Implementing Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement

A Guide for Early Care and Education Leaders

Ohio Department of Education & Workforce

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Disclaimer: This guide was developed to support the development of comprehensive model literacy sites as part of Ohio's Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant. For more information on Ohio's plan for comprehensive literacy instruction, see Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement.

Preface

The purpose of this guide is to support birth through kindergarten-entry early care and early childhood education leaders, programs and school-based teams in their collaborative efforts to analyze language and literacy processes and provide high-quality, evidence-based language and literacy practices. This guide serves as a companion to Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy and supports implementation of Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement.

With the support of Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy and its embedded self-assessment process, birth through kindergarten-entry early education and childcare programs can:

1. Develop a language and literacy team
2. Create a vision for language literacy development in the early childhood education/childcare setting that is aligned with high-quality language and literacy practices
3. Complete a language and literacy self-assessment
4. Engage in collective action planning

This guide goes deeper into the non-negotiables of a Ready School, supporting early care and education programs as they analyze their Ready School Guide self-assessment, and develop and implement their Ready Schools Language and Literacy vision and action plan.

Introduction

In 2007, Ohio launched the concept of a Ready School, which shifted the responsibility of kindergarten "readiness" from the child to a shared responsibility between early care and education professionals and school district leadership. Both were charged with creating smooth transitions that result in cohesive educational settings prepared for each child, despite varied early educational experiences (Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators & Ohio Department of Education, 2007).

Eleven years later, Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy extended the concept further with a focus on language and literacy development, emphasizing that a Ready School ensures intentional systems are in place to support all learners and their families in language and literacy development. A Ready School provides assessment, curriculum and instruction focused on emergent and early literacy skills with the essential belief that all learners will learn and grow.

The purpose of the guide is to operationalize Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement in conjunction with Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy for use in programs caring for and educating children from birth through kindergarten entry. Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement and Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy calls for educational leaders to support a partnership between families and teachers in the use of developmentally appropriate and high-quality assessments, standards-aligned curricular materials and responsive adult-child interactions to implement evidence-based language and literacy practices that meet the needs of all learners.

Equitable systems that support all learners to thrive are grounded in disposition, access, opportunity, collaboration and efficiently matching resources to child needs. Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy supports partnerships between early childhood education programs and school districts as they prepare children for a smooth transition from infant and toddler environments to preschool settings and preschool settings to kindergarten meeting the needs of each child, regardless of their early learning experiences.

District and early care and education administrators play key roles in improving literacy outcomes in their district's programs. Meaningful change by leadership and others with leadership support must address four key actions:

Creating a collaborative culture of shared leadership	Increasing teacher and administrator knowledge of brain research around early language and literacy learning, as well as reading research	Aligning language and literacy instruction and adult-child responsive interactions with the research	Using data in a collaborative problem-solving model for ongoing action planning and improvement of language and literacy practices

This guide is organized into four sections that correspond to the four categories of non-negotiables of a Ready School. The Ready School non negotiables are:

1. High-Quality Instruction
2. Key Beliefs and Dispositions
3. Family Partnerships
4. Multi-tiered System of Support

Nonnegotiable #1: High-Quality Instruction

All early care and education professionals must:

- Understand that all learners develop language and literacy skills on a continuum beginning at birth
- Understand the importance of language development as a precursor and partner to emergent, early and conventional reading skills
- Implement high-quality curriculum and instructional practices that are evidence based
- Implement instruction with fidelity
- Ensure building leadership supports educators in the application of explicit instruction to teach language and literacy concepts and skills. Specifically, explicit instruction in early phonological awareness, vocabulary, print and alphabet knowledge
- Provide classroom instruction that reflects understanding and application of the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and its implication for early childhood learning experiences

Early care and education leaders need a solid understanding of how infants, toddlers and preschool children progress along the language and literacy continuum, how children learn to communicate and read, why some struggle and what can be done to support all children at the emergent and early literacy level. Research from cognitive science, brain research, psychology, communication science, linguistics and education inform the knowledge base commonly referred to as the **science of reading**. Reading science includes how the brain

learns to read, the skills that are essential for reading and research on how best to teach the essential skills.

The Simple View of Reading

In 1986, Gough and Tunmer proposed a formula known as the Simple View of Reading. This theoretical framework represents the interaction of two broad skill areas that are required for reading comprehension: word recognition and language comprehension.

