

From Adoption to Results

The District Leader's Toolkit for
Science of Reading
Implementation at Scale



Welcome

Leading literacy improvement requires balancing research with classroom realities, supporting educators through change, and making decisions that will shape student learning for years to come. I appreciate the leadership it takes to do that work well.

Over the past decade, districts across the country have made tremendous progress. The Science of Reading has reshaped literacy instruction through decades of research, stronger instructional materials, expanded professional learning, and growing state support. Together, those investments have created a stronger foundation for improving reading achievement.

That progress has changed the work in front of us. District leaders are no longer asking whether the Science of Reading works. They're asking how to ensure it works consistently—in every classroom, for every educator, and for every student.

The answers are found in outcomes, not as single assessment scores or annual benchmarks, but as the collective impact of strong instructional systems. When educators grow in confidence, instruction becomes more consistent. When instruction becomes more consistent, students receive the support they need earlier and more effectively. Those improvements strengthen one another, creating lasting change across classrooms, schools, and districts.

That is why implementation matters. The goal is to create systems that strengthen instruction over time, ensuring today's investments create better opportunities for students tomorrow.

This toolkit was written to support that work. Inside, you'll find practical guidance for aligning instruction, assessment, intervention, professional learning, and leadership around a common purpose: creating the conditions for lasting literacy outcomes.

Thank you for the work you do every day for students, educators, and your community. We hope this toolkit helps your team move from implementation to lasting impact.

Karl Rectanus

CEO, Really Great Reading

“The work ahead is significant, but so is the opportunity. Together, we can build literacy systems that support educators, strengthen implementation, and create lasting outcomes for every student.”

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The Science Behind Reading

Building a shared understanding of how students learn to read



The Science of Reading is a Body of Research

The Science of Reading draws from decades of interdisciplinary research on how reading develops and which practices support literacy growth.



Reading Requires Explicit Instruction

Unlike spoken language, reading typically requires deliberate, systematic instruction that connects speech sounds to written language.



Skilled Reading Is Integrated

Skilled reading develops as accurate word recognition works together with fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge, and language comprehension.

The Science of Reading is not a curriculum, a program, or a temporary initiative. It is a broad body of research that explains how reading develops, why students experience difficulty learning to read, and which instructional practices support stronger outcomes.

For district leaders, that research can inform decisions across core instruction, assessment, intervention, professional learning, and classroom practice. Alignment cannot stop with a label on an adopted curriculum. It must be visible in the instructional sequence, the language educators use, the way students practice, and how teams respond when learning stalls.

Skilled reading develops through the interaction of word recognition and language comprehension. Students require explicit instruction that connects phonemes in spoken words to graphemes in print. They also need intentional development of fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, and verbal reasoning.

When these components are taught inconsistently or treated as separate initiatives, educators are left to reconcile conflicting expectations. Systemwide alignment provides teachers with a coherent instructional model they can apply consistently across classrooms, grade levels, and tiers of support.

The Literacy Challenge

Recognizing the opportunity behind today's literacy data



Assessment Year	Grade 4 at or Above NAEP Proficient	Grade 8 at or Above NAEP Proficient
2019	35%	34%
2022	33%	31%
2024	31%	30% (Lowest on Record)

Grades 4 and 8 reflect the percentage of students assessed at or above National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Proficient. National Center for Education Statistics. (2025). 2024 NAEP reading assessment: National results for grades 4 and 8. The Nation’s Report Card.

National results highlight the scale of the literacy challenge. From 2019 to 2024, reading proficiency fell by four percentage points in both grades 4 and 8, with eighth-grade proficiency reaching its lowest level on record in 2024. Too many students move through school without reliable access to grade-level text, academic vocabulary, and the disciplinary learning required across content areas.

District teams need local screening, diagnostic, classroom, and progress-monitoring data to determine whether students need support in word recognition, fluency, language comprehension, or a combination of these. Broad achievement scores can identify urgency; they cannot determine the targeted instruction that a student needs next.

Reading difficulty is not inevitable. Districts can prevent many early literacy gaps from becoming long-term barriers by delivering explicit instruction, protecting additive intervention, monitoring student response, and adjusting support before students lose further access to grade-level learning.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

How consistently do schools across the district use reading data to identify student needs and guide instruction?

**NAEP Proficient is an achievement-level standard and is not synonymous with grade-level proficiency on state or district assessments.*



SECTION I: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

The Systems Behind Student Success

Identifying the conditions that make consistent instruction possible

National results establish the urgency. District evidence shows where leaders must act.

Most districts have already invested in research-aligned materials, professional learning, and new assessment systems. Uneven outcomes often persist because those pieces do not operate as one coherent system. Teachers are left to reconcile competing routines, disconnected data, inconsistent intervention practices, and priorities that vary across schools.

Even strong programs lose impact when educators must solve system alignment on their own. Districtwide success depends on creating the conditions that make evidence-based instruction easier to deliver: a shared instructional model, clear decision rules, compatible tools, protected learning time, and sustained leadership support.

The central question is no longer whether the district has adopted aligned resources. It is whether district systems, implementation support, and operational decisions work together to help every educator use them consistently and respond effectively when students need additional support.



INSTRUCTIONAL COHERENCE

Core materials, intervention, assessment, and coaching reinforce the same instructional model, language, and visual-sound anchors.



EDUCATOR SUPPORT

Teachers have protected time to learn, practice, receive feedback, and apply new routines without carrying competing expectations.



DATA-TO-ACTION ALIGNMENT

Screening, diagnostic assessment, and progress monitoring serve distinct purposes and connect to common instructional decision rules.



SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP

District and campus leaders protect time, remove barriers, monitor system patterns, and direct support where implementation needs strengthening.

District Literacy Implementation Self-Assessment

Identify where district and building-level systems are aligned—and where stronger leadership support is needed

Successful implementation doesn't happen by chance. It is built through aligned leadership, consistent instructional practices, ongoing professional learning, and responsive decision-making.

Use this planning tool with your district or building leadership team to identify strengths, uncover opportunities for improvement, and prioritize the systems that will have the greatest impact on implementation.

Implementation Leadership Planning Review			
Implementation Indicators	Needs Attention	Making Progress	Sustained Practice
Shared Literacy Vision: <i>A clear vision and instructional expectations have been effectively communicated.</i>	☐	☐	☐
Professional Learning Plan: <i>A yearlong professional learning plan supports consistent literacy instruction across classrooms, grade levels, and schools.</i>	☐	☐	☐
Assessment & Data Review: <i>Assessment windows, screening expectations, and data review routines are clearly established to shape instructional decisions.</i>	☐	☐	☐
Intervention System: <i>Clear guidelines exist for placement, progress monitoring, and instructional adjustments.</i>	☐	☐	☐
Implementation Monitoring: <i>Leaders observe implementation, identify barriers, and provide actionable feedback.</i>	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability Plan: <i>Systems support onboarding, leadership transitions, and long-term implementation.</i>	☐	☐	☐

Based on this review, what are your team's top 3 implementation priorities for the coming semester?



