The Urban Bellwether

METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE

Metropolitan Nashville Public School District approaches Common Core implementation with significant advantages, including dedicated dollars, strong district leadership, an active and helpful state partner, and communications savvy gained from prior experience with raising academic standards and then seeing the resulting drops in student test scores. Overall, the district is thoughtfully drawing on these resources to support its transition to the Common Core, and initiated implementation well ahead of other Tennessee districts. But with great resources come high expectations for effective implementation. One particular challenge Metro Nashville encountered early in its transition was identifying and adopting high-quality, Common Core-aligned curricular and instructional materials. Now, the large urban district's continued challenge is to hold educators responsible for student success with new standards as the state also transitions to a new accountability system.

State and District Context

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is a large, urban school district located in the capital of Tennessee, a state that has made headlines in recent years for instituting major reforms to its learning standards, teacher evaluation system, and accountability policies. In 2009, Tennessee overhauled its (pre-Common Core) academic content standards and graduation requirements, accompanying the change with an aggressive state-wide communications strategy aimed at minimizing the anticipated public outcry when student achievement numbers declined under new assessments. This prior experience with standards reform helped prepare Metro Nashville for the Common Core by familiarizing stakeholders with the importance of strong communication and driving home the central argument for raising academic standards: higher standards—and their successful implementation—are essential for students to be college- and career-ready.

METRO NASHVILLE DEMOGRAPHICS

74,680 students

5,127 teachers

140 schools (74 elementary, 38 middle schools and 16 high schools)

72.4% free- and reduced-lunch eligible

14.3% limited English proficient

16.4% Hispanic; 33.5% white; 46% African American; 4% Asian

Urban location encompassing the city of Nashville and the surrounding county

Tennessee adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. The same year, the state won a major Race to the Top (RTT) grant from the U.S. Department of Education for more than $500 million to support Common Core implementation and other statewide reform initiatives. From this total, the state gave a sub-grant of $30.3 million to Metro Nashville for the district's own set of comprehensive reforms, including $6.8 million to support Common Core implementation at the district level. To date, the district has used these funds largely to support data coaches and school-embedded professional development for teachers.

The education policy context in Tennessee is generally one of central control, with the state playing a strong role in both textbook adoption and professional development, among other areas. This centralized governance model, coupled with Race to the Top funds that enabled state-supported CCSS professional development, has resulted in a tight working relationship between Metro Nashville and its state education agency.

Politically, Tennessee also benefits from strong state leadership on the Common Core. Its two recent governors (of both parties) have stood firmly behind the new standards, and the chiefs of the state's K–12 system and postsecondary Board of Regents are also vocal Common Core advocates. Even so, political opposition to the Common Core gained steam in Tennessee in the second half of 2013, stoked by right-of-center organizations claiming the standards represent federal overreach and a "national curriculum."

Table 1. Tennessee CCSS Implementation Timeline

2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
Tennessee adopts the Common Core in July 2010; Tennessee wins RTT grant of $501 million; Nashville receives $30.3M sub-grant	Began implementation of K–2 math and English language arts (ELA) standards	Full implementation of K–2 math and ELA standards; partial math standards implementation in 3–8	Full implementation of 3–12 math and ELA standards	Scheduled implementation of ELA and math PARCC assessments (of which Tennessee is a governing state)

In terms of student performance, over the last three years, Metro Nashville has seen steady growth on the state's Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) results. Math proficiency has improved in grades 3–8, with a particularly dramatic improvement in high school math (up 9.6 percentage points in Algebra I and 7.1 in Algebra II) from 2011–12 to 2012–13. Graduation rates increased from 76.2 to 78.4 percent and science and social studies proficiency scores also increased. Overall, the district is ranked as "intermediate" status in the state, meeting eight of eleven Tennessee benchmarks for student achievement, though it continues to struggle with reading achievement scores in grades 3–8.

Note that most of the academic functions in Metro Nashville Public Schools are organized into two parallel "central offices": one for elementary and one for middle and secondary levels. Research was conducted in the 2012–13 school year when implementation of the Common Core was fully underway in grade K–2 and partially underway in grades 3–8, so the following findings focus on the elementary-level functions and efforts of the district.

Detailed Research Findings

As Metro Nashville embarked on its initial Common Core rollout, dedicated dollars smoothed the road ahead. But non-financial resources have also been critical in preparing the district for effective implementation. These resources include strong leadership, good relationships with the state, and successful communication practices honed through previous experience with raising standards. Together, these factors created a generally positive context for implementation in the district.

Metro Nashville has worked hard to foster a supportive district climate for implementation to take root. Spurred by the superintendent's unequivocal direction to prioritize the new standards, district staff are working across divisions to integrate assessment, instruction, and professional development to buttress the standards. The district is well down the (sometimes rocky) path of transitioning its existing elementary curricular materials to a common curriculum vetted by the state for alignment (and selected by a committee of district teachers). Metro Nashville's instructional coaching program has also evolved and improved to better support teachers with in-depth, customized training on the new standards. Despite reservations about how the new standards will affect their evaluation system, many teachers expressed support for the Common Core and described examples of implementing the shifts in their classrooms. Similarly, most parents and community members interviewed reported that they were at least somewhat familiar with the standards and believed that they represented higher expectations for their kids.

