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Published Online: March 4, 2015

Most Math Curricula Found to Be Out of Sync With Common Core

By Liana Heitin

For an updated version of this story, see "Review of Math Programs Comes Under Fire."

The first round of a Consumer Reports-style review for instructional materials paints a dismal picture of the textbook-publishing industry's response to new standards: Seventeen of 20 math series reviewed were judged as failing to live up to claims that they are aligned to the common core.

The reviews, released online Wednesday by the nonprofit EdReports.org, were conducted by small groups of teachers and instructional leaders from across the country. They looked at digital and print K-8 mathematics materials from widely used publishers—including Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt—as well as from some lesser-known providers whose texts passed state review processes. The results echo previous alignment studies conducted by university-based researchers.

"In general, the results are pretty bad for all the publishers," said Morgan Polikoff, an assistant professor of education at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles, who studies common-standards alignment but was not involved in the EdReports.org project. "I think people really will pay attention to this, and I think it will affect [curriculum] adoption processes going forward."

In all, just one curriculum series stood out from the pack. Eureka Math, published by Great Minds, a small Washington-based nonprofit organization, was found to be aligned to the Common Core State Standards at all grade levels reviewed.

Infographic: See How Math Programs Rated

A McGraw-Hill series, My Math, was deemed aligned to the standards in two of the five grade levels evaluated. All other series reviewed were found to only "partially" or not at all meet the criteria for common-core alignment.

EdReports.org was spearheaded by Maria M. Klawe, the president of Harvey Mudd College, in Claremont, Calif., and was launched in August. Its nine-member board includes representatives from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Council of La Raza, and the Education Trust.

The project is funded primarily by \$3 million in grants from the Seattle-based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—which also was a major financial backer of the development of the common core—the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation of Menlo Park, Calif., and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust in New York City.

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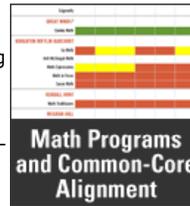
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(The Gates and Hewlett foundations also support, respectively, news coverage of college- and career-ready standards and deeper learning in *Education Week*.)

EdReports.org plans to eventually move on to secondary math and K-12 English/language arts curricula.



Collecting Evidence

The 46 reviewers, **half of whom are practicing teachers**, worked in teams of four over several months to review the K-5 or 6-8 instructional series. Team members combed through texts independently and then met in a weekly videoconference to discuss their findings.

“There were weeks we could not actually agree, and we would table that discussion until we could find more evidence,” said Kimberly Osbourne, an assistant principal in Murfreesboro, Tenn., who was on a review team. “We worked hard to come to an agreement on the evidence we all collected.”

The curricula were first evaluated on whether they meet the common core’s expectations for focus and coherence—that is, whether they stick to grade-level content and follow a logical sequence for math learning. If a text passed that first threshold, or “gateway”—and a majority did not—the reviewers then moved along to gateway two, which looked at whether the curriculum meets the expectations for rigor. The third and final gateway measured usability.

Jay A. Diskey, the executive director of the Association of American Publishers’ P-12 learning group, based in Washington, said the use of gateways was a major concern. “The review process was halted if there were minor instances of perceived lack of alignment, resulting in a very shallow, incomplete review,” he wrote in an email.

The EdReports.org website uses a three-tiered rating system—meets criteria, partially meets criteria, or does not meet criteria—for each gateway. The site also has **more-detailed reports** for each textbook, which include documentation on how the reviewers reached each score. Users can search by series title, publisher, or grade level, and can compare curricula with one another.

Eureka Math far surpassed all other curricula evaluated. It was found to be aligned for all grades, K-8, and passed through all three gateways. On usability, Eureka’s offerings for grades K-5 meet the criteria, while its materials for grades 6-8 only partially meet the criteria.

Eureka Math differs from other texts in that, rather than being an update to existing material, it was designed specifically for the common core.

“None of our work in any subject predates the Common Core State Standards,” said Lynne Munson, the president and executive director of Great Minds.

Among the highlights of the reviews:

- My Math, a K-5 instructional series by McGraw-Hill, was deemed fully aligned for grades 4 and 5. The kindergarten text in that series was found not aligned, and the 1st and 2nd grade texts partially meet criteria for alignment.
- Seven Houghton Mifflin Harcourt instructional series were reviewed. Of those, four partially meet the alignment criteria for at least one grade level.
- One of the four Pearson texts reviewed were deemed partially aligned for at least one grade level.
- All texts by Agile Mind, Big Ideas Learning, Edgenuity, Kendall Hunt, and TPS Publishing Inc., were deemed not aligned to the common standards.

More than 40 states have adopted the common core, which covers English/language arts

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and math. The standards, released in 2010, were the result of an initiative led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association.

Early Reactions

Publishers were given two weeks to respond to their reviews before the EdReports.org website went public. Responses of up to 1,500 words are published along with the reviews.

In its response to the review of the K-5 series Investigations in Number, Data, & Space, Pearson wrote that the reviewers “applied a very narrow standard for measuring focus that we believe compromises the intent of the [Common Core State Standards for math] with regard to instructional materials.”

