



Board Meeting: March 3, 2025

Title: Elementary Literacy Curriculum Adoption Recommendation: Benchmark Advance

Type: Action

Presenter(s): Bethany VanOsdel, Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning; and Jody De St. Hubert, Director of Teaching and Learning

Description: This report is intended to inform the Edina School Board on the recommendation for implementation of the Benchmark Advance program for the Edina elementary schools. In addition to defining the ELA curriculum review process, this report also includes information about the new Minnesota English Language Arts Standards in conjunction with the MN READ Act legislation approved by the Department of Education. The priorities in this report directly align to the goals established in the Comprehensive Literacy Plan approved by the school board in June of 2021.

Recommendation: Review and approve the Elementary Literacy Curriculum Adoption Recommendation.

Desired Outcomes for the Board: Review and approve the elementary literacy adoption recommendation of Benchmark Advance.

Attachments:

1. [Culturally Proficient School Systems Curriculum and Instruction Continuum](#)
2. [2020 English Language Arts Standards](#)
3. [Quote for purchase](#)
4. [Sole Source Letter](#)

Background Information

In June of 2021 the PreK-5 Comprehensive Literacy Plan was approved by the Edina School Board. This plan outlined the priorities and commitments for ensuring that all learners have equitable access to evidence-based instruction, building language and literacy knowledge, as well as the skills and strategies to competently engage in relevant learning opportunities that foster success. A key part of this commitment is to ensure that the staff and students have the necessary tools to accomplish this critical goal.

The process for identifying the appropriate tools for teaching English Language Arts and Reading in the elementary schools began in 2021. Since then, there have been critical updates from the MN Department of Education to further inform the work. The information in the following paragraphs will further define these updates.

Minnesota Department of Education Overview

The Minnesota Department of Education has released two critical updates to English Language Arts programming in the past few years:

- **2020 MN State ELA Standards**

The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student learning in K-12 public schools. School districts are required to put state standards into place so all students have access to high-quality content and instruction. The 2020 Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts were adopted in 2023 and are scheduled for full implementation in the 2025-26 school year.

- **MN READ ACT Background Information**

Minnesota Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act, known as the READ Act, was passed and signed into law by Governor Tim Walz on May 24, 2023. The goal of this legislation is to have every Minnesota child reading at or above grade level every year, beginning in kindergarten, and to support multilingual learners and students receiving special education services in achieving their individualized reading goals.

A district or charter school must use evidence-based curriculum and intervention materials at each grade level that are designed to ensure student mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Starting July 1, 2023, when a district or charter school purchases a new literacy curriculum, or literacy intervention or supplementary materials, the curriculum or materials must be evidence-based as defined in Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 120B.1118.

In order to ensure that district purchases are evidence based MDE has reviewed resources and categorized them as highly aligned, partially aligned, minimally aligned, or not aligned to evidenced-based structured literacy practices.

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

All curricula were categorized based on descriptors and look-fors in the [rubric](#) according to the scale above.

Although District selection, adoption, and implementation of ELA curriculum is locally determined, district curriculum adoption teams are strongly encouraged to review the rubric and additional MDE resources, if they are considering use of any resource on the list, *regardless of its categorization*.

Benchmark Advance is currently in the MDE full re-review cycle. This means that they have submitted full curricular program revisions to MDE and the date that this review will be complete is March 3rd.

Currently in the early implementation stage, the Literacy Leadership Team is learning more about the strengths of evidence-aligned practices with Benchmark Advance and what areas will need supplementing in alignment with the MDE rubric and additional resources.

The areas that will require supplementation are:

- *phonemic awareness
- *handwriting

Standards, Curriculum, and Instructional Outlines

All students deserve equitable access to rigorous core content through the use of the Minnesota State Standards, comprehensive and viable curriculum, and evidence based literacy instruction. Literacy is a priority for all educators at every level, shown by committing to:

- **Standards and Curriculum** - Rigorous core content begins with standards as common expectations to guide instruction, assessment, and outcomes. The Minnesota Reading and ELA Standards outline clear goals for reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and exchanging ideas. Curriculum review is an ongoing process to ensure high quality, research and evidence based resources that
 - support effective instruction, alignment, and application of the standards;
 - provide strategies for differentiated instruction based on students’ needs;
 - are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive; and
 - build background knowledge and understanding of key learning concepts.