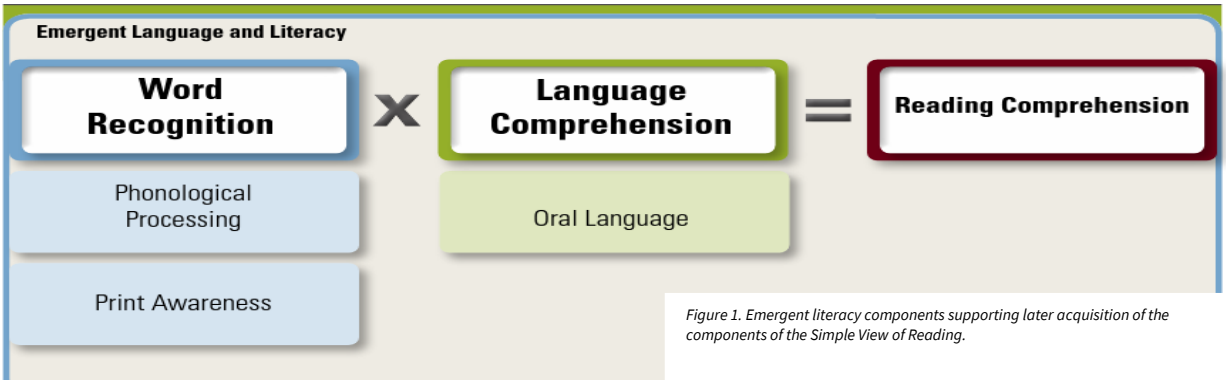


Figure 1. Emergent literacy components supporting later acquisition of the components of the Simple View of Reading.

Reading comprehension struggles when students are lacking in one or both broad skill areas. To support all students to understand what they read, instruction must emphasize the skills that make up each broad component. Those skills were summarized in the Report of the National Reading Panel and extended to students under age 5 in the Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. The image above illustrates the emergent literacy components that support the later acquisition of the components within the Simple View of Reading.

Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards

Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards describe the concepts and skills children develop and learn along the developmental continuum from birth to kindergarten entry. Their purpose is to support teachers as they plan and develop lessons and ecosystems that foster each child's learning and well-being. The standards demonstrate how children develop early literacy skills in speaking, listening to understand, building vocabulary, understanding stories, read aloud, awareness of sounds in spoken words, the alphabet and beginning writing skills. The **Language and Literacy** domain reflects important life skills that are the foundation for learning how to talk, listen, read and write.

Essential Emergent Literacy Skills

Language and literacy-aware early care and education professionals understand the process of how children learn to read and how to support the precursors to reading once children enter birth to age 3 programs, preschool programs or public school. The Simple View of Reading serves as a useful framework for understanding the interaction between oral language and word recognition. Recent brain research underscores the need for children to

enter kindergarten with the oral language skills that serve as the basis for learning to read. Kindergarten students should be supported to attend to the individual sounds or phonemes in spoken English. They learn to map those sounds to printed letters and letter combinations. Once accurate word-level reading is achieved, students build fluency in reading connected text that is necessary, but not enough, for reading comprehension.

In 2008, the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) confirmed that three foundational areas strongly predict how children learn to read. These three foundational areas of emergent literacy skills are essential because they directly relate to later forms of conventional reading and writing.

- Oral language assists in vocabulary and phonological sensitivity.
- Phonological processing builds phonological sensitivity, phonological naming and phonological memory.
- Print awareness, knowledge and referencing develop a child's ability to be able to distinguish letters, identify letter names and write using invented spelling.

Consider and plan for each child's mode of communication, whether it is spoken sounds and words, sign language, gestures, picture system or electronic device.

Emergent literacy has an impact on conventional literacy, making it a crucial part of early childhood education. Recognizing the importance of emergent literacy provides a focus for and impetus behind the principles of a language and literacy-ready school.

To increase children’s emergent literacy skills at kindergarten entry, intentional instruction and responsive adult-child interaction in early learning programs can focus on the key skills that make students more likely to become readers in elementary school. These skills include vocabulary and oral language, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and print knowledge. The following sections provide an overview of each essential emergent literacy skill, how to recognize what young children need in each skill area, research-based instructional practices for teaching each skill and what can be built into classroom instruction and supplemental intervention.

