

Imagine Schools Literacy Position Paper

Leaders Guiding and Coordinating
Teachers Planning and Instructing
Students Acquiring and Owning
The Science of Reading into Action





Developing Character,
Enriching Minds

Vision Statement

Imagine Schools' vision is for every student to reach his or her full potential and discover the pathways for lifelong success.

Mission Statement

As a national family of public charter school campuses, Imagine Schools partners with parents and guardians in the education of their children by providing high quality schools that prepare students for lives of leadership, accomplishment, and exemplary character.

Visionary Academic Goals

Imagine Schools aims for every student to gain more than one year's growth during the academic year. We also strive for all students who enter Imagine Schools below grade level to attain grade level proficiency within three years or less. Those at or above grade level will be challenged to soar beyond expectations.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2019, we began this literacy reform journey following the lead of our learning partner, Dr. Gene Kerns, Chief Academic Officer at Renaissance Learning. Members of the National Academic and Character Team embarked on a three-year literacy study with valued colleagues across Imagine Schools.

Jason Bryant – Chief Academic Officer

Karen Gayle – National Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Alex Fernandez – National Director for Assessment

Nadja Pardo – National Director for Character Development

We want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our National Academic Council consisting of our Imagine Group Academic Directors:

Dr. Stephania Sherman – Southeast Florida

Victoria Brown – Gulf Atlantic Coast Florida

Travis Miller – Mid-Atlantic

Heather Carrick - Heartland

Dr. Matthew Gehrman - Southwest

Dr. Karen Benson - Southwest

Clara Thigpen - Southwest

Helen Ritchey - Texas

These voices combined with members of a Reading Task Force who represented groups, regions and schools across Imagine Schools:

Diane (Beatty) Thorne – Executive Vice President for the Southeast Group

Jennifer Keller – Regional Director for the Heartland Group

Heidi Lindsey – Regional Director for the Southwest Group

Dr. Stephania Sherman – Group Academic Director for the Southeast

Dr. Karen Benson – Group Academic Director for the Southwest

Erin Kelly – Principal for Imagine North Manatee in FL

Nichole Shaffer – Principal for Imagine Mountain View in NV

Jamie Lama – Principal for Imagine Sullivant in OH

Mark Connelly – School Academic Coach for Imagine Andrews in MD

Crystal McCann – Reading Specialist for Imagine Andrews in MD

Alison Brannack – School Academic Coach for Imagine North Port Lower in FL

Lisa Presley – School Academic Coach for Imagine at Mountain View in NV

April Schafer – School Academic Coach for Imagine Sullivant in OH

Patrick O'Brien – School Academic Coach for Imagine Sullivant in OH

Carmen Hernandez – School Academic Coach for Imagine International Academy of North Texas

Pamela Hinterscher – MYP Curriculum Coordinator for Imagine International Academy of North Texas

All diligently and thoughtfully reviewed and discussed the research, brought different perspectives to the table, participated in book studies and webinars, attended conferences and spoke with experts in the field in order to provide this vision and guide this mission to establish a critical alignment between the evidence-based reading research and the instructional practices at Imagine Schools. Their keen advice and comments greatly improved the depth and breadth of this position paper.



Contents

SECTION	PAGES
Leading on Purpose	5-9
Vision and Mission	10-14
Purpose to Practice	15-25
Measuring Success	26-30
Professional Support	31-34
Conclusion	35
Glossary	36-48
References	49-58



INTRODUCTION

Good literacy skills—the ability to read, write, and communicate confidently—are foundational to learning. They unlock access to all areas of the *curriculum*, enabling students to discover and pursue their individual talents and interests.

By broadening and deepening *literacy* skills, our Imagine Schools’ students will optimize their lifelong learning potential, have the ability to become active members of society and find satisfaction in their reading experiences.

If students are truly literate, they can make their own sense of the world. Students can use their skills to create, produce and understand language. They can use that understanding to interpret, communicate and share their world and experience the world of others.

- Lisa Presley,
Imagine Mountainview

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



PURPOSE: Our Data and the Science of Reading Research

This **Literacy Position Paper** is needed because our reading data has been stagnant for the last decade. Our instructional practices have not improved our students’ reading achievement. The purpose of this paper is to bring a universal understanding to our educators of the **Science of Reading** and to support them in constructing and maintaining the critical alignment between evidence-based reading research and actionable instructional strategies that will improve our students’ literacy skills.

VISION and MISSION: Our Beliefs and Expectations

Our vision, mission, beliefs and expectations, on how students learn to read and develop into literate adults outlined in this paper, will guide our work to enact bold reform efforts to advance the reading outcomes of all our students.

PURPOSE to PRACTICE: Our Approach and Methodology Based on the Science of Reading

Structured literacy and *disciplinary literacy* are the instructional *approaches* that lead to effective student learning. *Skills-based* and *knowledge-based competencies* guide the methodologies that lead to student reading mastery.

MEASURING READING SUCCESS: Our Process for Monitoring Reading Progress and Providing Effective Feedback on Students Reading

Recommendations for appropriate reading *assessment* tools and practices will provide insight into the effectiveness of instruction and guide *interventions* and feedback that will ensure student progress.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: Our Support and Recommended Resources

This paper concludes with guidance for effective implementation through professional learning and recommendations for close scrutiny of instructional materials based on the *Science of Reading*.

**Words in italics in this paper can be found in the glossary.*

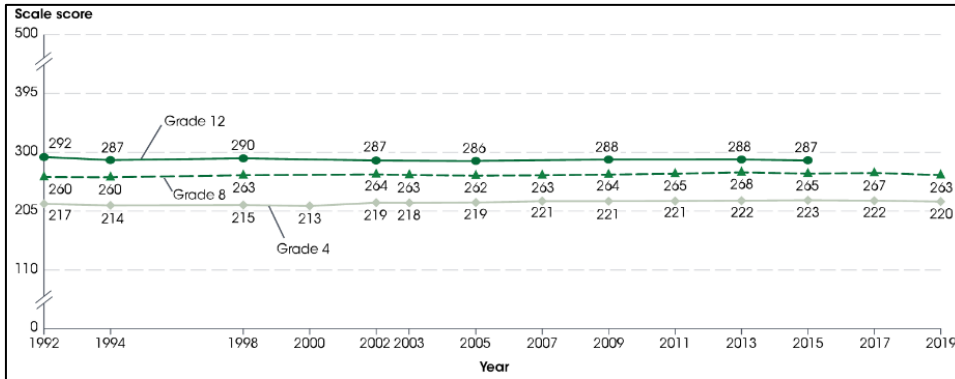
LEADING ON PURPOSE:

Data

“Continually stagnant rates of proficiency when many schools substantially increased time devoted to ELA clearly tell us that the way we are currently addressing literacy simply is not paying adequate dividends.”

– Gene Kerns *Literacy Reframed*, 2021, p.5

Despite our best efforts, many children are struggling to learn to read. In 2019, on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), only one-third of fourth graders, 35%, were considered *proficient* readers. Only 36% of eighth graders were proficient. More staggering is that over the past twenty years reading scores have been stagnant.

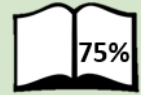


[National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (U.S. Department of Education, 2019)

At Imagine Schools, we see an even more concerning trend. Even with all the initiatives over the years: [Imagine Schools Curriculum Guides](#), [Academic Excellence Framework](#), [Literacy Focus Strategies](#), [Acceleration Model](#), [Collaborative Plan](#), our students are not progressing.



We cannot ignore this stagnant and declining data and continue teaching as usual. Understanding the research will help us examine our literacy practices.



of students who do not read proficiently by third grade never reach reading proficiency in future grades.

-EAB – [Narrowing the 3rd Grade Reading Gap](#),

2019, p. 5

Reflect-to-Act

- ① What trends do you see in your school’s reading data over the last seven years?
- ② What trends do you see in your school’s grade level reading data over the last seven years?
- ③ What other reading data can you analyze? What reading data was collected in your most recent SEP?
- ④ Discuss root causes for stagnant reading scores.

Bravely Embrace Research

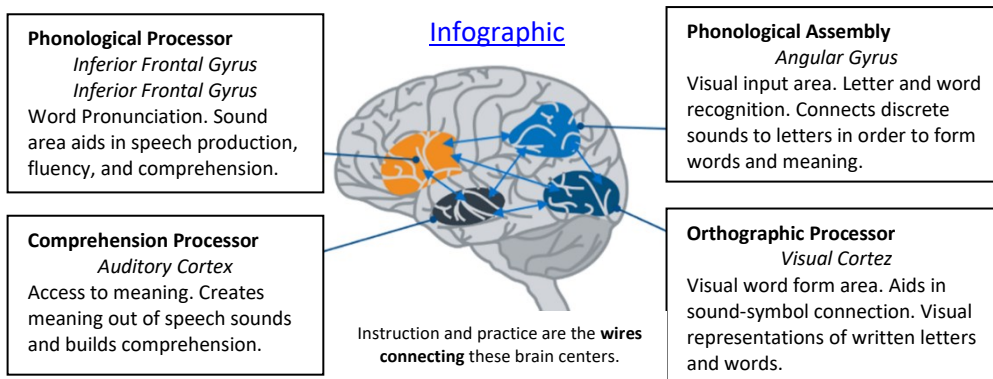
“Instead of looking to authoritative and valid evidence of what works, teachers frequently rely on experience and anecdotal information to guide their teaching. Although experience is valuable, depending on experience alone typically leaves many children behind. To provide reading instruction that will enable all students to succeed, educators must also have basic information about scientific knowledge: how it is developed and how it should guide the selection and implementation of instructional programs, strategies, and approaches.”

-McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Moats, 1999; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003

The knowledge of the researchers must transfer to the practices of our educators.

The Science of Reading: Neurological Model

There have been thousands of studies on reading since the original [National Reading Panel](#) 2000 report on effective reading practices. The current body of work referred to as “the *Science of Reading*” is not an ideology, a political agenda, a program of instruction, a philosophy or only about a specific component of reading instruction. It is the consensus, a body of knowledge, based on literally thousands of studies conducted by educational researchers, *linguists*, *cognitive* psychologists (brain researchers) across the world on how students learn to read, what impedes students from learning, and what instruction works best for all students (Moats, 2019).



- Sandak, Mencl, Frost, & Pugh, 2004; Houde, Rossi, Lubin, & Joliot, 2010

Key points from the brain research:

- The human brain is not naturally wired to read (Wolf, 2018). **Reading needs to be taught *explicitly* and *systematically*.**
- Within the brain, neural circuits are being built by effective instruction and practice that link the sounds of spoken words, the *phonemes* (*Phonological Assembly*) to the print code, the letters that represent those sounds (*Orthographic Processor*) (Shaywitz, 2003). **Reading instruction is the only way to bridge oral language and visual image processing, *segmenting* sounds before matching sounds to letters.**
- *Comprehension* (making meaning) involves spoken language and *topic* knowledge, and is contingent on recognizing and comprehending sequences of words accurately and efficiently ([Seidenberg, 2017](#)). **Good readers do not rely on the inefficient strategy of guessing words from pictures or context; they *decode* each word and integrate it with what has come before to make meaning.**

The idea that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community.

-Keith Stanovich, 2003, pgs. 285-286

Reflect-to-Act

- ① What neurological aspects of learning to read were you not aware of before?
- ② How is this explanation of how the brain learns to read different from what you previously understood? Were you taught that reading is a natural process, like speaking? How does this new research influence your thinking?
- ③ Some programs still use the [Three-cueing model](#), how does what we know now influence the use of that practice?
- ④ How can you use this new knowledge to implement what is known and achieve the critical alignment between research and practice?

The Science of Reading: Theoretical Models

“Knowing the regions of the reading brain is helpful in understanding neural activity during the act of reading. It’s also helpful to explore the theoretical underpinnings of the science of reading.”

- Laura Steward National Director for The Reading League

Researchers have identified two instructional *models*, the **Simple View of Reading** and the **Strands of Reading**, which explain the critical components of how reading comprehension develops and needs to be taught.

The Simple View of Reading

The [Simple View of Reading](#) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) model demonstrates that success with reading comprehension requires competency in both *language comprehension* and *fluent word recognition* (Lonigan, Burgess, & Schatschneider, 2018).

The Skilled Reading Strands

In [Scarborough’s Rope](#) (Scarborough, 2002) model, the twisting ropes represent the underlying skills and elements that come together to form the two necessary braids, which represent the two essential components of reading comprehension, established in the Simple View of Reading.

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE
(facts, concepts, etc.)

VOCABULARY (make meaning,
breadth, precision, connections)

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES
(syntax, semantics, etc.)

VERBAL REASONING (inference,
metaphor, prediction, monitor)

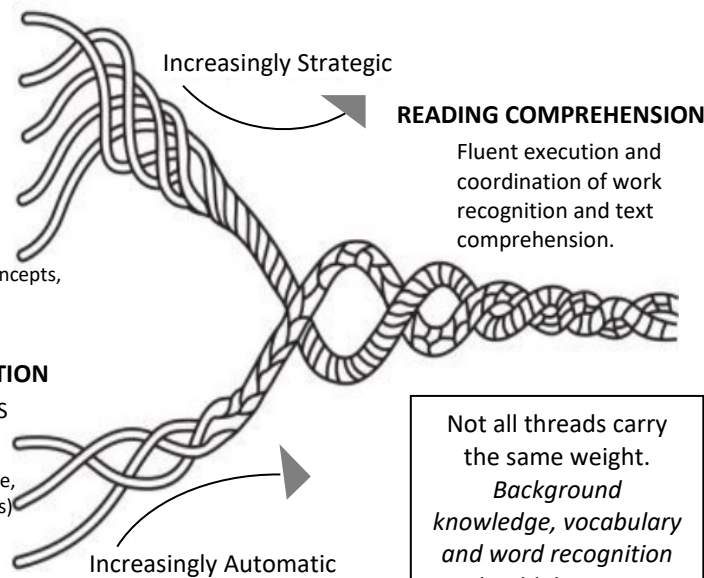
LITERACY KNOWLEDGE (print concepts,
genres, etc.)

FLUENT WORD RECOGNITION

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS
(syllables, phonemes, etc.)

DECODING (alphabetic principle,
spelling-sound) correspondences)

SIGHT RECOGNITION
(of familiar words)



Key points from these theoretical models:

- Strong reading comprehension results only when word recognition is fluent and language comprehension is strong. **To be a skilled reader, both automatic word recognition and an understanding of the world through language comprehension are necessary.**
- Navigating through *text* and utilizing language comprehension strategies requires a level of *automaticity* in word recognition. **When words become sight words (the brain’s instant retrieval of words learned through explicit phonics instruction), attention can be focused on constructing the meaning of the text.**

It simply is not true that there are hundreds of ways to learn to read... when it comes to reading, all children have roughly the same brain that imposes the same constraints and the same learning sequence.

