

Advancing Literacy

Navigating the Minnesota READ Act and embracing systemic change

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Implementing the Minnesota READ Act marks a significant shift in our educational landscape, emphasizing the necessity of systemic change and the disruption of long-standing non-evidence-based practices. Historically, Minnesota has prided itself on local control, allowing districts the autonomy to tailor their approaches. However, the past year has ushered in a series of essential requirements aimed at transforming student outcomes across the state. These mandates, though challenging, are vital to advancing literacy and ensuring every student thrives.

When it comes to statewide literacy reform, there is no single "quick fix." Literacy improvement is a complex, systemic issue that involves multiple components:

- Professional Learning
- Curricula aligned to evidence-based structured literacy practices
- Valid and reliable assessments to measure student progress
- Collaboration through professional learning communities
- Sufficient time allocated to instruction
- Instructional coaching to help transfer learning to practice
- Leadership
- Utilizing a Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework (MTSS) to guide continuous improvement

This article aims to update members of the Minnesota School Boards Association on the latest developments in curricular resources and capacity-building supports designed to support this pivotal initiative.

Curricular Resources

The READ Act mandates that districts must use evidence-based curriculum and intervention materials at each grade level designed to ensure student mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Starting July 1, 2023, when a district purchases new literacy curriculum or intervention materials, they must be evidence-based as defined in section 120B.1118.

During the 2023-24 school year, CAREI and MDE partnered to evaluate 42 curricular resources to empower districts to make informed decisions in selecting a high-quality reading curriculum that is ideal for learners, educators, and the community. The curricula review process examined materials according to the following elements:

- Evidence-based or focused on structured literacy to ensure student mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and/or writing
- Culturally and linguistically responsive
- Reflects diverse populations
- Reflects the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, including multilingual learners, biliterate students, and students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

A structured rubric was developed, tested, and used to evaluate each curriculum in eight domains: (1) global, (2) phonemic awareness, (3) phonics and morphology, (4) fluency, (5) comprehension, (6) vocabulary, (7) writing, and (8) cultural responsiveness. Publishers were given a copy of the rubric and were required to submit evidence of evidence-based practices at each grade level. An initial list was released in January and included one comprehensive curriculum (covering all eight domains), three foundational skills programs (covering phonemic awareness, phonics, morphology, encoding, and fluency), and one knowledge-building curriculum (vocabulary, comprehension, and writing):

- **Comprehensive Curricula:** EL Open Up Resources, 1st edition, 2017.
- **Foundational Skills Curricula:** Magnetic Reading (2023), Curriculum Associates; UFLI Foundations (2022), Ventris Learning; and Functional Phonics + Morphology (2023), University of Minnesota.
- **Knowledge Building Curricula:** Wit and Wisdom (2023), Great Minds.

Following the initial review, publishers were offered an opportunity to resubmit additional evidence to demonstrate evidence-based practices missed during the initial review.

The initial READ Act language indicated that districts would receive partial reimbursement if they selected a curriculum from the approved list. However, in the last legislative session, changes were made to the READ Act, removing partial reimbursement for curriculum. Instead, curriculum funds were repurposed to help pay stipends for professional learning. Consequently, we are pivoting to categorize curricular resources as highly aligned, partially aligned, minimally aligned, or not aligned with evidence-based structured literacy practices. Materials part of the reconsideration process are reflected in these new categories:

- **Highly aligned:** 100% of domains were above the cut point with no significant red flags identified for the program.
- **Partially aligned:** 60-99% of the domains were above the cut point.*
- **Minimally aligned:** 34-59% of domains were above the cut point.*
- **Not aligned:** 33% or fewer of domains were above the cut point.*

While there is no longer partial reimbursement for curricular materials, districts are allowed to use READ Act Literacy Aid and/or Literacy Incentive Aid to purchase curricula identified as highly aligned. Districts are not allowed to use READ Act Literacy Aid and Literacy Incentive Aid for materials that are partially, minimally, or not aligned.