Table 1. Essential Emergent Literacy Skills

Emergent Literacy Skill	Definition
Vocabulary and Oral Language	The ability to use gestures, words and sentences to express wants, needs, thoughts, ideas and emotions. The ability to derive meaning from spoken, written and signed language. Understanding the meaning of the words we hear and being able to use words in oral language. Oral language includes a child's specific mode of communication that supports communicative intent such as sign language, gestures, tools or technology. Vocabulary and oral language are critical to reading success as children move to and through 3rd and 4th grade and beyond.
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	The ability to recognize that sound has meaning by attending to and distinguishing environmental and speech sounds. Noticing, thinking about and working with the sound structure of spoken language, ultimately at the phoneme level.
Print Knowledge	The ability to understand that pictures and written symbols (including alphabet letters) have meaning. Alphabet knowledge, the alphabetic principle, understanding the conventions of print and understanding the function of print. The four domains of print knowledge include: • Print organization; • Print meaning; • Words; • Letters.

VOCABULARY AND ORAL LANGUAGE

Vocabulary and Oral Language in Action

Infants and Toddlers
In her infant class, Miss Beth provides children with support in understanding new words by engaging in responsive, back-and-forth interactions with words, sounds and gestures. She reads one on one with toddlers/babies (or with small groups) and playfully talks with children.

Examples of what a director or coach might observe in a class include the following:

- Narrating children's actions, labeling, using new words
- Engaging in self-talk with planful exposure to meaningful vocabulary
- Engaging in turn-taking conversations (serve and return)
- Intentionally offering fingerplays, nursery rhymes, songs

Older Toddlers and Preschool
In his 3's and 4's class, Mr. Jason provides children with support in understanding new words by intentionally selecting read-aloud books with rich vocabulary. He continually reads the same stories over when a child requests.

Examples of what an administrator might observe in a class include the following:

- Recasting to model appropriate language usage
- Expanding a child's phrase or sentence
- Exploring and reading environmental print, asking questions
- Intentionally offering fingerplays, nursery rhymes, songs
- Talking about read-aloud stories before, during and after reading

Why is Vocabulary and Oral Language Important? Reading is a language-based skill. Children who experience oral language delays or are English learners often have difficulty learning to read and comprehend what they read without support. Children must have a solid foundation in their home languages, which will support their English learning and, in turn, provide a solid foundation for making meaning of printed symbols into oral language. All children need to have a wide vocabulary and the ability to understand and select words for effective oral, written or alternative mode of communication.

Oral language may be represented differently. For example, some children may use sign language or devices to communicate. Children who don't demonstrate age-appropriate vocabulary and language comprehension are at risk of not meeting future reading comprehension goals and should receive instructional support.

How to Know if Students Have Adequate Oral Language and Vocabulary?

Infants and Toddlers

- Respond to a caregiver's voice (turn, make sounds, respond with words or gestures)
- Imitate and respond to simple directions, signs or gestures. (For example, "Find your shoes!" or "It's snack time…find your chair!")
- Demonstrate they understand much more than they verbalize
- Pat or point to named familiar pictures in a book, listen to stories and engage with songs, rhymes or fingerplays.

Preschool

- Name people, objects and pictures using words and phrases
- Ask simple questions; begin to ask why
- Are understood by people besides their caregivers
- Understand and use many new words
- Demonstrate speaking and listening comprehension by use of age-appropriate vocabulary and oral language (or another mode of communication such as sign language or technology-supported)
- Evidence of vocabulary knowledge as demonstrated in oral language and listening comprehension assessments, observations and tasks such as following multi-step directions and retelling

