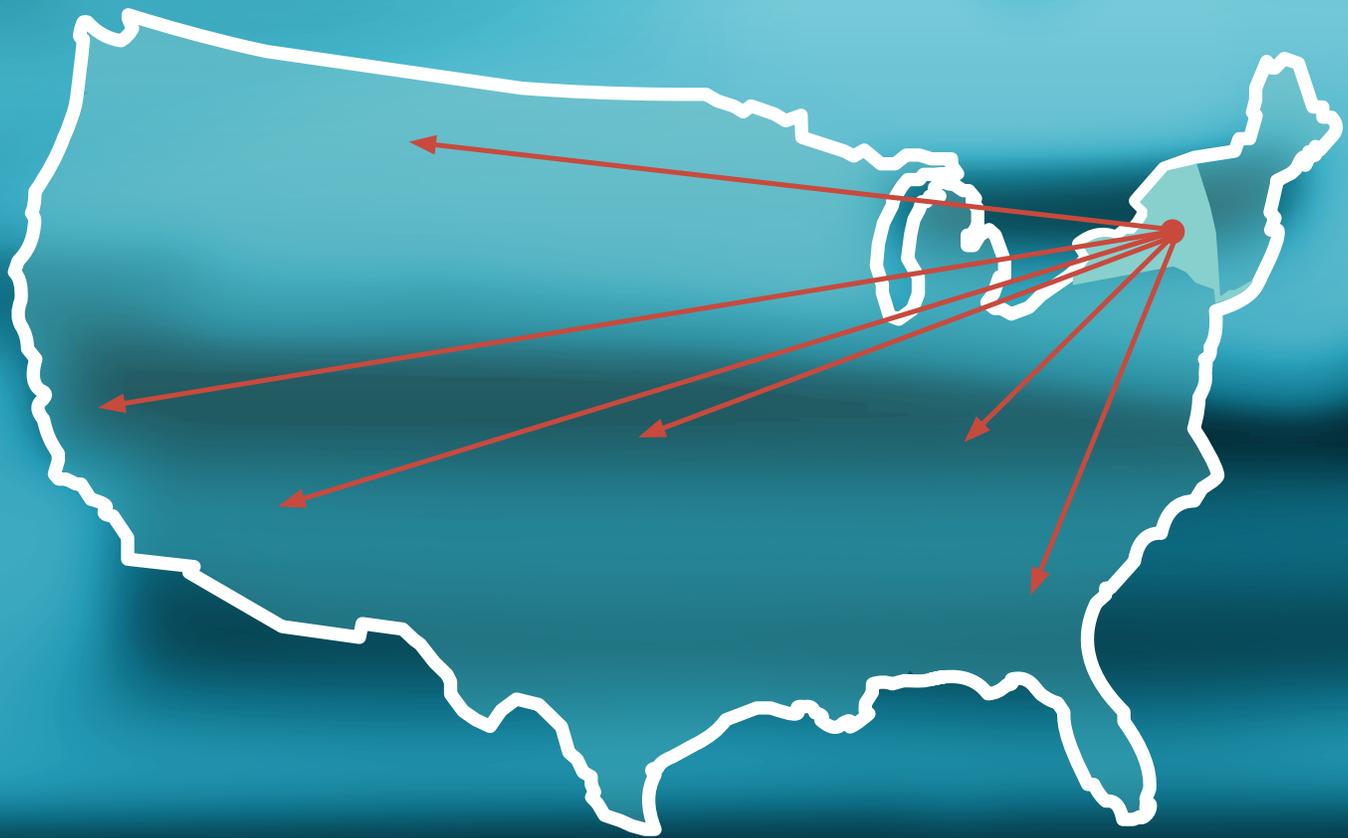


# UNCOMMONLY ENGAGING?

## A Review of the EngageNY English Language Arts Common Core Curriculum

BY ELIZABETH HAYDEL AND SHEILA BYRD CARMICHAEL

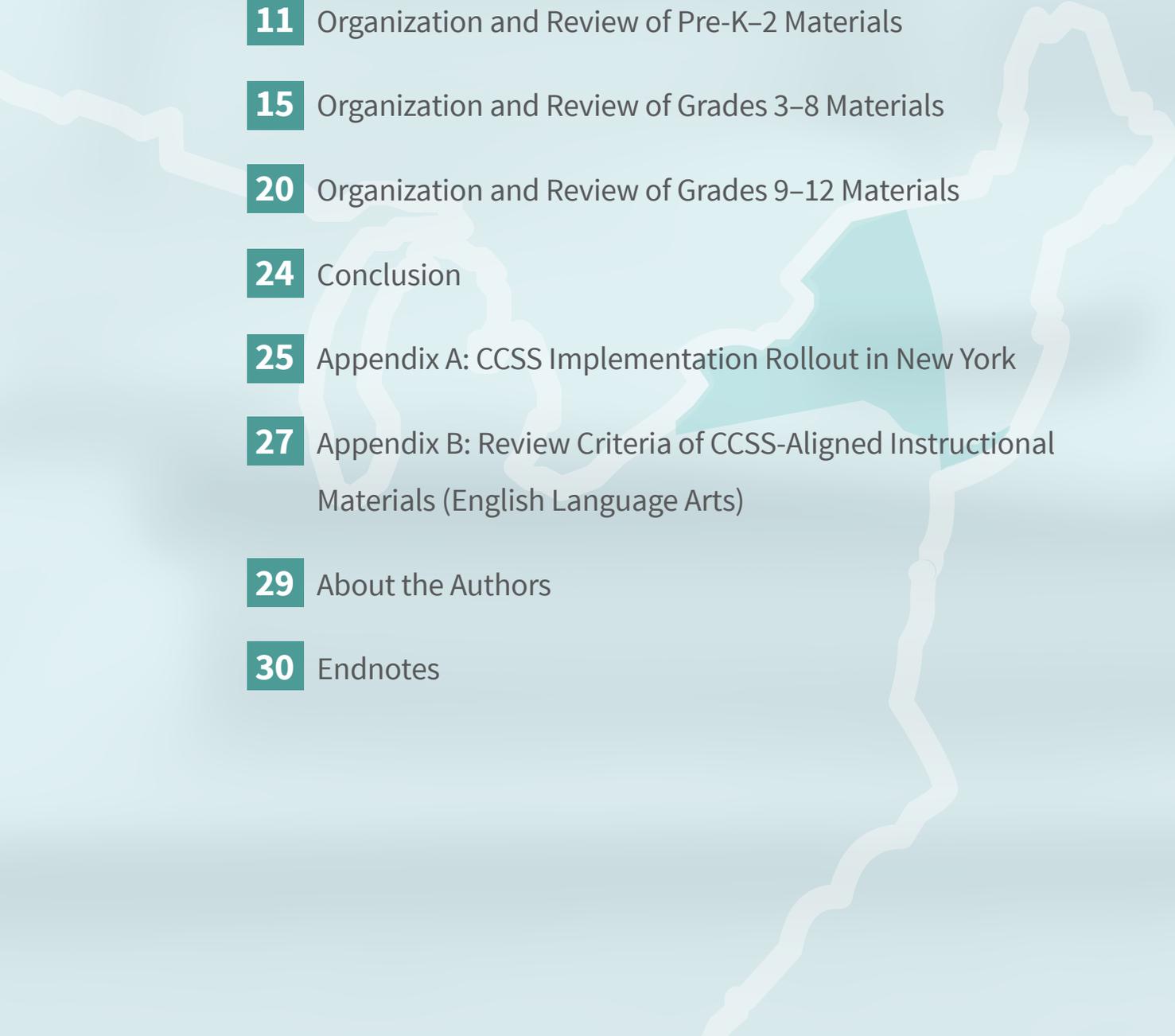
Foreword by Kathleen Porter-Magee and Victoria Sears



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# FOREWORD

*by Kathleen Porter-Magee and Victoria Sears*

Since we at Fordham began reviewing state academic standards in 1997, we've understood—and made clear—that standards alone are insufficient to drive improvements in student achievement. They describe the destination, but they don't chart the journey for leaders, teachers, or schools. Which means that for standards to have any impact on what students actually learn, they need to influence curriculum, assessment, and accountability. It's far better to have a desirable destination than an unworthy one—better to aspire to reach the mountains than the recycling plant—but standards by themselves won't get you there.

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...fewer than one-third of educators report having access to high-quality textbooks that are well aligned to the new standards.