-Stanislas Dehaene,
2009, p. 218

Reflect-to-Act

- ① What makes sense to you about the Simple View of Reading?
- ② What subset of Scarborough’s Rope needs more attention at your school? Why?
- ③ How will these models affect the instructional schedule at your school and in your class?
- ④ How can knowledge of these components influence how reading diagnostic assessments and interventions are determined at your school?

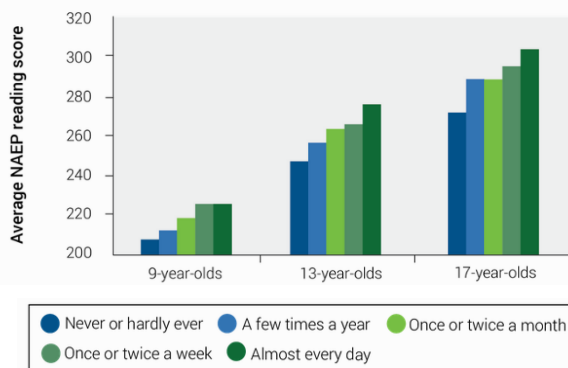
The Science of Reading: Background Knowledge Studies

“After we learn the mechanics of reading early on, through phonics and decoding, reading growth then depends, more than anything, on our ability to develop students’ knowledge base and vocabulary”.

- Lemov, 2015; Pinker in Hirsch, 2016; Shanahan, 2011, 2014; as cited in Schmoker, 2018, pg. 270

When we think about teaching literacy, we most often think about *skills* and *strategies*—the *how* of reading, rather than the *what* of reading – the ideas within texts and the knowledge readers bring to the text (Palincsar & Duke, 2004). Dozens of studies demonstrate the importance of the *what*. A recent study, published by the [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#), advocates for a greater emphasis on building elementary students’ knowledge of history, civics, and geography. A compelling study, that supports the iconic “[Baseball Study](#)” by Recht & Leslie, was designed around the adventures of four species of *Wugs* (a pseudo word). The results sustained the hypothesis about the importance of background knowledge for reading comprehension. By holding background knowledge constant with the introduction of an unknown topic, there were no significant differences between groups in children’s word recognition, comprehension, or ability to make inferences ([Neuman, Kaefer, Pinkham, 2014](#)).

Frequent Reading Correlates with Higher Reading Scores



Building background knowledge and increasing vocabulary occurs through frequent reading. Research has shown that more than half the variance in students’ reading comprehension scores can be explained by the depth and breadth of their vocabulary knowledge. It is estimated that readers need to know about 98% of the words in a passage for comfortable comprehension (Renaissance, 2018).

Key Points from Background Knowledge Studies:

- Knowledge, of both the topic and the vocabulary, is the most important contributor to reading comprehension (Cervetti & Heibert, 2018). **Cross-curricular units of study on social studies and science topics are an efficient and effective way to build background knowledge systematically.**
- Readers that can *activate prior knowledge* connect new information with that existing knowledge where it then becomes stored in long-term memory through neural activity (Kerns, 2021). **Having a solid base of knowledge of a topic enables readers to choose between multiple meanings of words and construct meaning by supplying missing information and making inferences.**
- One of the best ways to build students’ vocabulary and background knowledge is to provide time for them to practice reading. **Making reading practice a system-wide objective may be one of the most important things we can do for our students’ long-term outcomes** (Kerns, 2022).

Average Number of
**Minutes per Day
Spent Teaching
Each Subject in Self-
Contained Classes
by Grade**

	K-3	4-6
Reading	89	83
Math	54	61
Science	19	24
Social Studies	16	21

- Hansel & Pondiscio,
2016

Reflect-to-Act

- ① What are three things members of your collaborative team could do tomorrow to reframe the acquisition of knowledge? Why does [knowledge matter](#)?
- ② How much time do students spend reading conceptually and thematically rich texts in your school and/or classroom?
- ③ What opportunities do students have to build their knowledge of important *concepts* and *themes* about the natural and social world?
- ④ What resources are available in your school to create a purposeful, knowledge-focused ELA curriculum?



VISION & MISSION:

Our Vision and Mission for Literacy Instruction

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it much finally depends on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

- Ronald Edmonds 1979, p. 15

A school that can identify its core beliefs about effective literacy instruction has an empowering framework for guiding the school's vision and mission. A *vision* for literacy provides direction through a description of an imagined future of excellence. A *mission* for literacy describes how that future will be achieved.

"There is a world of difference between having a mission statement and having a sense of mission"

-Lawrence Lezotte, 2002, p.119

At Imagine Schools, we have a sense of mission to improve literacy instruction based on the *Science of Reading*. Creating schools where all students are on a positive journey to becoming literate will not be easy, but we must create schools where literacy abounds.

Vision for Literacy at Imagine Schools

Imagine Schools empowers students with a strong foundation of reading so they can be literate about the world around them and reach their fullest potential.

Mission for Literacy at Imagine Schools

Students at Imagine Schools will use their understanding of *literature* to interpret, communicate and share their world and experience the world of others.

Continuous school improvement is a never-ending cycle of self-examination and adjustment. At Imagine Schools, we never stop asking,

How are we doing?

What can we do better?

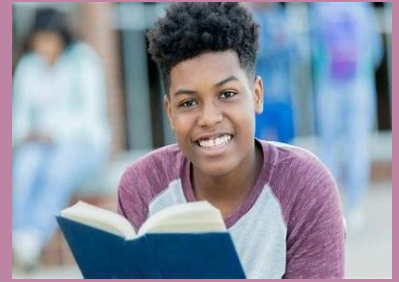
How can we better serve our students?



Our Beliefs about Literacy

WE BELIEVE.....

- ☞ All students can learn to read and write with the right instruction.
- ☞ Reading and writing are essential to playing a full role as a citizen in our society.
- ☞ Reading experiences and reading accomplishments make ongoing contributions to a student's personality development and sense of self.
- ☞ Reading is a source of self-improvement in knowledge of the world and in understanding the human condition.
- ☞ Reading a good book is one of the greatest experiences in life.
- ☞ Literacy instruction and experiences that are social, contextual, engaging, collaborative and student-owned lead to deeper learning.
- ☞ Reading and writing are active and complex processes that involve understanding text and developing and interpreting meaning from the text.
- ☞ Adequate content knowledge is critical; the more students know the broader the range of texts they can comprehend.
- ☞ Our students must see themselves, their families, and their cultures and communities in the books they read.
- ☞ Elementary schedules need to provide ample time for the teaching of social studies and science to increase background knowledge AND that writing, listening and speaking, viewing and presenting and character *development* are all part of developing proficient readers.
- ☞ There should be explicit instruction in reading and writing in the primary grades and all our teachers should know the foundations of learning to read.
- ☞ Early readers need practice applying their sound/letter knowledge with decodable readers.
- ☞ We read to construct meaning and we must use particular strategies and skills to do so.
- ☞ It is necessary to intentionally plan for *independent reading* by attending to book selection, *text complexity*, *conferencing*, and ample time for students to read in the daily schedule.
- ☞ Assessments drive instruction and interventions.
- ☞ Materials matter, but Implementation matters more.
- ☞ Literacy is engaging with written texts, in order to develop and achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Which of these beliefs do you agree with? Which beliefs do you question? What are other beliefs you have about literacy?
- ② Develop a vision and mission for your school that complements your school's current vision and mission, starting with a list of your beliefs.
- ③ How can you make sure all stakeholders are involved in this process to ensure a strong commitment?
- ④ How can you keep your literacy mission from becoming just another plaque on the wall?

Our Expectations about Literacy

STUDENTS WILL ENGAGE IN....

- Opportunities to practice reading by using foundational literacy skills that have been taught explicitly and systematically.
- Learning to *decode* and encode simultaneously.
- Reading *decodable texts* in the early grades based on the sound/letter sequence being taught.
- Thinking like a disciplinarian while reading texts across subject areas.
- Independently and collaboratively reading a wide range of content-rich, complex texts every day.
- Formulating interpretations and arguments through speaking and writing.
- Using strategies to analyze texts in a variety of genres, for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- Building knowledge and vocabulary through their curiosity about the world while reading for pleasure and reading within a unit of study.
- Self-teaching through more and more reading, setting goals and assessing progress with a system that is monitored and supported by the teacher.

TEACHERS WILL ENGAGE IN....

- Developing students' speaking, listening and writing skills for a wider understanding and use of language.
- Using a structured literacy approach to developing reading by teaching both skills-based competencies and knowledge-based competencies.
- Instructing explicitly and systematically the foundational skills, beginning with sounds and then connecting the symbolic code.
- Organizing skill groups for targeted instruction instead of leveled reader groupings.
- Teaching students to decode words, analyze word parts, and avoid any programs that include drawing shapes around words, making alphabetic *word walls*, teaching the "cueing system" approach or using context clues (pictures) to guess at how to pronounce unknown words.
- Evaluating texts in order to intentionally select and sequence texts based on topics to build students' knowledge and vocabulary.
- Reading aloud to students to build background knowledge and vocabulary.
- Teaching students to use reading strategies for developing and *monitoring* their reading comprehension and refraining from over-skillification practice.
- Explicitly teaching spelling and word *morphology* based on a system to build word recognition and vocabulary.
- Conferencing with students on their reading choices, motivation and progress, and providing effective feedback based on knowledge of the student and how feedback will be received.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Which of the student expectations do you agree with? Which expectations do you question? Why?
- ② Which of the teacher expectations do you agree with? Which expectations do you question? Why?
- ③ Which of the expectations do you hope to find out more about in the paper?
- ④ How can these expectations be manifested in your school?

COACHES WILL ENGAGE IN....

- Becoming experts in the *Science of Reading*.
- Providing the appropriate professional development for teachers on the *Science of Reading*.
- Training teachers in explicit instruction of the foundational skills and administration of *oral reading fluency checks*.
- Coaching teachers who are reluctant to change practices that are not effective.
- Developing comprehensive units of study based on cross-curricular universal themes to build students' background knowledge.
- Providing avenues for teachers to grow professionally through video coaching and peer collaboration.
- Using data to inform instruction and designing the appropriate interventions to meet all students' needs.
- Prioritizing reading for pleasure by inventorying all classroom libraries and developing a system for students to access books.
- Supporting teachers in scheduling conferences with students and providing productive feedback.

LEADERS WILL ENGAGE IN....

- Coordinating the development of the *School Excellence Plan* to ensure that the action steps are in alignment with and focused on the *Science of Reading*.
- Evaluating the schools' materials and resources to ensure teachers are using high quality, appropriately rigorous programs aligned with the *Science of Reading*.
- Monitoring teaching practices to ensure that primary teachers systematically and explicitly deliver stellar lessons on foundational skills.
- Ensuring that reading and writing are emphasized across all content areas.
- Prioritizing science and social studies instruction in the elementary schedule and promoting rich cross-curricular units of study that build background knowledge.
- Investing in assessment resources that give teachers the necessary tools to monitor students' progress in the various aspects of reading adequately.
- Investing in classroom libraries and an abundance of reading materials for all grade levels giving students access to quality texts for independent and academic reading.
- Communicating with parents on the *Science of Reading* in order to strengthen the home-school partnership for reading development and motivation.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Which of the coach expectations do you agree with? Which expectations do you question? Why?
- ② Which of the leader expectations do you agree with? Which expectations do you question? Why?
- ③ Which of the expectations do you hope to find out more about in the paper?
- ④ How can these expectations be manifested in your school?

Building a Strong School Culture of Literacy Based on the *Science of Reading* in your School Excellence Plans

“The ‘Science of Reading’ is a body of basic research in developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience on reading, one of the most complex human behaviors, and its biological (neural, genetic) bases. This research has been conducted for decades in the US and around the world. The research has important implications for helping children to succeed.”

-Mark Seidenberg, 2017

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to support educators in constructing and maintaining the critical alignment between *evidence-based* reading research and actionable instructional strategies that will improve our students’ literacy skills at all grade levels.

Audience

This paper is for teachers and all who support their instruction. Knowledge and implementation of best practices are essential. All educators must have a deep understanding of the art and science of literacy instruction in order to develop lifelong learners.

How to Use this Paper

Support and collaboration through the Imagine Family is integral. This document is organized into five areas, each with summarizing key points and side bar reflection questions. Use this document to guide reflection on data, beliefs, practices, and support (through resources and professional development) at the school and regional level to develop the necessary action plans in your school excellence plans.



FROM PURPOSE TO PRACTICE:

Our Approach Advances

“Literacy educators have been in search of “what works” for decades. As a group, we’ve dedicated ourselves to students’ reading and writing (and speaking, listening and viewing) development because we know that literacy can change lives.”

- Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, John Hattie, 2016, p. xi

In order to advance all of our students’ reading progress, we must commit to implementing evidence-based reading instruction aligned with the *Science of Reading* using a structured literacy approach. With a growth mindset, our teaching is grounded in what students can do, an “*asset based*” approach rather than on what they cannot do, a “*deficit based*” approach. If better approaches can lead to outcomes that are more successful for a greater number of students, we need to consider implementing those practices and stop using approaches that research has shown do not work as well.

Here are the key **ABCs of our Literacy Approach** that will advance reading success at our schools.

A **ACQUISITION:** Reading is a language-based skill. The relationship between oral language and reading is *reciprocal* with each influencing the other to varying degrees as children progress through school (Literacy**how**, 2020).

B **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:** Foundational reading skills do not stand-alone. Students also need content knowledge and academic vocabulary to be skilled readers (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2018).

C **COMMUNICATION:** Written expression (composition) and oral language (speaking and listening) are essential components for literacy (Literacy**how**, 2020).

D **DIFFERENTIATION:** In a *differentiated* classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches for content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs (Carol Ann Thomlinson, 2017).



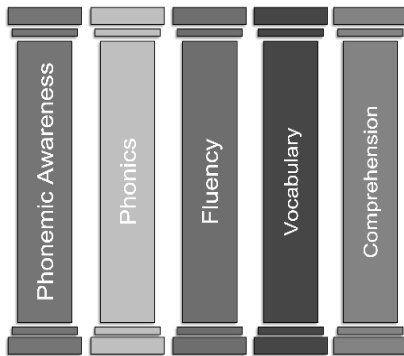
Our Approach Advances

Structured Literacy

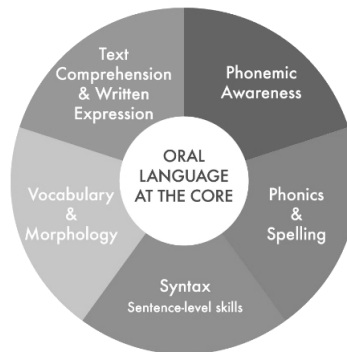
Teacher knowledge and skills matter, but so do appropriate approaches to instruction and intervention – approaches forged in scientific evidence. It is not the case, as is sometimes claimed, that a highly skilled, knowledgeable educator can teach reading effectively using literally any method.