Multi-Tiered System of Support Alignment:

Benchmark Advance is a Tier 1 resource. This **will replace** the current Collaborative Classroom (Making Meaning, Being a Reader and Being a Writer). Tier 1 instruction occurs during the core literacy block. The English Language Arts Standards are directly taught and assessed.

Other resources aligned to the Science of Reading (Sonday, Heggerty) currently in the system will continue to exist in Tiers 2 and 3 when aligned to student needs. This will occur outside of the Tier 1 literacy block.

Curriculum Review Process

In Edina, a core belief we share is “Professional Excellence.” This means that, *“We believe our educators and staff are essential to student success. We value and support them in advancing strategic and innovative initiatives grounded in best practices.”* One way we live out this value is by including stakeholders in the review, design and implementation of district programming. This will be done through the use of “district design teams.” A design team is a group of representatives who serve to guide and inform district decisions.

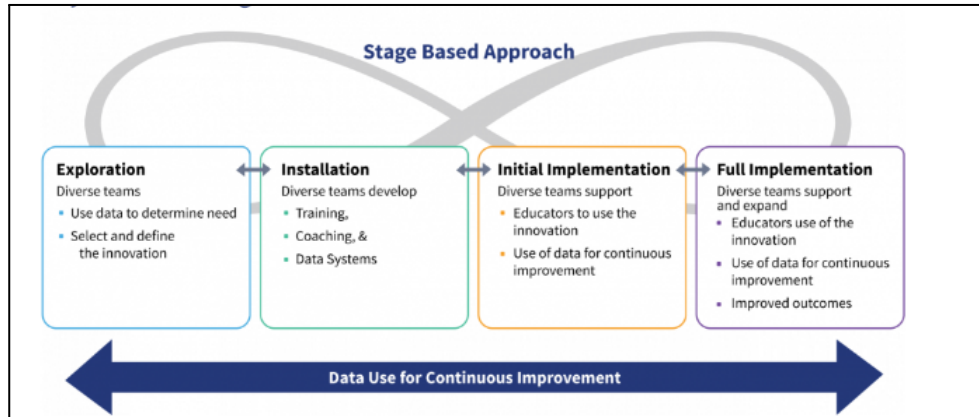
The following staff members have been integral in the review and recommendation that resulted from the curriculum review process:

LITERACY LEADERS							
	ELC	Creek Valley	Normandale	Countryside	Cornelia	Concord	Highlands
Pre-K	Liz Denn						
K				Alyssa Barnes		Steph Blachowiak	
1					Christine McCarthy		Megan Salmon
2		Jennifer Rauen			Kylee Muehlberg		
3			Katy Thomas	Jennifer Gross			
4		Emily Nuss Emily Torgeson					Zach Prowell Leah Spellman
5			Molly Swiderski		Molly O’Keefe	Nicole Bey	
EL				Kelly Paulson	Nicole Schweigert		
Special Ed						Anne Kile	
Immersion Rep							
Media Specialist		Krista Winkel					
Intervention			Jennifer Johnson Laura Hanson				
Sandra Harley, Shannon McGinnis Paul Domer, Principal Rep Leona Santillan, Administrative Dean Rep							

The Design Team, also called the Literacy Leadership Team (LLT), has used a proven process following Implementation Science to build upon current best practices in Edina and to consider opportunities for improvement. The team drafted a plan that recommends program updates and instructional/course enhancements as they align to the new standards, the MN READ Act and the Comprehensive Literacy Plan.