SECTION I: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

From Policy to Practice

Transitioning from implementation plans to instructional practice

TURNING SCIENCE OF READING RESEARCH INTO DAILY PRACTICE

As of March 2026, 42 states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation aligned with the Science of Reading.¹

Policy momentum has created clearer expectations, but it does not guarantee classroom execution. Educators still need time to learn new routines, interpret student data, and apply instruction within the realities of the school day.

Lasting implementation depends on turning broad requirements into a practical operating model: define shared instructional practices, align assessment and intervention, protect professional learning time, and give principals and coaches the tools to support implementation.

The leadership task is not to monitor whether teachers are “doing the Science of Reading.” It is to remove barriers so evidence-based instruction becomes consistent and responsive to student need.

Policy establishes the direction. District systems determine whether it reaches classrooms.



The Overlooked Pieces of the Science of Reading

Decoding gives students access to printed words; language comprehension supports meaning. This on-demand webinar explores how coherent systems strengthen vocabulary, syntax, knowledge-building, and inferencing through explicit classroom practice.

Watch the Webinar

The Overlooked Pieces of the Science of Reading →

Strengthening Educator Practice

Consistent implementation starts with consistent support.

Strong implementation begins with strong instructional practice. Professional learning lays the foundation, but meaningful change happens when educators have opportunities to deepen their understanding, apply new learning in the classroom, and reflect on the impact of their instruction. District leaders play a critical role in creating the conditions that support ongoing professional growth and consistent implementation across every school.



Learn Together

Develop a shared foundation in the Science of Reading and evidence-based instructional practices.

Build Confidence

Support educators through modeling, coaching, and shared routines as they apply new learning.

Reflect & Refine

Use classroom evidence, student outcomes, and collaborative reflection to strengthen instruction over time.

Continue the Learning

Building a shared understanding across a district takes time. New staff join the team, experienced educators deepen their practice, and instructional priorities continue to evolve. These free, on-demand professional learning courses help districts provide flexible learning opportunities that leaders can use themselves or share with teachers, coaches, and school teams throughout the year.



Build a Strong Foundation

Reading Essentials

Develop a shared understanding of how reading develops and the instructional practices that support literacy success.



Strengthen Language Instruction

Vocabulary Essentials

Explore practical strategies for teaching vocabulary, oral language, and reading comprehension across grade levels.



Deepen Word Learning

Morphology Essentials

Learn how morphology strengthens decoding, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension as students encounter complex texts.

Watch on Demand:

[▶ Reading Essentials](#)

Watch on Demand:

[▶ Vocabulary Essentials](#)

Watch on Demand:

[▶ Morphology Essentials](#)

Reading Is a Continuum, Not a Handoff

Building both domains throughout a student's literacy journey

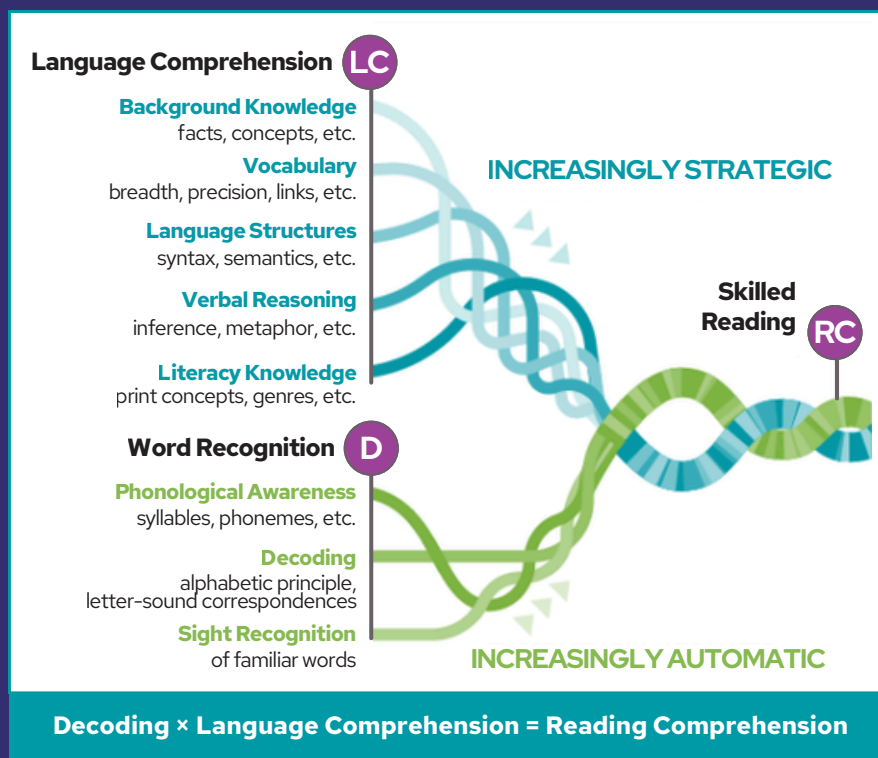


Districts cannot implement what they have not clearly defined. Skilled reading develops as word recognition and language comprehension strengthen together over time. Neither domain is sufficient on its own.

Skilled reading develops through the continued growth of word recognition and language comprehension. These domains strengthen together as texts, vocabulary, and academic demands become increasingly complex.

Scarborough's Reading Rope illustrates how these two major domains work together. Word recognition includes phonological awareness, decoding, and increasingly automatic word recognition. Language comprehension includes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge.

Effective literacy systems identify whether students need support in word recognition, language comprehension, or both so instruction can be matched to the underlying need. Core instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional learning should strengthen both domains while preserving access to grade-level knowledge and text.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Skilled reading is not a sequence of isolated skills. District literacy systems should strengthen word recognition and language comprehension together throughout a student's educational journey.

When Accurate Reading Does Not Equal Understanding

Identifying the language demands that can limit comprehension

Accurate word reading gives students access to text, but it does not guarantee understanding. Some students read accurately and fluently yet struggle to explain ideas, interpret academic vocabulary, connect information across sentences, or draw inferences. When this happens, the instructional response should look beyond decoding to the language demands of comprehension.

Reading comprehension depends on more than recognizing words. Vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, verbal reasoning, and text structure work together to help students construct meaning. As texts become more complex, these language demands increasingly determine whether students can access grade-level learning across every subject.

For district leaders, fluent oral reading should never be the final measure of reading success. When accuracy outpaces understanding, assessment should identify the language skills that limit comprehension so that instruction addresses the source of the difficulty rather than its symptoms.

WHEN ACCURATE READING FALLS SHORT

Students may be able to:

- Read words accurately
- Decode unfamiliar words
- Maintain appropriate pacing
- Sound fluent when reading aloud

While still needing support to:

- Explain or summarize what they read
- Connect ideas across sentences
- Interpret academic vocabulary
- Understand complex syntax
- Draw and support inferences

DISTRICT DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION

Does the student's difficulty stem from word recognition, language comprehension, or both?

As students progress through school, factors like vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, and verbal reasoning carry an increasing share of the work of comprehension. District assessment systems should measure these components directly so educators can identify the right instructional response.