- Louise Spear-Swerling, 2019, p. 1

In addition to the five components identified by the National Reading Panel (2000), the [Structured Literacy](#) approach emphasizes highly *explicit* and *systematic* instruction of both foundational skills and higher-level literacy skills. (Louis Spear-Swerling, 2018).



-[National Reading Panel](#), 2000



-[Literacy How](#), 2020

The “literacy wheel” above depicts the essential components of comprehensive literacy instruction with *oral language*—speaking and listening—as the foundation for learning to read. This approach expands on the five pillars to also include *spelling* (with *phonics*), *syntax*, *morphology* (with *vocabulary*), and *written expression* (with *text comprehension*). The ultimate goal is to produce *fluent* readers and writers who are proficient in both discrete skills (word recognition) and complex skills (comprehension and *composition*). These are all necessary to become literate adults (Literacy How, 2020).

The *Structured Literacy* approach is efficient, effective, and impactful. The following **obstacles** need to be addressed for this approach to be successful (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

- **An inadequate or nonexistent review and repetition cycle.** Many curricular materials focus on exposure, rapidly moving from one skill to the next. Most students need significantly more time in applying the skill after the initial introduction to achieve mastery (at least four to six weeks).
- **Lack of application to real reading and writing experiences.** Learning sticks when applied and students need to apply their growing skills to reading and writing daily in texts with ample knowledge of decodable words.
- **Inappropriate reading materials to practice skills.** Decodable texts are an essential part of each day’s phonics lessons. Leveled texts often do not contain enough decodable words to bring all students to mastery.
- **Ineffective use of the gradual release model.** Teachers must not over support lessons; the teacher’s role is to model, provide ample practice opportunities, and offer corrective feedback. The student needs to be doing the thinking and learning by actively reading.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What elements of the Literacy Wheel do you need to know more about?
- ② What aspects of the pillars and wheel does your current approach to literacy instruction include? What is emphasized? What is not?
- ③ How much time does your current approach allot to review and repetition? How could pacing be adjusted?
- ④ What type of texts are used for students to practice reading at your school? Discuss your beliefs about and use of decodable and leveled texts.

Our Approach Advances Structured Literacy

Without research-based instructional approaches and curricula, teachers might overlook important components of reading and writing instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, spelling, and writing processes such as planning and revision. Both capable teachers and research-based instructional approaches are necessary.

-Louise Spear-Swerling, 2019, p. 1

The *Structure Literacy* approach differs significantly from the [Balanced Literacy](#) approach. Educators might have previously followed the *Balanced Literacy* approach, but now that we know a *Structured Literacy* approach prevents students from struggling unnecessarily when they are learning to read, we must embrace the change to teach reading *explicitly* and *systematically*. If educators are prepared to implement this kind of instruction, and are given appropriate instructional materials, they can reach a much wider range of children than with other less effective literacy practices (Iowa Reading Research Center, 2022).

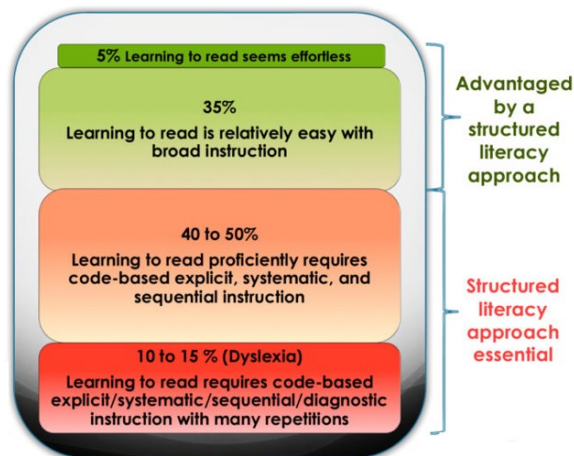
Structured Literacy	Typical Literacy Practices
Phonics skills are taught explicitly and systematically, with prerequisite skills taught first. These skills receive considerable initial emphasis for beginning readers.	Phonics skills are usually taught but not emphasized. Teaching is often not highly explicit or systematic. Prerequisite skills may not be taught first.
<i>Phonics</i> approach is <i>synthetic</i> (parts to whole). Students learn common letter sounds, letter patterns, and how to blend letter sounds (phoneme <i>blending</i>).	Phonics approach is often <i>analytic</i> (whole to parts) or decoding by analogy (word families).
Beginning readers usually read <i>decodable texts</i> (texts largely controlled to specific phonics patterns that have been explicitly taught) that facilitate learning to apply phonics skills while reading a new text.	Beginning readers usually read leveled and predictable texts (texts in which words are predictable based on sentence structure, repetition, or pictures) that do not easily lend themselves to application of phonics skills.
Time for individual students to read texts orally with a teacher is intentionally scheduled as part of lessons.	Partner and independent reading may be emphasized more than oral text reading with a teacher.
When students read text orally, they are encouraged to look carefully at printed words and apply decoding skills to unfamiliar words.	When students read text orally, some errors may be overlooked, especially if they do not greatly alter meaning of the text. Teacher feedback to errors may emphasize sentence context or pictures rather than consistent application of decoding skills.
Spelling skills and rules are taught explicitly and systematically with prerequisite skills taught first. Spelling instruction reinforces and extends what students learn in decoding.	Spelling is often not taught in an explicit or systematic manner. Students may learn word lists in which words exemplify no particular phonics pattern or spelling rule. Spelling program may be completely distinct from decoding program with different words in the two programs.
Higher levels of literacy are explicitly and systematically taught (e.g., sentence structure, paragraphs, discourse), including prerequisite skills.	Some higher levels of literacy may be explicitly taught but usually not systematically and not with strong attention to prerequisite skills.

-Louise Spear-Swerling, 2019, p. 5

Our Approach Advances Structured Literacy

“Literacy is not a single skill that simply gets better ... Being literate is very different for the skilled first grader, fourth grader, high school student, and adult, and the effects of school experiences can be quite different at different points in a child’s development.”

— Catherine Snow, et al, 1991, p.9



-Young, 2017

Key Points of the *Structured Literacy Approach*:

- Understanding language at an oral level is necessary in order to understand it at the text level. **Creating oral language practice routines develops the initial pathway for learning to read.**
- *Structured Literacy* emphasizes a **smallest-unit approach**, which focuses from the start on individual *phonemes* (sounds) in words and the *graphemes* (letters/letter patterns) that represent them. Other approaches focus on larger units such as *onsets* and *rimes* or whole words ([Blevins, 2016](#)).
- **Highly explicit instruction is provided** not only in important foundational skills, but also in higher-level aspects of literacy such as *syntax*, reading comprehension, and text composition ([Literacy How, 2020](#)).
- Comprehension requires *metacognitive* skills, vocabulary, background knowledge, and verbal reasoning ability. **Effective reading comprehension instruction focuses on text structure, background knowledge, text cohesion, inference, and reading/writing connections** ([Chall, 2022](#)).
- Students successfully complete activities at a high criterion level of performance before moving on to more advanced skills. **Well-targeted corrective feedback** is provided after initial student responses ([Brookhart, 2008](#)))
- **Meaningful interactions with language** occur during the lesson with multiple opportunities to practice instructional tasks. ([Moats, 2020](#))



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What approaches for oral language currently happen at your school at all grade levels?
- ② Why is an early literacy scope and sequence, first teaching the segments of sounds and then linking the sounds to the letters, important?
- ③ What key differences between the *Balanced Literacy* and *Structured Literacy* approaches cause you to reconsider your current practices?
- ④ If your school has been using a *Balanced Literacy* approach, what shifts are you willing to make based on the research?

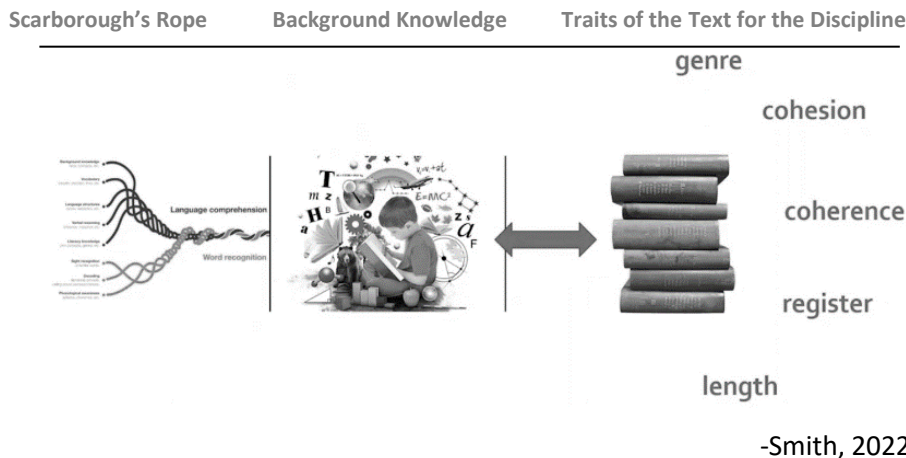
Our Approach Advances Disciplinary Literacy Model for Knowledge Building

“Content area reading prescribes study techniques and reading approaches that can help someone to comprehend or to remember text better (with little regard to the type of text), whereas disciplinary literacy emphasizes the description of unique uses and implications of literacy use within the various disciplines.”

— Timothy Shanahan, 2012, p. 8

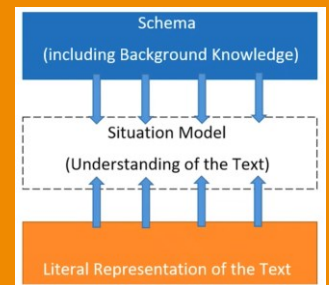
Numerous studies point to background knowledge, as having a significant effect on reading comprehension. As students read they connect new knowledge into the *schema* of the knowledge that exists, which “builds” more knowledge. Disciplinary learning does not just build knowledge it actually produces it. In a disciplinary literacy approach, students “think like” the people in the discipline (Lent, 2017):

- Observe-infer-conclude in science
- Deconstruct-solve-apply in math
- Analyze-compare/evaluate-infer in history
- Summarize-evaluate/analyze-write in English
- Listen-comprehend-speak in world languages
- Observe-analyze-express in art



Key Points of the *Disciplinary Literacy Model*:

- Instruction providing guidance that is explicit in the specialized ways that literacy works in the texts of history, science, mathematics and literature helps students when reading in the content areas (Shanahan, 2012). **Content area teachers do not merely teach students how to close read a text, they teach students how to think like a disciplinarian and learn from a text** (Lent, 2017).
- We can help students learn new material by *activating* their *prior knowledge* (i.e., helping them access their *schemata*) in order to establish connections with lessons and new material. **If we understand what students already know, we will know how to build on that (or clear up any misconceptions) and then identify what remains to be learned** (Cross, 2022).



- Reid Smith, 2021

Reflect-to-Act

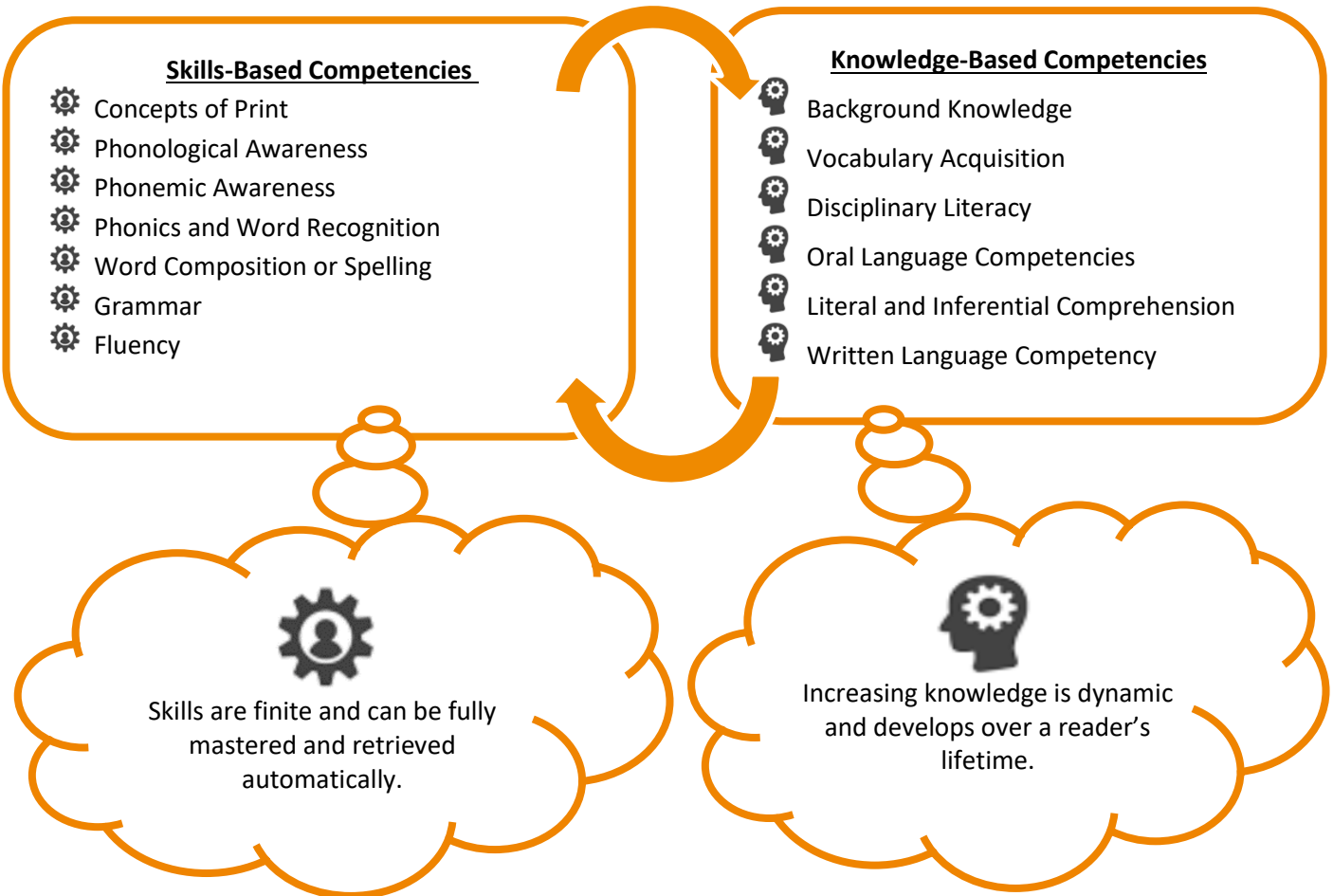
- ① How is reading the text like a disciplinarian different from using reading strategies to understand the text?
- ② What approach do you use to build students' background knowledge?
- ③ Discuss ways to help students build an **organized meaningful system of relationships** (*schemata*) among facts, ideas and associations (such as events, places, procedures and people).

Our Methodology Matters

"If education matters, we are obligated to examine whether and how much accepted practices could be improved."

