

Additional Review Tools to Support the Selection of a High-Quality Curriculum in RI

A Guidance Document

Division of Teaching and Learning

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RI Curriculum Legislation (2019)

Having access to high-quality curriculum materials is an important component of increasing equitable access to a rigorous education that prepares every student for college and careers. Through this national movement to increase access through high-quality materials, in 2019, [RIGL§ 16.22.30-33](#) was passed which requires the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, and RIDE, to accomplish the following:

- Develop statewide academic standards and curriculum frameworks;
- Identify at least five (5) examples of high-quality curriculum and materials for each of the core subject areas (English Language Arts, Mathematics, & Science);
- Support LEAs in the selection and implementation of curriculum materials.

This legislation requires that all RI LEAs adopt high quality curriculum materials in K-12 schools that are (1) aligned with academic standards, (2) aligned with the forthcoming curriculum frameworks, and (3) aligned with the statewide standardized test(s) (i.e. RICAS, PSAT/SAT, NGSA), where applicable. In June 2020, [RIDE published RI's approve lists of high-quality curricula which can be reviewed here](#).

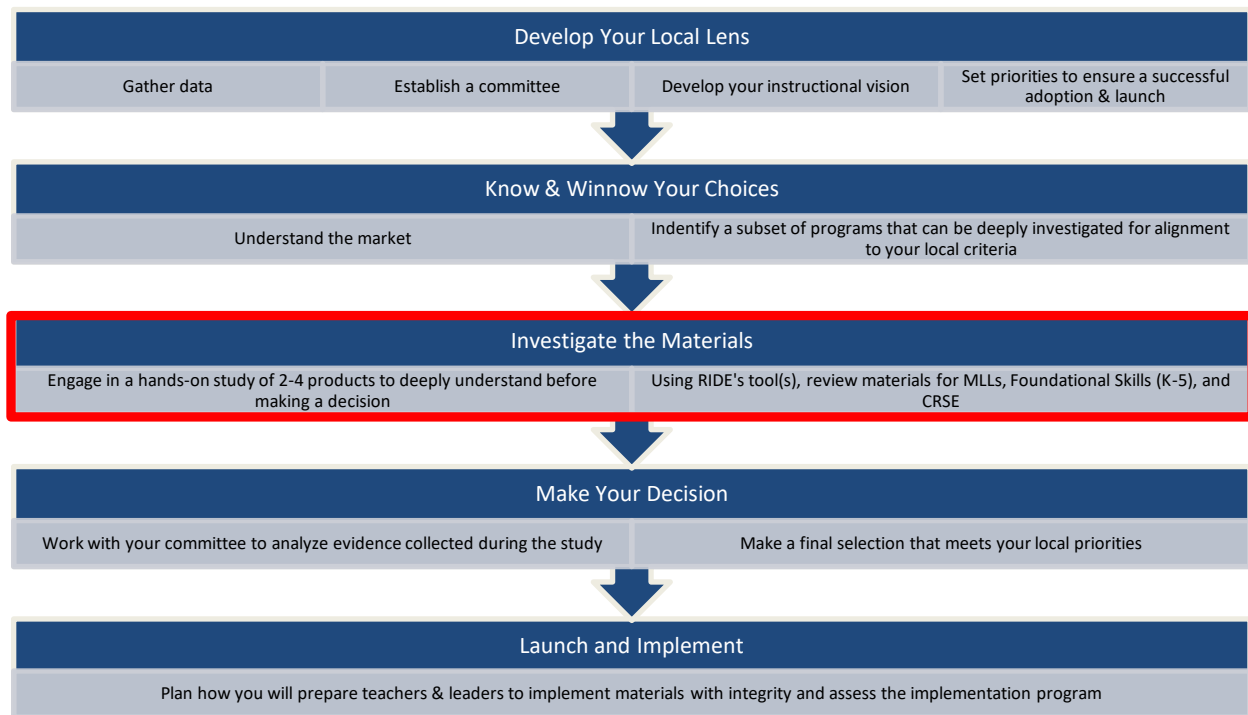
Additionally, *The Right to Read Act* ([RIGL§ 16.11.4-6](#)) requires all teachers to have the required knowledge and skills to teach reading consistent with the best practices of scientific reading instruction and structured literacy instruction. This legislation intersects with the selection of high-quality curriculum materials in English Language Arts. Specifically, LEAs will need to ensure that high-quality curriculum materials in grades K-2 attend to foundational reading skills.