Educators understand this. The need for standards-aligned curricula is undoubtedly the most cited implementation challenge for states, districts, and schools. It's also why “access to high-quality, standards-aligned curricular resources” is cited in nearly every discussion of the implementation challenges that teachers, schools, and districts face as they ramp up to meet the content and rigor demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

This near-universal need for properly aligned curricula and curricular materials is also why so many publishers rushed to slap shiny “CCSS-aligned!” stickers on their products, regardless of how much those products did or did not change between the release of the standards and the claims of alignment.

Yet five years into Common Core implementation, teachers still report scrambling to find high-quality, standards-aligned materials. Results from a survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) in October 2014 showed 45 percent of districts report having “major problems” finding Common Core-aligned curricular resources; an additional 45 percent experience “minor problems.” That means fully 90 percent of surveyed districts are struggling to find the materials they need to teach the new standards. Findings from an Education Week Research Center study echoed the CEP report and showed that fewer than one-third of educators report having access to high-quality textbooks that are well aligned to the new standards.

Take note of the phrase “*well* aligned.” Despite publishers' claims, there is a dearth of programs that are well and truly aligned to the content and rigor demands of the CCSS. For example, in a forthcoming paper, Morgan Polikoff analyzed the alignment of seven popular mathematics textbooks: three explicitly billed as “Common Core-aligned,” three pre-CCSS editions of those same textbooks aligned to Florida's previous state standards, and one text not explicitly aligned to any standards.<sup>1</sup> Polikoff found that “for these three textbooks produced by major publishers and marketed as Common Core-aligned, there are substantial alignment problems.” More specifically, the materials generally covered the requisite content, but they focused unevenly on certain areas (overemphasizing some and neglecting others) and often did not reach the desired level of cognitive demand.

EdReports.org, a new organization with a mission to provide educators with information on high-quality, Common Core-aligned instructional materials via free, online, *Consumer Reports*-style reviews, recently came to a similar conclusion. In March 2015, it released findings from its initial reviews of twenty digital and print-based

K–8 math series. Among these, just one met the full criteria EdReports.org outlines for alignment at all grades: Eureka Math, a program first developed as a free, open-source curriculum for the EngageNY website.<sup>2</sup>

Now *that's* an interesting development.

## Enter EngageNY

It wasn't hard to anticipate the need for high-quality, well-aligned Common Core curricula. Educators and policymakers have complained for decades about the poor quality of most textbook series and the unwillingness of many for-profit publishers to invest the time and money to get it right. Plus, the Common Core called for significant instructional shifts that would require an overhaul in curricular and instructional materials, such as including more content-rich nonfiction and requiring students to use evidence from texts in English language arts (ELA). Fixing America's curriculum problem is no small challenge.

Still, most Common Core advocates hoped that a nationwide market would provide the necessary incentives for the commercial publishers to get their acts together—or, alternatively, would give an opening to new for-profit upstarts that might enter the game and deliver better products ([Amplify](#), for example). Another possibility was that teachers themselves would create excellent materials, especially if they had a portal where they could post their best work (such as [BetterLesson](#) or the American Federation of Teachers' [Share My Lesson](#)). To ensure quality control, several funders supported a variety of tools to vet materials, such as the aforementioned EdReports.org, EQUIP, IMET, and the Publishers' Criteria. (See “Monitoring Quality” sidebar.) And a few states, including Louisiana and Tennessee, developed their own rating systems.

But only one state contemplated a completely different approach: Building a brand-new, Common Core-aligned curriculum from scratch and making it available online, for free, for all to use.<sup>3</sup>

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Fixing America's curriculum problem is no small challenge.

After adopting the Common Core standards and receiving almost \$700 million in the second round of the federal Race to the Top competition in 2010, New York State embarked on an ambitious (and unprecedented) effort to develop its own comprehensive, Common Core-aligned ELA and mathematics curricula.<sup>4</sup> The process kicked off in early 2012, when the New York State Education Department (NYSED) issued a request for proposals to develop “modules of learning” aligned to the new standards. Common Core Inc. (now Great Minds), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and curriculum developer, was contracted to develop mathematics materials for the state. The Core Knowledge Foundation, Expeditionary Learning, and the Public Consulting Group (PCG) were awarded contracts to develop ELA materials for grades pre-K–2, 3–5, and 6–12 respectively.<sup>5</sup> (PCG later subcontracted the grades 6–8 portion of their contract to Expeditionary Learning and focused on materials for grades 9–12). Today, EngageNY comprises a nearly complete set of curricular materials for math and ELA. The materials are now freely available online to anyone—not just Empire State educators—at EngageNY.org.

However, if New York State Superintendent John King and his colleagues were expecting thanks for building a free, open-source curriculum, they were sorely disappointed. EngageNY has been controversial almost since the beginning. On the right, it's seen as an inappropriate, anti-competitive governmental intrusion in the textbook market. After all, how can commercial publishers compete with a product funded by \$26.6 million in federal dollars?<sup>6</sup>

On the left, and particularly among educators, it was seen as a top-down mandate. While that was not the intention of New York officials (who stress the materials are “optional and supplemental”), reports surfaced of principals, and maybe even superintendents, telling their teachers that its use was mandatory. Not surprisingly, considering America’s traditions of local control and teacher autonomy, that has contributed to the anti-Common Core backlash in the Empire State.

Ironically, EngageNY may be more popular outside of New York than within it. (Or maybe not ironically—surely no superintendents in *other* states are mandating its use.) When working on our 2014 study [\*Common Core in the Districts: An Early Look at Early Implementers\*](#), we found many educators elsewhere who were using EngageNY as a resource, if not a full curriculum. While the NYSED does not track use geographically, staff report that as of April 2015, the math and ELA modules have been downloaded nationally more than twenty million times.

But is it a high-quality product? Is it well aligned to the Common Core? Is it teachable? That’s what we wanted to know. When we launched this review, EdReports.org was working on its math analyses, so we decided to tackle English language arts. We recruited two of the country’s leading ELA content experts, Elizabeth Haydel and Sheila Byrd Carmichael, each with more than twenty years of experience in developing and reviewing standards, standards-aligned curricula, and assessments, to conduct an in-depth review of EngageNY’s alignment to the CCSS ELA standards. (See Appendix B for more on our evaluation criteria.)

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While imperfect, the materials offer educators—both inside and outside New York State—an important alternative to traditional textbooks of questionable quality and alignment.

What did we find?

- Impressively, the alignment to the Common Core is generally strong.
- Selected texts are high-quality and appropriately rigorous, and the program allows educators greater flexibility than other scripted programs.
- But because New York engaged multiple curriculum developers to create separate resources for specific grade bands, each set of materials reflects a distinctive underlying approach to curriculum and literacy, meaning that the progression across grade bands is bumpy.
- While content and foundational skills in the early grades appear thoughtfully developed, the sheer quantity of content across all grade bands can be overwhelming.
- Additionally, EngageNY’s high school curriculum (not yet complete) lacks a critical emphasis on literary content, a problem that is amplified by the fact that students read mostly excerpts of great books rather than full novels, biographies, and so on.

While imperfect, the materials offer educators—both inside and outside New York State—an important alternative to traditional textbooks of questionable quality and alignment.

## MONITORING QUALITY

Even as more evaluation resources become available, the need mounts for teachers and local leaders to obtain better information about the quality, content, and rigor of the instructional materials being developed. Since the CCSS were unveiled in 2010, several other groups have developed rubrics and evaluation tools meant to help state, district, and school leaders judge the quality, content, rigor, and alignment of existing curricular resources. These include:<sup>7</sup>

### EQuIP

Achieve’s Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuIP) rubric is intended to help educators gauge the CCSS alignment of individual lessons and units of instruction.<sup>8</sup> The tool grew out of a project called the “Tri-State Collaborative,” in which educators and leaders from New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island came together to develop a tool that could be used to judge CCSS materials alignment. The final version of the tool includes three rubrics (for K–12 math, K–2 ELA/literacy, and 3–12 ELA/literacy) that rate alignment to the key shifts and depth of the CCSS, as well as the quality of instructional supports and student assessment components. To further assist states and districts, EQuIP’s website now includes a lengthy set of “exemplar” and “exemplar if improved” lessons and units that “best illustrate the cognitive demands of the CCSS.”<sup>9</sup>

### IMET

Developed by Achieve, Student Achievement Partners (SAP), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET) aims to help educators evaluate entire textbooks and textbook series for alignment to the Common Core in both math and ELA. It’s intended to inform educators as they purchase new materials, evaluate materials already in use, and develop new ones. Each of four tools is organized into two sections: “non-negotiable” criteria that must be fully met for materials to be deemed well aligned to the CCSS, and additional alignment criteria and indicators of quality.