- Mark Seidenberg, 2017, p. 247

Our *methodology* is based on studies that show accomplished readers use both *skills-based* and *knowledge-based competencies* to understand text. Literacy experts have used these two categories of competencies to clarify the relationships between foundational literacy building and the resulting goal of comprehension and knowledge building from reading ([Shanahan, 2018](#)).



PHASE ONE: <i>BEFORE</i> <i>students have learned the mechanics of reading</i>	PHASE TWO: <i>AFTER</i> <i>students have learned the mechanics of reading</i>
The teacher's role is critical for the acquisition of skills.	The student's role is critical in acquiring knowledge.
The teacher instructs critical skills for mastery.	The teacher facilitates the students transferring of knowledge to new situations.
Students learning skills on their own is not possible.	Students increasing knowledge grows exponentially based on their involvement.

-[Kerns, Fogarty & Pete, 2021](#)

Our Methodology Matters PHASE ONE

Foundational Skills (*Skills-Based Competencies*)

“Unfortunately, too many of our nation’s students spend the first year or two in school focusing primarily on reading texts by sight-memorizing words and story patterns through leveled texts, with few or no words that can be sounded out based on phonics skills. **Phonics instruction with follow-up reading in decodable, phonics-based texts is a strategy that works best.**”

- Wiley Blevins, 2019

Foundational reading skills must be taught *explicitly* and *systematically* by a skilled informed teacher. These are the seven key characteristics of strong phonics instruction ([Blevins, 2019](#)).

1. Readiness skills (Phonemic Awareness and Alphabetic Recognition)
2. *Scope and sequence*
3. *Blending, Segmenting and Syllabification*
4. *Dictation* (Guided Exercises)
5. Word awareness (*Word Ladders* and *Word Sorts*)
6. *High-frequency words*
7. Reading connected text (Controlled and Decodable)



[Structured Literacy Primer](#), 2016

The following elements are demonstrated in an effective early literacy classroom.

- Explicit, systematic, and sequential teaching occurs at multiple levels – phonemes, sound and letter relationships, *syllable* patterns, *morphemes*, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and text structure ([Really Great Reading](#), 2022).
- A well-defined [scope and sequence](#) for sounds and letters builds a systematic learning progress with built-in review and repetition.
- [Phonemic awareness](#) is used as an early predictor of reading success. Correctly pronouncing each of the [44 phonemes sounds](#) accelerates learning the alphabetic code. (Moats, 2009).
- [Sound walls](#) are used to promote a greater emphasis on phonemic awareness and phoneme grapheme correspondence.
- A focus on isolating the sounds in words is modeled, applied and assessed frequently for decoding instead of the [3-cueing method](#).
- Phonics instruction uses the process of making sight words by *orthographic mapping*, not by memorization. Sound spelling correspondences and [syllable patterns](#) are used to decode 85% of all words accurately (Murray, 2012).
- Students use engaging *decodable readers* or [accountable texts](#) so they can apply the phonics taught to their reading and writing (Blevins, 2019).
- Teaching students to *decode* and *encode* (spelling) concurrently will help students apply their reading skills to writing ([Moats](#), 2005).
- Students will *engage* in hands-on learning using hand gestures, letter tiles and/or color codes to foster multi-modal language learning ([Inclusive Education](#)).



Reflect-to-Act

- ① How can you establish a shared understanding of foundational skills at your school?
- ② Review your current foundational skills scope and sequence. How systematic is it? How can it be improved?
- ③ How can *word walls* be transitioned to *sound walls*?
- ④ How can your spelling practices become more explicit, systematic, and aligned with the phonics instructional sequence?
- ⑤ If you have been using the *3-cueing method* for decoding, what research has influenced your thinking now?

Our Methodology Matters PHASE TWO

Background Knowledge (*Knowledge-Based Competencies*)

*“The mistaken idea that reading is a skill—learn to crack the code, practice comprehension strategies and you can read anything—**may be the single biggest factor holding back reading achievement in the country.** The mainspring of comprehension is prior knowledge—the stuff readers already know that enables them to create understanding as they read.”*

-Daniel Willingham

Comprehension comes about through the interaction of knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, prior knowledge), processes that operate on text (e.g., meaning activation, inference generation), and general cognitive factors (e.g., *working memory*). However, in most classrooms the bulk of time is spent teaching students *comprehension skills* (i.e. main idea, recognizing supporting details, drawing conclusions, comparing and contrasting, knowing vocabulary meaning, and sequencing events) and how to use *comprehension strategies* (i.e. *monitoring, clarifying, questioning, summarizing, predicting, visualizing, inferencing, analyzing, and synthesizing*).

Reading comprehension has much more to do with being able to read particular kinds of texts and to deal with particular kinds of text features and structures than to answering particular kinds of questions. Each text presents information in its own way, so answers are “text dependent” (Shanahan, 2018).

Explicit strategies designed to improve reading comprehension cannot solely compensate for the lack of vocabulary or content knowledge. Reading comprehension is heavily bound up in the readers’ knowledge of the topic covered by the text. If our goal is to have literate students, we should systematically plan for building knowledge (Willingham, 2007).

Students acquire knowledge through the interaction of two factors:

1. The ability to process information ([executive function](#), Sulla, 2016) and store it in permanent memory.
2. The number and frequency of their academically oriented [experiences](#) (Barrett, 2019).

Access to Academically Oriented Experiences				
		Low	Medium	High
Information Processing Ability	High	Even though lacks experiences, can store everything experienced to build background knowledge.	Highly developed ability to process, enables maximum use of the mid-level access to experiences.	With high ability to process, the many academic experiences are translated into a lot of background knowledge.
	Medium	Limited ability to build background knowledge.	Limited ability to build background knowledge.	Draws from the many experiences to build background knowledge.
	Low	Very inhibited in ability to build background knowledge.	Limited ability to build background knowledge.	Draws from the many experiences to build background knowledge.

-Marzano, 2004



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What misconceptions might you have about teaching reading comprehension strictly through question types (e.g.. main idea)?
- ② Discuss the role of executive function in building background knowledge.
- ③ How can you assess the academically oriented experiences that students bring to school?
- ④ How can academically oriented experiences be enhanced at your school?
- ⑤ What are three things you can do tomorrow to reframe *acquisition* of knowledge?

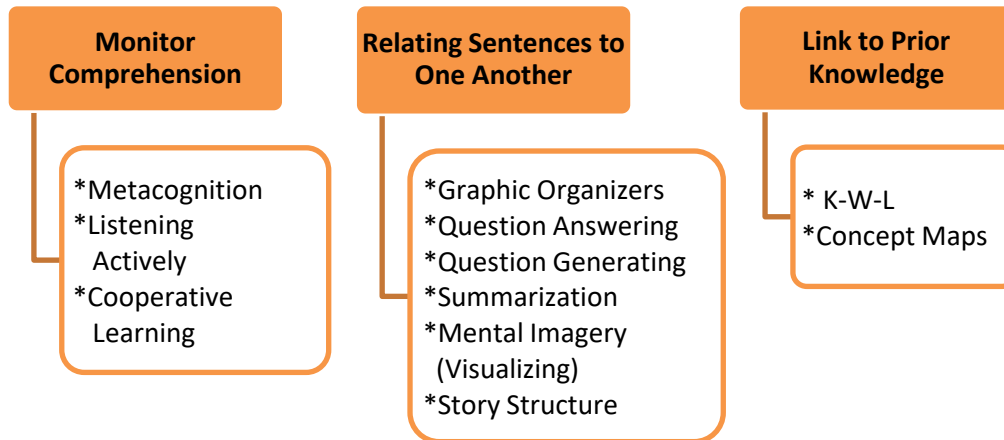
Our Methodology Matters PHASE TWO

Reading Comprehension (Knowledge-Based Competencies)

“Knowledge-centric, knowledge-rich, knowledge-driven curriculum should be at the heart of what students talk about, hear about, read about, write about and think about throughout the school day.”

-Gene Kerns, 2021, p.98

Shifting time from solely concentrating on reading comprehension *skills* and *strategies* to dedicating time and resources for enhancing the academic *background knowledge* of students is necessary. Comprehension strategies are quickly learned and do not require a lot of practice (Willingham, 2007).



Information Processing Enhancements

- Categorizing information helps students solve authentic problems.
- Identifying similarities and differences helps students engage in convergent thinking.
- Generating hypotheses develops strong reasoning skills.
- Discussing a text with peers using [reciprocal teaching](#) empowers students to become independent (Palinscar & Brown, 1984).
- Conducting *think-alouds* models how to: understand ideas in sentences, connect ideas across sentences, and determine the main idea of the text (Willingham, 2017).
- Engaging students in *repeatedly reading* texts aloud ([paired reading](#), [shared reading](#), [whisper reading](#), [audio assisted reading](#)) improves word reading, oral reading fluency and comprehension ([Shanahan](#), 2017).

Academically Oriented Experiences

- Using *formative assessments*, helps determine progress of students toward meeting the knowledge threshold for a topic.
- Developing both broad and deep concepts through [units of study](#) that originate in science and social studies content topics builds a cumulative knowledge base (Smith, 2021).
- Reading aloud rich texts that are above grade level, introduces new concepts, builds vocabulary and expands language comprehension.
- Selecting *authentic texts* with intentionality, building text sets on topics, and considering [text complexity](#) based on text *coherence* and *cohesion* all provide the depth necessary to build background knowledge that sticks.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Compare the time allotted to building knowledge vs. practicing [comprehension strategies](#) or standards. What shifts might be necessary?
- ② How can opportunities for students to engage in repeated readings of a text be incorporated into the reading block?
- ③ How can the information about text complexity influence how students conduct a “close reading”?
- ④ How can organizing *interactive read-alouds* around topics increase students’ background knowledge?

Our Methodology Matters PHASE TWO

Direct and Indirect Vocabulary and Text Structure Instruction

“Rich vocabulary knowledge subsumes not just the number of individual words known, but how well they are known and how flexibly they can be used in a given context (this is critical given that the majority of words are polysemous – i.e. they have multiple meanings or senses).”

-Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018, p. 29

Students need to know 98% of the words in a passage to read fluently with understanding (Kerns, 2021). Knowing how affixes, [Greek and Latin word roots](#) combine can generate an understanding of thousands of words (Templeton, 2012).

Students also need to know how words are being used and how words in a sentence work together. This is done by drawing on [syntactic understanding](#) and understanding [cohesive devices](#) that string together different ideas presented in a sentence. Understanding [semantics](#) and the structure of a text play key roles in reading comprehension (Sedita, 2020).

Word Knowledge	Make meaning of synonyms, antonyms, homophones, and homographs.
Morphemic Elements	Make meaning of affixes and common roots.
Word Meaning	Use prior knowledge and references to identify word meaning.
Word Analysis	Categorize and identify similarities and differences among words.
Words in Context	Identify the meaning of words by using context.

[Florida Center for Reading Research](#)

Direct

- Use [concept mapping](#) and *semantic webbing* for word association (categorizing and comparing and contrasting).
- Intentionally select tiered vocabulary worthy of direct instruction.
- Model how to interpret the meaning of words and phrases through *morphology*.
- Develop [cognate awareness](#) of the origin of words to promote metacognition and curiosity.
- Provide time for students to use new words in discussions and conversations.

Indirect

- Immerse students in multiple ways to access texts through wide frequent reading opportunities.
- Schedule time for students to read together (*buddy reading*) and read alone (*echo and whisper reading*), putting students in charge of expanding their vocabulary through independent reading.
- Plan ways to connect reading to writing to deepen students' comprehension when they make applications with new words and new content.

([Fisher & Frey, 2014](#))



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Compare and contrast your current vocabulary instruction with this information.
- ② Describe how understanding the way authors use words and sentence structure can improve reading comprehension.
- ③ Which resources do you find the most valuable in this section?
- ④ How can this information about vocabulary acquisition influence your instruction?
- ⑤ How can you enhance students reading experiences by replacing *round robin* and *popcorn* reading?

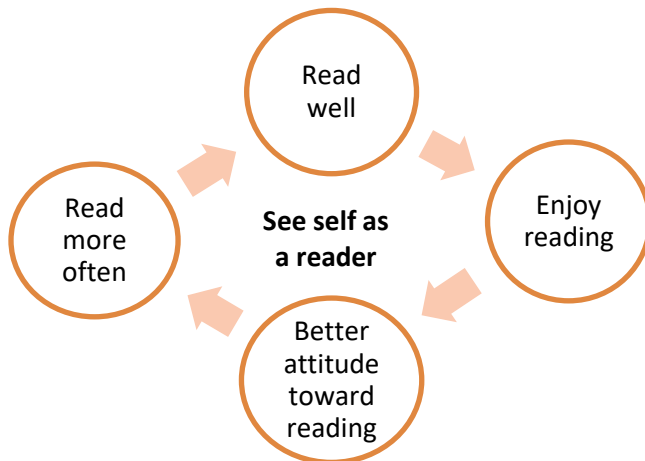
Our Methodology Matters

Reading Motivation

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”

- Dr. Seuss, 1978

To become a proficient reader, one must read a lot. We have emotional attitudes towards reading that grow over time. If reading is rewarding, exciting and interesting, one will find time to read. If reading is a chore, lacks a specific purpose and becomes stigmatizing, it will be avoided. Having a positive reading self-concept (seeing yourself as a reader) will bolster positive reading attitudes and behaviors, which will produce a cycle of more reading.



Teachers can influence attitudes towards reading by employing an expectancy value model: by first outlining how reading will be a positive beneficial endeavor and then providing easy access to books on topics a student loves, peers have read or will be of use to them. Boost a book’s value by making sure it is at the right reading level and challenging enough to warrant interest without causing frustration (Bridges, 2016).

Key Points about our Approach and Methodology:

Our approach advances because we are:

- Committed to implementing evidence-based reading instruction aligned with the *Science of Reading* using a structured literacy approach.
- Educators, regardless of the grade level or discipline, dedicated to building our students’ content knowledge through reading and thinking like a disciplinarian.

Our methodology matters because HOW students learn to read greatly depends on:

- What teachers teach – foundational skills in a logical scope and sequence, and content through comprehensive units of study.
- How teachers teach – explicit and systematic foundational skill instruction, and a focus on linking new content to prior knowledge and building vocabulary.
- What students spend their time doing - plenty of time dedicated to practice by reading, writing, listening, speaking, discussing and thinking.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What changes could increase reading motivation at your school?
- ② What is more clearly stated at your school – **what** to teach or **how** to teach it? How can this be targeted in your **SEP**?
- ③ What tools could help in the planning of explicit and systematic instruction?
- ④ Conduct observations to assess what students are spending their time doing during a reading block. How much time are they actually reading the text?

