

# *Florida Paths to College and Career*

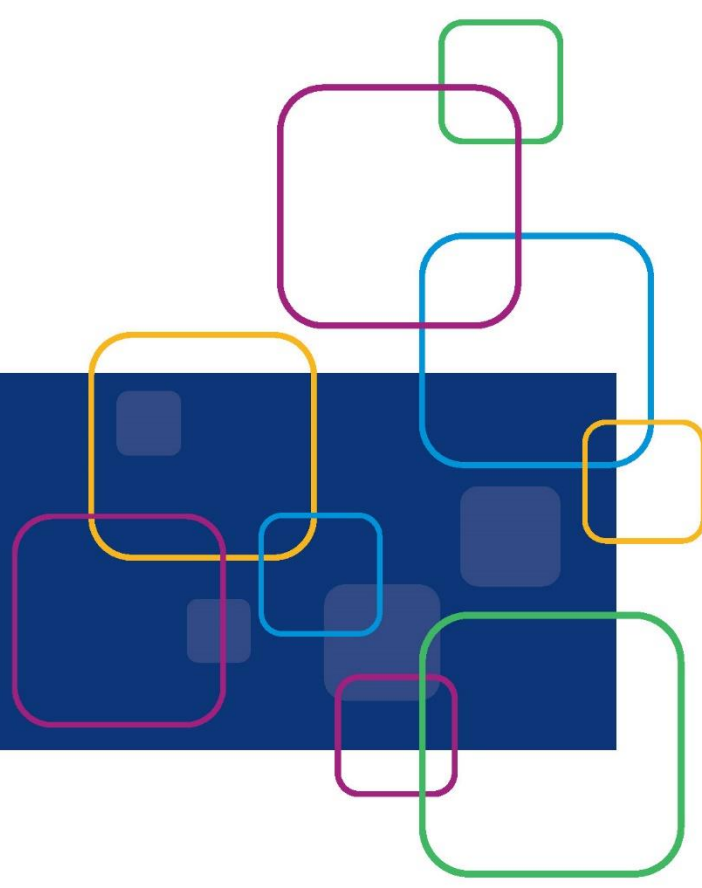
English Language Arts Curriculum

Research-Based Curriculum Development

2020-2021

PCG Contact:  
Evan Lefsky, Ph.D.  
352-617-6040  
elefsky@pcgus.com

Public Consulting Group, Inc.  
148 State Street, 10th Floor  
Boston, Massachusetts 02109  
(617) 426-2026  
PublicConsultingGroup.com



The *Paths to College and Career* curriculum has received accolades from the educational community, including “Exemplar” ratings by the EQuIP Peer Review Panel, which identifies high-quality, innovative, and standards-aligned instructional resources. *Paths to College and Career* (6–12) curriculum received favorable EdReport ratings, which are indicative of text quality and complexity and alignment to standards components; building knowledge with texts, vocabulary, and tasks; and usability.

Three important research-based models are at the core of PCG’s curriculum design and development:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL);
- Differentiated Instruction (DI); and
- Understanding by Design (UbD).

PCG’s curriculum incorporates UDL’s principles of multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement<sup>1</sup> in order to include all students (e.g., English language learners, students with disabilities, gifted or advanced) in reading, writing, and discussing grade-appropriate, complex text. The curriculum embeds differentiated instruction via scaffolding, guidance for the teacher, and explicit curriculum adaptations.<sup>2</sup> Lesson plans include activities, multimedia, and other resources that provide multiple entry-points, challenges, and opportunities for engagement. UbD’s design principles guide a curriculum development process that creates a sequence of lessons and learning activities building backward from instructional goals. This sequential design prepares students to be successful on performance tasks and other summative assessments that embed established standards and desired knowledge and skills.

## Impact

The *Florida Paths to College and Career* curriculum has been customized from our base version to meet the specific requirements of the B.E.S.T. Standards and Florida specifications. A rigorous evaluation of the impact of the base version of the curriculum<sup>3</sup> with professional development on **teacher practice, student engagement, and student achievement** was conducted in school systems across the country using study designs that produced **strong and moderate evidence of efficacy** (Level 1 and Level 2) under the ESSA definitions for levels of evidence.<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, the evaluation, conducted as part of USDoe i3 grant for implementation, assessed the curriculum’s effect on English Language Arts proficiency rates and instructional practice outcomes among all teachers, and novice teachers in particular, in 70 schools across 18 districts, including 10 districts in large, urban areas. The evaluation used two research designs: a one-year randomized control

---

<sup>1</sup> CAST.org. Universal design for learning: Theory and practice, Wakefield MA: CAST.