### Publishers’ Criteria

SAP developed the Publishers’ Criteria to help educators and curriculum developers identify, develop, and revise instructional materials to ensure CCSS alignment.<sup>10</sup> Released in 2012, the criteria are broken into four sets of guidance (K–8 and high school math materials and K–2 and 3–12 ELA/literacy materials). They highlight the most significant elements for both subjects, including focus, coherence, and rigor in math and text selection in ELA.

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**In addition to the current review of EngageNY English language arts, Fordham plans to release several additional curriculum reviews later this year. Stay tuned for more.**

## Acknowledgments

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We gratefully thank the study’s reviewers, Elizabeth Haydel and Sheila Byrd Carmichael, for their valuable research and insights, and Diana Senechal for synthesizing reviewer notes early in the project. We also appreciate the review of our work by the curriculum developers and the responsiveness of NYSED in answering our questions. On Fordham’s side, we extend thanks to Michael Petrilli, Amber Northern, and President Emeritus Chester E. Finn, Jr. for reviewing drafts. (Disclosure: Dr. Finn also serves on the board of the Core Knowledge Foundation.) Kudos also to Michelle Lerner for managing dissemination; Alyssa Schwenk for overseeing funding and grant reporting; and Kevin Mahnken for ushering the report through the production process. We also thank Shannon Last, who served as copy editor, and Edward Alton, who designed the report’s layout.

# OVERVIEW

New York State moved ahead quickly in its efforts to create and adopt a curriculum aligned to the CCSS. The depth, breadth, and quality of the materials exhibit, on balance, strong results. (The curriculum was still under development during the time of the review, thus gaps remain in the high school modules.)

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has engaged vendors, educators, and experts nationwide to create curricular resources and instructional materials (both of which are reviewed here), professional development resources, samples of test questions, and other test-related material to support state educators and students as they transition to the New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).<sup>11</sup> (See Appendix A for details on the implementation rollout.) According to the state’s website:

*The optional curricular materials on EngageNY are designed to be adopted or adapted. Some lessons provide detailed instructions or recommendations but it is important to note that the lessons are not scripts and rather should be viewed as vignettes so that the reader can imagine how the class could look.<sup>12</sup>*

While the materials comprise a nearly comprehensive ELA curriculum, multiple vendors developed materials for different grade bands:

- The Core Knowledge Foundation (pre-K–2);
- Expeditionary Learning (grades 3–8); and
- Public Consulting Group (grades 9–12).<sup>13</sup>

In addition, for grades 6–12, New York provides educators with program units developed by Odell Education known as “Developing Core Proficiencies.” These materials focus on core literary and research skills in the Common Core at various grade levels—such as “Making Evidence-Based Claims” in grade six.

## Evaluation Criteria

This evaluation provides an in-depth, contextualized review of EngageNY’s ELA curriculum (as opposed to a checklist of characteristics). Though it examines subject matter content and alignment to the CCSS, the review is not a one-to-one match of standards to curricular elements. Rather, we focus our energies on the key dimensions of the CCSS, such as coverage of foundational reading skills in the early elementary grades and the use of increasingly complex texts and evidence-based reading in the middle and upper grades.

In addition, we examine criteria that classroom teachers tend to prioritize: coherence and clarity across lessons and grades. Relative to the former, we assess whether materials are a logical progression of activities and themes or an assembly of isolated lessons or activities. For example, are meaningful connections made among units and topics? As for clarity, we examine whether topics and activities are organized logically and covered clearly. We also consider instructional quality and delivery: Do materials include ample guidance for teachers? Do they offer recommendations for meeting the needs of all students, and are they explicit about how students will demonstrate learning?

For a complete list of the evaluation criteria, please see Appendix B.

## Bottom Line

For readers interested in a summary of findings for EngageNY, we offer this “bottom line” first.

### OVERALL STRENGTHS

New York has provided a wealth of materials for teachers at all grade levels. Especially in grades pre-K–8, the materials are detailed enough to guide less experienced teachers and those who may be anxious about Common Core implementation.

In general, alignment to the Common Core State Standards is strong—and the materials go beyond the standards in specifying important content and skills for each year of instruction, as would be expected in a curricular document (as opposed to a standards document). This specification is especially important in English language arts because the standards only specify the *skills* students must master, but leave to state and local leaders the decision about what *content* students need to learn at each grade level.

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The quality of texts is generally high across the grades. Students are exposed to intellectually challenging material—whether the focus of the activity is listening, reading, writing, or discussion and collaboration.

The pre-K–12 curriculum provides detailed, focused materials and includes a heavy dose of high-quality, sufficiently complex texts through the grades. In addition, the material for the early grades (pre-K–2) thoughtfully and purposefully sequences content and skills within each grade and across the grade band. The sequencing and alignment of content from grade band to grade band is less seamless, in part because different vendors—each with its own distinct philosophy and approach to literacy—developed materials for different grade bands.

### OVERALL WEAKNESSES

The New York ELA curriculum is extremely detailed, and in the early grades, heavily scripted. While Core Knowledge clarified that it does not intend these modules to be mandatory scripts and encourages educators to adapt the materials as they see fit, this clarification was not immediately apparent to reviewers.

Providing lesson-by-lesson scripts to guide planning and instruction can be useful. Unfortunately, the level of detail in the materials can sometimes obscure the larger picture. The sheer quantity of text can be difficult to navigate.<sup>14</sup> To put a finer point on the volume of materials provided, Expeditionary Learning provides teachers with 2,520 pages of materials, scripts, and resources to guide planning and instruction.<sup>15</sup>

Further, because of the use of multiple vendors, different grade bands have different underlying philosophies (which are not stated explicitly). Consequently, while the sequencing of content and skills is strong *within* grade bands (i.e., from grades pre-K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12), that is not the case *across* grade bands. Similarly, the

approach to instruction and the specific curricular strategies employed are also far less coherent across grade bands than within them.

At the high school level, the NYSED provides supplemental resources from Odell Education. The Odell Education Units focus on developing literary and research skills. While some PCG materials integrate Odell, the two sets of resources are separately presented. For the purposes of this review, PCG materials are evaluated because they are intended to inform the full-year curriculum for students in grades 9–12.

Furthermore, because the Common Core explicitly calls for students to split their reading time between literary and informational texts, the New York materials for grades 3–8 pair literary with informational texts. This approach to developing an ELA curriculum introduces a few challenges. First, the pairing of texts is sometimes too forced or artificial. Second, it results in tipping the balance of coverage too far toward informational over literary texts—more than an *English* curriculum should. (The CCSS intend for students to read the balance of informational and literary texts across the curriculum, not only within the confines of the ELA classroom.) Finally, by the time students reach middle and high school, literary study should include the study and analysis of full books. Unfortunately, the New York curriculum focuses mostly on excerpts, leaving little time for the teaching of novels.

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Unfortunately, the New York curriculum focuses mostly on excerpts, leaving little time for the teaching of novels.

As different vendors were contracted to develop materials for specific grade bands, a more thorough analysis of each grade band below offers further insight into these issues. But first, a note about how the review is organized.

## Organization of the Review

As indicated earlier, this review is organized by grade band (pre-K–2, 3–8, and 9–12). Each grade band review first explains how the materials are organized before delving into the review itself, which is broken into six key areas:

- Text complexity, quality, and balance
- Evidence-based reading
- Content knowledge and vocabulary
- Writing, language, listening, and speaking
- K–3 foundational reading skills (when applicable)
- Instructional coherence, delivery, and assessment

All three curriculum developers reviewed and provided feedback on prior report drafts. When relevant, we have noted some of their feedback in the review and in the endnotes.

# ORGANIZATION AND REVIEW OF PRE-K-2 MATERIALS

## Original Developer: Core Knowledge

The EngageNY ELA curriculum for grades pre-K–2 consists of the following components:

- Listening and Learning Strand (to build background knowledge and vocabulary);
- Skills Strand (to build decoding skills, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing skills); and
- Guided Reading and Accountable Independent Reading (GRAIR).