Table 2. Vocabulary and Oral Language Look Fors

Differentiated Universal Instruction in Vocabulary and Oral Language		Vocabulary and Oral Language Instruction in Intervention
Infants and Toddlers	***Preschool***	
❑ Maximizing opportunities for responsive back-and-forth interactions and conversations ❑ Supporting and valuing the child's mode of communication (e.g., signs, gestures, technology-assisted) ❑ Valuing the family's home language ❑ Infusing songs, nursery rhymes and fingerplays throughout the daily routine ❑ Providing intentional read-alouds to support themes, play experiences, vocabulary, concepts or language skill ❑ Having conversations about books before, during and after storybook reading ❑ Expanding child's word or phrase with interesting new words and actions ❑ Using effective teacher language in the classroom (parallel talk, narrating, self-talk, recasting, expansion of student language, modeling)	❑ Engaging children with intentionally selected songs, nursery rhymes and fingerplays throughout the daily routine. ❑ Providing planned, intentional play opportunities (using new words, aligned to a theme) ❑ Providing intentional read-aloud to support theme, vocabulary, language concept or literacy skills ❑ Having conversations about books before, during and after storybook reading ❑ Pre-teaching Tier 2 vocabulary before reading aloud ❑ Promoting classroom discussion and turn-taking conversations ❑ Modeling oral language with appropriate sentence structure and intentional use of academic language ❑ Using effective teacher language in the classroom (parallel talk, self-talk, recasting, expansion of student language, modeling) ❑ Providing repeated read-alouds from a text that: ○ Draws attention to the form and function of print ○ Supports complex sentence structure ○ Includes academic vocabulary ○ Facilitates interactive questioning ○ Builds phonological awareness	❑ Effectively utilizing the family's home language to support intervention ❑ Providing planned, intentional play and practice opportunities aligned to a target skill ❑ Utilizing data-driven small groups or one-on-one intentional instruction ❑ Employing well-designed, explicit instruction ❑ Direct instruction of new words aligned to targets ❑ Repeating and recasting the child's language ❑ Recasting and expanding child's language ❑ Providing additional read-alouds related to the theme, focusing on vocabulary or language structure. Use read-aloud texts and text sets that provide scaffolding and may be more simplistic in language structure ❑ Front-loading read-alouds on a topic (e.g., using text sets or vocabulary instruction ❑ Creating topic immersion lessons that include read-alouds with related play experiences, target skill practice and conversations

Note: Oral language may be expressed and supported through technology, sign language or gestures.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Why Is Phonological Awareness Important? For children to learn the code of how letters represent sounds, they must become aware of the sounds in spoken English. English orthography is described as morpho-phonemic, which means the print represents the sounds and meaning of the words we speak.

Children who can make sense of the sounds in their world and students who can manipulate the sounds at the level of individual phonemes are more likely to become readers. Older, struggling readers often are missing this skill which, without the proper instruction and intervention, impairs their ability to decode. Without evidence-based instructional support, children who cannot isolate the beginning sounds in spoken words at the beginning of kindergarten are at risk of not reading at the end of first grade.

Phonological Awareness in Action

Infants and Toddlers
In her infant class, Miss Hodman provides children with an awareness of spoken and environmental sounds through speaking "parentese" with babies and toddlers and engaging in back-and-forth sound play and interactions.
Examples of what a director or coach might observe in a class include the following:

- Imitating mouth shapes in mirror
- Offering or imitating play sounds exchanges
- Engaging with nursery rhymes, songs and stories
- Reading aloud intentionally chosen stories

Older Toddlers and Preschool
In her pre-K class, Mrs. B provides children with opportunities to explore spoken and environmental sounds by clapping words and syllables and intentional playing with words that have the same first sounds.
Examples of what a director or coach might observe in a class include the following:

- Engaging with nursery rhymes, songs and stories
- Reading aloud intentionally chosen stories
- Modeling words and sentences
- Playing with initial sounds in words (especially children's names)

How to Know if Children Have Adequate Phonological Awareness?
Infants and Toddlers

- Turn to and respond to sounds, singing and talking (especially when the adult uses "parentese")
- Join in responsive adult-child back-and-forth interactions with sounds, gestures or movements
- Pretend to read your favorite books out loud with expression

Preschool

- Demonstrate phonological awareness without print and are assessed for phonological without using print
- Isolate beginning phonemes through activities that support alliteration, blending onset-rime and blending and segmenting syllables and compound words
- Isolate the initial sounds in spoken words, which is a critical predictor of future reading success when given at the end of preschool