MEASURING READING SUCCESS:

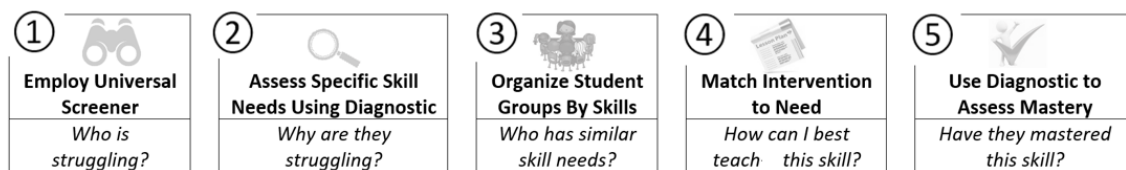
Monitor Progress and Provide Effective Feedback

“An incomplete assessment agenda, including one that ignores how students develop in terms of motivation and self-efficacy in relation to reading, or their ability to construct meaning from multiple texts on the Internet, will limit the inferences that we can make about students’ reading development, our teaching effectiveness, and the value of the reading curriculum.”

- Peter Afflerbach, 2018, pgs.30-31

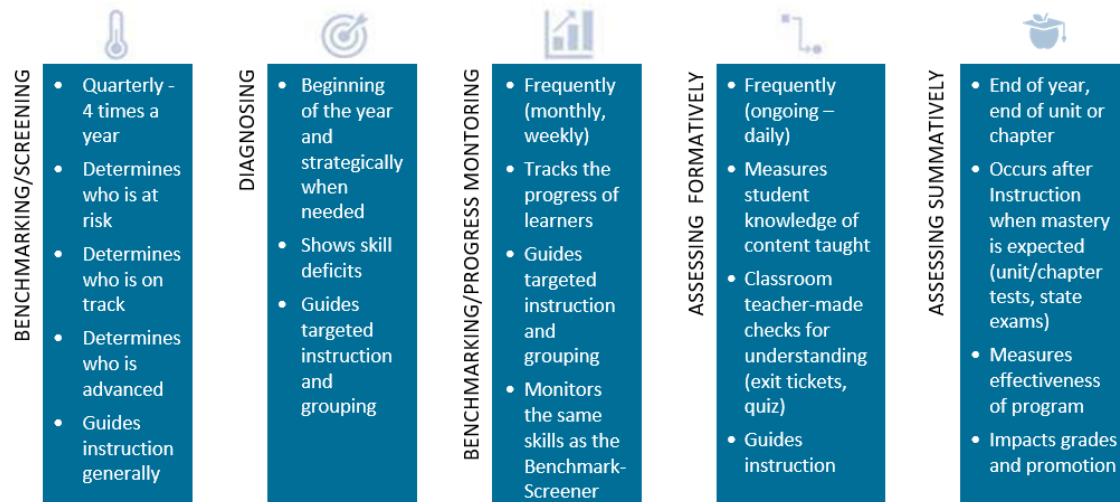
Effective reading instruction begins and ends with assessment. Viewing assessments as checks for understanding is the first step to making them an integral part of classroom activities, rather than a series of isolated tests unconnected to other parts of the learning experience. Reading assessments pinpoint what students can do, cannot do yet, and the next steps for learning in foundational skills, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It is beneficial to use multiple assessments when gathering reading data. Different measures provide distinct information. Some instruments, such as the STAR Benchmarks, can be used for multiple purposes. Therefore, understanding how to use assessment data within the cycle of teaching and learning is critical.

A comprehensive assessment plan makes use of data from *screeners* (those that pre-assess to help us ‘find out’), to *formative assessments* (those that monitor progress to help us ‘keep track’ and ‘check on’) to *summative assessments* (those that report outcomes to help us ‘make sure’). The following flow chart illustrates the step-by-step process by which teachers can use assessments alongside instructional practices. ([The Access Center](#), 2005).



-EAB Skills-Based Grouping Toolkit

Only through accurate and ongoing assessment of student learning can teachers know the impact of their teaching. Assessments can be viewed as “feedback” that identifies progress made, determines current needs and guides future decisions about teaching and learning. The following chart summarizes the different types of assessments that should be administered at different times and used for different purposes throughout the year (Afflerbach, 2018).



Why do we assess reading? How do all stakeholders embrace assessment?

Students

- To report on learning and communicate progress.
- To motivate and encourage.
- To learn about assessment and how to self-assess.
- To build independence in reading.

Teachers

- To determine the nature of student learning.
- To inform instruction.
- To evaluate students and construct grades.
- To diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses in reading.

Leaders and Coaches

- To determine reading program effectiveness.
- To provide school and teacher accountability.
- To determine resource allocation.
- To support teachers' professional development.

Parents

- To be informed about children's achievements.
- To help connect home efforts with school efforts to support children's reading development.

What do we assess when we assess reading? How is a love of reading instilled through success?

Skill-Based Competencies

- Print concepts
- Phonological awareness
- Phonics and sight-word recognition, word composition (spelling)
- *Oral Reading Fluency* (ORF)
- *Curriculum-Based Measures* (CBMs)

Reading Motivation

- Student growth and development
- Changes in or maintenance of student motivation
- Reading stamina, persistence, and self-discipline
- Reading curiosity, enthusiasm, empathy, compassion, and self-awareness

Knowledge –Based Competencies

- Literal and inferential comprehension
- Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary
- Oral language skills
- Concepts about the world

Reading Interests

- Range of students' social uses of reading
- Creativity leading to authorship
- Genre selection
- Cross-curricular connections: civic-mindedness, and leadership

How, where and when do we assess reading? Does the assessment calendar purposefully include ALL types?

Benchmark (Screening Assessments)

- Given to determine students' strengths and needs. They provide information on which students are on track, those who are struggling, and those who are advanced. It is advised, at Imagine Schools, that all students take the STAR reading assessment four times a year.

Progress Monitoring Assessments (Benchmarks)

- Given frequently (quarterly, monthly, weekly) More often for struggling readers. They measure a student's progress toward acquiring specific skills that have been taught. They guide instruction, grouping and interventions.

Diagnostic Assessments (Pretests)

- Given strategically to identify the specific domains, concepts or skills in which students need further instruction. Pretest can fall into this category. In reading, they assess specific components of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency. They guide instruction, grouping and interventions.

Outcome Assessments (Performance-Based)

- Given to all students annually to measure students' mastery of skills against grade-level expectations. They are summative tests used to make decisions about students, teachers, a school, or reading programs.
- Imagine surveys students, teachers and parents about the school's culture of reading.

MEASURING READING SUCCESS

Monitor Progress

“I’ve really gotten the necessity of assessment. Without assessing our students, we really don’t know what they know and we don’t know what they’re learning... Certain approaches that may be effective for most of the class may be leaving one or several students in the dark... I would suspect that they are often capable, but the instruction itself is not meeting their need. Maybe they need more practice, maybe they need to have the material presented in an alternative form, maybe they just need a little one-on-one instruction from a teacher or a peer.”

— Mr. Beckwith, a beginning special education teacher, 2007

At Imagine Schools we provide tools to assess our students’ accomplishment and growth—and by implication, teacher and school success. We want reading assessments to mirror students’ accomplishments, so we must avoid reading assessment practices that provide only a partial reflection of those accomplishments. Conduct an assessment inventory to help you better understand the relationship between the things your school community values in relation to students’ reading development and what is actually assessed. Administering assessments that measure the complexity of all aspects of student reading achievement is critical to their reading development.

Assessment is a measure of students’ . . .						
	Cognitive Reading Strategies and Skills	Motivation for Reading	Social Uses of Reading	Independence in Reading	Reading in Collaborative Learning Environments	Choosing Reading Over Attractive Alternatives
Student Growth, Motivation and Interest Measures						
Tests and Quizzes	✓					
Portfolios with Reflection Notes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance Assessments with rubrics	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Reading Inventories	✓	✓	✓			
Reading Surveys		✓	✓			✓
Oral Reading Fluency Checks	✓			✓		
Teacher Growth in Content Knowledge and Pedagogy						
Teacher Questioning	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Reading Conferences	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Teacher Observations and Anecdotal Notes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(Afflerbach, 2018)

Key Components of a Useful Reading Assessment:

- The **cognition component** of a reading assessment focuses on the strategies and skills used by students as they develop as readers.
- The **observation component** of a reading assessment reflects our understanding of how students read in relation to a particular task, text, and setting.
- The **interpretation component** of a reading assessment done well allows teachers to make inferences about students’ needs and strengths.

(Pellegrino, 2014)



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Compare how reading is currently assessed at your school with the suggestions listed. Where can you improve your intentionality?
- ② What areas for measuring student performance would be new for your school?
- ③ What areas for measuring teacher performance would be new for your school?
- ④ How can these assessment types provide a more targeted way to measure the effectiveness of your reading efforts?

MEASURING READING SUCCESS

Providing Effective Feedback

“I used to think giving more feedback and better feedback was the answer [to improving education], and it’s the exact opposite: How do teachers and students receive feedback? How do they interpret it?”

-John Hatti, 2018, p.1



When assessing student responses, teachers make inferences from the characteristics of the students and their performance to determine the level of the students’ skills, knowledge, and motivation. So the specific feedback is based on hypotheses about what might help the student learn. The way feedback is presented impacts how it is received. Sometimes if feedback is received negatively, it reduces a learner’s motivation. Explaining the purpose of any monitoring, and ensuring that learners understand how the feedback is meant to help them meet their goals will motivate them to excel in reading.

Target Feedback Based on Data		
If you notice.....	It indicates that students have....	So, use feedback to....
Specific Word Recognition Difficulties <i>Average or better listening comprehension and oral vocabulary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited phonological awareness or Limited knowledge of letter sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the letter sounds they do know. Concentrate orally on blending and separating syllables into discreet units. Orally match, isolate, blend, segment and manipulate sounds for students to identify. Start decoding multisyllabic words in units (chunks) rather than by letter.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack fully accurate decoding skills or Lack multisyllabic word reading 	
Specific Reading Comprehension Difficulties <i>No history of word recognition or phonological difficulties</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack comprehension strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase vocabulary understanding and background knowledge. Focus on <i>narrative</i> or <i>informational</i> text structure. Model rereading, questioning and predicting.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack higher-order comprehension skills (e.g., evaluating) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broaden scope of reading by comparing multiple texts. Analyze texts through inferring, identifying facts and opinions and author’s purpose.
Fluency Reading Difficulties <i>No history of word recognition or phonological difficulties</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack proper phrasing, intonation, and expression. Lack understanding of the vocabulary and/or punctuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build vocabulary and background knowledge Show how to use punctuation as a cue for phrasing and intonation. Work on multiple meanings of words and phrases and an author’s voice.

-The [Center](#) for Effective Reading Instruction

Reflect-to-Act

①

Do your assessments provide an optimal mix of formative and summative assessments?

②

Does this mix help guide students across the grades toward consistent attainment of their reading goals?

③

What information in this section will be useful when developing tools to monitor your SEP reading action steps?

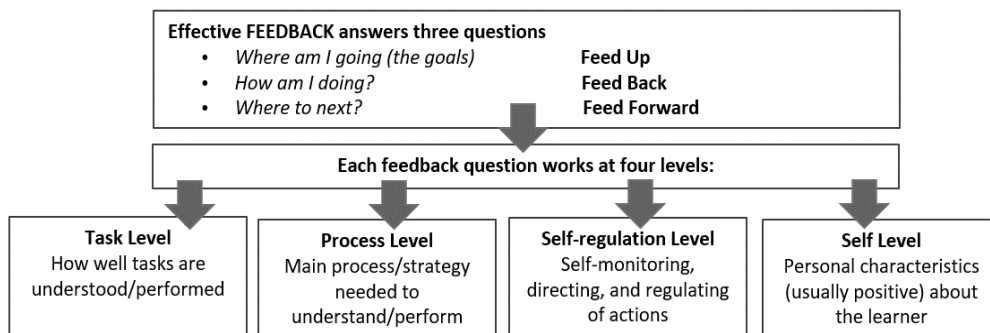
MEASURING READING SUCCESS

Students Monitoring Their Progress

"The first fundamental principle of effective classroom feedback is that feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor. Feedback functions formatively only if the information fed back to the learner is used by the learner in improving performance"

Dylan Wiliam, 2017, p. 123

If a student did not understand a reading, giving them feedback to read more carefully may not be helpful. Telling students to read more carefully assesses them as being careless. In reality, they may have been careful, but the true cause of poor performance may actually be a lack of reading skills or the strategies necessary to comprehend and think critically about a complex text.



-John Hatti and Helen Timperley, 2007, p. 87

The most valuable feedback begins and ends with the student. When students self-assess their reading, they can make decisions on their learning journey by determining their current location, the route to get to the destination and then where to go next. Using a [tool](#) to customize goals based on their self-assessment motivates them to take charge of their growth (Sackstein, 2016).

Key Points for Measuring Reading Success:

- The *Science of Reading* does not end with the implementation of effective instructional strategies. Progress monitoring is necessary to complete the learning cycle. [STAR Assessments](#) have multiple purposes: screening, diagnosing, benchmarking, progress monitoring, and goal setting.
- Checks for understanding (assessments) need to be administered systematically at multiple levels of skill acquisition such as the [Phonological Awareness Skills Test](#), [Curriculum-Based Measures](#), and [Dynamic indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills DIBELS](#).
- [Timed repeated readings](#) improves three aspects of fluency: reading rate, reading accuracy, and *prosody* leading to improved comprehension.
- Teachers need to be skilled at assessing all components (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) of reading as well as uncovering students' attitudes about reading (see glossary under assessment for type and tool recommendations).
- How and when feedback is given to students by teachers is important, how it is received and processed by the student is more important.
- Once students are able to assess their own reading progress, they have the tools to grow exponentially.



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What does effective feedback through conferencing look like?
- ② What tools can students use to self-assess their reading growth?
- ③ Conferencing takes time. How can you plan for and schedule time to build self-directed readers?
- ④ What is your current practice for empowering students to set goals and track their reading progress? Could additional data points be monitored to make sure all aspects of reading are getting the students' attention?



PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Professional Learning, Resources, Action Planning

At Imagine Schools, we have created clear and consistent structures that will ensure:

- Leaders know how to guide and coordinate the *Science of Reading*.
- Teachers know how to plan and instruct implementing this knowledge into practice.
- Students know how to acquire and own learning to read and reading to learn.

Explicit implementation guidance and frequent feedback will help teachers, coaches, and principals make sure their students benefit from scientifically informed reading instruction.

1

Encourage that teachers, coaches and leaders build their reading knowledge through professional learning.

2

Examine all instructional reading materials for their alignment with the *Science of Reading*.

3

Design plans for using this resource to guide efforts to improve reading outcomes.

“A review of the impact of professional learning on student achievement found that 14 or more hours of teacher development are needed to have a positive and significant effect on student achievement. However, too often districts are not devoting sufficient hours to professional learning to any one content area, as many teachers report spending just a few hours each year on development in reading instruction.”

-National Center on Teacher Quality

Simply providing principals and teachers knowledge of the *Science of Reading* is critical but not enough. The best professional development needs to translate to classroom practice with ongoing support and pragmatic guidance. Our 2022 staff surveys collected the following data:

Instructional leaders at this school visit classrooms regularly and provide teachers with targeted and timely feedback to improve instruction.