The Listening and Learning Strand and the Skills Strand converge by the end of grade two. Until that time, the two strands have complementary but different goals. The Listening and Learning Strand seeks to expose students to complex texts (above their reading level) in order to build their content knowledge, develop vocabulary, and familiarize students with academic language; the Skills Strand seeks simultaneously to build their decoding skills. Both strands involve working with and discussing texts—but the texts are different. For example, first-grade students hear about and discuss Mesopotamia, but they are not expected to spell or decode the word itself.

In Listening and Learning, each grade has up to twelve anthologies, each of which covers a specific content-area domain and contains read-alouds (i.e., advanced, content- and vocabulary-rich texts that are meant to be read by teachers to students). In Skills, Core Knowledge offers workbooks and readers. The workbooks correspond with the instructional units and contain worksheets for each lesson. The readers include 100 percent decodable texts for students to read in the later units.<sup>16</sup> There are 150 spelling patterns taught in over 150 lessons in each grade, with an emphasis on mastery. The materials are intended to provide teachers with a full year of instructional activities. In addition, Core Knowledge provides an Assessment and Remediation Guide that provides guidance about how to interpret assessment results and how to use those results to inform instruction and remediation. These Assessment and Remediation Guides are provided for all but the last unit in each grade, K–2.

GRAIR is a resource that gives teachers the opportunity to provide additional literacy time within the school day to work with students in developmentally appropriate groups. This is an opportunity for traditional read-aloud work, literacy-based centers, and immersion in a “whole-class” text. Or, if desired, teachers can facilitate students choosing texts from leveled libraries based on student interest, the availability of texts, and their readability. The purpose of this time is to build independent, interested, and capable readers. Because this is an optional part of the CKLA program, we did not review GRAIR.

# Content Review

## TEXT COMPLEXITY, QUALITY, AND BALANCE

### Strengths

The texts in the Listening and Learning Strand are sufficiently complex—often difficult—as well as important, worthy of rereading, and well chosen to build students’ cultural and academic literacy. There is also an excellent balance of fiction and nonfiction, including a significant number of high-quality informational texts.

## EVIDENCE-BASED READING

### Strengths

The read-aloud texts include embedded questions to ask during reading. The post-reading comprehension questions include literal, inferential, and evaluative questions for students to consider.

### Weaknesses

Comprehension questions in the CKLA curriculum tend to focus more on factual recall than the Common Core standards demand. For instance, RL.1.3 states that students will:

“Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.”

In the Core Knowledge curriculum, students are asked to name the characters—but not *describe* them. (“The people or animals in a story are called the characters of the story. Who are the characters in ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf?’” or “There are only two characters, or people, in this fable. Who are they?”) That is to say, the Core Knowledge goals tilt toward literal comprehension and factual recall, whereas the CCSS expectation suggests that students should use textual evidence to interpret and describe. That said, a limited number of recall questions have their place, especially at the early grades.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the comprehension questions tend to look like familiar reading-strategies prompts (e.g., “Make a prediction about what will happen next”) and lack an evaluative element.

The materials also encourage students to make personal connections—which may be appropriate instructionally, but is generally discouraged by the Common Core. For example, in Grade 1, Domain 1, students are asked the following:

“Do you think you could feel lonely if you were tending the sheep? Why or why not?” (page 15)

Such questions do not require students to use evidence from the text, or even to have read and understood the text.<sup>18</sup>

## CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY

### Strengths

The pre-K–2 curriculum places knowledge—including literary knowledge—at the center. This emphasis is grounded in research that demonstrates a strong link between reading comprehension and content knowledge.<sup>19</sup> The more children know about a given domain, the better equipped they will be to read in that domain—and even across domains. At the same time, knowledge is not sufficient for building literacy in the early years; students must also learn how to decode. Thus, the pre-K–2 curriculum consists of two complementary but separate strands (Listening and Learning as well as Skills) that ultimately converge.

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The pre-K–2 curriculum places knowledge—including literary knowledge—at the center. This emphasis is grounded in research that demonstrates a strong link between reading comprehension and content knowledge.

The Core Knowledge curriculum sets a strong and compelling example for curriculum developers, as it lays out a detailed sequence of instruction across a range of domains. (In second grade, for instance, the domains include Early Asian Civilizations and the Ancient Greek Civilization.)

### Weaknesses

The “content” focus is on engaging and interesting content-area topics. Because the development of content knowledge and vocabulary is a primary focus of CKLA, the instructional guidance occasionally conflicts with guidance found in the CCSS and the related Publishers’ Criteria for the Common Core State Standards grades K–2.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, the Publishers’ Criteria advise against activities—including prefatory instruction—that delay entry into the text. CKLA, by contrast, provides teachers with considerable guidance about what vocabulary and content should be taught before students dive into a text. Note, however, that this is a “weakness” only inasmuch as it deviates from the instructional guidance provided by the Publishers’ Criteria, not because it conflicts with the skills in the Common Core itself.

## WRITING, LANGUAGE, LISTENING, AND SPEAKING

### Strengths

Overall, CKLA’s coverage of writing, language, listening, and speaking is very strong.

Speaking and listening skills are thoughtfully and intentionally developed from pre-K to second grade. Speaking and listening exercises are a part of daily activities, and there are formative assessments that provide teachers with useful information about student progress. Furthermore, the progression of skills is thoughtful and age-appropriate. The program requires almost entirely oral language response in pre-K and kindergarten, then shifts seamlessly to oral and written responses in grades 1–2.

## FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS

### Strengths

The coverage of foundational reading skills in CKLA is outstanding. In fact, in many places, the CKLA Skills Strand includes a level of detail that is absent from the standards themselves. For example, the CCSS read, “RF.1.3.e: Decode two-syllable words following basic patterns by breaking the words into syllables,” whereas the Core Knowledge expectation states (in Grade 1, Domain 11), “Read and/or write two-syllable words composed of the following syllable types: closed syllables; magic ‘e’ syllables; vowel digraph syllables; r-controlled syllables.” Here and elsewhere, the added level of detail helps to organize and focus the instruction.

## INSTRUCTIONAL COHERENCE, DELIVERY, AND ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

The Core Knowledge lessons (pre-K–2) offer a predictable lesson structure: overview, key vocabulary, at-a-glance overview, materials, introducing the read-aloud, presenting it, discussing, and extensions.

The materials assume some teacher autonomy—teachers decide how to fit the skills into instruction—but offer ample detail (including actual teacher talk text) that teachers can follow if they lack the time or expertise to make their own instructional plans/decisions.

The “Supplemental Guide” is helpful for teachers in determining how to meet the needs of all students instructionally—with suggestions specific to the Listening and Learning Strand for students with limited English proficiency and students struggling with language skills.<sup>21</sup>

### Weaknesses

Teachers, and particularly teachers of struggling students, may find the volume of content and skills that need to be mastered within a lesson intimidating. This is particularly true in writing. Open-ended questions are exceptionally rigorous and require the use of evidence from difficult texts to respond. While this is the kind of writing required by the Common Core, the CKLA program doesn’t consistently build in the time and space teachers would need to grow those evidence-based writing skills and offer reteaching or remediation as necessary before moving forward.

# ORGANIZATION AND REVIEW OF GRADES 3-8 MATERIALS

## Original Developer: Expeditionary Learning and Odell Education

For each grade, 3–8, Expeditionary Learning provides a full year of English language arts instruction in four modules that cover 160 days of instruction. (The curriculum actually provides six modules from which to choose, with the intent that teachers can teach four of the modules: Module 1, then Module 2A or 2B, then Module 3A or 3B, and finally Module 4. This gives teachers the flexibility to dive deeper in at least a few areas.) These modules are developed down to the level of daily lessons so that teachers have everyday guidance they can use to drive their planning and instruction.

Each module is about eight weeks long and consists of three units; each unit contains anywhere from six to twenty lessons that link reading and writing with speaking and listening skills.<sup>22</sup> Like Core Knowledge, Expeditionary Learning approaches this task with a strong instructional philosophy, which seems to have student motivation and engagement as a primary goal (rather than building content knowledge, an emphasis of Core Knowledge).

For grades 6–8, New York also includes supplemental Odell Education units (the Developing Core Proficiencies Series), which appear designed to teach important Common Core skills. For example, Grade 8 includes units titled “Reading Closely,” “Making Evidence-Based Claims,” “Researching to Deepen Understanding,” and “Building Evidence-Based Arguments.” These materials are separate from the core Expeditionary Learning curriculum.