Race to the Top and Title I dollars have supported a number of elements of Metro Nashville's Common Core transition. These funds have been primarily used for two purposes: 1) to place instructional coaches in every elementary school, who work with teachers to adapt their instruction based on formative data, and 2) to support professional development for teachers on the standards. Metro Nashville also draws on community resources, namely a supportive mayor's office and Chamber of Commerce, to fund and/or articulate support for reforms in the district. Yet this support alone is not sufficient to explain the district's promising start to Common Core implementation. Metro Nashville has drawn equally on several key non-material resources: district leadership, a strong relationship with the state, and prior experience with preparing the community for higher standards, followed by lower student scores.

At the highest level, implementation of the Common Core in Metro Nashville is supported by the superintendent's vocal endorsement and elevation of the standards. Nearly all district staff that we interviewed reported hearing the strong, consistent message that Common Core-aligned instruction is the superintendent's top priority and that they trust his leadership on the new standards. The superintendent, in turn, is backed by a supportive, reform-minded local Board. As the superintendent noted, "lots of folks are looking for fireworks, but the Board really does get it and did a nice job of asking questions [during district staff presentations on the standards]."

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Such strong district support for the new standards has helped to focus the energies of Metro Nashville's large and diverse corps of educators and administrators. The superintendent describes the transition as an opportunity to create coherence across the district, explaining that the Common Core "takes us in [the] right direction in terms of what to spend time on" relative to the old, "mile-wide and inch-deep" standards and tests. That requires "making sure teachers and principals know what to abandon." Leaving behind familiar practices and content means that teachers need not only the support but also the trust of the district, especially since they are operating a year ahead of the state's formal timetable for implementation (more below). For their part, many teachers and school administrators in Nashville cite a culture, a number of years in the making, of respectful leadership and frequent communication from the central office. This has been key to gaining educator trust while making the difficult transition to the new standards and assessments.

> "We already took the hit [in 2009] when proficiency levels fell from 90 percent to 30–40 percent. That made the transition to the Common Core a little easier to face."

Insight gleaned through recent experience with raising standards has also proven valuable for the district. Metro Nashville staff report that when the state adopted the Common Core standards, their district was able to adapt the communications structures used during the rollout of higher state standards in 2009, such as community liaisons to churches and parent academies. Given their recent experience with raising academic standards, educators and the general public were less fazed by Common Core adoption. As one district staff member explained, "We already took the hit [in 2009] when proficiency levels fell from 90 percent to 30–40 percent. That made the transition to the Common Core a little easier to face." Conversations with parents and community members revealed similar support for Common Core. Many reported that they understood and believed that higher standards are needed to benchmark students in Nashville against others around the country and the world. The ongoing dialogue around higher standards has also buffered Metro Nashville somewhat from the conservative anti-Common Core backlash around the state. District administrators report hearing some community dissatisfaction around the amount of testing, but little pushback in the vein of "federal overreach" or widespread political opposition.

Finally, Metro Nashville draws extensively from the well of Common Core resources and leadership of its active state education agency, particularly in the areas of curriculum and professional development. Since adopting Common Core, district administrators have worked closely with the state's department of curriculum and instruction to adapt the statewide "training of trainers" program to fit Metro Nashville's model of instructional coaching. District coaches have a sustained relationship with the state, frequently participating in state-led Common Core training and attending monthly statewide meetings. During the district's 2012–13 ELA textbook adoption process, Metro Nashville relied on the state's judgment about which products were truly aligned with the Common Core, considering only those five publishers approved by the state. District administrators and coaches also report consistently using the state's TNCore.org site for Common Core-aligned supplemental curricular resources and professional development materials.

Like many districts, Metro Nashville started implementing the Common Core before fully aligned textbooks were available. The district now has a state-vetted ELA textbook in place for K–6 and will adopt a new math text in 2015. Transitioning to the Common Core without a completely aligned curriculum was a substantial challenge for Metro Nashville teachers, though the district reports targeted trainings on the standards themselves helped teachers better understand the new teaching and learning expectations.

Metro Nashville's Common Core implementation considerably predated the textbook adoption calendar. With district staff and leadership enthusiastic about the promise of the new standards, Metro Nashville started implementing the Common Core two years ahead of the time that reading textbooks were to be adopted, and three years ahead of math textbook adoption. During the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years, Metro Nashville teachers and administrators relied on district-wide frameworks based on the principles of Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math—which emphasize student-centered pedagogy—to guide instruction.[1] The district also provided curriculum maps and guidance to help teachers adapt their current textbooks to the demands of the Common Core. Individual educators report supplementing these guides with lessons and units adapted either from textbooks that pre-dated the Common Core or from national, online resources.