Tools for Reviewing Curriculum Materials

Details of the aforementioned legislation require that the high-quality curriculum selection process includes a local review for additional components to ensure that the materials are, in fact, high quality and accessible for all students. This collaborative review process with a local team of educators and administrators should determine the degree to which a set of curriculum materials provide supports for:

- culturally responsive & sustaining education (CRSE)
- multilingual learners (MLLs)
- foundational reading skills (K-2)

Toward this end, RIDE has developed three tools in this guidance document to support local teams in reviewing materials as part of the curriculum selection process to ensure alignment with the requirements of high-quality curriculum selection, and the legislation. The use of these review tools, within the selection process, is designed to support LEA teams in becoming critical consumers of curriculum materials:



It is important to note that the review process, through the use of these and other tools, is not designed to identify a 'perfect' set of materials, which at this point in time, does not exist. Moreover, these three focus areas are not the only components of a set of curriculum materials that teams would consider throughout the review process and before making a selection. This component of the overall high-quality curriculum selection process is designed, through the use of these tools, to identify which areas are, or are not, present in a set of materials, and reflective of the needs of students in the LEA. In the case that teams determine supplementation of materials is required to address gaps, there should be an intentional conversation about the quality of materials, and the way in which it could impact the integrity of the curriculum design.

In total, the learning from these review processes should support LEA teams in determining implications for selection and, ultimately, implementation of a set of high-quality curriculum materials and additional areas for support and professional learning to bridge high-quality curriculum with high-quality instruction.

RIDE encourages you to send your questions related to the content presented in this guidance document to curriculum@ride.ri.gov.

Review Tool for Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Education (CRSE)

High-quality curriculum materials promulgate messages about who and what is valued in society. Though historically, publishers have not taken notice, or time to notice which messages are sent to students through the material: How are people in this text shown, described, or talked about? What types of decisions to authors use to depict people of different cultures and linguistic backgrounds? What types of language is used to describe people of particular cultures, genders, statuses, etc.? These are foundational questions that teams of teachers and leaders should be asking, and discussing openly, to better understand how materials can be a launching point for equitable representation and disrupt the cultural norms which, for too long, have omitted so many students' lived experiences. Materials are a critical component toward a culturally responsive school climate and culture, which, together, provide a foundation for an inclusive and affirming education. Moreover, materials provide a foundation for equitable representation, educators can develop and implement culturally responsive instruction that meets the needs of every student within that educative space.

RIDE developed a culturally responsive & sustaining education (CRSE) tool that is structured across five elements: *diverse identities*, *cultural awareness*, *high expectations*, *instructional engagement*, and *critical consciousness*. Curriculum materials that demonstrate alignment to these elements, by design, set a foundation for educators to develop and enact culturally responsive, and affirming, instructional practices.

Rhode Island LEAs are deep in the work of selecting and adopting high quality instructional materials. While a curriculum might be rated "high-quality," that review is not comprehensive for the components of CRSE that are required to achieve RIDE's CRSE vision. So, as part of a local comprehensive selection and adoption process, RIDE has developed a team-based tool to review instructional materials to determine the degree to which the curriculum materials set a foundation for a culturally responsive-sustaining education.

[RIDE's CRSE Review Tools](#) are intended to be used by teams of educators and district leaders to understand the degree to which a set of curriculum materials is reflective of student identities, lived experiences, and instructional needs from a global context. The design of RIDE's CRSE Review Tool is based on two national curriculum material review tools: [NYU Steinhardt's Culturally Responsive Scorecard](#) and [Great Lakes Equity Center's Assessing Bias in Standards and Curricular Materials](#). It is important to note that the development, and intended use, of these

two curriculum review tools are for different state and local contexts when compared to RI's curriculum legislation. Additionally, RIDE intends to support LEA cohorts in the use of this tool, as part of the selection and implementation process starting in the 2020-21 school year.

How should LEAs utilize this review tool for CRSE?

The CRSE Review Tool has been developed to meet the needs of LEA teams during the curriculum selection process. While it is a strong foundation to engage in this important work, the tool does not provide all of the answers to questions that will arise through this review process. Many of the questions in the tool should provoke individual and collective reflection on the content of the material.

We recognize that to this point, most educators have not been trained, or provided the necessary time and space, to review curriculum materials for CRSE. However, many educators do have experience considering the needs and interests of their students when making curricular and instructional decisions and must of this process asks educators to draw on similar knowledge. Because of this, curriculum review and selection teams should consider a structured, on-boarding process for the use of this tool. We expect that through its use, there will be many powerful conversations as a result to advance this work in your local school or district toward a more culturally affirming, and inclusive learning environment.