How Words Become Automatic

Building rapid word recognition through orthographic mapping

Students do not become automatic readers by memorizing the visual shape of words. They build automatic word recognition by connecting the sounds in spoken words to the letters that represent them, then linking spelling, pronunciation, and meaning in memory.



This memory process is called orthographic mapping. It is supported by strong phonemic awareness, accurate phoneme-grapheme mapping, repeated successful reading, and spelling practice. As these connections become secure, students recognize familiar words effortlessly, allowing more attention for vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension.

Automaticity supports comprehension, but it does not guarantee it. Coherent systems must strengthen word recognition and language comprehension together while using assessment to identify which area requires additional instruction.

DISTRICT LOOK-FOR

Align core instruction, intervention, assessment, and professional learning around explicit speech-to-print instruction.

BUILD AUTOMATICITY THROUGH CONNECTED PRACTICE

Provide repeated opportunities for students to apply decoding, spelling, and connected reading so word recognition becomes increasingly automatic.

Avoid Visual Guessing

Remove routines that encourage students to rely on pictures, context, or word shape before attending to print.

Prioritize Speech-to-Print Mapping

Teach students to connect spoken sounds to written letters through reading, spelling, and meaningful practice.

Measure Component Skills Separately

Assess decoding, fluency, and language comprehension independently to shape instructional decisions.

Building Language Comprehension

Building knowledge and meaning across every grade

Accurate word reading gives students access to text; language comprehension allows them to make meaning from it. Strong literacy systems strengthen vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, and verbal reasoning across every grade while continuing to provide explicit word-level support.

Long-term literacy improvement depends on building strong language foundations in the primary grades, monitoring whether those skills are maintained, and continuing to strengthen them as academic demands increase. When students read accurately but struggle to explain or apply what they have read, teams must examine the language demands beneath comprehension.

Word-level and language needs can also occur together. Students should continue to receive explicit foundational-skills instruction when assessment identifies unmet needs in decoding or fluency.

FROM PROBLEM TO PRACTICE: INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Identify the Barrier

When understanding breaks down, examine listening comprehension, vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, verbal reasoning, and text structure before selecting the instructional response.

Build Oral Language Deliberately

Content-rich read-alouds, structured discussion, and writing expose students to the vocabulary and sentence structures they will encounter in increasingly complex text.

Strengthen Language Across Grades

As texts become denser and more specialized, students need deeper word knowledge, stronger sentence comprehension, and broader background knowledge to maintain grade-level access.

Vocabulary in Context

Teach high-utility and domain-specific words within coherent topics, then revisit them through speaking, reading, and writing.

Sentence-Level Comprehension

Model how clauses, transitions, pronouns, and grammatical structures shape meaning within complex sentences.

Structured Verbal Reasoning

Use discussion routines that require every student to summarize, explain relationships, cite evidence, and refine an interpretation.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Across every grade level, are vocabulary, knowledge, and language comprehension intentionally developed and strengthened as academic demands increase?

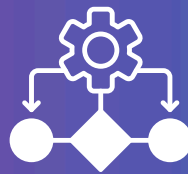
Structured Literacy Turns Research Into Instruction

Building consistent, explicit, and responsive classroom practice



Explicit Instruction

Teachers model clearly so students understand the skill, the routine, and how to apply it.



Systematic Sequence

New learning follows an intentional order that builds from established skills.



Cumulative Practice

Students revisit and apply prior learning as new patterns and word structures are introduced.

Tying the Steps Together with Diagnostic Response

Teachers use student performance to adjust pacing, regroup students, revisit skills, and determine when intervention or additional practice is needed.

A reading framework only matters when educators can translate it into instruction students experience every day. Structured literacy provides a practical approach for teaching the connections among spoken language, print, spelling, word structure, and meaning.

Instruction follows a clear sequence, builds cumulatively, and makes each step visible to students. Teachers explicitly model the target skill, lead students through aligned practice, respond directly to errors, and adjust support based on student performance.

For districts, structured literacy creates shared instructional language across classrooms, grade levels, and tiers of support. The goal is not identical teaching. Consistent routines, compatible visual-sound anchors, and clear expectations reduce confusion for educators and students.

Key Takeaway

Align core instruction, intervention, assessment, and coaching around the same instructional language while allowing support to respond to student needs.

Precision Matters for Foundational Skills

Maximizing accuracy through tight routines



ADOPTION IS NOT IMPLEMENTATION

Foundational skills instruction depends on precision. Students are learning to connect speech sounds, letters, spelling patterns, pronunciations, and meanings. Small instructional moves can either strengthen those connections or make them less clear.

A lesson may be aligned on paper, but student outcomes depend on how that lesson is delivered. When teachers model sounds accurately, maintain clear routines, provide guided practice, and correct errors quickly, students have a better chance of building accurate and automatic word recognition.

This is where classroom practice matters. Strong foundational skills instruction is not only about what is taught. It is also about how clearly, consistently, and responsively it is taught. Skilled reading depends on repeated opportunities to hear, say, read, spell, and apply skills in ways that connect directly to the instructional target.

For district leaders, precision matters because small inconsistencies can become system-level barriers when they appear across classrooms, grade levels, or intervention groups. Shared routines and clear expectations help make foundational skills instruction more consistent for students.