Table 3. Phonological Awareness Look-Fors

Differentiated Universal Instruction in Phonological Awareness		**Phonological Awareness Instruction in Intervention**
Infants and Toddlers	***Preschool***	
❑ Engaging in intentional, responsive, adult-child back-and-forth interactions with sounds, gestures, talking and singing throughout daily routines ❑ Experimenting and playing with sounds ❑ Intentional mirror-play ❑ Caregiver or teacher engaging in self-talk during daily routines ❑ Utilizing "parentese" ❑ Narrating a child's actions, gestures, play ideas and feelings ❑ Engaging children with songs, fingerplays, rhymes, gestures and conversations ❑ Utilizing music in different ways to soothe, play and experience rhythm ❑ Reading aloud from books with rhyme and alliteration ❑ Intentional/explicit instruction ❑ Playing with rhyme	❑ Experimenting and playing with sounds ❑ Engaging in activities that support alliteration, blending onset-rime and blending and segmenting syllables and compound words ❑ Modeling correct articulation of words and phonemes ❑ Sequencing from larger to smaller linguistic units ❑ Reading aloud from books with rhyme and alliteration ❑ Playing with rhyme ❑ Repeating words that rhyme ❑ Playing with words that have the same beginning sounds ❑ Bringing student attention to the individual sounds in words, especially beginning and ending sounds ❑ Clapping syllables ❑ Blending and segmenting syllables in oral language ❑ Matching words with the same first sounds ❑ Matching words or pictures that rhyme	❑ Matching intentional/explicit instruction to where students are on the continuum of skills ❑ Utilizing data-driven small groups of children that all have the same phonological awareness need ❑ Explicitly modeling target skill ❑ Modeling mouth positions, utilizing mirrors to support correct sound production ❑ Using manipulatives to represent sounds in words ❑ Focusing on not more than two phonological awareness skills during a lesson ❑ Providing multiple practice opportunities ❑ Providing immediate, clear corrective feedback ❑ Progress monitoring frequently to inform changes to the intensity of instruction if needed (time, duration, group size, repetitions)

PRINT KNOWLEDGE

Print Knowledge in Action

Infants and Toddlers
In her infant/toddler class, Mrs. Joelle has stocked the book corner with variety of books for the children to choose and explore. This week she has added books that support the current theme and that have text that stands out (e.g., large text, speech bubble).

Examples of what a director or coach might observe in a class include the following:

- Books and print readily available for mouthing, exploring, turning pages, patting and pointing
- Babies, toddlers and adults enjoying reading intentionally chosen books together
- Drawing children's attention to print and features of print, such as variations in print, speech bubbles and text features, when reading aloud
- Learning centers and small group instruction that build on read-alouds and support communication and language skills

Older Toddlers and Preschool
In his pre-K class, Mr. Ki provides children with opportunities to explore books and other print related to the theme. He selects books that are read-aloud books so he can draw attention to the print in the book (text features, large printed words, speech bubbles, etc.) He has set up a "writing" station for children to experiment with making play-dough letter shapes.

Examples of what a director or coach might observe in a class include the following:

- Using environmental print that supports the theme
- During read-alouds, referencing text, variations in print, speech bubbles, text features and letters
- Connecting print to oral language throughout the daily routine with read-alouds, centers, transitions, etc.

Why is Print Knowledge Important? Early on, babies and toddlers notice that books, pictures, symbols and print have meaning. Later, accessing the meaning of text begins with decoding the words and translating the print into speech. Eventually, decoding is facilitated by learning the alphabet, letter names and letter sounds.

The alphabetic principle includes the awareness that letters represent the sounds we speak and the ability to blend letter sounds to read words. Accurately and automatically naming letters is an excellent predictor of future reading performance. Letter-naming fluency indicates the amount of support a student might need to cement letter-sound relationships. Letter-sound fluency and the ability to read consonant-vowel-consonant words indicate the level of alphabetic principal instruction that will be needed in kindergarten.

How to Know if Children Have Adequate Print Knowledge?

Infants and Toddlers

- Reach for and explore books, mouthing them and carrying them
- Bring books to a caregiver or teacher to read
- Have favorite books they like to hear over and over
- Turn the pages, pat the pictures, point to pictures, turn a book right-side-up, and pretend to read

Preschool

- Recognize the meaning of familiar signs, symbols or other print material
- Notice how print is organized
- Find their name
- Accurately and automatically name some letters
- Understand that letters make up words and have meaning

