

SpringBoard English Language Arts Grade 6–8, 2014 Edition SpringBoard’s Response to EdReports Common Core Program Review

Program Description

SpringBoard English Language Arts Grades 6–8 is a college and career readiness program from the College Board designed to prepare and encourage all students to succeed. More than a collection of texts, SpringBoard English Language Arts provides the tools, content, and supports needed to engage a modern, diverse classroom. The 2014 Edition of SpringBoard is a research-based, comprehensive instructional program developed by the College Board specifically to meet the Common Core State Standards. Fully aligned to the Common Core State Standards, SpringBoard integrates high-quality instructional materials with formative and summative assessments, along with professional development and coaching services.

SpringBoard is organized around performance-based embedded assessments that are the foundation of an instructional pathway integrating reading, writing, language, and speaking and listening. The program is built on the same rigorous strategies and skills found in Advanced Placement (AP) classes: critical thinking, problem solving, and deep contextual understanding. SpringBoard makes rigorous standards accessible to all students and helps to prepare them for success in high school and postsecondary opportunities.

SpringBoard, unlike any other published English language arts program, has been written by teachers for teachers and has been built from the ground up using the Understanding by Design model of curriculum design. All students work with challenging texts and tasks are deliberately and purposefully aligned to standards-based performance tasks that measure their learning in relation to grade-level standards.

In an effort to provide information to the general public and to potential and existing customers, SpringBoard has submitted the 2014 National Edition of SpringBoard ELA for review and evaluation. We see this review not only as information, but as part of a constructive cycle of reviewing, revising and refreshing our curriculum to meet the needs of the ever-expanding body of students, teachers and administrators who may want to use SpringBoard.

Gateway One: Text Quality and Alignment to the Standards

We at SpringBoard appreciate that in all grades, EdReports recognizes that SpringBoard consistently **meets expectations** in **Gateway 1, indicators a–e**. The review notes the quality and complexity of SpringBoard texts that represent a wide range of text types and genres that are engaging for the student and, more importantly, worthy of careful reading, and that support increasing literacy skills over the course of the school year. And further, SpringBoard **meets expectations** in **Gateway 1, indicators k–n**, fully meeting the expectations for on-demand and process writing, opportunities to address different text types of writing, evidence-based writing, and sequenced and embedded language instruction.

Despite the fact that in other indicators reviewers remarked that SpringBoard supports increasing literacy skills for all students and offers a robust independent reading program with strong accountability, for **indicator 1f** they raise concerns about the lack of supports to identify gaps in literacy ability. And the only evidence that seems to relegate this indicator to “partially meets” is the lack of oral and silent reading practice. SpringBoard sees this practice as a natural part of classroom reading routines that depends on the teacher’s assessment of students’ needs in this foundational literacy skill. This is an issue of instructional focus. As a secondary ELA program, SpringBoard focuses instruction on the reading and understanding of complex texts, the production of effective writing and speaking in a range of modes, and the skilled use of standard English conventions; the emphasis is mastery of grade-level ELA content and skills rather than systematic review of foundational reading skills. Reading strategies mentioned in the evaluation such as rereading, thinking aloud, visualizing, chunking the text, and summarizing are part and parcel of every reading in SpringBoard, but not the sole focus of instruction. In SpringBoard, we see this is an issue of differentiation, and in our upcoming 2018 Edition, we have addressed foundational aspects of literacy specifically with our *Foundational Skills Workshop*, which provides teachers with lessons in phonics, word recognition, and fluency for use with students who have not received instruction in these important skills at the primary level and/or have not developed sufficient skills in these foundations to become successful at the secondary level. Close Reading Workshops provide additional differentiation practice in close reading strategies that are already part of the close reading protocol in the ELA materials.

Comments about **indicator 1g** have been closely analyzed and we want to emphasize that SpringBoard teachers are expected to, and are given support to, actively guide student reading and understanding of text, and this guidance, as well as the formative assessment tools such as double-entry journals, graphic organizers, analytical strategies such as Soapstone, and Writing to Sources writing prompts, take students beyond the surface level and give teachers ample opportunities to monitor students’ work and help them build independence in critical thinking and analysis. SpringBoard has taken additional measures in our 2018 Edition to further ensure students dive deeper into texts by creating a more detailed, explicit reading protocol for every experience a student has with a text. This close reading protocol gives special attention to multiple readings of a text, starting with a reading for comprehension and inference that focuses on the vocabulary within the text. A second reading always entails

questioning of a higher order, typical of the kind of text-dependent questioning outlined in the Common Core reading strands and standards. Additional readings as required foster deeper understanding and ask students to transfer their understandings to completing complex tasks that help them extend and synthesize information from the texts they are reading. Additional support to teachers in the form of scaffolded text dependent questions in the Teachers Edition, address the criticism about needing support for students who may need extra work to build proficiency.

