Advice for selecting curriculum

A form to that could be updated and used:
<http://www.sde.com/Downloads/TeacherResources/di_text/textbook_evaluation.pdf>

A couple suggestions from my own mistakes and
first-hand experience of living through the mistakes of others.

1)  Call your local rep and request review kits for the series you're
going to review. From secular publishers, these are free and you or
the teacher gets to keep the books for her own personal library. From
Christian publishers, you'll probably have to return them after 60
days.

2)  Be sure to allow enough time. I typically plan to start in October
for the following term, although plans and reality don't always
coincide.

3)  Be sure to include the teacher(s) who will be teaching the
curriculum on the review team and take their input seriously. Some of
the most attractive, apparently engaging texts, may be organized and
sequenced in a way which is difficult to teach. A parent and/or board member on the
team isn't a bad idea either. FMH used to have an Education Committee,
including both a board member and parents, whose job it was to give
final approval to the text/publisher the faculty committee
recommended.

4)  Be sure to look at the entire scope and sequence of the subject
from your lowest to highest grade. Also, don't ignore state standards
in the subject for each grade level.

5)  When you select a series, if it is sequential, like reading or
math, consider implementing it grade by grade. When my son was in 4th
grade many years ago his elementary school switched the entire reading
program throughout the school to aBeka in the same year (or else they
used different curricula from grade to grade based on teacher
preference--we're not sure which). My son and a few of his friends
survived; however, overall the backlash was severe enough that they
soon dropped the series. I'm not sure they would have had to had they
implemented it grade by grade.

6)  Don't assume that one publisher's work is superior in every
subject. We use one publisher for math, another for history. Neither
of them Christian publishers.

7)  Beginning teachers especially, but experienced teachers as well,
can significantly enhance their classroom presentations (as well as
minimize preparation time) with adequate teacher resources -- answer
keys, overhead transparencies or PowerPoint presentations, well
annotated teacher's editions, editable test masters on CD, etc. Our
MyWorld Geography text (gr. 6, Pearson, 2011) comes with an unlock key
to access short, online, first-person bios from children living in the
community being studied. My Algebra and Geometry series (McDougal
Littell, 2007), comes with online PP presentations which take the
examples from the text and solve them step-wise in the presentation.
This series also has online homework tutors on the same website for the kids.

8)  Unless your students are dramatically different from mine, today's
kids will not focus long on resources that are too text intensive. The
more pictures and diagrams, the better. I would automatically
eliminate any book which wasn't published in full color.

9)  MEEC (does it still exist?) used to do an annual review of a
specific subject area, going through the basic curriculum once ever
five or six years. They made their evaluation of each series as well
as their final recommendations available to member schools. If that
isn't available for you, ask around to find out what others are using and finding
successful.

10)  The obvious missing criterion above is whether or not the series
is compatible with our Anabaptist understanding of the Word. I didn't
miss it; I'm assuming it's at the top of your list.

-Jim Gochnauer