English Language Arts Curriculum Vetting Report

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Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement

and the

Division of Curriculum, Instructional Improvement, and Professional Learning

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

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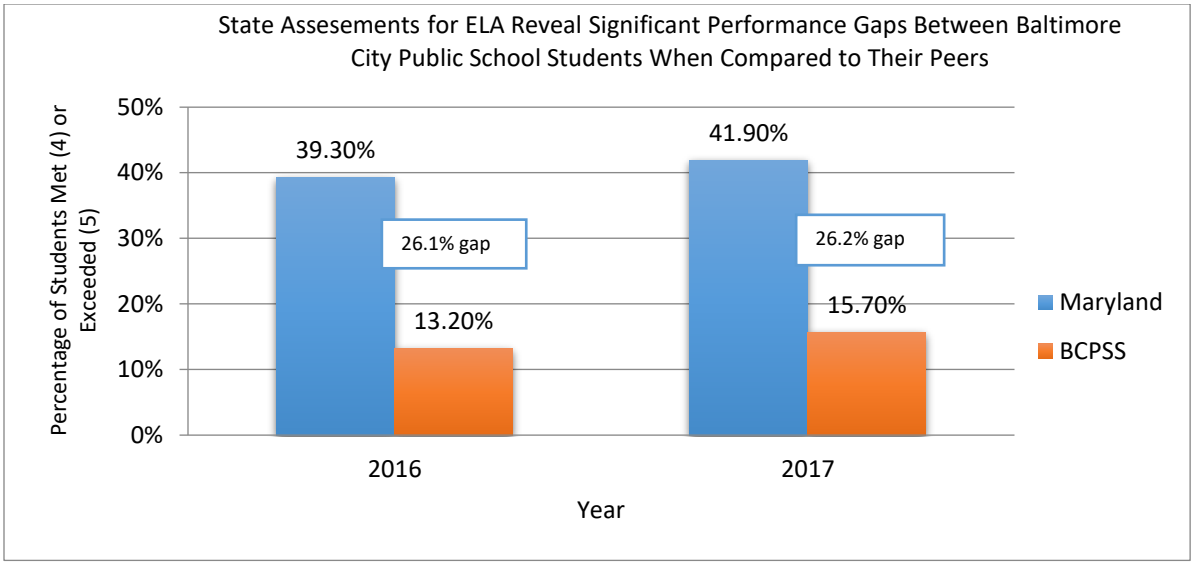
Background

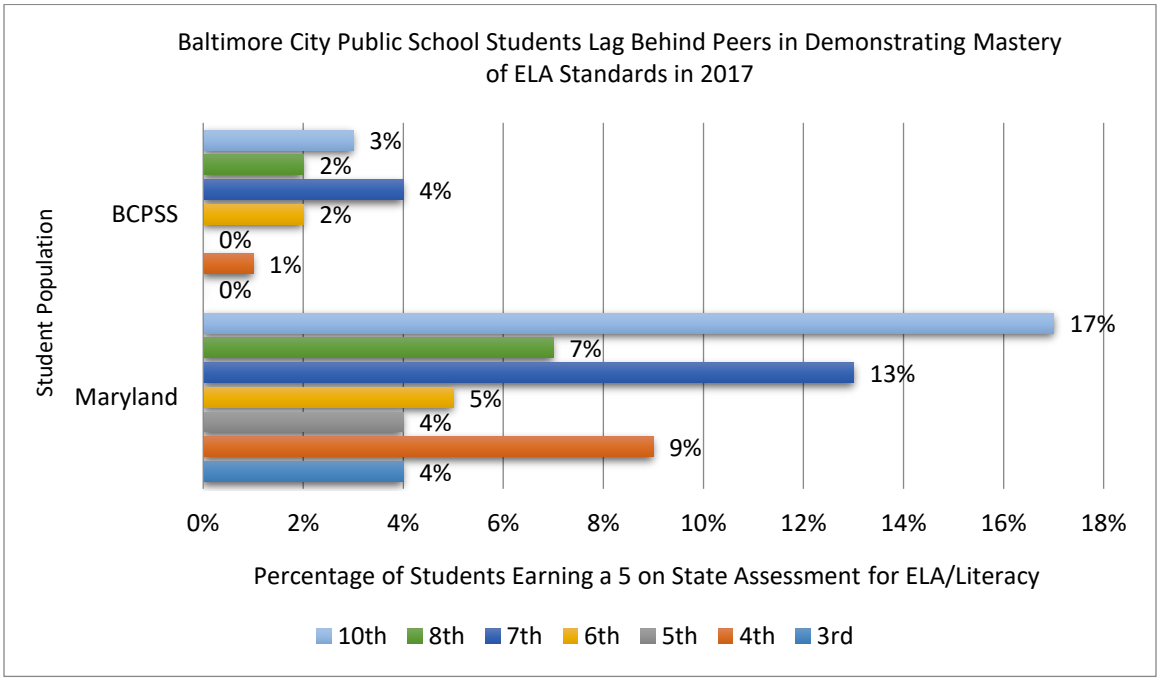
In September 2017, Baltimore City Public Schools and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) detailing a partnership to provide customized support to improve performance of schools in priority status (MOU, 2017). Priority schools are the lowest performing 5% of all Title I schools; and/or have graduation rates below 67%; or are schools that receive Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds under Section 1003g. For the 2017-2018 school year, 23 priority schools were identified. Over 80% of priority schools identified are located in Baltimore City.

The MOU established between Baltimore City Public Schools and MSDE aligns with school improvement initiatives detailed in the Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated Plan. As a result, the MOU has provided the opportunity for MSDE to pilot school improvement strategies in one school system prior to statewide implementation. The MOU focuses on providing support for turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift (Center on School Turnaround, 2017). Through this partnership, Baltimore City Public Schools and MSDE has collaborated to align and leverage resources to raise the quality of education in identified priority schools.

An essential element of school improvement is the implementation of high-quality, standards-based curriculum. Code of Maryland Regulation (COMAR) 13a.04.14.01 requires all Maryland public schools to align English language arts (ELA)/literacy curriculum to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. Additionally, COMAR 13a.04.14.01 requires that all students read, comprehend, and analyze a wide range of grade appropriate informational and literacy texts that meet the grade level text complexity guidelines of the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards for ELA/literacy. Independent research has found that Maryland's state assessment for ELA aligns with Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards (Doorey, 2016). State assessment data for ELA reveal significant gaps in Baltimore City student performance when compared to their grade-level peers (graphs 1 and 2). As a result, the MOU includes curriculum vetting of English language arts curriculum as a key deliverable. MSDE is committed to supporting curricula improvements and associated professional learning experiences for Baltimore City Public Schools in alignment with recommendations presented in this report.



Graph 1: Graph 1 compares the aggregate percentage of all students in Maryland Public Schools and Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) who scored a 4 (met expectations) or 5 (exceeded expectations) for grade-level ELA/Literacy content. Scores were combined from grades 3-10.



0% means in 3rd grade 33 students in Baltimore City Public Schools scored a 5; and in 5th grade 36 students scored a 5. In both cases, grade level averages were reported at 0%.

Graph 2: The graph above compares Maryland Public Schools students (in aggregate) to students in Baltimore City Public Schools (in aggregate) who earned a 5 on the 2017 administration of the state assessment for ELA. Level 5 indicates that students exhibited mastery of the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. This graph shows BCPSS students are lagging behind students across Maryland's public schools.

This report describes the results of the ELA curriculum vetting for Baltimore City Public Schools. The results are organized by grade bands K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-10. For each grade band, an overview is provided that contains a general summary of results. The overview is followed by areas of promise, opportunities for growth, and recommendations for improvement.

It should be noted that in 2015, Baltimore City Public Schools had an external curriculum audit of the current ELA curriculum (Curriculum Management Systems, 2015). Significant gaps in standards alignment was revealed in the 2015 audit. Additionally, Baltimore City Public Schools secured another external vendor in 2018 to audit the same curriculum. MSDE did not become aware of the curriculum audits until after the vetting process began. As a result, there has been three different independent reviews of the ELA curriculum for Baltimore City Public Schools.

The Vetting Process

The vetting process consisted of three phases as shown in Figure 1 below. Phase I focused on establishing structures for the vetting process. This included development of vetting tools, identification of lessons, and selection of vetters. Phase II focused on vetting the curriculum. In phase III, vetting results were synthesized and consensus reports were developed.

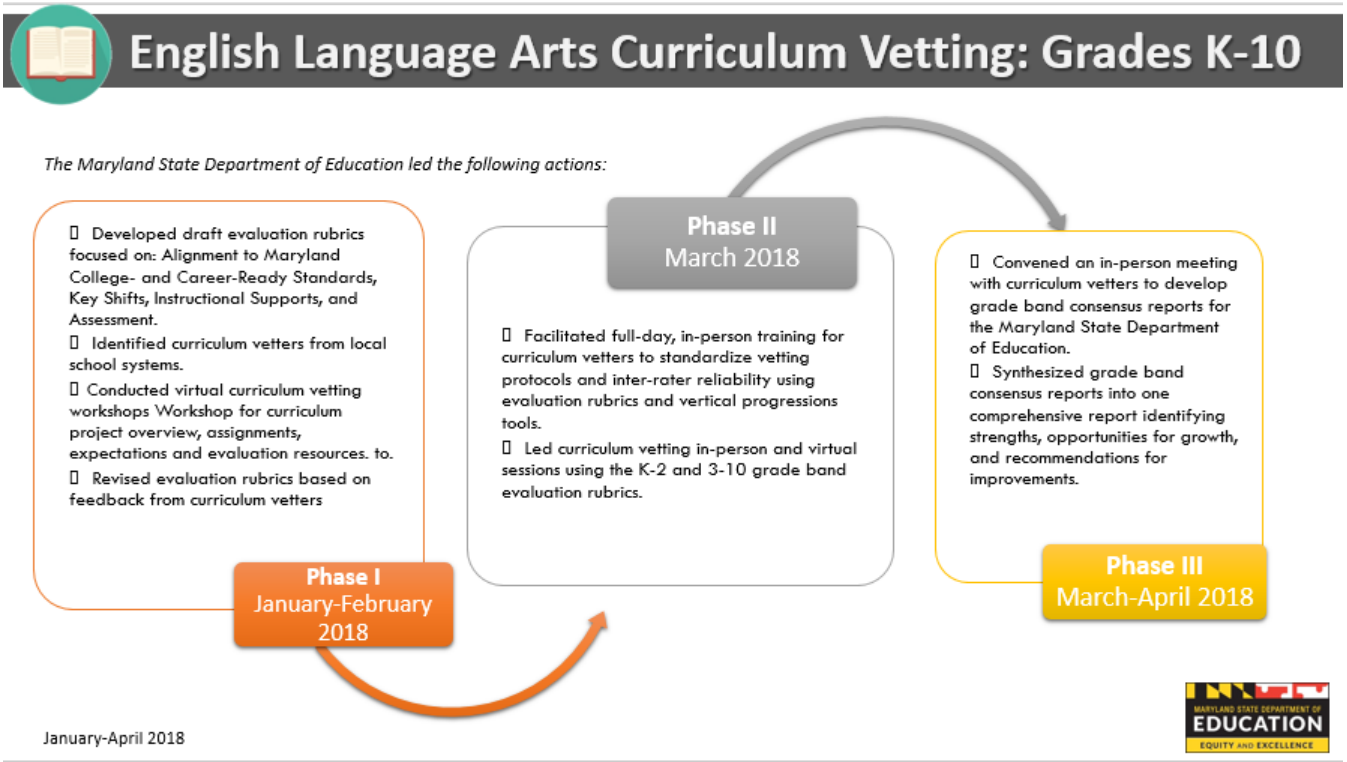


Figure 1 summarizes the three phases of the English language arts curriculum vetting process led by the Maryland State Department of Education.

Phase I: Identifying Lessons, Developing the Rubric, and Selecting Curriculum Vetters

Lesson Selection

In January 2018, Baltimore City Public Schools released to MSDE ELA curriculum for grades kindergarten to 10. Upon receipt of the curricular materials, MSDE began selecting modules to vet for alignment to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards for ELA. A module is the written curriculum which consists of daily lessons which outline standards, objective, materials for instruction such as core and supplementary texts, and accompanying worksheets associated with each lesson. Each module, across kindergarten through grade 10, constitutes one full marking period or quarter of an academic school year. MSDE redacted any identifiers of the school system in the curriculum to ensure anonymity of the school system was maintained. Selections of modules were derived from modules 2, 3, and 4 meaning the second, third and fourth marking periods. Module 1 from each grade level was not selected as it was devoted to up to 25 days of basic review such as identification of genre and book selection. Thus, a rotating selection of curriculum from module 2 through 4 was employed. In doing so, a large cross-section of one academic year's worth of curriculum was captured. In only one instance was a module 1 selected, in grade 5, as at the time of the curriculum vetting, module 4 was not available from the fifth-grade curriculum.

Each module selected varied in length from approximately 150 pages to almost 300 pages. MSDE used well-reputed best practices which suggest selecting some curricular documents undergo an evaluation rather than all curricular documents. Assessing the entire curriculum is not practical due to the amount of time such an evaluation would take and the complexity of the documents. Since this evaluation is not assessing the entire selection of curricular documents, collecting a sample size of documents across all grade levels is a feasible method as long as a rubric is used and the evaluation is conducted by someone other than those who wrote the curriculum (Washington State University, 2018). With each module having the same or known chance of being selected, it is possible to make generalizations based on the sample size collected (Powell, 1998). From the modules selected, approximately 15% of the module was printed and placed in a binder for each reviewer; however, the entire module, for each grade level, was available on flash drive, which represents about 25% of the K-10th grade curriculum that was available for review.

Along with the printed selection of a grade-level curriculum, the same selection was available in its entirety on flash drive. In addition, binders also held the following ancillary curricular documents available for reviewers:

- *decodable passages*
- *stand-alone articles, referenced in a Module*
- *new texts grade 4 and 5*
- *text websites, grade 4*
- *whole Group lessons*
- *writing lessons*
- *instructional Models for K-2, 3-5, and 6-12*
- *Scholastic Leveled Library K-3*

- *year-at-a glance documents for corresponding grade levels and/or grade bands*

To view the exact lessons selected within a given module and grade level, please see Appendix A.

Selection of Curriculum Vetters

Assistant Superintendents from all 24 school systems were invited to recommend curriculum vetters to evaluate ELA curriculum. MSDE selected curriculum vetters from the recommended list based on their qualifications. Curriculum vetters selected had experience in the development and/or identification of ELA curriculum for their school systems or have worked with MSDE as Master Teachers. Curriculum vetters represented supervisors, coaches, specialists, coordinators, or teachers from Cecil, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, Harford, Howard, Worcester, Dorchester, St. Mary's Counties and the SEED School. Vetters had backgrounds in early learning, special education, and ELA. The curriculum vetting process was led by MSDE representatives from the Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement; ELA; and English Language Learners.

Rubric and Resource Development

MSDE used research to guide the development of a rubric and supporting resources for curriculum vetting. An examination of several high-quality, evidence-based existing curriculum evaluation tools were considered. MSDE's Evaluation Rubric for grades K-2 and 3-10 incorporated aspects from the following reputable tools:

***The Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products, or (EQUIP) tool*,** derived from the Tri-State Rubric and the collaborative development process led by Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island for ELA/Literacy evaluation for grades K-2, 3-5 and 6-12. MSDE included features from this tool including:

I) Alignment to the depth of Common Core State Standards;
II) Key Shifts in Common Core State Standards;
III) Instructional Support; and
IV) Assessment

Specific indicators and a rating scale were included for each criterion. MSDE's final rubric focused on Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards for two grade bands, grades kindergarten through 2 and grades 3 through 10.

Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET) for ELA/Literacy K-12, by Achieve the Core is used in the evaluation of comprehensive textbooks, textbook series, and other instructional materials for alignment to the shifts and major features of the Common Core State Standards. MSDE replicated concepts from this tool including: non-negotiable sections for text complexity, text-dependent and text-specific questioning; and a section on each rubric to record narrative comments pertaining to strengths and weaknesses. There was an additional section added under each criterion in which vetters could provide recommendations.

Grade-Level Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool/ Quality Review(GIMET-QR) Guide is a tool which focuses on key features of the standards by grade to supports a deep analysis alignment of content and instructional design of the materials to the Common Core State Standards (Council of Great City Schools). MSDE replicated concepts from this tool including: attention to the type and quality of diverse literary texts, range of informational texts, culturally-

responsive texts, and range of print and digital curricular documents easily accessible for teachers and students.

Once draft versions were developed, they were shared with curriculum vetters for feedback and suggestions for improvement. During the February webinar, curriculum vetters provided comments on the organization, content and the ease with which they could effectively evaluate a given curriculum with the evaluation rubric. Two final rubrics were created: one focusing on grades kindergarten through 2 curricula and one focusing on grades 3 through 10 curricula. For examples of each of the tools cited for use in the development of MSDE's Curriculum Evaluation Rubrics, please see Appendix B.

