

English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy
Curriculum Review:

Middle School ELA Curriculum

Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland

Prepared by:

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Introduction and Methodology

To ensure that all students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) are able to meet the expectations of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), MCPS educators need access to high-quality standards-aligned instructional and assessment materials. This report presents the results of an alignment review of MCPS's middle school English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. Because the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards incorporate the [Common Core State Standards](#) (CCSS) for ELA/Literacy, the review is based on the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool ([IMET](#)), an authoritative rubric for aligning instructional materials with the requirements of the CCSS. In total, there are four IMET rubrics, each one specific to a subject area and grade band: ELA/Literacy grades K-2, ELA/Literacy grades 3-12, Mathematics grades K-8, and Mathematics high school. For the ELA middle school review, the ELA/Literacy 3-12 IMET served as the foundation for determining alignment. All references to standards in this report will be to the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, which will be referred to throughout as "MCCRS" or simply "the standards".

Description of the IMET:

The ELA/Literacy IMET draws directly from the ELA/Literacy CCSS and the [Publishers' Criteria for Common Core State Standards in Literacy](#). Because of this, the ELA IMET is aligned with MCPS's emphasis on the Core Literacy Practices as the critical processes and proficiencies of the curriculum. For example, Non-Negotiable 1 of the ELA IMET 3-12 focuses on measuring whether the materials include high-quality text meeting the appropriate complexity criteria for each grade, including a mix of informational texts and literature. This directly aligns with MCPS's first Core Literacy Practice, ensuring that students read and discuss a wide variety of complex texts. In addition, because standards are for all students, evaluating instructional materials requires careful attention be paid to ensure that special populations, including English Language Learners and those with different learning needs, have access to high-quality aligned materials. The IMET, therefore, includes specific guidance ensuring that evaluators assess the availability, alignment, and quality of embedded supports within the instructional materials for English Language Learners and other special populations.

The ELA/Literacy 3-12 IMET includes Non-Negotiable Alignment Criteria and Alignment Criteria. Together, they cover critical features of aligned materials including: quality, complexity, and range of texts; quality of questions, tasks, and assignments including evidence-based discussion and writing; building knowledge; academic language; and support for all learners. The *Grade-Level Evidence and Ratings* table (Appendix), which was used to capture detailed evidence of middle school ELA curriculum, is based on the IMET and is organized as follows:

- Section 1: Close Reading of Complex Text
- Section 2: Building Academic Language
- Section 3: Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge
- Section 4: Evidence-Based Discussions
- Section 5: Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge
- Section 6: Foundational Skills/Fluency
- Section 7: Supporting All Students

This grouping of the criteria captures the essentials of the IMET while allowing the reporting of results to be organized in the way instructional materials are generally encountered by users.

Review Team:

This review was conducted by ELA/Literacy specialists at Student Achievement Partners (SAP). Student Achievement Partners is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping teachers and school leaders implement high-quality, college-and career-ready standards, with a focus on instructional materials, instructional practice and assessment. Student Achievement Partners developed the IMET, working in concert with organizations and experts who likewise had originally participated in the development of the standards. The ELA/Literacy specialists who reviewed the middle school ELA curriculum are well versed in the Common Core State Standards, from the individual standards statements to the overall structure of the standards. SAP's content specialists are experienced in the design and use of the IMET, and have extensive experience applying the criteria to evaluate instructional materials and training other organizations, state education agencies and local education agencies to use the tool.

Process and Methodology:

The methods for this review consisted of a close reading of existing MCPS curricular documents found on the MCPS English website and an evaluation of them based on specific evidence gathered to assess the criteria in the ELA/Literacy 3–12 IMET. This process was carried out in the following stages:

Project Set-Up and Planning: Once access to the middle school ELA curriculum was provided, the review team met with MCPS staff in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs to understand the scope and background of the middle school ELA curriculum and to become familiar with the online platform. SAP collaborated with MCPS to create and refine a sampling plan that specified which documents from the curriculum the SAP team would review.

Phase 1: The phase 1 review of the written curriculum consisted of a detailed analysis of the middle school curriculum framing documents: the Curriculum Guides and Overview Charts for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. These were analyzed for their implementation of the ELA/Literacy Instructional Shifts: Regular practice with complex text and its academic language; reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational; and building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction. This review was used primarily to understand to what extent the provided texts met the complexity expectations for the grade and how well the Common Tasks were specific to these texts.

Phase 2: The phase 2 review consisted of a detailed review of Grade 8 ELA curricular materials. This grade was selected in conjunction with MCPS. Grade 8 would provide a perspective on where students end up at the end of the PK–8 progression. The sampling plan focused on Common Tasks from both semester courses in the 8th grade ELA curriculum: 8A - Writing and Language and 8B - Language and Literature. Four tasks in total were selected: two each from 8A and 8B — two centrally reported tasks and a mix of argument, narrative, and informational writing tasks. These tasks were: From 8A — Argument, An evaluation or review of a product, service, or experience; Narrative, A fictional narrative that develops a theme (centrally reported during Quarter 1). From 8B — Unit 1, Literature as Craft, Argument, An argument discussing the most meaningful word or phrase in a text (centrally reported during Quarter 3); Unit 2: Literature in Context, Analysis, An explanation of how a work draws on themes or patterns from literature or history. Other key components of the curriculum were also reviewed: lists of Core Texts, Literature Circles (both texts listed and models), Vocabulary and Language Study, Components of Rigorous Classroom, Core Learning Practices, Common Task resources listed on MCPS landing page (were found for 8A only).

To conduct the phase 2 review, the curricular materials were examined and evidence was collected

corresponding to the criteria; see *Grade-Level Evidence and Ratings* table (Appendix). The evidence gathered was used to determine the degree to which each individual metric was met.

Format of the Results:

The determination of alignment of the ELA middle school curriculum to the Shifts and high-level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards is based on the number of points obtained for both Non-Negotiables and Alignment Criteria. Specifically, the following thresholds were used to determine overall alignment:

| Alignment Determination | Component | Conditions | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | | Required Non-Negotiable Alignment Criteria to Be Met | Minimum Required Points on Alignment Criteria |
| ALIGNED to the Shifts and high-level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards when it meets all of the following conditions: | 1. Close Reading of Complex Text | NN 1A & NN 1B | 3 out of 4 |
| | 2. Building of Academic Language | --- | 3 out of 4 |
| | 3. Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge | NN 3A & NN 1A | --- |
| | 4. Evidence-Based Discussions | --- | 3 out of 4 |
| | 5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge | NN 2B | 5 out of 6 |
| | 6. Foundational Skills/Fluency | --- | 2 out of 2 |
| | 7. Supporting All Students | --- | 4 out of 6 |
| APPROACHING ALIGNMENT to the Shifts and high level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards when it doesn't meet all of the conditions stated above for ALIGNED but meets all of the following conditions: | 1. Close Reading of Complex Text | NN 1A & NN 1B | 2 out of 4 |
| | 2. Building of Academic Language | --- | 2 out of 4 |
| | 3. Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge | NN 3A & NN 1A | --- |
| | 4. Evidence-Based Discussions | --- | 2 out of 4 |
| | 5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge | NN 2B | 4 out of 6 |
| | 6. Foundational Skills/Fluency | --- | 1 out of 2 |
| | 7. Supporting All Students | --- | 3 out of 6 |
| FAR FROM ALIGNED to the Shifts and high-level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards when it does not meet the conditions for "Aligned" or "Approaching Alignment," as stated above. | | | |

Summary of Findings and Recommendations: ELA/Literacy (Middle School)

The MCPS Middle School ELA curriculum (grades 6–8) is focused on a collection of common writing tasks and core text lists that teachers select from for classroom instruction. This review is based on curricular materials from the [MCPS English Website](#), including the Curriculum Guide, Components of Rigorous Classroom, Core Learning Practices, various professional development modules and any ancillary materials referenced. **Based on the materials reviewed, the curriculum in middle school is far from aligned to the Shifts and high level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards: the Non-Negotiables required for alignment or approaching alignment were not met, and none of the thresholds for alignment or approaching alignment in the Alignment criteria were met.** (A score breakdown is found in the Appendix.)