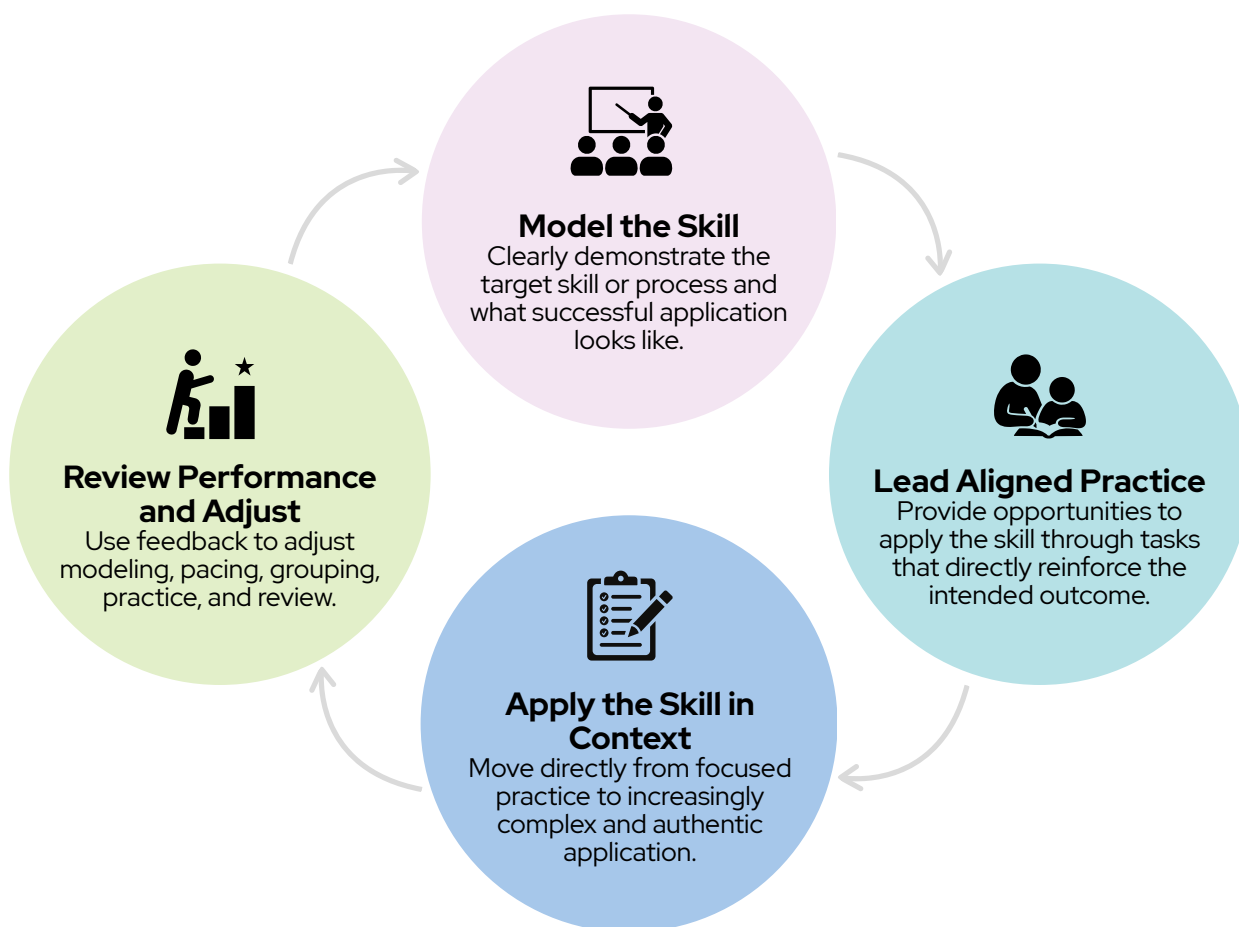
“Phonemes become the anchoring points for a word's printed sequence. The student uses the power of what they know and attaches it 'like superglue' to the printed word.”

—Dr. David Kilpatrick

A District Framework for Explicit Instruction

Aligning leadership, support, and classroom practice around shared expectations

The practices that support strong instruction should be visible at every level of the system. District leaders model them through clear expectations, aligned support, and ongoing review. Principals and coaches reinforce them through professional learning and feedback, while teachers apply them in daily instruction and respond to student performance.



Throughout the Cycle

Frequent Opportunities to Respond

Create repeated opportunities for participants or students to demonstrate understanding and apply the target skill.

Prompt, Specific Feedback

Identify gaps, clarify the process, and give participants or students a clear path back to successful practice.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A shared framework helps leaders, coaches, and teachers support implementation and improve practice over time.

Implementation Consistency Guide

Aligning building leaders and educators around strong literacy instruction

Use this resource during collaborative planning, instructional rounds, coaching conversations, or staff reflection to identify strengths and determine where additional support may be helpful.

Planning and Instructional Purpose

- ☐ The lesson reflects a clear instructional goal
- ☐ Tasks and materials align with the target skill(s)
- ☐ Instruction follows a coherent sequence
- ☐ Previously taught skills are intentionally revisited

Explicit and Responsive Instruction

- ☐ Target skill is explicitly modeled
- ☐ Guided practice leads to independent practice
- ☐ Understanding is checked throughout
- ☐ Instruction responds to student needs

Student Thinking and Participation

- ☐ Students frequently respond and practice skills
- ☐ Students demonstrate active participation
- ☐ Students explain, apply, or demonstrate their thinking
- ☐ Lesson pacing supports active engagement

Learning Environment and Routines

- ☐ Classroom routines maximize instructional time
- ☐ Students understand classroom expectations
- ☐ Instructional materials are used consistently
- ☐ Students feel safe making and correcting mistakes

Reflection & Discussion

What instructional strengths were evident during this lesson?

What instructional practice should be prioritized for continued growth?

What implementation support would be most helpful before the next observation?

Intervention Starts with the Instructional Need

Using diagnostic evidence to select the right support



A below-grade-level score identifies a need for support, but diagnostic evidence identifies the skills instruction should target.

Stop asking

"Is this student below grade level?"



Start asking

These six diagnostic questions:

1 Which domain is limiting access?

Word recognition, fluency, language comprehension, or more than one.

2 Which component skills need support?

The exact phoneme-grapheme pattern, word structure, fluency, or language skill.

3 What evidence supports it?

Multiple relevant data points, not a single composite score.

4 How should students be grouped?

Flexible groups around a shared target, regrouped as needs change.

5 How will progress be measured?

A measure sensitive to the skill, on a consistent monitoring cadence.

6 What's the next instructional step?

When to maintain, adjust, intensify, or reduce support.

DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION STANDARD

What Effective Intervention Requires

Turning diagnostic evidence into precise, additive support

Once the instructional need is clear, districts must deliver additive intervention with the sequence, intensity, and monitoring required to change the student's trajectory.



Once teams identify the instructional need, the district must ensure students receive intervention designed to address it. Effective intervention adds focused instruction to the student's day without replacing access to grade-level knowledge, vocabulary, and text.

The intervention sequence should respond to diagnosed skill needs rather than mirror the pacing or vocabulary of the Tier 1 curriculum. At the same time, compatible sound anchors, instructional language, and correction routines should help students transfer learning across settings.

Intervention intensity is not defined by a program label or tier assignment. It is built through deliberate changes to instructional time, group size, practice density, feedback, and review. Districts must give teams clear ways to adjust those variables rather than treating placement as the intervention itself.

When students do not make expected progress, the first question should not be whether they have “failed” the intervention. Teams must examine whether the instruction matched the diagnosed need, whether it was delivered with sufficient dosage and consistency, and whether the progress measure captured the skill being taught. Student response should drive refinement—not blame.

FOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION

- **Protect Additive Support**
 - Schedule intervention in addition to Tier 1 instruction so that students continue to build grade-level knowledge and language.
- **Follow a Systematic Speech-to-Print Sequence**
 - Teach phoneme-grapheme patterns and word structures through an explicit, cumulative sequence matched to the diagnosed need.
- **Increase Intensity Deliberately**
 - Adjust group size, frequency, practice opportunities, feedback, and review based on students' needs.
- **Monitor and Adjust**
 - Use skill-aligned progress data and common decision rules to regroup students, adapt instruction, intensify support, or reduce intervention.

DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION STANDARD

Protect intervention time, trained staff, compatible instructional routines, and clear decision rules across every school.

What Effective Dyslexia Support Requires

Delivering explicit, systematic, and intensive instruction across every school

Decades of research have transformed our understanding of dyslexia and the instruction students need to become successful readers. Effective support depends on explicit, systematic teaching delivered consistently through strong instructional systems, knowledgeable educators, and ongoing use of student evidence.



