

Empowering D26 Learners and Teachers

Formal recommendations for the 2025–26 curriculum adoptions in Elementary English Language Arts and Middle School Social Studies.

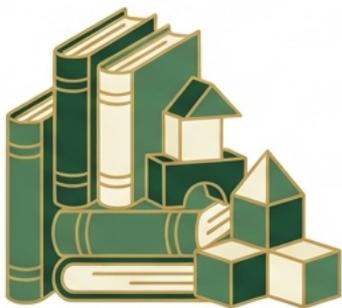


River Trails School District 26 Board of Education

Presented by Kristine Seifert, Assistant Superintendent
Teaching & Learning

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Executive Recommendations for the 2026-27 School Year



Elementary ELA

We recommend the adoption of HMH Into Reading (6-year term) to provide comprehensive, consolidated literacy instruction aligned with the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan.



Middle School Social Studies

We recommend the adoption of History Alive! by TCI (3-year term) to revitalize student-centered investigation and structured inquiry.

A Rigorous, Evidence-Based Audit Process

Both the ELA and Social Studies review teams followed a unified, chronological framework spanning the 2025-26 school year to ensure quality and alignment:



Needs Assessment

Identified the daily burdens on teachers and the specific gaps in current instructional materials.

Custom Rubric Creation

Grounded evaluations in state standards, including the seven essential components of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Framework (Oracy, Phonological Awareness, Word Recognition, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Writing).

Extensive Piloting

Tested narrowed publisher options in active classrooms from November 2025 to March 2026.

Stakeholder Feedback

Gathered comprehensive data from both teachers and students to drive the final decision.

Consolidating the Load to Elevate ELA Instruction

Over the past six years, D26 teachers have done incredible work building their diagnostic reading capacity. However, to meet the diverse student needs, they have been forced to act as curriculum writers, piecing together fragmented resources.

We need a *comprehensive tool* to dramatically reduce this heavy planning burden, allowing teachers to focus on how they teach rather than searching for what to teach.



HMH Into Reading Delivers a Comprehensive Literacy Foundation

HMH Into Reading emerged as the program that best supports every necessary component of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan with an equal and age-appropriate focus. It seamlessly integrates:

- Explicit foundational skills at all grade levels
- Authentic reading experiences tied directly to student worktexts
- Deep background knowledge building
- Explicit, student-friendly vocabulary routines



The Student Verdict Demanded a Clear Direction

During the pilot phase, classrooms tested both Benchmark Advance and HMH Into Reading. If students aren't engaged, they aren't learning. The contrast in their daily classroom experience was profound.

Benchmark Advance:

"It was boring, slow,
and not engaging"

"Very repetitive."

Felt overly scripted, required steep pacing adjustments, and led to repetitive, unengaging lessons.

HMH Into Reading:

"My students LOVED the stories"

"They were able to build background knowledge... and had such fantastic and in-depth conversations."

Reinvigorated excitement for reading and writing through authentic texts and rich, collaborative conversations.

Overcoming the Limitations of Outdated Social Studies Materials

Our middle school Social Studies team confirmed that while our current 2014 Holt/McDougal materials offer clear pacing and vocabulary support, they have reached the end of their lifecycle.



Teachers are forced to rely primarily on print and legacy materials.



The digital platform has expired, leaving limited online functionality.



The curriculum lacks structured opportunities for primary source analysis and student-centered investigation aligned with recently revised Illinois Social Science standards.

History Alive! Drives Structured Inquiry and Historical Thinking

History Alive! by TCI directly addresses the needs of grades 6–8 through an engaging, inquiry-driven approach that actively involves students in exploring historical questions.



Interactive Learning: Deepens understanding of historical events and diverse perspectives through collaborative structures.



