Reading and Writing Instructional Resources Consumer Guide

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Introduction

The Kentucky legislature charged the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) with creating a consumer guide to aid in local selection of high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) and to provide for public participation in the process ([KRS 156.405](#)). Because districts direct the process to evaluate and select instructional resources per KRS 160.345, within the Curriculum Development Process in the *Model Curriculum Framework*, the KDE has set out to:

- Communicate the definition of and rationale for HQIRs;
- Promote the use of standards-aligned HQIRs to support implementation of the locally developed curriculum; and
- Provide guidance and tools for evaluating, selecting and implementing standards-aligned HQIRs at the local level.

HQIRs are a means by which local curriculum aligned to the *Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS)* becomes an actionable foundation for improving the way students experience learning in the state of Kentucky, and selecting a primary HQIR enables districts and schools to make a marked shift toward equitable, vibrant learning experiences for all students. A local curriculum anchored in a HQIR supports the learning goals, outcomes and core competencies that students must demonstrate to reach the grade-level expectations within the *KAS*. It also provides teachers with an array of pedagogical supports to help meet the needs of all learners.

Current research recommends districts adopt and implement a primary HQIR as the print, nonprint or electronic medium designed to assist student learning and support implementation of a high-quality curriculum. The research shows:

- Aligned to state standards, a HQIR can reduce variability in the quality of instruction across classrooms (SREB, 2017), and students in classrooms that used one HQIR for four consecutive years outpaced comparison students by a margin of 38 percentile points — equivalent to four additional years of learning (Steiner, 2018).
- Teachers creating their own lessons rarely results in a fully sequenced, coherent learning experience over time and across systems (Steiner, 2018), and 75 percent of teacher created or selected resources are found to be below grade-level (TNTP, 2018).
- Teachers without access to HQIRs spend 7-12 hours per week searching for resources online (Goldberg, M. 2016).
- Switching from a low to a high-quality instructional resource can boost student achievement more than other, more popular interventions (Steiner, 2018).
- When students who started the year behind had greater access to grade-appropriate assignments, they closed the outcomes gap with their peers by more than seven months. (TNTP, 2018)

Students and teachers deserve access to high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) designed to help students reach the grade-level expectations within the *KAS*. When teachers have access to HQIRs, it increases their pedagogical knowledge. Access to comprehensive HQIRs also enables teachers to adapt lessons to meet the diverse needs of students and to focus their time, energy and creativity on bringing lessons to life and engaging students with grade-level content.

Selecting instructional resources to support implementation of a locally developed curriculum is a key component of the Curriculum Development Process. Curriculum teams should use their instructional vision developed in Phase 2 of the Curriculum Development Process as their guide for identifying, evaluating and selecting HQIRs. The instructional vision for teaching and learning in each content area ensures decision-makers select resources that will serve local priorities and meet the needs of all learners.

The work of selecting instructional resources may be completed by the curriculum team, or the district may choose to form a sub-committee to undertake this task. If a sub-committee is charged with the evaluation and selection of HQIRs, members of the team must understand the instructional vision to ensure selected resources align to that vision. In addition, the sub-committee should receive ongoing support and collaboration with the curriculum team throughout the selection process.

Overall, this consumer guide is intended to help decision-makers at Kentucky districts and schools select high-quality reading and writing instructional resources that meet the unique needs of students, educators and families within their local communities. Specifically, the purpose of the guide is to provide:

- An overview of the characteristics and markers of high-quality reading and writing instructional resources, and
- The four key steps districts may utilize as they seek out resources, evaluate their effectiveness and ultimately select them for use in schools.

Characteristics of High-Quality Reading and Writing Instructional Resources

An effective instructional vision for Reading and Writing must account for elements specific to the *KAS* and to a local context; it also must be equitable. To identify and be **aligned with** what is unique in the ***Kentucky Academic Standards*** *for Reading and Writing*, and to equitably assure **vibrant student learning experiences**, the content and considerations in this section should be used to crosscheck an instructional vision draft. This ensures selection criteria derived from an instructional vision account for the depth, dimensions and practices of the *KAS* and can fully inform HQIR evaluation.

KDE's General Definition of High-Quality Instructional Resources

The KDE defines High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs) as materials that are:

- Aligned with the *Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS)*;
- Research-based and/or externally validated;
- Comprehensive to include engaging texts (books, multimedia, etc.), tasks and assessments;
- Based on fostering vibrant student learning experiences;
- Culturally relevant, free from bias; and
- Accessible for all students.