The decision to create differentiated rubrics for the K-2 grade band and the 3-10 grade band was based upon the explicit differences in curriculum and instruction required at these grade levels. For example, a K-2 analysis of a well-rounded curriculum must contain specific foundational skills components, which serve as anchor standards for the Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards Vertical Progressions:

- print concepts
- phonological awareness
- phonics and word recognition
- fluency

Unlike the K-2 evaluation rubric, the 3-10 evaluation rubric did not include foundational skills, but instead, focused more on the shift in the balance of fiction and non-fiction text. In K-5, the expectation is that ELA curriculum will have a balance of roughly 50% fiction and about 50% non-fiction, which can include literary non-fiction; however, as students advance through each grade, the balance shifts to an inclusion of more non-fiction or literary non-fiction to that of fiction. Unlike their elementary peers, students in grades 6-12 should encounter 70% nonfiction/literary nonfiction and about 30% fiction. During this virtual workshop, time was spent on these crucial differences by sharing the Vertical Progressions charts.

To view all Vertical Progressions, which were available to vetters, please see Appendix B.

Once all feedback was received, MSDE made necessary revisions to both the K-2 and 3-10 evaluation rubrics which was shared during a virtual workshop with curriculum vetters.

Phase II: Ensuring a Reliable and Valid Evaluation

In February, curriculum vetters received the final evaluation rubrics and reviewed the process for curriculum vetting. MSDE also discussed the importance of confidentiality and inter-rater reliability.

A segment of the four criteria used in the evaluation of the ELA curricula are displayed in Table 1. For consistency, these same criteria were used again when teams synthesized individual curriculum reviews into a grade-band consensus reporting as the final phase.

I. Alignment to Maryland College- and Career Ready Standards	II. Key Shifts	III. Instructional Supports	IV. Assessment
Aligns with the Vertical Progressions Chart; checks for clarity, conciseness and connectedness among lessons and activities; measurable objective; evidence of text complexity	K-2: ~50-/50 text balance; student response to text in drawing, writing and speaking. 3-10: higher-order thinking skills; student response from text to analyze, create and/or argue. 70/30 text balance.	Equitable access to instruction, materials, activities. Supports and scaffolds are evidence; Individualized Education Program and/or English Learner plans	Independent mastery of grade-appropriate standards; evidence of rubrics and/or assessment guidelines and success criteria Assessment design

Table 1 shows the four key criteria modeled from research-based tools in developing MSDE's final version.

Each of the four sections concluded with a rating evaluation, as shown in Fig. 2, in which curriculum vetters gave an overall score based on the presence or absence of each indicator listed in the four criterion sections. The rating used was similar to the EQUIP rubric.

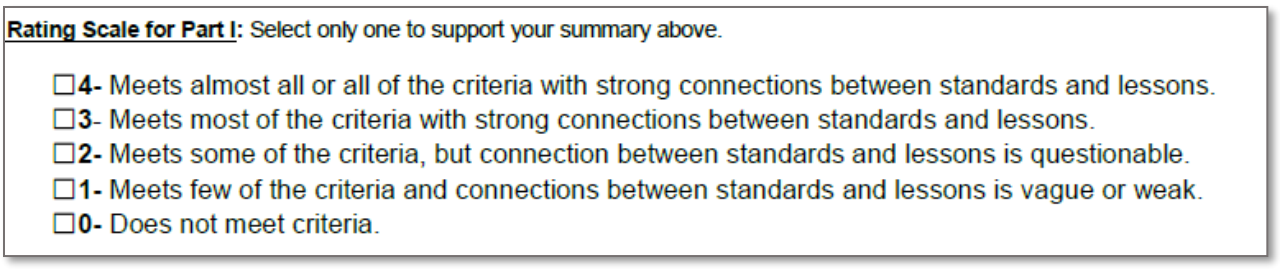


Figure 2 shows how curriculum vetters provide an overall rating for each of the four sections evaluated.

Final versions of the evaluation rubrics are available in Appendix B

Curriculum vetters participated in a full day of in-person training on March 3, 2018. Each curriculum vetter received a binder housing the print version of at least 15-20% of grade-level curriculum, Vertical Progressions Charts for each grade level, ancillary curricular documents such as Scholastic reading lists, decodable passages, Model for Effective Literacy Instruction diagrams, several copies of the Evaluation Rubric, and the flash drive.

To ensure the highest level of consistency and coherency throughout the evaluation process, MSDE developed a protocol in which to engage each curriculum vetter in a hands-on practice evaluation of a randomly selected sample set of lessons from the 5th grade curriculum. Curriculum vetters used each of the evaluation resources including the rubric and Vertical Progression tools during this practice session to develop a sense of how to record objective comments and make evidence-based comments while referring to the Model of Effective Literacy Instruction diagram (BCPSS reference redacted) as necessary. By engaging in and comparing how comments are written, it is anticipated to reveal any inconsistencies, assumptions, and possible bias. Consequently, it allows for clarifications within the protocol, *before* the formal evaluation begins (Office of Data, Analysis, Research and Evaluation, 2016). The description on the following page describes the practice evaluation and inter-rater reliability protocol in more detail:

Independently, each curriculum vetter:

1) Referenced the "Model of Effective Literacy Instruction" to identify lesson organization.
2) Independently reviewed and annotated a sample grade 5 ELA, Module 2 lesson.
3) Used the Vertical Progressions chart to identify which standards would be explicitly taught; not just referenced.
4) Verified the extent to which the activities meet the expectations of the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.
5) Selected indicators, within each criterion, as to whether it was evidenced in the sample lesson.
6) Wrote examples of areas of promise, areas for growth, summary, rating, and recommendations.

Collectively, as a grade band team:

7) Shared with team findings from the independent evaluation and developed a combined summary. MSDE facilitators ensured each sample evaluation demonstrated an equal level of consistency among grade level curriculum vetters (in each grade band: K-2, grade 3-5, grade 6-8 and grade 9-10), through the correct and accurate use of rubrics and tools.
8) Prepared grade band team summary chart with compiled comments summarized to share out with all curriculum vetters. Grade band summaries were displayed for review by all curriculum vetters and MSDE facilitators. This allowed for calibration of responses prior to conducting the formal evaluation.

Collectively, as a whole group:

9) All participants engaged in a feedback gallery walk in which they made comments on summary charts to help support an objective evaluation. MSDE asked clarifying questions providing opportunities for curriculum vetters to refine comments and/or feedback that were not clear and modeled constructive comments so that a high level of agreement is reached.
10) MSDE provided feedback to the entire and engaged curriculum vetters in a discussion on how to write comments, suggestions and feedback in the rubrics.

After the training, curriculum vetters begun the work of reviewing and rating (Figure 2) their assigned grade level ELA curriculum based upon the four criteria and indicators. MSDE staff were on hand fielding questions, offering guidance as it relates to the inter-reliability norms established, and ensuring a smooth transition to the independent review that continued off-site.

Phase III: Consensus Building and Recommendations Development

MSDE facilitated a final in-person meeting with curriculum vetters to synthesize all grade-level evaluations in grade band consensus reports. The purpose of the reports were to identify areas of promise, opportunities for growth, and recommendations for improvement to the ELA curriculum.

Curriculum vetters shared general analysis which revealed several commonalities and patterns in the curriculum. Each vetter shared a summary of areas of promise and areas for growth for each of their respective grade level findings. Grade band team leaders summarized the findings into one document.

Discussion around summarized findings were used to evaluate and ensure consistency among comments and areas for consideration. As a result, reviewers used this activity to edit or revise evaluations for MSDE into a one grade-level reporting analysis for each grade.

As a final step to this process, grade-band team leaders synthesized each of their grade level reports into one overall report using the same four criteria as throughout the entire process and submitted them to MSDE.

Refer to Appendix B for additional details on the Consensus Building documents.

Curriculum Vetting Results

MSDE compiled all four grade band Consensus Reports for K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-10 grade bands. The next page presents the findings for each grade band. The information and examples do not represent an exhaustive account of the findings, but act to highlight and reveal common patterns, strengths, and areas for growth. Each grade band concludes with recommendations and overall rating score exactly like the rating used throughout the evaluation process. Full grade Consensus Reports are available for review.

Grade Band K-2

Overview:

An ELA curriculum designed for grades kindergarten to 2 must include foundational skills. Foundational skills create a strong structure for reading fluency, phonological awareness, word recognition, and concepts of prints (Rasinksi, 2014). In addition to foundational skills, curriculum must include regular read aloud protocols embedded in standards-rich lessons (Baker, 2013). Lessons that incorporate multiple ways to express understanding of standards can be more effective when they include writing, drawing and speaking for young learners (Rao, 2016).

Using the MSDE developed evaluation rubric for grades kindergarten - 2, curriculum vetters assessed each grade level and developed a consensus report detailing their findings. The findings are organized into areas of promise, opportunities for growth, and recommendations for improvements.

The criteria shown in table 2 was used assess the curriculum.

I. Alignment to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards	**II.** Key Areas of Shift/Focus	**III.** Instructional Supports	**IV.** Assessment/Measurability
▪ Measurable alignment with MCCRS (RI, RL, W, and L) ▪ Text complexity ▪ Vocabulary acquisition ▪ Variety of texts ▪ Foundational skills (see above)	▪ Text-based evidence (incl. read alouds) ▪ Write to source (incl. drawing and speaking) ▪ Academic vocabulary ▪ Balance of information to literary text	▪ Equal access to text ▪ Close reading techniques ▪ Evidence of differentiation ▪ Extensions included and appropriate	▪ Valid measures ▪ Success criteria ▪ Accommodations and accessibility ▪ Reliable measures

Table 2 shows the research-based criteria on which curriculum vetters evaluated for inclusion in the grade level curriculum.

Curriculum vetters rated the curriculum on a scale of 0-5 for each of the four criteria.

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

The overall rating for grade band K-2 was a 2. There were several promising practices regarding the variety of texts used and access to grade-level text. However, the curriculum was not sufficiently aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

Areas of Promise:

I. *Variety of Texts*

Lessons incorporated engaging topics presented through a variety of texts and were found to be within an appropriate Lexile level for each grade. Appropriate, in this context, means students should be able to read relatively easily with 95% accuracy at the Independent Level; or read challenging, but still

manageable text at the Instructional Level with 90% accuracy. Once reading accuracy falls below 90%, students are the Frustration Level as text becomes too difficult to read (Partnership for Reading, 2001). Some of the text selections include topics such as animal habitats at a 380L for grade 1, monster bugs in grade 2 at a 640L, and various fictional pieces at mixed Lexile Levels ranging between 240L, 360L, and –590L. Since Lexile levels are indicators for both text complexity and a reader's reading ability, appropriate Lexile Levels for kindergarten through grade 2 should range between 190L-650L, according to the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts, Appendix A (2012).
In grades 1 and 2, nearly 80% of lessons reviewed were found to be aligned to the Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards. Curriculum vetters for grade 1 praised the use of one text with focus through different standards or part of the same text. This allowed students to interact more deeply with the text allowing more time and practice to meet the expectation of the standard. In all three grade levels, evidence of direct instruction of foundational skills occurred through Fundations and Morning Message.

II. *Text-Based Discussions*

A majority of lessons provide opportunities for students to engage in text-based discussions using multiple means such as cold call, group share, and turn and talk. Examples included students explaining how an illustration within a story led to their understanding of the text. Opportunities were embedded at each grade level for student to present ideas and information through writing, drawing and/or speaking. For example, in one lesson, students could show mastery of content using stickers or drawing while in other lessons, they could highlight or explain to a partner. Kindergarten lessons, in particular, demonstrated explicit vocabulary instruction in most lessons. Noted also was an equal collection of fiction and non-fiction text across this band.

III. *Access to Grade-Level Texts*

Lessons throughout grades kindergarten - 2 provided students with opportunities to engage with some age-appropriate grade-level text. Several lessons included an interactive component in which students engaged in read alouds encouraging them to respond to authentic, complex text (380-540L, for kindergarten). Texts were revisited over many instructional days providing students time to develop comprehension, during which time, teachers utilized close reading strategies, observed more regularly in the kindergarten and grade 1 curriculum. Shared reading was a strategy mentioned in kindergarten to allow students to read simultaneous to the teacher to develop fluency and/or foundational skills. In grade 2, embedded template charts were used in several instances in order to provide a visual model for teachers to model aloud when introducing a skill as a starting place. Reviewers noted use of differentiation and Universal Design for Learning tactics such as turn and talk, visuals, color-coded graphic organizers, and text and picture arrangements. While the grade 1 curriculum called for teachers to post organizers as reference during independent reading, there was not verification of this practice.

IV. *Variety of Measures*

There was observable evidence in lessons for students to demonstrate understanding of content through informal or formative assessment practices such as exit tickets, sentence annotations, graphic organizers, and discussion. Lastly, a gradual release model was incorporated at each grade level as teachers conducted read alouds with some instances of students assuming control of their learning, during the lesson activity. For example, in Grade 1 and 2, several lessons contained a, "You Do".

Opportunities for Growth:

I. *Alignment of Standards, Objectives, Instruction, and Assessment in Kindergarten*

There was a lack of observable alignment among the standards, objectives, instruction, and assessment for kindergarten. Only 50% of the kindergarten curriculum was aligned to Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards. Curriculum vetters reported that:

- the entirety of the standard(s) was not addressed within the content of the lesson it was placed;
- lesson objectives were not aligned to the standard nor the outlined instruction;
- lesson content was not aligned to the indicated standard or standards and/or objectives; and
- an incorrect standard was identified.

In the kindergarten curriculum from module 2, one example showed the primary standard as RL.K.3, but the lessons and the learning objective were not aligned nor addressed within the lesson body. Another example, from module 2, shows the primary standard as RI.K.5; however, the learning objective and outlined instruction address content beyond the expectations of a kindergarten student. In some cases, text selections for Kindergarten students fell into Lexile range: 380-540 which suggests students would not be reading at an independent level since this Lexile is often suited for Grade 1 or 2 students.

Across all three grades, vetters repeatedly identified lack or misuse of standards on vocabulary development and acquisition. To be clear, vocabulary development and acquisition standards appear in a couple of ways: through Language standards or through comprehension of literary or nonfiction text standards, such as L.K.4-6; L.1.4-6 and L.2.4-6 and RL/RI.K-2.4, respectively. Examples from the kindergarten module 2, grade 1 module 3, and grade 2 module 4 include lessons that lacked specific vocabulary instruction and ways to capture the vocabulary in such a way that will allow students to practice and use vocabulary in next or future discussion and lessons. Conversely, in lessons in which vocabulary acquisition was apparent, there were no evident strategies for students to become more independent learners as the idea of acquisition did not advance beyond direct instruction.

II. Inclusion of Questions to Foster Higher-Order Thinking

Student questions posed throughout lessons did not provide the opportunity for higher order thinking. Questions were basic recall questions such as, “Let’s consider what kind of poem this is turning out to be; raise your hand if you think it is a fiction poem…now raise your hand if you think this is a non-fiction poem,” from grade 1, module 3; or, “Identify the main topic of the paragraph,” from grade 2, module 4. Several other examples ask students more open-ended questions, but vetters often found few opportunities within the written curriculum where students would justify or explain their thinking. One example is from grade 1, module 3: “Does the poem tell us what the turtles are doing? Can we show that in our picture? Does the poem tell us what color the fish are? Let’s double check so that our picture can show as much detail as we know.”

Writing tasks reviewed in grades kindergarten to grade 2 did not align with Maryland College- and Career- Ready standards. For example, in grade 1, module 3, students were learning about wind power by completing a graphic organizer on how the author supported the claim of “wind power saves money” citing CCR.RI.1.5 and CCR.RI.1.1, as the primary and secondary standards, respectively. As written, the text, along with questions could be used for students writing an opinion piece (CCR.W.1.1) using textual evidence (CCR.RI.1.1) to support their claims. However, the end of lesson independent writing task was for students to label the parts of a wind turbine. This does not meet the full intent of the primary

standard in determining whether students know and use various text features to locate key facts or information in a text (CCR.RI.1.5). The set of tasks did not align to the full intent of the standards listed. In this example, and many others across the K-2 grade band, a writing task was not clearly driven by a Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standard. This was a recurring pattern. The standards emphasize using the text to support responses. Young learners must be held responsible for supporting all responses from text, even if it begins through discourse. This practice must be explicit in all grade levels, (Fisher, D, 2008).

A goal of vocabulary instruction is to help students learn what new words mean so they can communicate and achieve academically and socially. Effective vocabulary instruction requires intentional activities that are both rich and robust for students to learn words, related concepts, and their meanings. Consequently, students need multiple opportunities to build vocabulary, develop deep levels of word knowledge, and strategies to acquire new words, especially when reading independently (Butler, 2010). In grades kindergarten – 2, the intentionality of vocabulary instruction aligned to college- and career- standards for vocabulary acquisition was not evident. Further, the more students are exposed to and interact with language throughout their academic career, the more easily they acquire meaning of words, use patterns, word structure, syntax, morphology, and other methods to develop meaning of words (corestandards.org). This was not evidenced in a way consistent with the research for learning meaning of words or strategies to acquire new words.

One strategy emphasized in research is the use of questioning and language engagement to promote word knowledge (Butler, 2010). In grade 2, module 4, curriculum vetters identified evidence in which teachers were to conduct think alouds to explain “how visual information helps readers understand key points and vocabulary. Good readers “read” visual information too in order to gain a better understanding of the text.” The primary standard was RI.2.7-explain how specific images contribute to and clarify text with a secondary standard- RI.2.4- determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic.

Through the use of the think aloud modeling, teachers were prompted to ask questions in how illustrations, in the core text, could be used to determine how they “contribute to and/or clarify the text.” Following this, students were given 3-5 minutes to read and discuss with other students how an illustration contributed or clarified the text. No follow up questioning techniques were used nor was there evidence in which students would have multiple opportunities to practice or explain the how use of an illustration help them meet the primary or secondary standards.