1h – It is a misunderstanding of SpringBoard’s Understanding by Design organization and pedagogy to say that the culminating tasks are not “text specific.” The instructional design creates a balanced and complex approach to reading and analyzing text. While our reading protocol effectively addresses the need for a deep understanding of text, our integrated reading and writing connection means that our embedded performance-based assessments use the texts and tasks in the unit activities to build content knowledge and skills by using texts as both evidence and models of the writing required. This is the explicit and deep connection we make between the act of reading and writing. This balanced and integrated approach to English language arts instruction, in which texts are read and examined for multiple purposes, ultimately demonstrates that all culminating tasks are directly linked to the texts students read in the units of instruction.

The “partially meets” evaluation of **indicator 1i** seems not to recognize the multiple explicit opportunities that SpringBoard students have to practice their growing bank of academic vocabulary in discussions and writing. Every unit of instruction includes the protocol of vocabulary introduction and oral practice through strategies such as Word webs, QHT graphic organizers, and Word Wall discussions, providing students with both oral and written practice with new vocabulary. In addition, speaking and listening discussion strategies such as Socratic Seminar and Literature Circles are designed to encourage students’ independent ownership of new vocabulary through unit activities that require discussion and writing.

In response to **1j**, SpringBoard consistently teaches and asks students to apply learning strategies that foster academic discussions. Discussion strategies such as Literature Circles and Socratic Seminars and collaborative discussions are explicitly taught, not as skills unrelated to content mastery, but as ways to support students on their pathway to independent critical reading through speaking and listening. The SpringBoard integrated approach to English language arts instruction means that ideas and themes are always explored in multiple modes: reading, writing, speaking and listening. SpringBoard is proud to say that we promote a student-centered classroom. Collaborative discussions and tasks encourage students to explore ideas verbally and struggle together to construct meaning.

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

Once again, it is heartening to know that EdReports evaluators recognize the strength and depth of the SpringBoard writing program as shown in the comments and examples for **Indicators f–h of Gateway 2**. Springboard fully meets the expectations for increasing writing skills over the course of school year, for

providing focused short- and long-term research projects, and for designing an independent reading program that includes student choice and accountability. The review consistently commends strong writing, research, and grammar components as well as the robust independent reading program.

Indicators b–c focus on the importance of building content knowledge through a sequenced set of questions and tasks. While the reviewers noted the presence of carefully sequenced text-dependent questions and tasks, the comments focused on an apparent lack of depth in considering deeper meanings and thematic connections. A closer look at the Embedded Assessment and the Scoring Guides used to evaluate these assessments should make clear how the multiple readings and focused writing prompts and speaking opportunities are meant to develop students’ deep understanding of texts and their relationships to larger themes and ideas. In addition, SpringBoard’s upcoming 2018 Edition places even greater emphasis on students’ engagement with texts by providing a revised reading protocol that allows for more time with text and text-dependent questioning that mines the complexity of each text, leading students to deep, enduring insights. The design of the units fosters deep thinking about topics and the building of knowledge surrounding that topic, while also building skills that grow students’ ability to apply new knowledge to performance-based assessments. For example, in our curriculum we have students read articles about the media’s influence on teen buying habits and then ask them to use that new knowledge to analyze and evaluate their own understanding of how the media drives their purchases and self-perceptions, or students closely examine multi-modal presentations of biographical information about a world leader and then create their own biographical presentation using multiple modes to represent the subject of their biography.

In response to reviewers’ comments on **Gateway 2, Indicator a**, we at SpringBoard suggest that the reviewers did not understand the expectation that SpringBoard teachers provide direct guidance for the work happening in the classroom with students. Student understandings of text are closely monitored by classroom teachers with the help of comprehension and analysis tools like graphic organizers, student annotations of text, text-dependent question responses, and double-entry journals, to name a few. In this way teachers can monitor and adapt instruction based on the ongoing formative assessments provided by these tools. Teachers’ experience and judgment is validated and supported by SpringBoard’s instructional pathway, which offers support and guidance for teachers to introduce and practice targeted learning strategies with students in order to foster deeper, more independent understanding of texts and tasks. Throughout SpringBoard instruction is the expectation that the teacher engage students explicitly with the materials as they read and tackle tasks.

2e – Explicit focus on literary terms and academic vocabulary in SpringBoard directly links to student mastery of English language arts content. In SpringBoard, academic vocabulary is studied not only in the context of reading literary and informational texts, but also in the context of the English language arts classroom, in which academic vocabulary is used in Learning Targets to inform students about what knowledge and skills they are working to master. This emphasis on the language of English language arts aligns with SpringBoard’s stated purpose to prepare students for academic success in high school and

beyond. Our year-long plan for students to build vocabulary is evident in our teacher guidance, which asks teachers to make use of a classroom Word Wall for consistent oral work with vocabulary, and a Reader Writer Notebook to monitor and guide vocabulary acquisition in every unit, building a rich bank of academic vocabulary over the course of the year. In our upcoming 2018 Edition, we have augmented our focus on academic vocabulary in the context of reading, adding more glossed vocabulary at point of use and increasing the amount of text-dependent questioning about writers' language choices and the meaning of words in context. Support for struggling students' vocabulary development is also provided by Zinc Learning Labs, a digital platform that engages students in multi-modal, spaced repetition practice to foster a more engaged and sustained study of vocabulary.

In summary, SpringBoard English Language Arts provides students and teachers with the support they need to ensure academic success in the pursuit of academic excellence.