<http://udltheorypractice.cast.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Flanagan, B., Liebling, C., & Meltzer, J. (2013). *Universal design for learning and the common core ELA standards: Rigorous reading and writing instruction*. A PCG Education White Paper. Boston: Public Consulting Group.

[https://www.publicconsultinggroup.com/media/1273/pcg\\_udl\\_whitepaper.pdf](https://www.publicconsultinggroup.com/media/1273/pcg_udl_whitepaper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Curriculum materials for grades 6-8 were created by Expeditionary Learning, on behalf of Public Consulting Group, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Dolfen, S. Richman, S., Choi, J, Streke, A. DeSaw, C, Demers, A, Poznyak, D. (2019). *Evaluation of the Teacher Potential Project*. Washington, DC: Mathematica. Retrieved from: <https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/evaluation-of-the-teacher-potential-project#:~:text=After%20two%20years%20of%20teacher,percentile%20to%20the%2054th%20percentile>

trial study (Level 1-strong evidence) and a two-year quasi-experimental study (Level 2-moderate evidence) of curriculum implementation in combination with professional development.

Final results of the study demonstrate a **positive impact on student achievement**:

- Among **all schools** that engaged with the project, both among schools that engaged for one year or for an additional year of implementation support, researchers found a positive and significant impact on student achievement in the second year. The study reports an effect size of 0.08 standard deviations.
- Among schools in their **second year** of engagement with the project, researchers found a positive and significant impact on the achievement of students. The study reports an effect size of 0.10 standard deviations which they state, “can be interpreted as roughly 1.4 months of typical student improvement or moving an average student scoring at the 50th percentile to the 54th percentile.”<sup>5</sup>

Final results of the evaluation study also demonstrate:

- 1) **Statistically significant, positive impacts on overall teachers’ ELA instructional practices** among teachers engaged with the project for one year (Level 1-strong evidence); and
- 2) **Statistically significant, positive impacts on specific teacher instructional practices**<sup>6</sup> among teachers who engaged with the project for two years (Level 2-moderate evidence).
  - **Close Readings of the Text and Development of Content Knowledge:** Novice teachers using the curriculum had students do close readings of the text and developed students’ content knowledge more often than the control novice teachers.
  - **Citing Evidence:** More novice teachers using the curriculum had students cite evidence from texts, a key research-based skill in the standards.
  - **High-Order Thinking Skills:** Novice teachers using the curriculum more often encouraged students’ high-order thinking skills (e.g., inference, analysis, synthesis, evaluation).
  - **Student Accountability:** Students taught by novice teachers using the curriculum engaged more often in practices that develop students’ responsibility for their own learning.

### **Evidence-based Instructional Practices**

Evidence-based instructional practices in adolescent literacy are embedded in every component of the *Florida Paths to College and Career* curriculum. That is, practices throughout the curriculum have a strong research basis and are best practices known to positively affect student learning. In addition to the evidence of effectiveness and overarching design considerations described above, below we highlight selected research-based instructional and assessment practices to support student learning and engagement in the curriculum. Each section cites research studies that support the practices and describes the level of evidence to support each practice. Evidence spans ESSA’s four levels of evidence from strong evidence of effectiveness (Level 1) to demonstrating a rationale (Level 4).

---

<sup>5</sup> Dolfin, et al. (2019), page ixv.

<sup>6</sup> Choi, J., Richman, S., Dolfin, S. (2017). *Transforming Teacher’s Practice: The Impact of EL Education’s English Language Arts Curriculum and Professional Learning on Teacher Practices*. Washington, DC: Mathematica. Retrieved from: <https://eleducation.org/uploads/downloads/Final-In-Focus-Brief-to-EL-10-19-17.pdf>

**Metacognitive strategies:** Consistent with theory on adolescent literacy development, and recommendations based on literacy research, *Florida Paths* provides explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies students may use to increase their comprehension of different types of text.<sup>7</sup> Explicit instruction of comprehension strategies including summarization, identifying the main idea, semantic mapping using graphic organizers, prediction, and activating background knowledge, and teaching students to become aware of how their comprehension of text develops are woven throughout the curriculum. There is a strong evidence of efficacy, based on multiple studies, supporting the practice (Level 1).<sup>8, 9</sup>

