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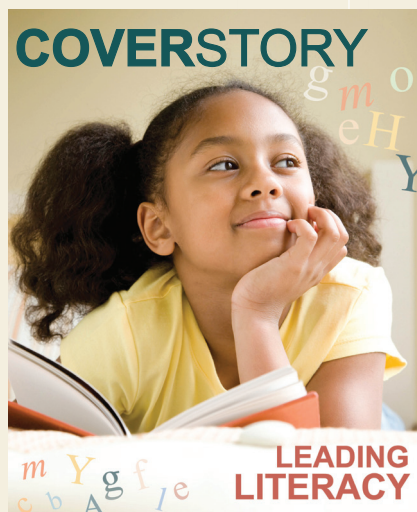
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Vanguard Practices

WINTER 2025

from practitioners

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**THE SCIENCE OF READING:**

Retrospectives, Perspectives, and the Path Forward

By Kim M. Smithgall

“It changes the entire trajectory of children’s lives if they become literate adults,” said Kathleen Chaucer. “We owe it to our students to give them that.”

Chaucer is principal of Milton Terrace Elementary School in the Ballston Spa Central School District — which is among a relatively small number of districts in New York State that were ahead of the curve as Governor Kathy Hochul and New York State Education Department (NYSED) officials generated headlines over the last year and a half with their calls to change the way reading is taught.

The shift involves transforming teachers' instructional methods to align with "science of reading" principles.

And it's a huge shift — especially for educators who have spent their careers teaching children to read using "whole language" and/or "balanced literacy" approaches. Chaucer understands this perfectly; she was one of those teachers.

"I was a first-grade teacher for a number of years; I was originally hired in 2002 because of my knowledge of balanced literacy," she said, adding that the same knowledge helped her earn a position as an assistant principal in the district before being named Milton Terrace principal in 2009. "In 2018, we got a new superintendent who brought us the information about the science of reading. Until then, we were unaware that that body of knowledge existed."

Now, educators from around the state are visiting Ballston Spa to see science of reading based instruction in action.

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF READING?

According to the Reading League, a national education nonprofit led by educators and reading experts, the science of reading is "a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties."

The Reading League's President and CEO Maria Murray also stresses what the science of reading is NOT: "an ideology or philosophy; a fad, new idea or pendulum swing; a political agenda; a one-size-fits-all approach; a program of instruction; a single, specific component of instruction, such as phonics."

In simplified terms, the scientific data shows that the best way to teach children to read involves very explicit

(and repeated) instruction on how letters relate to sounds and then building on that basic knowledge to teach kids how letters combine to form words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. The science of reading also goes beyond simple phonics to include five additional "pillars": phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and oral language (see accompanying sidebar). The explicit instruction in these areas helps to build neural networks in the brain that promote the acquisition of reading and literacy skills.

Murray explains it this way: "Explicit instruction is instruction that's intentional and follows a specific scope and sequence. More complex tasks build upon previously learned, easier ones. And news flash to everybody: This is what we do with everything else in education. We teach children to play instruments like the flute one note at a time. We say, 'You put your finger on your flute here to make the B,' and then that day, you take home a little piece of music that has the B note in it. The next week you learn B flat. 'This is how your fingers move when the little note is on this line.' And now you're taking home a piece of music that has B and B flat in it."

Whole language and balanced literacy approaches to reading instruction, on the other hand, assume that learning to read is a natural process — like learning to talk. In other words, children will automatically learn to read if adults read to them and if they are provided with cues (pictures, etc.) and immersed in literacy-rich environments (think reading nooks and large classroom libraries). This does seem like a much more appealing approach, right? After all, there is little to no drilling on letters and letter combinations, which educators believed would only serve to bore students and turn them away from a love of books and reading.

Immersing kids in literature is "delicious-sounding," Murray comments. "But, the thing that makes you love reading is being able to read."

Scientific research shows that whole language and balanced literacy approaches are ineffective for many children because the human brain is not automatically wired for reading. Unlike talking, reading is not a natural process for humans; it takes explicit instruction and repetition.

CHANGING THE TRADITIONS

Ballston Spa's educators certainly weren't alone in using traditional teaching methods like balanced literacy. For most districts across the county, the scientific findings on how children learn to read were not reaching elementary schools — due, in part, to the fact that educator preparation programs weren't teaching reading science to America's future educators.

This has been among multiple factors leading to alarmingly low literacy rates. On the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also referred to as the Nation's Report Card, only one-third of fourth-grade students were reading at proficient or advanced levels, and 37 percent landed in the "below NAEP basic" category, meaning they had not

The Science of Reading's "Big Six" Skills and Competencies

- **Phonemic Awareness** — The ability to notice, think about, and work with phonemes (sounds) in spoken words.
- **Phonics** — The relationship between graphemes (letters) and the phonemes (sounds) they represent.
- **Vocabulary** — The acquisition of knowledge about the meanings, uses, and pronunciation of words. A student's internal dictionary, comprising words and their meanings.
- **Fluency** — The ability to read out loud accurately at an appropriate rate and with appropriate expression (including proper phrasing, intonation, and pausing).
- **Comprehension** — The understanding of the meaning of texts (in print or other forms) and the context in which words occur.
- **Oral Language** — Includes speaking and listening, providing the foundation for written language, and is the system we use to communicate with others through speaking and listening.

mastered even the most foundational skills for their grade level. In New York specifically, 42 percent of fourth-grade students scored “below basic.”

Murray points out, though, that reading proficiency has been less than stellar for some time now. “The scores have been low for 30 or 35 years. They’ve never really been where they should be. So that unfortunately allows people to believe that nothing can be done and we can just keep doing what we’re doing,” she commented... “But now, the science of reading has garnered wider attention.”

Murray credits the Reading League for some of this increased awareness, noting the vital role of support from such prominent philanthropists as Pleasant Rowland in allowing the organization to become an influential “knowledge broker” after its founding in Syracuse in 2015. The League now has chapters in 40 states. The Literacy Academy Collective and WNY Education Alliance — both based in New York State — are also significant players in the positive shifts in reading instruction within the state’s borders and beyond. Perhaps one of the biggest players responsible for bringing the science of reading to the forefront, though, was an unlikely one — American Public Media education reporter Emily Hanford. In particular, her 2018 report, “Hard Words: Why Aren’t Kids Being Taught to Read?” and her podcast series, “Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong” (which started in 2022), have been incredibly influential in bringing the science of reading to mainstream audiences.

“The podcasts are brilliantly done,” Chaucer said. “Emily made them easy to listen to and to understand the issues with reading instruction.” (The podcasts also cover earlier efforts to make the switch to science-based instruction, including President Bush’s Reading First initiative.) And once families and policymakers heard the podcasts and took in the information from grassroots organizations that were quickly gaining traction, it was difficult to look back. “It became clear that we couldn’t continue with the same strategies and expect different outcomes,” said Tarja Parssinen, founder of WNY Education Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Western New York students.

NEW YORK’S LITERACY INITIATIVE

Fast-forward to January 2024. Governor Kathy Hochul appeared at Watervliet Elementary School to introduce her Back to Basics plan to improve reading proficiency — a very public signal that New York was joining more than 40 other states to mandate the alignment of reading instruction with science of reading research. Her announcement was accompanied by a \$10 million allocation to NYSUT to provide professional development to current teachers.

One week later, NYSED held a statewide conference in collaboration with BOCES across the state and the “Big Five” districts to introduce a series of seven literacy briefs designed to strengthen knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices in preK through grade 12 education. Dr. Nonie Lesaux from the Harvard Graduate School of Education wrote the literacy briefs in collaboration with NYSED. The first brief explains the science of reading and the key ideas behind the approach. It also explains the “Big Six” skills and competencies. The last brief presents tips to help school leaders successfully implement science of reading in their districts. In between, the other briefs cover debunking common myths, the reading-writing relationship, and the science of reading in the preK, elementary, and secondary years. A glossary of key terms is also included.

The rollout of these briefs set the stage for NYSED’s approach to helping districts through this process of change. “During the [January 2024] webinar, we were able to provide professional development to 1,500 to 2,000 literacy leaders,” said NYSED Office of Early Learning Executive Director Erik Sweet, adding these literacy professionals met at their local BOCES sites. “They could then use our materials and webinar recordings and turnkey that information back out to the component districts they work with. We understand that this model works well because the BOCES staff already have established connections with the individual districts.”

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

In June 2024, NYSED released its K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Guide, an optional guide for districts



to use to determine if curricula and curricular materials meet the needs of all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. NYSED stresses that it will not endorse or prescribe any curricula because New York is a “local control” state that allows school districts to make decisions that will best serve their individual needs. “The guide is a resource intended to help districts and schools identify criteria or ‘look-fors’ of high-quality literacy curricula,” explained NYSED Office of Standards and Instruction Assistant Commissioner Santosha Oliver. “It’s another tool that will uplift the science of reading.”

Some science of reading experts and advocates also see the need for more specific guidance — namely, what curricula, associated materials, and teaching methods should not include (along with the best practices). To this end, the Reading League developed its Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines Reviewer Workbook, which essentially gives curriculum reviewers a rubric to highlight any nonaligned practices or red flags that may be present in the areas of word recognition, language comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and assessment. This, along with ongoing, high-quality professional development, can help districts develop a transformative process rather than an additive one, Murray explained. In other words, you can easily identify and remove the instructional elements that don’t work rather than just adding in new strategies.

Murray uses an analogy straight out of her morning routine. “So, I’m dieting and doing kickboxing. I can’t add kickboxing to my schedule and keep eating donuts,” she said. “The kickboxing is not going to work, right?”

MORE MOVEMENT FORWARD

October 2024 marked the release of New York State Action Plan: The Path Forward, a far-reaching plan to integrate the science of reading into teacher preparation programs. This plan grew out of the state's participation in the third cohort of the Hunt Institute's The Path Forward initiative, a national program.

"The Hunt Institute helps bring together states that are committed to bringing more science of reading into their educator prep programs," explained Ruth Genn, cofounder and executive director of the Literacy Academy Collective. "There are five or six states that participate each year. The Literacy Academy Collective ended up playing a facilitative role [for the 2023 cohort]."

The Literacy Academy Collective originally started as a small school support organization that came together in New York City to start the first public school in the country that would specifically support students with dyslexia and other struggling readers, Genn said. The Collective is preparing to open a second school and also expanded into statewide policy work — thus its involvement with the New York State Action Plan.

In its facilitative role, the Collective convened The NYS Path Forward team comprised of three working groups, a leadership committee, and a steering committee that included representatives from NYSED, the New York State Legislature, the governor's office, higher education educator preparation programs, and school districts, as well as community advocates, funders, and stakeholders with wide-ranging perspectives and backgrounds.

"It was really about having all of the leaders at the table negotiating what levers we're going to pull in New York State to solve this collective issue," Genn commented. "It was really powerful."

Together, they produced the plan, which suggests actions in six areas:

1. aligning educator preparation programs (EPPs) with culturally responsive, evidence-based principles grounded in the science of reading;
2. reviewing EPP courses of study;
3. securing public and philanthropic funding to support the necessary shifts;



4. engaging EPP leadership and faculty to integrate science of reading principles into the educator preparation programs;
5. promoting P-20 partnerships;
6. studying the plan's activities and creating an information sharing system.

The plan also previewed the release of NYSED's Prekindergarten-3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Best Practices guide, which became available on January 7, 2025. The release of this guide was accompanied by a NYSED webinar, which once again brought together around 1,500 educators to dig into the guide and ask questions about its use.

District and building leaders, literacy professionals, and teachers are now expected to use the best practices guide to reflect on instructional best practices and their literacy curriculum and materials, ultimately ensuring that literacy instruction and interventions align with science of reading principles. By September 1, 2025, all school districts in the state will be required to conduct this review and attest that they are aligned with the science of reading.

Some educators and school leaders are understandably anxious about having a deadline placed on such large shifts in instructional practices. NYSED's Erik Sweet addressed these reservations: "I see the attestation process as an opportunity for districts to do a deep dive into their instructional practices to see if those practices best impact and help students, and also to reflect on any types of future adjustments they would want to make or professional development that might be helpful," Sweet commented. "It's a reflective opportunity for change."

A follow-up Q&A document from NYSED provided a few more insights to help address additional questions — for example, what will happen if districts cannot honestly say that all of their P-3 practices align with the science of reading? Apparently, the attestation will allow districts to indicate how they plan to comply if total alignment is not the current reality. A preview of the types of attestation questions that might be used was presented in the January 7 webinar, and Sweet noted that the actual set of attestation questions would be posted on the NYSED website by March 2025. Districts will complete the attestation process using the NYSED Business Portal.

NEXT STEPS

Sweet also mentioned that NYSED is posting two additional best practices guides, which will be focused on writing; these will also be available by March 2025. In addition, the department will begin working with libraries.

"The family and community engagement piece is really important. So, we're planning a webinar in the spring with the New York State Library, which will explain the briefs to the library community across the state and help them learn more about the science of reading and how it relates to libraries. Then the New York State Library can also share some best practices about what libraries do to help promote reading, whether it's family and community nights, read-alouds, or helping schools get connected with books that they can use for a reading club or reading program," Sweet explained. "It's important for a full coordinated effort to go beyond the K-12 realm and out into the libraries and community."

In the meantime, NYSED and other support organizations anticipate districts will continue to arrange professional development opportunities that will help their educators integrate science of learning principles into their instructional practices.

“The training should be ongoing,” Parssinen commented. “The states and

districts that are having the most success with the science of reading are providing ongoing training and coaching. And I would also say that this all starts with a change in mindset — starting with educational leaders. Yes, teachers will be doing the work, but leaders need to help change the mindset to one of ‘we can do this; let’s learn together

and take this journey together.’ We say literacy for all and we’ve really got to believe it can be done.”

KIM M. SMITHGALL is an award-winning communications specialist and freelance writer, designer, and photographer.