While the middle school ELA curriculum materials articulate an intent to ensure that all students are exposed to high-quality learning experiences, the materials themselves fall far short of the expectations established by the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. Without a clear articulation of complex texts that all students read to build knowledge and the use of high-quality text-specific tasks, it will be very challenging for teachers and students to meet the expectations of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards.

- Although the materials provide a list of suggested texts for each grade level and within Sample Learning Tasks, they fail to identify which of these texts should be taught as anchor texts that are to be read carefully and deeply, or which might be supporting texts. Suggesting high-quality texts is a necessary but not sufficient step. To be aligned to the standards, students need to be reading texts of grade-appropriate complexity as defined by the standards. The materials do not provide adequate guidance on the complexity of the listed texts: Only some have a quantitative measure (and many of those are outside the grade band) and none have a qualitative measure. This lack of clarity on *what* specific texts might be taught and a *guarantee* that these texts meet the complexity requirements set by the standards is a central fault of the materials and is the core cause of its weaknesses. Lacking a clear identification of complex text that is both appropriate for the grade level and worthy of close study, there is insufficient evidence that students will engage in regular practice with complex text. Additionally, the lack of text identification *and* lack of complexity analysis or information makes it impossible to clearly articulate a staircase of text complexity required by the standards and other requirements of the standards, such as a series of high-quality text-specific questions, a systematic study of academic vocabulary, evidence-based writing tasks or discussions that are connected to specific texts.

Among the **strengths**:

- The listed Core Texts that teachers can choose from represent a selection of some previously published texts and some classic text materials for teachers to use.
- The ancillary curricular materials provide professional learning and pedagogical resources that frame instructional support for students who read below grade level or whose primary language is not English.

In several important ways, the materials examined fall short of meeting the criteria. These **weaknesses** include:

- With more than 57% of provided quantitative measurements for texts shown to be below grade level, an additional 72% of all listed texts with no quantitative measure at all, and no qualitative

information provided for any text, there is no assurance that students across the district will receive regular practice with complex texts as required by the standards.

- Expectations for the study or building of academic language are not accompanied with specific resources or directions for teachers
- There are too few text-dependent questions and writing prompts matched to specific texts to support close reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text.
- Texts are not organized around conceptually-related topics or themes that allow students to build general knowledge about the world.

The following **recommendations** are offered as steps to bring the curricular materials into alignment with the Shifts and high-level features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards:

1. Identify a sequence of grade-level-appropriate complex anchor and supporting texts that will be used by all teachers and students. This should include:
 - a. a robust text selection process based on CCR-aligned text complexity analysis (qualitative and quantitative) and a quality analysis to determine that the text is worth reading;
 - b. the creation of series or sets of texts organized by robust topic or concrete themes – preferably connected to the topic of the anchor text;
 - c. the clear articulation of anchor and supporting texts all teachers and students will use for the core of grade-level instruction;
 - d. the careful sequencing of anchor texts so a staircase of complexity is built from the beginning of the school year to the end.
2. Integrate robust and challenging *text-specific* tasks (questions, discussion tasks, writing prompts) that support students’ deep understanding and analysis of selected texts and students’ use of textual evidence to buttress their analysis. It is through such tasks that students experience close reading, and evidence-based writing and discussions
3. Deeply integrate specific lessons, tasks, and modules (including reading supports, discussion tasks, a volume and variety of writing tasks, etc.) that align to anchor and supporting texts.
4. Integrate a yearlong clearly articulated plan to develop students’ *academic* language (both vocabulary and syntax) that provides practice and learning both in and out of context. This plan must include specific vocabulary from provided texts (rather than the currently listed literary terms which do not qualify as academic vocabulary as defined by the standards).
5. Provide formative and summative assessments that inform teachers about the learning needs of students *and* provide clear recommendations for instructional change. These assessments must be text-specific (to a single text or a set).
6. Integrate clear supports, protocols, and a system for writing instruction that is embedded throughout the curricular materials that provide robust and specific lessons, tasks, etc.
7. Articulate a clear and coherent scope and sequence of materials and instruction that spans an entire school year so that daily instruction, learning goals, and the yearlong instructional purpose is clear to a using teacher.

It is evident that MCPS has adopted an approach in which teachers are asked to make local decisions and build their own lessons and units, but there are not sufficient resources in the current materials to support teachers to do so. The recommendations listed above are an exceptionally heavy lift and will take months if not years of sustained work to accomplish. Therefore, it is recommended that MCPS adopt high-quality instructional materials that already reflect the full demands of college- and career-readiness in ELA/literacy. Such a standards-aligned, high-quality curriculum should be completely articulated, previously vetted by authoritative sources, and highly aligned to the Shifts and high-level

features of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. As a critical part of this adoption process, MCPS educators could use the IMET to evaluate curricular programs that are highly rated by external expert panels (e.g., EdReports) and determine which one(s) best reflects the needs of local students and schools. Instead of requiring each teacher to create his or her own lessons and accompanying supports, teachers need and deserve to be provided with materials that are aligned to the academic demands (and the research underlying them) so they can make principled and productive adaptations and devote their time to honing their instructional delivery of the materials. As one AFT educator put it: “Teachers should not be expected to be the composers of the music as well as the conductors of the orchestra.”¹

¹ http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/editorsnote_0.pdf.

Detailed Findings and Recommendations

On the pages that follow, please find a narrative discussion of the findings and recommendations based on the review of the provided MCPS curricular materials for 8th Grade English. The discussion is organized according to each of the sections of the review tool. Each section header appears in a box, followed by a summary of findings and corresponding recommendations. More detailed information is included in the *Grade-Level Evidence and Ratings* (Appendix).

Section 1: Close Reading of Complex Text

High-Level Summary: Close Reading of Complex Text

The curricular materials for English 8 provide a list of 'Core Texts' that include some high-quality, grade-level texts teachers might select. However, the materials do not specifically define any of these Core Texts as anchor texts that all students must read. There can be no confidence that across the district, or even across a school, there is a shared standards-aligned curriculum without designated anchor texts. The standards demand close reading of complex, quality texts which means that lessons have to deeply and precisely explicate how to instruct with those texts. As things stand, each teacher must do this for himself or herself. As such, MCPS cannot be assured that students across the district are receiving instruction to support them in reaching grade-level expectations.

Moreover, the curricular materials do not provide any high-quality sequences of text-specific questions, tasks, or lessons that correspond to the listed core texts. Several of the example lessons and common tasks provided in the materials do not require the use of listed core texts or any text at all. Again, the lack of anchor texts is a significant barrier. The curricular materials do provide some text-dependent questions². Although these are technically standards-based questions they are generic, repeated from text to text, and are not tailored to support students in understanding the particulars of each text. Included Common Tasks also do not refer to any particular text or set of texts and there are only a few tasks that might support students' deep analysis of the core texts listed. By definition, such questions and tasks cannot be said to meet the demands of the standards because they are not connected to a text or texts; the reading standards, most of the writing standards, and the collaborative conversation standards are centered on the texts students are reading.