**Gradual Release:** Consistent with current research and recommended practice, PCG's *Florida Paths* curriculum enables the teacher to *facilitate* learning so that it is the *students* who do the work of collaboratively and independently thinking, talking, and writing about the text.<sup>10, 11</sup> The gradual release shifts the cognitive work to the students in a measured and intentional way using four lesson components of focus lessons, guided instruction, productive group work, and independent learning. The curriculum follows an explicit, systematically developed progression of learning, ensuring that knowledge and skills are introduced, developed, and deepened within and across the grades. To align and grow vertically from grade to grade, the curriculum also integrates the principles of spiral design<sup>1</sup> and a gradual release of responsibility. The curriculum also includes optional supports for fluency to provide students who are not fluent readers with scaffolded opportunities to engage in independent analysis of disciplinary texts with confidence.<sup>12</sup>

**Building Academic Vocabulary:** A key element of the curriculum is building students' vocabulary through work with Tier 2 words.<sup>13, 14</sup> This focus on academic language is consistent with the instructional shift on text complexity and its academic language. It is also consistent with the

---

<sup>7</sup> Biancarosa, C., Snow, C. E. (2006). *Reading next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

<sup>8</sup> Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., and Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A Practice Guide* (NCEE #2008-4027). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>

<sup>9</sup> Baye, A, Lake, C, Inns, A, Saving, R. (2018). A Synthesis of Quantitative Research on Reading Programs for Secondary Students, p 14. Retrieved from: <http://www.bestevidence.org/word/Secondary-Reading-01-31-18.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Buehl, D. (2013). *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning By*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2013) *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility* (2nd ed). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<sup>12</sup> Hawkins, R., Hale, A., Sheeley, W, Ling, S. (2010). Repeated reading and vocabulary-previewing interventions to improve fluency and comprehension for struggling high-school readers. *Psychology in the Schools*, 48 (1), pp. 59-77. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20545>.

<sup>13</sup> Bauman, J.F., Graves, Michael F. (2010) What is Academic Vocabulary? *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 54 (1), 4-12. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20749071>

<sup>14</sup> Flanigan, K., Templeton, S., & Hayes, L. (2012). What's in a Word? Using Content Vocabulary to Generate Growth in General Academic Vocabulary Knowledge. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(2), 132-140. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23367719> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/JAAL.00114/abstract>

recommendation to provide explicit vocabulary instruction by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) *Practice Guide: Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (2008)<sup>15</sup> based on strong evidence of efficacy (Level 1). Through guided practice in class, and self-guided technology-based work outside of class, students gain familiarity with new vocabulary in context. To ensure that students continue to acquire new vocabulary, the curriculum provides guidance for teachers about how students ought to select and read appropriate texts independently outside of class.

**Annotating the Text:** The curriculum emphasizes annotating text as a foundational practice to support students in achieving a depth of understanding through analytic reading.<sup>16, 17</sup> Through explicitly taught annotation routines, students identify the parts of a text that contain important ideas, connect to other parts of the text, or require additional attention or discussion to support comprehension and analysis. Students use these annotations to build schema and inform the selection of relevant evidence in text-based writing and discussion.<sup>18</sup> Studies on adolescent literacy and writing provide a research-based rationale for an emphasis on annotation (Level 4 evidence under ESSA).

**Integration of Writing with Reading:** Consistent with research on effective writing instruction for secondary students, *Florida Paths* combines writing with reading instruction to help students learn about important text features.<sup>19, 20</sup> The design of *Florida Paths* is consistent with this guidance and integrates reading and writing where students study exemplar texts and study the features of the text that make it effective. Findings from eight research studies are reported by Graham and colleagues (2016) which demonstrate consistent positive effects on overall writing quality, writing skills, and process<sup>21</sup> related to this practice. These studies together provide moderate evidence of effectiveness (Level 2 under ESSA guidance).

---

<sup>15</sup> Kamil et al. (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Vaughn, S., Swanson, E. A., Roberts, G., Wanzek, J., Stillman-Spisak, S. J., Solis, M., & Simmons, D. (2013). Improving reading comprehension and social studies knowledge in middle school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 48(1), 77–93. Retrieved from: <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/rrq.039>

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2013). *Note-Taking and Note-Making for Academic Success*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, ILA E-essentials.

<sup>18</sup> Carol Porter-O'Donnell. (2004). Beyond the Yellow Highlighter: Teaching Annotation Skills to Improve Reading Comprehension. *The English Journal*, 93(5), 82-89. doi:10.2307/4128941

<sup>19</sup> Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., Kim, J., Lyskawa, J., Olson, C.B., Wulsin, S.C. (2016). *Teaching secondary students to write effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.

