

Recommended Core Instructional Program Guide

2023



CORE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM REVIEWS: OVERVIEW

The Virginia Literacy Act (VLA) passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2022, and expanded in 2023, focuses on improving literacy outcomes for all students in the Commonwealth. The VLA requires that “each local school board shall provide a program of literacy instruction that is aligned with science-based reading research and provides evidenced-based literacy instruction to students in kindergarten through grade eight.” To support school divisions to comply with this requirement, the VLA requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to recommend instructional programs - including core, supplemental, and intervention materials - for approval by the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE).

The first review cycle in 2022-2023 evaluated K-3 core instructional programs for alignment with evidence-based literacy instruction (EBLI)¹, science-based reading research (SBRR)² and the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). This guide provides an overview of the approved core instructional programs.

To compile this guide, VDOE partnered with Virginia Literacy Partnerships (VLP) at the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development to facilitate reviews of core instructional programs. The Core Instructional Review Process is unique to Virginia and consists of two phases, each with discrete rubrics for each grade band. Rubrics were produced by VLP and reviewed by national experts, Virginia higher education partners and Virginia educators, and posted online. Reviews were conducted by outstanding Virginia educators including administrators, reading specialists, and teachers from all eight regions. This review process was also designed to align with Virginia’s textbook adoption process. The list is the final result of a rigorous, multi-month, [process](#) to identify best-in-class K-3 core instructional programs.

VDOE, in partnership with VLP, will conduct additional review cycle(s) to evaluate core (K-5), supplemental (K-8), and intervention programs (K-8), beginning in Summer 2023, to support full implementation of the VLA by the 2024-2025 school year.

¹“Evidence-based literacy instruction” means structured instructional practices, including sequential, systematic, explicit, and cumulative teaching, that (i) are based on reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence consistent with science-based reading research; (ii) are used in core or general instruction, supplemental instruction, intervention services, and intensive intervention services; (iii) have a demonstrated record of success in adequately increasing students’ reading competency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension and in building mastery of the foundational reading skills of phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, phonics, spelling, and text reading fluency; and (iv) are able to be differentiated in order to meet the individual needs of students.

²“Science-based reading research” means research that (i) applies rigorous, systematic, and objective observational or experimental procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading and writing difficulties and (ii) explains how proficient reading and writing develop, why some children have difficulties developing key literacy skills, and how schools can best assess and instruct early literacy, including the use of evidence-based literacy instruction practices to promote reading and writing achievement.

RECOMMENDED CORE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM GUIDE: CONTENTS

Instructional program materials are one of the most important tools educators use to teach students how to read and write. Virginia is committed to ensuring all educators have high-quality instructional programs that 1) consist of EBLI, aligned with SBRR, and 2) correlate with Virginia SOLs. To this end, the Core Instructional Program Guide communicates the results of this rigorous review process to equip local Virginia educators and decision makers—those closest to students—with the information they need to select the core instructional program that will best support the literacy instruction of students in their division.

The Guide enables school divisions to begin to:

- Select and implement evidence-based literacy instruction during core instructional programming as defined in the VLA;
- Understand the strengths and challenges of each approved core curriculum to guide purchasing decision and implementation, especially when considering supplemental resources;
- Select the option that best meets the needs of their students, educators and communities; and
- Ensure compliance with the VLA by the 2024-2025 school year as required by the law.

Included in the Guide are:

1. A list of K-3 core instructional programs that Virginia educators determined to:
 - a) Consist of EBLI, aligned with SBRR; and
 - b) Correlate with Virginia SOLs.
2. A “Snapshot,” which is an overview of each approved program that summarizes the strengths and challenges of each program to help guide decision-making.

PROGRAMS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL: CYCLE I

K-2

- McGraw-Hill, Wonders, First Edition, 2023
 - ◊ Snapshot
- Open Up Resources, EL Education Language Arts Curriculum, First Edition, 2017
 - ◊ Snapshot

K-3

- Amplify Education, Inc., Core Knowledge Language Arts 2e, 2022
 - ◊ Snapshot
- Benchmark Education Company LLC, Benchmark Advance, 2022
 - ◊ Snapshot
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, HMH Into Reading Virginia, 2020
 - ◊ Snapshot
- Imagine Learning LLC, Imagine Learning EL Education, First Edition, 2019
 - ◊ Snapshot
- McGraw-Hill, Open Court Reading, First Edition, 2023
 - ◊ Snapshot
- Open Up Resources, Bookworms Reading and Writing, 2022
 - ◊ Snapshot