General Resources

- NYSED Instructional Best Practices at a Glance (based on “Big Six” Literacy Pillars)
<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/early-learning/prekindergarten-3rd-grade-literacy-instructional-best-practices-at-a-glance.pdf>
- NYSED K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Guide
<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/standards-instruction/literacy-curriculum-review-guide.pdf>
- NYS The Path Forward
<https://linktr.ee/NYSthepathforward>
- NYSED Prekindergarten-3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Best Practices
<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/early-learning/new-york-state-education-department-prekindergarten-3rd-grade-literacy-instructional-best-practices-v1-3-25.pdf>
- The Hunt Institute/ The Path Forward
<https://hunt-institute.org/programs/the-path-forward/>
- The Reading League
<https://www.thereadingleague.org>
- WNY Education Alliance
<https://www.wnyeducationalliance.org/>
- Literacy Academy Collective
<https://www.literacyacademycollective.org/>
- The Science of Reading: Defining Guide from The Reading League
<https://www.thereadingleague.org/what-is-the-science-of-reading/defining-guide-ebook/>

- The Reading League’s Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines Reviewer Workbook
<https://www.thereadingleague.org/curriculum-evaluation-guidelines/>
- American Public Media (APM) podcast, *Hard Words: Why Aren’t Kids Being Taught to Read?* <https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read>
- APM podcast, *At a Loss for Words: How a Flawed Idea is Teaching Millions of Kids to be Poor Readers* <https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2019/08/22/whats-wrong-how-schools-teach-reading>
- APM podcast, *Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong* <https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>
- Recommended reading list from Emily Hanford, host and lead producer of the APM podcasts (listed above) <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2022/10/20/science-of-reading-list>
- Recommended resources from Fulcrum
<https://www.fulcrumliteracy.org/resource-library>
- Reading Universe
<https://readinguniverse.org/explore-teaching-topics>

- *It’s Possible! A Leadership Plan for Implementing Quality Reading Instruction and Ensuring Literacy for All*, by Pati Montgomery and Angela Hanlin
<https://www.solutiontree.com/its-possible.html>
- EdTrust’s *ExtraOrdinary Districts: Ordinary School Districts That Get Extraordinary Results* (podcast)
<https://edtrust.org/rti/extraordinary-districts/>
- The Right to Read (film)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YwE45gP_fk

Professional Development Resources

- LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) for Administrators
<https://www.lexialearning.com/leters/administrators>
- AIM Institute for Learning and Research
<https://institute.aimpa.org/aim-pathways/aim-pathways-individual-cohort>
- Cox Campus
<https://coxcampus.org/>
- Angela Hanlin and Associates
<https://angelahanlin.com/>
- The Reading League’s professional development
<https://www.thereadingleague.org/professional-development/>
- NYSUT professional development
<https://www.nysut.org/members/member-guide/professional-development>

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Because this is the last step prior to building out your financial analysis, we may ask specific questions about your situation that we feel are needed for us to assemble your strategy.

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- ☐ How 'on track' you are to meet your projected retirement needs if your financial situation and habits remain as they are today.
- ☐ What future events (ex: paying for a wedding, college expense, or other large-ticket-items) may impact your retirement, and any necessary changes to plan around them.

Our Post-Analysis Discussion

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LEADING THROUGH LITERACY:

How K-12 Administrators Support Change in New York State

By Ellen Ullman

Now that districts across the state will be required to annually review their curriculum to align with the State Education Department's best practices by the beginning of the next school year, principals and other building administrators are playing a pivotal role in implementing literacy best practices grounded in the science of reading (SoR). Through collaboration, structured professional development, and strong leadership, schools and districts are making significant strides in improving reading outcomes for students. These efforts not only benefit students academically but also provide teachers with the tools and confidence to implement effective literacy instruction consistently.

As part of New York State's initiative to improve literacy outcomes, teacher preparation programs are undergoing significant changes to ensure new educators enter the classroom equipped with evidence-based instructional strategies. The recently released action plan emphasizes aligning teacher training with the SoR, requiring educator-preparation programs to integrate structured literacy practices into coursework and clinical experiences. These updates aim to close knowledge gaps and ensure that future teachers are ready to deliver high-quality literacy instruction.

We can all agree that literacy is the cornerstone of education and that changes in teacher preparation programs are good, however, two big questions remain:

1. How do we prepare and support current teachers who need quality and sustained professional development (PD) in the science of reading and new literacy initiatives?
2. How do principals and other building administrators lead through this initiative, supporting and leading with understanding, processes, communication, and teacher support?

FACILITATING COLLABORATION AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Capital Region BOCES, which serves 24 component districts ranging from small urban to large suburban communities, plays a key role in supporting districts through the transition to evidence-based reading strategies. According to Laura McDaniel, director of curriculum and instructional data, Cap BOCES focuses on setting the conditions for district leaders to connect, share best practices, and engage in meaningful discussions on systemic literacy improvements.

"We do not believe episodic professional development works," says McDaniel. Instead, this BOCES takes a compre-

hensive and varied approach that includes panel discussions, workshops, and regional cross-district gatherings. For instance, McDaniel held a series of roundtable discussions to help administrators connect SoR with multi-tiered systems of support. The goal is to create cohesion so that administrators can better support teachers in implementing best practices. "Connecting things that relate and finding the coherence is helpful for administrators so they can show teachers where everything fits in," says McDaniel. "The cohesion conversations from a systems standpoint have been huge."

McDaniel highlights the importance of the guiding documents released by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), which provide clarity on literacy leadership and best practices and debunk common SoR myths. BOCES uses these documents as foundational tools for facilitated conversations with administrators, ensuring that principals and other leaders have a clear understanding of evidence-based reading instruction.

Additionally, Capital Region BOCES encourages schools to use the NYSED guiding documents as a framework to assess and refine existing literacy programs, ensuring alignment with the latest research and best practices. "As we provide facilitated conversations, we can learn what additional support is needed and can set conditions for administrators to discuss."

Overall, McDaniel says, she bases her conversations on the documents and sets outcomes collaboratively. "We have a consistent, clear, and holistic statewide approach that offers autonomy for schools to enter at their own pace, which is our job to figure out. Our leaders have a good pulse on where their staff and communities are at; we just need to meet them where they are."

ENSURING CONSISTENCY ACROSS SCHOOLS IN GATES CHILI CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

At Gates Chili CSD, the Making the Shift to Reading Science

initiative is transforming how literacy instruction is delivered across four elementary schools. With a diverse student population speaking 36 languages, ensuring equitable and effective reading instruction is a top priority.

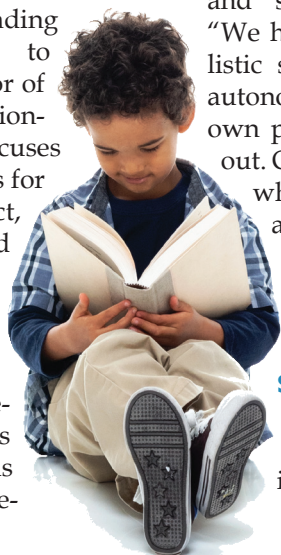
Sara Mucino, director of elementary education, emphasizes the district's commitment to providing consistent, high-quality training for everyone. "We started with district and building leadership to establish a sense of urgency and understanding before moving on to teacher training," she says. "Instructional and building leaders need to be trained and to understand the why so they could better support teachers and students."

Mucino says leadership ensured her team had everything they needed to deliver consistent, required training to all elementary school staff during school hours. Jennifer Christensen, the K-5 literacy coach, controlled the calendar and was strategic with scheduling to make sure buildings could handle the absences. "Starting with administration before teachers was critical in our shift," says Christensen. "We are all on the same page and want the same end goal so we work together to make it all happen."

The training features four full-day sessions spread over several months, with built-in opportunities for reflection and data analysis. Literacy teams at both the preK-5 and 6-12 levels meet regularly to align instruction with SoR principles. Christensen says that any initial resistance among staff was overcome as teachers gained a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the shift. "Once we started, we couldn't move fast enough. They understood the why and they trusted us," says Christensen. Consistency and structured collaboration have led to widespread buy-in among educators.

Additionally, the district has embraced data-driven decision making, using assessment results to inform instructional choices and refine literacy practices. Mucino stresses the importance of continuous collaboration, explaining that professional learning is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that adapts to teachers' and students' needs.

Coming together as grade-level



“When each building operated independently, it was harder to provide meaningful support and ensure effectiveness,” says Mucino. “Streamlining our approach has been crucial.”

teams allows the trainers to identify trends across the entire program, rather than focusing on just one building. “When each building operated independently, it was harder to provide meaningful support and ensure effectiveness,” says Mucino. “Streamlining our approach has been crucial.”

To support all of this, the district introduced monthly Walk & Talks three years ago. During these visits, the assistant superintendent for instruction, the principal, the reading teacher, and Mucino walk through classrooms unannounced. Mucino says this was a challenge for staff at first — they needed time to trust the process. “But our goal has always been to observe instruction and understand the true impact of our decisions. It’s about evaluating the program, not the individual teacher,” she adds.

The Walk & Talks add another layer of calibration, allowing the observers to see instructional strategies in action. “After each walk, we debrief as a team to make any necessary adjustments. It helps us refine professional learning opportunities, ensuring our approach is effective. It’s not about evaluating teachers — it’s about evaluating ourselves. Are the parameters we set reasonable? Are students responding well? Are processes taking too long?”

Mucino and Christensen continue their own learning and try to be a year ahead of the buildings. “We can share goals with the leadership team and let them know what we’ll need from them to be successful. If they foresee any challenges, we work together to address them,” says Mucino.

BUILDING A COHESIVE APPROACH IN NYC

In New York City, the rollout of NYC Reads has required significant professional learning for administrators and teachers. Christopher Anest, principal of Public School 5 Ellen Lurie, highlights how the initiative has provided schools in his geographical district with a common literacy curriculum, professional development, and ongoing support from educational consultants.

The district’s phased approach allowed schools to adopt the new curriculum ahead of the mandate, with principals and literacy leads receiving early orientation. By fall 2024, all schools were required to implement the new curriculum, with centrally funded consultants assisting with implementation.

Anest emphasizes that the new curriculum builds on existing best practices, refining instructional strategies rather than completely overhauling them. One challenge has been ensuring strong foundational skill instruction while maintaining rigorous comprehension-based learning, particularly for multilingual learners. With 40 percent of his students being English learners, the school is working to develop translated curriculum materials to better support all students.

A key benefit of the initiative has been the establishment of a shared instructional language across schools in his geographical district. “Because all the schools are implementing the same curriculum, my colleagues and I are speaking the same language,” says Anest. This consistency enables principals and teachers to collaborate effectively, fostering professional growth and student success.

Furthermore, instructional leaders have implemented a multipronged approach to professional learning, including peer observations, coaching cycles, and collaborative lesson planning sessions. These initiatives help ensure that teachers feel confident in their instructional practices and receive ongoing support as they implement the new curriculum.

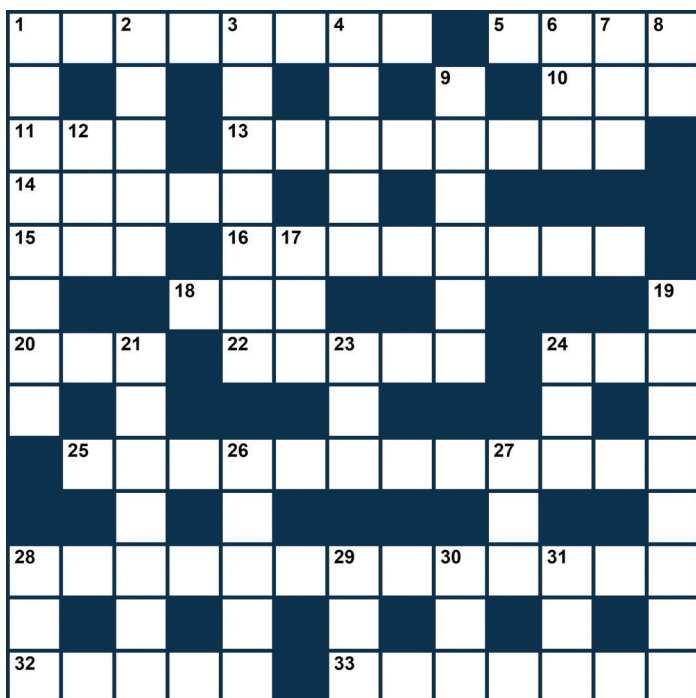
SUSTAINING LITERACY SUCCESS THROUGH STRONG LEADERSHIP

By prioritizing collaboration, structured professional learning, and systemic support, districts are ensuring that all students receive high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction. The work being done across the state demonstrates the power of informed leadership in driving meaningful educational change.

Moreover, these efforts underscore the importance of sustainability and long-term investment in literacy education. By embedding professional learning into daily practice, using data to drive decisions, and fostering strong relationships between principals and teachers, schools are creating a foundation for lasting improvement. Ultimately, these strategies help ensure that students not only learn to read but develop the literacy skills necessary for lifelong success.

ELLEN ULLMAN has been writing about education since 2003. She lives in Burlington, Massachusetts, and is the former editorial director for eSchool News.





ACROSS

- 1 Basic skill of reading and writing
- 5 Direct and guide
- 10 ___-school
- 11 Cry of discovery
- 13 Rleating to education and scholarship
- 14 Hurried
- 15 Ultimate degree in math
- 16 Impart skills and knowledge to
- 18 Subject that is a H.S. requirement, abbr.
- 20 Navigator's dir., abbr.
- 22 Objectives
- 24 __ capita
- 25 Essential reference books that need to be used in every classroom
- 28 Understanding
- 32 Evaluations of knowledge
- 33 Subject which associates letters with sounds

DOWN

- 1 Process of gaining knowledge
- 2 Pass on skills to others
- 3 Understanding written words
- 4 Group of students
- 6 Prefix with center
- 7 Part of curved line
- 8 Of in French
- 9 ___ of wisdom
- 12 Job in an organization
- 17 Nonprofit org., abbr.
- 19 Shows how to do or learn something
- 21 Mysteries
- 23 Back in time
- 24 Greek letter
- 26 Words with specific meanings
- 27 Hospital staff members, abbr.
- 28 Reduce, as costs
- 29 Trendy
- 30 New, as prefix
- 31 Third in sequence

Answer key: See page 39

EducationWeek...



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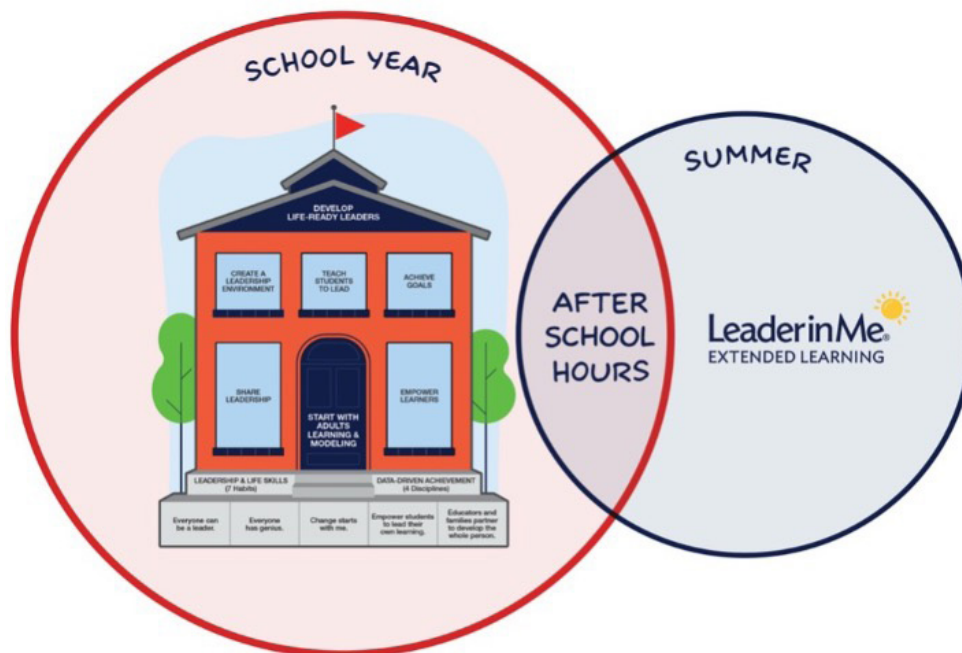
A young girl with dark, curly hair and black-rimmed glasses is smiling and looking down at a blue book she is holding open with both hands. She is wearing a blue and white striped button-down shirt over a white t-shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a library or classroom setting with bookshelves.