KDE's Markers of High-Quality Reading and Writing Instructional Resources

Markers for reading and writing can fall into five categories. These categories are interdependent and interrelated, and all must be represented within an instructional resource for it to be deemed high-quality. Furthermore, these categories represent the *KAS for Reading and Writing* and the key criteria found in the K-2 and 3-12 Reading and Writing Instructional Alignment Rubrics. The markers for high-quality reading and writing resources include:

1. **Text Quality and Complexity**
   Identifying markers of standards alignment for text quality and complexity includes reviewing instructional resources for the following:

   - Specific text selection that includes an appropriate range of both literary and informational text;
   - Question types and quality of student tasks;
   - Academic vocabulary students are exposed to and how it is incorporated and addressed in resources; and
   - Opportunities for writing to sources as well as opportunities for students to research.

   The range and quality of selected texts are purposely chosen to provide students with the opportunity to master the *KAS for Reading and Writing.* Analytical resources should be used to evaluate text selection criteria, including quantitative (typically computer-generated, such as Lexile Framework for Reading), qualitative (typically reader-determined, factors such as levels of meaning, purpose, structure and style), reader and task, and cultural relevance measures. Text-dependent questions and tasks that require students to present the information, analyses, inferences and claims they formed through their careful reading of complex texts and the strategic teaching of academic vocabulary with authentic application of new Tier 2 and Tier 3 words and terms should also be assessed.

2. **High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks**
Clear, connected and coherent lessons that address the *KAS for Reading and Writing* are fundamental requirements of high-quality instruction. Reading and writing are done in a cohesive learning environment, rather than separated out as discrete tasks. Instructional design should cultivate student interest and engagement in reading rich texts carefully. Resources should:

- Include questions that prompt critical thinking, verbal expression, and/or writing tasks that focus on the key ideas and details and craft and structure of the text, rather than superficial or peripheral aspects of a text;
- Reflect an integration of the standards, highlighting questions and tasks that are text-based;
- Require the use of textual evidence to support valid inferences from the text;
- Lead to the synthesis of knowledge and ideas across multiple, diverse texts; and
- Provide opportunities for language instruction in the context of the texts and author's choices.

3. **Interdisciplinary Literacy Practices**
Leveraging text selections, text-dependent tasks and questions to align with the ten student practices listed below fosters a multidimensional, literacy-rich environment. Rather than the shallower, fragmentary experience of literacy instruction as discretely disconnected elements, the possible teacher and student actions these practices clarify allow students to synergize skills and deep understandings toward becoming independent, lifelong learners able to think critically about texts of various types and across contexts and disciplines.

- Recognize that text is anything that communicates a message;
- Employ, develop and refine schema to understand and create text;
- View literary experiences as transactional, interdisciplinary and transformational;
- Utilize receptive and expressive language arts to better understand self, others and the world;
- Apply strategic practices, with scaffolding and then independently, to approach new literacy tasks;
- Collaborate with others to create meaning;
- Utilize digital resources to learn and share with others;
- Engage in specialized, discipline-specific literacy practices;
- Apply high level cognitive processes to think deeply and critically about text;
- Develop a literacy identity that promotes lifelong learning.

4. **Research-Based Practices for Foundational Skills Instruction**
Following an explicit, research-based scope and sequence to support students' reading development is a proven method for ensuring all students have access to quality reading

instruction. Phonological awareness and phonics skills and strategies help students distinguish individual sounds (phonemes) within words and learn the necessary sound-spelling relationships required for success with complex texts and spelling. Resources should include explicit instruction and student practice opportunities in all components of foundational skills (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, word analysis and fluency).

The KDE's Structured Literacy page and The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines for K-5 English Language Arts (ELA) are recommended supplements for understanding key criteria for reading foundations.

5. **Access to Standards for All Learners**
Instructional resources must provide supports to help ensure equitable access across all student populations.

- Support for multilingual learners and other special populations is thoughtful and helps those students meet the same standards as all other students. The language in which questions and tasks are posed is carefully considered.
- Design of lessons attends to the needs of a variety of learners. Instructional resources provide appropriate level and type of scaffolding, differentiation, intervention and support for a broad range of learners with gradual removal of supports, when needed, to allow students to demonstrate their reading and writing skills and understandings independently.