## Content Review

### TEXT COMPLEXITY, QUALITY, AND BALANCE

#### Strengths

The modules exhibit a strong emphasis on texts, and the curriculum includes appropriately and increasingly complex texts within and across grades. In addition, the text types listed include suitably varied genres, such as articles, short stories, poetry, speeches, essays, letters, full-length novels, and a balance of literary and informational texts. The connection to social studies and science content seems deliberate.

#### Weaknesses

As mentioned previously, the Expeditionary Learning curriculum focuses more heavily on informational text than is appropriate for grades 6–8 ELA classrooms.<sup>23</sup> Worse, this overemphasis on nonliterary study means that, in some cases, the curriculum occasionally subjects literature to nonliterary interpretation.

For example, in Grade 8, Module 1, students read *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (a Newbery Honor Book that is a coming-of-age immigrant story told in verse) and pair it with multiple informational texts on Vietnam and the experiences of immigrants across cultures. At the end, students “write two free verse narrative poems that capture the universal refugee experience.” Thus, the focus is on reading for content more than for literary analysis.

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In addition, the texts selected as the primary focus for instruction—not just those on the suggested reading lists—are not as representative of classical literature as reviewers would like. For example, in Grade 8, two of the four modules include contemporary popular works—*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan and *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand—as the central texts. These texts offer the chance to engage in interesting content discussions—such as historical and social issues—but may lack the levels of deeper meaning and author’s craft that would make them rich enough for the kind of thoughtful, thorough reading that the CCSS encourage.

In addition, Module 2 is the only module that focuses on classic literature as the central text—Module 2A includes *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Module 2B includes *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Modules 1, 3 (A and B), and 4 are almost entirely focused on informational texts, with *Inside Out and Back Again* as the only example of literature. These three modules do not include a variety of important or classic literary texts as the central texts of study.

## EVIDENCE-BASED READING

### Strengths

Most of the lessons show evidence of attention to the Common Core instructional shifts, with a particular emphasis on using the text and textual evidence to drive comprehension and analysis. For example, the “Teaching Notes” in Grade 3, Module 1, Lesson 2 remind teachers that:

*The read-aloud should be “pure”: Simply read the text. Do NOT start with a picture walk, pause to discuss key passages, etc. During the lesson, students will reread the text multiple times on their own to understand the text more fully. The read-aloud is just a taste: to get the beautiful language, rich images, and important ideas swimming in the classroom. (page 1)*

Included throughout the lessons are repeated references to and activities around close reading—answering text-dependent questions and so forth. In Grade 8, Module 1, students are reminded of an anchor chart called “Things Close Readers Do” that was previously introduced in the curriculum, and “things” are added as the year progresses—and as students practice those tasks. There are plentiful reminders that students must cite evidence to support their assertions.

The modules also build CCSS analysis skills over the course of each year and from one grade band to the next. For example, in Grades 3–5, Module 1, students focus on becoming close readers and writing to learn. In Module 2, they engage in research in order to build knowledge and teach others. In Module 3, they consider perspectives and supporting opinions. And finally, in Module 4, they focus on gathering evidence and speaking to others. (There is an implicit increase in the complexity of the tasks across the four modules within the grade.)

The modules for grades 6–8 appear to build on the skills taught in grades 3–5. The skills for this grade band include: close reading and writing to learn; working with evidence; understanding perspectives; and research, decision making, and taking positions.

Finally, the reading skills and strategies taught and practiced throughout the curriculum are used in service of understanding appropriately complex and mostly worthwhile texts. While that makes it difficult to track the progression and coverage of particular CCSS expectations and skills (discussed in greater detail below), it puts the emphasis where it should be: on text comprehension over reading skills and strategies development.

## Weaknesses

While the modules do emphasize CCSS instructional shifts, they miss some opportunities for text-based analysis.

For example, in Grade 4, Module 1, Unit 1, students read the laws of the first Native American settlers in the area that is now New York. Students could extend these ideas; they could extrapolate what Native Americans prioritized and valued, using evidence from the text to support their inferences.

Instead, students write a postcard to a Native American boy explaining the symbols of the Iroquois. Then they make their own flag with symbols to represent their own classroom. Finally, they write about the flags—something completely detached from the text.<sup>24</sup>

Given that each module ostensibly addresses multiple standards—each carefully paired to drive textual comprehension and analysis—it is not always easy to tell which standards are and are not addressed. In fact, the “NYS Common Core Aligned Curriculum Maps,” created to show module/standard correspondence, reveal many holes in important areas of focus in the CCSS. For example, in grade eight, standards such as RL.8.2 are assessed in only two of six modules, and teachers are to choose only *one* of those two to teach in a year. (That standard reads, “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.”) The same is true of standards RL.8.5 and RL.8.6, which address comparing and contrasting two or more texts—and analyzing differences in points of view of the characters and the audience/reader. Because teachers choose only four of the six modules to teach, it’s possible for students to finish the year without having studied or been tested on several standards.

Where informational texts are concerned, essential standards such as RI.8.4 (“Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts”) and RI.8.8 (“Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”) are both assessed in only one module of six. Given the emphasis in the CCSS on students’ ability to analyze and produce logical arguments, it seems troublesome that these crucial standards are given short shrift, especially as eighth-grade students are preparing to enter high school, where much will be expected of them in this area.

Yet another important standard, particularly for students about to enter high school, is RI.8.9 (“Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation”), which is assessed only in two modules (3A and 3B). In effect, it will only be assessed in *one* of six modules because, again, teachers may choose from these two modules; they will not be teaching both.

Speaking and Listening standards are sparsely assessed, as are Language standards. In general, neither grammar nor word analysis is explicitly included in most modules. The “main” grammar standards for grades 6–8 (L.6–8.1) are assessed only in one or two modules per year. The lack of focus on grammar and word analysis could seriously slow students’ progress in both reading and writing comprehension.

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## CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY

### Strengths

Expeditionary Learning’s materials demonstrate a welcome focus on reading for building content knowledge and learning content-area and academic vocabulary. In fact, the Teaching Notes include reminders about how students should approach unknown vocabulary while reading. There are many examples of vocabulary being embedded into instruction and discussion of texts.

### Weaknesses

While content is robust and presented coherently throughout the Expeditionary Learning materials for grades 3–8, there is nonetheless a near-exclusion of literature in the upper grades.

## WRITING, LANGUAGE, LISTENING, AND SPEAKING

### Strengths

The New York materials include many opportunities for sharing and discussing in small and large groups (oral responses to text-dependent questions, Write-Pair-Share, Think-Pair-Share, Turn and Talk) and for oral presentations in the form of Readers Theater, speeches, and other oral presentations. Reminders that students must cite evidence to support their assertions are plentiful and a focus of instruction/assessment.

In terms of vocabulary, the materials demonstrate a focus on reading for building content knowledge and learning content-area and academic vocabulary. The Teaching Notes include reminders about how students should approach unknown vocabulary while reading.

There are many examples of vocabulary being embedded into instruction and discussion of texts.

The lessons include specific instructional ideas for teaching students skills related to vocabulary acquisition—such as using context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words (for example, see Grade 3, Module 1, Unit 1, Lesson 3, on page 5 and Grade 6, Module 1, Unit 1, Lesson 2, on page 7).

### Weaknesses

In terms of language, grammar study seems to be a weakness of the program—less apparent and not as well integrated. In fact, most assessments do not appear to place the necessary emphasis on correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling as a matter of course. Indeed, the lessons themselves hardly mention grammar and mechanics.

Adding the study of morphemes such as roots and affixes, especially derivational suffixes, could strengthen the teaching of vocabulary acquisition. Such study of etymology helps to build understanding of the parts of speech and assists students with word analysis over the long term.

## FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS

Not applicable.

## INSTRUCTIONAL COHERENCE, DELIVERY, AND ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

For each lesson, the EngageNY modules provide all of the resources, details, and information a teacher might need to drive daily, step-by-step instruction.

### Weaknesses

Although the EngageNY site states that its lessons for grades 3–8 “are adaptable and allow for teacher preference and flexibility,” they are so prescriptive (without a general outline or overview) that they do not lend themselves to easy adjustment. In addition, their sheer length can be overwhelming. For example, Grade 3, Module 1, Unit 1 is one hundred pages long—and this is just for one unit of one module—so the total grade level would be many hundreds of pages.<sup>25</sup> That makes it easy to miss the forest for the trees.