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Brick by Brick: Building a Culture of Literacy



By Jennifer Christensen,
Sara Mucino, and
Iva Petrosino, APR

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who lived in Rochester, New York, for most of his adult life, often spoke of literacy as a gateway to freedom. He wrote, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” Nearly 180 years later, just ten miles from where he once championed the power of reading, obstacles to literacy still exist.

For students, literacy is essential — without it, they can struggle to construct meaning in every other subject they encounter. Yet for too many students, reading remains a barrier rather than a gateway.

Imagine trying to build a house without the right tools. You might get some pieces in place, but the structure won't hold. Beyond the tools, you also need a skilled artisan equipped with the knowledge of how to use them effectively. That combination of tools and expertise parallels Gates Chili Central School District's approach to literacy — grounding instruction in research-based practices while empowering teachers to implement them effectively.

The suburban district, located just outside of Rochester, serves more than 3,700 students across one high school (grades 9-12), one middle school (grades 6-8), and four elementary schools (grades K-5). With more than half of students identified as economically disadvantaged, the district reflects a diverse community, including a significant mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds and a growing population of English language learners (ELLs).

A BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

Recognizing the urgent need for improved outcomes, Gates Chili's literacy leaders combined their expertise in classroom teaching, special education, literacy intervention, and leadership to create a blueprint for transformation. That blueprint began at the elementary level, where early literacy skills serve as an essential foundation for all future learning. At the forefront of the plan was not a shiny new program or instructional materials but rather the most precious resource of all — teachers.

"Resources can be highly effective, but nothing can take the place of good teaching," said Sara Mucino, director of elementary education. "A teacher can adapt, respond, and bring literacy to life in ways no program ever could. The time students spend with their teachers is where learning truly happens."

But before shifts in instruction could take place, district leaders first had to address the varying levels of knowledge and understanding among teachers regarding literacy development and research-based practices. The team recognized that

professional learning was key — but that meaningful change would require logistical coordination and full district support.

The plan called for teachers to step away from their classrooms for extended professional learning, which meant coordinating substitute coverage, lesson planning, and time away from students. Yet, from office staff and teacher aides to building leaders and the superintendent, the entire district rallied behind the effort — ensuring that teachers had the time and space to engage in deep, meaningful learning.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In 2022, Gates Chili launched its first professional learning cohort focused on the science of reading. The training deepened teachers' understanding of evidence-based literacy instruction, equipping them with the skills needed to support reading development and language acquisition.

Teachers engaged in four full-day sessions spread across several months, allowing for built-in opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and data analysis. As each cohort moved through the training, teachers began shifting instructional approaches in their classrooms — small changes at first, followed by deeper instructional shifts. Key to the process was a network of building reading teachers in each elementary school who helped guide their colleagues through implementation.

"Classroom teachers are faced with ever-changing demands, so they needed help making small, measurable changes that allowed them to see that their hard work was paying off for students," explained Sarah Dumrese, building reading teacher at Paul Road Elementary School. "It's also helped teachers buy into these changes, because they can see the success in their students."

BUILDING STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY THROUGH STURDY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

With each successive cohort, literacy instruction in classrooms across the district became more aligned with

reading science. Early on, this meant subtle yet intentional shifts in phonics instruction, with teachers ensuring explicit, systematic approaches were used consistently.

"When teaching students to decode unfamiliar words, teachers previously might have encouraged them to use cueing strategies — looking at the pictures, guessing based on context, or using the first letter to predict the word," explained K-5 literacy coach Jennifer Christensen. "Now, instruction is grounded in structured phonics, where students are taught to break words into phonemes, blend sounds, and apply spelling patterns, helping them read with accuracy. This shift ensures that students develop strong foundational skills rather than relying on strategies that can reinforce guessing instead of decoding."

As teachers' expertise deepened, so did the impact on classroom instruction. Small-group reading interventions became more targeted, assessments were used more effectively to drive responsive teaching, and students began demonstrating stronger reading skills.

"It's been amazing to see the growth in our students' vocabulary," shared Leigh Herkamp, who co-teaches in a second-grade integrated co-teach classroom at Florence Brasser Elementary School. Seeing that they understand and can apply the words "has been incredibly motivating."

Another key component of this shift was teacher collaboration. Instead of working only within their building teams, teachers worked across grade levels district-wide to analyze instructional practices, identify what was working, and refine their approaches accordingly. This teacher-led problem-solving approach became a defining feature of the district's literacy transformation.

"Between the many years of literacy expertise that we bring as educators, the new resources, and the time we have to collaborate, I feel we're armed with the knowledge to truly impact student success," added Sarah Klineczar, second-grade teacher at Walt Disney Elementary School.

WIRING THE SYSTEM FOR STRONGER ASSESSMENTS

To keep instruction responsive to student needs, strong assessment practices were essential. In spring 2023, the district's literacy team identified gaps in the existing assessment system and recognized the need for a new, more effective universal screener.

Reliable data is critical to effective literacy instruction — it allows educators to move beyond assumptions and make informed decisions about what each student needs to grow as a reader. Without clear, consistent assessment measures, gaps in foundational skills can go unnoticed, making it harder to intervene before students fall further behind.

With this in mind, the district formed an assessment team to train teachers in interpreting and utilizing assessment data, allowing teachers to focus on instructional responses rather than administration logistics. This work set the stage for more consistent and meaningful use of student data. By spring 2024, trained teachers were implementing side-by-side assessments, ensuring consistency before a full district-wide rollout of the new universal screener in fall 2024.

With assessment data now fueling instructional decisions, teachers could see real-time evidence of student growth and adjust their instruction more effectively than ever before.

"We're starting to see the impact that a strong Tier 1 program can have on student success," said Klineczar. "Initial assessment data is showing growth in vocabulary acquisition and language comprehension."

REINFORCING THE FRAMEWORK WITH REFLECTION AND COLLABORATION

Another key component of Gates Chili's literacy journey has been structured reflection. Rather than leaving each building to operate independently, the district created intentional opportunities for cross-building collaboration.

Previously, four different systems had emerged across the district's elementary schools, leading to inconsistencies in literacy instruction. Now, teachers and administrators come together to reflect, refine, and ensure fidelity in implementation.

This consistent, district-wide approach has strengthened collaboration and accountability, and has shared best practices, allowing the district to remain responsive to student needs.

A LASTING FOUNDATION FOR LITERACY SUCCESS

With a unified instructional vision in place, the district continues to anchor its literacy efforts in data and state standards. Teachers use assessment data to guide instruction, ensuring every student receives targeted, high-quality literacy experiences.

Gates Chili's literacy transformation has been built brick by brick — through intentional planning, deep professional learning, and the dedication of teachers who bring literacy to life in their classrooms. Yet, this work is far from finished.

"While it's important to celebrate the growth and success we've seen so far, it's even more important to stay the course," explained Mucino.

"We remain committed to building sustainable systems at the district and building level to ensure supports are in place for leaders, teachers, and ultimately, students."

More than a century after Frederick Douglass championed literacy as a pathway to freedom, Gates Chili is carrying that legacy forward — ensuring that every student has access to the reading skills needed to unlock their future.

But just as no house is built without skilled craftspeople, no literacy transformation happens without the dedication of teachers. Educators have laid the foundation for a culture of literacy, using their expertise, passion, and commitment to ensure that every student can read, learn, and thrive for years to come.

JENNIFER CHRISTENSEN is the K-5 literacy coach for Gates Chili CSD.

SARA MUCINO is the director of elementary education at Gates Chili CSD.

IVA PETROSINO is the director of communications at Gates Chili CSD.



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From Evaluation to Implementation: **Centering Trust While Aligning Curriculum** with the Science of Reading



By Ian Knox and
Dan Hash

New York's latest literacy initiative has forced educators to confront a fundamental shift in how reading should be taught. Investigative journalism, particularly the *Sold a Story* podcast, exposed weaknesses in traditional reading instruction, revealing how professional development and curriculum choice had often overlooked foundational literacy skills. In response, the science of reading has emerged as a research-based framework to guide districts toward more effective instruction.

Recognizing the need for change, our district set out to align our ELA curriculum with both NYS mandates and the core principles of the science of reading — while ensuring that the process remained teacher led, transparent, and responsive to our unique educational community. Throughout this process, we prioritized trust as the foundation for meaningful change. However, trust alone is not enough — consistency is equally essential in fostering a lasting impact. By maintaining a reliable and structured approach, we ensure that our efforts lead to sustainable growth. Additionally, we are committed to a curriculum that adheres to research-based best practices, ensuring that our methods are not only effective but also rooted in evidence-based strategies that support long-term success.

While evaluating the changing landscape and planning next steps for your programs, it is imperative to center your efforts around trust. In their article, *Managing People: Begin with Trust*, Frances Frei and Anne Morriss emphasize that trust is “one of the most essential forms of capital a leader has” (p. 5). They identify three core drivers of trust: empathy (“I believe you care about me and my success”), authenticity (“I experience the real you”), and logic (“I know you can do it; your reasoning and judgment are sound”). Together, these drivers form a framework for addressing the complex social and emotional needs of students.

This article offers insight into our structured approach to reshaping our ELA curriculum to meet NYS mandates while honoring our district’s unique culture and needs. Through a five-step process, we demonstrate how clearly defined roles, transparent decision making, and opportunities for ownership built trust across stakeholders. Our goal is to provide a clear framework for other districts navigating significant program shifts.

BUILDING A DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE

Trust is essential in any curriculum reform. We relied on our district’s cabinet structure — a decision-making

body that includes educators and administrators across disciplines — to ensure that our approach was teacher driven and transparent.

Key Takeaways for Implementation:

- **Empower teachers** — Teachers from each elementary school (one primary, one intermediate) serve as our review team and voting members.
- **Define administrator roles** — Administrators act as facilitators, organizing mandates, arranging vendor meetings, and managing logistics while teachers pilot programs and provide feedback.
- **Use a structured review cycle** — Every five years, the cabinet conducts a curriculum review, using student data and instructional concerns to shape decisions. This cycle allowed us to proactively shift toward a science of reading aligned program before the NYS mandates took effect.

Reflection Question: How does your district ensure teachers have a voice in curriculum selection?

IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES FOR A NEW PROGRAM

Before evaluating potential curricula, we established clear, skills-driven criteria rooted in instructional priorities. This logical, evidence-based approach builds trust by demonstrating thoughtful, well-reasoned decision making.

- **Elements of reading:** Authentic texts with diverse perspectives; interdisciplinary learning opportunities; text experiences both at and slightly above grade level.
- **Elements of writing:** Systematic writing instruction with embedded grammar and word work; student experiences with a variety of genres within each unit.
- **Alignment with current programming:** Seamless integration with our existing phonics and phonemic awareness curriculum; creates a connection with our science and social studies curriculum.

To keep the selection process objective, we converted these priorities into a checklist-style rubric to evaluate each program. We then used the Knowledge Matters Campaign directory to identify five potential curricula for review.

Reflection Question: What nonnegotiable elements would you require in a reading and writing program? What would your wishlist include?

THE CURRICULUM REVIEW AND PILOT PROCESS

We structured our review process into three distinct phases. The structured process, rubric-based evaluation, and data-driven decision making demonstrate a thoughtful, evidence-based approach that builds trust.

- **Vendor Presentations and Initial Rubric Evaluation:** Hour-long overview sessions were scheduled with each company, accompanied by requests for sample materials. Our priorities rubric, mentioned above, guided follow-up questions, ensuring a consistent and thorough evaluation process.
- **Mini-Pilot Phase:** At least two teachers per program were selected from multiple schools to pilot one unit. Teachers identified the units that would fit nicely into what they were already planning to cover. The supervisor gathered qualitative feedback through classroom observations, teacher discussions, and student responses.
- **Consultation Meetings:** After identifying other local districts that were already using the programs under review, brief virtual meetings were held to hear their reactions and any hurdles to their implementation. This included feedback both from administrators and teachers to better understand any classroom needs.
- **Final Evaluation and Unforeseen Challenge:** After the pilot, none of the programs fully met our needs. In response, the Cabinet revisited the Knowledge Matters Campaign, identified a new

program, and conducted a late-stage vendor review. Using the NYSED-provided Materials Alignment Quick Check (ELA/Literacy) rubric, the Cabinet evaluated each program.

Following a comparison of the rubric results, the Cabinet held a vote and unanimously approved a full-year pilot.

Reflection Question: How does your district ensure that teachers take the lead in the product review and approval process alongside administrators?

ROLLING OUT A FULL-YEAR PILOT

To ensure a smooth district-wide pilot, we focused on trust, transparency, and collaboration. The focus on teacher inclusion, readiness, and ongoing support highlights an understanding of their needs and experiences and shows empathy. These actions demonstrate a commitment to listening, collaborating and valuing perspectives throughout the pilot process.

- **Selecting Pilot Teachers:**

Recruited one teacher per grade level from each school, totaling 30 participants. Science and social studies teachers were included to evaluate interdisciplinary potential. Principals were involved to ensure representation across all instructional levels.

- **Building Teacher Readiness:**

Offered asynchronous summer training modules with paid incentives to support teacher preparation. Ensured all materials were available before the school year, despite some initial logistical challenges.

- **Ongoing Support and Feedback:**

Hosted a half-day, in-person check-in after the first month to gather initial insights. Established monthly virtual meetings during morning prep time to maintain regular communication. Collected early survey feedback to gauge teacher sentiment, which informed the decision for full adoption in January.

Reflection Question: How does your district ensure pilots are structured and provide meaningful data for decision making?

SHARED AGREEMENTS FOR CONSISTENCY AND AUTONOMY

To promote consistency while honoring teacher autonomy, we developed a district-wide shared agreements document, categorizing program expectations into three tiers. The clear, tiered framework balances consistency and flexibility, demonstrating a structured, well-reasoned approach that maintains program integrity while addressing student needs.

- **Implement as directed:** Non-negotiable program elements; the goal is to ensure fidelity to the core pieces of the program so that all students receive skill instruction in the same way.
- **Acceptable variation:** Modifications based on student needs; this can include spending extra time on areas that students need additional support on and shortening (but not skipping) elements where students are showing success.
- **Unacceptable variation:** Deviations that risk program integrity; without this column, we would be unsure whether students were receiving the core elements of the program.



