



# Curriculum Review Rubric



## Contents

- [\*\*Program Fundamentals\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Student-Specific Supports\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Implementation\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Alignments\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Family and Community Connections\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Assessments\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Technical Specifications\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Sustainability\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Organizational Commitments\*\*](#)

This rubric highlights several key components to consider when selecting a program that strengthens building blocks students need to achieve goals, overcome obstacles, and form meaningful relationships. This rubric also outlines how Second Step® programs meet these essential criteria to support student outcomes and district goals.

An additional notes column is available to either add your own notes or consider the qualifications of another curriculum.



	Key Program Component	Component Description	Second Step® Spotlight	Additional Program Notes
Program Fundamentals	Research- and Evidence-Based	Translating research findings into key program components ensures that curricula are effective in learning environments. Consider the merit of the research conducted on the program itself. Small studies conducted on single schools may not be significant and will carry less weight than a large randomized controlled trial. <b>Is the program grounded in research and/or evidence-based?</b>	Since 1985, districts have trusted Committee for Children, the makers of Second Step programs, as the leader in research-based human skills programming. Committee for Children utilizes a team of expert researchers to ensure that Second Step programs are high-quality and designed to strengthen learning environments to improve student outcomes. Second Step® Early Learning, Second Step® Elementary classroom kits, Second Step® Out-of-School Time, and Second Step K–8 digital programs are evidence-based.  <a href="#">Discover the research and evidence</a> behind the Second Step family programs.	
	Comprehensive EL–12 Solution	Districtwide implementation, as highlighted by CASEL, supports better academic performance, improved behavior, and a more positive school environment. <sup>1</sup> <b>Does the program provide a comprehensive solution that serves all students (EL–12)?</b>	With expanded EL–12 programming, Second Step programs offer a unified approach that can support students across your district.  While early childhood interventions are essential for establishing the foundation for social and academic skills, they must be followed with ongoing supports in order to be most effective. <sup>2,3,4,5</sup> The Second Step family of programs provides everything you need to foster ongoing skill development across age ranges.	
	Continuous Improvement	Continuous improvement efforts ensure a program reinvests in increasing implementation, impact, and ease of use. It should also include a process to evaluate new research and feedback from educators, students, and leaders. <b>Does the program have a continuous improvement process?</b>	Second Step digital programs undergo yearly updates using a continuous improvement process that incorporates extensive feedback from student, educator, and leader advisory groups and nearly 26,000 after-lesson surveys from implementers throughout the year.	



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Program Fundamentals	Ease of Use	Tools can only be effective if they're used. <b>Is the program easy for educators to understand and implement?</b>	Second Step programs are known for easier implementation for educators and leaders, without sacrificing quality. Second Step digital programs provide leaders and educators easy access to everything a school needs to support high-quality universal school-based human skills instruction—including lesson content, extension activities, reinforcement resources, schoolwide implementation resources, online dashboards, and family engagement resources.	
	Tier 1 Universal Program	Universal Tier 1 programs teach foundational skills to all students using high-quality instructional techniques. Strategies at this level are implemented with all children in a classroom or school. <b>Is the program a universal Tier 1 program?</b>	The Second Step family of programs is a Tier 1, universal, classroom-based curriculum for teaching foundational skills to all students, from Early Learning through Grade 12.	
Student-Specific Supports	Tiered Interventions	Tier 2 supports provide targeted interventions for students who need additional support beyond universal Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 program supports ensure that schools can meet a wider range of student needs. <b>Does the program offer Tier 2 interventions?</b>	<p>Starting in the fall of 2025, the Second Step® Elementary and Second Step® Middle School digital programs will include research-based tiered interventions. These embedded tiered interventions are meant to be built upon a strong Tier 1 foundation, as universal instruction provides essential skill development, a common language, and a shared framework for reinforcing these key concepts in more targeted settings. Tier 2 skills will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotions, Thoughts &amp; Feelings</li> <li>Relationships &amp; Prosocial Skills</li> <li>Executive Functioning</li> <li>Behavior Intervention</li> </ul>	