Metro Nashville started the 2013–14 school year with a new textbook for K–6 English, vetted by the Tennessee Department of Education for alignment and adopted with significant input from MNPS teachers. Adoption of this textbook—Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's *Journeys* (adopted by 78 percent of districts in the state)—was the result of an extensive process executed by a cadre of six to eight district-vetted and trained teachers and specialists at each grade level (see Appendix for *Journeys* review). The textbook adoption committee interviewed five publishers whose materials were evaluated and approved by the state Department of Education as aligned to the standards. District administrators express

confidence in the alignment of *Journeys* to the Common Core ELA standards, citing its complexity of text selections and its organization per the grade-sequential development of each Common Core standard.

The district will replicate this process during math textbook adoption in the 2014–15 school year, and in the meantime continues to provide annually updated guidance to teachers for adapting the current math textbooks (adopted in 2011–12, before high-quality aligned textbooks were widely available).[2]

> **“ District leaders articulated at least one positive aspect of transitioning to the Common Core prior to formal textbook adoption: The process empowered Metro Nashville educators to take ownership over curricular materials and supported a deeper understanding of the new standards. ”**

However, for a district as large as Metro Nashville, implementing the standards without a full, Common Core-aligned curriculum posed a substantial quality-control risk during the transition. Elementary teachers were left without an aligned textbook for reading for two years—and will be without an aligned math textbook for three years. This has understandably led to real implementation challenges during the transition. Instructional coaches work with teachers in each school to find, evaluate, and disseminate materials that support the new standards, such as lesson plans and texts. But there is no formal measure of quality in place in the district to ensure that the materials are truly Common Core-aligned. During the first two years of implementation, coaches reported that, in some cases, teachers were not questioning or being discerning enough about the alignment of the lessons and activities that they found online or from other sources. Teachers themselves described at times feeling overwhelmed by the demands to find, rewrite, and implement all-new lesson plans, explaining that “all our teachers feel like they’re new teachers right now.”

District leaders articulated at least one positive aspect of transitioning to the Common Core prior to formal textbook adoption: The process empowered Metro Nashville educators to take ownership over curricular materials and supported a deeper understanding of the new standards. When interviewed during this transitional period, many teachers explained that they appreciated the opportunity to exercise their professional judgment over materials, especially compared to a district-enforced “checklist mentality” (i.e., simply getting through or covering that day or week’s lesson). Other teachers reported shelving their old and not particularly well-liked textbooks with enthusiasm.

District administrators also felt that, while challenging, the transition “gave teachers a baseline” for the Common Core, helping them to recognize the kinds of materials that the new standards demand. Teachers were trained using the textbook, *Journeys* (Houghton Mifflin), throughout the summer of 2013 and start of the 2013–14 school year. (It was adopted in 2012–13.[3]) During this time, district administrators reported that teachers were evaluating the new materials, and judging where they needed supplemental texts, based on their now two years of experience with implementing the standards.

In short, district leaders in Metro Nashville believe that their transition to the new standards, despite its many challenges, has helped teachers grapple with the implications of the standards and hone their judgment about alignment of materials. In the end, student performance and mastery of the standards will be the ultimate evidence of whether this strategy was successful. As an early implementer, Metro Nashville will provide key insights as to whether the additional transitional learning years for teachers—spent in “trial and error” with materials—has helped facilitate the major classroom changes required by Common Core.

Tennessee's teacher evaluation system, tied to student achievement, has raised the stakes of student performance for Metro Nashville teachers. These higher stakes, coupled with a lack of information about pending PARCC assessments, are leaving teachers uneasy and the district without accurate data about Common Core-aligned teaching and learning.

As part of its Race to the Top proposal, and consistent with two decades of pioneering work in value-added analysis of teacher quality, Tennessee implemented the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluation system statewide in 2011–12. Under TEAM, teacher evaluations are comprised of observations (50%), student growth (35%) and student achievement (15%). Once the state consortia-developed, Common Core-aligned PARCC assessment is fully operational in the 2014–15 school year, the state and district plan to transition to PARCC as the summative measure of student growth. In the interim, however, teachers remain accountable for student growth on the state's Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessments, which Metro Nashville administrators and educators admit are not fully aligned to the new standards.

> "District trust and rapport with educators will likely hinge on how the upcoming transition to Common Core-aligned assessments and accountability is handled."

The Tennessee Department of Education adjusted the TCAP in 2012–13 to align better to the Common Core by narrowing the focus of the test and dropping some of the state performance indicators that were extraneous to the standards. However, the TCAP-to-PARCC transition creates a situation wherein teachers are teaching to new standards, but students are being tested (and teachers' value-added evaluation scores are therefore based) largely on the old standards. Though PARCC tests will not be available until the 2014–15 school year, the state has decided to continue its use of the TEAM evaluation model during the implementation of the new standards. Teachers are understandably uneasy; as one district administrator explained, "You're telling teachers that Common Core is the most important thing, but testing them only slightly on the Common Core. The [TCAP] assessments do not have the same depth that the new standards do." Given the lag in rolling out Common Core-aligned assessments, the district has to ask teachers to trust them that teaching to the new standards will translate to better student performance on not only the PARCC assessments in 2015, but the TCAP too. "The message," one administrator said the district is sending, "is if you have depth of knowledge and understanding in Common Core, it will translate to end of year tests, but we can't demonstrate it with data."