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt wrote in its response for Math Expressions, which was found to partially meet criteria for K-2 and not meet criteria for grades 3-5, that the program “offers many resources that were not included in the review process, including digital and assessment materials that reflect student conceptual understanding, fluency checks, and performance tasks.”

In a webinar for reporters, Eric Hirsch, the executive director of EdReports.org, said “the goal was to review student and teacher editions—not to review an entire instructional program.”

Four of the nine publishers reviewed responded to *Education Week’s* requests for comments by deadline.

Ms. Munson of Great Minds said she was “thrilled” with the review by EdReports.org. “We consider all our materials to be living documents that are under continual improvement. ... We’re extremely keen to have their advice and input and will certainly be acting on it.”

Edgenuity pointed to concerns with the EdReports.org methodology. “The fundamental flaw in the EdReports process is their gateway approach, which unfortunately will mislead readers,” John Hartz, a spokesman for the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Edgenuity, wrote in an email. “The limitations of the EdReports approach stand in contrast with many state and district adoption processes that have allowed reviewers to analyze the full scope of Edgenuity’s content—including in states such as California, Georgia, West Virginia, and Utah where Edgenuity’s courses were approved.”

TPS Publishing Inc. and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt also said the results are in opposition to state and district adoptions.

Regarding the conflicting reviews, Mr. Diskey of AAP said, “it has to be asked whether some of the differences here have to do with the type of rubric and alignment tool that was used” by EdReports.org.

EdReports.org is not the only group looking at common-core alignment. [Learning List](#), a for-profit company based in Austin, Texas,

analyzes digital and print educational resources for alignment with the standards. In a press release issued in advance of the EdReports.org release, Learning List clarified what it sees as key distinctions between the groups, including that Learning List is a paid subscription service, that it reviews for alignment to a variety of standards rather than just common core, and that subscribers and publishers can request certain materials be reviewed for Learning List.

University-based researchers William Schmidt, the co-director of the education policy center at Michigan State University, in East Lansing, and Mr. Polikoff of USC have

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conducted alignment studies as well. Both have come to the same conclusion as EdReports.org: Claims of common-core alignment are generally unfounded.

After his own analysis was released, "I can't tell you how many emails I got from folks in school districts all over the country who are just desperate for that kind of info," said Mr. Polikoff. "I do want a vibrant, competitive marketplace for materials to drive that competition and innovation in a way we really couldn't before."

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17 comments

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IDOMATH

Score: 2

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12:04 PM on March 4, 2015

As someone who has been working with the CCSSM in K--8 and supporting teachers since its release, I question the rating for Connected Mathematics III (If that is the version that was reviewed.) That program was completely revised and is now very closely, if not 100%, aligned with both the content standards and the mathematical practices. Some of the other programs are currently under revision -- it is too bad that it is taking publishers so long to get this important work done.



Nancy Willard, Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

Score: 0

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1:36 PM on March 4, 2015

Another recent article indicates that the Common Core standards, developed under the leadership of Jason Zimba, one of the founding board members for Michele Rhee's Students First organization, are flawed:

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/02/25/common-core-seen-falling-short-in-high.html>

Can anyone explain why students across the country are being forced to take high stakes tests (which some need to pass to graduate) that require them to perform in ways that they are not prepared to do using current curriculum, on standards which are considered to be flawed?

And then these test scores are going to be used to judge teachers to be failures.

How does this make any sense?

Nancy

 1 reply



JacquelynC

Score: 3

[Report Abuse](#)

4:00 PM on March 4, 2015

After serving on an adoption committee and then teaching Engage New York, the "for free" version of Eureka Math, my colleagues and I are finding serious concerns. There are sequencing Problems - teaching skills in a later module needed for a previous one, sometimes going beyond the scope of the standard (for example, creating math terminology found nowhere else in the world of mathematics and then hitting this terminology in multiple lessons) and sorely lacking in appropriate engaging activities for the respective age groups. (12 year olds don't care what you are buying for your office party - they sure do like to celebrate birthdays though!) Last but not least it is visually very bland. We need kids to dig deeper and express more understanding with CCSS than they ever have before and that means they need to want the product that we as educators are offering - there has to be age appropriate appeal to the materials! Engage New York has much potential but feels like a draft with much revision needed. I had high hopes that Eureka Math had picked up that ball and enhanced the product. The free sample module looks almost exactly the same as ENY - quite disappointing.

 2 replies



DrSpector

Score: -1

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12:31 AM on March 5, 2015

After reading and studying the so-called "common core" Mathematics "standards" over the past few years, I think that being out of sync with these dubious "standards" would be grounds for a merit badge for common sense and good practice. There was nothing wrong with the way Mathematics was sequenced and taught before the so-called "common core" was conceived in the fever dreams of Gates and friends, and there is no logical reason to not return to sanity and teach Mathematics properly, in logical sequence.

 5 replies



RHughes

Score: 0

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7:20 AM on March 5, 2015

Within the last month we were presented with Eureka Math from the company and at the time there were no assessments (other than mid-module and end of module) included with the program. Supposedly they were getting ready to release a new partnership with a "big name" assessment company. Did the review include any of these assessments? My understanding was they have not been created yet so a full alignment in terms of usability seems odd.

