, the teacher asks students to repeat and "stretch out the word" by pronouncing each phoneme. Learners then use the sound board, a support document that includes a horizontal row of three boxes on one side and four on the other, to show where each sound would go by pointing. Finally, students write the letter(s) for each sound. During this lesson, the teacher explains that /ir/ is written in the same box because it is an r-controlled vowel. The teacher then provides students with an opportunity for practice by offering learners 4-5 additional words with similar r-controlled 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	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.	2
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

Expeditionary Learning's practices for composition were **"mostly met."** The curriculum includes strong protocols and routines that provide for oral rehearsal of ideas. Time for planning and brainstorming is incorporated into the writing launch of targeted lessons. For example, in ELA G1:M1:U3:L1, after reading *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires, students use the *Pinky Partners* protocol to brainstorm ideas for making their own magnificent thing. Writing instruction is also structured and includes the frequent use of models and graphic organizers to support both composition and executive functioning. Teacher modeling is typically included in the initial lessons of the program's writing units and scaffolds and supports are provided to meet students at varying levels of ability. In the lesson, ELA G1:M1. U2:L1, which precedes the lesson mentioned above, the teacher models each aspect of the writing process within whole group shared writing before releasing students to complete the task in a collaborative group with their peers. Thus, writing is taught explicitly through a gradual release of responsibility. The reviewers noted that for extended writing and performance task creation, students analyze models, evaluate them in accordance with the evaluation criteria provided on corresponding rubrics, and then use them as reference points as they write. The curriculum includes an extensive collection of graphic organizers for student reference and support.

While conventions of print, grammar, and syntax (i.e., sentence structure) are taught explicitly in the context of the program's Language Dives, there is no separate scope and sequence for these skills. As noted in the Language Structures section, this is problematic for a few reasons. First, during the Language Dives activities, the teacher guides students through the use of prompts and questioning; however, the use of teacher modeling/think-aloud or explicit instruction on how to deconstruct sentences is minimal. Second, the reviewers noted that the scope and sequence for syntax was not fully fleshed out, leaving a more complete document to be desired. A fully envisioned scope and sequence of grammar and syntax would empower educators by providing a structured framework for teacher planning, a sequence in which the progression of student skills is taught, opportunities for differentiation, and assessment.

In regard to the development of writing macrostructure skills, like text type and genre, Expeditionary Learning's curriculum offers instruction in a variety of text types including narrative, poetry, informational/expository, literary analysis, and opinion/argument. The table below offers a sampling of the writing genres taught, including:

LESSON	LESSON DESCRIPTION
NARRATIVE	
ELA G1:M2:U3	Students write a narrative poem about the sun.
ELA G2:M2:U3	Students write a narrative about becoming a paleontologist.
ELA G3:M2:U3	Students write a pourquoi tale.
ELA G4M2U3	Students write a "Choose Your Own Adventure" story.
ELA G5:M2:U3	Students write their own rainforest adventure ebook.
INFORMATIONAL/EXPOSITORY	
ELA G1:M1:U3	Students write an informative text about their "Magnificent Thing" that fills a need for their classroom.
ELA G2:M3:U3	Students write an informative scientific text about a pollinator.
ELA G3:M2:U3	Students write an Informational text on frog adaptations.
ELA G4:M2:U2	Students write an informative essay about their expert group animal's physical characteristics, habitat, predators, and defense mechanisms.
ELA G5:M4:U3	Students write and record a public service announcement (PSA) explaining how to stay safe during a natural disaster.
OPINION/ARGUMENT	
ELA G1:M4:U2	Students engage in opinion writing about Pale Male's nest, a red-tailed hawk that made his home on the side of an apartment building in New York City.
ELA G2:M4:U2	Students draft an opinion piece about why butterflies are important to plants and animals.
ELA G3:M4:U3	Students write an opinion essay about the importance of water conservation.
ELA G4:M3:U2	Students write an opinion piece from the Patriot perspective, outlining reasons colonists should join the Patriot cause.
ELA G5:M4:U3	Students write an opinion essay about the personal items they would include in their emergency preparedness kit.