The district's recent 2013 TCAP results shed some light on these tensions. Similar to other districts around the state, Metro Nashville student performance was flat in reading, but showed growth in math. Administrators suspect the improvements in math stem from teachers' use of Common Core-aligned pilot assessments over the past two school years, which featured constructed-response items.[4] Administrators expect reading performance to improve as teachers gain more familiarity with aligned instruction (and as that instruction is supported by a new textbook, as described in the preceding section). Like teachers, though, they are still in a "wait and see" holding pattern until fully aligned Common Core assessments are available.

In the meantime, teachers report feeling anxious about the lack of information regarding the new PARCC assessments and the sample formative assessments based on PARCC. Given the magnitude of the shifts in practice and student expectations required by the Common Core versus the current Tennessee standards, many of Metro Nashville's teachers feel, as one described, that the new assessments are "the monster off in the woods" for their performance evaluations.

In many other districts, the mismatch between standards and assessments (and therefore teacher evaluation) would likely lead to teacher resistance to the new standards. While this may be the case among some pockets of teachers in Metro Nashville, most teachers reported moving forward with Common Core implementation because of the trust they place in central office and the superintendent. Going forward, however, district trust and rapport with educators will likely hinge on how the upcoming transition to Common Core-aligned assessments and accountability is handled.

Summary of Findings

Uniquely poised going into the transition, Metro Nashville Public Schools has drawn on dedicated funding, good partnerships with the state, and strong local leadership in its early rollout of the Common Core. High levels of communication and a culture of trust among educators, the district, and the central office have helped Metro Nashville to move forward with the Common Core without major opposition, despite emerging pushback in other areas of the state. The transition to the new standards has not been without challenges in the district, and the early adoption of the standards—prior to the state's textbook adoption timeline—presented a particular challenge as teachers struggled to find and create high-quality transitional curricular materials. But the district believes the short-term challenges and at times rocky transition have deepened teacher learning about the demands and details of the new standards, improving conditions for quality implementation in the long run. Metro Nashville's continued implementation challenge now lies in navigating the complexities of integrating teacher evaluation reforms with the ongoing transition to new Common Core-aligned assessments.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Metro Nashville

ALL ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, REFER TO METRO NASHVILLE'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND ELEMENTARY DIVISION OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE.	
Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials	◆ District-level instructional leaders developed guidance documents that cite specific lessons in existing textbooks to support each Common Core standard for the grade; these materials are provided to teachers online, via a wiki site. ◆ In addition, teachers are finding and using supplemental content-rich informational texts from *Limitless Libraries* (municipal library access). ◆ The district is still using instructional frameworks built upon Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math approaches, which were in place before CCSS adoption. The district is also using the *Envision* math textbook, adopted prior to full implementation of the Common Core, which is not fully aligned to the new standards. ◆ In 2012–13, the district adopted a new ELA textbook for K–6 (*Journeys* by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing) through an extensive process executed by vetted, trained teachers and specialists at each grade level. The textbook was approved by the TDOE for alignment to the CCSS in 2012.
Use of CCSS-aligned Assessments	◆ District RTT funds support twelve data coaches across the district to work with schools on analysis and interpretation of student data. ◆ The district is implementing a new instructional management system called School Net and hosts a "scorecard," an interactive tool that enables teachers and schools to access and use student learning data. ◆ During spring of the 2012–13 school year, TN DOE was in the process of aligning the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) to CCSS (e.g., removing 15–25 percent of the state performance indicators (SPIs) in each grade for math to reflect greater focus). Revised TCAP assessments (with fewer SPIs) were administered starting in the 2012–13 school year. ◆ The district uses the following formative assessments: » Discovery Education Assessments (DEA), formerly ThinkLink. This assessment is administered two to three times per year in math and reading/ELA for grades 2–8. DEA is aligned to Tennessee content but not necessarily to CCSS. » DIBELS assessment (a screening for reading issues) in grades K–4. ◆ The district tests students in math and ELA/reading in grades 2–8 three times per year. The district assesses a subset of students in grades 9–12 in Algebra I, English II and Biology throughout the year. Results are provided back to schools within a few weeks. ◆ Other formative assessments are largely school-based. Schools are starting to use sample items from PARCC as they are released.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Metro Nashville (cont'd)