Timeline, Goals and Milestones

The Comprehensive Literacy Plan is being implemented through a Stage Based Approach as it is defined by Implementation Science. In the stage approach, there are 4 main stages that outline the journey to the goal of full implementation. There is not a defined amount of time spent in each stage. The goal is to complete the steps in each stage. The progress of the Comprehensive Literacy Plan is outlined below:



Exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define current reality Unpack standards Research best practices Select and define the practice/program 	Installation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program/practice has been identified and defined Professional Development and coaching are used to prepare for the implementation Resources are purchased Data systems are prepared 	Initial Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators begin using the program/practice Data is collected around both implementation and student outcomes Adjustments and alignments 	Full Implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 50% of educators are using the program/practice as intended Student outcome data is showing improved outcomes
2021-July 2024	August 2024 (Current)	August 2025	August 2026 (on-going)

Literacy Leadership Team Goals:

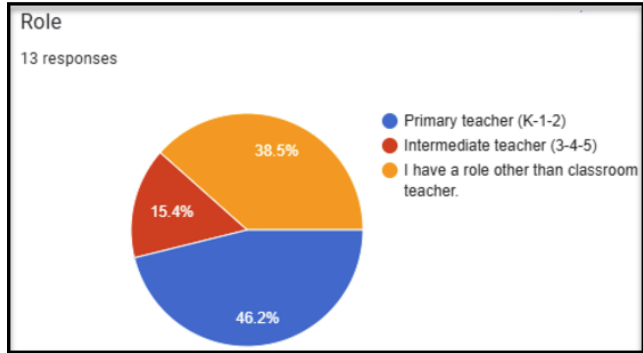
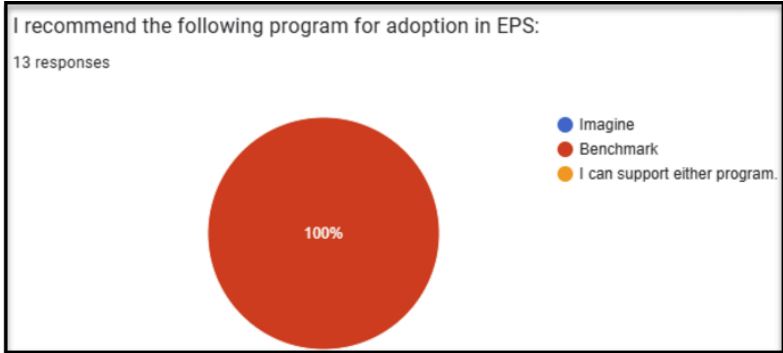
- 2021-2022:
 - Unpack class/course structure and content, review current and enduring research and analyze data to get a full picture of the current reality.
- June 2022:
 - Unpack new ELA standards
- 2022-2023: Review materials/instructional enhancements for recommendation.
- July 2024: Recommendation made to Teaching and Learning
- 2024-2025: Installation (LLT teachers only) of Benchmark Advance

Curriculum Review Process:

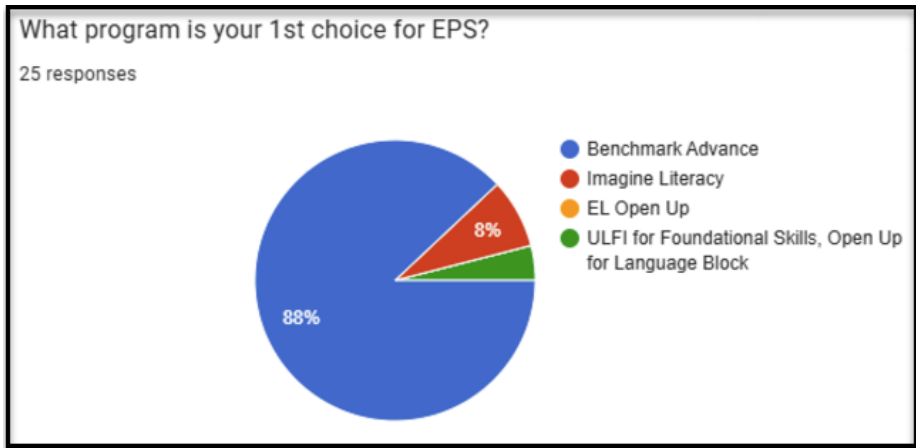
The Exploration Stage lasted 2 years. During this time, the Literacy Lead Team researched best practices and examined evidence-based programs using the [Reading League Curriculum Evaluation Tool](#). The Reading League Curriculum Evaluation Tool aligns with the MDE rubric referenced above and specifically adds detail in the the following components:

- ✔ Word Recognition
- ✔ Language Comprehension
- ✔ Reading Comprehension
- ✔ Writing
- ✔ Assessment

After reviewing several programs on the curriculum review list for MDE, the team unanimously recommended Benchmark Advance for implementation at the elementary level in Edina.