Overall, there was no additional learning experiences for developing words before, during, or after the learning experience in alignment with the intent of the standard, RI.2.4 nor did instruction move beyond finding an illustration to clarify meaning. It is not clear how students could make the connection between using an illustration to understand “key points and vocabulary” and build their vocabulary or acquire new words based on this lesson example. Other lessons in this band were sequenced in a similar way.

III. Teacher-Directed Instruction

As students move through text, over multiple days, they must have practice with all or parts of text and within the broader expectation of the domains of Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. Standards should be derived from the first domain, "Key Ideas and Details", then from the second domain of "Craft and Structure", and the third domain, "Integration of Knowledge and Ideas," in a near sequential way. Lessons reviewed demonstrated navigation through the increasingly difficult standards beginning with the first domain of identifying the theme or central idea (RI/RL.2) followed by citing textual evidence (RI/RL.1). In most kindergarten-2 lessons, the teacher is expected to conduct the "first read" by reading aloud to the class during Whole Group. An effective practice is to have students predict a central idea, before the teacher begins the read aloud and/or informs students of the central idea. In grade 2, few lessons utilized close reading strategies. Other lessons throughout the grade band showed where the scripted curricula expected teachers to inform young readers of the central idea and/or modeled the whole process with few interactive experiences by students.

Lessons were highly scripted with little time left for extension activities. In grade 1, over 75% of the lessons offered no extension activity or above-grade level text. When Universal Design for Learning was incorporated, reviewers noted they did not fully meet the definition of what could be considered a Universal Design for Learning technique or that they seemed more like disconnected, random side note. In grade 1, module 3, the lesson opens with a "UDL Connect" stating that linking prior knowledge to new learning helps students understand novel concepts and provides motivation for learning. In this example, the primary and secondary standards are RL.1.7- use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events; RL.1.1- ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

In another set of lessons, "UDL Connect" appears at the end of the lesson: "fostering a community of learners through turn and talks." Here, the primary and secondary standards focused on a student's ability to use text features to locate key features or information in a text, and, ask and answer questions about key details, respectively. There is no tangible evidence in how or why this would occur. Research indicates, when Universal Design for Learning is used along with standards-designed instruction, it can be effective in unwrapping standards in order to determine what students should know and be able to do. This involves identifying what skills and what key concepts, knowledge, and background must be addressed so that it is clear how the standard corresponds to the concepts students need to learn. (Rao, 2016). In these examples, there is no direct connection to the skills, concepts or how students would be assessed through Universal Design for Learning methods aligned to the standards and activities.

IV. Alignment of Standards to Leaning Experiences

Many standards from the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards are cited in curricular documents within each grade level module reviewed. Lessons that included an explicit measure or assessment did not align to the standards cited; were not rigorous; or were not meeting the full intent of the listed standard. For example, in kindergarten, more than half of the assessment used "observation" by the teacher, without specific mention as to what criteria would be used to determine mastery. The same was true for grades 1 and 2, where there was a near absence of success criteria and/or a rubric, whether teacher- or-student-designed. Including what teachers should look for through specific criteria and a bank of possible ways to measure learning is highly advisable.

Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendation 1: Include learning experiences and assessments to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The ELA curriculum for Baltimore City Public Schools is highly scripted, detailing what a teacher will do and say. Research offers varying perspectives in support of and in opposition to scripted curricula. Scripted curricula with embedded teacher-directed lessons have been seen as a way of meeting higher accountability measures in implementing and measuring mastery of standards, particularly in urban school districts (Kavanagh, 2017). Curriculum vetters identified a lack of differentiation for the English learner, students with disabilities, and those struggling with reading comprehension and writing. In the journal article, *The Allure of Simplicity: Scripted Curricula and Equity (2017)*, authors concluded when a scripted curriculum is used, there must be a concerted, explicit effort of practical-adding scaffolds that help teachers to differentiate, thus making the scripts more "equity-conscious". While there are schools of thought that advocate to curricular sameness to ensure equity, it's important to look deeper at what is happening with this approach to an ever-growing diverse student body. Further, the over reliance on scripted curriculum could discourage teachers or schools from engaging in inquiry about how the concept of equity factors into teacher knowledge, expertise, and relationships with students (Timberlake, M. 2017). In other words, a scripted curriculum may not provide the freedom for teachers to focus more on their students in finding ways to sort out how to best handle their lack of academic achievement. Instead it implicitly emphasizes being hyper focused on a set of documents not necessarily designed to considers all learners' needs with respect to instructional delivery and assessment of and for learning

Recommendation 2: Align language and vocabulary standards to instruction.

Incorporating multiple vocabulary strategies for development and acquisition throughout instruction and assessment is strongly encouraged. Indicate specific words that must be taught in a lesson, before students enter the classroom. Relying on a teacher to identify words during a lesson does not indicate thoughtful planning thus anticipating where students may struggle. It could also lead to teachers straying from standards-based instruction by visiting resources outside the written curriculum. Additionally, assisting teachers with background on what constitutes a high-quality vocabulary instruction on domain-specific and academic words can support instruction for diverse learners (Gersten, 2007). Identifying domain-specific and academic words and definitions along with pictures or photographs could prove helpful, especially for struggling, English learners, and/or students with disabilities (Olson, 2015).

Recommendation 3: Use Vertical Progressions charts to ensure correct standards-based objectives for grades K-2 Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

Use of Vertical Progressions in creating grade level curriculum is a necessary task. Without this kind of deliberate attempt to align standards and lessons to a specific grade level to which they are intended can cause gaps in learning as students' progress to the next grade level. Additionally, for new or non-tenured teachers who are unfamiliar with the Common Core progression of standards, they may not have the content knowledge to make sound instructional decisions until they have had experiences or professional learning to observe that "each instructional experience will add more depth of knowledge for students as they grapple with the authors' viewpoints in texts…and a combination of other kinds of

standards-based analyses in order to impact the reader's response to become adept and discerning readers" (Council of Great City Schools, 2017). Thus, using MSDE's Vertical Progressions tool alongside the development of a standards-based curriculum is highly recommended.

In the process of revisiting lessons to better align content, objective, standards, and assessment, embedding simple learning targets with success criteria is highly encouraged. In order to make a determination if, and to what extent, a student has met with success, supports such as rubrics and guides can help teachers and students know who needs additional support or who may need an extension, having exceeded expectations. In particular, when using a written piece as a formative or summative measure, there must a direct citation to what writing standard is being assessed, such as argument, informative/explanatory, or narrative, and the measure for what success looks like. This way, the writing assignment is anchored in content and focused on developing academic language and the writing process. (Baker, S. 2014). Having this kind of data serves to determine progress for student growth over time and helps teachers adjust instruction accordingly, not to mention putting good writing and self-assessment habits in place early.

Earlier it was noted that the use of Universal Design for Learning, or the school system's use of Universal Design for Learning Connect, should be revisited. While it is praiseworthy to include the use of Universal Design for Learning techniques to engage all learners, it is recommended to incorporate checkpoints from the revised Universal Design for Learning guide to proactively design lesson that address learner variability (Rao, 2016). Left as is, the subtle nods to Universal Design for Learning could be ignored when, instead, they offer access and equity to any classroom. Consider reviewing *Using Universal Design for Learning to Design Standards-based Lesson*s. See Works Cited for more information.

Recommendation 4: Incorporate evidence-based read-aloud practices.

Baltimore City Public Schools' curriculum demonstrates the practice of conducting read-alouds in grades kindergarten-2. A recent quasi-experimental study of first grade classrooms showed that explicit instruction on a range of reading instruction outcomes can make a positive impact on student achievement. Specifically, when a read-aloud intervention was implemented incorporating core principles and features, students realized positive results in retelling, vocabulary development, and higher-order skills comprehension skills as compared to their first-grade peers in comparison groups (Baker, S., 2013).

It is recommended that Baltimore City central office ELA staff review effective practices as it relates to using a read aloud in a strategic and purposeful way to benefit all students within a single classroom. To Four principles are recommended for read aloud practices:

1) Teachers uses a think aloud technique modeling a step-by-step demonstration of the comprehension [reading standard to be assessed] and the decision-making process, leading to students using them independently;
2) Read aloud content is scaffolded to become increasingly complex, over time, building on previous skills and strategies learned, such as more complex narrative story structures with students producing more elaborate summaries, independently;
3) Interactive read alouds engage all students, not just a few, some of the time with frequent interactions throughout lesson;
4) Teachers provide frequent and extensive feedback to students either affirming or correcting; when students answered incorrectly, teacher draws students' attention back to

text for literal questions; for inferential; teacher practices a think aloud strategy leading to a justifiable answer based on text.

Effective read aloud strategies must be coupled with interventions that implement the following features:

1) Teachers and students use the same books aligned to a content standard;
2) Use narrative and expository systematically, i.e., with
   - Narrative - students taught to predict before reading, followed by retelling after reading.
   - Expository – students taught to listen for specific information before reading.
3) Lessons include an overview and tiered plan to be used during implementation suggesting excerpts for a *before, during*, and *after* reading segment;
4) Dialogic interactions during read alouds occur between teachers and students and among students. All structures would be modeled and put in place on how students can interact in dyads, triads, groups, on explicit comprehension strategies with close monitoring and tracking by teachers (Baker, 2013).

For the most effective read-aloud technique, it is suggested a set of professional learning opportunities be extended in which teachers can practice the many facets of this intervention. For more information, please see the Works Cited appendix.

As a result of the analysis and examination, reviewers scored this grade band as follows:
Overall Rating the K-2 Grade Band:

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

Grade Band 3-5

Overview:

Using the MSDE developed evaluation rubric for grades 3-10, curriculum vetters assessed curriculum for grade 3, 4 and 5 as shown below in Table 3. Findings were summarized into three categories: areas of promise, opportunities for growth, and recommendations for improvement.

Curriculum vetters used the criteria below to assess curriculum.

I. Alignment to Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards	**II.** Key Areas of Shift/Focus	**III.** Instructional Supports	**IV.** Assessment/Measurability
▪ Measurable alignment with MCCRS (RI, RL, W, and L) ▪ Text complexity ▪ Vocabulary acquisition ▪ Variety of texts	▪ Text-based evidence ▪ Write to source (incl. drawing and speaking) ▪ Academic vocabulary ▪ Balance of information to literary text	▪ Equal access to text ▪ Close reading techniques ▪ Evidence of differentiation ▪ Extensions included and appropriate	▪ Valid measures ▪ Success criteria ▪ Accommodations and accessibility ▪ Reliable measures

Table 3 summarizes criteria used by curriculum vetters to evaluate curricula.

Curriculum vetters rated the curriculum on a scale of 0-5 for each of the four criteria.

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

The overall rating for grade band 3-5 was a 2. There were several promising practices regarding the variety of texts used, attention to key shifts, and evidence of assessment practices. However, the curriculum was not sufficiently aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

Areas of Promise:

I. *Variety of Texts*

Across the 3-5 grade band, the inclusion and explicit notation of several Maryland College- and Career Ready Standards for both literary and non-fiction standards were evident. Curricula showed the presence of age-appropriate, complex texts including both short and longer passages. A majority of lessons included print and digital materials balanced between literary and non-fiction texts. In grades 4 and 5, an obvious inclusion of science and some social studies materials was infused. A representative sample from grade 5 curriculum begins a lesson with: “Teacher Alert: Science requires a careful, critical approach to reading. Students should be exposed to a variety of texts…” The attention given to the use of informational text in the 3-5 grade band, particularly grade 4 and 5, is noteworthy for a few reasons and will be visited later in recommendations.

Grades 3-5 curricula showed promise in other areas including in grade 3 where curriculum vetters noticed some of the learning experiences included scaffolding and tiered instruction through the use a gradual release approach. In addition, grade 4 and 5 curricula demonstrated in several places in which explicit parts of lessons were modeled by the teacher using think aloud strategy, via multiple modalities, such as photos, partner practice activities, organizers, post-it notes, charts, and more.

Numerous writing opportunities were observed in the grade 3-5 band through routine writing, formative writing tasks, and the text, "Explorations in Nonfiction Writing". The text was often cited for use during "whole group, small group, and guided and independent writing instruction", which typically followed the "Send Off" in the whole group lessons.

II. *Attention to Key Shifts*

Lessons facilitate opportunities to respond both orally and in writing, using text evidence. Most lessons have a balance of fiction and non-fiction passages and texts. In some cases, routine writing was used to draw evidence from the text with support from the anchor charts and strategy activities.

Clearer evidence of vocabulary instruction occurred in Grade 4, as compared to Grades 3 and 5. For example, words were listed along with a Universal Design for Learning Connect suggestions and aligned to a corresponding Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. Strategies included word walls, gallery walk of visuals, and several anchor charts that called for a variety of engaging, standards-focused ways to organize thinking and comprehension.

III. *Incorporation of Universal Design for Learning*

Curriculum vetters commented vigorously about the use of and reminders [to teachers] for including Universal Design for Learning Connects throughout the grade band. Examples included multiple opportunities for students to record information from the teacher or text into a graphic organizer. This practice was modeled during instruction which also can aid struggling students, English learners or students with disabilities in building their capacity toward meeting outcomes. Use of modeling, shared, and guided practices between and among peers can support student learning through the, "I do, we do, you do" model. Organizers and charts, if used, were clearly marked with directions making them easy to access throughout lessons by teachers and students. A variety of instructional supports, including examples and models by teachers, were located and found to be an appropriate form of support.

IV. *Evidence of Assessment Practices*

Grade-band comments showed the ELA curricula incorporated observable opportunities for students to demonstrate meeting the expectations of a college and career standard. While this is presented here as an area of promise, it should be noted the statement is broad and leaves room for deeper examination, which will be addressed in detail in the following section.

Opportunities for Growth:

I. *Consistent and Coherent use of Vocabulary and Language Standards*

Across each grade level, there is a noticeable absence, incorrect use, and/or a mismatch between the various college and career standards for learning new words and phrases from interaction with reading literary (CCR.RL.4) and information text (CCR.RI.4) and/or through language associated with general or

domain-specific texts (CCR.L.4, CCR.L.5, and CCR.L.6). The focus of the college and career vocabulary standards, included in the language (CCR.L.) standard, is on students' ability to understand words and phrases, their relationships, and the subtleties when learning new words, particularly general academic (Tier 2 words) and domain-specific words and phrases (Tier 3) (Research Supporting Key Elements, Appendix A). Vocabulary development and acquisition remains one of the most impactful ways to improve understanding and comprehension for narrative and expository text. In particular, there is recent research asserting attention must be given to what is considered academic vocabulary in everyday instruction. Academic vocabulary is defined as words used in classrooms and text much more than an everyday informal setting. This includes both academic words and domain-specific words (Baker, S., 2014).

More specifically, curriculum vetters observed tenuous links between vocabulary or language standards and the lesson content. For example, in grade 3, module 3, a lesson cited the use of RL.3.4 (determine meaning of words and phrases are they are used in text), as the primary standard; yet, there was no appearance of this which could indicate an incorrect standard was being assessed or the lesson content and activities did not align. Another representative example (evident more than once), was in grade 5, module 1, where the "TASK" is listed at RL.5.6 (assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text) while the primary and secondary standards are listed as, RL.5.4 (determine meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text) and RL. 5.3 (compare and contrast two or more characters, setting or events), respectively. While it is understood there may be lessons and standards building in rigor and relevance toward this TASK, it is the interpretation and activity associated with the RL.5.6 standard that is in question; specifically, the disconnect between the writing task and the corresponding inferencing necessary to analyze multiple points of view. In this example. The TASK required students to "write a story surrounding the spring of eternal life that is told from the point of view of one of the characters…" If vocabulary was being assessed in this lesson, the reviewer was unable to detect how or where. There were no associated writing standards included in this lesson.

Another example of standards misalignment occurs in grade 3, in which the standards identified for instruction are RL.3.2. and RL.3.4, in module 2. The lesson content did not support these standards as the activity set an expectation of finding a "message", while the instruction and organizers attempted to identify the central idea. There must be an explicit alignment among the intent of the standard, instruction, lesson content and assessment.

There is also a noticeable lack a lack of connection among lesson content, Maryland College-and Career-Ready Standards, formative assessment processes, and writing assignments from the text, "Explorations in Nonfiction Writing (ENW)." Toward the end of most lessons (in the "Send Off"), students were often required to write under certain conditions, but not always explicitly writing to source. Examples include:

- Draw and label part of the Earth, followed by pages 42-43 (ENW) on creating diagrams;
- Describe a tsunami using scientific information, followed by pages 26-27 on Publishing and Sharing;
- Write an analytical response to *Tuck Everlasting*, followed by pages 214-215 (ENW) on identifying the purpose and features of an analytical response
- Highlight and identify a text structure…, followed by pages 28-29 (ENW) on prioritizing a list to summarize; and

- Identify a cause and effect relationship [from a non-fiction text read aloud by teacher] to write how the cause and effect relationship increase your world-mindedness; followed by pages 144-145 (ENW) to "tell about a surprise you received or bought with your own money…".