Table 4. Print Knowledge Look Fors

Differentiated Universal Instruction in Print Knowledge		Print Knowledge Instruction in Intervention
Infants and Toddlers	***Preschool***	
❑ Books and print materials are accessible and available for children to experience and explore (mouth, turn pages, pat, etc.) ❑ Adults and children intentionally interact with symbols, books and print materials ❑ Exploring books and print materials are supported ❑ Incorporating and utilizing environmental print and pictures throughout the day ❑ Providing abundant intentional reading experiences with children individually and in groups ❑ Engaging in print referencing (calling out text features) during read-alouds ❑ Offering centers and activities for children to create representations or "symbols" through drawing, play**dough** or painting (planned purposeful play with print)	❑ Books and print materials are accessible and available for children to experience and explore ❑ Utilizing environmental print throughout the daily routines ❑ Explicitly teaching letter names and sounds ❑ Incorporating letter shapes, letter manipulatives, and writing materials into learning centers and activities ❑ Providing multiple means of practice reviewing letter names and sounds with playful, intentional letter-learning games ❑ Print referencing (calling out print and text features) during lessons and read alouds ❑ During read-alouds, highlighting concepts of print (e.g., parts of a book, reading left to right, different print symbols) and teaching that words (not pictures) convey the meaning of written words ❑ Following a purposeful scope and sequence and explicitly instructing in the four domains of print knowledge through intentional read-alouds	❑ Small group (grouping children by need) ❑ Matching instruction to where students are on the continuum of skills ❑ Explicit modeling of target skills ❑ Targeted print referencing during a lesson ❑ Using manipulatives such as blocks or felt squares to represent sounds and words ❑ Providing immediate corrective feedback

Planning for and Implementing Highly Intentional Language and Literacy Instruction

Effective early care and education leaders understand, notice and support intentional language and literacy instructional practices in the infant room, toddler room and preschool classroom. Children take their first critical steps toward learning to communicate, read and write very early in life. Long before they can exhibit reading and writing production skills, young children begin to acquire basic understanding of the concepts of literacy and its functions. As infants, toddlers and preschoolers engage with caring adults, they begin to demonstrate communicative intent with facial expressions, gestures and sounds and understand and use sounds and symbols. Eventually, they combine their oral language, drawings, print and play into a coherent mixed medium to create and communicate meaning in a variety of ways.

From birth through kindergarten entry, communication, language and literacy develop and need support along a continuum.

In the first few months of life, children begin to experiment with language. Young babies look toward sounds and their loved one's voice, understand words and tone of voice, make sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of adult talk, "read" gestures and facial expressions of their caregivers and loved ones and begin to associate sound sequences frequently heard — words — with their referents (home language).

Infants and toddlers delight in responsive interactions with adults — listening to familiar songs and rhymes, interacting with loved ones in games such as peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake and exploring objects such as board books and alphabet blocks in their play. From these caring and playful beginnings, children learn to use a variety of symbols on their way to becoming readers.

As children use symbol systems (sounds, gestures, signs, early words), they acquire through interactions with others the insight that specific marks such as pictures or print can also represent meanings. At first, children will use the physical and visual cues surrounding print to determine what something says. But as they develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle, children begin to process sounds into letters and connect this information with a known meaning. It may seem as though some children acquire these understandings magically or on their own; however, research indicates language and literacy understanding is supported through lots of playful, informal and intentional responsive adult interactions, guidance and instruction.

Characteristics of Effective Instruction

Because reading is not a natural skill, **becoming a reader must not be left to chance**. Early language and literacy instruction is most effective when it is planned intentionally and taught directly, unambiguously and with purposeful play. Teaching methods that focus *only* on student development or maturation, creating a literacy-rich environment or fostering a love of reading are insufficient and often leave many students without the basic language literacy competencies. Intentional instruction can be thought of as "errorless learning" because students are supported with experiences, interactions, direct models and scaffolds to correctly perform the skills that lead to greater language and literacy competence. Intentional instruction is engaging and requires skilled instructors who can maximize systematic, explicit and implicit learning opportunities in natural and playful ways that are responsive to each child's skills and needs.

Effective instruction includes the following:

- An emphasis on the essential emergent and early language and literacy skills, which change across the birth to kindergarten entry ages
- Consistent and nurturing adult-child responsive interactions facilitate language and literacy learning beginning at birth
- Intentionally planned play experiences to support language and literacy, often around a theme
- Encouraging families to talk with their children in their home languages
- Encouraging caregivers and teachers to honor their students' home languages
- Using daily routines as a springboard to rich back-and-forth responsive interactions
- Well-planned, active engagement and participation
- A detailed scope and sequence that integrates aspects of the language across skill areas
- The use of predictable routines
- Elements of explicit instruction include:
    - Breaking tasks into small steps
    - Providing explicit models and well-defined expectations (I Do)
    - Using clear examples and nonexamples
    - Providing immediate corrective feedback (We Do)
    - Practicing automaticity (You Do)

Intentional (explicit) teaching through the lens of adult-child responsive interaction includes:

- A caregiver or teacher is "tuning in" and consistently responding to a baby, toddler or child's attempt to communicate. Communication may be in the form of facial expression, sounds, eye gaze, babbling, word attempts, gestures or sentences.
- A caregiver or teacher uses child-directed speech with babies and toddlers (a high-pitched sing-song voice with stretched-out words). Research has shown that babies and toddlers attend to and prefer child-directed speech or "parentese."