My school leader or direct supervisor works with me to evaluate my performance and helps me identify areas of growth to target my professional learning opportunities.



The programs and resources at this school are adequate to support students' learning.



■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

Digging deeper into teachers' specific needs for reading pedagogy helps coaches and instructional leaders make a greater impact with targeted on-going support.

Recommendations to Build Capacity:

- **Build region-wide expertise in the Science of Reading:** Seek out and provide professional development on the **Science of Reading** for teachers, coaches and leaders to become experts and advocates for reading.
- **Provide explicit guidance for implementing *evidence-based reading instruction*:** Empower coaches to support instructional improvement.
- **Increase opportunities for observation and feedback:** Create systems for self and peer-to-peer observations that allow teachers to record, observe, and reflect upon reading lessons in the classroom.



Suggested Resources

- Webinars: [Renaissance Learning](#), [Reading Great Reading](#), [Amplify](#)
- Organizations: [EAB -The Science of Reading Implementation Guide](#), [The Reading League](#); [FCRR School Leader's Literacy Walkthrough](#)
- [Imagine Schools Padlet](#), [Imagine Schools Teacher Self-Assessment](#)
- Education Endowment Foundation (EFF): [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)
- Articles: [How Literacy Must Be Reframed this School Year](#) - Kerns, [Structured Literacy and Typical Literacy Practices](#) - Spear-Swerling, [What is Disciplinary Literacy and Why Does it Matter](#) - Shanahan, [The Science of Reading and Its Educational Implications](#) - Seidenberg, [Hard Words, Why Aren't Our Kids Being Taught to Read](#) - APM Reports
- Video Enhanced Observation ([VEO](#)), Peer Observations (i.e. [Pineapple Chart](#))

Imagine Schools' Network of Support



Reflect-to-Act

- ① What do your school surveys say about professional development and instructional materials at your school?
- ② Who can lead the movement to improve reading instruction at your school?
- ③ What changes can be made to your school calendar to increase hours of professional learning for reading?
- ④ After reflecting on the Imagine Schools' Network of Support chart above, how might your campus utilize this support?

“Publishers will not produce better textbooks until selection committees become more discerning and demanding about quality.”

- Harriet Tyson

In 2017, the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and Johns Hopkins Center for Research and Reform in Education conducted a [research review](#) on the effects of curricular choices in K–12 education and concluded that:

- Curriculum is a critical factor in student academic success.
- Comprehensive, content-rich curriculum is a common feature of academically high-performing countries.
- The preponderance of instructional materials is self-selected by individual teachers, so students are taught through *idiosyncratic* curricula that are not defined by school districts or states.

Using evidence-based instructional materials boosts student learning and a weak one can actually cause students to lose ground. Replacing ineffective instructional materials with strong programs is probably the easiest and most cost-effective way to boost student learning.

- David Steiner, 2017

Recommendations that are Time Worthy:

- **Set up a reading task force** to do an audit of your current reading program, classroom libraries, technology tools and assessment instruments.
- **Identify any gaps in support materials** (e.g., Foundational skills, units of study that build content knowledge across the curriculum, reading assessments).
- **Consult reputable reviewers** to analyze the effectiveness of current programs and explore possibilities for new programs. Seek advice from others who have evidence of program effectiveness.



Suggested Resources and Tools

- The Reading League [Curriculum Evaluation Tool](#)
- Reputable reviewers: [EdReports](#), [What Works Clearinghouse](#), [Achieve the Core](#), [ESSA Guidance](#)
- Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET) Grades [K-2](#), Grades [3-12](#)
- Quality English Language Arts K-2 Review [Tool](#)
- Why Materials Matter [Resource](#)
- [University of Oregon: Center on Teaching and Learning](#)
- Core Reading Programs [K-3 Core Reading Program](#) Guide
- Supplemental and Intervention Programs [Items for Analysis](#)

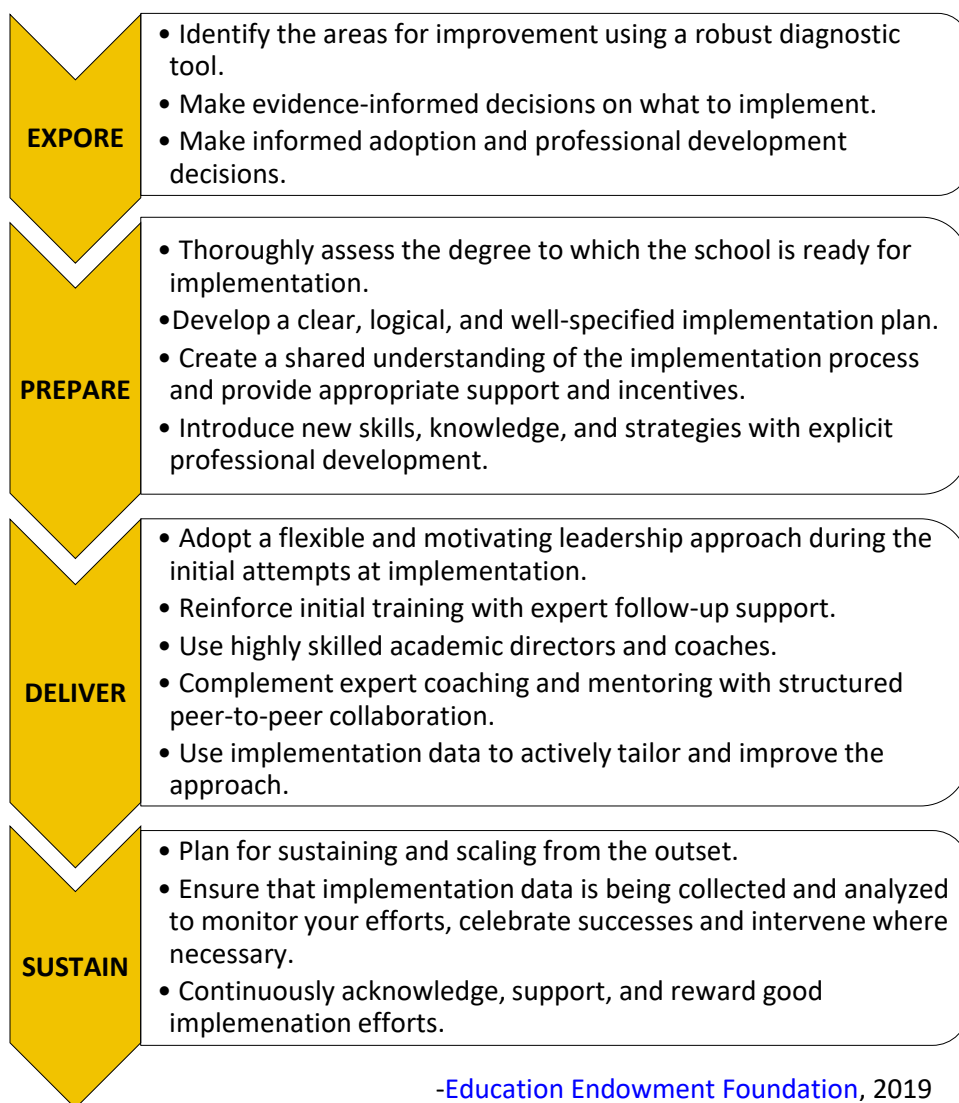


Reflect-to-Act

- ① What does it mean to have a [content-rich curriculum](#)? Do your textbooks and programs fit that description? What programs fit that description?
- ② How can the Academic Growth Committee, the Economic Sustainability Committee and the School Development Committee support the ideas suggested in this section?
- ③ Think about the other areas of this paper and determine how to allocate resources to address all aspects of the *Science of Reading*.
- ④ Setting up task forces and inventorying and evaluating curriculum materials is time consuming and a laborious process. How can you guide and coordinate this efficiently?

Developing a strategic plan for implementing the Science of Reading will involve concerted effort at the national, regional and school levels. Once you have gathered the most recent reading data, conducted a thorough root cause analysis, and detailed a needs assessment, you can begin to develop a robust reading action plan that can be targeted in multiple sections of your School Excellence Plan. Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute in stages. A positive school climate with a visionary leader is conducive to effective implementation.

- Allow enough time for effective implementation, particularly where changes in beliefs are necessary.
- Set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines and practices.
- Identify and cultivate leaders of implementation throughout the school.
- Build leadership capacity through Implementation teams.



-Education Endowment Foundation, 2019



Reflect-to-Act

- ① Why bother with this work? What is the purpose of putting in the time?
- ② Where are you in this process? Where will you need the most support?
- ③ How can starting at the Group and Regional level with your Academic Directors ensure a common vision and set of expectations for implementation?
- ④ How can your SEP reflect your schools' efforts to reform reading practices at your school?
- ⑤ The National Academic and Character Team will provide support and tools for implementation. Consider how to employ their expertise.

CONCLUSION

“Research is the only tool we have that allows us to determine the kinds of teaching most likely to advance our students’ learning; common sense and past experience are useless before such questions. No teacher can ever know what her kids are missing from staying with the current approach that seems so satisfying.”

- Timothy Shanahan

This paper establishes the Imagine Schools’ view and expectation for the teaching and assessing of reading, shares critical research that dismantles poor instructional practices and provides guidance for the appropriate approaches and methodologies that work.

Our stagnant data compels us to take action. Many of our students are not proficient readers. We can change that and deliver on our promise of literacy for all. We know a great deal, about how the brain operates when learning to read. We know what instructional practices are effective for “all” children. We can start doing what works, stop doing what does not and dismiss outdated practices based on misconceptions about the process and mechanics of reading. Instead, we can be guided by the research and evidence.

Use this Imagine Schools Literacy Position Paper to guide you. Each of your state’s department of education has developed literacy plans. Courses are being offered, certifications are being required, and improvement plans are being written showing how evidence-based practices will be implemented, supported, and monitored. **Integrate the knowledge and bridge initiatives into your Imagine School Excellence Plan.**



Setting high expectations for every student means setting high expectations for every Imagine person at each campus, regional office, and national office. This effort will require increased focus, collaboration, innovation, and accountability.

-Academic Excellence Framework, p. 1

GLOSSARY

A

Accountable Text (decodable texts) are stories or books where the majority of the words can be sounded out based on the sound-spelling relationships children have learned – giving them many opportunities to apply those skills to real reading experience. These texts for reading practice are those that teachers can reasonably hold students ‘accountable for’ because they reflect what has recently been taught. By contrast, if we have children read leveled texts after a phonics lesson, it would not really be fair to hold them accountable for decoding it because there is not a reliable, close connection between our lesson and the leveled text.

Acquisition is the act of gaining through effort.

Alphabetic Principle the concept that letters and letter combinations represent individual phonemes in written words.

Approach is the overall style, idea or generalized concept that one adopts to overcome a problem or face a given situation. An approach remains at the level of an idea and does not involve steps that are time tested or proven (see methodology).

Assessment refers to the wide variety of methods that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, and skill acquisition of students.

-Benchmark Assessments are given periodically (e.g., beginning of the year [also called screener] at the end of every quarter or as frequently as once per month) throughout a school year to establish baseline achievement data and measure progress toward a standard or set of academic standards and goals. Typically, these assessments are formal, and may be computer-scored and administered. They provide teachers with information about which content standards have been mastered and which require additional instruction by identifying students’ strengths and needs.

Well-articulated benchmark assessments can also be used to measure student progress over time. (Imagine Schools uses [STAR Renaissance](#) Benchmark Assessments quarterly).

-Diagnostic Assessments are used to assess specific skills or components of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and fluency. The results of diagnostic assessments inform instruction and intervention. Diagnostic assessments can be formal standardized tests of children’s reading and language abilities or informal measures such as criterion-referenced tests and informal reading inventories. Not all children need this kind of in-depth reading assessment, which is most important for struggling and at-risk readers. Examples are [STAR Phonics](#), and [Really Great Reading](#) Phonological Awareness Survey and [PAST](#).

-Curriculum Based Measure is an empirically validated method of **screening and progress monitoring** that provides a standardized and systematic method to monitor the acquisition of specific skills: letter sounds, letter naming, phonemic segmentation and blending, receptive and expressive nonsense words, and oral reading fluency ([STAR CBMs](#) included in Renaissance subscription, or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills [DIBELS](#))

-Formative Assessments are assessments “for” instruction. They are used to collect detailed information that educators can use to improve instructional techniques and student learning while it is happening. We often call them ‘checks for understanding’ when they are informal mini-assessments (hand signals, exit tickets, observations with anecdotal notes, or index cards/dry erase board displays) or ‘focus tests’ when they are more formal but still part of informing on-going instruction.

-Oral Reading Fluency Assessments (ORF) refers to the ability to read text aloud with sufficient speed and accuracy and with proper expression. Fluent readers read aloud with expression and minimal effort, whereas struggling readers may make frequent mistakes or pause in ways that disrupt the meaning.

-Outcome Assessments also called high stakes assessments are given to all students in a grade. They measure students' skills against grade-level expectations. Outcome assessments are summative assessments used to make decisions about students, teachers, a school, or even an entire school system.

-Performance-Based Assessments require students to demonstrate mastery of specific skills and competencies by performing or producing something.

-Portfolio Assessments are a compilation of a student's work assembled for the purpose of (1) evaluating coursework quality and academic achievement, (2) creating a lasting archive of academic work products, and (3) determining whether students have met learning standards or academic requirements for courses, grade-level promotion, and graduation. Advocates of student portfolios argue that compiling, reviewing, and evaluating student work over time can provide a richer and more accurate picture of what students have learned and are able to do than the more traditional measures, such as standardized tests or final exams, which reflect only what a student knows at a specific point in time.

-Progress Monitoring instruments measure a student's overall progress during the school year or progress towards acquiring specific skills that have been taught. Examples of these kinds of measures include curriculum-based measures (CBMs), criterion-referenced tests, and informal measures such as reading inventories. These tests can be given more than once a year and, depending on the assessment, sometimes quite frequently. For instance, many CBMs could be given on a weekly basis if desired.

-Running Records are informal assessments of oral reading in a familiar book or passage, with checkmarks for words read correctly and incorrectly. Miscues are often linked to the three-cueing system. Students are assigned to a level based on the results. This tool is not aligned with the *Science of Reading*.

-Screening Assessments are given to all students at the start of the school year to determine which students are at risk of struggling with reading. They are not used to diagnose specific skill gaps; rather, they help to identify children who need diagnostic assessments, as well as children who may require supplemental intervention. Screening assessments should be relatively fast and efficient to administer. One type of useful screening assessment involves curriculum-based measures (CBMs).

-Summative Assessments are assessments "of" instruction used to evaluate learning progress and achievement at the 'conclusion' of a specific instructional period – usually at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year and therefore considered evaluative rather than diagnostic. It is also appropriate to use summative assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs, measure the achievement of improvement goals, or make course-placement decisions, among other possible applications. Summative assessment results are often recorded as scores or grades that are then factored into a student's permanent academic record, such as letter grades on a report card, or test scores used in promotion and the college-admissions process.