 1 reply



MATH WORTHY

Score: 3

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10:00 PM on March 5, 2015

I feel that the "Gateway" methodology used by Edreports.org was incredibly shallow. The publishing of a giant infographic about curricula that mostly were barely read, due to failing a very superficial test, is downright irresponsible. I encourage everyone to read the reports in detail as well as the publisher rebuttals before making a decision about the meaning of this "study."



Principal LD

Score: 2

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8:29 AM on March 6, 2015

I'm curious why the EnVision Math program (Scott Foresman) was not included in the study.

 1 reply



Shari Pobjecky

Score: 1

[Report Abuse](#)

9:43 AM on March 6, 2015

Bravo, and many more companies need their products to be reviewed in this manner. Having sold products into schools for many years, I can tell you it's sketchy business, and it's time for an expose so that the good products can prevail. For the sake of the children.

 1 reply



psmyth20

Score: 1

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5:04 PM on March 6, 2015

As if writing, publishing, and adoption processes have anything to do with being in sync with anything but ... the bottom line.



Tuhaybey

Score: 1

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9:20 PM on March 6, 2015

Just messing around with standards won't ever get us there. Look at how spending per student correlates to 8th grade math proficiency-

<http://politicsthatwork.com/graphs/education-spending-math>

This is a matter of choosing to invest in the future, or not.



alankilkey

Score: 1

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5:40 PM on March 7, 2015

If you read the publishers' responses on the EdReports website, especially Agile Mind's middle school response, you will see how much of a joke the methods were to the review of curriculum and that they didn't do what they said they were

going to do. Shallow, indeed, and not a fair shake for any curriculum, as none are completely reviewed unless they make it through all of the gateways. Reading what kicked certain curricula out of the review is laughable. Also, the Navigator tool mentioned in this article seems broke, as I can't get to 7th or 8th grade standards and can only get to curricula that are at the beginning of the alphabet. Really bad user experience. Overall, I would not take either of these reviews too seriously and would look into who is funding this (Gates).



VN12345

Score: 1

Report Abuse

12:50 PM on March 10, 2015

Large scale development is a huge undertaking. To create brand new content for brand new standards takes a lot of time and money. That's why products were slow to come to the market.

Then, Common Core starts to lose steam -- states withdraw from the tests, consider dropping the standards altogether, and are talking about all sorts of alternate plans. That's why products aren't always 100% aligned -- too much risk.

That is, if they focus too much time and effort in making something that is totally 100% no matter what aligned to Common Core, as soon as Common Core reaches the dustbin, then the complaint starts over again -- where are the properly aligned materials?

My opinion -- I think there are some good ideas in Common Core, but it went too far. States either were misled or had too high of expectations, and that's what we're seeing now -- the reality vs. what they thought it would be. I don't think it's all bad, but I do think the focus needs to be on literally what the COMMON elements are of CORE curriculum. Like "Make sure every state does this, this, and this. Beyond that do whatever you want. But make sure you do THOSE things."

1 reply



Geauxteacher

Score: 1

Report Abuse

9:57 AM on March 12, 2015

Yet another bogus promotion of Eureka Math. How do you get a top evaluation? Have an evaluation system designed that will yield that result. The tentacles of CCSS promoters are amazing. <http://www.geauxteacher.net/2014/11/john-whites-bogus-textbook-evaluations.html>



Wilbert

Score: 0

Report Abuse

7:31 PM on March 17, 2015

As much as I'm sure that the publishing companies did a sloppy job at aligning their texts, I have serious issues with any study that rates the Eureka, or Engage NY math as anything

above very poor.

Engage NY uses terms that they seem to have made up because I've never heard any engineer or mathematician use them. The sequencing is off. They force kids to use different ways to solve problems, even if they don't 'make sense' to them. Often they don't make sense because they are teaching the mental shortcuts that regular people only start using after they understand math a lot better than a beginner.

That we even have a national discussion where Engage NY is considered anything but really expensive garbage says all that needs to be said about the whole process.



Regi-Kumon

Score: 1

Report Abuse

1:27 PM on May 13, 2015

With several children coming to my center for assistance I find that the biggest issue is that they lack necessary math skills - like addition and subtraction and especially multiplication. Without mastery of these skills, they have great difficulty in quickly arriving at answers when dividing or multiplying or fractions. After mastering these skills through the Kumon method, they find that math is actually enjoyable -- but it takes time depending on when they enter the program My recommendation is to start them at age 4 in some structured program for 5 -10 minutes and gradually increase to 30 minutes a day.



teachwin

Score: 0

Report Abuse

8:33 AM on July 9, 2015

enVision is a Pearson product--right? Anyone have info on how effective it is from a source other than Pearson? Thanks.



JJ from Oregon

Score: 0

Report Abuse

5:04 PM on August 22, 2015

Bridges in Mathematics 2nd Edition, K-5 was built around CCSS for math. This program was not cited in the article. It is a curriculum constructed by The Math Learning Center, a nonprofit in Salem, Oregon, and has been adopted by many districts across the nation.



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