Wonders

First Edition

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Does Not Meet Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Provides a strong development of comprehension and background knowledge and integrates vocabulary development and writing instruction through units organized around big ideas. Students have ample opportunities to interact with vocabulary as well as writing opportunities across a variety of genres.
- Supports teachers to provide small group instruction that aligns with whole group instruction.
- Teacher materials (including a handbook, overview guide, videos, and workshops) are oriented to guide teachers to effective implementation, including step-by-step guides and consistent routines across instruction with example language for corrective feedback.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Grade 3 instructional materials did not meet expectations overall because of phonics, text reading and fluency, and small group instruction criteria. The Tier 1 program does not provide time or materials for grade 3 students to practice with decodables.
- Includes decodables, however the program also prominently features instruction with leveled texts. The leveled texts are not in alignment with the phonics scope and sequence. While the leveled texts are not accompanied by instructional procedures that encourage cueing, students may rely on picture support and patterned text to read the text, rather than letter-sound correspondence.
- Materials would be strengthened by more explicit instruction and additional practice opportunities for phonics, spelling, and high-utility words.
- Contains more resources and materials than can be reasonably completed within a regular school year. Additionally, materials provide limited guidance on how to prioritize various components of the program, requiring teachers to decide what to include and what to leave out.


THE BOTTOM LINE


Wonders provides strong instructional routines for the development of comprehension and background knowledge, vocabulary, and writing. Although phonics instruction is included, divisions should consider how to provide guidance and support for teachers to ensure that the students have sufficient practice opportunities with decodable texts and can develop firm phoneme-grapheme connections.

WONDERS

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

EL Education Language Arts Curriculum

First Edition

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Does Not Meet Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Provides explicit and systematic instruction that combines a strong phonics component in kindergarten through second grade that centers content-driven comprehension instruction that builds vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Provides resources (e.g., lesson slides, teacher notes) for teachers that support both whole group instruction and small group instruction. Small group instruction for kindergarten through third grade is well-designed and includes independent student practice opportunities while the teacher facilitates small groups.
- Provides specific instructional guidance, including teacher language, clear student definitions for vocabulary terms, stopping points for read alouds, and language for modeling comprehension skills.
- Provides high-quality, diverse trade books to build deep understanding of specific topics. Students practice reading complex text and applying comprehension strategies.
- Provides specific suggestions to help teachers support English Learners. Lessons highlight content that might be challenging for English Learners and provides differentiated scaffolds based on levels of English proficiency.
- Provides a strong sequence to build content knowledge and vocabulary. Vocabulary is explicitly taught, reviewed, and applied through discussion and writing. Students have ample opportunities to write for different purposes throughout each unit, while making connections to grade-level appropriate content knowledge and vocabulary.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Grade 3 instructional materials did not meet expectations because it does not include phonics instruction. The phonics scope and sequence in Open Up Resources EL is completed by second grade.
- Includes one decodable text per week in grades K-2. Divisions should consider providing additional practice decoding in context for these students.
- Requires 3 hours (1 hour for Skills, 1 hour for Modules, and 1 hour for Labs) to implement the full K-2 instructional program. Divisions may need to revise their school schedule to fully implement this instructional program with fidelity.
- Although teacher's guides are detailed and thorough, teaching materials are difficult to navigate and lesson information is found in many different documents. Below-level instruction uses resources from previous grades, which would require teachers additional time to gather and prepare lessons.


THE BOTTOM LINE


Open Up Resources provides a strong integrated and research-based literacy curriculum in an easy-to-use digital platform. Divisions may find it challenging to allocate the time required to implement all parts of the curriculum in Grades K-2. Additionally, the program did not meet expectations in third grade because of the lack of systematic, explicit instruction in phonics and word study that will be necessary for many students.

EL EDUCATION LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

Core Knowledge Language Arts 2e

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Provides the materials and support for teachers to implement a systematic, explicit comprehensive literacy instruction program from a carefully built format that integrates foundational skills, background knowledge, and comprehension.
- Builds content knowledge through the use of rigorous texts that center complex concepts and ideas. The program uses materials to help students engage with the grade-level concepts and provides many opportunities for students to complete questions and tasks in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- Provides teachers aligned assessments with explicit guidance to help teachers make instructional decisions to best support the needs of all their students.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Materials have more limited vocabulary support, particularly in kindergarten and first grade. Teachers may benefit from additional supports for cumulative review of vocabulary words and additional student engagement opportunities with vocabulary words.
- Phonics and word study is not as strong in third grade. While materials are available, the program lacks specific guidance and devoted practice opportunities for students needing additional foundational skills work. Divisions may consider how to strengthen instruction for students in third grade who need additional support in phonics and word study.
- The content of the knowledge-building domains may not be accessible for all students. Teachers may need additional support implementing appropriate scaffolds to ensure all students are accessing the content from the text while maintaining the text complexity.


