

DATE: April 6, 2022

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FROM: Christine Fankell
7-12 ELA and Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator

SUBJECT: Curriculum Resource Recommendations for Middle School Language Arts

This memo recommends CommonLit 360 as the primary curriculum resource for Livonia Public Schools developed units of study for Language Arts 7 and 8. The details below provide more information about the adoption process, as well as information to support the recommendation.

Committee Members

Emerson

Walt Power
Julie King

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Kristie Wells-Biggert
Kelly Stone

Holmes

Russ Keberly
Alyssa Pakulski
Seth Torkelson-Regan

Recommended Materials for Adoption

CommonLit 360 is a free, open source curriculum resource with an interactive digital platform. It has the following components:

- Comprehensive Reading, writing, speaking and listening, grammar, and vocabulary
- Scaffolded Standards-aligned but with supportive questioning for struggling readers
- Easy to use Classroom-ready materials, fully packaged with teacher guides
- Digital/Print Most lessons have a print/digital option for a blended instructional approach
- Highly Effective Research-backed, with strong pilot results in a diverse set of schools

Our team will utilize CommonLit 360 as a curriculum resource to support the development of Livonia Public Schools' integrated reading/writing units of study for Language Arts 7 and 8.

Evaluation Process

A committee of 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts teachers, with representation from all middle schools, began meeting in Spring 2019. The committee followed the textbook adoption procedures outlined in the Board Policy of Livonia Public Schools.

Shared Vision

The committee reviewed our LPS vision, focusing on the part that was adopted directly from the Common Core State Standards, “students who are college and career ready” to determine what students who are college and career ready will need in an English Language Arts experience:

- Demonstrate independence
- Build strong content knowledge
- Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
- Comprehend as well as critique
- Value evidence
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures

In addition, the committee also identified the following needs:

- integrated reading/writing units
- inquiry/problem-based instruction
- texts as mirrors and windows
- access to print and digital texts

Evaluation Criteria

Based on our vision we created a rubric with the following criteria:

- Alignment to vision and state standards
Units with universal themes
- Complexity of texts, variety of texts, cultural diversity
- Close reading, metacognitive reading strategies, literary elements
- Questions and tasks that require textual evidence and critical thinking
- Analysis of arguments, use of textual evidence, writing in response to reading
- Academic conversations
- Grammar and language conventions
- Gradual release model
- Connections to student experience, contemporary world, diverse cultures
- Differentiation
- Formative and summative assessment
- Digital platform

Curriculum Resources Considered

The following resources were identified for review based on high scores from EdReports:

Amplify ELA
LearnZillion Guidebooks
Expeditionary Learning

Wisdom and Wit, Great Minds
Springboard, College Board
American Reading Company
Developing Core Proficiencies
Core Knowledge Language Arts
Louisiana Guidebooks
Engage NY
StudySync, McGraw-Hill Education
myPerspectives, Pearson/Savvas Learning
IntoLit, Houghton Mifflin

CommonLit was identified as a possible resource by a member of the committee. As it was not reviewed by EdReports, I reached out and learned that CommonLit 360 is in the process of being reviewed. As the results are pending, I completed a comprehensive standards analysis of CommonLit and have identified adaptations that we would make to strengthen the units. See below.

Evaluation Rubric Outcome

The results of the rubric rating showed McGraw-Hill Education, Pearson, and CommonLit to be front runners. Based on the rubric rating, each curriculum resource was piloted for 3-4 weeks during the 2021-22 school year.

Student Response

Following each pilot, students were surveyed to provide us feedback on the resources used. 70 percent of students indicated that they would recommend CommonLit as a learning resource over the other two curriculum products. The following are quotes from the survey that was given after piloting:

“These materials were somewhat easy to understand as they had steps and basically told you what you had to do. It guided you throughout the lesson.”

“I liked the stories and how most of the main characters showed a lot of character development.”

“I really liked being able to highlight (digitally) as I read because when I needed evidence I was able to go back and find my highlighted quotes to use.”

“I enjoyed the stories and how they were real life situations and putting you in an environment that maybe you never had to go through yet it helped you understand how other people live . . .”

Ultimately, the decision to recommend CommonLit 360 as a curriculum resource was based on the ease of digital navigation, the resources available in the digital platform, and high interest texts and topics within the units.

Integrated Reading and Writing Units

My research provided the committee with a lot of additional information in order to make this recommendation. Each CommonLit 360 unit contains a single theme and essential question. Multi-faceted exploration of each theme and essential question allows for the development of deep content knowledge. This investigation also provides students the opportunity to apply learning across a wide range of texts in and out of the classroom, build domain-specific vocabulary, and practice writing across

texts. Each unit is based around a theme and essential questions, such as, Life Changing Moments, “How can the challenges in our lives affect our perspective on the world?”. In addition to the theme and essential question, each unit component, and lesson shares an integrated approach that blends instruction across reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language strands. The lessons within each unit will provide a model for direct instruction for skills linked to state standards as well as instructional notes to support a culturally responsive framework. CommonLit360 provides an interactive digital platform to support instruction.

As we move forward as a committee with developing LPS reading/writing units of study using the CommonLit 360 curriculum, we will:

- Use the standards analysis results to identify areas that need to be strengthened
- Add texts to support a balance of literary and informational texts in each unit
- Establish close reading routines
- Develop common unit assessments
- Create a culturally responsive curriculum

Professional Development Needs

The committee members, along with Christine Fankell and the new 7-12 ELA and Social Studies Coordinator will design a professional development plan for supporting staff. The focus for learning will be:

- creating a safe environment for learning (SEL)
- understanding how to navigate the digital platform
- recognizing and applying instructional shifts
- using assessments to drive instruction

In addition, we would like the following supplemental materials to support the LPS developed units.

Novels for classroom libraries

Novels for class study

Novels for book clubs

Chromebooks for each classroom

For additional information on the adoption recommendation, contact Christine Fankell at x42192.

CC

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