ALL ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, REFER TO METRO NASHVILLE'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND ELEMENTARY DIVISION OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE.	
Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	◆ The Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) was implemented statewide in 2011–12. Under TEAM, teachers' final evaluation status is comprised of observations (50%), student growth (35%) and student achievement (15%). Once CCSS-aligned TCAP (and, in 2015, PARCC) assessment data are available, student achievement against the CCSS measured by these tests will be part of teachers' scores. ◆ The district reports that its classroom observation instruments are closely aligned to CCSS expectations, emphasizing the standards' depth and instructional shifts.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	◆ The district pays for a coach in every elementary school (using Title I and Title II funds) who serves as the key deliverer of professional development. The district elementary curriculum director identifies a pool of coaching candidates and what they are expected to do; principals select from that pool. (Secondary teachers report a lack of dedicated coaches for middle schools; high schools do not have coaches.) ◆ The district trains coaches to work with school staff and sends them to state trainings. Metro Nashville also hosts intensive summer institutes for teachers focused on the CCSS, starting with K–2 in 2010–11 and 2011–12, and grades 5–8 in 2012–13. The district tracks participation (and to some extent, quality) of PD offerings through electronic registration and real-time teacher feedback. ◆ Coaches or assistant principals lead school-based weekly team meetings that support CCSS implementation. Principals identify teachers' needs through observations and raise them to coaches, who conduct the training. ◆ Coaches facilitate the professional learning of principals and assistant principals.
Communication and Buy-in	◆ The district developed a communications plan based on previously successful initiatives, such as the TN SCORE's "Expect More, Achieve More" campaign. ◆ Metro Nashville offers workshops for parents called "Parent University," which include dedicated sessions on CCSS; the district also hosts a website, *Parent Resources for Common Core*, with resource links. ◆ The district tracks media mentions, customer service calls, attendance, and requests for parent workshops and presentations on CCSS.

Appendix: Tennessee Textbook Review Instrument: Reading (3-8 content)

Program category (choose one):

☒ Basal
☐ Co-basal
☐ Alt. level: high
☐ Alt. level: low

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin
Edition: Journeys Common Core
Title of program: Journeys
Copyright year: 2014

Ratings **M -** meets requirement **N -** does not meet requirement

A. NON-NEGOTIABLE REQUIREMENTS	COMMENTS
I. Quality of Text	
1. RANGE OF TEXT: 50% of reading selections in the submission are high quality non-fiction/ informational texts and instructional time is divided equally between literary and informational text. **Rating: M**	A review of the tables of contents in grade 3–5 reveals the ratio of fiction to nonfiction/informational text to be approximately 50/50.
2. COMPLEXITY OF TEXT: The submission exhibits concrete evidence that research-based *quantitative* and *qualitative* measures have been used in selection of complex texts that align to the standards. Further, submissions will include a demonstrable staircase of text complexity as materials progress across grade bands. **Rating: M**	The program gives concrete evidence that quantitative and qualitative measures have been used. The teacher's editions include documentation of this component. The reading levels and text complexity chart can be located in the bound CCS Correlation component provided by the publisher. *Quantitative: Lexile levels seem more sporadic than arranged on a demonstrable staircase of text complexity. In the first unit for 3rd grade, the Lexile progression is 660, 760, 660, 700, 960, 810, 610, 630, 860. In the final unit for 3rd grade, the Lexile progression is 480, 870, 920, 570, 750, 720, 770, 570, 660. It is interesting to note that the Lexile level for the final reading selection of the year is identical to the Lexile Level for the first reading selection of the year.* Qualitative: The publisher assigns each text with clear indicators of text complexity, such as text structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands, and purpose/levels of meaning. Each indicator is justified by specific evidence from the reading selection.
3. SUFFICIENT PRACTICE IN READING COMPLEX TEXTS: The submission provides all students, including those who are below grade level, with extensive (at least weekly) opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex text as required by the standards. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re- reading, discussion, and writing about the ideas, events, and information found there. This opportunity is offered regularly and systematically through all K–5 materials. **Rating: M**	All students encounter complex texts several times per week. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re-reading and discussion of ideas offered there. Examples include "When Manny says he thinks he can score, how is Gayle's reaction different from Hiro's?" (Grade 3, "A New Team of Heroes") and "What evidence does the author provide to support the idea that Erik was going to succeed and be a leader at rock climbing?" (Grade 3, "Becoming Anything He Wants to Be").
II. Quality of Questions & Tasks	
4. FOCUS ON THE TEXT IS THE CENTER OF ALL LESSONS: Significant pre- reading activities and suggested approaches to teacher scaffolding are highly focused and begin with the text itself. Pre-reading activities should be no more than 10% of time devoted to any reading instruction. **Rating: M**	Pre-reading discussions are short and consist of previewing the topic and previewing the text.