- **Embed the CRSE Review Tool in the team's process to select & adopt a high-quality curriculum.** The review process for CRSE supports should be an embedded part of the process to select a high-quality curriculum. While investigating curriculum materials, LEA teams will gather and review evidence to help winnow the curriculum choices to two or three that align to the LEA's instructional vision, and ultimately, the needs of all students. It is at this point in the selection process that a review of CRSE should occur using this review tool.
- **Plan for the use of the CRSE Review Tool in advance through a review and calibration with local curriculum adoption team.** This tool contains 5 focus areas with a series of statements. As such, a team comprised of educators and leaders should review the questions ahead of its use and calibrate on the understanding of key language and concepts. There may be new learning for members of the team. Therefore, calibrating is essential to accomplish the goals of this tool. One part of this should be providing additional resources to become familiar with CRSE themes, which can be explored through the following free, professional resources:
 - [Teaching Tolerance Professional Development Webinars](#)
 - [Cultural and Linguistic Differences: What Teachers Should Know](#)
 - [Culturally Relevant Education \(CEEDAR Center\)](#)

- **Teams must have norms and a productive structure for adult learners.** Much of this work requires individual vulnerability and an openness to learning new things about themselves, and others. To be vulnerable, the group structure must foster a trusting, open environment. This is developed through the use of agreed-upon group norms and a skilled facilitator. Ultimately, we know groups of professionals work best when norms are developed, a structure is clear and adhered-to, and frames a shared accountability structure to engage in conversations about students throughout the duration of the process.
- **The conclusions and implications drawn from a review of evidence should guide teams to make decisions about selection and implementation.** Based on current research, we know that no set of curriculum materials meets every need of every student in a local context. Though we are hopeful that more high-quality curricula are designed in a way that presents a culturally responsive and sustaining education. As such, the process of collecting evidence directly from the materials should help teams of educators understand which areas do, and do not, reflect local student populations, and the overall instructional vision. Ultimately, the outcomes of this process should help teams see which areas need to be addressed, supplemented, or revised to ensure that affirming, accurate, and equitable representations will set the foundation for high-quality instruction.

Review Tool for Multilingual Learners (MLL) Supports

In 2019, multilingual students accounted for approximately ten percent of the student population in grades K-12. Recent state assessment scores show that this identified group of students are not achieving at the level of their peers for a variety of reasons. One factor contributing to this outcome is that curriculum materials used across the state are, in many ways, not designed to be culturally responsive to the linguistic needs of MLLs. In an effort to set a new vision for MLLs across RI, Commissioner Infante-Green has committed to the development of a Multilingual Learner (MLL) Blueprint (2020) as a statewide framework to guide stakeholders in creating systems that value, and build upon, the cultural assets that multilingual learners bring to their communities.

It is imperative that educators support the needs of diverse and multilingual students in a way that provides access to, and success in, grade-level content through high-quality curriculum materials. The curriculum that LEAs select should offer research-based practices for supporting every student, including multilingual students. In the cases where these practices are not included, LEAs must make appropriate additions to ensure that English language development for multilingual learners is embedded in the core, grade-level content through the units and lessons plans that teachers will implement each day.

[RIDE has developed tools for use when selecting high-quality English Language Arts \(ELA\) and Mathematics curriculum.](#) These tools are a modified version of the [Guidelines for Improving English Language Arts Materials for English Learners](#) and the [Guidelines for Improving Mathematics Materials for English Learners](#) developed by the [English Language Success Forum \(ELSF\)](#), a non-profit whose work equips educators and content developers to help English Learners. This organization is a collaboration of researchers, teachers, district leaders, and funders who are passionate about improving the quality and accessibility of instructional materials for multilingual learners (MLLs).

How should LEAs utilize this review tool for MLL supports?

Most educators have not been trained to look at curriculum materials in this way, nor have they been provided the necessary time to do this work. Through this lens, it would help to structure part of the process (e.g. one section at a time) for team members to work through sample materials on their own and bring evidence, and learning, to the group for larger discussion. As a result, there will be many powerful conversations to advance this work in your local school or district.

Nationally, states are recognizing the need to have educator resources to guide local reviews of instructional materials. One of these resources is a tool that frames the overall process for local review teams. By design, these resources will help teams of educators and district leaders to understand the degree to which the materials provide embedded supports multilingual learners.

We suggest the following structures to ensure that the tool is used in a way that yields the most useful information to local curriculum selection and adoption teams:

- **Embed the MLL Review Tool in the team’s process to select & adopt a high-quality curriculum.** The review process for MLL supports should be an embedded part of the process to select a high-quality curriculum. While investigating curriculum materials, LEA teams will gather and review evidence to help winnow the curriculum choices to two or three that align to the LEA’s instructional vision, and ultimately, the needs of all students. It is at this point in the selection process that a review for multilingual learners’ needs should occur using this review tool.
- **Plan for the use of the MLL Review Tool in advance through a review and calibration with the curriculum adoption team.** Both the ELA and the Math MLL Review Tool contain 5 areas of focus with a series of metrics to be reviewed. As such, teams comprised of educators and leaders should review the metrics ahead of its use and calibrate on the understanding of key language and concepts. There may be new learning for members of the team. Therefore, calibrating is essential to accomplish the goals of this tool.
- **Teams must have norms and a productive structure for adult learners.** Much of this work requires individual vulnerability and an openness to learning new things about themselves, and others. To be vulnerable, the group structure must foster a trusting, open environment. This is developed through the use of agreed-upon group norms and a skilled facilitator. Ultimately, we know groups of professionals work best when norms are developed, a structure is clear and adhered-to, and frames a shared accountability structure to engage in conversations about students throughout the duration of the process.
- **The conclusions and implications drawn from a review of evidence should guide teams to make decisions about selection and implementation.** Based on current research, we know that no set of curriculum materials meet every need of every student. Through we are hopeful that more high-quality curricula are designed, with embedded resources, to meet the needs of multilingual learners. As such, the process of collecting evidence directly from the materials should help teams of educators understand which areas do, and do not, reflect local student populations, and the overall instructional vision. Ultimately, the outcomes of this process

should help teams see which areas need to be addressed, supplemented, or revised to ensure that supports for MLLs are present, and will set the foundation for high-quality instruction.

Review Tool for Foundational Reading Skills

This review tool is designed to ensure your K-2 literacy curriculum includes a solid foundation in early reading skills that target both decoding and language comprehension. A curriculum should include explicit instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and word recognition, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and fluency to ensure students are learning to decode and comprehend grade-level text in a way that aligns with how the brain learns to read. Without these essential components, many students are often left to rely on undependable reading strategies such as guessing or sight word memorization, which often result in less-proficient readers. Thus, building a strong reading foundation is crucial to students' future academic success.

How should LEAs utilize this review tool for foundational reading skills?

This tool helps teams of educators to understand the degree to which the materials provide research-based foundational skills; specifically, it guides LEAs to review curriculum materials for its strengths and/or gaps in phonological awareness, phonics, encoding, vocabulary and morphology, grammar and syntax, and fluency instruction. Furthermore, this tool allows the user to look at assessments as a diagnostic-prescriptive lens and ensure student practice texts align with the skills learned in a cumulative manner.

RIDE's tool to review for foundational reading skills is a hybrid of tools that have been developed by national experts including the [Student Achievement Partners](#) and the [Florida Center for Reading Research](#). Local review teams comprised of educators and leaders should review the rubric and accompanying glossary of terms ahead of its use and calibrate on the understanding of key language and concepts. There may be new learning for members of the team, and to accomplish the goals of this tool, calibrating is essential.

There are 8 components to be reviewed; phonological awareness, phonics, encoding, practice tests, vocabulary & background knowledge, grammar & syntax, fluency, and assessment. Each component in this review tool includes three indicators to be studied; indicators A, B, and C. If the skill described by that indicator is present in the curriculum, that box will receive a checkmark. After assessing each indicator, reviewers will use the notes section to determine what resources they may use to fill the gaps in foundational reading skills that are missing from the curriculum materials being reviewed.

We suggest the following structures to ensure that the tool is used in a way that yields the most useful information to local curriculum selection and adoption teams:

- **Review the foundational reading skills review tool module.** Upon release in the summer of 2020, teams should review this module, in addition to using the following steps, to calibrate on the use of the tool and to create a structured review team process.
- **Embed the foundational reading skills review tool in the team’s process to select & adopt a high-quality curriculum.** The review process for foundational reading skills should be an embedded part of the process to select a high-quality ELA curriculum. While investigating curriculum materials, LEA teams will gather and review evidence to help winnow the curriculum choices to two or three that align to the LEA’s instructional vision, and ultimately, the needs of all students. It is at this point in the selection process that a review of foundational reading skills should occur using this tool.
- **Teams must have norms and a productive structure for adult learners.** Much of this work requires individual vulnerability and an openness to learning new things about themselves, and others. To be vulnerable, the group structure must foster a trusting, open environment. This is developed through the use of agreed-upon group norms and a skilled facilitator. Ultimately, we know groups of professionals work best when norms are developed, a structure is clear and adhered-to, and frames a shared accountability structure to engage in conversations about students throughout the duration of the process.
- **The conclusions and implications drawn from a review of evidence should guide teams to make decisions about selection and implementation.** We know the importance of foundational reading skills as part of a high-quality literacy curriculum. We are hopeful that as more high-quality curricula are designed, publishers will include foundational reading skills as the core instruction in grades K-2. As such, the process of collecting evidence directly from the materials should help teams of educators understand which areas do, and do not, reflect the latest research in reading foundational skills. Ultimately, the outcomes of this process should help teams see which areas need to be addressed, supplemented, or revised to ensure that all readers have solid foundational reading skills.