There are numerous instances where the reading and writing standards are sequenced in such that they either do not complement one another or they lack a cohesive purpose for reading and writing within the body of a lesson. Further, it was noted assignments from the *Explorations in Nonfiction Writing* text were used to conclude or close out a lesson but were in some cases not aligned to the sequence of the Maryland College-and Career-Ready standards cited in the onset of the lesson. Rather, the "Send Off" formative writing assessment, as shown above, did not connect back to the primary nor secondary standards. The book that was used in the curriculum, "*Explorations in Nonfiction Writing*", does not align to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards for writing. For example, there seems to be no mention or practice of argument writing in this text. Argument writing is a highly assessed standard on the Maryland state assessment for ELA Instead, the book has a section on "persuasive writing", which is not assessed on state assessments for ELA. Maryland requires students to meet or exceed standards for argument writing by grade 5. However, the text that Baltimore City Public Schools includes for instruction focuses on opinion and persuasive writing. There is great concern that Baltimore City Public School students in grades 3-5 are not getting sufficient practice for argument writing.

II. *Text-based Questioning and Alignment to Reading and Writing Standards*

Text-dependent questioning was evident throughout the grade band. However, questions did not encourage critical thinking skills such as inferencing. Questions in the grades 3-5 curriculum focused on recall without scaffolding to higher order thinking questions. It is recommended that scaffolding is incorporated into curriculum to allow students time to engage in text, at a grade-appropriate level, instead of a daily teacher-centered set of lessons that maintains a lower-level cognitive demand of students.

The vetted curriculum for grades 3-5 was largely teacher-centered. Most lessons begin with similarly designed graphic organizers found in a template-like format. Examination of lessons showed students were not always expected to extend responses, such as a justification to a response, rather instruction and modeling showed how to complete the graphic organizers for students Lessons, in general, were not driven by student data such as a formative assessment. Thus, curriculum vetters could not determine how much and to what degree students were, in fact, accessing standards and applying them to later learning at increasingly higher levels.

When texts are complex in structure, language, and meaning, extended and collaborative discussions are ways to give students safe practices to talk with peers about their understanding of the text. Guided by questions that are intentional and systematic can deepen a students' close interaction with the text, thus moving students from the literal level to the inferential level. Literal-level questions focus on general understanding and could begin with, "What does the text say?" Structural-level questions focus more on vocabulary, text structure, and author's craft. Using a question such as, "How does the text work?" can guide instruction toward understanding how and why authors organized a specific text. Inferential-level questions like, "What does the text mean?" focus on logical inferences, text-to-text

connections, and opinion and argument (Fisher, 2016). It is believed when students engage in a type of well-planned, extended and collaborative discussion (around a complex text), it can lead to students feeling more dedicated and motivated (Guthrie, 2014) especially when they anticipate a challenge with a given text.

In applying the concept of this effective practice of scaffolding close reading text-dependent questions into curriculum, reviewers wondered if these types of questions would have the intended impact, as described above:

- Grade 3, Module 2- [the teacher is expected to read nearly 15 pages aloud to class*] Identify two key details that support the central message.*
- Grade 3, Module 2- [teacher read for 5-10 minutes modeling cause and effect, using chart to record findings] *"I'm going to continue reading. After I'm done, I want you to discuss with a neighbor another cause and effect relationship." "Let's record on our chart." (student do not have chart)*
- Grade 4, Module 3- [the teacher reads up through page 7 aloud to class] *Where did the old gentleman live? Why do you think he lives on a knoll above the sea? What kind of figurative language is used on page 6? (as cited in curriculum before instruction on figurative language)*
- Grade 4, Module 3- [teacher displays a chart for RL.3.3-character, motivations, actions, traits during read aloud; reads three chunks of text aloud; after third chunk, teachers poses a series of questions in the 3-5-minute guided practice component]- *"Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss the important events of Jiva's life. Think about how they lead him to rebuild and live once again by the sea. Discuss his choices, including why and how he changed throughout the novel. The assessment that follows: Write a biography of Jiva. Include an analysis of his character as well as important events in his life. Use details.*
- Grade 5, Module 1- [teacher reads aloud a few pages]- *What can you say about her character from the narrator's point of view as well as from Winnie's words and actions?*
- Grade 5, Module 1 – pre-designed charts or organizers (per curricula) tend to keep learning teacher-controlled [a high percentage of teacher read alouds are accompanied with a graphic organizer]. Once the teacher models a strategy, while conducting a read aloud, the lesson tends to come to an abrupt stop with the "Send Off" immediately following the read aloud or the occasional guided or independent reading time. (See Figures 4, 5, and 6 below).

Elements of Poetry	Example from Poem	My Thoughts
Simile		
Metaphor		
Imagery		
Personification		

Figure 3 is a grade 5 graphic organizer example

Facts	Questions	Response

Figure 4 is a grade 5 graphic organizer example

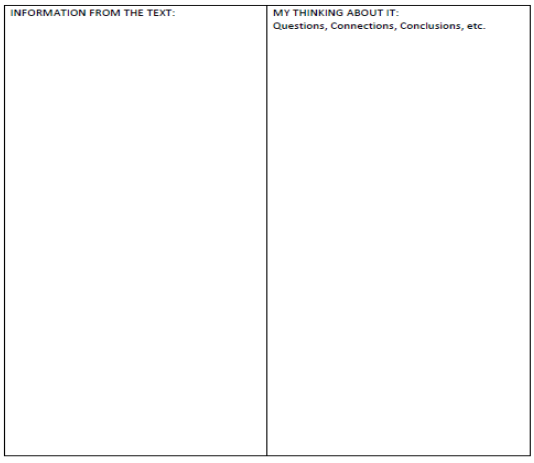


Figure 5 is a grade 5 chart example

III. *Use of Close Reading with High-Order Questioning Techniques Moves Students Toward Independence*

Two recurring themes emerged from the Consensus Reporting by this grade band:

1) Questioning techniques tended to stay at lower levels of cognitive demand. Curriculum vetters wanted to see an increase in rigor and variety in how students were questioned, both orally and in writing to move students toward independence; close reading activities were cited throughout curricula, but the level of questioning or steps to build toward independence was not as evident.
2) No extensions were observed for students who may complete work early and/or those reading above grade level.

An example from grade 3, module 2, is representative of the many of the lessons demonstrating lower level questioning, lacking extensions and/or a non-match of standards to assignments, within the grade band. Here the teacher introduces and teaches a text over the course of five lessons:

- Day 1 of newly introduced text- Teacher introduces text and tells students what they need to know. A chart is created, but it is unclear whether students are given similar charts, reproduce their own, or orally share thinking. Standards: Rl.3.3 and RL.3.1. Formative assessment- how setting impacts events; use evidence to support. Note: RL.3.1 is the incorrect standard. During read aloud and think aloud, Teacher does most of talking. There are 2-3 checkpoints where students are asked to turn and talk to a neighbor. Data-informed decision-making is not evident in this instructional model.
- Day 2- Teacher revisits chart, calls on 1-2 students to recall yesterday's read aloud. Standards: RL.3.3 and RL.3.1- Teacher reads second half of story. Again, it is unclear whether students are writing independently or reading along with teacher. There is little questioning and interaction between teacher and students. Formative assessment- Explain how the fortune coin affects the outcome of the story. This does not align to either Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standard suggested for this lesson. Students are again asked to talk to a neighbor suggesting no data (student work from day before) in strategically pairing or grouping students during turn and talk.
- Day 3- Teacher revisits and reads selected parts of text with a focus on the illustrations. Modeling shows students how illustrations can evoke emotions in readers (i.e., mood). Standards: RL. 3.7 and R.L.3.4. The primary standard is well-suited to the activity and text; however, there was no significant instruction around RL.3.4. Using RL. 3.1 should have been the secondary standard. Formative assessment requires students to complete a pre-formulated cloze paragraph. The illustration shows _____. The text says _____. This makes me feel _____ because _____.
- Day 4- Teachers addresses title of story for the first time. Discusses origin of title using a chart to guide instruction (Universal Design for Learning Connect informs teacher to produce a copy for students). Standards: RL.3.2 and RL.3.4. Teacher walks through completing chart with students on finding evidence to support the central message (from chart). Students are asked to talk with neighbors during Shared Practice. Formative Assessment- Write a letter to the author of "Title of story" telling them what you learned from reading the story (message). State details that provide the best evidence. A letter template frame is suggested for support (UDL Connect) Dear Ms.-----, I learned _____ In the text, _____ Sincerely, ____ Curriculum provides an exemplar for the teacher. RL.3.2 fits the nature and content of lesson. Again, there is no mention or revisiting of any vocabulary, thus this standard should be RL.3.2.

- Day 5- Teacher models reading aloud and then turns the lesson over to paired students who practice reading the story aloud to each other. Standards- RF.3.4a and RF.3.3. There is no formative assessment.

As noted earlier, there were no noticeable extensions for students who have demonstrated readiness or reading above grade level. This is consistently missed throughout grades kindergarten - 5. Research suggests, high-quality curricula must encourage the use of student data to inform instructional decisions and to use that data to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. Consideration to how the instructional strategies in curricula ask students to apply the concepts toward a differentiated product; how instructional strategies are structured to lead toward independence; and, how the use of instructional strategies support and challenge students beyond understanding in new and authentic ways leads to academic enrichment (Beasley, 2017).

IV. *Incorporate Clear, Frequent, and Accessible Measures of Student Progress Throughout Curriculum*

As a reference, the criteria for this part of the evaluation and consensus building centers on how well lessons elicit observable evidence of student performance on mastery of standards through some form of assessment. The indicators for the Assessment/Measurability criteria factor in whether measures are valid and reliable, how students know what is expected of them and the degree to which they have met or exceeded those expectations. Likewise, assessment construction of and delivery to students with accommodations, English learners, gifted/talented and those reading below grade level must be seriously considered throughout a student's academic career.

Valid ways to ensure assessments are equitable and accessible for and by all students often rests in well-developed scoring guides, rubrics, success criteria so that students are involved in and aware of what is expected before, during and after learning (Garrison, n.d.). Of lessons reviewed in grade 3, module 2, curriculum vetters reported less than 50% included what students should know and be able to do through the use of success criteria. In grade 4, module 3, curriculum vetters found no evidence of standards-based success criteria or rubrics for any of the student-produced activities. It is hard to discern true learning of students without some kind of benchmark, milestone, or goal post in mind to determine how close students came to meeting or exceeding the expectation of the standard, thus making necessary, real-time instructional adjustments.

To illustrate these points, please refer to the following examples when contemplating how a students' performance could be ascertained against the standard; what would be possible next steps by teachers or by students, based on the current assessment example; where in the curriculum would be an appropriate time to check progress; and how do these types of items truly prepare students for the rigor and demand of the state assessment for ELA? Curriculum vetters collected these examples that were explicitly identified as formative assessment or were placed at the end of a lesson:

Grade 3, module 2-

- "check for understanding through formative assessment" (RI.3.1, RI.3.2)
- "describe and illustrate your tooth tradition…tell how it is similar, yet different to another area that we've read about." (RI.3.1, 3.2)
- Read the text below (determine if it is an example of comparison or cause and effect (RI.3.8, RI.3.2)

Grade 4, module 3-

- ✧ "Circulate to monitor discussion and group work. Call on several groups to share and record responses on the graphic organizer. Clarify any misconceptions before moving on." (RI.4.5, RI.4.2)
- ✧ "Using your glossary, draw an infographic explaining an earthquake, specifically what it is and how it forms." (RI.4.4 and RI.4.1)

Grade 5, module 1 -

- ✧ "Write an explanation of how the last stanza of Echoing Green fits with the previous stanzas to provide an overall structure of the poem." (RL.5.5, RL.5.1)
- ✧ "Write a review of the song or movie clip, explaining how it enhances or diminishes your understanding of the text. Support your response with textual evidence." (RL.5.7, RL.5.3)

These examples provide a starting point from what is known about best practices in the formative assessment process. When building formative assessments within the instructional lesson component, strategies proven to be effective include: setting goals with correlating success criteria with students; display exemplar student work of the effort demonstrated so peers see where they are, where they need to be and examples of how they could get there; during "observations", collect and record data to use as feedback; vary how an end of lesson assessment will adequately capture how close students moved toward their goals; and, build in opportunities for self and peer assessment so students begin to think more metacognitively, (Garrison, n.d).

Additionally, curriculum vetters examined teacher created lessons that were included as part of the module scope and sequence of lessons. Each of the lessons had the same heading for each lesson: "Whole Group and Small Group, Guided & Independent Writing Instruction." Directly beneath this title is a note to teachers to "use guidance provided in this lesson utilizing Explorations in Nonfiction Writing text". The lesson contains a few sentences on which set of pages to use, but little else is offered in terms of guidance. There is no attention to standards, assessment, or differentiation offered as guidance. While this could encourage creativity and attention to what teachers believe students need, it is strongly suggested some guidelines are put in place such as what standards have not been attended to or how to spiral standards for remediation or extension with an embedded formative assessment.

An example: In grade 3, module 2, of the 45 lessons, teachers are expected to create 11; in grade 4, module 3, of 45 lessons, teachers must create for 10 on their own; and in grade 5, module 1, of 22 lessons, teachers are expected to create 10 lessons. For consistency, guidance should be provided to teachers from the school system on what must be included such as instructional documents, tools, and assessment measures used to reflect the content and rigor of college-and career readiness standards (SREB, 2017). For example, in grade a lesson states:

> "Consider using the text *Illuminature* by Carnovsky as an introduction to how climate change impacts animal survival, specifically in regards to their adaptations. [redacted content] …and will be covered in the literacy curriculum in Module 3."

Curriculum vetters noted that there was an absence of district summative assessments for the lesson. Rather, there was a bank of writing tasks. It was unclear how this bank of tasks could be used to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit in alignment with content standards.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Recommendation 1: Align lessons to grade-level standards.

The misalignment of grade-level standards to learning experiences was prevalent throughout the curriculum for grades 3-5. Standards must be the foundation for lesson content, assessments, and rubrics. It is recommended that ELA specialist revise lessons for stronger alignment to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. MSDE supports the integration science and social content in ELA lessons as demonstrated in Baltimore City's ELA curriculum. It is recommended that content specialists in science and social review ELA lessons to ensure alignment to content standards.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate a logical sequencing of Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards for reading and writing to increase critical thinking and cognitive demand. Regularly include writing standards appropriate to lesson, task, and text.

A review of lessons cited for "Close Reading" suggested a need to embed opportunities for students to interact with increasingly challenging standards through a gradual release of responsibility with all or parts of text and within the broader areas of the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. Lessons sequenced by infusing standards from each of the reading domains beginning with Key Ideas and Detail is recommended so that all students have a general idea of the central idea or theme before grappling with the more rigorous standards within the Craft and Structure domain and the Integration of Knowledge and Ideas domain. In most lessons for grades 3-5, the teacher conducted the first read the class. While it is acknowledged this took place during Whole Group lessons, the activities that immediately followed left curriculum vetters wondering about effectiveness of this strategy.

Research confirms the use of the read aloud, even in the intermediate classroom, as a viable way to facilitate enriched language exposure, vocabulary and foundational literacy skills. In fact, studies show students who are read to can show higher on average on standardized tests (Merga, 2017). In particular, best practices for reading aloud informational text can include boosting students' comprehension, developing familiarity with informational aids and structures consistent with expository texts and increasing a students' background knowledge in areas they otherwise may be unfamiliar (Cummins, 2011).

The way in which read alouds are conducted for students matter. One recommendation is to use an ongoing assessment or data-driven instructional strategy which can help facilitate students' understanding of texts. Currently, the curriculum includes think-alouds and read-alouds as a common instructional strategy. Curriculum vetters noted the rigor to these strategies leans more on the lower end of cognition. Lessons must be sequenced, with embedded scaffolds to encourage synthesizing of information, particularly nonfiction, since the curricula is heavy with science and social studies text. Instead of simply recalling facts (in charts and organizers) research supports ways to encourage students to describe and elaborate on the big ideas in texts (Cummins, 2011). Explicit instruction can include teacher sketching out a think aloud, while reading, and then adding symbols to show how all the facts add up to one big idea together, or rather synthesize information to increased comprehension. This is followed with collecting and analyzing student work on author's purpose of a given text. Teachers use this formative assessment to guide next steps, rather than the current practice of moving to a new chart or organizer without fully immersing students in the more demanding College- and Career-Ready

reading and writing standards. For example, teachers can randomly choose a few pieces of students' responses to engage the class in how the writing could go deeper. In general, the idea is to get students to see the difference between retelling or providing low-level summaries to developing the central idea with appropriate details. Herein lies the idea of close reading. "Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically encouraging students to read and reread deliberately" (PARCC, 2011).

Research continues to show, on average, students tend to comprehend narrative text at higher levels than informational text. Moreover, research has begun to show a positive correlation with those who have prior knowledge about a non-fiction topic by demonstrating higher levels of comprehension of the expository text, than peers who do not. Unlike comprehension of nonfictional text, students who are more adept at decoding tend to show higher rates of comprehension when encountering narrative passages, than their peers who struggle with decoding (Liebfreund, M., 2016). This piece of research hints at how instructional and curricular developers could sequence activities designed to tap into students' strengths through the use of the incorporated science and social studies nonfiction pieces currently embedded in curricula.

Recommendation 3: Develop a process to measure academic vocabulary acquisition through reading and writing standards.

It is strongly recommended to remove curricular phrasing such as: "*Call out vocabulary through questioning, quickly model a think aloud"*. It occurred 21 times in the grade 3 curriculum. This approach does not exemplify effective instructional practices for vocabulary acquisition.