Findings:

- *Strength:* The listed Core Texts for English 8B are of publishable quality and many are classic texts.
- *Strength:* Close reading is named in the Components of a Rigorous Classroom and Core Learning Practices as a key component of English classrooms. The Guide to Creating Text Dependent Questions is provided as a professional learning resources for teachers.
- *Area for Improvement:* No guidance is provided on which texts to select (including which texts

² Text-dependent questions are those that require use of evidence from text; they push students to rely solely on the text for insight and analysis, they must be traceable "back to the text," and they rely on the language and mechanics of the text itself rather than personal experience or opinion. Examples include: What is the author's message in the text?, What is the main idea of the passage?, What details can you find that support the main idea?. Text-specific questions are a subset of text-dependent questions. These questions probe the specifics of the text and avoid "canned" questions that could be asked of any text and can only be applied to one specific text. Examples include, Why does Monk ask this question, "Which 'We the People' has 'troubled the nation'?", Why does Monk claim that popular sovereignty is the form of government in America?, What evidence is there in paragraph three regarding Marshall's claim about the "evolving nature of the constitution"?

might be anchor texts); teachers may select any text from the listed Core Text in the instructional materials, and those could include texts that may not be at the appropriate complexity level for the grade.

- *Area for Improvement:* There are no standards-aligned and high-quality text-dependent questions; there are no exemplar close reading lessons, questions, or tasks dependent on specific core texts provided for using teachers (no examples of close reading of Core Texts are provided).
- *Area for Improvement:* Lists of suggested texts are not clearly connected to topics or themes (other than genre or vague concepts).
- *Area for Improvement:* As teachers make their selections, they need to understand the quantitative dimensions of complexity (vocabulary, length of sentences, the text’s organization) and qualitative elements of complexity (language, structure, and knowledge demands) of each text for both proper text sequencing and instruction. Currently, of 99 texts listed for 8th grade, only 28 (less than one-third) have been evaluated for their quantitative appropriateness for grade-level complexity as defined by the standards. Of those, 14 (one half) are below grade level and two are above grade level. No qualitative analysis is provided for any listed text. Providing students with regular opportunities to access complex texts is key to preparing students for college and careers and required by the standards.
- *Area for Improvement:* Texts listed do not provide a balance of literature and informational text (made potentially more severe by lack of guidance of what texts to use).
- *Area for Improvement:* Culminating tasks (the “Common Tasks” provided in the Curriculum Guide) are not specific to any given text or text set and most often do not address multiple standards. They occasionally do not reflect any standards. To meet the demands of the standards, common tasks must be connected to a specific text or texts; the reading standards, most of the writing standards, and the collaborative conversation standards are centered on the texts students are reading.

Recommendations:

1. ***Select anchor texts according to grade level standards for complexity and sequence these texts throughout the year to build a clear staircase of complexity.*** Naming anchor texts and guaranteeing their alignment to complexity expectations ensures that the instructional materials are centered around high-quality grade-level complex texts as called for by the standards. Ensuring a staircase of text complexity also supports all students to meet the expectations of Reading Standard 10 by the end of the course.
2. ***Select supporting texts connected to the anchor texts that clearly reflect topics or concrete themes and provide a balance of literature and informational texts.*** Building such series of texts supports teachers and students to build knowledge of important topics and engage in a volume of reading that spans a range of complexities.
3. ***Develop sequences of high-quality, text-specific questions for each named anchor text tied to the demands of the standards for that grade.*** Moving beyond professional learning materials and providing specific tasks tied to specific anchor texts ensures that students are regularly required to draw on texts to support careful analysis and inference and that students regularly dive deeply into texts to build a full understanding of central ideas, key details, craft, and structure.
4. ***Develop culminating tasks that are specific for each anchor text and its accompanying set of supporting texts.*** Such culminating tasks allow students to develop *and* demonstrate learning of what is most essential in the text(s) and addresses multiple grade level standards.

Section 2: Building Academic Language

High-Level Summary: Building Academic Language

Though the Curriculum Guides list language standards and course terms that are intended to address vocabulary and express the importance of instruction in academic language, teachers would benefit from specific resources in the instructional materials for the building of students' academic language. The lack of a coherent selection of texts across the grade level translates into a lost opportunity for the curricular materials to provide systematic work with building vocabulary in context. There is no systematic plan provided for students to build academic vocabulary in context (or out of context) and no questions or tasks that support students' understanding of academic language in complex text. Additionally, the materials list literary terms and not academic vocabulary words. This is an important distinction, as the standards require regular attention to academic vocabulary (defined as words that appear in many different contexts and are often subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things, for example "relative" or "accumulate", [SAP, 2017])

Findings:

- *Strength:* The Curriculum Guides state that students should build academic vocabulary over the course of a school year.
- *Area for Improvement:* There is no clear text or series of text selected for use in English courses that could build students' knowledge and vocabulary efficiently and effectively.
- *Area for Improvement:* There is no cohesive yearlong plan for students to interact with and build vocabulary.
- *Area for Improvement:* No academic vocabulary words are chosen for careful study from the provided lists of suggested texts.
- *Area for Improvement:* No text-specific questions or tasks that support systematic work with vocabulary in context are provided.
- *Area for Improvement:* No out-of-context systematic work with vocabulary or syntax is provided.

Recommendations:

1. ***Ensure that selected texts are organized around a variety of conceptually related topics appropriate for the grade level.*** This supports reading, writing, and speaking tasks that build knowledge and vocabulary. Strategically organizing texts into such discrete topics provides the opportunity for students to efficiently build robust knowledge about the world and large vocabularies.
2. ***Develop a cohesive yearlong plan for students to work with and build a robust and sophisticated academic vocabulary. This plan should include both in-context tasks (text-specific questions, text-specific discussion tasks, etc.) and out-of-context tasks (games, exercises, strategies, etc.).*** Such a plan ensures that students learn, work with, use, and know complex academic vocabulary that supports their building of knowledge, reading comprehension, writing, and speaking in academic settings.
3. ***Select specific words to study in context from anchor and supporting texts. Be clear about which words should be highlighted from any given text, including which merit more time and attention, which merit less, and why they merit these differences.*** Doing so supports teachers' strategic instruction of the words and ensures that all students are building a robust and worthwhile vocabulary.
4. ***Craft questions and tasks that focus on high-value words in context that merit more time and attention. These should be provided for each anchor and selected supporting texts.***

Including such tasks in instructional materials support an already-articulated cohesive vocabulary development plan that allows all students to build their knowledge and vocabulary base.

Section 3: Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge

High-Level Summary: Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge

It is not clear how the curricular materials support students to build knowledge on clearly articulated topics. While themes are suggested in the instructional materials, these are more skill-based (as opposed to content-based). For the suggested themes, there is no clear articulation of the significance or meaning of these themes or what distinct knowledge might build an understanding of any given theme. There is an opportunity to provide a volume of reading via the Literature Circles suggested in the Curriculum Guides, but there is no evidence that students will build knowledge systematically through a volume of reading within the curricular materials or that there students will be given a choice of choice of what to independently according to their own interests.

Findings:

- *Strength:* The Curriculum Guides provide a list of texts students might use for Literature Circles, and the MCPS English website provides a series of professional learning materials and structures for using Literature Circles in the classroom.
- *Area for Improvement:* There is no sequence or series of texts provided that organize texts around conceptually related topics or themes to build knowledge through reading, writing, speaking, or listening.
- *Area for Improvement:* No connection (thematic, topical, or otherwise) is provided between the listed Literature Circle texts and the listed Core Texts.
- *Area for Improvement:* There is no evidence that texts are organized to provide students with texts from a variety of complexity levels or organized so that access to more complex texts are supported by the reading of less complex texts.

Recommendations:

1. ***Ensure that a series of texts build knowledge by organizing selected texts around conceptually related topics or themes.*** This not only allows students to build knowledge through the careful reading of a clear sequence of materials, but also allows enough time for such knowledge and vocabulary to grow. Building knowledge is a known research-based accelerator for literacy gains for all students. Rather than just “accessing students’ background knowledge,” it is critical to find concrete ways to build students’ general knowledge through what we do with students in school. Increasing knowledge also increases vocabulary, since words are the names we use to talk about what we know. Increasing students’ banks of words and knowledge accelerates students’ comprehension growth.
2. ***Select texts for independent reading that are clearly connected to anchor texts and support access to complex anchor texts.*** This allows students to build the necessary background knowledge and vocabulary to better understand complex anchor texts as well as engage in a volume of reading required by the standards.
3. ***Provide clear accountability for independent reading and (if Literature Circles will be required) a single, articulated research-based model for Literature Circles.*** This ensures that students will consistently engage in reading independently and that a useful system of accountability will be used in classrooms.

