

CALVERT LEARNING

Calvert Learning is appreciative of the opportunity to respond to EdReports’s review of the K-5 Calvert ELA Curriculum. The service EdReports provides is invaluable to the education community. Calvert has had the privilege of serving learners in non-traditional settings for over a century and is proud of serving more than 500,000 alumni with exceptional stories and outcomes fostered through a Calvert experience. Calvert Learning’s digital curriculum, designed for fully online learning in virtual schools, has demonstrated excellent student outcomes in ongoing [research](#), which speaks to the efficacy of the innovative project-based design and foundations in active learning. While many aspects of the curriculum were reviewed favorably by EdReports, Calvert Learning believes the evaluation tool utilized in these reviews reflects a rubric for curricula designed to serve students physically present in a collaborative classroom led by a teacher, rather than virtual school students working through a curriculum individually and at their own pace, helped by a Learning Guide and generally asynchronous interactions with a teacher. While not all aspects of the Calvert curriculum will align to the evaluation rubric, EdReports offered valuable feedback, and due to the digital nature of the Calvert product, has already been implemented and is available for review in May 2019.

Gateway One: Text Quality and Alignment to Standards

Indicator 1d – Calvert agrees that the cognitive burden must remain on students as much as possible and agrees that independence and mastery should increase together. When the Calvert materials continue to offer scaffolding at the same frequency within and across grades, it is done purposefully to support Learning Guides being able to respond to the vast spectrum of learner needs they encounter in a virtual school setting. As such, scaffolding is offered in-line with the learning, rather than as a separate volume, with guidance as to how to fade it for some learners and continue to use it for others as appropriate. Thus Calvert’s approach to scaffolding is intentionally different for virtual schools, but this difference based on best practices in virtual schooling is at odds with the rubric for this indicator.

Indicator 1e – Calvert recognizes the importance of educators understanding the need for the rationale for text choices to be included in the curriculum. To this end, text complexity analyses are offered for all anchor and supporting texts in each unit. Each text for study includes a rationale via a link in the Getting Started lesson. Each rationale addresses the three aspects of complexity as designated by p. 4 in [Appendix A](#) of the Common Core State Standards. We believe that the rationales included via a link may have been overlooked in the review process.

Indicator 1h – Calvert places a premium on active learning, including high-quality sequences of questions that lead to understanding on a culminating task. While the Calvert curriculum includes projects, it was our goal to provide students with a number of different ways to demonstrate their learning through culminating tasks that show both near and far transfer from the learning in the lesson. The reviews note that the question sequences and texts in lessons do not always link to the projects, and this is by design. Projects in Calvert’s context are evidence of transfer of learning into real-world contexts and are not the only culminating tasks. Question sequences sometimes relate to the reading/writing culminating task just for the lesson part or day, or the mastery assessment as the culminating task at the end of each multi-day lesson.

Indicator 1i – Requiring that students have evidence-based discussions was very much a goal of the Calvert curriculum, even given that students in a virtual context generally do not have the same opportunities to learn in proximity to other students. To this end, the Calvert curriculum supports daily opportunities for students to speak with their Learning Guide and also provides a collaboration feature for students to asynchronously communicate with peers, a notable feature in a virtual curriculum. Thus, Calvert’s approach to supporting virtual school student discussions is intentionally different than discussions in traditional classroom settings, but as such Calvert did not score as well as we anticipated on all rows related to speaking and listening.

Indicator 1o – Research is clear that systematic instruction of foundational skills is required for reading success, and Calvert’s curriculum is intentionally designed to address this need. Calvert has authored more than 400 additional instances of foundational skills and phonics instruction, which will be added in the 2019-20 curriculum to those already present in the 2018-19 release of the curriculum that was reviewed. With these additional exercises, foundational skills and phonics will be taught daily in K-2, addressing the report’s findings regarding frequency and depth. These additions include systematic direct instruction, multiple opportunities to practice the skill in and out of context, as well as frequent assessment of foundational skills. The design of these activities is consistent with [research](#) regarding pedagogy, frequency, and systematic organization, and the new 2019-20 release is that one that should be reviewed with regard to this indicator.

Indicator 1q – In full agreement with our EdReports’ review, Calvert’s 2019-2020 version has been improved to present that much more of an increased focus on decoding and sight words. More than 200 such activities have been added to the 2019-2020 release. New fluency activities include modeling, videos, and practice, and are accompanied with a fluency rubric for easy and systematic assessment of fluency progress. High-frequency words are practiced and assessed throughout the grade. The new 2019-20 release is that one that should be reviewed with regard to this indicator.