Empowering teachers as decision makers drives both buy-in and effective implementation.

This clear framework of expectations, created with teacher input, combined with flexibility for teachers, fostered trust and ensured program fidelity.

Reflection Question: How does your district balance teacher autonomy with structured implementation?

FINAL THOUGHTS: KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

Key Lessons:

Through this process, we discovered key lessons that shaped our approach:

- **Trust is the foundation of change** — Empowering teachers as decision makers drives both buy-in and effective implementation.
- **Transparent communication prevents resistance** — A clearly articulated process minimizes skepticism.
- **Flexibility is necessary** — Even after thorough review, the “right fit” may not be found immediately.

As we move forward, we will continue to assess outcomes, provide professional learning, and refine our approach to ensure that our curriculum serves all students effectively.

Implementation Checklist for Districts:

- Establish a structured decision-making body (e.g., cabinets).
- Define program selection criteria and create an evaluation rubric.
- Engage teachers in a structured pilot process.
- Gather feedback through multiple touchpoints (observations, surveys, peer district discussions).
- Develop a district-wide implementation plan with professional learning and ongoing support.
- Set clear shared agreements to ensure consistency without rigidity.

Reflection Question: Would this structure be helpful for your district's curriculum review process? What challenges might you face in implementation?

Our district's journey with the science of reading has shown us that real change happens when trust, transparency, and teacher voices are at the heart of the process. By leaning on research-based practices and working together to make thoughtful decisions, we've built a strong foundation for lasting growth. Before embarking on a curriculum shift, districts should take inventory of existing structures, resources, and decision-making processes to determine the most appropriate starting point. Some districts may already have a structured review cycle in place, while others may need to build foundational systems for teacher involve-

ment, transparent communication, or data-driven evaluation. By assessing what is already working, leaders can focus on strengthening gaps rather than rebuilding from scratch. Once these elements are established and routines are in place for systematic program evaluation, the process becomes repeatable and transparent. More importantly, this structured approach can be adapted for various initiatives beyond curriculum selection — ensuring that instructional decisions are consistently informed by research, teacher expertise, and student needs.



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Leading Literacy

with Research, Collaboration, and Commitment



By Mary E. Wood

In 1996, I began my career as a special education teacher. At the time, inclusion was still emerging, and my primary focus was on helping students with disabilities access the general education curriculum. My co-teachers and I approached this by applying the same strategies I had always used with students with special needs — strategies that benefited all learners. We incorporated additional visuals, provided scaffolding, and taught in small groups. These were not simply “special education” techniques; they were examples of effective teaching for all students.

I share this example because it reflects how we transitioned from whole-word reading and context cue strategies to the science of reading. The key to this shift was implementing instructional practices that benefited all students. For instance, we never fully abandoned systematic phonics instruction. Although we attempted to remove it for one year based on a recommendation from staff developers, we quickly reinstated it after recognizing its importance. Additionally, our assessment approach evolved. Rather than relying solely on running records, teachers began assessing students on letter naming fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics skills. This data allowed educators to provide targeted, explicit instruction in these areas and closely monitor students performing below benchmark.

Although we had been gradually shifting our instructional practices and assessments, it wasn't until the release of Emily Hanford's podcast, *Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong*, in October 2022, that we truly began to reflect on our approach to literacy instruction. The podcast highlighted decades of scientific research showing that a balanced literacy approach was ineffective in teaching students to read. Like many educators, I struggled to accept this. I was a proud graduate of multiple TCRWP Institutes, had spent weekends helping teachers organize classroom libraries by level, and had modeled reading workshop lessons with confidence. The idea that these widely accepted practices were not grounded in the science of reading was difficult to reconcile.

Determined to learn more, I, along with my administrative colleagues and teachers, delved into additional research, including *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000), *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* by Dr. David Kilpatrick (2016), *The Simple View of Reading* (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001). As we engaged with this research, it became clear that we needed to transform our approach to teaching reading — beginning with professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The first step in professional development (PD) was to establish clear goals. The primary goal was to establish district-wide implementation of the science of reading. Not only did we want our teachers to implement more science of reading (SoR) strategies, but we also wanted them to develop a deeper understanding of why these approaches are essential for helping students become proficient readers.

To support this shift, we established a professional learning environment grounded in safety in learning (Zimmerman et al., 2019). This began with ensuring that PD sessions were well structured, started on time, and provided teachers with meaningful resources. Additionally, each building principal facilitated monthly meetings to turnkey important insights from *The Six Shifts* (2021).

As a leadership team, we took a collaborative approach to this process. Each month, one principal took the lead in developing a Google Slides presentation for a specific shift, but all of us contributed by reviewing, editing, and discussing the content to ensure clarity and effectiveness. We also recognized that each building had a unique culture and varying levels of teacher knowledge. To address this, we adapted the presentations as needed — skipping, modifying, or adding content to best meet the needs of our teachers.

Most importantly, we fostered safety in learning by openly acknowledging mistakes and thinking aloud through challenges and new understandings (Zimmerman et al., 2019, p. 25). By modeling this vulnerability, we helped move our staff from *informational learning* to *transformational learning* (Drago-Severson, 2009), which emphasizes self-direction, autonomy, reflection, and critical thinking. We saw this transformation in action as teachers took initiative — conducting their own research on SoR, meeting



independently to plan lessons, incorporating more decodable texts, and asking thoughtful questions in staff meetings to deepen their understanding.

Like any initiative, professional development is an ongoing process. Grade-level meetings with our reading teacher have been dedicated to developing lessons using decodable texts, while instructional support team meetings, led by the building school psychologist, focus on implementing science of reading (SoR) strategies to support individual students. The reading teacher and school psychologist's expertise in data-driven instruction has been critical in this process.

RESOURCES AND PRODUCTS

To ensure we selected high-quality resources truly aligned with the science of reading, rather than those simply labeled as "SoR compatible," we focused on programs that have been grounded in research for decades. Therefore, we began identifying materials aligned with structured literacy approaches, such as Orton-Gillingham. One well-established program that meets these criteria is *Wilson Foundations*. Designed for whole-class Tier I instruction, Foundations provides systematic, phonics-based lessons. The program incorporates hands-on learning through the use of magnetic tiles and includes a dictation (encoding) component to reinforce skills. Additionally, unit assessments and dictation exercises serve as valuable data points for teachers to monitor student progress.

For phonemic awareness instruction, we implemented *Heggerty*. While

several programs target phonemic skills, we found Heggerty to be both effective and easy to implement. Teachers have utilized Heggerty's instructional videos to model hand movements that support phonemic manipulation, such as segmenting, blending, and emphasizing sounds. Additionally, we have adapted the program for some students by incorporating blank Elkonin boxes and counters, allowing them to physically push together and break apart the different sounds in words for deeper engagement.

BOOKS AND PASSAGES

Transitioning from leveled readers to decodable readers has presented several challenges. Many school libraries are organized by leveled reading systems, parents are accustomed to their children bringing home leveled texts, and there are currently limited decodable books available in our schools. To successfully implement this shift and to create more teacher buy-in, we needed to deepen our understanding of *orthographic mapping* and how it relates to decodable texts.

Orthographic mapping is the process of connecting the known phonemes in a spoken word to the graphemes that represent them in print. Because the word has been decoded and holds meaning, it becomes permanently stored in memory. Research shows that proficient readers require only one to five exposures to a word to orthographically map it (Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 30). Encoding or spelling plays a critical role in this process because it reinforces the connections between sounds and letters, helping students to solidify their ability to recognize words automatically. When students spell words, they segment them into phonemes and match them to the correct graphemes, strengthening their ability to retrieve and recognize these words in print. To support this process, students need to practice reading and spelling words they have been explicitly taught — words that follow phonetic patterns they have learned. Decodable texts provide this essential practice, ensuring that students apply their phonics knowledge rather than relying on guessing strategies or rote memorization.

Recognizing this need, the district has invested in expanding our collection of decodable texts. One resource we have implemented is *Geodes* by Great Minds, which provides nonfiction texts aligned with the phonetic patterns taught in *Foundations*. These books have been well received by students, who find them engaging, and by teachers, who appreciate their rich content. Since the science of reading (SoR) emphasizes not only decoding but also comprehension, these texts support the development of content knowledge, listening comprehension, and language skills.

To further supplement our decodable text collection, we have also explored the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, to create customized reading materials. Following a suggestion from our district superintendent, teachers have generated personalized stories with their students as the main character. Here is an example: Create a story about a boy named Jack who likes basketball. Include first-grade-level high frequency words and CVC patterns, enabling the AI tool to generate a tailored narrative. Then review the passage, revise prompts, and edit as needed. This innovative use of AI has allowed us to provide more engaging texts, ensuring that students have access to instructionally appropriate reading materials.

As our understanding of orthographic mapping deepened and additional decodable texts became available in classrooms, a shift away from leveled books began to take place. Instead of selecting books based on reading levels, students are now choosing books based on topics of interest and exploring a wider range of previously leveled texts. To support this transition, teachers introduced the shift to parents during conferences, helping them understand the reasoning behind the change. Administration provided teachers with a concise explanation to use in these discussions and further reinforced the message at PFA meetings, ensuring families were informed and engaged in the process.

The transition to the science of reading has been both a learning journey and a leadership challenge — one that required reflection, research, and a

willingness to embrace change. As educators, we had to rethink long-standing instructional practices, reframe professional development, and ensure that teachers felt supported throughout the process. While the journey is ongoing, our foundation is stronger than ever — built on research, collaboration, and a shared commitment to student success.

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The Reading Wars: One Battle Won

A Tale of One District's Journey



By Dr. Mary Volkomer
and Jennifer Sullivan

“This is educational neglect,” declared a 20-year, second-grade veteran teacher, as our monthly faculty meeting began. It was 2017 and our district’s five elementary principals began to lead the charge to change our teachers’ traditional reading teaching methods to using the science of reading.

Holding on to belief systems is protective and affirming to people. As educators, it is difficult to imagine that we, the collective, could be using methods that science and research have not backed up for decades. This information was held in postsecondary institutions and with researchers who had been studying methods to improve reading instruction.

It almost seems criminal to have solid research on teaching reading in a way that is prescriptive and actionable and not have that information in the hands of those who are charged with teaching students across the state to read.

During the summer of 2017, our district began a reading initiative that we knew would take several years to foster and implement. Our district was committed to using the science of reading (SoR) for all reading instruction. As a team of elementary principals, our monthly administrative meetings were focused on studying and understanding this research and teaching methodology. We all attended a five-day science of reading training (LETRS for Principals) and our eyes were opened and our minds were changed. Once we learned how our brains learn to read, and after we analyzed statistical facts of how learning the sounds (phonemes) of letters and manipulating these sounds help the brain make connections between letters and their graphemes, we were hooked. This “science of reading” was what our students needed. It actually felt good to know there is a reason and a guided path in teaching people to read.

Our charge was then to change some deeply embedded belief systems that revolved around whole language educators. Coming back to the district, we learned quickly that we had an uphill battle to change the hearts and minds of some of our veteran teachers. The divide was real. There were hard conversations, tears, and walls built by our teachers to protect their long-held beliefs about whole language learning. For many of our veteran teachers, we were asking them to change, relearn, what they knew and believed about teaching our kids how to read. For some, it felt as if everything they valued about teaching was being uprooted. They were faced with new ideas that contradicted their long-held teaching practice and knowledge of learning to read. Additionally, our new teachers were being hired with a master’s in literacy and did not have the knowledge of the SoR.

While the summer of 2017 focused

on principals learning about the SoR, the 2017-2018 school year began with principals working alongside their teachers, and the district’s literacy committee. Slowly and methodically, we read research articles, listened to reading experts, and analyzed our student data. Much of this was provided by attending the Reading League conferences (after-school gatherings for professional learning). Some of us had staff who were on the Reading League board and these people were instrumental in combining our efforts to lead the change. Teacher leaders and influencers in your district or buildings can be recruited to assist in changing the long-held beliefs of the whole language paradigm, and assisting with peer classroom visits, grade-level meeting conversations, and staff meeting discussions.

We knew we were not the first district to move in this direction. We met with and examined data from those districts that used the SoR and noticed how their reading fluency and comprehension scores soared above ours. We even looked at their scheduling of WIN (What I Need) time to expect skill instruction using a “six step lesson” to teach phonemic and phonics skills. At this time, our district created a goal of training all elementary teachers in “Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling” (LETRS) and found a curriculum that was built on the SoR. This learning was essential. It not only provided us with 50 years of research, it also provided the guided path for teaching reading. We knew that when teachers had the knowledge and a guided timeline of how to implement the SoR our students’ reading scores would improve.

Additionally, our district partnered with the Reading League, and each elementary school had a Reading League coach assigned to help them in this endeavor. The coaches visited classrooms, modeled lessons, assisted in planning, and provided explicit feedback that could be used immediately to enhance instruction and learning. For the next three years, every professional day was focused on reading instruction, Scarborough’s



Rope, and how to use the newly selected curriculum in our classrooms and with our students. As principals, our visits focused on observing reading practices and providing our teachers with reflective feedback that enhanced their instructional practices. It was evident from comments made to each of us that our teachers appreciated that their principals were learning alongside them and were able to collaborate with them about reading instruction, student learning and data-driven lesson planning. Together, principals, teachers, and coaches worked to change reading instruction that would ensure all of our students would learn to read on grade level.

Not all buildings were finding a stride. One in particular employed several staff members who worked as adjunct faculty teaching reading courses to preservice teachers using the whole language paradigm. These teachers were adamantly against using the SoR and did not want the reading coach in their classrooms. To shift their thinking, the principal used all of the local student data available to conduct a longitudinal study that included reading scores and district poverty levels. The data collected showed that while the K and first graders did well on the grade-level assessments (Running Records) used at that time, by third grade most of the students were not reading on grade level. While kids could read words like “cat,” “in,” and “pan” in the primary grades, they could not decode multisyllabic words like “category,” “insist,” and “panic” once they entered the second and third grades. It was clear that memorizing sight words did not provide our students with the reading essentials they needed for future growth. Students

did not know or understand how letters worked together to create sounds or how to decode multisyllabic words. This was a big eye opener and shifted practices for even the most veteran teachers. Truth be told, a few teachers retired, but many, even the 20-year second grade veteran teacher, changed their practice. We now have 100 percent of our teachers LETRS trained and using the SoR every day.

As a district, our classrooms have a new vernacular. Teachers and students regularly use words like phoneme, grapheme, blend, digraph, morphology and Scarborough's Rope. When faced with a new or unknown word, students use their knowledge of the English language to decode. It is fascinating to visit a classroom of primary students and listen to them talk with each other about the rules of English, how to read, and how to spell words. Our second graders use grammar rules to explain the reason *kite* is spelled with a *k* and not a *c*, how to read words with

a "bossy *r*" and why words that have a silent *e* make a long vowel sound in the first syllable.