In the process of revisiting lessons to better align content, objective, standards, and assessment, curriculum vetters suggested inserting learning targets with success criteria. In order to make a determination if, and to what extent, a student has met with success, supports such as rubrics and guides can help teachers and students know who needs additional support or who may need an extension, having exceeded expectations. In particular, when using a student's writing as a formative or summative measure, include a direct citation to what College- and Career-Ready writing standard is being assessed, such as argument, informative/explanatory, or narrative, and the measure for what success looks like. This way, the writing assignment is anchored in content and focused on developing academic language and the writing process (Baker, S. 2014). Having this kind of data aligned to specific standards serves to determine progress for student growth over time and helps teachers adjust instruction accordingly, not to mention putting good writing and self-assessment habits in place early.

A list of suggestions is provided from evidence-based research for teaching and assessing the acquisition of academic vocabulary, from text(s) in a curriculum:

1. **Mini-vocabulary lessons for one new word from a text.**
   Introduce new word (such as *technique*), students practice saying word, paying attention to syllabication. Next, teacher defines word and gives a synonym, followed by two examples in oral context. Before students write their own sentences, the teacher models how to do so in three multiple meaning (when applicable) written sentences. Students write in their journals, followed by writing their newly acquired word on a graphic organizer, which has other words that have been taught in other mini-lessons.

2. **Choose a small set of academic vocabulary words (5-8) for in-depth instruction**.
   This would take place over the course of several lessons. Choose words central to understanding assigned text. Choose words that are frequently used in the text and that might appear in other content areas (analyze, infer, extend). Choose words with multiple meanings (volume, skirt, parade) and words with affixes, such as **fortunate** > ***un****fortunate* or *fortunate****ly***; or **meander** > *meander****ed***.

3. **Teach academic vocabulary in-depth using multiple modalities (writing, speaking and listening**).
   Provide student-friendly definition of target academic words and apply these definitions to the context of the text. Explicitly clarify and reinforce the definitions using examples and concrete representations such as word maps. Use words with multiple meanings by having students show they know the subtle differences in usage and meaning.

4. **Structured discussions.**
   Teacher holds a conversation, initially, by discussing a new concept such as pros and cons or connect to another text. Students must respond using the newly acquired words as part of the discussion. Teacher requires students to use target academic words in their writing activities, varying length, prompts, or use the prompts contain the academic works requiring students to respond to an open-ended, but still text-based prompt (Baker, S., 2014)

Regardless of strategy used, vocabulary must become a vital and measurable part of the language arts curriculum, across several days and across reading, writing and speaking (Gersten, 2007). Further, adding in learning targets and criteria for success, students know exactly what is expected of them. Rubrics can be easily modified depending on how the teacher determines to differentiate learning (product, process, content, or learning style).

Recommendation 4: Vary the use of graphic organizers throughout the grade band to engage students who could benefit from multiple modalities.

Charts are used frequently throughout the grade band which work to scaffold learning. However, the use of charts must not be a substitute for students using other strategies to organize their learning. Students benefit from standards-based curriculum that offers many ways to express learning and understanding of content**.**

Much like the suggestion to use the Vertical Progression charts as a tool to check that all grade-appropriate standards are addressed and are aligned with text and task, using a tool or devising a method for checking the taxonomy of questioning techniques, whether they lie with the scripted components of the curriculum, the pre-populated organizers, or formative assessments, is yet another way of ensuring curriculum include instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that are flexible enough to accommodate learners (Meo, 2008).

A colleague of Benjamin Bloom, who created the original *Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing*, updated the tool reflecting a standards-based curriculum implementation, see Figure 6. The updated taxonomy provides a more comprehensive set of classifications for learner cognitive processes that could match an instructional objective (Anderson, L.W. 2001).

CATEGORIES	COGNITIVE PROCESS
Remember	**Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory** RECOGNIZING (identifying) RECALLING (retrieving)
Understand	**Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication** INTERPRETING (clarifying, paraphrasing, representing, translating) EXEMPLIFYING (illustrating, instantiating) CLASSIFYING (categorizing, subsuming) SUMMARIZING (abstracting, generalizing) INFERRING (concluding, extrapolating, interpolating, predicting) COMPARING (contrasting, mapping, matching) EXPLAINING (constructing models)
Apply	**Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation** EXECUTING (carrying out) IMPLEMENTING (using)
Analyze	**Break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose** DIFFERENTIATING (discriminating, distinguishing, focusing, selecting) ORGANIZING (finding coherence, intergrating, outlining, parsing, structuring) ATTRIBUTING (deconstructing)
Evaluate	**Make judgments based on criteria and standards** CHECKING (coordinating, detecting, monitoring, testing CRITIQUING (judging)
Create	**Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure** GENERATING (hypothesizing) PLANNING (designing) PRODUCING (constructing)

Figure 6, Revised Bloom's Taxonomy chart shows the categories and cognitive processes associated with each.

Additional suggestions include: access to narrative templates, sentence stems, word and sentence banks, pictorial supports, and graphic organizers (Olson, 2015). Increased use of Socratic Seminar or Philosophical Chairs are also motivating and engaging for students when based on complex texts and tend to push student thinking processes into more than one category of cognition.

As a result of the analysis and examination, reviewers scored this grade band as follows:

Overall Rating the 3-5 Grade Band

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

Grade Band 6-8

Overview:

Curriculum vetters evaluated grades 6-8 content using the grades used the grades 3-10 evaluation rubric. Findings were summarized into areas of promise, opportunities for growth and recommendations for improvement. There was a distinct difference noticed in the format of the secondary curriculum when compared to the primary (K-5) curriculum. In general, the secondary curriculum contained less scripted curricular material than the primary curriculum.

I. Alignment of Maryland College- and Career Ready Standards	**II.** Key Areas of Shift/Focus	**III.** Instructional Supports	**IV.** Assessment/Measurability
▪ Measurable alignment with MCCRS (RI, RL, W, and L) ▪ Text complexity ▪ Vocabulary acquisition ▪ Variety of texts	▪ Text-based evidence ▪ Write to source ▪ Academic vocabulary ▪ Balance of information to literary text	▪ Equal access to text ▪ Close reading techniques ▪ Evidence of differentiation ▪ Extensions included and appropriate	▪ Valid measures ▪ Success criteria ▪ Accommodations and accessibility ▪ Reliable measures

Table 4 shows the key criteria and indicators vetters used in evaluating grades 6-8 ELA curriculum.

Curriculum vetters rated the curriculum on a scale of 0-5 for each of the four criteria.

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

The overall rating for grade band 6-8 was a 2. There were several promising practices regarding writing to source and incorporation of formative assessments. However, the curriculum was not sufficiently aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

Areas of Promise:

I. *Student-Centered, Standards-Based Curriculum Across Grade Band*

The scope and sequence of grade 6 lessons reviewed demonstrated a strong alignment among the objective, instructional tasks, formative assessment, and identified College- and Career-Ready Standard. Lessons provided students multiple opportunities to read both literary and informational texts at the appropriate grade level. Lessons in each module demonstrated text complexity appropriate to topic, theme, and age and utilize a wide range of quality materials that represent diverse cultures.

Across this grade band, some lessons exhibited a move toward offering explicit vocabulary instruction in order for students develop specific strategies for acquiring new vocabulary.

A few highlights of the grade band are listed below:

- Lessons involved movement, collaboration, and mild competition;
- Lessons attempted to be authentic or relevant to student;
- Several paired and supplemental readings along with core novel;
- Hyperlinks to ancillary documents easy for teachers to access;
- Clear directions for various protocols;
- Inclusion of rubrics;
- Opportunities for students to collaborate with a text-driven purpose;
- Variety in organizers (in format and student use).

II. *Writing to Source and Aligned to Standards is Apparent*

Most of the lessons in the 6-8 grade band facilitated oral and written responses grounded in textual evidence. In grade 6, several lessons focused on extending student responses to evaluate the strongest, most relevant text example for a given question or prompt. In grades 6 and 8, there was evidence suggesting students routinely draw from texts in writing to analyze, create or argue. Hence, write to source was observed in abundance and in a variety of ways.

Academic vocabulary lists or words were included in grades 6-8, in the front of each module, and grade-appropriate Tier II academic vocabulary terms were also made available.

It appeared the module reviewed in grade 7 contained an approximately 70%/30% balance of non-fiction to literary text; a similar balance was not found in grades 6 or 8.

III. *Close Reading Techniques and Strategies Evident Across Grade Band*

Across grades 6-8, students were provided equal access to text through a scaffolded-like approach using, "I do, We do, You do" in a mix of teacher modeling, read alouds, think alouds, audio recordings, and discussion techniques.

A representative sample shows the idea of Gradual release (I do, We do, You do) mentioned above:

- Teacher models, through use of a chart, identifying a character trait with multiple pieces of textual evidence, while conducting and modeling a read aloud;
- Each student has same chart, recording along with teacher;
- Small groups continue working on same standard, with analysis chart;
- Independently, student finishes the passage and chart using both to respond to a text-based prompt provided at the beginning at the time of the closing activity.

Close reading techniques were observable in the overall scope of lessons in 6-8, being strongest in grade 6. Students often conducted close reading strategies when responding to routine writing and formative writing tasks. Curriculum vetters noticed that of those lessons reviewed, in the area of close reading, grades 7 and 8 included close reading protocols of some texts.

IV. *Incorporation of Formative Assessment Best Practices*

In grades 6 and 8, lessons contained evidence of the degree to which students could independently demonstrate mastery of the standards. The grade 6 lessons reviewed explicitly referenced and incorporated a formative writing task rubric. Through the highly scripted nature of the secondary ELA curricula, lesson construction reveals pre-populated rubrics are reviewed, revisited, and discussed prior to task completion so that expectations of students are clear. In a few cases, a best practice was used in sharing student exemplar responses during based upon success criteria. In addition, curriculum vetters identified other rubric models for evaluating elements for effective discussions and checklists were provide with formative writing tasks.

Opportunities for Growth:

I. *Alignment of Standards to Lesson Content and Assessment*

Curriculum vetters reported clearer strategies and techniques for vocabulary acquisition were included throughout the grade band. However, there remained one key area needed for improvement around the absence or mismatch of an appropriate College- and Career-Ready vocabulary standard to the written instruction and assessment.

In general, reading for literary or informational standards, RL.4 and RI.4, respectively, differ from language standards, L.4, in subtle, but important ways. When providing explicit vocabulary instruction, derived from the written curricula, differentiating between these types of vocabulary standards can make instruction clearer for teachers and learning smoother for students. Standard 4 in RI and RL texts asks students to determine meaning of words or phrases in a text. A question might look like, “What does this word [any word within a text passage] mean in the passage?” Conversely, Standard 4, 5 or 6 in the Language strand are not *only* looking for meaning, they are focused more on the strategies to determine word meaning, such as context clues, Greek/Latin affixes, or relationships between particular words. Questions for these standards might look more like, “Which two phrases helps you to understand the meaning of the word technique? Which two definitions of the word balance are used in paragraph 3 and 11?”

A few examples exemplify this point:

- Written curriculum does not accurately reflect cited vocabulary standards-

An example in grade 7, module 3, lesson listed RL.7.1 (Reading for Literary, cite text evidence) and RL.7.4 (Reading for Literary, vocabulary standard) as primary standards. Several other standards are listed as supplementary or secondary. The lesson opens with the teacher explaining terminology of claim and warrant, using several photos in a gallery walk, and a chart and sentence starters for each. Later in the lesson, the teacher is to lead a discussion around the terms: essay, argue, impact, position and evidence, followed by students conducting a close read of a text excerpt using a guiding chart, although it is not clear to which standard this activity is aligned. Students are asked to underline words they do not know for the first read. The teacher concludes the lesson by asking students if the words make more sense after a second read. As a formative, the teacher asks students if they can tell the relationships, between characters, in the vignette, closing with a mini-lesson if they do not know the word. This mismatch between the intent of specific vocabulary and Language standard and the activity was observed many times throughout the grade band. There were highlights to this particular lesson in terms of student

engagement and using tools for learning. However, there is no real explicit vocabulary lesson; instead there are vague mentions of what could be highly impactful instruction of Tier 2 words. The Common Core Standards demand significant instructional attention to Tier 2 words as they carry so much weight that when students do not understand, it could negatively impact their overall comprehension (Liben, 2013).

- Vocabulary standard listed, but was not directly taught to meet the intent, nor was it assessed:

In grade 6, a lesson listed RL.6.4 (Reading for Literary, vocabulary standard) as the primary standard (listed beneath RL.6.1 and RL.6.2, presumably as supplemental or secondary, but it is not clear). Lesson content focused mostly on examples of figurative language within the core text with some read aloud and modeling by teacher. As written, the teacher would state examples of what figurative language means as it relates to the definition of a simile or metaphor. Students were to work in groups to find additional examples, noting them on a chart: "Examples of Figurative Language > This deepens the reader's understanding of the text by…". Independent practice required students to use a different chart on "Environment and Individuality" but this was unclear as to how it aligned to the intent of the CCR.RL.6.4 as well. The end of lesson assessment required students to conduct a "*turn and talk*" about the day's objective. At no time was there an explicit alignment between the true intent of the standard and the lesson activities, nor with the assessment.

The use of Turn and Talk is used frequently in the school system's curricula. It was often viewed as an appropriate technique by curriculum vetters to encourage academic discourse and to keep the learning student-centered. Increasingly, research is pointing to ways for improving Common Core alignment with instructional strategies and materials through activities like a "turn and talk". Experts recommend when using this speaking and listening strategy that curriculum could offer text-specific structures such as conversation starters, listening cues, and rubrics designed to help teachers evaluate or responses, thus serving as a formative assessment. (Etienne, R., 2015). Strengthening the "turn and talk" strategy with these evidence-based ideas could improve the purpose and focus behind them.

For additional information, resources, and ideas on vocabulary instruction, please refer back to those outlined in Grade 3-5, adapting as necessary for the adolescent learner.

- Not all lessons, objectives and learning activities were clearly or fully aligned to the true intent of the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. There were numerous and specific citations across each grade band in which curriculum vetters found unclear application of the intent of the primary and supporting standards with content, activities and assessment. A few examples include:
    - grade 6, module 2, as written, shows the lesson aligned more closely with and addresses the work of RL.8.9 (a grade 8 reading for literary standard where students are to analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns, or events.), *not* RL.6.9 (a grade 6 reading for literary standard where students are to compare and contrast texts in different forms).
    - grade 7, module3, lesson includes an argumentative writing (W.1) task, but W.7.2 (writing to inform or explain) is listed instead.
    - grade 7, module 3 lesson, cited standard RL.7.6(explain how point of view is developed), but there is no clear connection to the written curriculum. Instead students seek out examples of relationships in and between characters in a play.

- grade 8, module 4, lessons did not show the appropriate standard to the context of the activities- L.8.4 missing, L.8.6 missing, RI.8.6 not fully included; RL.8.3 did not include the language of the standard, and several other standards appeared missing or partially met given the cited content in the lessons reviewed.

II. *Cognitive Demand of Text-Dependent Discussion and Questions*

In order to create a greater balance of texts between literary and nonfiction, additional nonfiction texts should be incorporated for direct instruction in lessons. Or, a cross-disciplinary inspection could determine if students are exposed to and interacting with the recommended 70%/30% balance of nonfiction to fiction text by the time they enter in to secondary ELA course work.

Inclusion of oral and written expression was grounded in evidence in most lessons. Curriculum vetters observed several lessons focus on evidence-finding through text-dependent questioning from text(s) around a College- and Career-Ready reading standard. To be sure, ensuring written curricula lays out a progression of increasingly demanding comprehension and critical thinking skills, is challenging. A few examples from the 6-8 grade band show this challenge:

- RL.7.1, RL.7.3 and RL.7.6- Students were assigned a Relationship Tracker organizer to capture notes about a main character while reading independently; then students were to use Cornell Notes to gather evidence from a film clip in comparing to what they read; followed by a Tableau activity (if time allowed). No follow up or final synthesis was included.
- RL.6.3, RL.6.1, and RL.6.2.- Students engage with peers in a placemat consensus activity which seems to serve as a way to help them evaluate between which evidence best supports the prompt (outcome-analyze actions of a character by identifying impactful actions and explaining how his actions make him an individual). The lesson concludes with sharing out responses but does not provide extension or connection back to the original objective.
- RL.8.1, RL.8.3, and RL.8.4- During the novel discussions, a series of teacher-prompted whole and small-group questions: “Who was surprised by the novel’s ending? Why? How did you expect it to end? What choice did George make in the face of conflict? What motivated his choice? Was it justified? Followed by the same questions for writing: What choice did George make in the face of conflict? What motivated his choice? Was it justified? These same questions were used again during a group rotation of student triads with an *optional* text. By the end of the third rotation, students were to debrief about the information they collected around each question. The teacher instructs students to use the debriefing to develop an argument for a writing task.

These examples demonstrate how lessons were not concluded with a relevant, challenging or standards-aligned formative task. While these activities could be seen as engaging, they would not serve to determine how closely and deeply students read and comprehend, especially when reading independently. Moreover, these representative lessons did not provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, but instead maintained thinking at the “understanding” level of cognitive demand. This shows students did not engage in experiences that would provide the opportunity to transition into higher level analysis or synthesis.