Equity Lenses for High-Quality Reading and Writing Instructional Resources

Students deserve access to HQIRs that are engaging, accessible and inclusive of the cultural diversity and perspectives of their communities. The KDE is committed to providing guidance that supports the selection of resources that are **culturally relevant, free from bias, and accessible for all students** to further the KDE's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Below are five equity lenses schools and districts may use during resource selection to help promote equitable learning environments for all students:

- Resources meet the high-quality instructional markers laid out in the KDE definition of High-Quality Instructional Resources.
- Resources recognize, celebrate and leverage students' cultures and identities and provide opportunities to broaden perspectives by learning about other cultures.
- Resources provide opportunities for students to lead learning that is meaningful and relevant to them, both in connection with their local context and communities and the broader global context of the world.
- Resources provide engagement with grade-level content and the *KAS* for all students.
- Resources allow students to engage and demonstrate learning in a variety of ways.

To support schools and districts in selecting equitable resources, a [detailed table of the equity lenses](#) provides guidance on what to look for in reading and writing resources. Throughout the Consumer Guide, there are connections to the lenses and suggestions for how to use them in each step of the selection process.

Remember, no single instructional resource will be perfect. Selection teams should use the KDE's definition of HQIRs, the Reading and Writing markers and the equity lenses to help evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of instructional resources to make the best decision about the resources selected. School and district leaders should use the analyses of those strengths and weaknesses to inform additional supports needed (such as high-quality professional learning, implementation supports and supplemental resource selection) for effective implementation of the locally developed curriculum and the selected HQIRs.

Identifying, Evaluating and Selecting High-Quality Reading and Writing Instructional Resources

The process of identifying, evaluating and selecting high-quality instructional resources involves multiple steps to ensure decision-makers adopt resources that will serve local priorities and meet the needs of all learners. The remainder of this guide outlines four steps school and district resource teams may follow as they seek out resources, evaluate their effectiveness and ultimately select them for use in schools.

Each subsection includes general guidance, key questions and recommended tools users may download and edit for use with their district review teams (e.g., guidance documents and data collection tools).

Step 1: Determine Selection Criteria

To help determine selection criteria, the team should use their instructional vision that considers KDE's definition of HQIRs, the Reading and Writing markers and the equity lenses included in section two of this guide.

As with crafting an instructional vision, the curriculum team should again engage educators and stakeholders upfront in meaningful ways to capitalize on the knowledge and expertise they can bring to the decision-making process. Gathering input from educators and other stakeholders is an essential component of the selection process and should reflect the diverse voices of the school and/or district (including families, students, teachers, support staff and community members). Taking time to gather this input will help build support for and investment in the work and ensure the perspectives of those affected by the selection decision inform the process.

- **Stakeholder Inclusion:**
  - How will we communicate the importance of selecting a primary high-quality instructional resource (HQIR) to support development of the local curriculum?
  - How will we gather stakeholder input to help inform possible selection criteria?
    - What do we want to learn from each stakeholder group?
    - How are we going to get this input?
    - Who is responsible for gathering input?
    - When and how will we see the collected information? (Instruction Partners, 2019)
    - How will stakeholder input inform drafting of the selection criteria?
- **Selection Criteria Considerations:**
  - How well do the selection criteria represent the most important aspects of the instructional vision?
    - Alignment to the *Kentucky Academic Standards*
    - Alignment to Current Research
    - Local Context
  - How are important local initiatives and pedagogical practices (e.g., portrait of a learner, project-based learning, cooperative learning, workshop model, standards-based grading) represented in the selection criteria?
  - Based on the instructional vision, what specific supports are needed in a resource to help teachers make the instructional shifts necessary to provide the desired student experience?
  - Has the instructional resources consumer guide been used to cross-check the instructional vision and selection criteria?
    - HQIR Markers for the Content Area
    - Equity Lenses for the Content Area

Key Tools

- [Developing Selection Criteria](#)
- [Data Collection Tool](#)
- [Sample Stakeholder Questions for Reading and Writing](#)
- [Equity Lenses for Reading and Writing](#)

Step 2: Identify Potential Primary HQIRs

Once the team has determined the selection criteria, the next step is to identify **research-based and/or externally validated** resources for review. Educators have more options than ever from which to find instructional resources to try to meet their local priorities; however, in such a crowded marketplace, finding high-quality instructional resources that are aligned to the

Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing and meet specific school and district needs can be difficult.