Now that we are talking the same language, we are more focused than ever on the learning of all students. Focused conversations about reading data, tracking, and planning for all students' growth occurs at each building's ELA data meetings (four-to-six week intervals). These collaborative meetings are focused on learning outcomes. We talk about what our students know and are able to do to find areas of growth and concern. Goals are created and assessments are aligned to the collective commitments. This data drives the next meeting.

It's now 2025 and, although it has been a long journey, we can celebrate our progress. Our students' oral reading scores continue to rise. Our students are learning to read and mastering fluency skills. Looking forward, as a district, next steps include looking at the other side of Scarborough's

Rope, improving students' writing and speaking skills, continuing to tighten our SoR instruction, and providing faculty with professional development opportunities. With ever tightening budgets it may be a hurdle to continue to provide professional development for our new faculty, but with collaborative grade-level teams and building literacy coaches, we have a collective commitment to make improvements in student learning outcomes in all classrooms. No longer are our teachers considering the science of reading as "educational neglect," but rather as a necessary prescriptive, evidenced-based way of developing students into readers.

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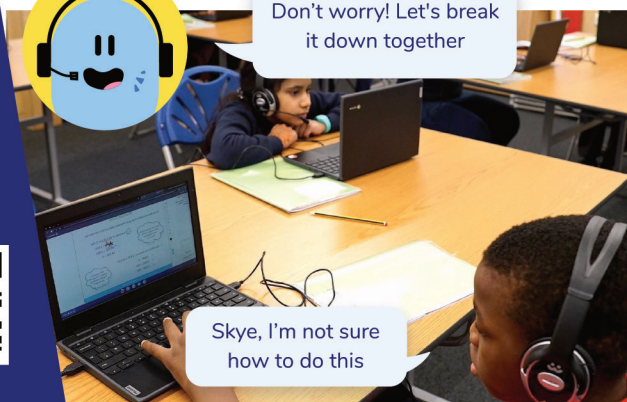
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Our Journey to the Science of Reading



By Sarah Holbrook

As a school district administrator, a former specialized reading teacher, an adjunct professor of literacy, and the co-creator of the microcredential on the science of reading, I am very hopeful about the changes in literacy instruction coming to New York State. However, I do believe this will not be an easy shift. It is going to take time, resources, and schools will need a lot of support to make this shift successful. The state has outlined what literacy instruction should look like; it has not provided a structured roadmap for how to get there. School districts are now left to navigate these shifts on their own. While I can't claim that what we've done in my district is the "perfect" solution, I can share what has worked and what hasn't in our journey toward the science of reading.

WHERE WE STARTED

The science of reading spans preK-12; however, the heavy lift will primarily fall on the elementary teachers. When I joined my district last February, we assembled a council of elementary teachers and provided them with training on the science of reading. From February to June, the science of reading became a central topic of every meeting with teachers. Teachers were given ample opportunities to express their feelings, ask questions, and collaborate with one another. This allowed us to build momentum and ensure that everyone was involved in the conversation.

Behind the scenes, I conducted a thorough review of our current curriculum. The district had already implemented a phonics program before I arrived, but it wasn't enough. We needed a more cohesive approach. To address this, I worked with our curriculum council to evaluate three knowledge-building programs using the Reading League's curriculum guide. We gathered input from teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators, and ultimately selected an all-inclusive knowledge building program to pilot in the 2024-2025 school year across all elementary schools. We plan on rolling out to all elementary classrooms in the 2025-2026 school year.

The next dilemma I was faced with was the assessment framework. Traditionally, the teachers had administered a running record and based their small group instruction on the results of that assessment. Students were placed in leveled text and teachers met with small groups of students throughout the week working at their instructional level. We replaced the running record with an oral reading fluency assessment. Oral reading fluency assessments are quick, effective ways to determine what students can perform on grade level. Students who do not reach the benchmark on the oral reading fluency assessment are administered a phonics diagnostic assessment that pinpoints deficit areas. Teachers were instructed to base their small group instruction on the areas of identified deficits from the phonics assessment. This allowed the teachers to maintain

the mentality of small group instruction. This was extremely helpful for the teachers who were not piloting. We just changed what they were doing in their small group instruction; instead of using leveled text, students were provided with targeted instruction in deficit areas. At the beginning of the school year, all teachers were trained on the new assessment framework and given time to practice and create instructional plans.

WHAT ABOUT THE OLDER KIDS?

I felt strongly that we had created a solid plan for our elementary schools during this transitional year. However, I was very concerned with the students in our middle schools. The students sitting in middle school right now are our COVID children. These are the kids who were home during those foundational years. The gaps we are seeing are larger than they ever have been. I knew we needed to do something drastic to intervene and make significant progress. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, I had all the fourth grade and fifth grade teachers administer a spelling inventory. Spelling inventories are an easy way to identify where students' word reading skills are. I used the summer months to review that data. Students were then grouped together based on the results of that assessment. In our middle school we already had an extension period for our fifth-grade and sixth-grade students. Instead of staying with their homeroom teachers, we created what we called a WIN (What I Need) block. Students rotated to the appropriate teacher and were provided with targeted instruction in deficit areas. Although met with some hesitation at first, our midyear data shows significant improvement, especially with our most struggling students.

WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHERS?

No shift in instructional practice can succeed without strong teacher buy-in. Gaining teacher support can be challenging, particularly when it involves a shift from traditional practices. For many educators, their teaching methods are deeply tied to their professional identity. For those

teachers accustomed to a balanced literacy approach, the transition can be jarring. Balanced literacy places a heavy emphasis on comprehension and leveled reading. The idea of adopting structured literacy practices, like explicit phonics instruction, can feel rigid or even "unnatural" to some teachers. Switching to skill-based instruction and reading of complex text (not leveled text) will challenge many teachers' long-held beliefs.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Fullan tells us that behavior changes before beliefs. As the administration we can tell the teachers what to teach, but we can't make them believe in it. Provide your teachers with professional learning in the science of reading. Teachers are more likely to embrace change when they not only understand the rationale behind it but also see how it will benefit their students. I highly recommend the SUNY New Paltz microcredential (disclaimer: I am one of the creators). It is a 35-hour, self-paced, knowledge-building training on the science of reading; how the brain learns how to read; what are the best instructional methods that align with the research; and what assessments can best identify deficit areas. By offering structured professional development, teachers are given the time and resources needed to shift their instructional practices. Without adequate time and guidance, teachers may struggle to effectively integrate new reading methods into their classrooms, limiting the overall impact of the change. Providing consistent professional development ensures that teachers have the tools and support they need to succeed in this transition.

Be strategic and have trained educators at each school to help turnkey the knowledge and provide on-the-ground support as shifts in instruction are made. Form cohorts of teachers and provide time for the teachers to work through professional development together. Tap into your literacy specialists. When we rolled out our new assessments, the reading teachers were trained first. That way they were on the ground ready to provide support to the teachers as they implemented these changes.

This year, we've continued with professional development by running book studies on *The Knowledge Gap* and *The Writing Revolution K-12*. By providing ongoing learning opportunities, we're reinforcing the importance of integrating the science of reading into everyday instruction.

As we move forward, we need to ensure that our teachers have both the knowledge and the resources they need to make lasting changes. This means continued professional development, collaborative support, and regular opportunities to reflect on and adjust practices.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the science of reading is a complex yet essential undertaking. It presents a significant opportunity to alter the academic trajectory of numerous students, enabling them to become proficient readers. Programs and curricula are vital in providing

the necessary support and guidance to educators, particularly regarding what to teach and how to teach it. Furthermore, assessments will be pivotal in driving this transition. With appropriate assessments, educators can accurately determine what content to teach, to whom, and at what time. However, the mere introduction of a program or new assessments will not fix the underlying challenges. Extensive professional development is also necessary, as many educators have not been trained to teach this way. It is imperative that as the administration we support our teachers in this change over. I have this quote hanging up in my office and I refer to it every day: "Educational change depends upon what teachers do and think. It's as simple and complex as that (Fullan, 2016, p. 97).

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A Collaborative Path to Literacy Success: **Strengthening Instruction for Every Student**



By Michelle L. Gabree-Huba

Educators in Clinton Elementary School were thirsty. You see, this group of educators is steadfastly committed to excellence and equity in outcomes, and they recognized there was more we could be doing to support student success. This shared commitment was key to shifting our practice. Aligning our reading instruction to the research around structured literacy had to be collaborative if it was going to be successful, and this group was ready to do the work. Strong instructional leadership and effective change management were also critical to ensure that our teachers were equipped with the knowledge, tools, and strategies needed to enhance literacy instruction and support student success.

Our journey began with the foundational belief that teachers needed a deep understanding of the research behind structured literacy before we could implement significant instructional changes. To achieve this, we supported all K-3 teachers and interventionists in earning a microcredential in the science of reading. This professional learning opportunity provided them with the theoretical and practical knowledge essential to implementing structured literacy effectively. By investing in their expertise, we ensured that instructional decisions would be rooted in research and best practice. Their thirst was being quenched with new understanding and they were excited about the potential impact these new approaches could have.

Once our teachers had a strong foundation in the science of reading, we turned our attention to selecting new instructional resources. We recognized that the selection process needed to be rigorous and inclusive so we developed a comprehensive rubric to evaluate potential resources. Rather than conducting full pilots, we engaged in a structured review process. Teachers took a deep dive into the final three options by writing lesson plans and delivering lessons from each resource. This approach allowed them to make meaningful comparisons and gather firsthand insight.

To further inform our decision, we sought references from other districts already using the resources under consideration. This provided valuable perspectives on implementation successes and challenges. The literacy committee reconvened to share feedback, engage in lengthy discussions, and follow up with publishers to address outstanding questions. This thorough and collaborative process ultimately led to a consensus on the best instructional resource for our district.

With the selection finalized, we prioritized professional learning to ensure effective implementation. Teachers participated in training on how to

use the new resources to ensure effective implementation. Our elementary principal was right alongside teachers throughout this process, learning, listening, and asking critical questions. Strong instructional leadership at the building level, including a deep understanding of best practices in literacy instruction, was essential to driving this change forward.

Beyond resource selection and training we dedicated time and efforts to mapping our literacy curriculum. While our instructional resources provide a strong foundation, we acknowledge that no single resource is perfect. As a result, we are committed to integrating supplemental materials to ensure that our curriculum fully meets the diverse needs of our students. Throughout this transition we have prioritized ongoing discussions, coaching, and collaboration. In our first year of implementation, we have continually supported our primary-level teachers as they adapt to the new approach and resources. Looking ahead to next year, we plan to expand this work through our intermediate grades. To prepare for this, we have provided science of reading professional learning for our intermediate teachers, with particular focus on building background knowledge and vocabulary — key contributors to reading comprehension.

Another significant initiative this year at Clinton Elementary School was the implementation of an intervention block. Our dedicated team of interventionists work closely with classroom teachers to provide targeted interven-

Strong instructional leadership at the building level, including a deep understanding of best practices in literacy instruction, was essential to driving this change forward.

tions and monitor students in alignment with our district's multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) plan. This structured approach ensures that students receive the individualized support they need to succeed.

This spring our preK-2 teachers will use the New York State Literacy Instructional Best Practices tool to reflect on their instruction, identify strengths and gaps, and develop action plans for continuous improvement. This reflective process will help us refine our approach and ensure that our literacy instruction remains aligned with the research and evidence-based practices.

As we move forward, our next steps include training intermediate teachers on our newly adopted instructional resources. This gradual implementation has allowed us to use our resources effectively as we invest in high-quality materials, training, and support. It has allowed our students to build strong early literacy skills critical for long-term reading success.

By prioritizing professional learning, fostering collaboration, and maintaining a strong vision, we have successfully navigated this transformative literacy initiative. Through ongoing commitment and continuous improvement, we are building a literacy program that will support all students in developing the skills necessary for life-long reading success.

MICHELLE L. GABREE-HUBA is the assistant superintendent for instruction and technology at Clinton CSD.



Using Science-Based Tools for Literacy Instruction to Ensure Student Success



By Michele Boutwell

New York's current literacy initiative is preceded by, and well founded in, the National Reading Panel's (NRP) 2000 research summary of the most effective components of reading instruction, so 25 years ago reading instruction based on philosophical beliefs should have come to a screeching halt. Unfortunately, it has required years of consistently poor national reading performance and some well publicized investigative reporting to get us where we are today in mandating evidence-based instructional practices in reading.

As of July 1, 2012, the Part 200 Regulations of the Commissioner, specifically, 200.4(c)(2)(i), mandated that students in grades K-4 receive instruction in “phoneme awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral reading skills, and reading comprehension strategies” before they could be eligible for classification as learning disabled. This is a “tail wagging the dog” story because special education legislation responded to the NRP report, albeit over a decade later, to reduce the number of instructional casualties classified as learning disabled. Districts with high classification rates still advertise that they follow a balanced literacy structure and the workshop model — two instructional approaches that have been highly discredited and do not comply with the NRP recommendations or the Part 200 Regulations.

Instructional leadership is the key to moving schools toward the science of reading. In 2011 the Office of Special Education (OSE) at NYSED was already on the cutting edge of the science of reading, and published the revised version of the Quality Indicator Review and Resource Guide for Literacy to support schools in assessing their instructional programs and processes. The guides also identified quality indicators and “look-fors” in leadership and other systemic supports like professional development. This document could be resurrected and used to help school districts develop best practices in literacy that align with the science of reading. When the Kennewick, Washington school board set a goal of 90 percent proficiency for third graders in 1999, they determined that it would take “excellent leadership, excellent initial instruction, and excellent data systems (Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier, 2004). Fielding and colleagues also noted that there would be a need for principals to move from being building managers to instructional leaders. They emphasized the need for principals to buy into the change. “Principals cannot be the loyal opposition and at the same time be effective leaders” (Fielding et al., 2004). The burden of preventing and closing gaps in student performance lies at the feet of administrators.

In order for teachers to embrace best practices, professional development and effective instructional tools must be provided in order for them to feel competent and confident. NYSED OSE’s quality indicator and resource guides also included several indicators for professional development that would provide necessary systemic support to administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff. Professional development should be outcome focused and driven by results (Literacy QI, p. 4) and be built into the school day with every member of the staff, including the principal, required to attend. Demonstration lessons and in-class technical assistance should be provided as teachers implement new routines and practices. The new innovation being implemented should be mandated district-wide, and ample opportunities for cross-district round tables should be created to provide support and encourage problem solving.