Curricula Type

- **Comprehensive (covers all 8 domains)**
  - **Highly-Aligned:** EL Education, Open Up Resources, 2017
  - **Partially Aligned:** Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA), Amplify 2022; Wonders, McGraw Hill, 2023
  - **Minimally Aligned:** Collaborative Literacy (second edition), Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2021/2023; Open Court Reading, McGraw Hill, 2023; The Superkids Reading Program, Zaner-Bloser, 2017 (publisher did not resubmit)
  - **Not Aligned:** ARC Core, American Reading Company, 2017 Edition, 2022 and 2023 Print Run (publisher did not resubmit)
- **Foundational (covers phonemic awareness, and/or phonics, and morphology, encoding, and fluency)**
  - **Highly-Aligned:** Magnetic Reading K-2, Curriculum Associates, 2023; UFLI Foundations-K-2, 2022; University of Minnesota Functional Phonics+Morphology K-5, 2023



- **Partially Aligned:** [None listed]
- **Minimally Aligned:** 95 Phonics Core Program™ (95 PCP), 2020/2023; Really Great Reading, 2015 – Countdown (K), Blast (1st), HD Word (2nd); Bridge to Reading Foundational Skills, Literacy Resources, LLC dba Heggerty, 2023
- **Not Aligned:** Ready4Reading, Scholastic, 2023; Fundations, Wilson Language Training, 2012 (publisher did not resubmit); Foundations A-Z, Learning A-Z, 2023

- **Knowledge Building (covers vocabulary, comprehension, and writing)**
  - **Highly-Aligned:** Wit & Wisdom-Great Minds, 2023
  - **Partially Aligned:** [None listed]
  - **Minimally Aligned:** [None listed]
  - **Not Aligned:** [None listed]

During the reconsideration process, the following publishers submitted full revisions of their curricula. As a result, the READ Act states that we have until March 3, 2025, to complete this comprehensive review:

- Into Reading, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), 2020
- myView Literacy, Savvas Learning Company LLC, 2025
- Benchmark Advance, Benchmark Education Company LLC, 2022
- Groves Method Literacy Curriculum for All (Foundational Skills), Groves Learning Organization (GLO), 2023
- Bridge2Read, Serve Minnesota, 2022

Cultural Responsiveness

The READ Act explicitly ensures that materials represent and reflect culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Publishers were asked to submit information on the representation of characters in materials, representation of authorship, and representation of illustrators. The curriculum review process provides a foundation for beginning this work, but it is not all-encompassing. MDE and CAREI are committed to culturally responsive education. A deeper analysis will occur in 2024-2025 to increase the level of scrutiny deserving of cultural competency and inclusivity. A Request for Proposal is being developed to contract with a third party for cultural responsiveness guidance on the curricula reviewed for evidence-based structured literacy practices. In the meantime, districts are encouraged to review the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecards developed by New York University (NYU) at https://tinyurl.com/2023crcs.

Curricular Resources

The MDE/CAREI partnership team is developing reports for each reviewed curriculum to empower districts to make informed decisions when selecting a high-quality reading curriculum ideal for their learners, educators, and community. Each reviewed curriculum will have a report that provides four levels of information:

1. **Level 1 - Domain Summary:** Highlights the strengths of the program at the domain level based on the review using the Minnesota READ Act rubric.
2. **Level 2 - Strengths and Considerations Summary:** Provides a summary analysis at the descriptor level of the strengths and considerations a

district would need to account for during implementation for each domain reviewed using the Minnesota READ Act rubric.

3. **Level 3 - Implementation Considerations:** Provides a line-item analysis of each domain's look-for weaknesses and red flags identified in the rubric by grade level that districts can use to create their implementation support plan. This may be used to develop a coaching plan focusing on the impact of instruction on student learning.
4. **Level 4 - Publisher Response (optional):** A response from the publisher regarding the review.

Links to these reports and other resources can be found on the READ Act Curricular Resources webpage at https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/READ/resources.

Plans for the 2024-25 School Year

As we move into the 2024-25 school year, the CAREI/MDE Partnership team will provide capacity-building "coaching" to the Regional Literacy Network. Each service cooperative has a literacy lead and literacy coaches that make up the network. The network will provide capacity building and coaching to districts around the state with support from CAREI. In addition, we will be reviewing intervention resources for K-12 students beginning this Fall and be releasing approved resources on a rolling basis through November of 2025.

As we navigate the implementation of the Minnesota READ Act, it is essential to recognize that systemic change in education requires commitment, collaboration, and continuous improvement. By prioritizing evidence-based practices, culturally responsive curricula, and professional learning, we can create a more equitable and effective literacy environment for all students. The journey toward literacy excellence is a shared responsibility, and through the collective efforts of educators, administrators, school board members and policymakers, we can ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed. We hope that Minnesota educators will embrace this opportunity for transformative change and work together to build a brighter future for Minnesota's learners.

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