“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual’s peers. The causes of dyslexia are complex and involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences that interact throughout development. Underlying difficulties with phonological and morphological processing are common but not universal, and early oral language weaknesses often foreshadow literacy challenges.”²

Effective instruction should respond to the reading skills students need most. An integrated, systematic, and cumulative approach can connect phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, morphology, and semantic reasoning to support accurate, automatic reading. For older developing readers, morphology also supports vocabulary, multisyllabic word reading, and comprehension. District support extends beyond the instructional approach itself. Diagnostic assessment, progress monitoring, and ongoing review of student response help teams make informed instructional adjustments. Consistency also depends on protected instructional time, well-prepared educators, and sustained high-quality professional learning.

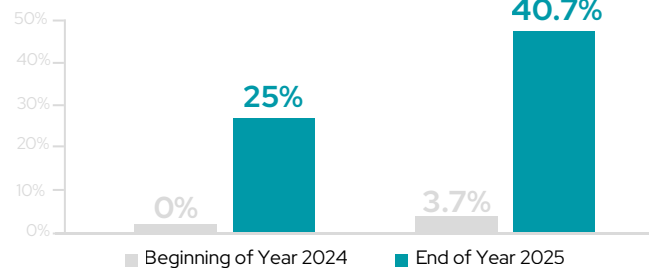
Instruction and accommodations serve different purposes. Explicit instruction develops reading skills, while accommodations provide equitable access to grade-level learning and should align with each student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan.

SIX REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE DYSLEXIA SUPPORT

- **Explicit, Multilingualistic Word Study:** Teach phonological awareness, phonics, orthography, and morphology as integrated components of word-level reading through explicit, systematic instruction.
- **Systematic and Cumulative Sequence:** Build instruction from foundational skills to increasingly complex concepts through planned review and practice.
- **Responsive Intensity:** Adjust instructional time, group size, practice, and feedback based on student response.
- **Multisyllabic & Morphological Processing:** Teach syllable division, root words, prefixes, and suffixes as word complexity increases.
- **Progress Monitoring:** Use skill-aligned assessments to monitor progress and inform instructional adjustments.
- **Systemwide Support:** Protect intervention time, prepare educators, and establish consistent instructional procedures across schools.

District Proof Point: Carrollton-Farmers Branch

MIDDLE SCHOOL DECODING GROWTH



*Within the 2024–25 school year, multiple middle school cohorts made substantial gains in decoding proficiency

Strengthening Adolescent Outcomes

The Challenge

Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD needed a more consistent literacy intervention system for their older readers. Instructional practices varied across campuses, foundational skill gaps persisted, and inconsistent progress monitoring limited teams’ ability to adjust support for students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties.

The Solution

The district established a unified structured literacy model across secondary campuses. Dedicated intervention teams used common instructional routines, diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, and progress monitoring to deliver more consistent and targeted support.

37 Percentage-Point Gain

One middle school cohort increased from 3.7% to 40.7% meeting the strong-decoder benchmark during the 2024–25 school year.

25 Percentage-Point Gain

A second cohort increased from 0% to 25% meeting the strong-decoder benchmark during the same period.

Unified Model for Adolescents

The district established a common structured literacy approach across secondary campuses.

Data-Informed Decisions

Teams used diagnostic and progress-monitoring data to inform placement, grouping, pacing, and instructional adjustments.

“When those light bulbs click on, that is where we see tremendous growth. Their fluency improves, their confidence rises, and their testing scores finally reflect their potential.”

—Brenda Weintraub

*Special Services Director,
Carrollton-Farmers Branch
Independent School District*



SECTION III: DELIVERING RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

Advanced Word Recognition for Older Readers

For older students with unfinished foundational skills instruction, these demands can expose gaps in advanced phoneme-grapheme patterns, syllable types, syllable division strategies, morphology, and multisyllabic word reading. These gaps can reduce reading accuracy and efficiency, making complex text more difficult to understand.

Adolescent literacy systems cannot bypass word-level needs. Students must maintain access to grade-level content in core classes while intervention provides explicit, cumulative instruction in advanced decoding, spelling, morphology, and fluency.

Intervention should follow the student's diagnosed skill needs—not the vocabulary sequence or pacing of the Tier 1 text. As students strengthen their understanding of word structure, they gain more reliable access to academic vocabulary, complex ideas, and grade-level coursework.

Intervention with Dignity

Preserving dignity through age-appropriate controlled text



Older readers benefit from connected-text practice that aligns with the phoneme-grapheme patterns and word structures they are learning. Without that bridge, students may understand a newly taught skill in isolation but struggle to apply it during reading.

Practice materials must also respect students' age and intellectual capacity. Adolescent texts should feature mature topics, sophisticated design, and meaningful ideas rather than repackaging early elementary materials with juvenile illustrations or simplified themes.

Decodable or controlled text is a temporary instructional bridge—not the final destination. It gives students repeated opportunities to apply taught patterns, improve accuracy and fluency, and reduce reliance on guessing.

This practice should complement, not replace, grade-level read-alouds, vocabulary and knowledge-building, classroom discussion, and supported access to complex academic text.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Do decodable texts align with taught phoneme-grapheme patterns, prepare students for necessary irregular words, reflect age-respectful content, and support a planned transition to less-controlled text?



"One school that went all-in on decodables is now showing the strongest [growth] data."

—Allison Beaudry, Ed.D.
*Federal Programs Coordinator,
Waynesboro Area School District*

MTSS Is a Framework, Not a Program

Increasing instructional intensity without compromising Tier 1 access

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports protect access to strong Tier 1 instruction while adding the precision and intensity students need. Clear entry criteria, shared routines, and common decision rules keep support responsive rather than turning tiers into fixed placements.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) organizes a continuum of instruction around student need. It is not a curriculum, a placement, or a fixed label assigned to a student.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions must remain additive to Tier 1. Students require targeted support for unfinished foundational skills instruction while continuing to access grade-level knowledge, vocabulary, discussion, and text.

Cross-tier coherence does not mean that intervention follows the pacing or vocabulary sequence of the core curriculum. It means that students encounter compatible visual-sound anchors, instructional language, and correction routines across settings while intervention follows a systematic sequence based on diagnosed skill needs.

Districts must define how students enter support, how intensity increases, how progress is monitored, and how teams determine when to adapt, intensify, or reduce intervention.

“MTSS is not a curriculum, a placement, or a person. It is a framework for organizing a continuum of evidence-based practices so that the intensity of our instruction dynamically matches the intensity of the student's need.”

–Dr. George Sugai

*Co-Founder of the Center on PBIS
& Foundational Architect of MTSS Systems*

The Three Tiers of Additive Literacy Support

Tier 1: Universal Instruction

- **Who:** All students
- **Instruction:** High-quality core literacy instruction
- **Intensity:** Grade-level instruction with explicit teaching, differentiation, and routine checks for understanding
- **Data Use:** Screening and classroom evidence identify students who may need additional support

Tier 2: Targeted Intervention

- **Who:** Students with a shared, identified instructional need
- **Instruction:** Supplemental, explicit intervention
- **Intensity:** Increased instructional time, practice, feedback, and progress monitoring
- **Data Use:** Progress monitoring determines whether support should be maintained, adjusted, intensified, or reduced

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

- **Who:** Students with significant or persistent instructional needs
- **Instruction:** Intensive, explicit intervention
- **Intensity:** Increased intensity through explicit instruction, additional time, and individualized support
- **Data Use:** Frequent progress monitoring and diagnostic data guide ongoing instructional decisions

LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATION

MTSS is a framework that works alongside services provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan. Instruction should be coordinated to ensure students receive all legally required supports.