EL's curriculum capitalizes on the reading-writing connection and integrates reading and writing instruction. Writing tasks are aligned to topics featured within the reading portion of the lessons. Additionally, writing skills are taught and analyzed during reading of module texts with application for writing in mind.

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

Expeditionary Learning's practices for assessment were **"mostly met."** The program's Skills Block is comprised of multiple assessment measures including phonological awareness, phonics, spelling of both real decodable and high-frequency words, sentence dictation, and optional fluency. Furthermore, module assessments evaluate comprehension through both oral and written responses.

EL's curriculum uses benchmark assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to assess letter recognition, letter sound identification, phonological awareness (optional), spelling, decoding, and fluency (optional). These Skills Block assessments place students into Linnea Ehri's word reading phases: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, or consolidated alphabetic (EL Resource Manual, 2017). Each phase is then divided into "microphases" distinguished as "early," "middle," or "late" (EL Resource Manual, 2017). Educators are expected to score and analyze these assessments to determine students' placement. The program's miscue analysis considers errors related to tracking, lack of monitoring, letter confusion, word guessing/substitution, and lack of spelling pattern knowledge. This process offers educators the ability to be diagnostic and prescriptive if they have a solid understanding of both Ehri's phases and their respective microphases. And again, while the module assessments evaluate comprehension, reviewers reported that these measures give limited guidance on next steps if a student does not attain mastery. Furthermore, the curriculum makes several references to "annotate student behavior" as a part of the assessment process; however, reviewers were unable to find specific information on what these annotations should include.

Reviewers reported that students' decoding and encoding skills are assessed at the end of each foundational skills cycle. This includes real words made up of previously taught letter-sound correspondences as well as taught high-frequency words. There is some instruction and assessment in nonsense words (called "silly words") in the last lesson of every cycle. During this lesson, teachers must generate their own nonsense words. The reviewers also noted that some lessons' decoding assessments include both real and nonsense words; however, this is not consistent across the program. Reviewers noted that phoneme awareness and oral reading fluency are not prioritized in the benchmark battery as they are listed as optional measures. The fluency benchmark is also assessed using a fluency rubric rather than a words per minute score making it somewhat subjective. Finally, the fluency battery offers "suggested" questions for the teacher to "check for comprehension" (EL Resource Manual, 2017; pg. 94). However, this is the only time comprehension is addressed in the benchmark testing.

Comprehension is mostly addressed through assessments built into each ELA module. In Grades K-2, the Language Arts Curriculum has one standards-based assessment built in, while Grades 3-5 have two standards-based assessments, one mid-unit and another at the end. In all grades (K-5), there is an additional "performance task" in which students show what they know in writing. These module assessments include components that assess vocabulary, syntax, and even some foundational skills (like rhyming and fluency). Listening comprehension is assessed in the Module Assessments in Grades K-2; however, the reviewers reported that they found limited examples of intentional listening comprehension assessment in Grades 3-5. One example, found in G4:M4, includes a video that students listen to and are then asked to identify key ideas; however, in this same assessment, learners also have to read a passage and respond using both the video and the text.

Finally, EL's curriculum does not include materials to assess Multilingual Learners in their home language. The team was not able to find any evidence in the *Resource Manual* or in the *Supporting English Language Learners* document. Educators must look to outside assessment tools to ensure that Multilingual Learners are assessed in this manner. However, reviewers noted that this would most likely be the case with most core curricula.

FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

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

STRENGTHS

Expeditionary Learning's curriculum provides direct, explicit instruction in many of its language comprehension and writing lessons.

Expeditionary Learning places a heavy emphasis on the reading-writing connection, which evidence shows enhances both student reading comprehension and writing.

Expeditionary Learning offers students exposure to many different types of reading genres, which is used to capitalize on the reading-writing connection during writing lessons.

Expeditionary Learning provides learners with diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.

Lower-order skills, like spelling and handwriting, are emphasized as fundamental skills, which support higher-order composition work.