THE BOTTOM LINE


Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is a comprehensive literacy instructional program that integrates strong content knowledge and foundational literacy skills. Divisions and schools should explore the featured content to examine if it is applicable and accessible to their student population. Additional foundational skills practice might also be necessary to support students in third grade who need more opportunities for instruction and practice.

CORE KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGE ARTS 2E

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

Benchmark Advance

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Provides good levels of support for teachers, particularly novice teachers. Much of the instructional resources and materials include teacher language and rationale. The online portal and instructional materials are intuitive and easy to navigate, offering many tutorials, videos, and resources to support effective implementation.
- Establishes a close tie between assessment data and instruction. Most Benchmark Advance assessments offer guidance on how to use data to group students, inform instructional decision-making, and guide next steps in implementation.
- Offers a sound structured literacy plan with strong connections between small and whole group instruction, detailed and realistic pacing and implementation guidelines, and assessment that drives instruction in most program areas.
- Materials incorporate opportunities for diverse populations of readers to see themselves reflected in stories, illustrations, and photos throughout the program.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Materials would be strengthened by additional supports for vocabulary and high-frequency word routines and instruction. Vocabulary routines might not provide sufficient student opportunities for practice and application of new words.
- The kindergarten program would benefit from stronger initial focus on phonological and phonemic awareness as well as letter-sound correspondence. The program provides limited guidance for teachers on corrective feedback and precise teacher language in kindergarten phonological and phonemic awareness instruction.
- As supportive and well-matched as this program is for novice teachers, veteran teachers may struggle with the lack of autonomy in selecting books and implementing unique, crafted lessons.


THE BOTTOM LINE


Benchmark Advance is a comprehensive core literacy program that offers teacher guidance and structured literacy materials for students in grades K-3. Divisions may consider how to strengthen vocabulary and high-frequency word instruction in K-3, as well as additional supports for phonological and phonemic awareness instruction in kindergarten.

BENCHMARK ADVANCE

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

HMH Into Reading Virginia

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- The scope and sequence for phonics and phonological awareness instruction is easy for teachers to locate. In addition to the scope and sequence, there are additional resources to enhance teacher understanding and implementation of phonics and phonological awareness routines.
- Content is structured with themes and topics through connected texts that support interactive discussion to expand and deepen background knowledge. The program includes resources to assist teachers in identifying texts by indicating texts that include characters and settings that represent different backgrounds/cultures as well as grade-level appropriate concepts.
- Provides a wide bank of resources for novice and veteran teachers such as literacy center guidance and printable literacy center resources. This program includes regular assessments that give teachers meaningful information and guidance to drive whole group instructional decisions, differentiate in small groups and provide additional, individualized supports based on student need.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Materials would be strengthened by additional supports for vocabulary and high-frequency word routines and instruction. Vocabulary routines do not provide ample opportunities for student practice and application of new words outside of the vocabulary lessons.
- Although the program does provide lessons for small group instruction that reinforce skills introduced during whole group instruction, the small group lessons are not consistent in focus and range, and materials may be confusing for teachers to navigate and implement


THE BOTTOM LINE


HMH Into Reading provides a strong scope and sequence for foundational skills and guidance for assessment-driven instructional decision-making. Texts are not only high-quality, but also engaging and appropriately complex. Divisions may want to consider ways in which to enrich vocabulary routines and practice and may consider a different approach to high-frequency word instruction.

HMH INTO READING VIRGINIA

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

Imagine Learning EL Education

First Edition

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Provides an explicit and systematic curriculum that combines a strong phonics component in grades K-2 with content-centered comprehension instruction that builds vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Provides many resources (e.g., lesson slides, teacher notes) for teachers that support both whole group instruction and small group instruction. Small group instruction for grades K-3 is mapped out for teachers, including the independent activities for students not occupied with the teacher during small group time.
- Provides specific instructional guidance, including teacher language, clear student definitions for vocabulary terms, stopping points for read alouds, and language for modeling comprehension skills.
- Provides specific suggestions to help teachers support English Learners. Lessons highlight content that might be challenging for English Learners and provide differentiated scaffolds based on levels of English proficiency.
- Provides high-quality, diverse trade books to build deep understanding of specific topics. Students practice reading complex text and applying comprehension strategies.
- Vocabulary is explicitly taught, continually reviewed, and applied in discussion and writing. Students have ample opportunities to write for different purposes throughout each unit, while making connections to relevant content knowledge and vocabulary.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Expects that most students in grade 3 have mastered basic phonics skills taught in grades K-2. Students who need additional phonics support utilize the Unlock Phonics computer program to receive asynchronous differentiated phonics instruction through videos and activities. Divisions may want to consider providing additional high-quality intervention programming in small groups beyond what is offered through the computer program.
- Provides limited decodable texts per week. The program includes one decodable text per week in grades K-2. Divisions should consider providing students with additional practice decoding practice and may need to supplement the program with additional decodable texts.
- Requires 3 hours (1 hour for Skills, 1 hour for Modules, and 1 hour for Labs) to implement the full K-2 instructional program. Divisions may need to revise their school schedule to fully implement this instructional program with fidelity.
- Although teacher's guides are detailed and thorough, teaching materials are difficult to navigate and lesson information is found in many different documents. Below-level instruction uses resources from previous grades, which would require teachers additional time to gather and prepare lessons.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Imagine Learning EL Education provides a strong integrated and research-based literacy curriculum in an easy-to-use digital platform. Divisions may find it challenging to allocate the time required to implement all parts of the curriculum in grades K-2. Additionally, divisions may consider additional decodable text for all grade levels as well as how to enrich phonics instruction in grade 3.

