Benchmark Advance and Michigan K–5 Literacy Curriculum Update

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Michigan law (Section 164k(e) of Public Act 15 of 2025) requires school districts to notify parents when the district is using a K–5 literacy curriculum that is not currently included on the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) approved evidence-based curriculum list.

Hillsdale Community Schools currently uses Benchmark Advance as its core English Language Arts curriculum for students in grades K–6. At this time, Benchmark Advance is not included on MDE's current approved evidence-based curriculum list. As required by state law, we are notifying families that the curriculum is not currently recognized by MDE as an approved evidence-based curriculum. State law further requires districts to inform parents that a curriculum not included on the approved list may not meet the state's evidence-based requirements and could negatively impact student academic outcomes.

It is important to understand that MDE's approved evidence-based curriculum list has been continuously updated and remains an ongoing process. Curriculum publishers continue to submit the extensive documentation, research, and evidence required by MDE for review. As publishers complete the state's review process and meet the required criteria, additional curricula continue to be added to the approved list.

Our district adopted Benchmark Advance in Spring 2025 through a comprehensive curriculum review process before MDE established its approved evidence-based curriculum list. During the adoption process, teachers and district leaders evaluated multiple instructional resources using established review criteria, including alignment to the Michigan English Language Arts Standards, instructional quality, recommendations from independent organizations such as The Reading League and EdReports, and the instructional needs of our students.

Benchmark Education Company is currently partnering with researchers to complete the additional ESSA-level research required by MDE. The publisher plans to submit this documentation for review this fall, and MDE is expected to release its final approved curriculum list in December 2026.

As part of our ongoing commitment to strengthening literacy instruction, Hillsdale Community Schools is also implementing UFLI Foundations (University of Florida Literacy Institute), an explicit and systematic phonics program that is included on MDE's approved evidence-based curriculum list. UFLI Foundations will complement our literacy instruction by providing students with high-quality, research-based foundational reading skills while supporting teachers with structured phonics lessons aligned to the Science of Reading.

August 2026

Our district remains committed to providing high-quality literacy instruction. We experienced a successful first year of implementing Benchmark Advance and will continue supporting our teachers and students as we strengthen implementation, integrate UFLI Foundations into our literacy framework, and monitor student learning.

District Plan and Timeline

- **September 2026:** Provide this required parent notification in accordance with Michigan law.
- **Fall 2026:** Benchmark Education Company will submit its completed research and supporting documentation to MDE.
- **2026–2027 School Year:** Continue implementation of Benchmark Advance while integrating UFLI Foundations to strengthen foundational literacy instruction for students.
- **December 2026:** MDE is expected to release its final approved evidence-based curriculum list.
- **Following MDE's determination:** Hillsdale Community Schools will review MDE's decision and any additional guidance provided by the state.
    - If Benchmark Advance is included on the approved curriculum list, the district will continue implementation.
    - If MDE requires additional action, the district will evaluate and implement the appropriate next steps in accordance with state law and the district's curriculum review process.

We appreciate your continued partnership in supporting your child's literacy development. If you have questions regarding this notification, please contact your child's building principal or the Director of Curriculum, Kimberly Bianco @ 517-689-1380.