CHALLENGES

While Expeditionary Learning's curriculum states there is no time set aside for "traditional guided reading," the program makes references to all three cueing systems within the Reader's Toolbox, and after the visual cueing system is sufficiently introduced to the whole class, the three-cueing system is introduced as a way to differentiate small group instruction.

Assessments for phonological awareness and fluency are optional. Additionally, fluency is assessed via a rubric instead of a words per minute (WPM) score.

The curriculum features a few examples of letter sound cards with key images that may be confusing and/or problematic for some learners.

While some explicit instruction in morphology takes place within the skills block and is embedded within the curriculum, the team could not find a separate scope and sequence of morphological skills for teacher use.

Similarly, while a sequence of instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, the team was unable to locate a stand-alone document for teachers' use. Additionally, the program features limited examples of teacher modeling and explicit instruction on sentence-level comprehension skills and the Language Dives activities appear to be more centered on inquiry-based learning rather than providing clear and direct examples of instruction.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE

Expeditionary Learning (EL) Language Arts Curriculum (2017) for Grades K-5

EL Education

EL Education's Responses to The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation

Comments and Scores

The Reading League's Comment	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).	2

EL Education's Response

EL Education has always been aligned to the science of reading research which includes direct, explicit instruction in both word recognition and language comprehension skills. The EL's K–2 Skills Block focuses on the word recognition aspects of reading: phonological and phonemic awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words.

At the time Skills Block 2017 edition was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To help teachers bridge their existing instructional practices to explicit, systematic instruction, we included a routine called the Reader's Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing as a resource for small-group instruction.

EL Education revised the Reader's Toolbox Routine in 2022 to remove mention of three-cueing. The revised Reader's Toolbox routine provides instruction and practice using letter-sound correspondences, spelling patterns, and knowledge of syllable types to decode unfamiliar words, even in isolation. The routine provides direct, explicit instruction using a gradual release format that ensures students have the knowledge they need to successfully approach unknown words.

In 2020 EL wrote Decodable Reader Routines for each decodable across grades K-2 to further support teachers during differentiated small-group instruction. The Decodable Reader Routines live on EL's website and within the Cycle Planner resource, which launched in 2022.

The chapters on Skills Block in EL's 2017 Your Curriculum Companion resource have also been revised to remove any references to three-cueing.

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Word recognition non-negotiables are **"somewhat met."** 1.10: Phonological and phoneme awareness is not assessed or monitored.	2

EL Education's Response
The Skills Block curriculum includes a Benchmark Assessment that specifically assesses Phonological and Phoneme Awareness. This assessment allows teachers to gather information about the control level of mastery a student has over seven skills including rhyme production; isolating initial, medial, and ending phonemes; adding, deleting, or substituting an initial phoneme; counting and segmenting phoneme; and blending phoneme.   After administration, teachers use the Student Scoring sheet to determine which Phonological awareness skills may require additional targeted instruction. Guidance on the Scoring Sheet helps teachers identify the instructional practices in the Kindergarten curriculum that can be used for the purpose of addressing these skills in differentiated small group work. This guidance offers teachers suggestions on how to adapt existing instructional practices (such as Feel the Beats), to focus on particular sounds in words (e.g., isolating the initial sound in a word). The table also identifies some Activity Bank suggestions for use in targeted instruction during differentiated teacher-led small groups. Teachers can adapt this assessment to use for ongoing progress monitoring.

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Phonological and phoneme awareness non-negotiables proved challenging and are **"somewhat met."** 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.	2

EL Education's Response
This instruction was part of the Reader's Toolbox, which was revised in 2022. At the time Skills Block was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To be inclusive of teaching methods, we included a routine in the Reader's Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing. EL Education revised this lesson to remove mention of three-cueing and to more closely align with the science of reading.   The chapter on Skills Block in the 2017 edition of Your Curriculum Companion was also revised to remove any references to three-cueing.