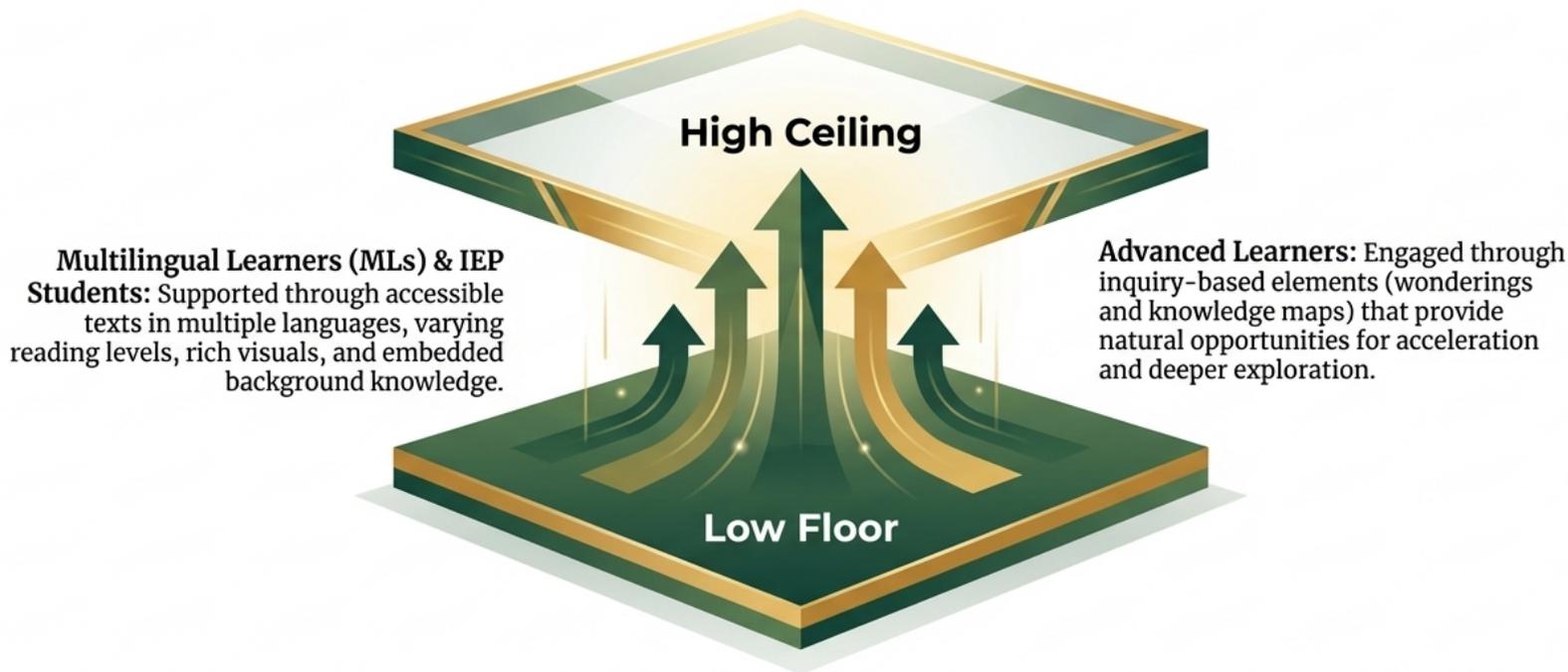
Primary Source Integration: Strengthens evidence-based analysis and integrates critical reading and writing skills.



Crucial Dual-Access Model: Provides reliable flexibility. Students can interact with multimedia (maps, videos, simulations) online while utilizing printed texts for annotation and reference.

A Shared Focus: Support for All D26 Learners

Both HMH Into Reading and History Alive! provide a “Low Floor and a High Ceiling.” They naturally integrate support mechanisms rather than treating them as an afterthought.



The Implementation Mindset: Cook vs. Chef

Adopting a comprehensive core curriculum provides all educators with the same high-quality ingredients.

Year 1 (The Cook)

We ask educators to trust the recipe. By following the scope and sequence with fidelity, we build a cohesive, district-wide foundation.



Year 2+ (The Chef)

Once the foundation is secure, teachers regain the flexibility to spice it up and personalize instruction to perfectly match their classroom's unique palate.



Financial Impact and Resource Allocation

Both adoptions represent responsible, long-term investments covered by the curriculum and instructional materials budgets for 2025-26 and 2026-27.

Middle School Social Studies



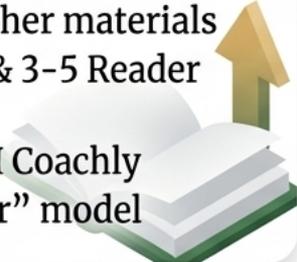
\$43,487.70

- Secures a 3-year term
 - 2 class sets of 30 textbooks per grade
 - Teacher print materials
 - Full online access for all students/staff
 - First-year professional development
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Elementary ELA



\$285,670.55

- Secures a 6-year term
 - All essential student/teacher materials
 - K-2 Decodable Libraries & 3-5 Reader Libraries
 - Full digital access & HMH Coachly
 - Internal “train the trainer” model
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The Critical Path to August 2026

We will not isolate our teachers during this transition.
Rollout begins immediately with clear, structured support.

April



Pending Board Approval, launch a Digital Showcase for staff to tour the online platforms.

May



Internal PD Lead Team builds grade-level alignment, defining core "Must-Dos."

June



Finalize purchase orders and secure physical materials ahead of the school year.

Summer



Optional learning sessions for early adopters.

August



Full District-Wide Launch with ongoing, dedicated release time for coaching.

Advancing Student Success Across River Trails

These recommendations represent a critical investment in our educators and our students. By adopting HMH Into Reading and History Alive!, we will consolidate teacher workloads, modernize our instructional resources, and provide highly engaging, equitable learning experiences across our district.

We respectfully request the Board's approval to proceed with the purchase and implementation of these instructional materials for the 2026-27 school year.