5. INCLUSION OF TEXT DEPENDENT AND TEXT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: 80 % of all questions in the submission are high-quality sequences of text- dependent & text-specific questions. The overwhelming majority of questions are text-specific and draw student attention to the particulars in the text. **Rating: M**	The Journeys teacher's edition used textual evidence-based questioning throughout the anchor text in the First Read question boxes. The student book also gives a systematic way of digging deeper into the text. There are comprehension questions, essential questions, and writing in response to the text questions after each anchor text.
III. Writing	
6. WRITING TO SOURCES: Written and oral tasks at all grade levels require students to confront the text directly, to draw on textual evidence, and to support valid inferences from the text. Writing tasks should be balanced between argumentative, explanatory, and narrative (conveying real or imaginary experiences) modes. **Rating: M**	Writing tasks are evenly balanced between argumentative, explanatory, and narrative modes. Writing tasks require students to use the text as a direct model, such as in the 3rd grade Unit on "Judy Moody Saves the World". Students write a persuasive letter during the unit and are consistently referring back to the anchor text to use it as a model for writing. Other examples of text-dependent writing tasks include the 5th grade Lesson 10 "Write about Reading" task, "Would you agree that one of the main ideas of this section could be stated as 'mother cougars know best'? Write a paragraph explaining your opinion" and the 5th grade Lesson 17 "Write about Reading" prompt, "Write a paragraph in which you discuss whether you are satisfied with the resolution of the story".
IV. Foundational Reading	
7. INCLUSION OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR ALL ASPECTS OF FOUNDATIONAL READING: Materials provide explicit and systematic instruction and diagnostic support in **1) concepts of print, 2) phonological awareness, 3) vocabulary, 4) development, 5) syntax,** and **6) fluency**. These foundational skills are necessary and central components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines. **Rating: M**	**1) Concepts of print -** There is some instruction for analyzing illustrations, text features, etc., primarily in the pre- reading discussions. **2) Phonics** - Phonics are taught systematically throughout the reading units. **3) Vocabulary** - here is a comprehensive language and literacy guide with small group and whole group lessons, a word study teacher's guide, and an intensive Oral Vocabulary component in the 3rd grade which includes two Read Aloud books and lesson plans. **4) Development** - Attention is given on the second reading of each passage to the author's development of theme or central idea. **5) Syntax** - Not much attention is paid to the unpacking of longer sentences, analysis of sentence length, word order, etc. **6) Fluency** - Expression, intonation, phrasing, reading rate, and accuracy are taught systematically. There are systematic assessments for student fluency.
Note: Do not proceed to the following sections until following non-negotiables protocol in instructions document	
B. PUBLISHERS' CRITERIA REQUIREMENTS *B(2): 3–8 Content*	**COMMENTS**
I. Key Criteria For Text Selection	
I. a. Text Complexity	
1. Texts for each grade band align with the complexity requirements outlined in the Common Core Standards.	The texts are leveled according to Lexile rating. In Component 3 of the Correlation document, the median number for the selections from the student book, magazines, and trade books fall in the appropriate range. The qualitative measures for the text complexity are met.
2. All students (including those who are behind) have extensive opportunity to encounter grade-level complex text.	Grade-level texts are a key component in whole-group instruction.
3. Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and re-reading are provided regularly at each grade.	Shorter, challenging texts such as informational articles are provided regularly in each unit in each grade level.
4. Novels, plays, and other extended full-length readings are also provided with opportunities for close reading.	Full-length readings such as plays, descriptive articles, persuasive articles, and realistic fiction pieces are provided at least once in each unit. Novels were included as trade books but did not seem to be part of regular whole-group instruction.
5. Additional materials aim to increase regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students' interests while developing both their knowledge base and joy in reading.	High-quality literature in the form of full-length trade books aim to increase regular independent reading. These texts appeal to student interests and aim to develop their knowledge base and joy in reading.

I. b. Range and Quality of Texts	
1. In grades 3–5, literacy programs shift the balance of texts and instructional time to include equal measures of literary and informational texts; informational texts cover content from across the disciplines. In grades 6–12 (where applicable), the balance shifts toward reading substantially more literary nonfiction.	Informational texts cover content from across the disciplines, such as American history, the arts, civics, communication, world cultures, earth science, health and safety, math, media, physical science, social relationships, and technology/ innovation. Although the balance of texts is shifted toward informational reading and literary non-fiction, there is not a demonstrable increase in attention devoted to non-fiction as grade levels progress, as evidenced by the following percentages: 3rd grade: Literature 45%; Informational text 55%, 4th Literature 45%; Informational text 55%, 5th grade: Literature 51%; Informational text 49%, and 6th grade: Literature 44%; Informational text 56%.
2. The quality of the suggested texts is high—they are worth reading closely and exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide useful information.	Texts with grade-level Lexile levels and text complexity are a key component in whole-group instruction. Texts exhibit exceptional craft and are worth reading and re-reading.
3. Specific texts or text types named in the Standards are included.	The specific text types named in the Standards for Grade 3 (fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures) are included. The specific text types named in the Standards for Grade 4–5 (stories, dramas, and poems) are included, although the number of drama selections is limited.
4. Within a sequence or collection of texts, specific anchor texts are selected for especially careful reading.	Anchor texts are labeled as such and are selected for especially careful reading.
II. Key Criteria For Questions and Tasks	
II. a. High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks	
1. A significant percentage (at least 80%) of tasks and questions are text- dependent.	The overwhelming majority of questions are high-quality sequences of text-dependent and text-specific questions.
2. High-quality sequences of text-dependent questions elicit sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their impact.	Text-dependent questions, both teacher-to-student and student-to-student, are high-quality and elicit sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their impact.
3. Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting valid inferences from the text.	Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting valid inferences from the text.
4. Instructional design cultivates student interest and engagement in reading rich texts carefully.	High quality materials for vocabulary in context and student reflection about the central issues of the text provide for high student interest and engagement with the anchor texts.
5. Materials provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close reading of specific texts.	Questions involving attention to text features and development of the author's central idea, for example, require students to build knowledge through close reading.
6. Questions and tasks attend to analyzing the arguments and information at the heart of informational text.	Questions and tasks after anchor texts require analysis of the central information or argument, such as analyzing how well the author achieved his/her intended purpose.
II. b. Cultivating Students' Ability to Read Complex Texts Independently	
1. Scaffolds enable all students to experience rather than avoid the complexity of the text.	Scaffolds such as pre-teaching, focused teacher questioning during reading, and close reading for follow-up allow all students to experience rather than avoid the text.
2. Reading strategies support comprehension of specific texts and the focus on building knowledge and insight.	Reading strategies such as forming predictions, asking questions, summarizing, and making comparisons support comprehension of specific texts.
3. Design for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction cultivates student responsibility and independence.	Instructional materials are devoted to whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction.

4. Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further evaluation or interpretation.	Questions and tasks facilitate student comprehension of the text first before students move to questions requiring further evaluation or interpretation.
5. Materials make the text the focus of instruction by avoiding features that distract from the text.	Text features support the text by inciting curiosity about what the text says explicitly. These features enhance the text rather than distracting from it.
6. Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.	Weekly tests and periodic assessments in vocabulary, reading comprehension, decoding words, and grammar provide genuinely measured progress.
III. Key Criteria For Academic Vocabulary	
1. Materials focus on academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.	Vocabulary instruction is rich and varied through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Tier II and Tier III vocabulary levels are emphasized.
IV. Key Criteria For Writing to Sources and Research	
1. Materials portray writing to sources as a key task.	Writing to Sources is a key question at the end of each anchor text. The most significant writing tasks for each unit are both inspired by the anchor text and encourage explicit textual evidence for support. Some questioning from the student text related more to self rather than text evidence. For example, in Grade 3 unit 2 page 264, students are asked, "Do you think the author did a good job illustrating this book? Why or why not?"
2. Materials focus on forming arguments as well as informative writing.	Major writing tasks are evenly divided among narrative, informational, and argumentative writing prompts.
3. Materials make it clear that student writing should be responsive to the needs of the audience and the particulars of the text in question.	The Common Core writing handbook contains instruction in the Purposes for Writing. The students are asked to identify the task, audience, and purpose before beginning to write.
4. Students are given extensive practice with short, focused research projects.	Research performance tasks are incorporated into each of the six major units of study. These research tasks are divided up into smaller, regular steps.
V. Additional Key Criteria for Student Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking	
1. Materials provide systematic opportunities for students to read complex text with fluency.	Each unit the materials cycle through a variety of fluency skills such as intonation, accuracy, and rate, and apply these skills to complex texts. These fluency skills are assessed regularly through the "Cold Reads" assessment component.
2. Materials help teachers plan substantive academic discussions.	Guiding information in the margins of the teacher's edition helps the teacher to plan substantive academic discussions.
3. Materials use multimedia and technology to deepen attention to evidence and texts.	Digital resources such as the Write-In Reader eBook encourage students to pay particular attention to evidence in the text.
4. Materials embrace the most significant grammar and language conventions.	Significant grammar and language conventions are addressed regularly through a grammar focus as part of each lesson.
C. PROGRAM DESIGN	**COMMENTS**
I. Equity and Accessibility	
I. a. Equity	
1. Content is accurate and free of bias (social, religious, racial, gender, ethnic).	Materials seemed free of social, religious, racial, gender, and ethnic bias.
2. Content represents a wide array of cultures and experiences, allowing students to learn about situations similar to and different from their own personal experiences.	Materials address a wide array of cultures and experiences.

I. b. Accessibility for all Students, Including Special Populations	
1. Materials and activities are responsive and adaptable to a variety of learning styles and developmental differences, including students requiring remediation, and offer teachers strategies to meet the needs of a range of learners.	Ample resources are provided for strategic and intensive intervention for students needing extra support.
2. The program provides resources for acceleration and extension of learning.	During small group activities, there are strategies and materials provided for advanced learners. There are also challenge activities at each literacy center activity (comprehension and fluency, word study, and think and write).
3. The program provides resources for supporting English Language Learners (ELL's) regular and active participation with grade-level text.	Resources such as visuals, gestures, comprehensible input, peer supported learning, help with idiomatic language, sentence frames, and expanded language production assist English Language Learners access core content with the whole group.
4. The program incorporates strategies, materials, activities, etc., that consider the special needs of all students, especially students with disabilities, and follows the principles of Universal Design.	The program incorporates strategies such as leveled readers, full audio texts, and multiple strategies for differentiation to serve students with special needs. Materials follow principals of Universal Design such as "3c. Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills, 3d. Arrange information consistent with its importance, and 3e. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion."
5. The program allows and encourages all students, regardless of aptitude or background, to work with rich and rigorous grade-level texts, questions, and writing prompts.	All students encounter complex texts several times per week. Materials direct teachers to return to focused parts of the text to guide students through re-reading and discussion of ideas offered there.
II. Structure and Ease of Use	
II. a. Physical Design and Structure	
1. The materials and sections within books are arranged in a logically- ordered/organized, clear structure so that teachers and students can easily access the content.	Overview materials and where each lesson/unit is in the sequence of learning are clear and easy to find.
II. b. Usefulness for Teacher and Students	
1. Materials provide clear and concise directions to teachers and students that are clearly connected to expected learning outcome.	The language of teacher questions and teacher tips is clearly connected to the expected learning outcomes.
2. Materials include features to help in searching and locating information (e.g., table of contents, menu or map of content, index, goals/objectives, outlines, checklists, etc.) and a list explaining where the relevant Common Core Standards are covered in the program.	Common Core Standards are clearly identified on each page. The table of contents, index, etc. are prominently located and easy to find.
3. Student resources include review and practice resources.	Multiple kinds of review and practice resources are included.
4. Strategies and activities are engaging, interactive, authentic, and of high- interest, using grade-appropriate content relevant to students' lives.	Writing activities, discussion topics, and multi-media ancillaries are just a few of the strategies for instruction that add interest/engagement.
II. c. Focus, Coherence, and Rigor	
1. The teacher and student can reasonably complete the amount of content presented in the submission within a regular school year.	Pacing guides are included and seem reasonably accurate/feasible.