Curriculum vetters were aware and referenced the culminating writing Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) task with the understanding they must be derived from a series of preceding standards-based lessons and activities. Based on the reviewed lessons, it was concluded that the combination of

activities, lessons, and formative writing tasks would not prepare students to write for the Final LDC task. Further, neither writing nor reading standards were indicated for the following tasks:

> Grade 8 Example: (Appeared sequentially in various places within module 4):
> Formative Writing Task 1-short story- explanatory writing- write an essay to analyze a character's motivation for making a choice…of a conflict.
>
> Formative Writing Task 2- longer story-explanatory writing- write an essay to analyze protagonist's motivation for his choices.
>
> Formative Writing Task 3- chapter 1 of novel- argument writing- explain character's motivation for taking on a friend like Lennie and argue who benefits most from this choice.
>
> Formative Writing Task 4- longer story and chapters 1-3 of novel- explanatory- identify a choice the narrator and George make, and analyze the impact of that choice on each of the characters.
>
> Formative Writing Task 5- full novel read- narrative- After reading Of Mice and Men, continue the story by writing a narrative in which you describe what happens to George now that does not have Lennie.
>
> LDC Final Task- full novel read- argument writing- After reading Of Mice and Men and other texts, write an essay in which you discuss George's choices throughout the text and argue whether or not George's final choice was justifiable.

Similarly, grade 6 and grade 7 ELA curricula were organized the same way as described in the grade 8 example above. Vetters wondered if the writing prompts for this grade band and the series of embedded text-dependent questions would advance students' thinking toward a level of analysis or synthesis. Other examples, within the grade band included the way in which "Quick writes" and "Write arounds" were used. In grade 7, for example, a Quick write example grounded the writing exercise in the core text, but did not explicitly align to a reading standard as shown: *"What connections do you see between "The Hangman" and The Diary of Anne Frank?* "The writing standard, W.7.3, which calls for students to write narratives, is listed as a supplemental standard. This and other examples led vetters to conclude a weak or non-existent link exists between reading and writing College- and Career- Ready standards to lesson activities.

III. *Organize Lesson Components, Standards, and Text with a Task-Generation Model*

Throughout the grade band, modeling by the teacher preceded a scaffolded instructional process much like described earlier with the concept of, "I do, We do, You do." This method has advantages, particularly when making learning accessible for all students. However, curriculum vetters struggled to find instances in which explicit instruction or extensions were provided for students who read above grade level, students with disabilities, English learners or those reading below grade level. In fact, there seemed to be few alternative texts for these diverse groups of learners. As stated, scaffolds are in place across the grade band but research suggests spiraling the following variations: sentence, paragraph, and essay templates and outlines; graphic organizers displaying ways of structuring paragraphs, such as: descriptive, problem and solution, cause and effect, summarize, episode patterns, concept pattern, and more (Olson, 2015). With this additional layer of support, students could benefit from making connections between reading and writing, gradually moving toward independence.

The aim is to use text to teach standards, while making sure all learners can, in fact, access those standards via supports and structures, and that they are able to analyze text closely when reading, ultimately producing a product, demonstrating proficiency or mastery, at the independent level.

In order to add clarity to this line of reasoning, Table 5 shows an annotated excerpt of one of the lessons leading to the Final Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) task for grade 7 students. Literacy Design Collaborative writing tasks appear be used as a formative writing assessment as they listed as the culminating task preceded by shorter writing tasks. The task, as written, is included at the top of the table, as shown in Table 5. In the left-hand column are the core and supplemental texts and standards as indicated in the written curriculum. The right-hand column shows actual written curriculum in black and vetters thoughts and suggestions in blue. The purpose of Table 5 was to capture notes from the 6-8 grade band consensus report around ways to improve the alignment of standards, text, content, formative assessment to a final Literacy Design Collaborative task.

LDC Final Task: After reading *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Play* and other texts, write an essay in which you discuss Anne's relationships and argue which one had the greatest impact on her throughout the play. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or texts	
Text and Standards listed	Grade 7 Current activity sequence Blue are derived from the Grade band evaluation.
Core Text: Diary of Anne Frank: The Play *(grades 6-8)* Supplemental text: The Hangman- 29 stanzas, four lines each	**Outcome**: Students will **closely read** "The Hangman" in order to analyze the impact of relationships by engaging effectively in small group discussion.
Primary- RL.7.1 -should always be included in all instruction RL.7.10 No other College- and Career-Ready Standards listed **Note:** RL.7.10 is used to measure text complexity, range and quality when making selections for instruction—it is not a measured standard. Begins with, "By the end of the year…"	○ Quick write- T. displays quote from a Holocaust survivor: *"Why? Why did we walk like meek sheep to the slaughterhouse? Why did we not fight back? What had we to lose? Nothing but our lives. Why did we not run away and hide? We might have had a chance to survive. Why did we walk deliberately and obediently into their clutches? I know why. Because we had faith in humanity. Because we did not really think that human beings were capable of committing such crimes."* Prompt: Define what "faith in humanity" means to you. Use evidence from the survivor's story [quote] to show how she had "faith in humanity". Do you have "faith in humanity?" Explain why or why not. Describe ways you might put "faith in humanity" into action, making the world a better place. *RL.7.1 asks students to cite textual evidence, thus, this is not the standard being attended to in this Quick write. A better reading standard might be: RL.7.4. or, the teacher could have students title the quote and add text evidence to justify their title, which brings in RL.7.1 *The quote, while narrative in format, could pose problems for English learners or struggling readers without some frontloading of a few words: *deliberately, obediently, humanity, slaughterhouse, meek.* * Students' responses must be grounded in text. The prompt, as is, could be a discussion leading up to reading the quote with a standards-based prompt that aligns back to the Primary standard. ○ T. reads aloud to students- Act 1, Scene III of *The Diary of Anne Frank- The Play*- p. **77-92**; students complete a Relationship Tracker (a graphic organizer). Then, students read independently noting which "relationship" is most impactful on Anne, via the Relationship Tracker organizer. *Praise for the amount of independent reading and with engaging, complex text. *Concerns: Review literary elements (act, stage directions, scene); How much of the play is read/acted aloud before or after analysis begins? Use purposeful (data-based) grouping with differentiated standards being addressed or adjust content or

LDC Final Task: After reading *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Play* and other texts, write an essay in which you discuss Anne's relationships and argue which one had the greatest impact on her throughout the play. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or texts	
Text and Standards listed	Grade 7 Current activity sequence Blue are derived from the Grade band evaluation.
	amount of content for English learners, students with disabilities, struggling/above grade level readers. What standard is being assessed in identifying impactful relationships? Are any students pulled for small group with teacher? ○ Group discussion- what questions did students have while reading—answering questions. ○ T. tells students to read the text, "The Hangman" by Ogden Nash "one more time today" by working in groups to analyze figurative language and its impact. T. models one or metaphors, as needed. Students were to complete a four-page packet, "The Hangman" Close Reading Recording Sheet. *It is unclear why students switch texts mid-lesson after reading several pages of the play. The lesson could have added another standard in keeping with reading the play more deeply and closely rather than "The Hangman". An alternative is to stay with RL.7.5- so students have time to explore and analyze showing this in some kind of differentiated product. *The purpose for the poem, in this lesson, is to analyze figurative language and its impact. It is unclear what this means and how it attends to a primary or secondary standard. If RL.7.5 (analyze text structure) is the standard to be assessed, how does it fit the task? Meaning why are students determining the impact of an example of figurative language? The use of the poem, in this lesson excerpt, marks *the third day of study* where preceding days it appears the standard did not match the activities either. *On the second read, there are 12 questions (as shown in the Recording Sheet packet) given to students, all of which could meet a number of different standards, but there is very little room on the worksheet for students to respond deeply, thus citing text evidence. ○ Students work in small groups to write an answer to this prompt: What claim did this poet make about relationships? What evidence can you find in this poem to support the claim? Was this poem effective in supporting this claim? Why or why not? * There is no formative assessment collected, reviewed or debriefed leading to an independent work where students can show what they know about the standards including in the lesson. Introducing a third text is not ideal. *Is there a text that would suit other readers who would struggle at the Independent level with the poem or play? There is no standard attached to the final text. Independent reading- a note states these can be saved for homework or built into class time. Students are to read, "Bubili: A Young Gypsy's Fight for Survival", answering the question: What did you learn about how people of another culture were affected during the Holocaust?
Secondary- SL.7.1, L.7.5, W.7.9	L.7.5 was not addressed to its fullest intent. W.7.9 was not addressed to its fullest intent; a better writing CCR standard could be: W.7.2
Additional Comment	The outcome, as written, is not measurable. It is unknown how students would be assessed for "closely reading". It remains unclear why "The Hangman" was selected as a companion text with the play since there were a number of texts available in the opening pages of the module. In other words, vetters could not conclude how the core and companion text work toward meeting the objective and intent of the primary and secondary standards as well as the final LDC task.

Table 5 is an annotated excerpt from grade 7, module 3 ELA curriculum with vetters'

When building a student's capacity to closely read and examine text for meaning and purpose, research shows it is most effective when done in short passages (Fisher, 2016) with built-in scaffolds. Writing fewer text-dependent, standards-aligned questions that vary in levels of learning, or taxonomy, (Anderson, 2001) is more effective for students, especially those who struggle with the kinds of complex text integrated in these lessons (Olson, 2015; Anderson, 2001). As is seen from the representative lesson in Table 5 there are a number of components including a four-page student packet, three texts, a few organizers, Quick writes, and discussion in one lesson that may not lead students to discover or practice literary elements through standards and text.

Using a Task Generation Model, similar in nature to the way in which the ELA state assessment questions are constructed, will ameliorate the overabundance of activities, therefore placing emphasis on fewer standards, but more deeply, ending with a clearly-aligned written analysis. Further, it is believed this approach will serve as a framework for moving students' thinking processes from a surface-level to a higher order, critical level.

IV. *Ongoing and Regular Formative Assessment Processes Throughout Lessons*

Earlier in this report, there was discussion around the importance of curriculum structured to clarify the nature and the degree to which formative and summative assessments are used as measures of student achievement. Each lesson must begin with a student-friendly learning target or objective in mind and end with a measure or assessment to provide teachers with valuable information on daily student learning and understanding of content. For the benefit of teachers and students, criteria for success shared at the beginning of each lesson, with targets and standards-based objectives, must be used so that students know exactly what is expected of them and how they need to meets the learning targets (Rao, 2016). The advocacy for this kind of assessment-driven curricula continues in this grade band as well, as evidence of mismatched or non-existent assessments remained elusive to curriculum vetters. To be clear, when reviewing the entire module of the grade 7 curriculum, there were very few formative-like assessments, outside of the "formative assessment writing tasks" mentioned earlier. Upon closer examination, these few examples approximate what could be construed as a formative assessment, but the level of rigor and alignment to standards, is questionable:

- Grade 6, mid-lesson- "Students should finish pages 1-4 and complete prediction chart independently.
- Grade 6, end of lesson- "Have students write independently on the following prompt: How has Percy demonstrated individuality in the first four pages of *The Lightning Thief*?"
- Grade 6, beginning of lesson- "have students turn and talk with a partner about which items on the "x" chart they will be addressing in class today."
- Grade 7, beginning of lesson- "You have read about half of "The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play. At this time, describe the relationships Anne has with various characters. Focus on what we have seen during the four scenes in the play. Use evidence…
- Grade 7, end of lesson- "After students have written their evidence on sticky notes they should do a gallery walk reading through the evidence from other texts. Quick write- Which relationship had the most impact on people throughout all of our texts? Why do you think that relationship has the most impact?
- Grade 8, end of lesson- "Allow students to complete the rest of chapter 3 and complete the graphic organizer. Make certain the students understand the importance of completing this assignment…"

- Grade 8, end of lesson- "Allow the students to read the rest of chapter one.
- Once they have finished reading, they will complete the graphic organizer with additional words and phrases that connects to the photos."

As students move through the standards, they become increasingly complex, refined and difficult to master, as seen through the vertical progressions in Appendix B. Knowing this, a curriculum that includes ways to incorporate methods or suggestions for educators to determine just how close a student is to demonstrating proficiency or mastery positions curriculum as the safeguard for this to happen at the instructional level. Consequently, teachers anticipate varying student performances by providing a bank of alternative or additional supports, especially for those students who innately struggle with the English language, students whose disability creates an additional challenge, and for those reading above and below grade level.

Research demonstrates effective schools are those whose curricula incorporated the state-level standards (as exemplified and assessed on the end-of-year examination) into the lessons, content and ongoing assessment activities. Thus, teachers in the higher performing schools were able to use assessments as an opportunity to revise and reformulate based on student performance. As a result, teachers can deconstruct and analyze performance on assessment items to determine, with a deeper understanding, which literacy skills, strategies and knowledge students need to demonstrate in reaching higher levels (Torgesen, 2009). The Center on Instruction, along with several other experts, note there are certain characteristics to consider when embedding an assessment system aligned to a standards-based curriculum. A few include:

- ✓ Formative assessment must involve short-cycle, frequent measures. This could take place each day and becomes part of an assessment-feedback cycle necessary to student growth. An ancillary but important byproduct is that students feel motivated toward their goals as they are part of the formative assessment cycle.
- ✓ Formative assessment takes a variety of forms which make look like: performance tasks, peer-to-peer interpretive discussion of text; high-quality questions derived from teachers and students; and tests and quizzes.

All suggestions come with the caveat of accompanying all assessments with a rubric or checklist (and criteria for success) and be used as a way to adjust and personalize instruction for students. Certainly, by middle school, students can be an active participant to creating goals and criteria as long as they know what the means to the end looks like.

Recommendation 1: Examine current knowledge and understanding of the nuances and intent of the reading standards for vocabulary (RI.4, RL.4 and language standards for vocabulary, L.4, L.5 and L.6).

Grade-level vocabulary must be introduced, reviewed, discussed and shared in multiple ways and assessed through more than one modality. To ensure this takes place, consider using a checklist with lesson planning to determine how students expressing their learning through multimodal means: linguistically, visually and/or auditorily. By engaging students through multiple means, they are more likely to learn and apply academic- or domain-specific words regularly and with accuracy.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate a series of task-generation model lessons to guarantee a standards-based focus and assessment informed curricula.

As indicated, vetters' findings showed the 6-8 grade band demonstrated several instances in which the alignment of standards did not show an appropriate or practical progression of standards leading students through increasingly challenging standards. Lesson activities and formative assessment practices could be improved by integrating a structured model similar to the ELA state assessment.

The ELA state assessment is designed around three types of tasks: narrative writing, literary analysis, and research simulation. As a result, questions are written in a deliberate sequence so as to move students through the three domains by incorporating specific standards from each of the three domains: Key Ideas and Details; Craft and Structure; and, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas as shown in Table 6. This sequence, known as a Task Generation Model, ensures a set of standards are included and sequenced appropriately for specific task types (narrative, literary analysis, and/or research simulation).

Domain 1- Key Ideas and Details	**Domain** 2- Craft and Structure	**Domain** 3- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
RI, RL, L Standards 1, 2, and 3	RI, RL, L Standards 4, 5 and 6	RI, RL, L Standards 7, 8, and 9
Standard 10- By end of year, read and comprehend complex literary and information text independently and proficiently. This standard is not directly assessed and should not appear as a standard within a lesson plan.		
As measured, through an analytical essay: W1- Write arguments (opinion for grades 3 and 4); W2- Write informative/explanatory; W3- Write narratives		

Table 6 shows where the Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards are clustered within each of the three domains.

Each Task Generation Model set of standards is anchored in one final core reading and writing standard to determine a students' ability to demonstrate deep understanding and comprehension in a narrative, argument, or inform/explain essay from an analysis of the anchor text(s).

In a grade 8 released task example from the ELA state assessment, as shown below, the core standard to be assessed is proficiency or mastery of RL.8.6 (point of view or purpose) through the students' capacity to respond to a series of standards-based questions followed by an essay on how point of view creates tension in two different fictional pieces. With the writing prompt being provided at the onset of the Task Generation Model, students respond to the following types of standards-based questions that lead them to the final written analysis:

- Read text #1 and respond to standards-based questions-
- Q1-- vocabulary RL.8.4, RL.8.1
- Q2- author's tone, point of view, RL.8.3, RL.8.1
- Read text #2 and then respond to the next set of standards-based questions-
- Q3- tone using figurative language, RL.8.4, RL.8.1
- Q4- objective summary, RL.8.2, RL.8.1
- Student has access and can reread both all of or parts of the first and second text, followed by a final set of standards-based questions-
- Q5. Conflict between characters, both passages, RL.8.6, RL.8.1
- Q6. Selected sections lead to understanding of both narrators RL.8. 9 RL. 8.1
- Students has access to same anchor texts when formulating a written response to this final standards-based essay-

- ESSAY-Both narrators have a point of view different from those of their parents. Write an essay analyzing how these differences in points of view create tension in both stories. W.2, RL.8.6

For more information and Task Generation Models created for each standard focus, please visit the PARCC Assessment site or contact the English Language Arts Office at the Maryland State Department of Education.

As a result of the analysis and examination, reviewers scored this grade band as follows:

Overall Rating the 6-8 Grade Band:

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

Grade Band 9-10

Overview:

ELA curricula aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards will demonstrate a student's mastery of standards at an increasing level of challenge. As indicated in the Vertical Progressions charts, as students move through their educational careers, the standards become more refined and more rigorous. This increased level of challenge reflects the growing ability of a student preparing, ultimately, to be determined college and career ready. As a result, it becomes more important for students at the high school level to experience intellectual challenges that are age appropriate and are preparing students for college and careers.