Building Literacy Into the Master Schedule

Planning considerations for protecting instructional time and intervention support

Few leadership responsibilities require more balancing than building the master schedule. Every decision affects another—from staffing and student enrollment to intervention, educator collaboration, and instructional time. The goal is to ensure the master schedule reflects district and school instructional priorities.

Is Tier 1 Instruction Protected?

- ☐ Daily literacy instruction is scheduled for every student
- ☐ Core literacy blocks are protected from interruptions whenever possible
- ☐ Intervention does not replace Tier 1 instruction
- ☐ Schoolwide activities minimize disruptions to literacy instruction

Is Intervention Planned Intentionally?

- ☐ Intervention is scheduled in addition to core instruction
- ☐ Student groups are flexible and adjusted based on evidence
- ☐ Time is protected for progress monitoring and instructional adjustments
- ☐ Staffing supports timely intervention delivery

Are Student Supports Coordinated?

- ☐ Co-teaching and push-in services align with core literacy instruction
- ☐ General and special education teachers have time to coordinate instruction
- ☐ Pull-out services minimize missed core literacy instruction
- ☐ Student support schedules reduce unnecessary transitions throughout the day

Is the Schedule Sustainable?

- ☐ Assessment windows are considered before finalizing the schedule
- ☐ The schedule allows flexibility for enrollment and staffing changes
- ☐ Intervention groups can be adjusted as student needs change
- ☐ The highest instructional priorities remain protected throughout the year

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Implementation depends on more than high-quality instruction. It requires systems that consistently protect the time needed for literacy instruction, intervention, and student support.

The Operational Cycle of Support

Moving from screening to instructional adjustment

Why This Operational Cycle of Support Works

Districts need one consistent process for identifying reading needs, delivering support, and adjusting instruction. Each phase should trigger the next without adding unnecessary delay or documentation.

1. Universal Screening & Benchmarking

Screen students during Beginning of Year (BOY), Middle of Year (MOY), and End of Year (EOY) windows using common measures and follow-up criteria.

2. Targeted Diagnosis & Root Cause Isolation

For students whose results indicate risk, identify whether instruction should target word recognition, fluency, language comprehension, or a combination.

3. Precision Grouping & Instructional Matching

Group students around a shared instructional target rather than a composite score, reading level, or scheduling convenience.

4. Explicit Teaching & Aligned Intervention Delivery

Teach the diagnosed skill through a systematic, cumulative speech-to-print sequence. Maintain consistent sound anchors, instructional language, and correction routines across tiers without mirroring Tier 1 pacing or vocabulary order.

5. Progress Monitoring

Use a measure aligned to the skill being taught at a predetermined cadence. Review both the student's growth and whether the intervention was delivered as intended.

6. Systemic Adjustment & Data-Based Decision Rules

Apply common decision rules to maintain, regroup, adapt, intensify, or reduce support. Review dosage and implementation before concluding that a student has not responded.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Can your team define the measure, owner, review date, and possible instructional response at every phase of the cycle?





SECTION IV: LEADING A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Professional Learning That Changes Practice

Bridging the gap between educator knowledge and daily classroom practice

Professional learning should do more than increase awareness. It should change what educators know, what they notice during instruction, what they do when students struggle, and how they adjust support based on evidence.

That kind of change does not happen in a single training session. Educators need opportunities to learn, discuss, practice, observe, receive feedback, and refine instruction over time. Without that follow-through, even strong professional learning can remain disconnected from daily classroom practice.

Success depends on transfer. Teachers need support connecting their new learning to real, evidence-based instructional decisions: how to model a skill, respond to errors, group students, use data, and determine whether students are making progress.

RGR's professional learning helps educators move from research understanding to classroom application through modeling, practice, feedback, and continued support. The goal is not training completion. It is stronger daily instruction and improved student outcomes.



Data improves instruction only when educators have the knowledge, time, and support to act on it. Effective professional learning connects research and assessment evidence to the next classroom decision.

Collaborative Data Reflection Protocol

A structured process for turning student data into instructional action

Student data should help teams understand why students are struggling and determine the next instructional response. Use this protocol during grade-level, department, or Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings to move from data review to a shared instructional plan.

Step 1 | Review the Evidence

What sources of evidence will be reviewed:

- ☐ Beginning of Year screening
- ☐ Middle of Year screening
- ☐ End of Year screening
- ☐ Progress monitoring
- ☐ Skill-based student assignments
- ☐ Skill-based curriculum assessments
- ☐ Observational notes
- ☐ Other _____

Step 2 | Identify the Literacy Skill

Which literacy skill(s) does the evidence suggest should be prioritized?

Word Recognition:

- ☐ Phonics and decoding
- ☐ Multisyllabic word reading
- ☐ Morphology
- ☐ Oral reading fluency
- ☐ Spelling and encoding

Language Comprehension:

- ☐ Oral language
- ☐ Academic vocabulary
- ☐ Reading comprehension
- ☐ Language comprehension
- ☐ Written response
- ☐ Other _____

Step 3 | Plan Instructional Action

Which instructional practice(s) will our team implement consistently?

- ☐ Explicit modeling
- ☐ Additional guided practice
- ☐ More opportunities for student responses
- ☐ Corrective feedback
- ☐ Scaffolded practice
- ☐ Differentiated instruction
- ☐ Enhancing background knowledge
- ☐ Vocabulary instruction (semantic reasoning)
- ☐ Morphology instruction
- ☐ Fluency practice
- ☐ Other _____

Step 4 | Reflect & Commit

Summarize your team's discussion and establish a clear plan for moving forward.

Our priority literacy skill focus

Our shared instructional commitment

Evidence of instructional impact

Leadership Makes Support Visible

Systems for monitoring and supporting routines

Leaders cannot strengthen implementation they cannot see. Walkthrough trends, educator feedback, student work, and coaching evidence should help teams identify the support teachers need—not produce another compliance score.

Pair every identified need with a practical response: modeling, co-planning, coaching, schedule protection, clearer materials, or focused professional learning.



Sustainable growth happens when a system balances central-office goals with campus visibility, letting principals clear the path for teachers rather than adding to their to-do lists.

Guiding this work doesn't require building leaders to become decoding experts. Leaders need clear evidence of what is happening in classrooms and where additional support is needed. Connecting walkthrough trends with PLC collaboration helps teams turn that evidence into targeted coaching and practical next steps.

This collaborative approach anchors data meetings in daily routines rather than lagging test scores. This clarity naturally shifts the culture away from policing compliance toward providing actionable guidance. Training stays responsive, teachers receive clear direction instead of creeping demands, and implementation becomes sustainable.