One needs to look no further than a small rural elementary school in Gowanda to see what highly effective, science-driven instruction should look like. Jennifer Johnson and Shana Bolen lead an integrated co-taught third grade classroom. Explicit and systematic structured literacy instruction that leaves nothing to the imagination nor assumes that students already have the necessary knowledge or will acquire it on their own is at the heart of their practices. Because some third graders come to these veteran teachers demonstrating below-benchmark performance, Johnson and Bolen, as well as other teachers like them, would likely be advocates for ambitious instruction starting in kindergarten to build a strong foundation and ensure that only a few students are in need of additional instruction to close existing gaps. It is essential that kindergartners have explicit and systematic instruction in handwriting, the alphabetic principle, phonics, decoding, phonemic awareness, and spelling to prevent the development of those gaps. What happens at this level sets the stage for the rest of those students’ careers. At third grade, students who are not meeting grade-level benchmarks on a universal screener receive not only ex-

plicit and systematic core instruction, they also receive specially designed instruction and gap-reducing intervention. In order to ensure students are advancing appropriately, these teachers monitor progress weekly, charting their students’ achievement and making those data public on the wall outside their classroom. Their focus is ensuring that students have strong decoding skills “while also embracing a lifelong intrinsic passion for literacy” (Cardona, 2023). Instruction is primarily large group, teacher led, and code focused. It includes vocabulary and background knowledge development, grammar, writing, spelling, and comprehension. Decoding and encoding instruction begins at the isolated element level progressing to the word level (blending and segmenting sounds), to sentences, and then to connected decodable text. Instead of reteaching previously taught material, practice is cumulative and distributed over 12 days to maximize instructional time and ensure mastery. Another critical aspect of this successful literacy program, the daily opportunity for students to practice reading aloud with corrective feedback, is absent in many of today’s classrooms. Using a multi-modal program with fidelity ensures excellent outcomes.

NYSED has published the K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Guide to help districts choose science-based tools to fulfill its literacy initiative. The document includes guiding questions, criteria, indicators, and in the editable version, reviewers can record the evidence they find to support a program they are considering and make notes for later reference. Although not perfect, it is a constructive tool to get districts started.

In addition to tools that the New York Education Department has already developed over the years, districts can look to the instructional design of a 2003 successful research study conducted by Benita Blachman of Syracuse University, Sally Shaywitz from Yale University, and others. At the end of the eight-month explicit and systematic word recognition intervention, researchers found large-effect sizes in word recognition, reading rate, and spelling, and a medium-effect size

in passage reading. One year later, the effect sizes had diminished slightly but maintained the ranking of large and medium. Even ten years later, the treatment group showed statistically significant positive differences from the control group (Blachman et al., 2014). So, if an average of 105 hours of instruction for students who were already experiencing a gap in instruction had such a significant impact, imagine the effect that a similar approach to instruction would have on students before the gap begins to form! That is the kind of instruction you will find in Gowanda's Johnson-Bolen classroom.

With a slight variation of the Syracuse University study treatment plan, students in kindergarten would begin with explicit and systematic handwriting instruction as they acclimate to school. Then, using a logical scope and sequence that starts with the simplest concepts and moves to the most complex focusing on sound/symbol associations, syllable types, and English spelling conventions, kindergartners would begin to read and spell. Students would be able to write all of the representations of the sounds they have been taught over time and transfer these skills learned in isolation to read and spell words. Students would practice these skills in sentences that they write from dictation and read

decodable text with increasing levels of difficulty. In every new lesson, students would learn a new concept that is practiced in 12 subsequent lessons. In the Johnson-Bolen classroom, they also include a daily one-minute word reading activity that aligns to their scope and sequence to work on word recognition automaticity. We know what works. The process is proven by research and can be seen in action on any given day in this low resource rural New York classroom.

When the Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Center network was in operation over a decade ago, the state was already working on improving outcomes for students with disabilities using the science of reading. The Quality Indicator Review and Resource Guides for Literacy document provided guidance on how schools should provide systemic support in the areas of leadership, professional development, formative and summative assessment, progress monitoring, communication, program development, and universal design for learning. It described the quality indicators for K-12 in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension, writing, spelling, and handwriting. Perhaps some updates are warranted, but the major work is done! Let us not

waste time reinventing the wheel. We know how to do this. Let's not delay — the futures of the state's children are at risk.

MICHELE BOUTWELL, M.Ed., is a retired teacher and former coordinator at Erie2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES.

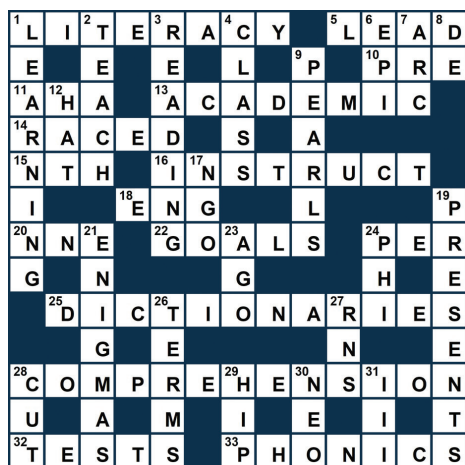
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CROSSWORD Answer Key

ACROSS

1. Literacy, 5. Lead, 10. Pre, 11. Aha, 13. Academic, 14. Raced,
15. Nth, 16. Instruct, 18. Eng, 20. NNE, 22. Goals, 24. Per,
25. Dictionaries, 28. Comprehension, 32. Tests, 33. Phonics

DOWN

1. Learning, 2. Teach, 3. Reading, 4. Class, 6. EPI, 7. Arc, 8. DE,
9. Pearls, 12. Hat, 17. NGO, 19. Presents, 21. Enigmas, 23. Ago,
24. Phi, 26. Terms, 27. RNs, 28. Cut, 29. Hip, 30. NEO, 31. III

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Effectively Engaging Teachers in Change: Creating Alignment and Building Enduring Understandings Around the Science of Reading



By Laura McDaniel

Engaging our educators in fruitful conversations about shifting instructional approaches or altering pedagogy can be challenging and unpredictable. This is especially true for topics like literacy instruction, on which there has historically been much debate. Entering into conversations around the science of reading that build both understanding and shifts in practice, however, are necessary and timely. How, then, do we more effectively hold conversations with our teachers that are positive, productive, and enduring?

BEGIN THE CONVERSATION FROM A PLACE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As an instructional coach and an instructional leader, I've found that the most impactful conversations on any change occur when they fundamentally stem from a place that values and explicitly acknowledges educators' commitment to their students. While the science behind the science of reading is by no means new, it may very well be at odds with how some of our educators were trained, and it may conflict with what our teachers have been doing in their classrooms for many years.

It is important to understand that engaging in conversations around the positive impact of science of reading may inadvertently send the message that any formerly used practices were bad or even damaging to students. That, of course, is not the message that we intend to send, nor will it cultivate the urgency we

need from our teachers in order to see true change in practice.

Instead, when leaders frame conversations and learning around literacy instruction as an opportunity to further refine and enhance educators' skill sets, not as a critique of their current or past efforts, we will be better positioned to leverage the wealth of strategies and adaptability that our teachers already possess. Once this framing has been established, the strategies below can be useful as you continue the conversation.

CRAFTING ALIGNMENT THROUGH CONVERSATION

Connecting an initiative like the science of reading to the why is another essential step leaders can use to engage teachers in the pedagogical shift. Missing this critical step could build a barrier to change, as teachers may view it as an "extra" or an "add-on," instead of as integral and embedded work. Clearly articulating how the science

of reading is directly aligned to other key district levers will demystify and connect the initiative to its larger purpose; it's why. Consider the following ways to align to the science of reading in your conversations with teachers:

Alignment to Mission: Take a moment to think about your district's mission statement: do the words *all students* show up at least once? Framing the context of your literacy conversations within the language of fulfilling your district's mission statement serves to engage teachers by building clarity between the literacy initiative and the district's intended outcomes for students. It will also serve to boost a larger sense of collective efficacy that is needed for conversations around the science of reading to move from talk into action. This cohesion will provide language for teachers to use as they verbalize how a change in their practice is connected with the forward movement of the district.



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Some questions to consider at this point in the conversation may include: What language in our mission statement calls out to you as most important? Which language is most aligned to the idea of literacy? Does the current state of literacy instruction in our district serve all students? How do we know? Are we doing what we are promising our community in our mission statement?

Alignment to Data: Use aggregate and disaggregate data to illuminate for teachers any current disparities in student literacy proficiency and growth. It is important to triangulate the data to ensure multiple measures are considered so that larger trends can emerge. I've also found that it is essential when working with data to understand the humanity that exists within any data set. Data tells a story, is connected to people, and shows us the impact of our teaching on students. Because data is connected to teaching and learning, it also comes with emotion; consider the use of common protocols to make the data digestible and action oriented, instead of overwhelming and deflating.

Some questions to consider at this point in the conversation may include: what student(s) are being served and underserved by our current literacy program or instruction? What explicit literacy strategies or understandings are strong/weak and for whom? Where in our curriculum are these strategies taught? What additional support do you need as teachers to support the areas of growth for students?

Alignment to the Familiar: When leaders initiate conversation with teachers in regard to the science of reading, many other questions (and sometimes anxieties) can emerge, because any change can feel like a mammoth task. It is important for teachers to understand where this change fits in conjunction with already established initiatives and systems within the district. Connecting something as robust as the science of reading with how it fits across your district's established MTSS framework, assessment strategies, or where it naturally lives in the Next Generation Reading Foundation standards can further serve to contex-

tualize the change into preexisting and predictable structures, and to further reinforce the why.

Some questions to consider at this point in the conversation may include: What systems, structures, and/or initiatives does the district already have in place? Where do changes aligned to the science of reading fit within or in connection to these systems, structures, and/or initiatives?

CREATING ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS BY FOSTERING CYCLICAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS

After you've effectively engaged teachers in conversations around the science of reading, how does new learning happen, and how do we uphold it? We know that episodic, one-off professional development sessions are not effective in fostering sustained change. Supporting teachers in adopting and sustaining evidence-based reading practices requires a cyclical approach that combines explicit, tailored support, facilitated discussions and feedback, and ongoing and sustained mechanisms of monitoring.

Explicit, Tailored Support: Teachers need clear guidance and resources to implement evidence-based literacy practices effectively. This includes but goes far beyond access to high-quality instructional materials. First, align your district's curriculum or curricular resources to the science of reading. Then, determine what additional support teachers need to truly understand the materials so that they can authentically teach them in a manner that addresses students' needs.

Consider asking yourself these questions to further the work: What systems are in place to determine professional development needs so teachers deeply understand the curriculum? Once teachers have a good understanding of the curriculum, do they have enough contextual understanding so that they are able to respond and adjust instruction in the moment? What trends are we seeing across classrooms that could indicate a larger professional development need across the building or district?

It is important for teachers to understand where this change fits in conjunction with already established initiatives and systems within the district.

Facilitated Discussion and Feedback: While explicit, tailored support is essential, teachers also need designated spaces for facilitated discussion where they can collaborate with peers, share insights, give and get feedback, and take ownership of their own learning in the change process. These discussions should encourage reflective practice, allowing educators to explore how evidence-based strategies can be adapted to their unique classroom contexts. Feedback loops are essential: if data reveals areas where students are not making expected progress, professional learning can and should be adjusted to address those trends. By embedding these conversations into existing structures, districts make professional learning a natural and integral part of teachers' routines, rather than an add-on.

Consider asking yourself these questions to further the work: What spaces for discussion and professional learning does our district already have in place that can be repurposed or reimaged with a spotlight on literacy? Can it be a standing agenda item for PLCs or a rotating topic for our department meetings? What opportunities exist for leaders to provide teachers with timely and useful feedback (or teachers to provide feedback to their peers)?

Ongoing and Sustained Mechanisms of Monitoring: To ensure that instructional shifts are having the intended impact, districts and teachers must continually measure the connection between professional learning, teacher pedagogy, and student outcomes. This makes all of the prior points about connecting to preexisting structures so necessary: Teachers are more likely to sustain new practices when they feel part of a supportive community that is cohesive, aligned, and connected. Above all, the district must ensure that a change in instruc-

tion, such as alignment to the science of reading, is having a positive impact on all students by leveraging predictable and consistent monitoring mechanisms.

Consider asking yourself these questions to further the work: What mechanisms does the district have or need to sustain a change like adopting the science of reading? What are our

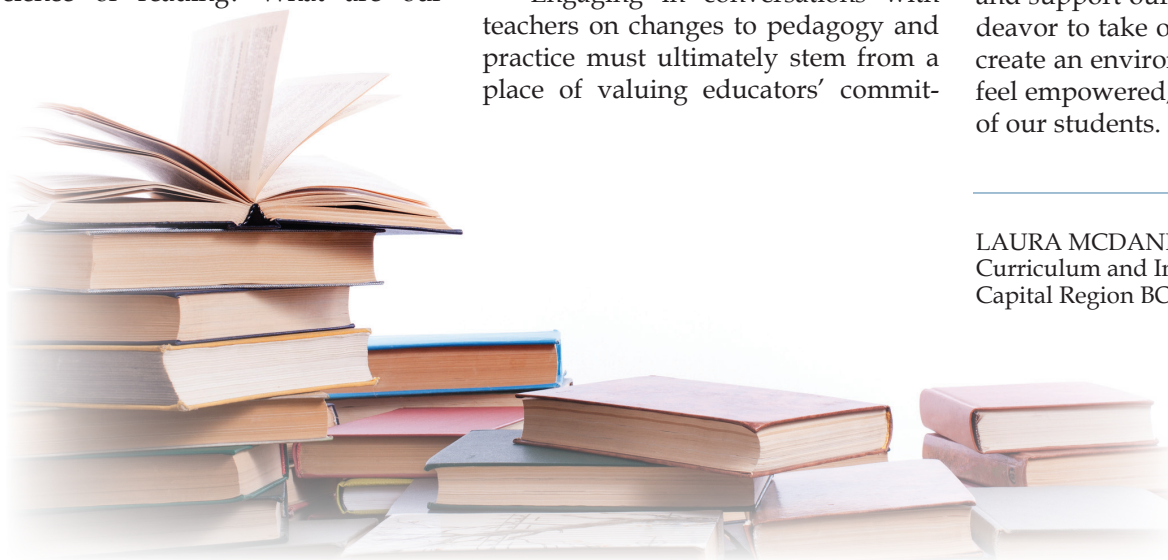
progress monitoring structures and where does this fit at the classroom, building, and district level? Reconnect to MTSS — how does the monitoring of the impact of the science of reading fit in alignment with current tiered practices?

CONCLUSION

Engaging in conversations with teachers on changes to pedagogy and practice must ultimately stem from a place of valuing educators' commit-

ment to students. As leaders, engaging teachers in explicit conversations about the impact of changes in practice, creating alignment, and providing ongoing collaborative spaces for growth are key components to any change, especially one so multidimensional as the science of reading. If we carefully frame these conversations and support our educators as they endeavor to take on this change, we can create an environment where teachers feel empowered, which is a win for all of our students.

LAURA MCDANIEL is the Director of Curriculum and Instructional Data at Capital Region BOCES.