When students enter high school, the expectation is that they have had access to daily rigorous, standards-based instruction grounded in informational and literary texts, as well as the strategies necessary for analyzing those texts. When students have difficulty with any of these standards, beyond expected educational frustrations, the student is at a greater disadvantage than their prepared counterparts. A strong curriculum based from the earliest grades allows students to continue on an upward tract for greater success beyond K-12 educational opportunities. High school students must be expected to analyze text for Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas as well as accompanying Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening standards.

Using the Maryland State Department of Education developed Evaluation Rubric for grades 3-10, curriculum vetters collected information from the Grade 9 and 10 curricula. Using the 3-10 curriculum evaluation rubric, the grade band team leader summarized findings areas of promise, opportunities for growth, and recommendations for improvements.

As a reference point, the 9-10 curriculum vetters evaluated using the four criteria (as shown below in Table 7) using a subset of indicators that must be evidenced throughout the 9-10 curriculum through lessons and activities:

I. Alignment of MCCRS	II. Key Areas of Shift/Focus	III. Instructional Supports	IV. Assessment/Measurability
• Measurable alignment with MCCRS (RI, RL, W, and L) • Text complexity • Vocabulary acquisition • Variety of texts	• Text-based evidence • Write to source • Academic vocabulary • Balance of information to literary text	• Equal access to text • Close reading techniques • Evidence of differentiation • Extensions included and appropriate	• Valid measures • Success criteria • Accommodations and accessibility • Reliable measures

Table 7 shows the four criteria and indicators curriculum vetters consulted for the 9-10 grade band ELA curriculum

Curriculum vetters rated the curriculum on a scale of 0-5 for each of the four criteria.

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

The overall rating for grade band 9-10 was a 2. There were several promising practices regarding text complexity, text-dependent lessons, and multiple means of expression of learning. However, the curriculum was not sufficiently aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

Areas of Promise:

I. *Text Complexity and Variety Evident*

As indicated in the Overview for grades 9 and 10 of ELA curriculum, a listing of Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards to be covered is provided along with a description of the essential question that guides the unit of study. Additionally, a review of all formative writing tasks and the culminating writing task is available for the teacher to review.

Both literary and informational texts are provided with a mix of short pieces and the biography, *Unbroken* by Laura Hildebrand for grade 9 and the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe for grade 10. These extended texts represent contemporary literature, diversity in authors (Hildebrand a female and Achebe and Nigerian) and both texts allow for the inclusion of non-print materials in lessons.

II. *Text-Dependent Lessons*

The lessons in the grade band facilitate oral and written responses which were grounded in textual evidence and driven by higher order thinking skills. Students are expected to use graphic organizers such as Evidence Capture charts and Cornell Notes Capture forms which supported the Essential Questions. The use of graphic organizers helps students to gather ideas in a nontraditional format which takes learning modalities into consideration. Graphic organizers also allow students to draw information, ideas, and textual supports for later writing assignments. In the majority of lessons, students were asked to read, annotate, discuss, and write about topics related to the texts. In grade 10, students were exposed to song lyrics, visuals, and maps.

III. *Multiple Means of Expression of Learning*

The lessons provided students with multiple opportunities to engage with text of appropriate complexity for the grade level. Each lesson began with teacher directed modeling of a strategy or an analysis of text which provided a gradual release for activities.

IV. *Written Responses Used to Demonstrate Learning*

Lessons elicited observable evidence to some degree of student mastery of standards using texts at the grade appropriate level of complexity. Both grade levels incorporated short writing assessments that led to a culminating writing task that addressed the grade level essential questions for each unit. There were multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency through written responses and both grade levels also had opportunities to demonstrate mastery of standards through discussion protocols such as Socratic Seminar.

Opportunities for Growth:

I. *Alignment to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards and Additional Focus on Vocabulary Development*

As mentioned previously, the overview of the curriculum in both grades 9 and 10 provided a listing of all standards being addressing in the module; however, over half of the lessons in grade 9 did not demonstrate a strong connection between the focus standard stated and the lesson objective stated, resulting in poor alignment. In grade 10, RL 1, which is a supporting standard, is the focus standard in 2 of 24 lessons; RL 2 is the focus standard for 6 of 24 lessons; RL 3 is the focus of 5 of 24 lessons; RL 6 is the focus standard for 9/24 lessons, of which two lessons are doubled (lessons 10-11 and lessons 22-23); and RL 7 is the focus standard for 1 of 24 lessons; however, 17 lessons in grade 10 are missing focus standards that seem to be taught based on the objective, are misaligned, or not aligned to the MCCRS. As teachers progress through the module, the instruction provided, based on the curriculum, is not preparing students to master the standards. This alignment issue would result in students completing activities but these activities are not supporting the standard.

In both Grades 9 and 10, only a handful of lessons referenced vocabulary acquisition with the teacher providing definitions. While that may be necessary for a teacher to provide a definition in some instances, there was little instruction in how to determine meaning. If the definition was not provided, students had some time to discuss a definition which was the only opportunity for building understanding. In Grade 10, one lesson was devoted to analyzing the word *burden* using a graphic organizer; in another lesson, students analyzed the multiple meanings of one word from the context of the novel which is the depth of the standard RL.9-10.4; however, this was for one word which does not allow for students to master the standard.

Grade level vocabulary must be addressed for students to increase their vocabulary and to maintain interest in the text. Providing class time to the one word does not use student time well, nor does it increase their knowledge of vocabulary as "burden" is a 5th grade vocabulary word as determined by *EDL Core Vocabulary* (Steck-Vaughn, 1989). In a grade 10 the teacher provides definitions of "colonialism" and "imperialism" in isolation and students copy the definitions into their notes. The lesson offers the following: Teacher may consider extended word study" but no direct instruction or modeling is provided. While the Overview details a list of content-specific vocabulary and tier two words from each chapter of the novels, there are no vocabulary acquisition strategies identified in the lessons to enable students to master unfamiliar words outside the classroom and teacher directed definitions.

II. *Teacher Guidance for Creating Text-Dependent Questions*

As mentioned in Areas of Promise, a list of tier 2 vocabulary words is listed at the beginning of the unit; however, there are no strategies for teaching and or determining the meaning of words in context to support students as they are reading the longer texts. As students continue reading or being read to, they do not have the requisite skills to determine unfamiliar vocabulary not provided by the teacher. This dearth of skill attainment results in students being able to read and comprehend only with the teacher who will provide definitions or when students look the words up individually. Students hands are figuratively tied and their ability to read and access text independently is hindered.

Throughout lessons, the curriculum writers have identified the need for teachers to create text dependent questions even providing a link to additional information regarding how to craft the

questions. Teacher ownership and freedom can make for rich lessons; however, when few text dependent questions are provided, the consistency with which a student is exposed to quality questions and text dependent questions that support the standards, a system cannot accurately determine if a student has been exposed to appropriate skills for analysis.

III. *All Students Demonstrate Independence and Responsibility for Learning*

Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards demands students read grade level and student appropriate texts which is demonstrated in the two longer selections in the 9-10 grade band, *Unbroken* and *Things Fall Apart.* In order to engage students in reading, it is sometimes necessary to begin reading in class or reread text for Close reading activities to redirect them to specific sections for closer analysis. In the lessons evaluated, almost all lessons revolved around the same text; students were reading and working with the text for the duration of the module or unit; translated into class time, the students worked with the same text for approximately 7 weeks. While other pieces of literature or visuals were included, and while there may be portions of a text that warrant reading aloud, and most certainly portions of text need to be analyzed through close reading strategies, reading the same text for the length of the unit does not allow for students to become independent readers.

Providing portions of the text in the "Text Set #1:…" does not require students to locate evidence; the evidence is provided. Additionally, the questions in the "Text Set #..." do not support the narrative writing at the end of the module. Lessons must build toward the summative assessment as guided throughout by the formative assessments. In these units, the natural progression of lessons does not culminate in the final writing sample.

Additionally, during these lessons, there was no other evidence of considerations made for students with disabilities, English learners, or students who are performing at or below grade level, nor were there extensions for students who read well above grade level. While Universal Design for Learning is mentioned in other grade levels, it is lacking at the high school level. Curriculum vetters noted that students were provided extensions for above level students in 0/24 lessons in grade 9 alone.

IV. *Integrate Frequent Formative Assessments to Standards-based Summative Assessment*

Success criteria is necessary for students to achieve; however, in both grade 9 and in grade 10, there was only one rubric referenced in one lesson each. While reviewers recognized that students had to provide written responses regularly, there is little in the way of expectation for student writing. As indicated on the Curriculum Evaluation Rubric, a curriculum must include lessons that incorporate aligned rubrics and/or assessment guidelines sufficient for interpreting performance; assessments that are appropriate for all students; and assessments, whether formal or informal, that are designed to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency.

In the lessons reviewed, there was no other evidence of rubrics or assessment guidelines for formative assessments, short writing samples, or other written responses. In grade 9, there was an exit ticket paragraph written response in 6/24 lessons; 5 formative writing tasks; 4 quick writes; and the expectation of ongoing journaling in multiple lessons, yet there is no indication of student expectations on the responses or how the responses are to be evaluated. Due to this missing information, it is unclear how the teacher would use the formative assessments to drive instruction, differentiate future lessons, or assess mastery of the standards. The Socratic Seminar activity provided students with a rubric but the activity was used once in the course of 24 lessons; one other rubric, a modified PARCC

rubric for a formative writing task was included. The concern is the possible misunderstanding of the purpose of a formative assessment. As indicated by Brookhart in *Formative Assessment Strategies for Every Classroom; An ASCD Action Tool, 2nd Edition (2010), "*A formative assessment refers to the ongoing process students and teachers engage in when they:

1. Focus on learning goals.
2. Take stock of where current work is in relation to the goal.
3. Take action to move closer to the goal."

Due to the nature of the rubric, three score points each in Reading: Comprehension and Key Ideas and Details; Writing: Written Expression; and Writing: Knowledge of Language and Conventions; and the writing assignment which is an argumentative essay incorporating three different sources, appears to be a summative assessment. This confusion in writing purpose, type of assignment, and scoring criteria indicates a lack of clarity from the curriculum writers which translates into a lack of clarity for teachers and for students. The narrative writing rubric is for teacher use and does not appear as a student document. The narrative assignment, while interesting, is not the culminating activity of the reading of two different texts.

As was the case in Instructional Supports, there was no evidence of accommodations or ways to vary the assessments for students who needed alternative formats; all students were expected to write exit tickets, essays, etc. which means that, while there were a variety of written response types, there were limited opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of the standards based on need and learning modality (Turner, 2014).

Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendation 1: Identify and align to specific standards that are essential to the lesson.

A complete list of standards addressed in the module is provided in the overview of the curriculum. This complete list, while comprehensive, is not as effective as they do not translate into each lesson. Due to the fact that 17 of 24 lessons are misaligned, not included, or not aligned, teachers who are unfamiliar with the standards may experience difficulty in how and where the standards are assessed, thereby jeopardizing student mastery. Aligning the focus standards within the lesson to an actual lesson plan will help solidify the intention of the standard for the teacher and establish student expectations for the lessons. This will also allow curriculum writers to review quickly which standards have not been addressed or have been partially addressed.

Reviewing and incorporating grade band standards and clarification documents will help with alignment between the student objectives from the lessons and the standards being addressed in the lessons. Lesson objectives must align with the standards and be observable in order for teachers to use student work to drive instruction. Without a clear, measurable objective, students will flounder as they are unaware of expectations, and teachers will be unable to monitor, assess, and redirect student learning. In insuring that the curricular lessons build toward the summative assessment, it is recommended that curriculum writers backward map prior to building lessons. This will allow the sequential development of lessons by having the end in mind.

Recommendation 2: Include academic vocabulary strategies for supporting making meaning from context of text being read.

Vocabulary acquisition does not end in the primary grades. Students need to be able to access a growing vocabulary that aligns with more challenging texts in ELA, science, and social studies. A major focus of the Key Shifts is that, "Lesson focuses on building students' vocabulary through instruction and context." While lessons provide a list of vocabulary words for students to know, there is little in the way of strategies that will help students anchor new words to their personal vocabularies, nor will providing a list of vocabulary words helps students when struggling with text outside the ELA classroom. In grade 9, students were exposed to academic vocabulary in 3 of 24 lessons. Vocabulary words were presented, but attack skills for making meaning of those words is unavailable. Adding a set of strategies for determining the meaning of words in context and modeling how to determine meaning from words with both fiction and nonfiction texts would benefit the teacher and the students; the teacher would benefit by empowering students to determine meaning without using the instructor as a dictionary, and students would benefit by being able to decode words. The skills garnered allow all students, even those with limited vocabularies, the ability to decode words, which allows them to become better readers not only in the English classroom, but also in other disciplines. The strategies, being reinforced throughout the student's school day, will allow the student to access texts which had been inaccessible.

Recommendation 3: Provide instructional supports for struggling readers, English Learner students, and/or Special Education students.

The reference and use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies for EL students, guidance for further scaffolding with vocabulary and writing structures would enhance the learning for all students. Universal Design for Learning strategies are addressed in other grade levels but seem to drop from the 9-10 curriculum, which in many cases is where providing supports for the diverse learners in the classroom can be most challenging. Student choice, where possible, creates ownership of learning and of product, thereby encouraging independence. When choices are provided and aligned with standards and objectives, students are able to show mastery in a variety of ways. Building these options for the students will allow teachers to identify student growth and adjust instruction as necessary.

Citing the standard with the appropriate lesson will help ensure lessons that must be scaffolded have incorporated strategies and activities that support student mastery based on individual need.

Recommendation 4: Develop assessment criteria and rubrics aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

As indicated in Brookhart's *How to Create and Use Rubrics for Formative Assessment and Grading, "*Rubrics are important because they clarify for students the qualities their work must have. This point is often expressed in terms of students understanding the learning target and criteria for success. For this reason, rubrics help teachers teach, they help coordinate instruction and assessment, and they help students learn." With this in mind, it is recommended that curriculum writers, once comfortable with alignment of standards to objectives in lessons, develop assessment criteria/rubrics aligned to the standards being addressed. The development of rubrics and assessment criteria would help solidify the standard to the lesson and provide students a clear indication on what they will be assessed and a clear indication on what teachers with grade student work. This would be best met by creating a lesson template that clearly addresses, at the beginning of the lesson, the focus standard or standards, the lesson objective, the assessment to determine student success, and the rubric for a student's work.

Rubrics may reflect more challenging extended writing skills which align with the Maryland Assessment for ELA Prose Constructed Responses, rubrics with which students must be familiar, as well as, other success criteria or rubrics for formative assessments. In order to address the needs of a group of diverse learners including EL, special education, and struggling readers, consider adding alternative measures to demonstrate successful mastery that do not repeatedly require written responses. This consideration will address students who, due to learning style or other factors, may need other formats to show mastery.

As a result of the analysis and examination, reviewers scored this grade band as follows:
Overall Rating of the 9-10 Grade band-

☐4- Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐3- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☒2- **Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable.**
☐1- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague.
☐0- Does not meet the criteria.

Discussion and Conclusion

Curriculum grounded in standards is the foundation for improved student outcomes. It is a priority of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) that all students engage in curriculum, instruction, and assessments that prepares them for post-secondary success. As a result, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. These standards identify what students must know and do to demonstrate proficiency in ELA/literacy. Proficiency in content knowledge is measured through state assessments.

Baltimore City Public Schools have consistently performed below the state average for ELA and mathematics. In 2015, an external audit of Baltimore City Public Schools' curriculum revealed significant gaps in standards alignment. A new math curriculum was implemented and revisions were made to the ELA curriculum. In 2018, as part of the MOU, MSDE vetted Baltimore City Public Schools' ELA curriculum. Similar to the 2015 audit, significant gaps in standards alignment was revealed. Code of Maryland Regulation 13A.04.14.01 requires each local school system to implement curriculum that is aligned with Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards. Based on Baltimore City Public Schools' curriculum audit (2015) and vetting (2018), it can be concluded that for the last three years, Baltimore City Public School students did not experience curriculum that was aligned to Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards.

It is essential that Baltimore City Public School students have access to high-quality curriculum that will prepare them for future success. Baltimore City Public Schools must implement a comprehensive K-12 ELA curriculum that is aligned to state standards for the 2018-2019 school year. It is strongly recommended that evidenced-based curriculum and instructional resources are implemented that address the needs of Baltimore City students as informed by data. Additionally, a comprehensive professional learning plan for ELA teachers and principals focused on standards-based instruction and implementation fidelity of new curriculum is needed. MSDE is committed to supporting Baltimore City Public Schools in identifying and implementing curriculum and professional learning experiences that is in alignment with state standards and effective practices for curriculum and instruction.