Resources like the *RGR Fidelity Guide* can help teams pivot from broad questions like "Is implementation happening?" to collaborative, campus-level look-fors. When implementation is viewed this way, tracking progress ceases to be an audit and becomes a practical mechanism to ensure that instruction remains supported and that daily routines drive student growth.

Questions That Make Implementation Visible

- **Instructional Consistency:** Are foundational routines predictable and unified across classrooms?
- **Student Practice Density:** Are students receiving sufficient, high-density practice with the target skill?
- **Supportive Feedback:** Is feedback clear, actionable, and delivered as a form of mentorship?
- **Data-Responsive Pacing:** Are teams actively using progress data to adjust pacing, grouping, or review?
- **Leadership Alignment:** Do coaches, principals, and district leaders share an evidence-based understanding of system strengths, barriers, and next actions?
- **Continuous Growth:** Is overall implementation showing measurable, sustainable improvement over time?

A New Model of Partnership

Protecting implementation through shared goals and collaboration

Districts are increasingly seeking partnerships that extend beyond implementation support to shared responsibility for measurable outcomes. Outcomes-based contracts reflect this shift by establishing clear goals, defining meaningful measures of success, and creating opportunities for districts and implementation partners to review progress together throughout implementation.



From Procurement to Sustainable Implementation

District procurement establishes requirements, deliverables, timelines, and protections for public investment. The next challenge is ensuring the selected solution is implemented consistently and supported over time.

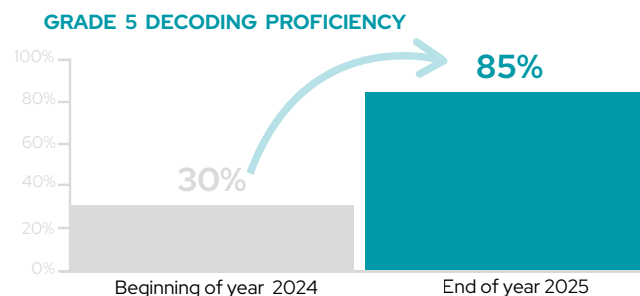
An outcomes-based partnership adds shared implementation commitments to the district's standard procurement process. Both parties define the outcomes they intend to strengthen, the evidence they will review, and the responsibilities they will maintain throughout implementation.

The goal is to protect the district's investment by establishing shared expectations, providing ongoing implementation support, and using evidence to support continuous improvement.

Four Commitments of an Outcomes-Based Partnership

- **Shared Goals:** Define a focused set of student, educator, and implementation outcomes the partnership can reasonably influence.
- **Transparent Evidence:** Agree on baselines, measures, reporting timelines, and interpretation rules before implementation begins.
- **Sustained Support:** Specify professional learning, coaching, technical assistance, and escalation pathways beyond the initial launch.
- **Mutual Accountability:** Review progress together and modify support, timelines, or implementation plans when evidence identifies a barrier.

District Proof Point: Wayne-Westland



*Performance on Diagnostic Decoding Survey from the 2024–25 school year.

Strengthening Elementary Outcomes

The Challenge

Wayne-Westland Community Schools was managing more than 100 literacy resources, inconsistent instructional routines, and limited visibility into student response across schools. Educators needed a more coherent system connecting materials, professional learning, assessment, and daily instruction.

The Solution

The district established a unified literacy approach supported by shared instructional routines, diagnostic data, ongoing professional learning, and implementation support. This alignment reduced fragmentation and gave educators clearer tools for responding to student needs.

85% Fifth-Grade Decoding Proficiency

Fifth-grade decoding proficiency increased from 30% at the beginning of the year to 85% at the end of the school year.

97% of Teachers Reported Literacy Gains

Teachers reported literacy gains across elementary school classrooms.

90% Felt Prepared for Classroom Use

Teachers reported feeling prepared to use the Literacy Suite in classroom instruction.

100+ Tools Replaced by One Unified Approach

Wayne-Westland replaced fragmented materials with one aligned district approach.

“Kids weren’t struggling in math as much as we thought. They just couldn’t read the problem.”

—Nancy Schulz

Director of PD & School Improvement, Wayne-Westland Community Schools

From Adoption to Outcomes

Building capacity through sustained implementation partnership



Moving from adoption to improved literacy outcomes requires more than aligned instructional materials or initial professional learning. Ongoing support strengthens educator expertise, connects evidence to instructional decisions, and helps leadership teams address barriers throughout implementation.

An increasing number of districts are exploring outcomes-based partnerships, an approach that aligns implementation around shared goals, continuous improvement, and measurable progress. These partnerships emphasize the impact of the work: stronger educator practice, more consistent instruction, and improved student outcomes.

As Science of Reading implementation matures, district leaders are asking new questions. Are educators applying instructional practices consistently? Is implementation leading to measurable improvement? Where is additional support needed, and how should it evolve over time?

RGR supports districts by connecting structured literacy instruction, professional learning, assessment, and implementation support around shared literacy goals. Together, these elements help leadership teams strengthen educator practice, monitor progress, and continuously improve implementation.

“What districts purchase matters. What changes for teachers and students matters more. Outcomes-based partnerships create shared accountability for stronger instruction and measurable reading growth.”

—Karl Rectanus
CEO, RGR

Sustaining Literacy Through Leadership Transitions

A 90-day framework for understanding existing systems, building trust, and preserving implementation momentum

Stepping into a new district, building, or leadership role often means inheriting an existing literacy initiative. That transition can feel both exciting and overwhelming. Educators have already invested time establishing routines, implementing new practices, and building momentum, while new leaders bring fresh perspectives and priorities for the work ahead. The first 90 days provide an opportunity to observe implementation, understand existing systems, and identify what is working before determining where change is needed.

Understand Days 1-30	Validate Days 31-60	Establish Priorities Days 61-90
Leadership Focus Learn how the current literacy system functions before making significant changes.	Leadership Focus Confirm what is working while identifying where additional support is needed.	Leadership Focus Build on existing literacy strengths by establishing a focused path forward.
Key Actions ☐ Review the literacy vision and implementation plan ☐ Meet with instructional leaders and teacher leaders ☐ Observe literacy instruction across classrooms ☐ Analyze student, assessment, and implementation data ☐ Identify existing strengths and successes	Key Actions ☐ Compare implementation across classrooms or schools ☐ Listen to educator and leadership feedback ☐ Evaluate coaching and professional learning systems ☐ Identify implementation barriers ☐ Celebrate successes and recognize progress	Key Actions ☐ Prioritize one or two implementation goals ☐ Align professional learning and coaching ☐ Clarify leadership expectations ☐ Establish routines for reviewing progress ☐ Plan for long-term sustainability
What strengths should be preserved as implementation continues?	What patterns emerged across classrooms or schools?	What is the highest-leverage leadership priority for the next semester?