All staff were given a voice in the process. The materials were presented for review at all sites in May 2024. Benchmark Advance was the top choice:



Benchmark Advance EdReport Evaluation:

EdReports is a curriculum evaluation tool used by districts across the country to assess curricula. The platform provides robust reports that align to current and enduring research on best practices in the content area. The following charts are a summary of the Benchmark Advance Report ([read full report here](#)):

Kindergarten [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality

52/58

0 26 52 58

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

1st Grade [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality

52/58

0 26 52 58

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

2nd Grade [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality

52/58

0 26 52 58

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

3rd Grade [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality and Complexity

38/42

0 20 37 42

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

4th Grade [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality and Complexity

38/42

0 20 37 42

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

5th Grade [View Full Report](#) →

GATEWAY 1
Text Quality and Complexity

38/42

0 20 37 42

GATEWAY 2
Building Knowledge

28/32

0 15 28 32

ALIGNMENT (GATEWAY 1 & 2) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

GATEWAY 3
Usability

24/25

0 15 22 25

USABILITY (GATEWAY 3) ⓘ

Meets Expectations

Content Alignment:

Benchmark Advance 2022 has knowledge strands that are consistently mapped across all grade levels, which supports knowledge-building, interdisciplinary instruction in all classrooms across all schools throughout the year.

Content Knowledge Alignment

Knowledge strands are consistently mapped across all grade levels, which supports combined classrooms.

Unit	Knowledge Strand	GRADES						
		K	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Life Science							
2	Character Matters							
3	Government and Citizenship							
4	Perspectives in Literature							
5	Technology and Society							
6	Themes Across Cultures							
7	History, Culture, and Geography							
8	Earth Science							
9	Economics							
10	Physical Science							

Cross-Linguistic Transfer Relations within the Program Components for Spanish Dual Language:

Spanish Dual Language:

Benchmark Advance and Benchmark Adelante's cohesive program architecture across English and Spanish Language Arts instruction provides ample resources to support Dual Language programs without compromising program models:

- Congruency and cohesiveness of parallel content and grade level topics provide ample variety and variance for a broad range of texts in both English and Spanish.
- Small Group Texts in English and Spanish provide content knowledge support for Science and Social Science at student's level of reading in L1 and L2 across the reading continuum.
- English and Spanish Language Development differentiated support is embedded in each lesson and are aligned in tandem with English and Spanish Language Arts Literacy and Language Instruction.

French Immersion:

Benchmark Advance will be implemented in 2024-2025 by 3rd-5th grade staff. The first year will be used to intentionally plan to align English Language Arts and French Language Arts. The Benchmark Advance materials are not translated to French, nor is there a French-aligned program like Adalente for Spanish Dual Language. *This is often the case with curriculum resources in other content areas.*

Normandale typically takes an additional year to plan for implementations to ensure the alignment is purposeful and honors the commitment to the French Immersion experience. This will be the case with the implementation of Benchmark Advance.

Recommendation:

The team unanimously recommended the adoption and implementation of Benchmark Advance as the Tier 1 curriculum for elementary schools in Edina.

The implementation of Benchmark Advance will occur in 2025-2026 with a rigorous professional development and coaching plan to serve as the foundation of the implementation.

Budget:

The purchase of an 8 year license to Benchmark Advance will cost a total of \$547,287.32. The direct quote from Benchmark Education Company is included in the attachments listed on the cover page. The quote includes 7 full days of Professional Development for staff to support the integrity of the roll out.

This purchase is able to be supported with the \$343,843 that Edina is receiving for Read Act curriculum funding, as well as a portion of the regularly allocated Teaching and Learning capital dollars.

There are no annual costs associated with this purchase.