Appendix A: Lesson Selection Organizer

Grade Band	Grade Level	Curriculum Documents Selected, School Year 2017-18 Curriculum vetters had access to an entire Module [marking period/quarter] on the flash drive that accompanied the print version.	
Modules mean a marking period or Quarter		Scope and Sequence	Curriculum and Resources Management
K-2 **Binder:** Scholastic Leveled Library K-3 Instructional Model K-2 YAG Grades 1-5 Assessment Calendar	Kindergarten	Q1 Q2-pull Whole Group 188 p (45 days) Q3 Q4	❑ Pages to copy: p. 1-99 ❑ Flash drive: MP 2 ❑ Flash drive: Decodable Passages
	First Grade	Q1 Q2 Q3-pull- Whole Group Q4	❑ Pages to copy: p. 1-87 ❑ Flash drive: Shark article ❑ Flash drive: MP 3
	Second Grade	Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4-pull- Whole Group	❑ Pages to copy: 1-74 ❑ Grade 2 Planning Map ❑ Writing Second Grade ❑ Flash drive: MP 4
3-5 **Binder:** New Texts Grades 4 & 5 Instructional Model 3-5 Texts Websites Grade 4 YAG Grades 1-5 Assessment Calendar	Third Grade	Q1 Q2-pull- Whole Group p. Q3 Q4	❑ Pages to copy: 1-98 ❑ Grade 3 Planning Map ❑ Writing Third Grade ❑ Flash drive: MP 2

Grade Band	Grade Level	Curriculum Documents Selected, School Year 2017-18 Curriculum vetters had access to an entire Module [marking period/quarter] on the flash drive that accompanied the print version.	
Module means a marking period or Quarter		Scope and Sequence	Curriculum and Resources Management
3-5 **Binder:** New Texts Grades 4 & 5 Instructional Model 3-5 Texts Websites Grade 4 YAG Grades 1-5 Assessment Calendar	Fourth Grade	Q1 Q2 Q3-pull- Whole Group 295 p Q4	❑ Pages to copy: 1-148 ❑ Flash drive: Texts. Websites Grade ❑ Flash drive: MP 3
	Fifth Grade	Q1- pulled instead- Whole Group- 190 p. Q2 Q3 Q4-Could not locate	❑ Pages copy: 1-95 ❑ Flash drive: MP1
6-8 **Binder:** **6-12 Year At a Glance**	Sixth Grade	Q1 Q2-pull- The Lightning Thief- 141 p (30-35 days) Q3 Q4	❑ Pages to copy: 1-69 ❑ Flash drive: MP 2
	Seventh Grade	Q1 Q2 Q3-pull- The Diary of Anne Frank: The Play 235 p. (35 days) Q4	❑ Pages to copy: 1-47 (through Lesson 14) and accompanying resources to copy: p.85-160 ❑ Flash drive: MP 3

Grade Band	Grade Level	Curriculum Documents Selected, School Year 2017-18 Curriculum vetters had access to an entire Module [marking period/quarter] on the flash drive that accompanied the print version.	
Module means a marking period or Quarter		Scope and Sequence	Curriculum and Resources Management
6-8 **Binder:** **6-12 Year at a Glance**	Eighth Grade	Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4-pull- "Of Mice and Men" 164 p (33 days)	❑ Pages to copy: 1-56 (through Lesson 15) and accompanying resources to copy: p. 81-134 ❑ Flash drive: MP4
9-10 **Binder:** **6-12 Year at a Glance**	Ninth Grade English I	Q1 Q2- pull- 9A- "Unbroken" 173 p. (35 days) did not pull- 9B- The Other Wes Moore" 203 p. (35 days) Q3 Q4	❑ Pages copied: Grade 9A- p. 1-35 (through Lesson 10) and accompanying resources to copy: p. 82-131 ❑ Flash drive: MP 2A
	Tenth Grade English II	Q1 Q2 Q3-pull "Things Fall Apart" 142 p. (30-35 days) Q4	❑ Pages to copy: 1-38 (through Lesson 24) and accompanying resources to copy: p. 46-115 ❑ Flash drive: MP 3

Appendix B: Tools, Resources, and Evaluation Materials

Summary	Tool, Resource, or Evaluation Materials
Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated Plan It is a priority that all students have access to high-quality, standards-based curriculum. As a result, Maryland ESSA Plan requires schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) to undergo a curriculum vetting by MSDE. Each CSI school will be required to use English/language arts and mathematics curriculum that has been vetted by the MSDE. Local school systems and the MSDE will collaborate to provide training that supports curriculum implementation and rigorous instruction. Curriculum implementation will be monitored by the LEAs and the MSDE to ensure that it is being implemented with a high-level of fidelity.	http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/ESSA/ESSAMDSubmissionConsolidatedStatePlan011018.pdf
Code of Maryland Regulations, 13a.04.14.01 J. Curriculum Documents. Consistent with Education Article, §4-111, Annotated Code of Maryland, each local school system shall provide English language arts/literacy curriculum documents for the elementary and secondary schools under its jurisdiction that: (1) Include the content standards described in §§C—I of this regulation; and (2) Are aligned with the Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy as developed by the Maryland State Department of Education in collaboration with local school systems. K. Student Participation. Each student shall have the opportunity to participate in the comprehensive Reading and English language arts program required by this chapter.	http://www.dsd.state.md.us/COMAR/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=13A.04.14.*
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between Baltimore City Public Schools and the Maryland State Department of Education The MOU serves to illustrate the collaborative agreement entered into between Baltimore City Public Schools and MSDE in September 2017. An essential deliverable in the MOU is vetting of curriculum for alignment to Maryland's College- and Career-Ready Standards.	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/09192017/BaltimoreCityMOU.pdf

Part I Background: Lessons must reflect a wide range of text types and genres, as required by the standards. Knowledge built at one grade level should be expanded in other grade levels.

I: Alignment to MCCRS *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Measurable Alignment:** Lessons include a clear and specific purpose between MCCRS and the behavioral (measurable) objective. ❑ **Text Complexity:** Lessons include engaging with texts that align with the requirements in the standards and are of sufficient scope for the purpose. ❑ **Vocabulary Acquisition:** Lessons provide strategies for vocabulary acquisition. ❑ **Variety of Texts:** There is a range of materials, both print and digital, which feature diverse cultures, represent high quality, and are appropriate in topic and theme for the grade level. ❑ **Foundational Skills:** Lessons include explicit development of foundational literacy skills (concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency).		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part I: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3-** Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lesson is questionable.
☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet the criteria.

Part II Background: The Key shifts, as indicated in the adoption of the MCCRS (CCSS), are evident throughout. Thoughtful/Sustained focus on these shifts means students must have access to and regular practice with complex text and related academic language, reading, writing, and

language standards. Instruction explicitly calls for students' responses to be grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational. (corestandards.org)

II: Key Shifts are Evident *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges and Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Text-based evidence**: Lessons facilitate rich text-based discussions and responses driven by thought-provoking questions about common texts (including read alouds and other media). ❑ **Writing from sources:** Lessons provide opportunities for students to routinely draw evidence from texts and present ideas and information through writing and/or drawing and speaking. ❑ **Academic vocabulary:** Lessons focus on explicitly building students' vocabulary and concepts of syntax. ❑ **Balanced of Informational to Literary text:** In K-2, there is a 50/50 balance of informational and literary texts.		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part II: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3-** Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lesson is questionable.
☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet the criteria.

Part III Background: While scaffolds are not a part of the standards themselves, it is important to meet the range of student needs in the

classroom. Supports and scaffolds should draw students back to the text and provide strategies for vocabulary acquisition. All scaffolding and supports require ongoing formal and informal assessments that provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency, both cooperatively and independently. Scaffolding is not just intended for struggling students, but also for students who are ready for above grade-level work.

III Instructional Supports Build Proficiency and Independence. *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Equal Access to Text:** Lessons provide all students with multiple opportunities to engage with text (including read alouds) of appropriate complexity for the grade level. ❑ **Close Reading Techniques:** Lessons make reading texts closely (including read alouds) a central focus of instruction and includes opportunities for students to ask and answer text-dependent questions. ❑ **Evidence of Differentiation:** Considerations are made for students with disabilities, English learners, and students who are performing at or below grade level. ❑ **Extensions are Appropriate:** Provides extensions for students who read above grade level.		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part III: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3-** Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lesson is questionable.
☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet the criteria.

Part IV Background: Since assessment drives instruction, lessons include regular formative and summative measures to determine whether students are mastering standards-based content and skills.

IV. Assessment Design and Purpose *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement*
❑ **Valid Measures**: Lessons elicit observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate foundational skills and targeted grade level literacy. ❑ **Success Criteria**: Lessons include aligned rubrics and/or assessment guidelines sufficient for interpreting performance. ❑ **Accommodations and Accessibility:** Assessments are appropriate for all students. ❑ **Reliable Measures:** Assessments, whether formal or informal, are designed to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency.		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part IV: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3-** Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lesson is questionable.
☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet the criteria.

Sources:
https://www.achieve.org/files/EQuIP-ELArubric-06-24-13-FINAL.pdf
https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/72/ELA_Rubric_Grades%209-10.pdf
https://parcc-assessment.org/content/uploads/2017/11/PARCCMCFELALiteracyAugust2012_FINAL.pdf
http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf
http://mdk12.msde.maryland.gov/instruction/curriculum/reading/includes/AdditionalFiles/Vertical%20Progressions%20-%20Reading%20Informational%20Texts.pdf

Part I Background: Lessons must reflect a wide range of text types and genres, as required by the standards. Knowledge built at one grade level should be expanded in other grade levels.

I: Alignment to MCCRS *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Measurable Alignment:** Lessons include a clear and specific purpose between MCCRS and the behavioral (measurable) objective. ❑ **Text Complexity:** Lessons consistently provide opportunities to read both literary and informational texts in the text complexity grade band, which include a mix of short and full selections. ❑ **Vocabulary Acquisition:** Lessons provide strategies for vocabulary acquisition. ❑ **Variety of Text:** There is a range of materials, both print and digital, which feature diverse cultures, represent high quality, and are appropriate in topic and theme for the grade level.		

Qualitative for website

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part I: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2-** Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons is questionable.
☐**1-** Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet criteria.

Part II Background: The Key shifts, as indicated in the adoption of the MCCRS (CCSS), are evident throughout. Thoughtful/Sustained focus on these shifts means students must have access to and regular practice with complex text and related academic language, reading, writing, and language standards. Instruction explicitly calls for students' responses to be grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational. Lessons have a greater emphasis on informational texts in order to build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction, which includes literary non-fiction, historical documents, and scientific texts. (corestandards.org)

II: Key Shifts are Evident *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges and Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Text-based evidence:** Lessons facilitate oral and written responses grounded in textual evidence and driven by higher-order thinking skills. ❑ **Writing from sources:** Lesson suggests that students routinely draw evidence from texts in writing to analyze, create, or argue. ❑ **Academic vocabulary:** Lesson focuses on building students' vocabulary through instruction and context. ❑ **Balanced of Non-fiction to Literary text:** In K-5, there is a 50/50[1] balance of nonfiction to literary texts, whereas in high school, nonfiction texts are to be more prominently featured in English classes as well as in science, history, and technical classes to maintain a 70/30* balance of nonfiction to literary texts.		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part II: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2-** Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons is questionable.
☐**1-** Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet criteria.

[1] **The balance of non-fiction and fiction should be evident over the course of the unit; however, breakdown may not necessarily be seen in each lesson. For example, over the course of a unit, literary text explicitly connected to standards-based lessons as well as non-fiction text should reflect the 50/50 or 70/30 split.*

Part III Background: While scaffolds are not a part of the standards themselves, it is important to meet the range of student needs in the classroom. Supports and scaffolds should draw students back to the text and provide strategies for vocabulary acquisition. All scaffolding and supports require ongoing formal and informal assessments that provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency, both cooperatively and independently. Scaffolding is not just intended for struggling students, but also for students who are ready for above grade-level work.

III Instructional Supports Build Proficiency and Independence. *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations.*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement.*
❑ **Equal Access to Text:** Lessons provide all students with multiple opportunities to engage with text of appropriate complexity for the grade level. ❑ **Close Reading Techniques:** Lessons focus on challenging sections of text(s) and engage students in productive struggle through academic discussion and text-dependent questioning techniques that build toward independence and proficiency. ❑ **Evidence of Differentiation:** Considerations are made for students with disabilities, English learners, and students who are performing at or below grade level. ❑ **Extensions are Appropriate:** Provides extensions for students who read well above grade level.		
Qualitative Summary of Evidence		

Rating Scale for Part III: Select only one to support your summary above.

☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
☐**2-** Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons is questionable.
☐**1-** Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
☐**0-** Does not meet criteria.

Part IV Background: Since assessment drives instruction, lessons include regular formative and summative measures to determine whether students are mastering standards-based content and skills.

IV. Assessment Design and Purpose *Criteria*	Strengths *Provide specific evidence or examples of commendations*	Challenges or Concerns *Provide specific evidence or examples of areas for improvement*
❑ **Valid Measures**: Lessons elicit observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate mastery of the standards with appropriately complex text. ❑ **Success Criteria**: Lessons include aligned rubrics and/or assessment guidelines sufficient for interpreting performance. ❑ **Accommodations and Accessibility:** Assessments are appropriate to all students. ❑ **Reliable Measures:** Assessments, whether formal or informal, are designed to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency.		

Qualitative Summary of Evidence

Rating Scale for Part IV: Select only one to support your summary above.

- ☐**4-** Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
- ☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons.
- ☐**2-** Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons is questionable.
- ☐**1-** Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons is vague or weak.
- ☐**0-** Does not meet criteria.

Sources:

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http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf
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Curriculum Vetting Grade Band Consensus Reporting English Language Arts/Literacy (Grades 3-10)

Grade Band reviewed:

Directions: Using the Evaluation Rubric, indicate the criteria evidenced across the grade band curriculum.

I. Alignment to MCCRS (Check ☑ all that apply.)	**II. Key Areas of Focus/Shift in MCCRS** (Check ☑ all that apply.)	**III. Instructional Supports** (Check ☑ all that apply.)	**IV. Assessment/Measurability** (Check ☑ all that apply.)
☐**Measurable Alignment:** Lessons include a clear and specific purpose between MCCRS and the behavioral (measurable) objective.	☐**Text-based evidence**: Lessons facilitate oral and written responses grounded in textual evidence and driven by higher-order thinking skills.	☐**Equal Access to Text:** Lessons provide all students with multiple opportunities to engage with text of appropriate complexity for the grade level.	☐**Valid Measures**: Lessons elicit observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate mastery of the standards with appropriately complex text.
☐**Text Complexity:** Lessons consistently provide opportunities to read both literary and informational texts in the text complexity grade band, which include a mix of short and full selections.	☐**Writing from sources:** Lessons suggests that students routinely draw evidence from texts in writing to analyze, create, or argue.	☐**Close Reading Techniques:** Lessons focus on challenging sections of text(s) and engage students in productive struggle through academic discussion and text-dependent questioning techniques that build toward independence and proficiency.	☐**Success Criteria**: Lessons include aligned rubrics and/or assessment guidelines sufficient for interpreting performance.
☐**Vocabulary Acquisition:** Lessons provide strategies for vocabulary acquisition.	☐**Academic vocabulary:** Lessons focus on building students' vocabulary through instruction and context.	☐**Evidence of Differentiation:** Considerations are made for students with disabilities, English learners, and students who are performing at or below grade level.	☐**Accommodations and Accessibility:** Assessments are appropriate for all students.
☐**Variety of Texts:** There is a range of materials, both print and digital, which feature diverse cultures, represent high quality, and are appropriate in topic and theme for the grade level.	☐**Balance of Informational to Literary text:** In 3-5, there is a 50/50 balance of informational and literary texts; there is a 70/30 balance of informational and literary texts in grades 6-12.	☐**Extensions are Appropriate:** Lessons provide extensions for students who read above grade level.	☐**Reliable Measures:** Assessments, whether formal or informal, are designed to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency.

Curriculum Vetting Grade Band Consensus Reporting

English Language Arts/Literacy (Grades 3-10)

Directions: Using the criteria evidenced above and the Evaluation Rubric notes, provide a synthesis of the strengths and challenges across the curriculum. Be sure to cite specific objective examples for each of the criteria.

I. Alignment to MCCRS	II. Key Areas of Focus/Shift in MCCRS	III. Instructional Supports	IV. Assessment/Measurability
Synthesis of Strengths and Challenges/Concerns	**Synthesis of Strengths and Challenges/Concerns**	**Synthesis of Strengths and Challenges/Concerns**	**Synthesis of Strengths and Challenges/Concerns**
Select an overall rating for all lessons evaluated for the grade level. ☐ **4**-Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable. ☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague. ☐**0-** Does not meet the criteria.	*Select an overall rating for all lessons evaluated for the grade level.* ☐ **4**-Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable. ☐**1-** Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague. ☐**0**- Does not meet the criteria.	*Select an overall rating for all lessons evaluated for the grade level.* ☐ **4**-Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable. ☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague. ☐**0**- Does not meet the criteria.	*Select an overall rating for all lessons evaluated for the grade level.* ☐ **4**-Meets almost all or all of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**3**- Meets most of the criteria with strong connections between standards and lessons. ☐**2**- Meets some of the criteria, but connection between standards and lessons are questionable. ☐**1**- Meets few of the criteria and connections between standards and lessons are weak or vague. ☐**0**- Does not meet the criteria.

Curriculum Vetting Grade Band Consensus Reporting

English Language Arts/Literacy (Grades 3-10)

Directions: Synthesizing all of the information collected throughout the evaluation process, list key recommendations for the grade band impacting teaching and learning to be shared with the school system.

I. Recommendations for Aligning to MCCRS	II. Recommendations for Demonstrating Evidence of Key Shifts	III. Recommendations for Providing Instructional Supports for ALL	IV. Recommendations for Developing Appropriate Assessments

This tool has been adapted by MSDE from the Quality Rubric created by the Tri-State Collaborative (Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island) – facilitated by Achieve.

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