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Phonics and phonic decoding non-negotiables are **"mostly met."** 1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	2
EL Education's Response	
EL's Decodable Reader Routines, originally created as part of EL Education's Flex Curriculum in 2020, include a routine where students practice reading the Words of the Week. These words contain the sound-spelling pattern(s) that are aligned with the scope and sequence. While some are also included in the controlled text of the decodable reader, there are additional words with this pattern.	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Fluency non-negotiables are **"mostly met."** 2.9: Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	2
EL Education's Response	
In ALL Block, students focus on word study and vocabulary. ALL Block includes: ● Practice with word analysis of additional words from the text ● Work with two academic words per week; practice using specific academic words in context ● Work with additional domain-specific words found in research reading and independent reading ● Word study games and activities In Module lessons, students also learn about word study and vocabulary. Module lessons include: ● Work with words emerging from complex texts related to content and words of general academic value that cut across many domains with an emphasis on morphology, syllabication, spelling ● Use of vocabulary protocols, routines, and tools to figure out the meaning of new words; ● Use of new words in writing—both domain-specific and general academic vocabulary Academic vocabulary is present in the learning target of every lesson as well and the vocabulary is often included in writing prompts which are translated into the writing itself. Learning targets are explicitly unpacked. In the 3-5 curriculum, the "Lesson Specific" Vocabulary that is part of the Vocabulary section of the teacher guide aligns with tier 2 words. The "Text-Specific" vocabulary would be closer to 'domain-specific' vocabulary.	

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Fluency non-negotiables are **"mostly met."** 2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.	2
EL Education's Response	
During ALL Block students work on grammar, usage, as well as mechanics and vocabulary. The skills build on each other and address all language standards.	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Despite opportunities to learn both Tiers of vocabulary words, most student exposure to Tier 2 words was through Interactive Word Wall work. While the Interactive Word Wall promotes the use of quick, daily activities to engage students in interactions around words, its explicit instruction of targeted terms is limited. 2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	2
EL Education's Response	
EL Education teaches explicit grammar, punctuation and spelling instruction within module lessons and in ALL Block. For example, in Grade 4, Language Standards are taught and assessed in all modules. L.4.1a is assessed in Module 4; L.4.1b is assessed in Module 3; L.4.1c and L.4.1d are assessed in Module 2. L.4.1e is assessed in Module 3; L.4.1f is assessed in Modules 1 and 3; L.4.1g is assessed in Module 3. L.4.2 standards are assessed throughout the modules. The ALL Block addresses five areas: independent reading; additional work with complex text; reading and speaking fluency/grammar, usage, and mechanics; writing practice; word study/vocabulary. If students are going to read and write successfully and proficiently, they need to read fluently (silently and orally), and speak and write competently in standard English. Practice with these literacy skills has been put together into one section of the ALL Block for two reasons: 1) convenience in scheduling, and 2) understanding the standard conventions of written English helps students read more fluently.	

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Despite opportunities to learn both Tiers of vocabulary words, most student exposure to Tier 2 words was through Interactive Word Wall work. While the Interactive Word Wall promotes the use of quick, daily activities to engage students in interactions around words, its explicit instruction of targeted terms is limited. 2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	2

EL Education's Response

The module lessons include teacher modeling and discussion prompts in the opening, work time, and closing. For example, in Grade 4 Module 1 Unit 1 Lesson 2, the following modeling and discussion prompts are provided:

> Guide students through the steps of the Think-Pair-Share protocol, leaving adequate time for each partner to think, ask the question, and share:
>
> "What happens on these pages?" (Jack begins the poetry journal, reads a poem about a red wheelbarrow, and writes a poem about a blue car.)
>
> "How does Jack feel about it? What can you infer from what he says?" (He doesn't want to write poetry, he doesn't understand the red wheelbarrow poem, and he doesn't like his poem--and perhaps he is ashamed or afraid of others seeing it.)
>
> "How do you know?" (He writes, "I don't understand the poem about the red wheelbarrow and the white chickens ..." and he writes, "I don't like it" about the blue car poem, and he asks that it not be read aloud or put on the board.)
>
> Model how to log independent reading without the prompt. Explain to students that they will log their research reading in the front of the book and choice reading in the back. Ensure students understand the difference between independent research reading (topical texts) and choice reading (any texts they want to read).