District Literacy Implementation Review

A planning and reflection tool for district leadership teams

Implementation is strengthened through regular reflection, shared evidence, and informed decision-making. Use this review to examine student outcomes, implementation progress, educator support, and leadership systems. Together, these conversations can help district leadership teams celebrate successes, identify opportunities, and determine the next steps that will strengthen literacy outcomes.

Student Outcomes

Are students making meaningful progress?

Key Metrics

- Universal screening results
- Diagnostic assessment growth
- Intervention progress
- Reading proficiency trends

Notes and Next Steps:

Educator Support

Are educators receiving the support they need?

Key Metrics

- Professional learning participation
- Coaching cycles
- New educator onboarding
- Implementation consistency

Notes and Next Steps:

Implementation

Is the initiative being implemented as intended?

Key Metrics

- Fidelity observations
- Progress monitoring completion
- Implementation milestones
- Identified barriers

Notes and Next Steps:

Leadership

How will you demonstrate success?

Key Metrics

- Stakeholder communication
- School board updates
- District reporting
- Sustainability planning

Notes and Next Steps:

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

- Every implementation review should end with three questions:
- What progress have we made?
 - What barriers remain?
 - Where should we focus next?

Evaluating an Implementation Partnership

Questions district leaders can use when selecting or evaluating implementation support

The District Literacy Implementation Review provides an opportunity to reflect on implementation progress, celebrate successes, identify barriers, and prioritize next steps. Those conversations also help clarify where additional expertise, coaching, or implementation support may strengthen the work.

Whether selecting a new implementation partner or continuing an existing partnership, district leaders should regularly consider how well implementation support aligns with current needs and long-term literacy goals. The questions below can help structure those conversations and clarify the type of support that will best strengthen implementation moving forward.

Strategic purchasing decisions should reinforce district priorities, reduce implementation barriers, and create the conditions for continuous improvement. Whether selecting a new partner or renewing an existing one, procurement decisions should strengthen—not complicate—the district's implementation plan.

BUILDING DISTRICT EXPERTISE

Discussion Questions

- Where are educators consistently applying new learning?
- Which schools, grade levels, or teams would benefit from additional coaching or professional learning?
- How are principals, coaches, and district leaders becoming more confident in supporting implementation?

TAILORING IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Discussion Questions

- How well does implementation support align with current district needs?
- How are implementation barriers identified and addressed?
- Where should coaching, professional learning, or technical assistance be prioritized?

USING EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS

Discussion Questions

- Which implementation measures demonstrate the greatest progress?
- Which student outcomes or instructional practices require additional attention?
- How are implementation and student evidence shaping next steps?

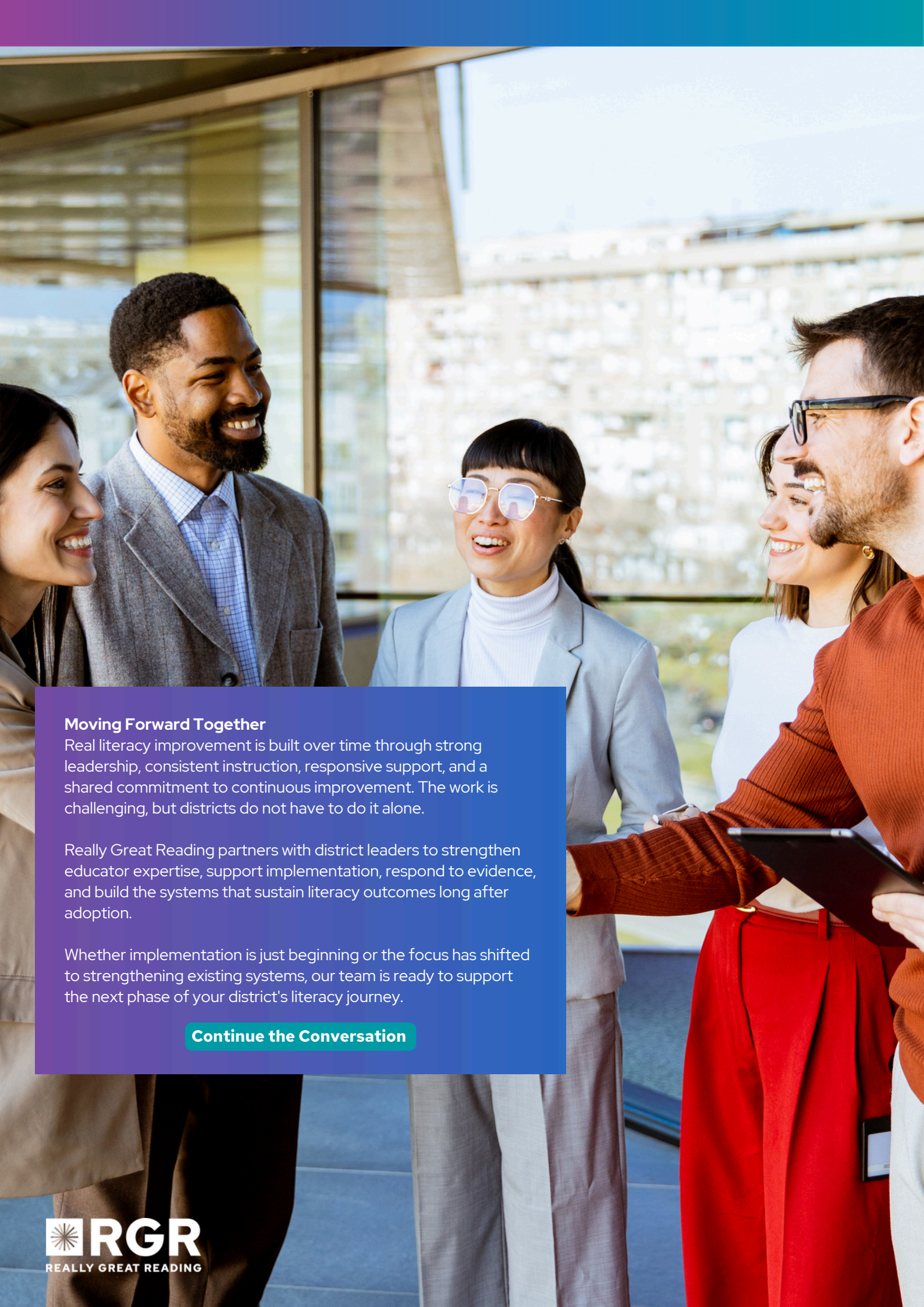
PLANNING FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Discussion Questions

- Which implementation practices should continue?
- Where would additional implementation support have the greatest impact?
- What should be the next focus for district leaders and implementation partners?

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Based on the implementation review, what additional expertise, coaching, or support would best help the district move forward?



Moving Forward Together

Real literacy improvement is built over time through strong leadership, consistent instruction, responsive support, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement. The work is challenging, but districts do not have to do it alone.

Really Great Reading partners with district leaders to strengthen educator expertise, support implementation, respond to evidence, and build the systems that sustain literacy outcomes long after adoption.

Whether implementation is just beginning or the focus has shifted to strengthening existing systems, our team is ready to support the next phase of your district's literacy journey.

[Continue the Conversation](#)