



# State-Level Guidance for The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines and Curriculum Navigation Reports

Empowering States, Districts, and Schools to  
Make Evidence-Aligned Literacy Decisions

## INTRODUCTION

Across the nation, states and districts are making critical decisions about literacy curriculum and instruction. As they navigate this process, leaders must have access to evidence-aligned resources derived directly from the body of research referred to as the science of reading.

The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (CEGs) and Curriculum Navigation Reports (CNRs) were designed to meet this need. These tools evaluate the alignment of instructional materials with evidence-based reading instruction, enabling leaders to make **informed, data-driven decisions** about literacy curricula. They are also the only resources that identify practices not aligned with the evidence, which can waste instructional time and leave students behind.

No curriculum is perfect. The goal is not to categorize or label, but to illuminate strengths and opportunities for growth, ensuring that teachers, schools, and systems are equipped with the knowledge and tools to deliver effective reading instruction grounded in scientific evidence.



## THE CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES

The CEGs serve as the foundation for evidence-aligned curriculum analysis for the following reasons:

- Derived from reading research on how children learn to read.
- The only resource that identifies “red flag” practices—those that may waste instructional time or contribute to student learning gaps.
- Unique in their transparency, as each CEG cites the research underlying its criteria, enabling review teams to deepen their understanding of evidence-aligned reading instruction.
- Distinct from other review organizations, which may recommend curricula that include unaligned (or “red flag”) practices.

By using the CEGs, states, districts, and review teams can make instructional decisions grounded in **high-quality research**, rather than trends or assumptions.

## THE CURRICULUM NAVIGATION REPORTS

Schools and districts often lack the time, capacity, or expertise to independently conduct comprehensive curriculum reviews. Additionally, many are still on their learning journey toward understanding the science of reading. To bridge this gap, The Reading League assembled expert review teams to analyze curricula using the CEGs and produce evidence-aligned reports that support informed decision-making at all levels.

The CNRs are designed to do the following:

- Serve** as the primary resource for schools, districts, and states by providing information on strengths and areas in need of support during curriculum adoption and decision-making.
- Help** educators and leaders strengthen existing programs without requiring full replacement of materials.
- Promote** teacher knowledge-building, empowering educators to recognize and adjust instructional practices based on scientific evidence.
- Provide** information on all literacy domains (i.e., word recognition, language comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, assessment, science of learning) to ensure schools are not overemphasizing one component of literacy over another.



## WHY TRUST THE CNRs

The Reading League has built a **rigorous**, **credible**, and **transparent** review process that includes the following:

A pilot study and an inter-reliability study to ensure the process is valid, reliable, and free from bias or conflicts of interest.

Highly qualified, anonymous reviewers, comprising experienced educators and nationally recognized literacy leaders with in-depth knowledge of reading research and curriculum design.

Informational reports that directly illuminate evidence-aligned practices within the nation's most widely used curricula, supporting districts and states in making their own decisions that align with their context.

Respectful dialogue with publishers, ensuring the reports are reflective of the materials, while also driving publishers to update their materials using practices in alignment with the science of reading.

Note: The CNRs **do NOT** include curricula recommendations, but instead provide the information needed for curriculum decision-makers to make informed choices.

## WHY STATES SHOULD USE THE CNRs

The CNRs provide a robust foundation for state-approved curriculum lists and literacy policy development:

Decisions about curricular materials should be unbiased and grounded in the scientific evidence on reading development; therefore, states should rely primarily on the CNRs when establishing approved curriculum lists.

By highlighting both strengths and areas needing improvement, the CNRs help states and districts identify where their existing K-5 curricula are strong and where they require attention, enabling thoughtful refinement and targeted professional development without discarding entire programs.

Using the CNRs increases educators' understanding of the science of reading and promotes curriculum adoption decisions based on student needs and research-based evidence, not marketing claims.



## HOW STATES SHOULD & SHOULD NOT USE THE CNRs

Because the CNRs are the only reports that directly compare instructional materials to evidence from the science of reading, The Reading League recommends that they serve as a primary gateway for curriculum review.

Without this level of direct comparison or the identification of red flag practices, states risk approving programs that include instructional methods shown to hinder student learning.

To maintain fidelity and accuracy, states should **avoid** practices that distort or misrepresent the intent of the CNRs.

Recommended state actions include the following:

How States Should Use the CNRs	How States Should NOT Use the CNRs
Using the CNRs as foundational documents in curriculum review and approval processes.	<b>Do NOT</b> create ranking systems or top lists based on CNR data.
Engaging with The Reading League for training, calibration, and technical assistance.	<b>Do NOT</b> apply state-developed color-coded or rating scales to summarize findings without consulting The Reading League for guidance.
Using CNR findings to guide professional learning and to inform policy and adoption decisions aligned with student literacy goals.	<b>Do NOT</b> interpret the reports or revise the language of the CEGs or CNRs without permission from The Reading League.



## SPOTLIGHT ON MICHIGAN



Michigan provides a strong model for using the CNRs effectively:

The Michigan review team consisted of Reading League-trained statewide literacy experts who were knowledgeable about the purpose and use of both the CEGs and CNRs.

CNRs were the primary gateway for curriculum review.

Publishers without a completed CNR were required to complete the CEGs independently, linking evidence from their instructional materials to support the claims.

The Michigan team also considered external evidence sources, including EdReports. This review examined the extent to which Tier 1, evidence-based, class-wide elementary reading curricula align with research on high-quality instructional materials and are designed to support student learning, teacher differentiation, and knowledge building. The team also reviewed evidence from the What Works Clearinghouse to assess whether the materials demonstrated a history of improving student outcomes.

## INFORMATION FOR STATEWIDE GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

States are recommended to include information in statewide guidance documents.

### Schools and districts should use the CNRs to do the following:

**Assess** how their current curriculum aligns with the science of reading.

**Identify** instructional gaps and areas for professional learning.

**Guide** curriculum adoption, modification, or supplemental planning.

**Foster** collaborative learning and build collective teacher knowledge about evidence-aligned literacy instruction.

How to Use Them Well	How NOT to Use Them
Approach CNRs as learning and reflection tools, not evaluation checklists.	<b>Do NOT</b> use CNRs to rank or penalize teachers, schools, or programs.
Use findings to inform professional development priorities and strengthen implementation.	<b>Do NOT</b> use them as a substitute for context-specific professional judgment.
Integrate insights into continuous improvement planning tied to student outcomes.	<b>Do NOT</b> reduce findings to oversimplified labels or scores.



## CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the heart of this work is the belief that **building teacher knowledge is the foundation for sustainable literacy improvement**. A comprehensive literacy policy must ensure that educators understand both what to teach and why it works, grounded in the body of scientifically based reading research.

## CONCLUSION

The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines and Curriculum Navigation Reports represent a groundbreaking approach to curriculum review, one rooted in transparency, research fidelity, and a commitment to equity and excellence in literacy instruction.

These tools are meant to spark reflection, learning, and improvement, rather than serve as an endpoint. By using them with integrity and collaboration, states, districts, and schools can move beyond compliance-driven decisions toward a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge-building. Together, we can ensure that every educator is equipped with the understanding and resources to deliver instruction aligned with the science of reading, so that **every** child, in every classroom, has the opportunity to become a confident and capable reader.

**State Education Agencies often partner with experts from their local Reading League Chapter.**

Reach out to your **chapter** to connect with knowledgeable thought partners for state-level work.



## IT TAKES A LEAGUE!

The Reading League is a mission-driven nonprofit ready to partner with states to ensure the process remains transparent, reliable, and aligned with the research.

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