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Similar to morphology, the scope and sequence provided for instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, and the team was unable to locate a separate, stand-alone document. Additionally, there is limited direct, explicit instruction around sentence-level skills. There is minimal teacher modeling/think-aloud or explicit instruction on how to deconstruct sentences. Reviewers noted that the Language Dives activities seem more inquiry-based rather than direct and explicit instruction. 2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	2

EL Education's Response

The chosen texts are ones that all students either read themselves or hear read aloud. The text in bold is the central text for a given module: the text(s) with which students spend the most time. Recall that texts can be complex based on both qualitative and quantitative measures. Texts are listed in order from most quantitatively complex (based on Lexile® measure) to least quantitatively complex. Texts near the bottom of the list are often complex in ways not measured by the Lexile tool: meaning/purpose, text structure, language, and/or knowledge demands. Within a given module, the list shows the wide variety of texts students read, write, and speak about using evidence as they build knowledge about the topic. For a procurement list of specific texts that need to be purchased for use with the curriculum, visit our website.

Students are taught about different text structures as they read complex texts. Text structure is also assessed throughout the grades and modules. For example, in Grade 5 Module 2 Mid Unit assessment, students are assessed on text structures for informational texts. This assessment centers on CCSS ELA RI.5.2, RI.5.5, and RI.5.10. Students apply what they have learned about the structure of informational texts to read, summarize, and compare two new texts. After reading passages about the destruction of the rainforest, written in two different text structures, students create an appropriate graphic organizer, record the main ideas and details of each text, and write a concise summary. Finally, they answer selected response questions comparing the structure of the two texts.

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Non-negotiables for Literacy Knowledge were **"mostly met."** 4.19: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically.	2

EL Education's Response
When specific grammar pieces are aligned to Language Standards there will be explicit practice, but the EL approach is focused more primarily on the language features rather than having a scope and sequence 'from simple to complex.' Both GUM in ALL Block (once a Unit, usually U2) and Language Dives are the primary components that serve as our 'grammar strategies' embedded within the curriculum.

The Reading League's Comment	Score
Non-negotiables for composition were **"mostly met."** 5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed	2

EL Education's Response
The Skills Block curriculum includes a Benchmark Assessment that specifically assesses Phonological and Phoneme Awareness. This assessment allows teachers to gather information about the control a student has over specific phoneme awareness skills including isolating initial, medial, and ending phonemes; adding, deleting, or substituting an initial phoneme; counting and segmenting phoneme; and blending phoneme. After administration, teachers use the Student Scoring sheet to determine which Phonological awareness skills may require additional targeted instruction. Guidance on the Scoring Sheet helps teachers identify the instructional practices in the Kindergarten curriculum that can be used for the purpose of addressing these skills in differentiated small group work. This guidance offers teachers suggestions on how to adapt existing instructional practices (such as Feel the Beats), to focus on particular sounds in words (e.g., isolating the initial sound in a word). The table also identifies some Activity Bank suggestions for use in targeted instruction during differentiated teacher-led small groups. Teachers can adapt this assessment to use for ongoing progress monitoring. The teacher guidance for Phonological Awareness Benchmark Assessment includes administering this assessment to all Kindergartners at the beginning of the year and then repeating the administration at the middle and end of the year for students who are still working towards mastery of these skills. For first and second grades, the guidance is for teachers to first administer the Spelling Assessment. The Phonological Awareness Assessment is then given to students who score in or below the Early Partial microphase on the Spelling Assessment.

The Reading League's Comment	Score
5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	2
EL Education's Response	
No response from EL Education.	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
5.11: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	2
EL Education's Response	
In Module lessons, ALL Block, and Skills Block, students practice reading aloud to improve fluency. In Module lessons, students read aloud new and familiar excerpts of literary and informational text, and speak to audiences during planned presentations. In ALL Block, students practice reading aloud texts from module lessons; set goals and monitor progress. In Skills Block, students practice oral reading with Decodable Readers.	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	2
EL Education's Response	
RI.4, RL.4, L.4, all L standards and all SL standards are explicitly assessed for all grade levels.	

