

McLean County Unit District No. 5
1809 West Hovey Avenue
Normal, Illinois 61761-4339



To: Unit 5 Board of Education
Dr. Kristen Weikle, Superintendent
Michelle Lamboleyn, Assistant Superintendent

From: Deidre Ripka, Director of Secondary Education

Re: EB Academics, Middle School ELA Curriculum Adoption

Our middle school Literature/Composition and Language Arts classes have been using Schoolwide mentor texts and resources that were adopted in 2014. While teachers have supplemented these materials as needed, this approach has led to inconsistencies in what students learn across our schools. To address this concern, we formed a Task Force of 16 middle school English teachers representing all four buildings to explore research-based curriculum options that align with state standards. This Task Force began meeting in 2024.

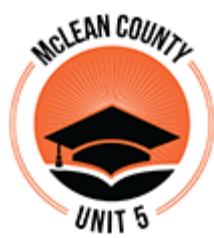
Through their work, the Task Force identified an opportunity to strengthen our instruction of English and literacy skills. Currently, most middle school teams have four teachers for a five subject schedule (Lit/Comp, Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Math). This means students may not always have a teacher who specializes in English instruction for their Language Arts class. As part of the district's efforts to strengthen our English and literacy skills, the Task Force began the work of combining the Lit/Comp and Language Arts courses into a single English Language Arts (ELA) class. This change ensures all students receive instruction from teachers with deep expertise in English education. With this new course structure in place for the 2026-2027 school year, the Task Force began evaluating curriculum resources with the goal of identifying high-quality, evidence-based, standards-aligned materials that serve all students equitably.

Process:

During the 2024-2025 school year, the Task Force reviewed four different curricula: HMH Into Literature, Savvas My Perspectives, CommonLit 360 Arts and Letters, and EB (Evidence-Based) Academics. All four curricula align with state standards. The Task Force also conducted an equity review of each program to ensure the novels and short stories students would read reflect the diversity of our student body. Teachers evaluated each curriculum on several key factors: diverse voices and representation, flexibility for different learning needs, reading and writing integration, vocabulary development, and the quality of both digital and print materials. Additionally, the curriculum and resources were reviewed using The Reading League's workbook. EB Academics received the highest ratings from every Task Force member.

To thoroughly vet the resources, we expanded the Task Force during the 2025-2026 school year. We now have 26 teachers, including both general education and special education, using EB Academics in their classrooms. Students have studied novels and stories using EB Academics resources including *Refugee*, *Ghost*, *The Giver*, *The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street*, *Flowers for Algernon*, *The*

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Outsiders, and several short stories. Through these units, students develop skills in grammar, evidence-based writing (narrative, informative, and argumentative), literary analysis, vocabulary, and speaking and listening.

Feedback:

Teachers participating in the pilot have provided strong positive feedback:

- Writing instruction: Teachers appreciate the structured approach to evidence-based writing and suggested that science and social studies teachers also receive training in this method so students experience consistency across subjects.
- Professional development: The training and ongoing support provided by EB Academics is engaging and responsive to teachers' questions and needs.
- Vocabulary development: The vocabulary resources are high-quality and effective.
- Student achievement: Teachers are already observing improvements in students' STAR reading scores.
- Ease of use: The digital resources are fully customizable and easy to share among teachers.
- Daily classroom routines: The daily warm-up activities (bell ringers) are engaging and help establish effective classroom routines.

The task force will continue to pilot lessons and contribute to the development of resources, assessments, and professional development leading up to the full implementation of EB Academics in the 2026-2027 school year.

Based on the thorough review process, strong pilot results, and positive teacher feedback, we recommend the Board of Education approve the adoption of EB Academics as the district's middle school ELA curriculum for full implementation in the 2026-2027 school year.