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How Schools Can Encourage Parental Involvement: The Role of Parents in Children's Literacy Development



By Michael Plotkin

Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's literacy skills, serving as their first and most influential teachers. Research consistently demonstrates that parental involvement in a child's literacy development has profound and lasting effects on academic achievement, cognitive abilities, and overall educational success (Foster, 2022). School leaders and teachers need parent-partners in their quest to help students become effective readers and develop the literacy skills they will need to be productive and happy adults. Parents play a multifaceted role in guiding and fostering literacy skills with their children. School leaders and teachers can effectively encourage and support parental involvement in this critical aspect of a child's education.

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Parental involvement in children's literacy activities has been shown to positively affect various aspects of a child's educational journey:

1. Early Reading Experiences:

When parents introduce their children to books at an early age, they provide a significant advantage that persists throughout primary school (Clark, 2007). These early experiences prepare children for formal literacy instruction and set the foundation for future academic success.

2. Language and Comprehension Skills:

Involvement in reading activities at home has been linked to improvements in reading achievement, language comprehension, and expressive language skills. This engagement also positively influences children's interest in reading and their attentiveness in the classroom.

3. Long-lasting Effects:

The impact of parental involvement in literacy practices is most profound when it begins early in a child's life, with effects that can persist into teenage years and even adulthood (Clark, 2007). This underscores the importance of establishing strong literacy foundations from the earliest stages of development.

4. Academic Achievement:

Parental involvement has been identified as a more powerful force in a child's educational success than other family background variables, such as social class, family size, or parental education level (OECD, 2002). This highlights the potential for parental engagement to overcome socio-economic barriers in educational outcomes.

5. Gateway to Success:

Success in reading has been found to be a gateway to success in other academic areas (Foster, 2022). By fostering strong literacy skills, parents are effectively supporting their child's overall academic development.

KEY WAYS PARENTS SUPPORT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Parents can support their children's literacy development through various activities and approaches:

1. Creating a Literacy-Rich Home Environment

- Providing access to a variety of reading materials, including books, magazines, and digital resources (Foster, 2022).
- Modeling reading behavior by engaging in their own reading activities (ABC, 2023).
- Displaying print materials around the home, such as labels, lists, and notes (Wohlers, 2005).

2. Engaging in Shared Reading Activities

- Reading aloud to children regularly, which helps develop vocabulary, comprehension, and a love for reading (Foster, 2022).
- Discussing stories and asking questions to enhance understanding and critical thinking skills (Wohlers, 2005).
- Encouraging children to read independently as they develop their skills (Foster, 2022).

3. Supporting Language Development

- Engaging in rich conversations with children to expand their vocabulary and language skills (Wohlers, 2005).
- Encouraging storytelling and creative expression (Simonds, 2012).
- Introducing new words and concepts through everyday activities and experiences (Stanford, 2023).

4. Connecting Literacy to Real-Life Experiences

- Incorporating reading and writing into daily routines, such as making shopping lists or reading signs (aecf.org, 2022).
- Engaging in literacy-based activities during family outings or vacations (Stanford, 2023).
- Encouraging children to write letters or cards, or keep a journal (Simonds, 2012).

5. Collaborating with Schools and Teachers

- Attending parent-teacher conferences and school events (Stanford, 2023).
- Communicating regularly with teachers about a child's progress and challenges.
- Participating in school-based literacy programs or workshops (Clark, 2007).

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN ENCOURAGING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

While parents are crucial to literacy development, schools play a vital role in fostering and supporting parental involvement. Here are strategies schools can employ to encourage parents to fulfill their role in their child's literacy development:

1. Educate Parents on the Importance of Their Role

Schools should provide information to parents about the significant impact their involvement has on their child's literacy development. This can be done through:

- Workshops and seminars on literacy development and parental involvement (aecf.org, 2022).
- Distributing informative materials such as newsletters, brochures, or online resources (Stanford, 2023).
- Hosting family literacy nights or events that demonstrate effective reading strategies (Clark, 2007).

2. Provide Specific Guidance and Resources

Many parents may be unsure or unaware of how to effectively support their child's literacy development. Schools can address this by:

- Offering training sessions on specific literacy activities parents can do at home (aecf.org, 2022).
- Creating and distributing literacy activity kits or resources for home use (Stanford, 2023).
- Providing access to online platforms or apps that support literacy development (ABC, 2023).

3. Foster Open Communication

Establishing strong lines of communication between parents and teachers is crucial. Schools can:

- Implement regular progress reports or updates on a child's literacy development (aecf.org, 2022).
- Use technology (e.g., apps, email, or text messages) to facilitate easy communication (Stanford, 2023).
- Encourage teachers to be accessible and responsive to parental inquiries (Clark, 2007).

4. Create Opportunities for School-Based Involvement

Schools can provide various opportunities for parents to be involved in literacy activities within the school environment:

- Inviting parents to volunteer in classrooms or the school library (aecf.org, 2022).
- Organizing family reading events or book fairs (Stanford, 2023).
- Implementing programs where parents can read to small groups of students (Clark, 2007).

5. Address Barriers to Parental Involvement

Schools should recognize and address potential barriers that may prevent parents from being involved:

- Offering flexible scheduling for parent-teacher meetings and school events (aecf.org, 2022).
- Providing translation services for non-native English-speaking parents (Stanford, 2023).
- Considering child care options during school events to facilitate parent attendance (Clark, 2007).
- Partnering with universal PreK programs to form relationships with parents and provide strategies and resources to parents early in a child's development.

6. Celebrate and Recognize Parental Involvement

Acknowledging and appreciating parental efforts can encourage continued involvement:

- Recognizing parents who actively participate in literacy initiatives (aecf.org, 2022).

- Sharing success stories of how parental involvement has positively impacted students (Stanford, 2023).
- Creating a supportive community atmosphere that values parental engagement (Clark, 2007).

The role of parents in a child's literacy development is undeniably crucial. From creating a literacy-rich home environment to actively engaging in reading activities, parents have the power to significantly influence their child's educational journey. Schools, in turn, have a responsibility to support and encourage this parental involvement through education, resources, and opportunities for engagement.

By fostering a strong partnership between parents and schools, we can create a powerful support system for children's literacy development. This collaboration not only enhances academic achievement but also instills a lifelong love for learning and reading. As we continue to recognize the importance of parental involvement in literacy development, it is essential that both parents and schools work together to create an environment where every child has the opportunity to develop strong literacy skills and succeed academically.

MICHAEL PLOTKIN is the principal at Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School in the Croton-Harmon school district.

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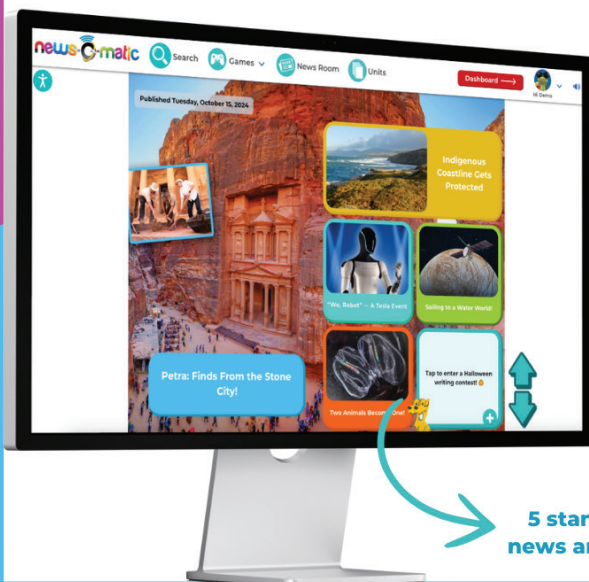
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The Path of Literacy Instruction



By Jill Farrand

On a recent trip to visit my parents in Florida, my father was driving me back to the airport and punched in the airport's address on the GPS in his truck. As we began our journey, taking the turns that the nice lady in the speaker told us to, my father became agitated when he was told to take a turn that he did not think was on the right, or most effective, path. Rather than keep with the automated system, he kept going straight because, he said, "I have been this way before and I remember it will be quicker." I will spare you the rest of this story, but it involves a dead end that was mysteriously not there before, and a U-turn with some colorful language to accompany it.

Why am I talking about GPS? Well, when I was introduced to the NYS Literacy Briefs and told about the attestation process that each district would have to go through, I knew I had to create a plan to lead the staff in my school through the process of assessing our current literacy initiatives and evaluating whether they were taking us to the correct destination or not. And if not, changes would need to be implemented. And so, I figured I could learn some lessons from that GPS and my father to make sure we didn't get held up at a dead end.

So...lessons learned from a father and a GPS. And what that has to do with literacy instruction. Here we go.

LESSON 1: TRUST

Now, trusting the GPS would be the obvious lesson for my father, but admitting that an automated voice coming out of his truck speakers is right, and he is not, will never. Ever. Happen. So, moving on.

Building trust in a school building is easier, thank goodness, but it is an intentional and critical process to move forward with any initiative. While it is not an easy or quick process, building trust can be accomplished over time in many ways. Being visible to staff so they know you are there for them in their time of need is one way that you can begin to build trust. Listening to staff and providing support and authentic feedback is another. Sometimes, what you say when you are not talking says the most. What does your body language tell staff? Where in the building are you spending your time? With whom? All this matters in building trust with staff, and without trust, why would they follow you to an unknown place?

LESSON 2: THE BIG PICTURE

A big mistake that my father made with the GPS was failure to look at the big picture. He simply entered the address of the airport, clicked "Go" and took off. Had he taken some time to check the turn-by-turn directions, or zoom in on the map of the route, he would have seen that every turn did, in fact, bring him closer to his destination. He wouldn't have felt the need to veer

off course, thereby encountering a dead end, and extending his trip in the process.

Establishing teacher buy-in starts with providing them with access to the big picture. If they are privy to only part of the process, they may not understand the overarching goals or be willing to make changes. What could this look like? Build collective knowledge around new initiatives. Share out State Ed updates at staff meetings. Provide resources to teachers that they can dive into should they wish to. Treat teachers as the copilots on this trip, as they will be the ones in the driver's seat when all is said and done anyhow.

A big piece of this for my district was to build collective wisdom together. I attended PD alongside my teachers when I could. I studied the changes in depth so that I could speak to them with the teachers and answer questions that came up. While I realize that there is often not enough time in the day to do everything we as administrators would like to do, or need to do, when facing a grand initiative like the literacy push in New York State, your time with teachers learning alongside you is invaluable. It helps build the trust mentioned above, connection, and buy-in. All of these are critical in any change process, especially when it involves looking at and evaluating current practices.

LESSON 3: COMMUNICATION

When he began to doubt the GPS's turn by turn navigation, my father would have been much better off communicating that to his copilot (me), who could have then consulted the GPS, or fact-checked it with her own GPS, to see if we were headed in the right direction. His lack of communication led him down, quite literally, the wrong path.

In schools, communication is probably the most important, yet often lacking, area when it comes to change management. Through my own missteps (monthly newsletters that didn't have much practical value) and fumbles (I sent it in an email — didn't anyone read it?!), I have taken feedback and developed systems to communicate

reminders, resources, and updates as they relate to pertinent staff. Although electronic communication is often the most efficient way to get information shared, I had to find a way to make sure it was getting where it needed to go. Enter our weekly bulletin — a one-page, to-the-point, week-at-a-glance newsletter. Important links, schedule changes, and updates are shared using this template. Emails are reserved for last-minute communications that cannot wait until Friday. Monthly staff meetings are also used for communication purposes, but these are communications on a grander scale, such as reviewing the seven New York State Literacy Briefs together, so conversation can accompany the information.

Being intentional about communication has taken time, and my suggestion is to lean on those around you who may have more expertise than you — I worked with our communications team to talk through my intentions so they could point me in the right direction. You will likely take a couple of wrong turns on the way, but continuing to put a focus on communication will pay off in the end.

In closing, although my father and I made it to the airport successfully, it could have been a much smoother ride had he focused on the three areas I mentioned above — trust, big picture, and communication. The same can be said for establishing teacher buy-in. Staff need to feel they can trust the person and the process, through effective communication and access to the big picture, before they will take the risks that are necessary for any change process to occur. Focus on these three areas, and it will pay dividends in the success of your initiatives and the impact they have on the students in your school.

JILL FARRAND is the preK-6 principal at Heuvelton Central School District.

Home Libraries:

Why Every Child Needs Books of Their Own

By Just Right Reader



Encouraging a love of reading is important for a child's development, and one effective way to foster this love is by building a home library. Learn why access to books at home is important for children and how it benefits their literacy development.

WHY HOME LIBRARIES?

Home libraries provide children with quick access to books, allowing them to explore reading independently and at their own pace. This easy access to books is critical in developing early literacy skills and fostering a lifelong love of reading.

Improved Language and Reading Skills

- Books in the home are linked to improved language skills and increased reading proficiency in children (Schubert and Becker, 2010).

Cognitive Development

- Early exposure to books at home influences cognitive development and fosters greater reasoning abilities (Mol and Bus, 2011).

Reading Comprehension

- Reading printed books increases the ability to comprehend six times better than digital screens (EdSource, 2023).

Long-term Education

- Research shows that children with access to books at home achieve up to three more years of schooling than those without (Evans et al., 2010).

HOW TO BUILD A HOME LIBRARY

Building a home library fosters a love of reading in children that begins at home. It provides easy access to a

variety of books and creates a dedicated space for reading and learning.

Choose the Right Books

It is important to select books that children are interested in. Include a variety of genres to introduce them to various styles of writing and topics. Reading fiction books enhances their imagination and creativity, while nonfiction books build background knowledge and broaden their understanding of the world.

Involve Children in the Process

Allow your child to choose books whenever possible. This ownership makes a home library feel more personal and they are more likely to read the books available to them.

Create a Reading-Friendly Environment

Designate a special place in your home for the books where your child can comfortably read. A cozy corner with easy access to books, good lighting, and comfortable seating invites frequent reading sessions.

Use Community Resources

Building a home library can be cost-effective by utilizing community resources. For instance, public libraries offer free book borrowing services and often have book sales. Book swaps, where you can exchange books with other families, thrift stores, and school sales, are also great options for continuously refreshing your child's collection and keeping them engaged with new reads.

Prioritize Family and Caregiver Involvement

Reading together and discussing stories by asking questions about the plot, characters, or their favorite parts

improves reading and critical thinking skills.

Praise Efforts, Not Just Success

Praise your child's effort, not just their ability to read fluently. This helps kids develop a positive mindset toward reading and feel confident about learning.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS HESITANT TO READ?

If your child is hesitant to read at home, try some of these strategies.

- Add interactive books, such as those with puzzles and activities, to capture their interest. Graphic novels and comic books appeal to many children and can be a pathway to reading other genres.
- Focus on their interests. A child who is intrigued by dinosaurs, space, or ocean animals might be more interested in reading books about those topics.
- Encourage short reading sessions initially and gradually increase the length to improve reading stamina.

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- Bite-sized tips, baby sign language, and videos for caregivers with every title
- Learning Together Guides equip caregivers with easy tips and fun ideas for their child's journey to literacy.