-Timed-Repeated Reading Assessments are an instructional practice for monitoring students' fluency development. Repeated readings, under timed conditions, of familiar instructional level text can increase students' reading speed that can improve comprehension.

Analyzing means to break something down into its parts and examine them. Analyzing is a vital skill for successful readers. Analyzing a text involves breaking down its ideas and structure to understand it better, think critically about it, and draw conclusions.

Asset-Based Approach (strength-based) is an approach that focuses on strengths. It views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. Teachers and students alike are valued for what they bring to the classroom rather than being characterized by what they may need to work on or lack.

Auditory Discrimination is the ability to perceive differences in spoken words.

Authentic Text (Literature) often called ‘real books’ is a term that refers to published narrative and informational texts. Authentic texts are written for ‘real world’ purposes and audiences: to entertain, inform, explain, guide, document or convince. In contrast, most of what students read in school is written for the purpose of student instruction at the student’s grade level, and is intended to provide content in a clear and accessible manner.

Automaticity is the fast, effortless word recognition that comes with a great deal of reading practice. In the early stages of learning to read, readers may be accurate but slow and inefficient at recognizing words. Continued reading practice helps word recognition become more automatic, rapid, and effortless. Automaticity refers only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. Therefore, automaticity (or automatic word recognition) is necessary, but not sufficient, for fluency (see fluency).

B

Balanced Literacy is about balancing explicit language instruction with independent learning and language exploration. A typical balanced literacy framework consists of five components including read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and word study.

Basal Reader is a graded reading textbook series, usually consisting of hardbound student texts, spiral-bound teacher’s editions and adjunct materials including workbooks, worksheets, supplemental readers and assessments.

Blending is the ability to smooth together isolated phonemes to identify a word.

C

Clarifying is an umbrella term for a set of cognitive strategies that students can use to identify where they have comprehension difficulties and how they can get at the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence or passage.

Close Reading is the intensive, thorough, and methodical analysis of a text passage to determine its key ideas and supporting details; close reading often includes repeated readings to uncover various layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension.

Cognate Awareness is the ability to use cognates (words in two languages that share a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation) in a primary language as a tool for understanding a second language. Children can be taught to use cognates as early as preschool.

Cognitive Skills are the basic underpinning tasks required in reading that allow the brain to take in and process information. Children who struggle with reading tend to have difficulty with some of these basic skills, such as memory, paying attention, organizing information and following instructions.


Coherent describes a curriculum that is logical, well organized, consistent and easy to understand. In a coherent text, ideas are semantically meaningful and logically connected producing a consistent understanding in all readers.

Cohesion describes the act of forming a whole unit. In linguistics, cohesion refers to the formal and semantic features of a text. Cohesive is the grammatical and lexical linking that holds a text together and lends to its meaning. Cohesion is related to the broader concept of coherence defined above.

Competency is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. It is the capability of using knowledge effectively by applying mastered skills.

-Skill-Based Competencies are acquired by ‘doing’ a task until it is mastered and automatic. Students need multiple opportunities to practice skills through explicit instruction (often as procedural steps).

-Knowledge-Based Competencies are conceptual understandings gained from the ability to process information and grow from experiences. These competencies are very content-focused and enable students to build on their prior knowledge when learning something.



Comprehension (reading) is the ability to understand and make meaning of text. It is the goal of reading and the result of mastery and integration of all the components of effective instruction.

-Comprehension Skills are the abilities required to answer particular kinds of comprehension questions. Skills would include things like identifying the main idea, recognizing supporting details, drawing conclusions, comparing and contrasting, knowing vocabulary meaning, and sequencing events. Comprehension skills can be thought of as exercises that a reader is often asked to complete to demonstrate understanding of a text read.

-Comprehension Strategies are cognitive processes that readers use in conjunction with one another flexibly and adeptly in different contexts. They represent deliberate moves readers make to engage in a text in order to increase their understanding and make meaning of the text. Think of strategies as purposeful metacognitive actions readers employ that are unique to each reading situation such as predicting, visualizing, questioning, summarizing, and monitoring.

Composition in the literary sense (from the Latin "to put together") is the way a writer assembles words and sentences to create a coherent and meaningful work.

Concept(s) are abstract or general ideas that represent universal knowledge that can be applied in various contexts.

Conceptual Understanding is the understanding of ideas and the ability to transfer knowledge into new situations and apply it to new contexts.

Concept Maps are visual representations of information. They can take the form of charts, graphic organizers, tables, flowcharts, Venn Diagrams, timelines, or T-charts. Concept maps are especially useful for students who learn better visually, although they can benefit any type of learner.

Conferencing is a scheduled discussion between a teacher and a student, which draws upon the principles of dialogic teaching. The focus of the discussion is based around a text independently selected by the student.

Consonant Blend (also called a consonant cluster) is a group of two or three consonants in words that each make a distinct consonant sound when blended, such as bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr, qu, sc, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw, tr, and tw. (See blending).

Curriculum is a standards-based scope of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. It is the central guide for all educators as to what is essential for teaching and learning. Textbooks and programs support the curriculum.

D


Decodable Text (decodable reader) is a story or book that is controlled based on the phonics skills taught up to that point in the scope and sequence. Most of the words provide practice on a phonics skill while allowing for the inclusion of high frequency function words and story/content words necessary to create a coherent text.

Decoding (word recognition) is the process of matching letters or letter combinations (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) in order to decipher a word.

Deficit-Based Approach is a focus on problems or learning gaps rather than potential and learning strengths. Instruction concentrates on what students cannot do, rather than building on what they can do.

Develop means to bring out the possibilities of or gradually improve the outcomes for a student over time. It is the ability to reach students at their ability level and design a plan to advance their learning.

Digraph is a group of two (di) consecutive letters (graph) that spell one sound. Digraphs that spell consonant sounds include the letter pairs sh, ch, th, wh, ck, ph, ng. Digraphs that spell vowel sounds (vowel teams) include the letter pairs ai, ay, ee, ea, ie, ei, oo, ou, ow, oe, oo, ue, ey, ay, oy, oi, au, aw. The important thing to remember is that a digraph is made of two letters, and although the letters spell a sound, the digraph is the two letters, not the sound.



Diphthong is a special kind of vowel sound. A diphthong is one vowel sound formed by the combination of two (di) vowel sounds (phthong). The vowel sound is produced by the tongue shifting position during articulation (e.g., ow, oy, ou, oi).

Dictation is the process of writing down what someone else has said. With young children, dictation offers a way for a teacher to record a child's responses, thoughts or ideas.

Differentiated Instruction is a process for making proactive adjustments to tailor instruction to meet individual needs in order to ensure students meet grade level expectations. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction.

Disciplinary Literacy is an understanding of knowledge and concepts related to certain subject areas or disciplines. It refers to the specialization and in-depth content knowledge of a certain type of curriculum or subject.

Dolch Words, first published by Edward William Dolch, are based on the 220 most frequently used 'service words' found in what kindergarten through second grade students would be reading (there also is a separate list of 95 common nouns). The words are organized by age group and should be taught in conjunction with the phonics sequence (see also Fry Words).

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disorder. The core indicator of dyslexia is *not* reversing letters; rather it is difficulty interpreting the sound (phonological) components of a language.

E

Encoding is the process of determining the spelling of a word based on the sounds in the word.

Executive Function is a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life. Trouble with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions, among other things.

Engagement in reading refers to the interplay of motivation, conceptual knowledge, strategies, and social interaction during literacy activities. It can be measured by emotional involvement of the reader in reading and responding to text.

Evidence-Based Program (or Strategy) is a program or strategy that has been reviewed, tested and systematically evaluated by experts in the field to determine its effectiveness. Researchers test it in a controlled environment, collect and analyze data to support or refute its effectiveness and create practical models so educators can implement the program in their classrooms. By going through the peer review process, evidence-based programs or strategies are likely to be considered credible and effective for producing the promised results.


Explicit Instruction is the direct, face-to-face teaching that is highly structured, focused on specific learning outcomes, and based on a high level of student and teacher interaction. It involves explanation (what), demonstration (how), and relevant practice (when and why) with topics being taught in a logical order.

F

Fluent is the ability to read words accurately and effortlessly with appropriate expression (prosody), phrasing, stress, intonation, and rate.

Formative Assessment are assessments 'for' learning because they are utilized during instruction, providing the information needed to effectively direct and target teaching and learning as it occurs. It is a continuous, planned process used by teachers and students to monitor progress towards the achievement of learning objectives. This is utilized during instruction to provide information needed to direct next steps in teaching.

Foundational Literacy Skills are a set of skills that develop students' understanding and knowledge of print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, word composition, and fluency. These skills are sequential and serve as a platform for later competence and proficiency in reading and writing across text types and disciplines.



Fry Words are words in a list compiled by Dr. Fry in 1957 (and updated in 1980) as an improvement on the Dolch High Frequency Word List. The Fry Word List ranks 1,000 words by their frequency and includes all parts of speech. Most can be taught in conjunction with the phonics sequence (see Dolch Words).

G

Grapheme is the smallest written unit (letter) corresponding to a sound or phoneme.

Growth Mindset is an approach to life in which an individual believes that their talents, intelligence, and abilities can be developed further. People with a growth mindset seek opportunities to learn, gain new skills, and enhance their existing skills. On the other hand, a **fixed mindset** is the belief that your basic qualities like intelligence or talent are simply fixed traits that cannot be changed or improved upon.

Guided Reading is a small-group instructional context where a teacher supports readers' development of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During guided reading, students individually read a text that has been selected at their instructional reading level. Research recommends that small group reading instruction and student grouping focus on skill development and not be created by leveled readers, especially in the early grades.

H

Heart Words are high frequency words with irregular spellings to learn by heart. Heart Letters represent the irregularly spelled part of the word (e.g., 'o' in to).

High Frequency Words are words that appear in over 50 percent of all text. They can be decodable or non-decodable. Teaching them within the phonics sequence is more effective than by rote memorizing.

I

Idiosyncratic means that an idea or activity is dependent on the teacher's personal preference and lessons are loosely structured without an intentional scope and sequence, approach or methodology.

Inferencing is the ability to draw a conclusion or opinion because of known facts, evidence or a personal experience. Helping students understand when information is implied, or not directly stated, will improve their skill in drawing conclusions and making inferences. Inferential thinking is a complex skill that will develop over time and with experience.

Informational texts analyze or explain information about the natural or social world. They include expository writing, pieces that argue in favor of one position or another, as well as procedural texts and documents. Texts (textbooks) that support science and social studies learning, such as biographies and autobiographies, are informational.

Instructional Strategy is an instructional technique or method teachers use to help students become independent, strategic learners.

Integration is the incorporation of multiple standards across disciplines. Often bringing subject areas together around a common theme.

Intervention is a process that aims to shift educational resources toward the delivery and evaluation of instruction that works best for students. Often the instruction is tiered (see below)

-Tier 1 Instruction is grade level core strategic instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the general education classroom. Often these tiers are referred to as part of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) or Response to Intervention (RtI)

-Tier 2 Instruction is targeted instruction and/or intervention. Efforts applied are for selected students in a targeted manner to reduce or eliminate learning difficulties as soon as they are identified. This is often done through small group differentiated instruction.

-Tier 3 Instruction is intensive instruction and/or intervention. Efforts applied are in response to significant and chronic learning problems to improve student success as much as possible, often done through scheduling additional instructional time.

Irregular Words are words that have exceptions to the typical sound–spelling patterns. Irregular words are difficult to decode because the sounds of some letters in the word do not correspond to the correct pronunciation. These words have few or no rhyming words that share the same phonogram pattern.

K

Knowledge is the understanding gained through learning or experience.

-Activating Prior Knowledge refers to students using their existing knowledge to help them construct meaning with a text.

-Building Background Knowledge refers to techniques one uses to add to the knowledge already accumulated on a topic by developing knowledge networks. These comprised of clusters of concepts are coherent, generative, and supportive of future learning on a topic.

L

Language Comprehension (linguistic comprehension, listening comprehension) is the ability to derive meaning from spoken words when they are part of sentences or other discourse. Language comprehension abilities, at a minimum, encompass receptive vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and discourse comprehension (see comprehension).

Leveled Readers are books characterized and categorized by the level of difficulty of the text. Based on a number of criteria, leveled books range from guided reading levels A-Z or DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) levels 1 to 70. Educators use diagnostic literacy tools measuring students' accuracy, fluency, and comprehension to determine their reading level (see below). There are some problems with using leveled readers to group students. Background knowledge is a variable that influences the resulting level designation, not necessarily the students' reading ability. In addition, research shows that students actually benefit more from challenging texts. Teacher time may be better spent helping students build their vocabularies and content knowledge so that students can tackle and

understand texts that are appropriate for their grade level. Learning requires effort and students do not learn much with an easy text.

-Frustration Reading Level is the level at which a reader can read and understand the meaning of words with 0-94% accuracy, so that even with teacher scaffolding, the reader cannot comprehend the message of the text.

-Independent Reading Level is the level at which a reader can read and understand words with 99-100% accuracy, allowing reading comprehension without teacher scaffolding.

-Instructional Reading Level is the level at which a reader can read and understand words with 95-98% accuracy, allowing reading comprehension with teacher scaffolding.

Listening Comprehension is the ability to comprehend spoken language at the discourse level including conversations, stories (i.e., narratives), and informational oral texts. It involves the processes of extracting and constructing meaning.

Literacy is the ability to read and write as a means of communication.

Literature are written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structure, including the study of morphology, syntax, phonetics, and semantics.

M

Meta-Analysis is a quantitative statistical analysis of several separate but similar studies in order to test the pooled data for statistical significance.

Metacognition is an awareness and understanding of one's own thinking process.

Methodology refers to procedures (or steps) tested and proven to help overcome problems. It is a very well organized and well-researched plan to solve a problem once the conceptual approach has been identified (see approach).

Model is a system or thing used as an example to follow or imitate.

Monitoring (clarifying/fix up) refers to a collection of reading strategies whereby students self-assess their understanding of what they read and, if their self-monitoring indicates gaps in understanding, they clarify their understanding using various “fix-up”

strategies such as rereading, looking something up in a reference guide, asking for help, and/or thinking about what is already known about a topic.

Morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit or word part in a writing system. Example: ‘un’, ‘de’, ‘cipher’, and ‘able’ in undecipherable.

Morphology is the study of the internal structure of words and forms a core part of linguistics. The term morphology is Greek. ‘Morph’ means shape and ‘ology’ means the study of something.

Monophthongs are vowel sounds made with the mouth in one position and with one pure sound. ‘Mono’ means one and ‘phthong’ means sound.

N

Narrative Text includes any type of writing that relates a series of events and includes both fiction (novels, short stories, poems) and nonfiction (memoirs, biographies, news stories).

Neurology is the study of the nervous system. The nervous system is a complex, sophisticated system that regulates and coordinates body activities. It has two major divisions: the brain and spinal cord.