Section 4: Evidence-Based Discussions

High-Level Summary: Evidence-Based Discussions

Though the materials regularly state that discussion is important and provide quality resources that teachers might use to build evidence-based discussions, they do not provide text-specific tasks, lessons, or plans that engage students in evidence-based discussions or systematically build their speaking and listening skills.

Findings:

- *Strength:* The Curriculum Guide, Components of a Rigorous Classroom, and Core Learning Practices regularly state that students must engage in small and large group discussions.
- *Strength:* The materials provide professional learning resources, pedagogical tools, and text-agnostic strategies to support teachers in creating discussion tasks.
- *Area for Improvement:* There are few discussion tasks that are connected to any specific text.
- *Area for Improvement:* There are no lessons that integrate speaking and listening into reading and/or writing lessons.
- *Area for Improvement:* The materials do not provide a plan for or activities that support the use of academic language in students' speech.

Recommendations:

1. ***Develop a series of discussion tasks that are specific to selected text(s).*** Such development helps teachers move beyond the professional learning materials to regularly engage all students in high-quality speaking and listening tasks clearly connected to selected text(s).
2. ***Create lessons and longer tasks specific to a text or series of texts that integrate speaking and listening alongside reading and/or writing.*** Designing lessons with such integrated literacy aligns not only with the Instructional Shifts, but also allows students to authentically meet multiple standards.
3. ***Include clear protocols and robust discussion structures with the text-specific speaking tasks.*** This ensures that students' speaking and listening skills grow throughout the year and that student discussions allow not only for the sharing of findings but also for students to build on one another's ideas.

Section 5: Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

High-Level Summary: Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

The focus of the Curriculum Guides are the writing-based Common Tasks, however, none of these tasks are specific to any single text, set of texts, topic, or clear theme. Without a clear connection to texts students are reading and researching, the instructional materials do not provide the practice students need to secure, expand, and showcase their knowledge of topics or themes.

Findings:

- *Strength:* The instructional materials provide writing opportunities for various genre types (informational, argumentative, narrative).
- *Area for Improvement:* Writing tasks are not connected to any specific text and so do not clearly

support careful analysis, claims, or information about a given text.

- *Area for Improvement:* Listed research prompts are not accompanied by guidance on or materials for the duration of projects, topics to research, sources, or evidence gathering tools.
- *Area for Improvement:* The Curriculum Guides do not include lessons or tasks that provide explicit instruction on the fundamentals of writing or grammar and conventions.
- *Area for Improvement:* The instructional materials did not make a distinction between on-demand and process writing for students to engage in as a regular part of class instruction (as opposed to on-demand writing being part of the assessments).

Recommendations:

1. ***Develop writing tasks that are connected to specific texts.*** This allows students to develop and demonstrate careful analysis, claims about, or information from a given text.
2. ***Provide concrete opportunities for students to engage in short- and long-term research projects that develop or extend topics and themes under study.*** This moves beyond listing writing prompts to providing the materials and resources to support students in meeting the standards' expectations for research and support students to further develop concrete knowledge of course topics and themes.
3. ***Create lessons and tasks that include explicit instruction on the fundamentals of writing as well as instruction on grammar and conventions. These lessons and tasks should be provided both in and out of context.*** Such opportunities support teachers and students to engage in a yearlong pursuit of the craft writing. In-context instruction ensures exemplars are used from provided texts.
4. ***Provide clear opportunities for both on-demand and process writing. These might include a regular cycle of instructional strategies.*** This means that students will engage in a variety of writing activities that prepare them for the authentic writing tasks required by colleges and careers.

Section 6: Foundational Skills/Fluency

High-Level Summary: Foundational Skills/Fluency

Because the instructional materials do not provide clear anchor or supporting texts and do not provide specific corresponding fluency support materials, there is no evidence that the materials provide all students with clear opportunities to engage in the range and volume of reading necessary to ensure students achieve grade-level fluency in either oral or silent reading.

Findings:

- *Area for Improvement:* No clear range of reading, volume of reading, or fluency support materials are provided (a result of the lack of specified anchor text or supporting texts).
- *Area for Improvement:* There is no evidence of regular practice with oral and silent reading fluency.
- *Area for Improvement:* No guidance is provided so that students might practice reading grade-level prose and poetry with appropriate accuracy, rate, and expression.

Recommendations:

1. ***When selecting course texts, provide support materials that include both fluency practice and a range and volume of reading.*** Doing so ensures the opportunity for teachers and students to work on appropriate or necessary foundational skills during instruction.

2. ***Provide regular practice with oral and silent reading fluency of grade-level complex text and the guidance to teachers about how to engage students in the practices.*** This ensures a clear protocol and practice for building grade-level silent and oral reading fluency (appropriate accuracy, rate, and expression).

Section 7: Supporting All Students

High-Level Summary: Supporting All Students

The instructional materials provide some supports to ensure all students meet grade-level standards, but these supports are not sufficiently robust. A variety of tools ancillary to the instructional materials (texts or tasks) is provided through the MCPS English website, however, these tools are disjointed from the instructional materials and so do not provide regular instructional supports that will ensure all students meet grade-level standards.

Findings:

- ***Strength:*** Guidance is provided to teachers on the timing and duration of various common tasks and units.
- ***Strength:*** Select common tasks are given to all students and centrally collected each quarter.
- ***Strength:*** Teachers and students can reasonably complete the common tasks in the Curriculum Guide in a school year.
- ***Strength:*** The materials provide professional development and occasional models for supporting students below grade level.
- ***Strength:*** The materials provide ELL resources for the grade level.
- ***Area for Improvement:*** There is no clearly articulated system, protocol, supports, or time provided specific to the instructional materials (texts or tasks) for students below grade level or whose language is other than English.
- ***Area for Improvement:*** No recommendations are provided for addressing the results of common tasks.
- ***Area for Improvement:*** The only regular assessment provided is the centrally collected common task, and this is not sufficient to assess student reading and writing proficiency.

Recommendations:

1. ***Integrate a systematic structure to provide the resources, time, and supports for students below grade level and English Language Learners. This structure should move beyond the isolated ELL supports and professional learning materials currently included to provide teachers and students with text and lesson specific opportunities for strategic and appropriate support.*** This ensures the materials regularly provide the opportunity for all students to work with and meet grade-level standards, including regular access to grade-level complex texts.
2. ***Supply a systematic assessment that accurately measures grade-level reading and writing proficiency and provides recommendations on how to address results.*** A clear assessment system (such as interims) aligned to MCPS's instructional materials would support teachers to provide the appropriate interventions, adjustments to instruction, and extended supports to meet the needs of students as they arise throughout the school year.