In a number of instances, the rigor of the activity does not match that of the stated standard. For example, in Grade 3, Module 1, the Performance Task asks students to write a “bookmark” about a librarian from another country:

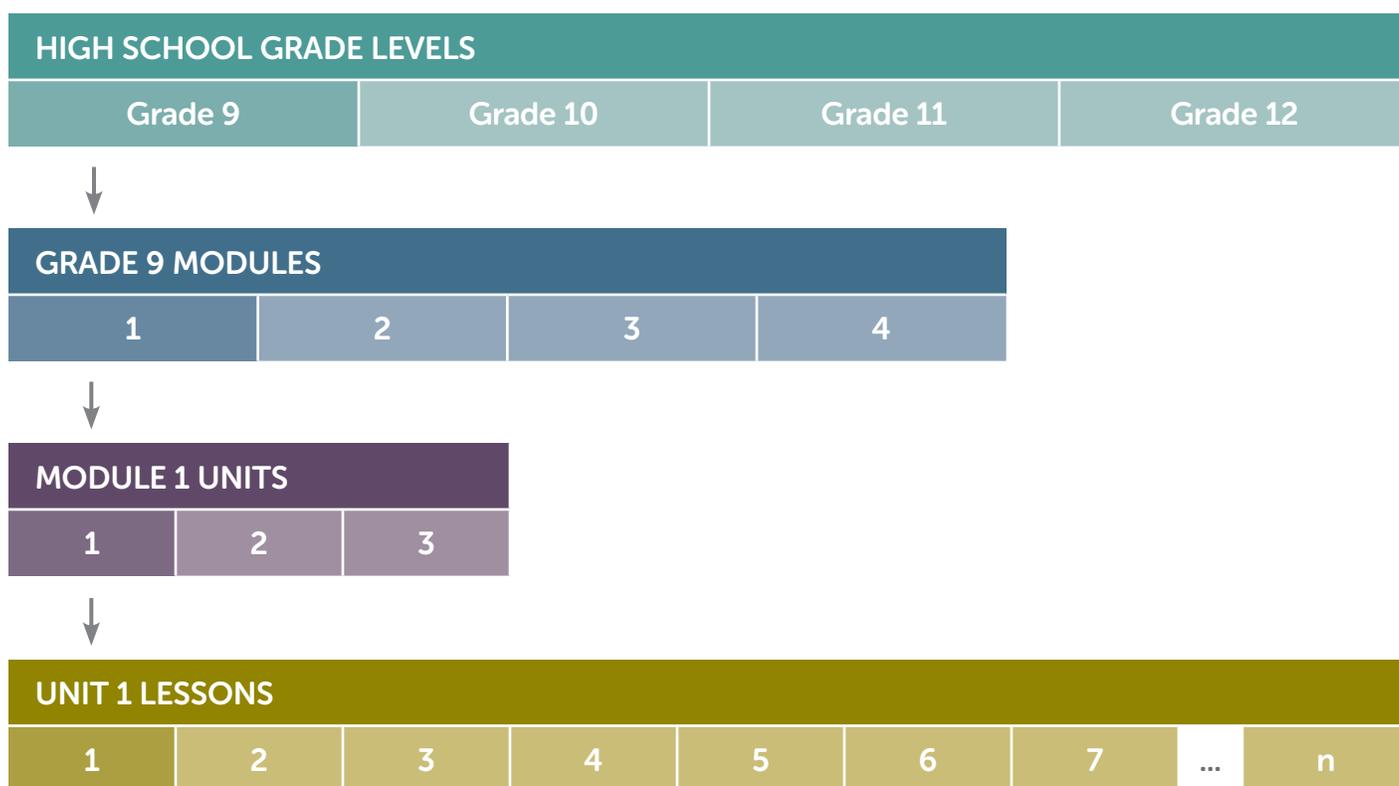
- *You are an author and advocate of reading. After reading about librarians and organizations from around the world, select one to write an informational text about. Your text should describe whom the person or what the organization is, where they are from, and how they help readers to access books in a unique way. Support your writing with specific evidence from the texts you have read.*
- *On the other side of your bookmark, draw a picture showing a specific geographical feature from the region where your librarian or organization works. Also, write a list of three to five of the most important words to tell readers what this geographic region is like. Your bookmark will be shared with others in our school or in our local community.*

In the “Key Criteria for Success,” students are instructed to include: “specific facts, definitions, and details (in your informative paragraph) from the texts you read that describe your librarian/ librarians/organization from this country (RI.3.2).” This does not fully address the cited standard: “Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.” It is not clear why creating a simple bookmark would be the chosen medium for a complex writing activity of this kind. Perhaps the authors were hoping to add a creative element to the task—which is commendable, if (a) it does not create excessive work and (b) the educational goal is not distorted.

# ORGANIZATION AND REVIEW OF GRADES 9-12 MATERIALS

## Original Developer: Public Consulting Group

Public Consulting Group (PCG) developed modules for each grade, 9–12. The curriculum is divided into four grade levels. Each grade level includes four modules, each module consists of up to three units, and each unit comprises a set of lesson plans. PCG illustrates the organization like this:



In addition, Odell Education Units are provided and can be used to supplement the core PCG units and lessons. These Odell resources focus on skills development, such as making evidence-based claims and arguments, reading closely for textual details, and researching to deepen understanding. They are brief units (together they amount to only a few weeks of instruction), and each provides instruction on specific literacy skills.

# Content Review

## TEXT COMPLEXITY, QUALITY, AND BALANCE

### Strengths

The New York curriculum materials for grades 9–12 are geared toward literary study. They place texts at the center and include many high-quality, appropriately complex literary texts.

The text selection seems very thoughtful, representing a pretty good sampling of literary texts—classic and contemporary, American and international, poetry, drama, novel excerpts, short fiction—as well as literary nonfiction.

### Weaknesses

While the texts for grades 9–12 are complex and worthy of close reading and analysis, at the time of review, the modules did not appear to follow a clear, purposeful sequence or form a coherent whole. Perhaps they will show greater coherence once fully developed.

In addition, the preface to the high school curriculum declares that:

*[T]eachers will no longer translate or explain texts that are complex; all students—regardless of current ability—will be unpacking, chunking, deconstructing, seeking meaning, conducting analysis, defining words in context, using and developing background knowledge, and working to understand what they can of the text at hand.*

While students should be doing all of these things, why discourage—even forbid—teachers’ explications of the text? In college and graduate school, professors do a great deal of explication—not at the literal levels, but at higher levels of analysis. If students are unused to comparing their own insights to those of a teacher, or if they don’t get the benefit of listening to complex and nuanced presentations, they will be ill prepared for higher studies.

Finally, at this level, students should read not just excerpts, but full books (novels, biographies, etc.). The New York curriculum includes only excerpted passages, leaving little time or space for teachers to incorporate novel study into their planning and instruction.

## EVIDENCE-BASED READING

### Strengths

Close, evidence-based reading is a clear emphasis in the New York high school curricular materials. The lessons of Grade 9, Module 1, Unit 1—the first high school unit—focus on setting the norms, habits, and practices to be employed during close reading. Teachers guide students through the first text—asking text-dependent questions about the author’s language, style, and content as well as requiring textual evidence in support of responses. They employ a model of working through a sequence of lessons where students experience the entire text read aloud before they deeply analyze the text.

Instruction is slowed down to a pace that is truly needed to read texts closely—and this is stated explicitly in the prefatory materials so that teachers know not to rush through texts to “check them off” a reading list.

Rather, students read texts repeatedly (as in Grade 9, Module 1, Unit 1) to practice close reading and to study vocabulary and annotate with partners.

In the modules that follow, each text is read closely through a series of text-dependent questions that focus largely on the author’s craft and how it relates to the central ideas of the text. Sample student responses are offered. Many of the units ask students to compare works to each other in thoughtful ways.

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Instruction is slowed down to a pace that is truly needed to read texts closely—and this is stated explicitly in the prefatory materials so that teachers know not to rush through texts to “check them off” a reading list.

## CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY

### Weaknesses

Although vocabulary is an emphasis, insufficient attention is devoted to morphology and etymology. Instead, students are encouraged to infer definitions through context (not always a reliable method) or to learn the meaning from the teacher.

In addition, as in grades 3–8, there is insufficient attention to grammar and spelling.

## WRITING, LANGUAGE, LISTENING, AND SPEAKING

### Strengths

In terms of speaking and listening, the high school lessons include collaborative conversations and evidence-based discussions.