IMAGINE LEARNING EL EDUCATION

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

Meets Expectations

Partially Meets Expectations

Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

Open Court Reading

First Edition

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Lessons are systematically designed to develop word recognition skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness and sound-spelling correspondences, as well as language comprehension by building background knowledge and vocabulary.
- The scope and sequence for phonics and high-frequency words is aligned to the decodable texts that are included.
- The online portal's teaching materials are well-organized and easy to use, enabling teachers to navigate and implement the curriculum effectively. Furthermore, the program includes materials to build teacher capacity, including embedded professional development videos.


























PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Open Court's materials consistently lack guidance on the composition of small groups based on data, support for intensifying or modifying small group lessons, and direction for implementing practice activities for independent work while the teacher is teaching small groups.
- Although there are assessments included in the program, there is limited guidance to help teachers make instructional decisions for whole group instruction, to differentiate for small group, and to support individual student needs.
- Does not provide a sufficient amount of review and practice opportunities, particularly for foundational skills to support all students to automaticity. Teachers may need to build in additional time for practice and review to ensure all students can master grade-level foundational skills.


THE BOTTOM LINE


Open Court provides systematic and explicit instruction in foundational skills that includes specific routines and builds knowledge and language comprehension skills in multiple genres through the use of strategies such as think alouds, story frames, etc. However, the program lacks specific guidance for teachers to use data to scaffold whole group lessons and the formation of small groups. Additionally, divisions may need to support teachers in supplementing the curriculum with practice opportunities in foundational skills and ensuring previously taught skills are reviewed.

OPEN COURT READING

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

 Meets Expectations

 Partially Meets Expectations

 Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level

Bookworms Reading and Writing

SNAPSHOT

OVERALL RATING

K	Meets Expectations
1st	Meets Expectations
2nd	Meets Expectations
3rd	Meets Expectations

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Offers an easy-to-implement structure of three components consisting of a shared reading block, small group block, and English Language Arts (ELA) block.
- Materials for teachers are easy to navigate and offer support for differentiated instruction. Professional development is included within the teacher's manuals and includes video webinars and written explanations of each of the highlighted components within the program.
- Program includes a varied collection of high-quality texts centered around a theme that facilitates vocabulary building. Students often work within the same text across multiple days which allows for deep conversation about the text and the opportunity to practice new vocabulary words.
- The writing component provides students opportunities to write across multiple genres, including narrative, opinion, and nonfiction as well as writing in response to readings.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Materials provide limited guidance for feedback and precise teacher language within each lesson. While veteran teachers may navigate this well, new teachers may need additional support delivering effective and efficient instructional explanations when introducing new skills or concepts.
- This program would be strengthened by providing additional practice opportunities in the areas of encoding and text reading. There is limited regular encoding practice and, while there is text available for practicing newly introduced phonetic elements, there are not additional decodable or controlled text books included with the program.
- Materials provide only a few complete sample small group foundational lessons and a generic lesson plan template. The program does not provide small group lesson plans for the whole year; as such, teachers will need continued support to effectively plan small group instruction for students over the course of the school year.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Bookworms is a comprehensive core literacy program that offers an easy to implement structure and teacher guidance for the K-3 classroom. Divisions should consider providing additional support to teachers to ensure lessons are delivered with an appropriate level of explicitness and practice opportunities. While some guidance on small group instruction is provided, divisions should consider how to support teachers to properly integrate small group and whole group instruction.

BOOKWORMS READING AND WRITING

	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Phonological & Phonemic Awareness			N/A	N/A
Phonics & Word Study				
Vocabulary				
Text Reading & Fluency	N/A			
Developing Comprehension & Background Knowledge				
Small Group Instruction & Independent Practice				
Writing				

Meets Expectations

Partially Meets Expectations

Does Not Meet Expectations

N/A = Not Assessed in This Grade Level