Appendix: Grade-Level Evidence and Ratings

Grade-Level Evidence and Ratings (ELA/Literacy – Grade 8)


| Section | # of Non-Negotiables Met | Does This Section Meet All Non-Negotiables? | Alignment Criteria Points |
|---|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Close Reading of Complex Text | <u>0/2</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | <u>1/4</u> |
| 2. Building Academic Language | <u>0/1</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | <u>0/4</u> |
| 3. Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge | <u>1/3</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| 4. Evidence-Based Discussions | <u>0/1</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | <u>1/4</u> |
| 5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge | <u>0/1</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | <u>1/6</u> |
| 6. Foundational Skills/Fluency | | | <u>0/2</u> |
| 7. Supporting All Students | | | <u>4/6</u> |

1. Close Reading of Complex Text

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>NN 1A: Anchor texts in the materials have the appropriate level of complexity for the grade as defined by the standards, according to quantitative and qualitative analysis. (Texts that are part of a series, chosen to build knowledge or for independent student reading should vary in complexity levels.)</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>regular practice with high-quality, grade-level complex anchor texts</i> as defined by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative analyses? - Detailed qualitative analyses? | <p>There are no clear anchor texts for English 8A and 8B. English 8A only provides a list of “Recommended Anthologies” and “Recommended Writing Resources”. English 8B provides a list of optional “Core Texts”, “Literature Circle” texts, and “Recommended Anthologies” from which teachers should select.</p> <p>Not enough text complexity information is provided. Of 99 texts listed for 8th grade in the “English Text Database”, only 28 provide Lexile scores. 16 of these titles are below the grade band for 6–8 and 3 of these titles are above the grade band. No qualitative analysis is provided for any texts and no selection criteria is articulated for either the “Core Texts” or “Literature Circle” texts.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |
| <p>NN 1B: Anchor texts in the materials are of publishable quality and worthy of especially careful reading; they include a mix of informational texts and literature.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>anchor texts</i> that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worthy of especially careful reading and of publishable quality? - The right balance of literature and informational texts? - Connected mostly to topics or themes under study? | <p>No anchor texts are listed for 8th grade in either English 8A or English 8B. No Core Texts list is provided for English 8A, only a list titled “Recommended Anthologies” is provided for teachers to select from. The instructional materials for English 8B provide a list of “Core Texts” and anthology titles that teachers select from during each unit of instruction. For both 8A and 8B it is unclear what are the requirements or expectations around teachers’ text selection. No single book or set of books is uniformly taught in 8th grade.</p> <p>The listed optional “Core Texts” for English 8B include some classics or published materials, for example <i>The Pearl</i> by Steinbeck, <i>Oliver Twist</i> by Dickens, <i>Out of the Dust</i> by Hesse, <i>Twelve Angry Men</i> by Rose.</p> <p>No Core Texts are provided for 8A. Listed “Core Texts” for 8B units are selected based on genre or literature study; there is no clear selection of texts connected to topic or theme. Examples of text</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |

Note: **Bold** font indicates the portion of the metric being reviewed in this section (e.g. Close Reading of Complex Text).


1. Close Reading of Complex Text

| IMET Metric  | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------|
| | | <p>selections include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unit 1 is focused on narrative fiction: <i>Annie John</i> by Jamaica Kincaid, <i>The Giver</i> by Lois Lowry, <i>The Pearl</i> by John Steinbeck. - Unit 2 is focused on the interactions between literature and context: <i>Animal Farm</i> by George Orwell, <i>The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass</i> by Frederick Douglass, and <i>Revolution</i> by Deborah Wiles. - Unit 3 is focused on poetry and drama: <i>As You Like It</i> by William Shakespeare, <i>Twelve Angry Men</i> by Reginald Rose, <i>Under the Mesquite</i> by Guadalupe Garcia McCall. <p>There is not a balance of literature and informational texts present in the materials. This is partly a result of the lack of guidance on which texts to select for instruction (meaning a teacher might select only literature texts from the Core Texts and anthologies for an entire year). However, the lists of texts themselves also do not represent a balance of literature and informational texts.</p> <p>The texts listed for 8A include 5 anthologies and 6 writing resources. No selections from the anthologies are suggested and the writing resources listed might be used for reference and guidance, but not part of a study of nonfiction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examples of anthologies include: <i>Junior Great Books/Great Books Roundtable</i> by Great Books Foundation; <i>The Language of Literature</i> by Arthur N. Applebee, et. al.; <i>A Multicultural Reader: Collection One</i> by Rebecca Christian, ed. - Examples of writing resources include: <i>Write Source</i> by Dave Kemper, et. al.; <i>The Center for Writing Studies</i> website from the U. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. <p>The texts listed for 8B also do not represent a balance of informational and literature texts. The instructional materials list the same anthologies for each unit in 8B as were listed for 8A and provide lists of Core Texts for each unit. Of 19 Core Texts listed among all 3 units for 8B, only 2 are nonfiction and the rest are literature.</p> | |

1. Close Reading of Complex Text

| IMET Metric | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>AC 2A High-quality sequences of text-dependent questions (TDQs) are prevalent in the materials and build to a deep understanding of the knowledge and central ideas of the text.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>high-quality sequences of standards-based TDQs</i> for anchor texts that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Require students to draw on textual evidence to support both what is explicit as well as valid inferences from the text? - Support students to delve deeply into anchor texts? - Focus on building a full understanding of the central ideas, key details, craft, and structure? | <p>While there are text-dependent questions in the instructional materials, there are not very many and they are not high-quality; the few included questions (examples included below) do not consistently provide opportunity for analysis of sentences, paragraphs, or words; they do not question author’s choice, probe arguments, or key details; nor do they analyze the structure or patterns of texts. Additionally, the questions do not appear to be intentionally sequenced, and none are tied to any specific Core Text(s). Teachers are expected to develop their own sets of text-dependent questions based on the examples provided in the curricular materials.</p> <p>Very few text-dependent questions or tasks are linked in the Curriculum Guides (only 2 lessons total were linked in the 4 tasks in this review).</p> <p>There is some use of text-dependent questions or tasks that are meant to be applied across multiple texts. Examples: from 8A, “Active Voice and Passive Voice” lesson: “With your group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the passage together. - Identify the use of active and passive voice. - Discuss the effect of both on the meaning and tone of the passage. - Take notes on the handout and be ready to explain your thinking to the group.” <p>From 8B, “Literature Circles” lesson and “Passage from a Different Point of View” lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Here are some questions your group may wish to consider: How does the point of view effect [sic]: the way the reader sees the main character? the way the reader sees the secondary characters? the development and resolution of the conflict? the way the author conveys theme? the author’s word choices and | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |

1. Close Reading of Complex Text

| IMET Metric  | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------|
| | | <p>sentence structure?"</p> <p>From English 8 "Lessons and Resources" linked on the landing page of MCPS English website (not linked in the Curriculum Guide): Exemplar lessons are provided for teachers that support some Common Tasks from 8A (no Common Task resources are listed for 8B) and some of these include text-dependent or text-specific questions. It is not clear that the text-specific tasks use texts from the listed Core Texts or anthologies in the instructional materials (none of the tasks seem to include Core Texts, some might be from listed anthologies). No indication is provided for the source of the texts listed in these exemplar tasks. All the exemplar lessons are listed as "choice" or "optional" so it is not clear that all students will experience these questions and tasks.</p> <p>Examples of Common Tasks with supportive lesson materials that include TDQs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8A: An evaluation of review of a product, service, or experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Text: Album review: "Katy Perry grows up, gets spiritual on 'Prism,'" sample TDQ: "Reread paragraphs 1-3. Why does the author claim it was "possible to feel sorry for Katy Perry"? In other words, why would the author and the reader feel sorry for Katy Perry?" - 8A: Narrative: A fictional narrative that develops a theme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Text: Unclear/selected by teacher. Task: "Directions: In your group, discuss, analyze, and explain the importance of a character's development to the author's theme, or message, in a story." A graphic organizer is provided for detailing a character's conflict, resolution, etc.] <p>"Close Reading" passages are provided in the curricular materials. These are only short selections from Core Texts. No questions or tasks are included with these passages, just 1-2 pages of selected texts.</p> <p>To support teachers' development of their own text-dependent</p> | |