The text-based vocabulary study is thoughtfully presented—with words separated between those that will need to be defined for students without extended study versus those that will be taught with direct word work and/or text-dependent questions. They are the kinds of Tier II/III words and academic vocabulary that students will want to learn more deeply.

## FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS

Not applicable.

## INSTRUCTIONAL COHERENCE, DELIVERY, AND ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

The materials are clear and detailed, and though they include scripts (which are off-putting to some teachers), those are voluntary. The modules and lessons are easy to follow and include summaries and overviews for each unit. They note the materials that will be needed, the standards assessed and addressed, recommended percentages of time for each lesson, and reminders for teachers about how the units function. Rubrics and sample student responses are included throughout the modules.

# CONCLUSION

Overall, the New York ELA curriculum provides a thorough, evidenced-based approach to literary instruction across all grades (though the study of vocabulary and grammar is not as strong). The coverage of foundational reading skills is outstanding, text selection across all grades is mostly good, and content development and sequencing is generally strong. While the presentation of content and philosophy of instruction varies as students move from grade band to grade band, alignment to essential Common Core expectations and skills does not suffer.

In the end, EngageNY's ELA materials offer a high-quality, comprehensive resource for educators teaching to the Common Core State Standards and may offer an excellent (and freely available) alternative to other programs that do not meet the criteria for alignment to the Common Core as thoughtfully or comprehensively.

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**Educators using EngageNY resources should be aware that revisions and additions to the materials are ongoing (and as of April 2015, several ELA modules remain incomplete). These changes are now incorporated by the NYSED, raising important questions about the role the original curriculum developers will play in updating or supplementing materials in the future.**

# APPENDIX A:

# CCSS IMPLEMENTATION

# ROLLOUT IN NEW YORK

<p><b>Common Core State Standards Adoption and Rollout</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New York adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in July 2010.</li> <li>▪ The same year, the state received almost \$700 million in the second round of the federal Race to the Top competition. Common Core implementation began in the 2011–12 school year, with plans to fully implement the standards in all grades by 2013–14.<sup>26</sup></li> <li>▪ In January 2011, New York’s Board of Regents approved state-specific additions to the Common Core State Standards for math and ELA, as well as a new set of pre-kindergarten standards. The newly branded New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) were implemented in schools beginning with the 2012–13 school year.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CCSS-aligned Instructional Materials</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In early 2012, the NYSED issued a request for proposals to develop ELA and mathematics “modules of learning” aligned to the Common Core. The NYSED hired Student Achievement Partners (SAP), nationally recognized CCSS experts, to help conduct the review process and involved educators and experts from across the state in reviewing and providing feedback on submissions.</li> <li>▪ The NYSED awarded Common Core Inc. (now Great Minds), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and curriculum developer, with the contract to develop mathematics materials for the state. The Core Knowledge Foundation, Expeditionary Learning, and the Public Consulting Group (PCG) were awarded contracts to develop ELA materials for grades pre-K–2, 3–5, and 6–12 respectively. In 2012, PCG subcontracted the grades 6–8 portion of their contract to Expeditionary Learning to enable consistency in the 3–8 grade band.</li> <li>▪ The state also funded Odell Education to create “Developing Core Proficiencies,” a set of four ELA units for grades 6–12 focusing on a set of literacy proficiencies at the heart of the Common Core State Standards.</li> <li>▪ New York’s ELA and mathematics curricular modules are now publicly available at EngageNY.org, along with a wider suite of instructional materials and resources (including resources on teacher-leader effectiveness and data-driven instruction). New York’s curricular modules are voluntary, free, and available to all districts in New York State (and nationally). As of April 2015, NYSED staff report that the math and ELA modules have been downloaded more than twenty million times.</li> </ul>

<p><b>CCSS-aligned Instructional Materials</b> <i>(cont'd.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Materials continue to be added to EngageNY.org on an “as available” basis. As of April 2015, staff report that several twelfth-grade ELA modules are still in development.</li> <li>▪ Revisions to EngageNY’s existing curriculum are also ongoing. Over the last several years, curriculum vendors have made substantive updates and corrections to their materials based on feedback received from teachers, NYSED, and the individual vendors themselves. Updates continue on a rolling basis, with all changes tracked on EngageNY’s website.<sup>27</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>CCSS-aligned Professional Development (PD)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ EngageNY curriculum developers design and perform statewide professional development (PD) for their materials. Trainings have been primarily conducted via Network Team Institutes (NTIs), large, multi-day sessions held across the state several times a year focusing on New York’s major Race to the Top school-based initiatives (including Common Core).</li> <li>▪ First offered in August 2011, NTIs aim to familiarize attendees with the new curricular resources and address broader Common Core implementation issues surrounding the curricula, such as strategies for improving Common Core instructional skills. The sessions are designed as “turnkey” (train-the-trainer) trainings where select attendees return to their respective districts and schools to share and deliver information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CCSS-aligned Assessments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New York rolled out brand-new tests aligned to the Common Core standards and New York’s state-specific additions for grades 3–8 math and ELA in the 2012–13 school year. New CCLS-aligned Regents (high school) tests for algebra 1 and ELA followed in 2013–14, and geometry in 2014–15. New tests for algebra 2 are planned for 2015–16.<sup>28</sup></li> <li>▪ In addition to its own assessment efforts, New York is a governing state in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of two multi-state consortia developing K–12 Common Core assessment systems. While New York conducted field tests of the new PARCC assessments in select schools from March to June 2014, the state has no current plans to administer the now-operational PARCC tests for statewide purposes.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B:

# REVIEW CRITERIA OF CCSS-ALIGNED INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## Text Complexity, Quality, and Balance

- **Quality:** Are the texts worthy of close reading and analysis? Are they well written, compelling, of an enduring nature? Are they written carefully enough to elicit effective questions about author’s craft?
- **Complexity:** Are texts thoughtfully sequenced to intentionally build knowledge and vocabulary, and do they increase in complexity both within and across units of study and grades? Do provided texts give students regular practice with grade-appropriate texts?
- **Balance:** Do the materials include a balance of text types reflective of the emphases suggested by the Common Core—and/or the recognition of how these varied texts will be included in the student’s entire academic day? Particularly in the upper grades (from six to twelve), does the curriculum focus on literary study and analysis?

## Evidence-Based Reading

- Is the text central to the instructional activities? Are a majority of questions and tasks text-dependent—i.e., do they require students to go back to the text to find evidence that supports answers and analysis?
- Are text-dependent questions thoughtfully sequenced to deepen student understanding of the text?
- Do the questions address important ideas/details, author’s craft and structure, and the integration of ideas and knowledge, as described in the CCSS?

## Content Knowledge and Vocabulary

- **Content:** In the elementary and middle grades particularly, do the materials/units/lessons attempt to build a body of content knowledge through the inclusion of texts on specific topics, a sustained focus on those topics, and a sequencing of texts and topics with the purpose of building knowledge and vocabulary within and across grades? At the high school level, are the texts rigorous and of high quality?
- **Vocabulary:** Do the instructional materials build students’ skills in analyzing figurative language and determining the meaning of unknown words through context (if useful), morphology, connotation, and learning the efficacy of reference materials?

## Writing, Language, Listening, and Speaking

- Balance of Writing: Do the materials include instruction on specific writing skills and a balance of writing text types that reflect what the CCSS suggest for grades K–5 and 6–12 (informational/explanatory, literary/fictional, persuasive/argument)?
- Speaking/Listening: Are thoughtful exchanges among students a requirement, in which they must cite evidence from texts to support their assertions?
- Language: Do the materials include language study that attempts, in largely text-based ways, to build students' knowledge and use of grammar and conventions?

## K–3 Foundational Reading Skills

Do materials for grades K–3 include the following:

- Explicit and systematic instruction in concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, syntax, and fluency?
- Ample opportunities to learn and practice spelling/sound patterns?
- An evidence-based, purposeful sequence for the instruction of foundational skills?
- Systematic and cumulative fluency instruction with research-supported techniques, including partner reading, repeated reading, and choral reading?
- Instruction in academic vocabulary?
- Regular assessments of foundational reading skills?
- Diagnostic support to ensure that all students' needs are met?