EL Education

The Reading League's Comment	Score
5.13: Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.	4
EL Education's Response	
Research tells us that multilingual learners need to be assessed at grade-level expectations, which includes being assessed in English when we're working in an English Language Arts context. (Math or science context could be a different case.) An assessment accommodation for multilingual learners could be assessment in home language, but with this accommodation, an assessment in home language would not show students' proficiency in the target content of English Language Arts (English).	

Education

Challenges

The Reading League's Challenge
While Expeditionary Learning's curriculum states there is no time set aside for "traditional guided reading," the program makes references to all three cueing systems within the Reader's Toolbox, and after the visual cueing system is sufficiently introduced to the whole class, the three-cueing system is introduced as a way to differentiate small group instruction.

EL Education's Response
At the time Skills Block 2017 edition was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To help teachers bridge their existing instructional practices to explicit, systematic instruction inclusive of teaching methods, we included a routine in the Reader's Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing as a resource for small-group instruction. EL Education revised the Reader's Toolbox Routine in 2022 to remove mention of three-cueing and to more closely align with the science of reading. To support the building of these skills, the revised Reader's Toolbox routine provides instruction and practice using letter-sound correspondences, spelling patterns, and knowledge of syllable types to decode unfamiliar words, even in isolation. The routine provides direct, explicit instruction using a gradual release format that ensures students have the knowledge they need to successfully approach unknown words. In 2020, EL wrote Decodable Reader Routines for each decodable across grades K-2 to further support teachers during differentiated small-group instruction. The Decodable Reader Routines Skills Block has also lived on EL's website and within the Cycle Planner resource, which launched in 2022. The chapters on Skills Block in EL's 2017 Your Curriculum Companion resource have also been revised to remove any references to three-cueing.

The Reading League's Challenge
While some explicit instruction in morphology takes place within the skills block and is embedded within the curriculum, the team could not find a separate scope and sequence of morphological skills for teacher use.

EL Education's Response
There is not a separate scope and sequence for morphology. Morphology is taught during ALL Block when students study GUM and vocabulary.

EL Education

The Reading League's Challenge
Similarly, while a sequence of instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, the team was unable to locate a stand-alone document for teachers' use. Additionally, the program features limited examples of teacher modeling and explicit instruction on sentence-level comprehension skills and the Language Dives activities appear to be more centered on inquiry-based learning rather than providing clear and direct examples of instruction.
EL Education's Response
One of our supports is the Language Dives which are written for MLLs only. These are strong opportunities for small group instruction before or after whole group instruction so that multilingual learners receive the additional language instruction they need to succeed in the ELA content-based literacy instruction.

In G6–8, EL Education provides a separate "Teachers Guide for English Language Learners" at each grade with complementary ELD Teaching Notes, ELD instruction, and differentiated student note-catchers for every lesson. To ensure that multilingual learners along the proficiency continuum receive appropriate support, this Teacher's Guide also includes detailed lesson-level recommendations for heavier and lighter support as well. In Grades K-5, this instruction lives in the Module Lessons Teacher Guides rather than as a separate volume.

Students deconstruct and reconstruct key sentences from the module's complex texts, then they practice using similar target language to prepare for the module assessment. Sentence Language Dives empower students to independently analyze and use academic language. This habit of mind encourages language development for multilingual learners and helps native English speakers gain deeper insight into academic English.

Students use Conversation Cues with one another to promote independent, productive, and equitable conversation, based on four goals: Goal 1: encourage all students to talk and be understood; Goal 2: listen carefully to one another and seek to understand; Goal 3: deepen thinking; and Goal 4: think with others to expand the conversation.

Teachers strategically group multilingual learners with native or proficient English speakers or by home languages. They vary groups so multilingual learners can interact with a variety of speakers in different situations. Teachers provide frequent opportunities in each lesson for groups to discuss and complete content and tasks. |