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Student-Specific Supports	Explicit Instruction	According to CASEL, "Explicit SEL instruction refers to consistent opportunities for students to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies in ways that are developmentally appropriate . . . . These opportunities provide dedicated time to focus on social and emotional competencies." <sup>6</sup> <b>Does the program provide explicit instruction?</b>	Second Step programs provide explicit instruction to help directly build competencies that support student attitudes, behaviors, and academics.	
	Developmentally Appropriate, Specific, and Differentiated by Grade	Ensuring the program supports the unique needs of all students and builds specific skills is crucial. <b>Is the program age-appropriate, developmentally specific, and differentiated by grade?</b>	Second Step programs are intentionally researched and designed to meet the specific developmental needs of students across grades. Content is differentiated and scaffolded to progress skills across units and across grades. Content is also age-appropriate to increase engagement and impact.	
	Leading Education Frameworks	Program design helps guide effective program development. <b>Does the program utilize leading program design frameworks?</b>	Built on the four elements in the acronym SAFE, Second Step programs are based on the latest research in explicit, outcomes-oriented human skills instruction. Second Step curricula align with SAFE program design: They are intentionally sequenced (S) in a logical progression, use active (A) learning to help children gain skills and knowledge, are focused (F) on developing social-emotional skills, and are explicit (E) about the competencies they aim to develop. <sup>7,8</sup>  Second Step programs also draw on research from the PERTS Learning Conditions, Design Thinking, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks.	



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Student-Specific Supports	Accessibility Features and Supports for Diverse Learning Styles	High-quality programming supports all learning styles and needs. <b>Does the program include accessibility features and support diverse learning styles?</b>	<p>The Second Step online platform is screen reader compatible and can zoom to 400%, and the curriculum videos have captions, transcripts, and audio description versions. Digital programs include downloadable Spanish-language materials for educators, students, and families.</p> <p>Second Step programs provide varied types of instructional strategies that allow students to interact with the content in multiple ways and via multiple learning styles.</p> <p>The family of programs includes experiential learning, authentic learning, real-life application, and multiple ways for students to practice. Students have various ways to learn: hands-on activities, media, visual aids, individual learning, partner or small-group learning, and whole-group learning. Students also have opportunities to choose how they want to learn and how to demonstrate their learning.</p> <p>Video elements with captions and audio descriptions also support diverse learning styles.</p> <p>Second Step programs are mostly WCAG 2.1 AA compliant and are working toward WCAG 2.2 AA compliance.</p>	
	Bilingual Programs	Supporting the unique needs of all learners helps make learning essential skills accessible for all. <b>Does the program have translation or bilingual offerings?</b>	Second Step programs include Spanish translations. Most programs include translation of all student-facing content, including lessons and lesson plans, media, and student handouts.	
	Reinforcement and Daily Practice Resources	Reinforcement and daily practice supports the extension of skills beyond lessons. <b>Does the program include resources to help students practice and reinforce skills?</b>	Second Step programs include opportunities for students to practice skills daily. Through embedded resources and guidance, like the Anticipate, Reinforce, and Reflect framework, educators can help students deepen their skills and bring skill-building out of just lesson time.	



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Implementation	Universal School-Based Human Skills Development	Participation in universal school-based human skills programs has been shown to increase students' prosocial behavior, communication, attention, responsibility, and self-control and to decrease student noncompliance, aggression, bullying, attention difficulties, and hyperactivity/impulsivity. <sup>9</sup> <b>Is the program universal and school-based?</b>	The Second Step family of programs is a universal school-based human skills curriculum with key components to support schoolwide engagement.	
	Embedded Educator Training	Supporting educators with easy-to-use and high-quality resources can increase buy-in, implementation fidelity, and impact. Access to simple, streamlined, and accessible training helps set educators up for success. <b>Does the program offer embedded educator training that is easy and accessible?</b>	Each Second Step program provides robust educator training to support understanding and implementation at no additional charge. These supports help educators to get started and to deepen their practices. Whole-school training and supports also help everyone in the building to support student skill-building. Digital programs include customizable, scripted overview presentations for school leaders to orient all staff to the programs' purpose, structure, content, and supports. For lesson instructors, grade-specific unit resources provide concise, targeted overviews of each unit's skills and concepts, research, and teaching tips.  <b>Elevating Second Step Programs: Virtual Workshops</b> are also offered for educators to help build buy-in, foster lasting engagement, and support successful implementation with fidelity.	
	Embedded and Tailored Leader Training	Research shows evidence for the important role of school principals/administrators in helping to drive effective implementation. <sup>10</sup> <b>Does the vendor offer embedded and tailored leader training?</b>	All Second Step programs include leader resources, training, and support. Second Step digital programs include embedded program training, leader training, on-demand training webinars, and kick-off support.  <b>Elevating Second Step Programs: Virtual Workshops</b> are also offered for leaders to help support successful implementation with fidelity.	