## Instructional Coherence, Delivery, and Assessment

- Coherence: Do the materials offer a coherent overview for activities/themes/units (e.g., are they not just a collection of isolated lessons or activities)? OR: Is good guidance provided to teachers about how to choose from among sample units/lessons?
- Coherence: Do the materials put lessons/units into context (e.g., what happens before and after)?
- Coherence: Are meaningful connections made among the various strands of the standards (e.g., are materials not just a checklist of activities by standard)? Do the materials highlight ideas that are integrated across all CCSS strands—such as research?
- Organization/Clarity: Are activities clearly and well written? Organized logically? Easily accessed?
- Instruction: Do the lessons exhibit well-considered and consistent instructional guidance for teachers? Do they offer suggestions for instructional delivery that would be helpful to new teachers/teachers unsure of how to address the CCSS instructionally?
- Meeting the Needs of All Students: Do the materials offer guidance for how to meet the needs of *all* students (not through leveled texts, but through scaffolding of instructional activities and other means of instructional support to enable *all* to read and produce complex texts)? OR: If they do not meet the needs of all students, are the materials clear about their intended target audience?
- Assessment: Do the materials show how students will demonstrate what they have learned? Do the materials include or provide guidance about quality formative, interim, and summative assessments? (Do they also include student samples, rubrics, etc.? These may be in development, but are they planned?)

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## Elizabeth Haydel

Elizabeth Haydel has over twenty years of experience in standards development, benchmarking, and review and in standards-aligned curriculum and assessment development. She has worked for the Ohio Department of Education, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Achieve, and Great Minds (previously Common Core Inc.) and as a contractor for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and the Indiana Department of Education. Ms. Haydel has a BA in American Studies from Stanford University and an EdM in Language Education from Indiana University.

## Sheila Byrd Carmichael

Sheila Byrd Carmichael is one of the nation's foremost experts on standards-based education reform, assisting over twenty states on the development, review, and implementation of their K–12 academic standards, curricula, and assessments. She has been particularly active in the District of Columbia, serving as an advisor for the D.C. Public Charter School Board, the Center City Consortium, and the Friendship Public Charter Schools. She previously served on the Board of Trustees at the Capital City Public Charter School. She was the founding director of the American Diploma Project and the former deputy executive director of the California Academic Standards Commission.

# ENDNOTES

1. M. S. Polikoff, “How Well Aligned are Textbooks to the Common Core Standards in Mathematics?” *American Educational Research Journal*, in press.
2. EdReports.org, “Independent Reviews of Educational Materials,” <http://www.edreports.org/>.
3. Notably, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) also created “scope and sequence” documents for kindergarten through grade twelve as well as optional model curriculum units and modules (only accessible by those in the school system).
4. New York’s P–12 Common Core Learning Standards were approved by the Board of Regents in January 2011. They align with the CCSS but also include a limited number of state-specific additions. See “New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy,” [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common\\_core\\_standards/pdfdocs/p12\\_common\\_core\\_learning\\_standards\\_ela.pdf](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/pdfdocs/p12_common_core_learning_standards_ela.pdf).
5. The state also funded Odell Education to create “Developing Core Proficiencies,” a set of four ELA units for grades 6–12 focusing on a set of literacy proficiencies at the heart of the Common Core State Standards.
6. This figure is the amount requested in the state’s Race to the Top application. See: New York State, “Race to the Top, Application Phase 2: Selection Criteria and Competition Priorities,” June 1, 2010, <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/application/criteriapriorities.pdf>. Upon requesting confirmation of the awarded grant funds, the New York State Department of Education asked that we complete a FOIA request (Freedom of Information Act), which our publication deadline prohibited us from doing.
7. In addition to EQUiP, IMET, and the Publishers’ Criteria, many other resources are available to assist educators in vetting alignment of instructional materials to the Common Core. The Open Educational Resources (OER) rubric and evaluation tool, developed by the OER Institute in collaboration with Achieve, includes eight rubrics, one of which focuses on “degree of alignment to the standards” (other rubrics gauge accessibility and the quality of instructional tasks and practice exercises). See <https://www.oercommons.org/authoring/1506-oer-evaluation-tool>. Another source is Learning List (<https://www.learninglist.com>), a fee-based subscription service that rates online and print instructional materials on their alignment to state standards (including but not limited to the Common Core). Additional organizations providing materials for math instruction—some of which are less targeted to *alignment*—include Illustrative Mathematics (<https://www.illustrativemathematics.org/>); the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (<http://www.nctm.org/ccssmresources/>); and the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin (<http://www.ccsstoolbox.org/>).
8. Achieve, “Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products,” [www.achieve.org/equip](http://www.achieve.org/equip).
9. EQUiP’s Peer Review Panel recently rated EngageNY’s ELA Grade 11, Module 4, Unit 1 as “Exemplar,” one of fourteen Exemplar ratings for 9–12 ELA materials that have been awarded by the panel nationwide.
10. Achieve the Core, “Publishers’ Criteria,” <http://achievethecore.org/page/686/publishers-criteria>.

11. An overview of the state's efforts, with links to the available documents and resources, can be found at the EngageNY website, <http://www.engageny.org/english-language-arts> and <http://www.engageny.org/common-core-curriculum-assessments>.
12. EngageNY, <https://www.engageny.org/common-core-curriculum>, retrieved October 1, 2014.
13. Public Consulting Group was actually awarded the contract for grades 6–12, but subcontracted with Expeditionary Learning for grades 6–8.
14. In response to this critique, Core Knowledge indicated that it is revising the materials to make them easier to navigate and slim down the volume of text. These types of revision and design changes will further strengthen the materials for the early grades.
15. Each grade has four modules; each module has multiple units; each unit has multiple lessons. So Grade 6, Module 1 consists of three units. Each averages fourteen lessons (range is from seventeen to twenty); each lesson averages fifteen pages. Hence, for a total grade: 4 modules x 3 units x 14 lessons x 15 pages = 2,520 pages for the grade.
16. Core Knowledge indicated that they include these readers because of the research that suggests students will have more success with early reading development when reading decodable texts that include only the sound-letter correspondences that they have been taught. Students move quickly from basic to more complex, longer texts, and by first grade, the readers appear much more similar to authentic texts.
17. In response to this review, Core Knowledge reported that the heavier balance on factual recall was intentional. Because the texts are rigorous, students begin with basic comprehension questions that prepare them for more sophisticated work in later grades.
18. In response, Core Knowledge explained that these questions were meant to align with the standards that New York added to supplement the CCSS during the standards adoption phase. They plan to pare back these types of questions in their own versions of these lessons designed for a wider audience beyond New York.
19. A. E. Cunningham and K. E. Stanovich, "Early Reading Acquisition and its Relation to Reading Experience and Ability 10 Years Later," *Developmental Psychology*, 33 (1997): 934–945; D. R. Recht and L. Leslie, "Effect of Prior Knowledge on Good and Poor Readers' Memory of Text," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80 (1988), 16–20.
20. David Coleman and Susan Pimentel, "Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades K–2," April 12, 2012, [http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/2.\\_Publishers\\_Criteria\\_for\\_Literacy\\_for\\_Grades\\_K-2.pdf](http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/2._Publishers_Criteria_for_Literacy_for_Grades_K-2.pdf).
21. Core Knowledge intends to develop supports to the program for students with special needs, but those were not yet available for review.
22. See Expeditionary Learning's website; <http://commoncoresuccess.elschools.org/>.
23. Note that in grades 3–5, the same teacher is often responsible for teaching social studies, science, reading, and writing. So she can balance appropriately the teaching of literary and informational texts within the day; whereas in grades 6–8, the content in the ELA classroom is primarily literature. In our view, the intent of

the CCSS is to encourage teachers across content areas to engage in reading instruction and content-based literacy development—not to push science and social studies into the ELA classroom and literature out.

24. Regarding this critique, Expeditionary Learning responded that this module was revised by New York and is not the intellectual property of Expeditionary Learning. This response points to a larger issue about the ownership of materials once they have been developed for a state and suggests that states or districts seeking external groups to develop curricular materials may want to consider the length of such contracts and the need for ongoing review and revisions.
25. Expeditionary Learning, “Grade 3: Module 1: Overview,” June 2013, <http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/3m1.1.pdf>.
26. Common Core State Standards Initiative, “Standards in Your State,” <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.
27. EngageNY, “Curriculum Module Updates,” NYSED, <https://www.engageny.org/resource/curriculum-module-updates>.
28. EngageNY, “Common Core Assessments,” <https://www.engageny.org/common-core-assessments>.