1. Close Reading of Complex Text

| IMET Metric | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|---|---|---|
| | | questions and tasks, SAP's "Guide to Creating TDQs" is provided in PD materials, linked through "Components of a Rigorous Classroom," "Tasks Worth Doing." However, there are no questions provided that aligned with specific Core Texts. | |
| AC 3A: Materials regularly ask students to complete culminating tasks in which they demonstrate their knowledge of a topic. | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>culminating assignments</i> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regularly reflect what is most essential to learn from the text(s)? - Address several grade-level (or above) standards? | <p>Six Common Tasks per semester are provided in the materials. One of these tasks is identified to be centrally reported each quarter. Some of these tasks are text-dependent. None of these assignments require demonstration of knowledge of a specific topic or a specific text and so the tasks as listed do not robustly support grade-level standards in reading, writing, or speaking. No other culminating assignments are provided in the instructional materials.</p> <p>For example, Common Tasks from 8A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Argument: An evaluation or review of a product, service, or experience." does not require the use of evidence from any text and therefore cannot meet the evidence-based writing expectations. - "Narrative: A fictional narrative that develops a theme." <p>For example, Common Tasks From 8B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unit 1: Literature as Craft, "Argument: An argument discussing the most meaningful word or phrase in a text." is not aligned to any reading standard. - Unit 2: Literature in Context, "Analysis: An explanation of how a work draws on themes or patterns from literature or history." | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0 |
| <u>Rating (Close Reading of Complex Text):</u> | | Non-Negotiables | Alignment Criteria |
| | | <i>Are All NNs Met?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | <i>Section Points: 1/4</i> |

2. Building Academic Language

| 2. Building Academic Language | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
| <p>NN 3A: Materials provide a sequence or series of texts that build knowledge and vocabulary systematically through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These texts are organized around a variety of topics at each grade level.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>systematic work with vocabulary and syntax</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In context, through text-based questions and tasks? - Out of context, through games, exercises, etc.? | <p>No clear sequence or series of texts are provided. Texts teachers should select are listed as “Core Texts” or “Literature Circle” texts and based on genre in 8B only. No Core Texts are provided in 8A.</p> <p>There is no text-specific work with vocabulary or syntax. No guidance is provided on how to choose vocabulary or syntax or on words that merit more time or attention.</p> <p>There are no out-of-context vocabulary or syntax exercises provided in the instructional materials.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet |
| <p>AC 3C: Materials include a cohesive yearlong plan for students to interact with and build academic vocabulary and increasingly sophisticated syntax.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>a cohesive yearlong plan that requires students to</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interact with and build academic vocabulary? - Interact with and build increasingly sophisticated syntax? | <p>MCPS does not provide a cohesive plan for vocabulary instruction (see previous note about lack of text & vocabulary selection).</p> <p>The Curriculum Guides acknowledge the importance of vocabulary study. On page 41, the Curriculum Guide states, “Vocabulary acquisition continues to be a necessary and vital part of the ELA curriculum. Vocabulary study not only enhances understanding of the writer’s craft—how word choice creates character, defines mood, and sets tone—but also is the key to a richer reading of all texts. Determining meaning and understanding word structure give students the tools to become independent, strategic readers of challenging texts. As students learn about the variety and richness of English, they should be encouraged to use language that is both precise and expressive.” This statement is followed by the listed “Common Core Language Standards for Grade 8” (standards 4, 5, and 6 for grade 8). However, there is no concrete plan provided to support students to interact with and build vocabulary or sophisticated syntax.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0 |

2. Building Academic Language

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>AC 2B: Questions and tasks in the materials support students in understanding the academic language (vocabulary and syntax) prevalent in complex texts.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>words chosen for study in context</i> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are essential to understanding, more abstract, part of a semantic word family, and likely to appear in other complex texts students will read? - Encourage the use, review, and assessment of the targeted words throughout a unit or module? | <p>No words are chosen for study in context in connection with any of the listed texts (Core Texts, Literature Circles texts, anthologies, or reference materials).</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>Rating (Building Academic Language:</p> | | <p><u>Non-Negotiables</u></p> | <p>Alignment Criteria</p> |
| | | <p><i>Are All NNs Met?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> | <p><i>Section Points: 0/4</i></p> |

3. Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>NN 3A: Materials provide a sequence or series of texts that build knowledge and vocabulary systematically through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These texts are organized around a variety of topics at each grade level.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>sequences or series of texts that build knowledge and vocabulary</i> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Texts that are organized around a variety of conceptually related topics (or themes for literary texts)? - Allotting enough time for growth of knowledge and vocabulary? | <p>The instructional materials do not provide a sequence or series of texts organized around topics or themes.</p> <p>The “Core Texts” lists and anthologies or reference materials that are provided are not organized around any related topics or themes. Core Texts are suggested for 8B only, anthologies and reference materials are suggested for 8A. There is no collection of a volume of texts on a given topic. The texts for 8B are organized by text genre (Unit 1 is short stories & narrative fiction, Unit 2 is historical narrative, nonfiction, and essays, Unit 3 is drama and poetry).</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |
| <p>NN 3B: Materials provide instructions, clear design, and lightweight student accountability that guide instructors regarding how students will regularly engage in a volume of reading both assigned texts (related to the anchor texts) and texts of their own choosing, in or outside of class.</p> | <p>Do the materials include <i>evidence of lightweight student accountability systems for regularly engaging in a volume of reading</i>, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assigned reading related to the topics and themes being studied? - Texts of student’s own choosing? | <p>The guidance provided for student accountability for a volume reading is the suggested Literature Circle models in professional development materials. There are multiple models provided but no clear design for teachers on how to assign readings related to topics (as there are no topics). These resources are found on the MCPS English website, but are not linked in the Curriculum Guides.</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |
| <p>NN 1A: Anchor texts in the materials have the appropriate level of complexity for the grade as defined by the standards, according to quantitative and qualitative analysis. (Texts that are part of a series or chosen to build knowledge or for independent student reading should vary in complexity levels.)</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of a <i>series of texts to build knowledge</i> that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At a variety of complexity levels? - Organized so less complex texts support access to more complex texts? | <p>There is no organization of lists of “Core Texts” and other selected works according to topic or text complexity; less complex texts are not selected or sequenced to support access to more complex texts.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |
| Rating (Volume of Reading to Build Knowledge): | | Non-Negotiables | |
| | | Are All NNs Met? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | |

4. Evidence-Based Discussions

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>NN 2B: Materials include frequent opportunities for evidence-based discussions and writing to support careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information about texts to address the analytical thinking required by the Standards at each grade level.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>frequent opportunities for a variety of collaborative evidence-based discussions</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - About the texts and content under study? - That address the analytical thinking required by the grade-level standards? - That vary among student pairs, small groups, and whole class? | <p>There are no clear opportunities for a variety of collaborative evidence-based discussions in the Curriculum Guides. While the guides do occasionally mention the use of discussion (for example, on p. 22 of the 8th Grade Curriculum Guide, one of the “Instructional Expectations” provided for a Common Task is: “Facilitate student discourse around the importance of individual words and phrases—expanding that focus to the impact of the words and phrases on various narrative elements”), no specific task is provided to use with any one or multiple texts.</p> <p>Evidence-based discussion tasks are not provided for specific texts.</p> <p>Literature Circles are often cited as an opportunity for group discussion.</p> <p>Some guidance on the importance of evidence-based student discussion is provided via the “Components of a Rigorous Classroom” document on the MCPS English 8 website. On this document, the “Tasks Worth Doing” link has a link titled “Student Discourse,” which further links to professional development and general materials: “Introduction to Student Discourse,” “Student Discourse Resources,” “Talking to Learn, Learning to Talk,” an article “On Socratic Seminars.” These are general resources for supporting student discussion in classrooms: strategies such as Fishbowl, Four Box Synectics are listed along with articles on various discussion models and purposes. However, none of these are tied to any specific text listed for 8th grade. Additionally, these resources are not linked in the 8th Grade Curriculum Guide.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |


4. Evidence-Based Discussions

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>AC 2E: Materials integrate speaking and listening into lessons, questions, and tasks and build in frequent opportunities for collaborative discussions.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of the <i>integration of speaking and listening opportunities</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - That are designed into lessons, questions, and tasks? - That have frequent opportunities for students to share their findings and conclusions and build directly on others' ideas? | <p>The only resources to support student discussion are the general ones listed above. As these resources are each provided independent of any specific text or lesson, there is no evidence in the instructional materials of an integration of speaking and listening opportunities into lessons, questions, and tasks. The speaking and listening opportunities are present but are not integrated into the instructional materials.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>AC 3C: Materials include a cohesive yearlong plan for students to interact with and build academic vocabulary and increasingly sophisticated syntax.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>encouraging students to use targeted academic language in their speech</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through modeling? - Through clear directions? | <p>There is no yearlong plan for supporting the development of academic vocabulary through any context. The instructional materials provide no clear opportunity to model or use academic language in their speech.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>Rating (Evidence-Based Discussions):</p> | | <p>Non-Negotiables</p> | <p>Alignment Criteria</p> |
| | | <p><i>Are All NNs Met?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> | <p><i>Section Points: 1/4</i></p> |

5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

| <u>IMET Metric</u> | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>NN 2B: Materials include frequent opportunities for evidence-based discussions and writing to support careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information about texts to address the analytical thinking required by the Standards at each grade level.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>writing and research</i> that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent opportunities for evidence-based writing? - Regular opportunities for short, focused research? - Assignments and tasks that address the analytical thinking required by the grade-level (or above) reading and writing standards? | <p>The instructional materials provide Common Tasks at each grade level, though none of these tasks are specific to any of the listed Core Texts. While some Common Tasks require the use of evidence in writing, not all of these tasks are designed to support analysis or claims made from the provided list of texts. Additionally, of the Common Tasks that do require evidence, some prompts are appropriate for the listed texts while some are not. It is not clear that the Common Tasks provided in the materials are well-matched to the texts provided.</p> <p>Examples of Common Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8A - “Argument: An evaluation or review of a product, service, or experience” - 8B - Unit 1: Literature as Craft, “Argument: An argument discussing the most meaningful word or phrase in a text.” <p>There are resources (“Text Table English 8B” and “Text Table English 8A”) that pair text selections from the Curriculum Guide’s listed anthologies with some of the Common Tasks (the ones that prompt for the use of text evidence). These tables list selected common tasks with various anthology text selections and their “Narrative Elements” and a one-sentence synopsis. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For the Common Task “Explain how a work draws on themes or patterns from literature or history,” the table suggests “A Diary from Another World” by Gerda Weismann Klein. It lists “Narrative Elements: voice, tone, mood, theme. In this newspaper article, Klein discusses visiting the home of Anne Frank and how the simple pleasures in life are best.” <p>The front matter and other narrative sections of the Curriculum Guide list and describe the importance of writing. However, no specific writing opportunities other than the Common Tasks are provided.</p> <p>Examples of statements about writing include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - p. 1, English 8A: Writing and Language: “Students write every day, keep a portfolio to track progress and set goals, and explore | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p> |

5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

| <u>IMET Metric</u> |  <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--------------------|--|---|--------------|
| | | <p>ways to convey their own voice. They read as writers, analyzing short texts, practicing the writers' [techniques, and imitating the style and sentence structures of published authors. They study literature and language as an integral part of the writing and revision process. Students write to explore their own thinking, engage in reflection, and learn each day that they have control over improving their craft."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - p. 2, English 8A: Writing and Language: "What does a writing class look like? Students write over both extended time frames and shorter time frames. Though students have opportunities for timed, on-demand writing, the course focuses on the writing process, where students have frequent opportunities for research, reflection, and revision." - p. 18, English 8B: Literature and Language: "Throughout the semester, students have opportunities to choose some texts based on their own interests and curiosities, to imitate the techniques of the writers they study, and to continue to hone their writing skills." <p>The "Tasks Worth Doing" portion of the "Components of a Rigorous Classroom" lists the following, but does not provide tasks, lessons, or specific resources to complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Questions to Consider When Planning: Have I created opportunities for all students to - evaluate the use of language and its effects? - complete extended writing with original thinking supported by textual evidence? - experiment with language in their writing (style, structure, word choice)?" <p>Research prompts are provided, but no direction is provided on the duration of projects, what topics to research, or what sources, evidence gathering tools students should use.</p> | |

5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>AC 3B: Materials require students to engage in many short, focused research projects annually to develop students' knowledge in a range of areas and to enable students to develop the expertise needed to conduct research independently.</p> | | <p>Though the narrative portions of the Curriculum Guide cites research as an important component of 8th grade teaching and learning, no concrete opportunities for research projects are provided. Examples of statements about research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - p. 2, English 8A: Writing and Language, "What does a writing class look like?' Students write over both extended time frames and shorter time frames. Though students have opportunities for timed, on-demand writing, the course focuses on the writing process, where students have frequent opportunities for research, reflection, and revision." - p. 26, English 8B, Unit 2, Literature in Context, "Students research and read texts related to the subject of the core text, including some primary documents when possible, to gain a fuller understanding of the significance of literature and language in the world." <p>The Curriculum Guide for 8th grade lists research standards W.8.7 and W.8.9.</p> <p>A review of the MCPS English website's pages "Core Learning Practices," "Important Documents" and "Components of a Rigorous Classroom" did not reveal any additional documents or resources to support students' research.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>AC 2C: Materials focus on argument and informative writing, spending approximately 1/3 of time on each genre (exposition, opinion, narrative). Alternately, they may reflect blended forms in similar proportions (e.g., exposition and</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>prominent and varied writing assignments over the course of the year</i> that address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On-demand and process writing? - Different genres, with a focus on argumentative, informative, and | <p>The Common Tasks listed in the instructional materials provide a mix of writing types over the course of the year but do not blend any types. Examples of Common Tasks include:</p> <p>From 8A -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Argument: An evaluation or review of a product, service, or experience" - "Narrative: A fictional narrative that develops a theme" (centrally reported during Quarter 1) <p>From 8B -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unit 1: Literature as Craft, "Argument: An argument discussing the most meaningful word or phrase in a text" (centrally reported during quarter 3) | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |

5. Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|--|--|--|---|
| persuasion): | blended forms of writing? | - Unit 2: Literature in Context, "Analysis: An explanation of how a work draws on themes or patterns from literature or history" Writing assignments are not clearly varied to include on-demand and process writing. | |
| AC 2D: Materials support students' developing writing skills over the course of the school year. This includes writing opportunities that are prominent and varied. | Do the materials include evidence of <i>developing students' writing skills over the course of the year</i> as defined by: - Explicit instruction in the fundamentals of writing? - Grammar and conventions instruction in and out of context? | There is no obvious, explicit guidance on the fundamentals of writing provided in the instructional materials. There are no instructional materials or guidelines for teaching grammar and conventions in context. The Curriculum Guide for 8th grade states, on p. 39: "Teachers plan instruction to incorporate language instruction into writing; the goal is for students to think clearly about ways to improve their own writing. Exercises in sentence combining, expansion, and imitation offer ways students can compose more sophisticated and effective sentences. <i>Separated</i> and <i>simulated</i> instruction may be used to introduce concepts; include <i>integrated</i> instruction to ensure that students apply these and other skills in their writing." and includes a list of language standards (L.8.1, L.8.2, and L.8.3). However, no specific resources to incorporate language instruction into writing are provided. Professional Development materials include, "Incorporating Language into Writing." However, grade 8 specific lessons were not found. No materials defining writing instruction over the course of the year were found. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0 |
| Rating (Volume of Writing to Build Knowledge): | | Non-Negotiables | Alignment Criteria |
| | | Are All NNs Met? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | Section Points: <u>1/6</u> |