Read our Family Reading blog post for tips on strengthening family reading at home.

Clark, C., and Poulton, L. (2011). Who are the independent readers? A new model of reading. *Literacy Research and Instruction*.

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D'Souza, Karen. (2023). Do children learn more from printed books than screens? *EdSource*.



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Magnetic Reading™

Foundations

By Curriculum Associates

At Curriculum Associates, we believe all students can become skilled readers, and the best way to get them there is a strong start with explicit, systematic, and evidence-based literacy instruction. Magnetic Reading™ Foundations thoughtfully merges the science of reading and the science of instruction. These beliefs are at the core of Magnetic Reading Foundations, our comprehensive foundational skills program for students in grades K-2.

READING IS A COMPLEX PROCESS

Thousands of international, interdisciplinary, scientific, and educational studies have pinpointed what — and, crucially, how — we must teach students who are learning to read. The resulting evidence forms the foundation of reading science. Humans are not hardwired to read in the same way we are to speak. We must all be explicitly taught to decipher the complex alphabetic code. In Magnetic Reading Foundations, students learn to read beginning with these word recognition skills:

- **Phonological Awareness:** The ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of spoken language
- **Phonics:** The ability to map sounds onto letters or combinations of letters (i.e., sound spellings)
- **Recognition of High-Frequency Words:** The ability to automatically identify and read words that occur most often in text

In addition to learning to read, Magnetic Reading Foundations supports students as they begin to build a foundation for reading to learn with instruction in two of the language comprehension skills:

- **Literacy Knowledge** (concepts of print): Knowledge specific to understanding how print works, such as reading from left to right and top to bottom in English
- **Background Knowledge:** Information stored in the brain based on prior experiences of topics and ideas

Word recognition and language comprehension skills weave together, becoming increasingly strategic and automatic as students become skilled readers (Scarborough, 2001). There are instructional opportunities in each week of Magnetic Reading Foundations for systematic, evidence-based, explicit fluency instruction to support students as they move toward skilled reading:

- **Fluency:** The ability to read with accuracy, automaticity, intonation/inflection, and proper phrasing
- **Vocabulary Knowledge:** The ability to understand the meanings of words and phrases

The students themselves also play a key role in reading success. Skilled readers utilize active self-regulation strategies to maintain engagement with the text (Duke and Cartwright, 2021). Active self-regulation includes:

- **Motivation and Engagement:** The interest and desire to read that leads to active reading

• Use of Comprehension

Strategies: Deliberate actions that help readers construct meaning

Magnetic Reading Foundations equips young learners with the essential skills, strategies, and confidence needed to become skilled readers. By integrating evidence-based instruction in word recognition, language comprehension, and fluency, the program provides a strong foundation for lifelong literacy. Additionally, it fosters motivation, engagement, and comprehension strategies to support students in actively regulating their reading process. With this comprehensive approach, educators can empower every student to develop the skills necessary for reading success and a lifetime of learning.

You can learn more about putting the science of reading to work at <https://qrs.ly/l5gl1ww>.

Duke, N. K., and Cartwright, K. B. (2021). The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the simple view of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(S1), S25–S44.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman and D. Dickinson (eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97–110). Guilford Press.

If you'd like more information about how Magnetic Reading Foundations could help your students, please reach out to your local educational sales consultant.

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GrapeSEED is a research-aligned, teacher-led oral language curriculum that follows the principles of Natural Language Acquisition. GrapeSEED helps students who are new to the United States and students in preschool through second grade build English oral language and critical listening skills to become successful readers, writers and communicators.

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Empowering Multilingual Learners

Through the Science of Reading

By GrapeSEED

With the science of reading, students get research-backed methods of instruction that help them master the vital skill of reading. These methods work well with all types of students. When it comes to students acquiring English for the first time, be they multilingual learners or developing preschoolers, the joy-filled, engaging, systematic and success-oriented GrapeSEED curriculum embraces and encompasses each facet of science of reading.

GrapeSEED supports language acquisition by offering explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, and strategies to improve fluency in both speaking and reading beginning right away. Let's take a closer look:

Phonemic Awareness — What's the first step in language acquisition? Learning to hear and form new sounds that will eventually lead to producing language! The technical term here is "phonemic awareness," but what it boils down to is being able to recognize and manipulate sounds within the context of words.

Our English learner students have already established a known language... their home language... and are now expected to learn the phonology of a new language. Day in and day out, they begin to learn and process English. While lots goes into this, one of our responsibilities as teachers is very clear: As mentioned above, English learners must be taught to hear and form phonograms, that is, have phonemic awareness. The need for phonemic awareness is an integral part of the research-based science of reading, is a best practice, and is also a fundamental skill that just makes sense.

GrapeSEED uses a carefully integrated platform called vertical phonics. With vertical phonics, students learn all the sounds of a letter or letter combination at one time and in the order of frequency, with those that are used most often presented first. Why is this important? Because students learn to associate letters (phonograms) with the sounds they represent (phonemes). Over time, students learn to read and write by assembling the phonograms that they're being exposed to. Learning the second, third, and fourth sounds of certain phonograms increases the number of words that are decodable, reducing the need for guessing. With GrapeSEED's repeated practice and systematic review, students memorize the phoneme-phonogram relationships to the point where they can automatically respond with the proper phoneme when shown both single AND multiletter phonograms.

Phonics — With the GrapeSEED curriculum, our approach to phonics instruction is powerful and unique, gets results, and aligns with the science of reading's framework.

What does this all mean for our English language learner students? Well, "if students cannot decode printed English, they cannot comprehend it. If students cannot comprehend spoken English, they cannot comprehend written English either" (Moats and Tolman, 2020). So, let's dig a little deeper. Phonics can be defined as any method of teaching reading by associating letters (called "phonograms") and letter combinations with their sounds (which are called "phonemes"). Think about it this way; a phonogram is one unit of

sound represented by a single letter or a combination of two, three, or four letters in English. A single phonogram may have more than one sound, and a single sound may have more than one phonogram. (Say that three times, fast!) For example, *a* has four different sounds. Similarly, *a*, *ay*, and *igh* are three different phonograms that share the same sound. Phew!

With GrapeSEED's research-based, natural oral language acquisition curriculum, you will be:

- Providing your students with the explicit phonics instruction they need.
- Building their "memory bank" of English vocabulary, language structure, and comprehension.
- Using the context of fun and catchy songs, stories, chants, action activities, shared reading, and more.

Reading Fluency — GrapeSEED teachers model speaking and reading English with accuracy, rate, and expression, all while encouraging students to do the same. After repeated exposures, students practice fluency by reading or speaking in small groups or with a partner. Fluency becomes the bridge between decoding and comprehension.

Teaching young students to read is a vital part of their growth and development, while teaching them to read fluently makes an even stronger impact. Reading fluency means being able to read quickly, accurately, and with expression. Teaching our students to do this well, as encouraged by the science of reading framework, boosts student comprehension and knowledge retention, while also increasing overall reading enjoyment.



Not only do GrapeSEED teachers engage their students in language-rich and vibrantly illustrated stories, action activities, and chants, GrapeSEED teachers also model using fluent and expressive reading through our shared reading big books and shared reading poems. These components are woven into each and every daily lesson, allowing students to hear correct pronunciation, phrasing, pacing, and intonation in real time. Fun fact: our shared reading big books are put to a catchy tune! Brain research shows that music and tunes do incredible things in the brain and one of those things is improving reading fluency.

Vocabulary Development — Systematic exposure to useful vocabulary happens in each lesson with GrapeSEED's vocabulary picture cards. These words are then immediately put into use in songs, stories, chants, action activities, poems, big books, story dictionaries, and even writers. GrapeSEED students are introduced to words, language functions, and notions that will be used with increasing complexity, all while reinforcing previous learning.

From an academic point of view, vocabulary:

- Gives us a window into our students' knowledge of word meanings.
- Is essential for them to express themselves fluently.
- Allows them to comprehend what's being spoken and read.

At the same time, English learners (and native English speakers, too, might I add!) often recognize more words than they're able to use in conversation or in their writing. English learners, in particular, tend to have a greater capacity for receptive vocabulary than for expressive vocabulary. That information, coupled with vocabulary playing an integral role in the science of reading framework, reminds us that incorporating deliberate and meaningful vocabulary instruction is key. So, how do we effectively deliver good vocabulary instruction and unleash our English learners' full potential? With GrapeSEED, it's a cinch! It all begins with deliberate vocabulary instruction, including word meaning,

pronunciation, and connection with other words. The GrapeSEED curriculum offers a clear and methodical approach to teaching new vocabulary with clear, vibrant vocabulary picture cards that are introduced and then carefully woven into the context of themed songs, stories, action activities, and more, keeping English learners engaged and motivated. This interwoven content design guarantees that your students will continually be reinforcing their accumulation of vocabulary. By equipping our students with a solid vocabulary foundation, we give them the tools to become competent communicators and to build the bridge to reading and writing. By following a spiral curriculum specifically designed for English language learners, students encounter vocabulary, language functions, and language notions that are used with increasing complexity while reinforcing previous learning. By efficiently and effectively consolidating new learning in this way, students can achieve maximum learning outcomes in minimum time!

Structural Analysis — Within the context of our shared reading materials including poems and big books, children are exposed to early reading strategies like directionality, return sweep, and more! They also learn to self-correct using early high frequency words and to cross-check beginning sounds with picture clues. Are you thinking to yourself, "What role does an oral language curriculum designed for young students to acquire English have to do with structural analysis?" The answer is "Everything!" Let's jump right in and start with defining structural analysis. To put it simply, structural analysis is the ability to break unfamiliar words down into smaller parts. In other words, once students achieve sound-symbol correspondence and can apply this knowledge to decode one-syllable words, they can then begin to focus on those meaningful word parts that will help them develop skills to read and understand more complex, multisyllabic words. That, of course, is why structural analysis is at the heart of science of reading. Structural analysis relies on using multiple

elements to develop a student's capacity to comprehend unfamiliar words. Your students may have the ability to decode words, but without a firm foundation in oral language and word meaning, their comprehension in English will be negatively impacted.

Put simply, language comprehension depends heavily on knowledge of word meaning, and knowledge of a word is gained over time after multiple exposures both in speech and in print.

With GrapeSEED's curriculum, your students receive multiple exposures to new words, and in context that's meaningful and fun... coming in the form of songs, poems, stories, action activities, and more. As you lead your children in their interactive daily lessons, they will learn new words and how to use them correctly.

Plain and simple, science of reading works. And designed with students in mind, GrapeSEED's engaging and joyful songs, stories, chants, poems, big books, action activities, and writers work too, by providing the firm foundation for literacy instruction to be built upon. It's not too late to begin supporting your young English language learners with teacher-led GrapeSEED instruction. Visit www.GrapeSEED.com or contact Laurie Metz@GrapeSEED.com for more information.

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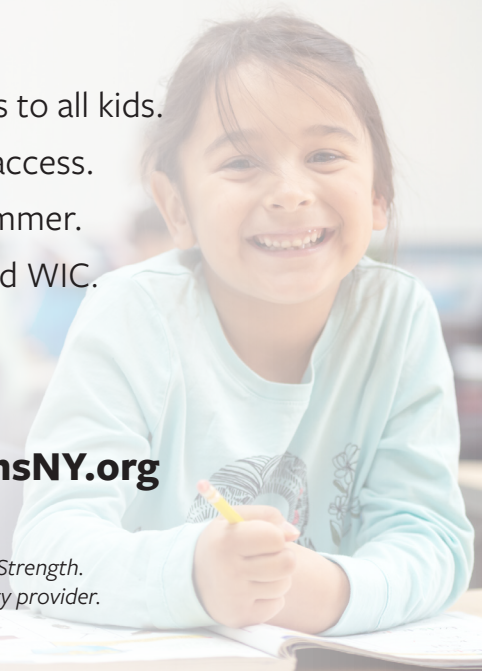
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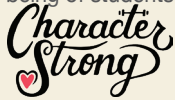
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As a global leader in assessment, reading, and math solutions for PreK–12 schools and districts, Renaissance is committed to providing educators with insights and resources to accelerate growth and help all students build a strong foundation for success. Renaissance solutions reach more than 50 percent of US schools and more than two million students in other regions across the world. Our portfolio includes solutions for assessment, practice, data-driven insights, and teacher-facilitated instructional delivery.

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Sarah Stevens | (620) 404-8782
sarah@thecorecollaborative.com
thecorecollaborative.com

The Core Collaborative is a professional learning network that delivers professional learning through seven pathways encompassing formative assessment, competency-based processes, culturally responsive practice, and more. TCC empowers administrators, teachers, families, and students to set ambitious goals and reach them.



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Dominic Frisina | (912) 660-0823
dominic.frisina@posproject.org | posproject.org

The Positivity Project brings positive psychology to life in schools in just fifteen minutes per day. School communities are empowered with the strategy and resources to build and maintain positive relationships by recognizing the 24 character strengths within themselves and others.



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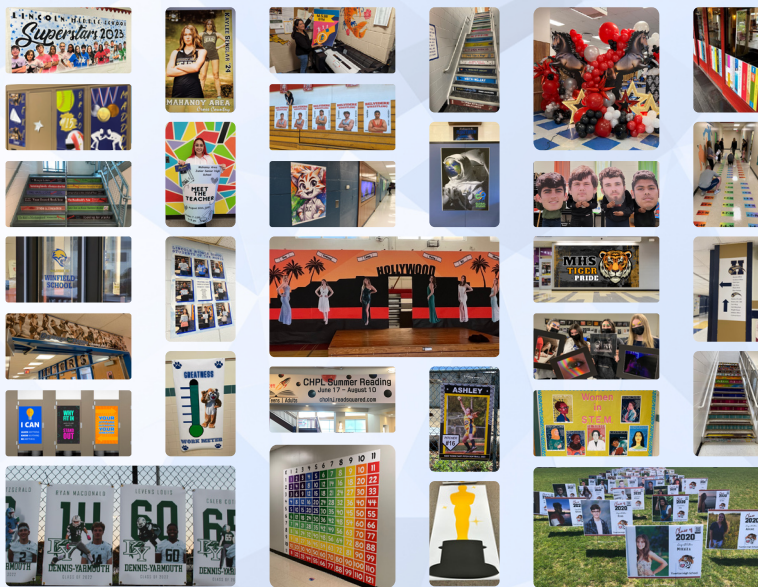
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Dr. Joe Sanfelippo

Announcing the 2025 Keynote...

Dr. Joe Sanfelippo

Dr. Joe Sanfelippo recently retired after spending the last 26 years in the building and the final 12 as the superintendent in Fall Creek, WI. The Fall Creek School District was named an Innovative District by the International Center for Leadership in Education twice during that time.

He was selected as 1 of 117 Future Ready Superintendents and 1 of 50 Superintendents as a Personalized Learning Leader by the US Department of Education. Education Dive named Joe their National Superintendent of the Year in 2019.



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