O

Onset-rime pairs are two parts within a syllable: the onset consists of the initial consonant(s), and the rime consists of the vowel and any consonants that follow it. (e.g., in the word cat, the onset is ‘c’ and the rime is ‘at’. In the word flip, the onset is ‘fl’ and the rime is ‘ip’).

Oral Language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings. Developing oral language, then, means

developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening and speaking—all of which have a strong relationship to reading comprehension and to writing.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) refers to the ability to read text aloud with sufficient speed and accuracy and with proper expression. Fluent readers read aloud with expression and minimal effort, whereas struggling readers may make frequent mistakes or pause in ways that disrupt the meaning.

Orthographic Mapping is the mental process readers use to store written words for immediate, effortless retrieval. It is a means by which readers turn unfamiliar words into familiar, instantaneously accessible sight words. It is now the most current theory of how children form sight word representations. It requires advanced phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and phonological long-term memory.

Orthographic Processor is the area toward the back of the brain on the left side that deals with visual images.

P

Pacing Guide is a written schedule or chart displaying the topics/skills and behavioral outcomes related to a curriculum to be addressed over a defined period of time. A pacing guide may also be known as a curriculum map, program timeline, instructional guide, or year-at-a-glance.

Phoneme is the smallest unit of sound within a language system. A phoneme may be a word by itself, or it may be combined with other phonemes to make a word.

Phonemic Awareness (subcategory of phonological awareness) is awareness of the smallest unit of sounds in spoken words (phonemes) and the ability to manipulate those sounds. Phonemic proficiency is both critical to and a result of orthographic mapping. It continues to develop throughout the elementary grades.

Phonics is a way of teaching that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences (phoneme- grapheme representations) and their use in reading and spelling.

-Analytic Phonics is instruction that focuses attention on larger spelling generalizations (like rimes: ab, ad, ag, ack, am, an) and word analogies (if 'game' is pronounced with a long a then 'came' must be pronounced with a long a).

-Synthetic Phonics is instruction that focuses on teaching each individual letter sound and having students sound each letter or letter combination (like th, sh) one at a time and then blend those back into word pronunciations.

Phonological Assembly is the region of the brain housing the system that enables reading.

Phonological Awareness is an overall awareness of sounds in oral language that includes identifying, counting, isolating, segmenting, blending, and manipulating (inserting, deleting, and substituting) sounds at the word level, syllable level, onset/rime level, and phoneme level.

Phonological Processor refers to the area at the front of the brain on the left side that handles spoken language.

Predictable Texts (pattern books) are books that employ rhyme or repetitive sentence structures to facilitate recitation with children who have not learned to decode.

Predicting is a reading strategy in which students hypothesize or predict what will happen next in a text or what the author will say next in the text. Effective readers consistently use this strategy.

Proficient means that a learner has demonstrated competence in relation to knowledge and/or a set of skills related to identified standards.

Prosody is the rhythmic and intentional aspect of language.

Q

Questioning is a strategy whereby readers develop questions about important ideas and subjects in the text and attempt to answer them to aid in their own comprehension of the text. Effective readers consistently use this strategy.

R

Reading is the process of getting the message encoded in a text or making sense of text by negotiating the linguistic and conceptual affordances and barriers to meaning.

Ways to Practice Reading:


- **Buddy Reading** pairs different grade-level students—an upper-grade classroom connects with a lower-grade one – for reading practice.

-**Choral Reading** is a reading context when the teacher and class read a text aloud together. This type of reading takes the spotlight away from struggling readers while encouraging them to participate. It improves reading fluency, expands vocabulary, and increases the confidence of students.

-**Echo Reading** is a rereading strategy designed to help students develop expressive, fluent oral reading as well as print knowledge. In echo reading, the teacher reads a short segment of text, sometimes a sentence or short paragraph, and students echo it back.

-**Guided Reading** is a small-group instructional context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During guided reading, students in a small-group setting individually read a text that has been selected at their instructional reading level.

-**Independent Reading** is children's reading of a text on their own, with minimal to no assistance from adults. There are strong associations between independent reading and reading achievement. Independent reading plays a key role in building fluency, vocabulary and background knowledge.



-Interactive Read-Aloud is an instructional practice where teachers read texts aloud to children. The reader incorporates variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery. By selecting books intentionally above grade level, teachers can build vocabulary, demonstrate fluency, and expose students to more advanced concepts and ideas, and model through think-alouds how to make meaning from what is read. Reading aloud a series of books on a similar topic can build substantial background knowledge.

-Paired Reading is a research-based fluency strategy where students read aloud to each other. When using partners, readers that are more fluent can be paired with less fluent readers, or children who read at the same level can be paired to reread a story. Paired reading can be used with any book, taking turns reading by sentence, paragraph, page or chapter.

-Popcorn Reading is round-robin reading in which the order of readers is not planned.

-Repeated Reading is a strategy where students orally read passages aloud several times and receive guidance and feedback from the teacher.

-Round Robin Reading arranges oral reading so that each child reads aloud a paragraph or page of a text in a planned order, working around the circle of readers. Round-robin reading in itself does not increase fluency. This may be because students only read small amounts of text, and they usually read this small portion only once. This type of reading may provide minimal assessment value if a teacher is taking notes.

-Shared Reading is an interactive reading experience that occurs when students join in or share the reading of a book or other text while guided and supported by a teacher. The teacher explicitly models the skills of proficient readers, including reading with fluency and expression. The shared reading model often uses oversized books (referred to as big books) with enlarged print and illustrations. Students might also have a copy of the book to read along.

-Whisper Reading is a strategy that teachers use to build reading skills. Instead of reading aloud or silently, students read in a whisper voice. [Whisper phones](#) are a tool for students to read to themselves.

Reading Workshop is an instructional approach that emphasizes reading growth through large amounts of independent reading, along with whole-class and small-group discussions and one-on-one teacher conferencing. Rather than reading assigned selections from a basal textbook or literature anthology, students choose from authentic literature written at their interest and reading level.

Reciprocal is an action or arrangement involving two people or groups of people who behave in the same way or agree to help each other and give each other advantages.

[Reciprocal Teaching](#) (reciprocal reading) is a structured method of guided reading for small groups. Children in the group will take on different roles, working together to explore and find meaning in texts. This method emphasizes teamwork and supports the independence of the comprehension strategies of clarifying, predicting, questioning, and summarizing.

Research-Based Program (strategy) is a program or strategy design based on scientific theories. For instance, an education researcher may develop an intervention based on research from educational theories and published studies. The researcher can describe their program as research-based because they used existing analyses and theories to develop it. However, the program does not have its own evidence to support its effectiveness (see evidence-based).

Rime refers to the string of letters following an *onset* in a syllable. It usually is a vowel and final consonants e.g. 'at' in cat (see onset-rime pairs).

Root Word (base word) is the part of the word that cannot be broken down.

Rubrics are a means of communicating expectations for an assignment, providing focused feedback on works in progress, and grading final products. A rubric articulates the expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria, or what counts, and describing levels of quality from excellent to poor. Rubrics can teach as well as evaluate. When used as part of a formative, student-centered approach to assessment, rubrics have the potential to help students develop understanding and skill, as well as make dependable judgments about the quality of their own work. Students should be able to use rubrics in many of the same ways that teachers use them—to clarify the standards for a quality performance, and to guide ongoing feedback about progress toward those standards.

S

Scaffolding is support work in a challenging activity at a slightly higher level than the student could work on independently.

Schema (plural schemata) is a representation of a plan or theory in the form of an outline or model.

Scope and Sequence is the range and order in which a curriculum is intentionally organized and systematically delivered.

Segmenting is breaking down a word (or taking a word apart). It involves identifying the individual sounds (phonemes) in a word. Students should practice segmenting initial sounds, onset--rime, and individual sounds in a word. Segmenting tasks take place orally without the written word.

Semantics is the study of word and phrase meanings.

Semantic Webbing (graphic organizer) is a way of organizing a hierarchy of ideas often for vocabulary.

Sight Words are words that once learned become automatic and retrievable without conscious attention. All words become sight words once learned. They are not limited to high frequency or irregularly spelled words.

Skills are the abilities needed to perform a task. They become automatic (e.g. riding a bike, word recognition).

Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.

Sound Wall is a tool to organize the 44 phonemes (sounds) and spelling patterns for students to reference when spelling and reading words. Words are grouped by phonemes and NOT beginning letters as in a word wall (see word wall).

Sounding Out is pronouncing isolated phonemes signaled by graphemes.


Spelling ability demonstrates an understanding of how the written form of words corresponds to their spoken counterparts and underlies the ability to decode words during the process of reading and to encode words during the process of writing.

Story map is a visual tool that can be used before, during, or after reading for students and teachers to identify the key elements and structure of a story. Story maps range in complexity from a structured plot summary to detailed descriptions of the characters, setting, problem, events, and main idea. Story maps for younger students are sometimes designed to represent a theme, for example, the trajectory of a space ship or the scoops on an ice cream cone.

Strategy is a teaching practice that shows students **how** to learn the content or skills they need to acquire. It provides students with clear strategies (such as note taking or thinking aloud) to help them process, remember, and express the information they learn.

Structured Literacy approaches emphasize highly explicit and systematic teaching of all-important components of literacy. These components include both foundational skills (e.g., decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression).

Summarizing involves briefly describing, verbally or in writing, the main points of what one has read.



Syllable is any one of the parts into which a word is naturally divided when it is pronounced. It consists of one or more vowel sounds alone or with one or more consonant sounds coming before or following. In Greek 'syllabē' means that which is held together or several sounds taken together.

Syllabification is the act of separating words into syllables," Syllables are sounds held together by vowels, and the process of syllabification involves identifying those separate syllables, in speech or writing. Syllabification is a good way to learn a new word, whether you are trying to spell it or pronounce it correctly (e.g., *syl-lab-if-i-ca-tion*).

Syntax is the formation of sentences and the associated grammatical rules.

Synthetic approach to learning to read is one in which the child first learns to recognize written letters and understand their associated sounds before learning to combine letters into syllables and words.

Synthesizing is the ability to make something by combining different things in order to make something new.

Systematic provides a carefully planned scope and sequence of skills from less complex to more complex and includes cumulative review. When instruction is systematic, nothing is left to chance.

T

Text refers to a body of written work, in various forms and structures, which conveys meaning to a reader. A text can be words, phrases and sentences that piece together a passage of written work.

-Argumentative Texts aim is to change the readers' beliefs. They try to persuade their readers that an object, product, or idea is in some way better than others.

-Expository Texts are intended to identify and characterize experiences, facts, situations, and actions in either abstract or real elements. Expository texts are meant to explain, inform or describe. An expository text structure can be classified into five categories: description, sequential (procedural), comparison, cause-effect explanation, problem-solution presentation.

-Fiction Texts refer to literature created from the imagination. Mysteries, science fiction, romance, and fantasy are all fiction genres.

-Informational Texts include expository, persuasive, and procedural.

-Narrative Texts include any type of writing that relates a series of events and includes both fiction (novels, short stories, poems) and nonfiction (memoirs, biographies, news stories).

-Nonfiction Texts refer to literature based in fact. It is the broadest category of literature.

Text Complexity is the level of sophistication in a text (in terms of content, intellectual engagement, and student readiness); text complexity can be measured through a three-part assessment including qualitative measures, quantitative measures, and reader-task considerations.

Text Features are parts of a text that provide supplementary meaning, such as headings, bold words, pictures and captions, and labeled diagrams.

Text Structure refers to the way in which a text is organized to convey meaning to the reader (e.g., sequence of events, comparison, cause and effect). Associating writing lessons with the text structure being read in the literature is an effective instructional approach.

Theme is a unifying idea that is a recurrent element or main subject of something. It is from the Greek word *thema* and in English has many uses.

-Classroom Themes give a particular setting or ambience to a venue or activity. Engaging classrooms are often decorated reflecting a yearly theme for relationship building.

-Literary Themes are the main idea a writer explores in a literary work. It is conveyed using characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all of these elements. In simpler stories, the theme may be a moral or message. In complex stories, the central theme is typically a more open-ended exploration of some fundamental aspect of society or humanity (e.g., heroes, good vs. evil, love, friendship, or justice).

W

-Unit Themes (topics) are often based on content-specific topics that are not generalizable across subject areas (e.g. fractions, oceans, Civil War).

-Universal Themes (Cross-Curricular Themes) are highly abstract, overarching ideas or concepts that can connect across (and within) any content regardless of the grade level. Universal themes transfer across topics and subject matter because of their generalizability (e.g. power, change, conflict, relationships, structure, patterns, or systems). The approach to teaching is highly engaging and effective for student learning.

Think-alouds are oral verbalizations of underlying cognitive processes. Students or teachers read a text, stopping occasionally to explain what they are thinking and how they are approaching the text. Think-alouds can be used effectively by teachers to model particular reading strategies, and students may be asked to think aloud during reading as a kind of formative assessment to guide instruction.

Three-Cueing Model says that skilled reading involves gaining meaning from print using three types of cues: Semantic (word meaning and sentence context) Syntactic (grammatical features) and Grapho-phonetic (letters and sounds).

Topics (subject matter) are an organized set of facts related to specific people, places and situations. Topics do not transfer because they are related to specific content (fables, habitats, or money). A topic is a vehicle for illustrating the theme (see themes).

Trigraph is a group of three consecutive letters that are read as a single sound (e.g., 'tch' in catch; 'igh' in night; '-ure' in closure).

V

Visualizing is a comprehension strategy that involves readers creating a picture or pictures in their minds based on the meaning of the text. Visualizing can include not only imagining sights but also sounds, smells, and other sensory experiences.

Vocabulary is the understanding of word meanings.

Whole Language reading approach suggests that children develop their language skills through reading, writing, speaking and listening about the world around them and their relationship to it. This student-centered holistic approach values self-selected authentic texts and real use of language over explicit skill instruction and a systematic scope and sequence.

Whole Word Method is the process of learning words by rote mechanical repetition to memorize whole words as a single image instead of by breaking down words to their letter sound correspondences (see phonics).

Word Analysis is the ability to use phonic knowledge to make systematic decisions to decode words in text.

Word Ladders are a kind of puzzle in which one word must be transformed into another specified word by changing one letter at a time; each step yielding a valid intermediate word, as in lead → load → goad → gold.

Word Wall is a display of words organized alphabetically by the 26 letters of the alphabet. High-frequency words (and sometimes learned or introduced content vocabulary words) are placed under each letter based on the first letter of each word. This is often used for rote memorization that is not an evidence-based technique (see sound walls).

Word Recognition is the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and effortlessly.

Working Memory is a cognitive system with a limited capacity that can hold information temporarily. Working memory is important for reasoning and the guidance of decision-making and behavior. It is how we hold on to and work with information stored in short-term memory.

Written Expression is a complex process of using various cognitive operations to translate ideas and thoughts into a written language.

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Developing Character,
Enriching Minds.

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