6. Foundational Skills/Fluency

| IMET Metric | Guiding Questions | Evidence | Score |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>AC 2G: Materials address grade-level standards for foundational skills by providing instruction and diagnostic support in phonics, word recognition, and fluency through a research based and transparent progression to develop proficient readers.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of addressing foundational skills with <i>instruction and diagnostic support in phonics, word recognition, and fluency</i> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addresses grade-level standards? - Is research-based? - Includes a transparent progression of skill development? <p>(Grades 4-5 only)</p> | <p>- N/A (8th grade materials)</p> | <p>N/A</p> |
| <p>AC 1C: Support materials for the anchor text(s) provide opportunities for students to engage in a range and volume of reading to achieve reading fluency of grade-level complex text as required by the Foundational Skills Standards.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of providing students <i>the practice they need to achieve grade-level reading fluency in oral and silent reading</i> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A range and volume of reading? - Practice reading grade-level prose and poetry with appropriate accuracy, rate, and expression? <p>(Grades 4-12)</p> | <p>The texts included in the lists of “Core Text”, “Literature Circle”, and “Recommended Anthologies” represent a possible volume and range of reading. However, without clear complexity information for the provided titles, it is difficult to determine if the volume of text is of sufficient complexity to support reading fluency. Additionally, there are few guidelines beyond the provided titles and expectation that students read one Core Text per quarter, so it is unlikely there is sufficient practice for students’ grade-level fluency in either oral or silent reading. Titles from the lists of texts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Junior Great Books</i> by Great Books Foundation; <i>A Multicultural Reader: Collection One</i> by Rebecca Christian, ed.; <i>As You Like It</i> by William Shakespeare; <i>The Light in the Forest</i> by Conrad Richter; <i>The Prince and the Pauper</i> by Mark Twain; <i>Write Source</i> by Dave Kemper, et. al.; <i>Will of the People: Readings in American Democracy</i> by Great Books Foundations. <p>There is no guidance nor practice opportunities to support grade-level reading fluency. The curricular materials do not include practice reading grade-level prose or poetry with appropriate accuracy, rate, expression.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>Rating (Foundational Skills/Fluency):</p> | | <p>Alignment Criteria</p> <p>Section Points: <u>0/2</u></p> | |


7. Supporting All Students

| <u>IMET Metric</u> | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>AC 4A: Teachers and students can reasonably complete the core content within a regular school year to maximize students' learning.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of teachers/students reasonably being able to complete <i>the core content within a regular school year</i>?</p> | <p>The materials include some guidelines for how long instruction on Common Tasks is expected to take. For example, "This task requires students to develop a substantial piece of writing that goes through all stages of the writing process. Instruction for this task may take anywhere from one to three weeks, which will include time for studying author's craft, planning the writing, developing writing skills, acting on feedback, and completing the final product."</p> <p>Additionally, there is an "Assessment Calendar" provided to teachers with suggested windows for completing the centrally collected Common Tasks. These windows are broad — from 3 to 6 weeks each — and provide a reasonable timetable to complete the Common Tasks.</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |
| <p>AC 4B: Materials regularly provide all students, including those who read, write, speak, or listen below grade level, or whose first language is other than English, with extensive opportunities to work with and meet grade-level Standards.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>all students having the opportunity to work with and meet grade-level standards</i> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematically building in the time, resources, and supports for students below grade level? - Systematically building in the time, resources, and supports for students whose first language is other than English? | <p>There are some professional development resources provided for teachers to better understand how to support diverse learners and some examples of such strategies. However, there is no clear system in the instructional materials to provide the time, resources, or supports for learners below grade level and those whose first language is other than English. There are no guidelines or resources provided in the Curriculum Guides for 8th grade. Resources to support teacher planning are included as links through the "Components of Rigor," but these do not provide grade-specific lessons or resources.</p> <p>There are no specific supports provided for weaker readers in the curricular materials. Recommendations are made to teachers regarding options and ways to access text (e-reader, accommodations, chunking passages). Some general UDL Resources are provided.</p> <p>The "Components of Rigor" diagram has a section titled</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0 (some resources, no system)</p> |


7. Supporting All Students

| <u>IMET Metric</u> | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|---|--|---|--|
| | | <p>“Reaching All Students,” which links to a document providing a list of guiding questions; for example, “Have I created an environment that respects the learning styles, interests, and readiness of each student?” “Have I created various opportunities for students to use technology to personalize learning?” The “Reaching All Students” document also provides a list of teacher resources under the heading “Learn More,” for example, “What Is Universal Design for Learning?” “Differentiated Instruction: Resource Roundup.” There is also a list titled “MCPS English Resources” providing professional development resources (“Reading Choices Professional Development”) and playlists that provide exemplars of Universal Design for Learning and resources for culturally responsive instruction. While helpful for framing how to support all students in a classroom, these resources are not designed to provide specific lessons, interventions, or extra supports for students in need.</p> | |
| <p>AC 4E: Materials regularly and systematically offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress on reading comprehension and writing proficiency as well as on mastery of grade-level standards. This progress includes gradual release of supporting scaffolds for students to measure their independent abilities.</p> | <p>Do the materials include evidence of <i>regularly and systematically offering assessments</i> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measure progress on grade-level reading and writing proficiency? - Include valid recommendations as to how to address results? | <p>There are two forms of assessment provided in the curricular materials; Progress Checks and Common Tasks. No other resources were found in the Curriculum Guides or MCPS’s English website.</p> <p>Progress checks are intended as formative assessments and given during the second and third quarter. At the time of this review, there was one Progress Check available (Grade 8, Quarter 2). This Project Check included two portions, a reading portion and a writing portion. An answer key was also included. With only one Progress Check available there is no evidence of assessment that is regular and systematic or able to measure student progress. The Progress Check does include an answer key for multiple choice questions and a holistic rubric for scoring the written response. However, the Progress</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0</p> |

7. Supporting All Students

| <u>IMET Metric</u>  | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|--------------|
| | | <p>Check does not include recommendations for how to address results. Also, there are no guidelines provided as to what level of reading or writing proficiency a student might have based their assessment score. Additionally, these scoring guidelines are not sufficient to allow teachers to make strategic decisions based on the results; the holistic rubrics do not allow for any nuance in student writing and teacher action (no ability to decipher which students can provide a strong claim but give weak evidence, those who have great evidence but poor writing mechanics, etc.). Furthermore, the multiple choice answer keys provide a single-standard alignment rather than any connection to misunderstanding of the text itself.</p> <p>Evidence from the holistic rubric includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Score of 5: This response demonstrates consistent mastery, although it may have minor errors. This response effectively states a claim and offers insightful thinking. develops the claim using clear reasoning and well-chosen evidence. is well-organized, focused, and coherent. demonstrates effective style through purposeful language and sentence structure. demonstrates command of conventions of standard English grammar and usage. - Score of 1: This response demonstrates a lack of mastery and serious flaws. This response does not state a clear claim and demonstrates weak thinking. offers little, if any, reasoning or evidence. is disorganized, rambling, or incoherent. has errors in language and serious flaws in sentence structure. contains numerous errors in conventions that consistently hamper meaning. <p>Common Tasks are centrally collected once per quarter.</p> | |

7. Supporting All Students

| <u>IMET Metric</u>  | <u>Guiding Questions</u> | <u>Evidence</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|--------------|
| | | <p>Guidelines for Common Tasks in the curricular guides include instructional recommendations. It is unclear to what extent Common Tasks measure students' independent abilities. At the time of this review, only a single holistic rubric was available to the reviewer, a narrative rubric for scoring the centrally reported task for 8A: A fictional narrative that develops a theme. This rubric includes guidelines on mastery and is not highly reflective of the standards. For example: "The narrative demonstrates consistent mastery, although it may have minor errors. This narrative demonstrates effective style through purposeful language and sentence structure." It is unlikely that this rubric will give sufficient feedback to students or teachers on the level of achievement to standards.</p> <p>No guidelines are provided on how to address assessment results.</p> | |
| <u>Rating (Supporting All Students):</u> | | Alignment Criteria | |
| | | <i>Section Points: 4/6</i> | |