Indicator 1r – Calvert is in full agreement that vocabulary instruction is essential in a Language Arts curriculum. In addition to the activities in the 2018-19 release, Calvert has authored more than 200 new instances of vocabulary and word solving instruction, which are being added to the 2019-2020 curriculum. These activities stress transferrable strategies including morphology, etymology, affixes, word solving through context clues, and utilization of items within the text to build vocabulary knowledge. The new 2019-20 release is that one that should be reviewed with regard to this indicator.

Indicator 1s – Calvert agrees that frequent assessment is necessary to inform instruction and provide the right supports for students who have not yet achieved mastery. Calvert has authored more than 600 additional instances of differentiation and assessment to be added in the 2019-2020 release above and beyond those in the 2018-19 release. Each of these activities specifies observable student indicators to assist educators in selecting appropriate tiered interventions while keeping rigor high. Differentiation strategies are provided consistent with recent [research](#) regarding English Language Learners, and more than 85% of the strategies added are also effective for an English Language Learner population. Additionally, brief assessments have been added to assess struggling students’ progress toward mastery of reading and writing skills even more frequently than before.

Gateway Two: Building Knowledge with Texts, Vocabulary, and Tasks

Indicator 2a – Given the importance of building subject knowledge in Language Arts, each unit of the Calvert curriculum is aligned to a topic, such as natural phenomena, and all texts within are aligned to that topic. Students read voluminously on subject matter topics within lessons to build knowledge. Additionally, more texts are offered in mastery activities at the end of each lesson that are also about building knowledge of the same unit topic. Calvert has authored more than 200 additional instances of adding texts to build knowledge on topics to be added to the 2019-2020 release above and beyond those in the 2018-19 release. The new 2019-20 release is that one that should be reviewed with regard to this indicator.

Indicator 2c – Calvert agrees that students must learn to integrate knowledge across texts, and, in each unit, students explore the unit topic through different texts and produce writing to analyze and integrate knowledge between multiple texts. Additionally, the projects in each unit are intentionally designed to require integration of topical knowledge gained from research and texts to demonstrate learning.

Indicator 2d – Demonstration of knowledge of a topic is a goal of the Calvert curriculum, and evidence of this occurs in assessment and writing activities within each lesson. The evaluation seems to have focused narrowly on only the curriculum projects as the place to look for opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge of a topic. While this is frequently an aspect of our projects and how they are scored per their rubric, this is not actually the purpose of projects; rather, projects are meant to show the transfer of Common Core literacy skills, not subject matter knowledge. That said, the questions and tasks within lessons are intentionally providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate knowledge of topics. However, these questions and tasks seem to have been overlooked in evaluating this indicator.

Indicator 2g – It is an explicit goal of Calvert’s curriculum design that students frequently conduct research through reading and writing tasks in the lessons. The report seems to indicate that students have only some opportunities to incorporate research skills, but these findings seem too narrowly focused on just the projects in the curriculum. In contrast to findings that “...students do not necessarily need to analyze a topic in order to complete the project,” we respectfully suggest that students regularly engage in research an analysis of various topics to complete all the culminating tasks, which include not only our projects, but also our mastery activities at the end of every lesson, and the writing activities within the lessons. Such analysis is written into all these culminating tasks to require the consideration of research findings, synthesis to form an opinion or thorough explanation, and an organized presentation to an audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while EdReports' evaluation rubric is thorough and well-designed, it seems to privilege a curriculum designed to be used in a traditional school setting, which is not the reality of a Calvert virtual school student. Calvert's digital curriculum is designed to support virtual school students working through instruction individually, apart from other students and outside of a classroom context. While Calvert fully agrees with the underlying goals of EdReports' evaluation rubric in providing what we know to be required to support the best ELA learning for student, Calvert's virtual school context requires our curriculum to be designed differently to support the same instructional goals. It seems that a curriculum that is delivered outside of the traditional classroom model isn't easily evaluated with the current rubric. That said, the Calvert materials are proving to be effective in providing instruction to virtual school students as early research shows. Calvert, being a digital curriculum, was able to respond immediately to the feedback provided by EdReports and has addressed several identified areas with more than 2,000 additions to the 2019-20 version of the curriculum across all grades. We are confident that these additions will only further strengthen the learning provided to virtual school students with the Calvert Learning curriculum in addition to improving any subsequent EdReports' review.