2. All components of the program interact and complement each other to reflect an integrated, comprehensive design which is coherent, sequenced, and systematic.	Materials are closely knit together to support unit themes.
3. As grade levels progress, materials reflect an increasing level of rigor to match the changing expectations of the Common Core State Standards.	The materials reflect an increasing level of rigor as the grade levels progress.
III. Assessment Components	
1. The program offers multiple easily-implemented assessments for use in diagnosing student ability and monitoring ongoing progress.	Quick, on the spot assessments are included in the teacher edition margins alongside the text. Other easily- implemented assessments include ready-to-use sentences for vocabulary assessments, rubrics for writing assessments, pre-made reading comprehension assessments, and teacher guides for writing conference assessments.
2. Assessments are aligned with instructional materials and standards from *all* strands of the Common Core State Standards (and clearly denote which standards are emphasized in each assessment), with a special focus on reading foundations and fluency.	Common Core State Standards are referenced on the Teacher's Edition assessment pages, clearly denoting which standards are emphasized in each assessment.
3. The program includes aligned rubrics and scoring guidelines that provide sufficient guidance to teachers for interpreting student performance and suggestions for follow-up.	Each lesson in the Teacher's Edition includes Progress Monitoring pages that offer specific guidance on how to proceed based on student assessment results.
4. Assessment tasks come in multiple formats (including both quick- response items and extended constructed response/performance-based items) and assess a variety of types of knowledge/thinking; the format is chosen carefully and specifically to adhere to the relevant standard and learning outcome.	Both quick response items and extended constructed response/performance-based items are utilized for assessment. Various types of thinking from Webb's Depth of Knowledge are reflected in the assessments.
IV. Technology and Media Components	
1. All technology and media components serve the crucial purpose of enhancing instruction/learning and support scientifically-based instructional practices.	Technology resources include background videos and interactive whiteboard student writing samples for editing/revision, both of which are scientifically based instructional practices.
2. Technology-rich resources work properly without the purchase of additional software, are platform-neutral (i.e., will run on Windows or other platforms), and run without error.	According to the publisher, all of the Interactive Whiteboard lessons are fully operational, involve no costs, and can be downloaded once per computer.
3. Resources are user-friendly and interactive, have an easy-to-operate interface, and allow the user to control the pace and choice of activity.	According to the publisher, all of the Interactive Whiteboard lessons are fully operational, involve no costs, and can be downloaded once per computer. There are over three hundred Journeys Interactive Whiteboard Activities on a Smart Board.
IV. Research Base	
1. Materials have a clear and documented research base, with evidence of usability and efficacy with a wide range of students, and a research plan for how the efficacy of materials will be assessed and improved over time.	Instructional strategies are sound and research-based. In the Teacher's Edition, the publisher provides the names of the individuals who conducted significant portions of the research. Evidence of usability and efficacy with students is not documented in the teacher's edition or on the website.
LETTER GRADE (A-F)	**A**
RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION (Y/N)? *(To be recommended, program must meet all seven non- negotiables and receive a letter grade of C or above)*	**Y**

Endnotes

1. At this time, we lack expert reviews and evidence for whether or not the Balanced Literacy and Balanced Math approaches are compatible with the greater rigor expected in the Common Core standards. Curriculum administrators in Metro Nashville believe that these approaches support student success with the Common Core in their schools.

2. This research focused on the elementary divisions and functions in Metro Nashville. The plans and sequence for adoption and rollout of curricular materials for math, ELA, and other courses at the middle and secondary level are critical for the district's ultimate success with implementation but outside the scope of this report.

3. In 2012–13, the district adopted *Journeys* via an extensive process spearheaded by vetted, trained teachers and specialists at each grade level. The textbook had been approved by the TDOE (in 2012) for alignment to the CCSS. See the Appendix for the district's review of *Journeys*.

4. Constructed-response questions ask students to apply knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to real-world, standards-driven performance tasks. They are also called "open-response" items.