<sup>20</sup> Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Inns, A., Baye, A., Dachtel, D., & Haslam, J. (2019, April). A quantitative synthesis of research on writing approaches in grades 2 to 12. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Retrieved from: [http://www.bestevidence.org/word/writing\\_grades2to12\\_April\\_2019\\_full.pdf](http://www.bestevidence.org/word/writing_grades2to12_April_2019_full.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Graham, et. al. (2016).

**Writing from Sources and Research:** Consistent with research-recommended writing practices for adolescents, the *Florida Paths* curriculum emphasizes writing from sources and research.<sup>22, 23, 24, 25</sup> Students write in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes, all grounded in their work with texts. Students also have frequent opportunities at the lesson level to engage in multiple forms of informal writing, and to develop writing skills while building topical, conceptual, and disciplinary knowledge.<sup>26</sup> In addition to short research projects that explore topics introduced by texts in the curriculum, students participate in formal, sustained research through grade-level research units. Building on these skills, students learn how to conduct effective, inquiry-based research. Studies on adolescent literacy and writing support an emphasis on writing from sources and research and meets the ESSA criteria for moderate.

**Cooperative/Collaborative Learning:** Consistent with current research on adolescent literacy and recommended practice, *Florida Paths* provides students with significant opportunities for discussion of text meaning and interpretation with peers.<sup>27</sup> Students frequently work together in small groups to engage with classmates about text to teach and learn from each other. Central to the *Florida Paths* approach, findings from multiple research studies indicate that this is among the “most effective strategies for improving adolescent literacy.”<sup>28</sup> Research evidence to support this practice is based primarily on experimental studies and meets the ESSA criteria for strong evidence (Level 1).

### Professional Learning

To complement the strengths within the curriculum to build teacher’s capacity to deliver effective instruction and teach the standards, PCG provides a range of professional learning supports. These supports help teachers become familiar with the *Paths* curriculum content and practices and ensure that the curriculum is implemented with fidelity. These supports include workshops/institutes to introduce the curriculum, specific modules, and provide other training in pedagogy. PCG also provides classroom-based coaching. In-school coaching for teachers provided by PCG provides additional support to build teachers’ capacity to implement the curriculum. Personalized training provided as part of *Florida Paths* will include observations of instruction, lesson study, and instructional modeling. Internal studies of implementation of the base curriculum with PCG professional learning support including coaching show promising results related to increased proficiency on state assessments compared to other district

---

<sup>22</sup> Graham, S., MacArthur, C.A., Hebert, M. eds. (2018). *Best Practices in Writing Instruction, Third Edition*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

<sup>23</sup> Hinchman, K.A., Sheridan-Thomas, H.K. eds. (2014). *Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction, Second Edition*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

<sup>24</sup>Graham, et. al (2018).

<sup>25</sup> Hawkins, J, Ginty, E, Kurzman, K.L, Leddy, D., Miller, J., Wiggins, G., Wilbur, D. (2008). *Writing for Understanding*. Vermont: Vermont Writing Collaborative.

<sup>26</sup> De La Paz, S. Wissinger, D. (2015) Effects of Genre and Content Knowledge on Historical Thinking with Academically Diverse High School Students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 83:1, 110-129. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2013.876228>

<sup>27</sup> Kamil et al. (2008).

<sup>28</sup> Baye, A, Lake, C, Inns, A, Saving, R. (2018). A Synthesis of Quantitative Research on Reading Programs for Secondary Students, p 14. Retrieved from: <http://www.bestevidence.org/word/Secondary-Reading-01-31-18.pdf>

schools.<sup>29</sup> Research on coaching affirms the efficacy of these supports to change teacher practice and improve student achievement. For example, a recent meta-analysis of 60 experimental and quasi-experimental studies of coaching<sup>30</sup> demonstrates impact in both areas. The authors note that across the studies, they find “the quality of teachers’ instruction improves by as much as—or more than—the difference in effectiveness between a novice and a teacher with five to 10 years of experience.”<sup>31</sup> This synthesis provides moderate, Level 2, evidence of effectiveness of coaching.

---

<sup>29</sup> Public Consulting Group. (2020). *Paths to College and Career: Paths to Success in Lake County Schools*.

<sup>30</sup> Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D (2018). Taking Teachers Coaching to Scale: Can Personalized Learning Become Standard Practice? *Education Next*, p 69-74.

<sup>31</sup> Kraft & Blazar. (2018). p. 69.