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Implementation	Embedded Implementation Supports	Student outcomes are only as strong as implementation. <b>Does the program include embedded implementation supports?</b>	<p>Second Step digital programs include a customizable Implementation Playbook, research-based guidance and best practices, classroom and schoolwide supports, and progress reporting.</p> <p>Second Step programs include guidance and tools to support implementation with fidelity, prioritizing adherence, student engagement, and generalization.</p>	
	Schoolwide Common Language	When everyone in the building uses the same language, key skills can be reinforced schoolwide. <b>Does the program support a schoolwide common language?</b>	Second Step programs provide schools, districts, and families with resources to help develop common language and reinforce skills and concepts at school and at home.	
	Access to Support	Districts need to trust they will have support after purchase and throughout the implementation process. <b>Does the vendor offer free support for all clients?</b>	<p>At no additional cost, Second Step programs include access to robust support for district and school leaders and educators.</p> <p>The Second Step Client Success and Support Team is available for technical and implementation questions throughout the implementation journey. The team has a 96.5% customer satisfaction rating and a less than one-minute wait time by phone. Client support is available to all Second Step users.</p>	
	Flexible Implementation with Pacing Options	Every school is unique. <b>Does the program have the flexibility to work within your school environment?</b>	Second Step programs are known for their adaptability and ease of use. The structured yet flexible format empowers educators to customize programs to meet the needs of their unique learning environments.	



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Alignments	CASEL Competencies	CASEL is the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social, and emotional competence for all students. Its mission is to help make evidence-based social-emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL has identified five interrelated core competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. <b>Does the program align to the CASEL core competencies?</b>	Second Step programs are aligned to the CASEL core competencies. <a href="#">Review CASEL alignment charts.</a>	
	State Alignments	Each state has a different set of social-emotional learning standards or guidance. Some are included in broader standards. <b>Does the program align to these standards?</b>	By aligning with academic standards and interventions, Second Step programs integrate with your current curricula and objectives. Explore Second Step alignment charts to see how Second Step programs align with laws, other programs, and standards. <a href="#">Review state alignment charts.</a>	
	Culturally Inclusive Framework	To be successful, a program must be relevant for all students. <sup>11</sup> <b>Does the program have a culturally inclusive framework?</b>	Second Step programs are designed to help build a foundation for a positive culture through strengthening human skills, which include perspective-taking, empathy, processing emotions, understanding and resolving conflicts, and building positive relationships.	
	ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors	<b>Does the program meet the standards set by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), supporting comprehensive school counseling programs?</b>	Second Step programs are aligned to the standards set by the American School Counselor Association.	
	Erin's Law Requirements	If applicable in your state, is the program aligned to Erin's Law or other child safety laws?	The Second Step® Child Protection Unit provides easy-to-follow, scripted lessons that teach children safety skills using age-appropriate instruction, giving kids the know-how and avenues to disclose abuse.	
	Student Support Frameworks (PBIS and MTSS)	<b>Is the program aligned to student support frameworks?</b>	Second Step programs are aligned to student support frameworks like MTSS, RTI, and PBIS.  Starting in August 2025, Second Step K-8 digital programs will also include tiered interventions.	



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Family and Community Connections	Family Engagement Resources	The school-home partnership is vital for student success initiatives. <b>Does the program include family resources?</b>	Second Step programs include embedded tools that provide families visibility into Second Step lessons and opportunities to reinforce skill-building at home.	
	Access to Translated Family Resources	Communicating the importance of strong human skills encourages families to reinforce these skills at home. It's important to serve every family in your community, including those who speak languages other than English. <b>Does the program offer translated resources?</b>	Second Step digital programs include access to family resources in 13 languages.	
	Family Access	Providing access to the program helps families understand what's being taught and helps set the stage for an ongoing partnership. <b>Does the program offer access to families?</b>	Second Step programs offer program access for families to encourage transparency and further engagement.	



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Assessments	Measurable Outcomes and Aligned Assessment Partners	There are many possible metrics and tools to measure competencies and the overall impact of your implementation. Finding the right strategy depends on your goals. <b>Does the program provide guidance for measurable outcomes or assessment?</b>	<p>In collaboration with Aperture Education, Committee for Children offers DESSA-based assessments that are fully aligned with Second Step® Elementary and Second Step® Middle School.</p> <p>Second Step programs also align to other common assessment tools—such as the Delaware Social-Emotional Competency Scale (DSECS-S), the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), Panorama Education, SELweb, and the Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS)—making it simple to understand how to assess program effectiveness and student outcomes.</p> <p>Starting in August 2025, the Second Step K-8 digital programs will also include a third-party, universally evidence-based screener and assessment to help educators identify students in need of Tier 2 interventions.</p> <p><a href="#">Learn more about Second Step assessments.</a></p>	
	Program-Specific Evaluation Guide	Implementation with fidelity is an important measure to show effectiveness. <b>Does the vendor provide resources or guidance on evaluating program impact and implementation with fidelity?</b>	Second Step Evaluation Guides provide detailed information about the different ways evaluations can be designed, how to match evaluation strategies to program goals, how to implement Second Step programs with fidelity, and how to use findings to improve outcomes.	