EdReports is a recommended starting point for school and district review teams to research available resources. It provides free reviews of K-12 instructional resources and offers comprehensive information about indicators of quality from a number of publishers. Contacting other districts or schools to gather anecdotal information can also help ground findings in a Kentucky context.

After identifying primary HQIRs of interest, the team is ready to narrow the choices down to those that have the potential to meet the instructional vision and the needs of the teachers and students in the district. The narrowing process allows the team to not only learn about potential resources through research, but also to compare characteristics of resources to determine how well they can serve the selection criteria.

Key Questions

- Based on EdReports reviews, which resources for this content area are rated green according to indicators for their three gateways?
- Of the green-rated resources, which 2-3 do we want to further evaluate using our selection criteria?

Key Tools

- EdReports Reports Center
- How to Read an EdReports Review
- EdReports Compare Tool and Compare Tool Overview
- Video Tutorial: Navigating EdReports to Identify Potential HQIRs

Step 3: Evaluate Potential Primary HQIRs

Once EdReports has been used to identify two to three potential resources, the district should establish a process for examining each of the resources being considered to determine the best option for meeting the local selection criteria. As a part of the process, the team will need to create an organizer around their selection criteria to capture evaluation notes.

Because HQIRs are **comprehensive** and include a range of **texts, tasks and assessments**, teams should also engage publishers to request samples and set up presentations. The time spent with publishers can be used to have them answer questions the team has developed that specifically align to the instructional vision and the identified selection criteria.

Key Questions:

- **Review Considerations:**

- How will the team collect evaluation notes and final ratings? What format for an organizer might work best (for evaluation organizer examples, please see Key Tools).
- What is the timeline team members will have to conduct the reviews?
- Who will set up meetings with vendors and what questions will guide those conversations (Sample HQIR Vendor Questions in Key Tools below)?
- What materials/resources will reviewers need access to and how will they get access?
- **Stakeholder Inclusion:**
  - How will stakeholders be provided opportunities to review and give input on the 2-3 potential high-quality instructional resources under consideration?

- [Sample HQIR Vendor Questions for Reading and Writing](#)
- [Sample Evaluation Organizers](#)

Step 4: Select Primary HQIR

The evidence gathered from the evaluation process is used to inform the review team as they make a final selection. Resource review teams should examine evidence collected during any evaluation activities with stakeholders and in the evaluation organizer. **Ultimately, no one primary instructional resource is likely to provide the full supports necessary to reach the grade-level expectations within the *KAS for Reading and Writing*, the local articulated vision and the identified selection criteria.** Therefore, districts may select a primary HQIR but then determine there is a need to purchase supplemental resources to fill identified gaps. The [Instructional Resources Alignment Rubrics](#) ([K-2 Rubric](#) and [3-12 Rubric](#)), [Review Criteria English Language Arts Foundational Skills](#) (EdReports) and [Kentucky Digital Learning Guidelines](#) can help inform selection of supplemental resources if they are not reviewed on EdReports.

Once made, the decision and next steps should be shared with all stakeholders. Finally, a plan should be established for the procurement and distribution of the resources to get them into teachers' hands and for the team to use as they move into developing the curriculum documents.

Key Questions

- **Selection Considerations:**
  - What are the comparative strengths and weaknesses of identified HQIR options (selection criteria, alignment to stakeholder feedback, initial and recurring costs, vendor supports, etc.)?
  - What work will need to be engaged to implement each option, and what are potential implications of the choices on other initiatives and on staff capacity?

- For any identified gaps (e.g., with the *KAS*, the equity lenses, local initiatives) in the selected primary HQIR, what additional resources/supports will teachers need to ensure students experience the content in a way that fulfills the instructional vision?
- **Stakeholder Inclusion:**
  - How will a rationale for the selected primary HQIR be communicated to stakeholders?
- **Logistical Considerations:**
  - Where will we store the materials before distribution can occur?
  - How will we inventory materials once they arrive?
  - How will we inventory and track materials once they are distributed to schools?
  - Where and how will the school and/or district distribute the resources (Instruction Partners, 2019)?

Key Tools

- [Decision-Making Options](#)
- [Sample Consensus Protocol](#)

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