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Technical Specifications	Integration with SSO and Rostering	Districts need programs that reduce barriers for access. Integration into existing systems can help make it easier to use. <b>Does the program offer single sign-on and rostering options?</b>	Second Step programs seamlessly integrate with platforms like ClassLink for single sign-on and Clever for single sign-on and rostering.	
	Commitment to Data Privacy	Data privacy ensures that students and educators are protected and that leaders can feel confident using a program. <b>Does the vendor have a commitment to data privacy?</b>	<p>Committee for Children believes in the importance of meeting data privacy requirements affecting the safety of students online.</p> <p>Second Step programs do not collect, receive, or process student data.</p> <p><a href="#">Read more about the Second Step privacy policy.</a></p>	
	Robust and Downloadable Progress Reporting for Classroom, School, or District	Studies show districts are 20% more effective when tracking progress. <sup>12</sup> <b>Does the program provide progress reporting?</b>	Second Step digital programs offer district and school leaders robust lesson and training completion reports on a Leader Dashboard.	
	Trial and Pilot Access	Providing educators with real opportunities to review a program, preview lessons, or pilot a program in the classroom can increase buy-in and ensure everyone knows a program is the right fit. <b>Does the vendor offer free trial or pilot options?</b>	Second Step programs offer access to sample lessons, various pilot options, and free, full program trials.	
Sustainability	Comprehensive Access	Ensuring an initiative is sustainable means there are no barriers to effective universal school-based human skills instruction. <b>Does the program offer comprehensive access at no extra cost?</b>	Second Step digital programs allow everyone in the building to support implementation. Digital programs provide access for all leaders and staff without additional fees or caps.	



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Sustainability	Funding and Grant Expertise	Some vendors don't understand the reality of district budgets. <b>Does the vendor have funding and grant expertise to help identify and secure funding?</b>	<p>With over 45 years of experience in impactful student programming, Committee for Children can assist districts with identifying and securing funding for initiatives.</p> <p>There are many ways to fund this work, and Committee for Children has developed several resources to support districts in identifying new funding or utilizing district funding.</p> <p>The Second Step family of programs meets federal funding eligibility standards and other state and local grant requirements.</p> <p><a href="#">Learn more about Second Step funding resources.</a></p>	
	Transparent Pricing	Understanding how a program fits into your budget long term is a key component of sustainability. Transparent pricing also shows the program is committed to empowering you with the information you need to make the right decision for your school or district. <b>Does the vendor have transparent pricing?</b>	<p>All pricing is available on the Second Step website. Districts can take advantage of multi-site and multi-year discounts for additional savings.</p> <p><a href="#">Learn more about Second Step pricing.</a></p>	
	Comprehensive Pricing	Districts need to trust that their curriculum provides everything they need for a successful implementation. <b>What does pricing include?</b>	<p>Second Step program adoption includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schoolwide access to CASEL-aligned, research-based, and easy-to-use explicit instruction programming</li> <li>• Online leader access and implementation tools</li> <li>• Embedded training</li> <li>• Customer support</li> </ul>	



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Organizational Commitments	Mission- and Impact-Driven	Organizations that are committed to mission and impact reinvest in things that improve implementation, support educators and leaders, and most importantly, drive positive outcomes. <b>Is the vendor committed to impact?</b>	As a nonprofit organization, Committee for Children, the maker of Second Step programs, has championed the safety and well-being of children since 1979.	
	Program Reach	Organizations with experience supporting districts of all sizes can better scale their solutions to meet your needs. <b>How many schools does the program reach?</b>	Second Step programs are used in classrooms across all 50 states. Currently, Committee for Children's programs and resources, including the Second Step family of programs, reach over 26 million children and 45,000 schools nationwide annually. This reach allows Committee for Children to draw on immense leader, educator, and student feedback.	
	History	Districts need to trust that the organization they partner with has experience and leadership in the field. <b>Does the program have a history of developing high-quality programming and effectively supporting districts' needs?</b>	Since 1985, Committee for Children has been a leader in research-based skill-building and primary prevention programming. In that time, Committee for Children has advocated for policies to enhance, gathered research to support, and developed educational programs to advance the safety and well-being of children.	

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