- A tuned-in caregiver or teacher interacts with a child playfully in back-and-forth exchanges. Peek-a-boo is a good example of this. There are several names for tuned-in back-and-forth interaction, such as responsive back and forth, serve and return, and turn-taking interaction.
- A caregiver or teacher interacts with the infant, toddler or preschooler and tunes in throughout his or her daily routine. Back-and-forth interactions happen all day in daily routines such as brushing teeth, book time, diapering, playing outside and snack time.
- A caregiver or teacher playfully extends or models the quality or quantity of back-and-forth exchanges.
- A caregiver or teacher models with self-talk (parallel talk) about what he or she is doing throughout the day.
- A caregiver or teacher "narrates" what the child is doing, providing labels, action words, and expanding vocabulary.
- A caregiver or teacher joins in with the child's play ideas, often on the floor with the child.
- Playful learning experiences are the result of purposeful play opportunities, likely grounded in a theme.

When early care and education programs apply the principles of intentional instruction, they reduce the percentage of students who need intervention and increase the percentage of students who perform in ways that lead to better literacy outcomes. Intentional instruction is one element of an effective early learning model that can prevent reading failure for most students.

Table 5. Intentional literacy instructional practices: examples and nonexamples.

Skill Area	More Intentional Literacy Practices	Less Intentional Literacy Practices
Vocabulary and Oral Language	• Books used for reading aloud are selected for rich language, vocabulary and knowledge-building opportunities • Intentional teacher dialogue • Teachers tune in to independent play as a means for explicit instruction opportunities to build language skills	• Nondirective questioning and discussion • Focus on illustrations rather than words
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	• Emphasis on the sounds in spoken language distinct from and before letter-sound instruction • Phonological awareness is used as the starting point for print.	• Letters used as the starting point for print • Reading is treated as a visual skill • Confusion about phonemic awareness and phonics
Print Knowledge and Referencing ***Print domains: Print Organization, Print Meaning, Letters, Words***	• Intentional instruction in letter names and letter-sound combinations • Recognizing words in print (not decoding) • Recognizing letters in print • Understanding that print carries meaning • Concepts of print, book and print organization	• Word recognition is taught as a visual memory task • Students are asked to memorize words • Read aloud books without bringing student attention to words, letters, print meaning or print organization. These concepts are learned implicitly, not through explicit instruction.

Supporting High-Quality Instruction with Strategic Professional Learning and Coaching

In a language and literacy improvement model, leaders value and support coaches who have the primary responsibility of building the knowledge and skills of the early childhood program community and supporting the implementation of the program action plan with fidelity. Strengthening knowledge and skills can take the form of professional learning and coaching that includes modeling adult implementation of evidence-based practices. Program staff, family members and community partners can provide input on topics for training and coaching and have access to participate in the training and coaching themselves. Educators who coach others will help them develop deep knowledge, implement components with fidelity and provide supportive feedback to embed new practices so they are sustained over time. The purpose of coaching is to support deep implementation and sustained use of the foundational components of *Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement*.

Coaching is a Function, not a Person. It is not necessary that each early care and education program has a dedicated person in a coaching role. The language and literacy leadership team should work to support a coaching *system*. Thought should be given to how to create and sustain a systemwide safe environment that values coaching as shared professional learning. Early childhood educators in different roles can provide the functions of coaching. The function of coaching can be provided by multiple educators who support an early childhood program. One person may not have deep skills in all areas, including systems change, consultation, assessment, data-based decision-making and research-based instructional practices. Teams need access to training and support in each of these areas, regardless of whether there is a full-time person in the program whose title is "coach."

Thought should be given to creating and sustaining a systemwide safe environment that values coaching as shared professional learning.

In a program-wide literacy improvement model, caregivers and educators with coaching roles have the primary responsibility of building knowledge and skills of the early childhood community and supporting them to implement the center and program improvement plans as intended. Strengthening knowledge and skills can take the form of training supported by coaching. Program staff, family members and community partners should provide input on topics for training and coaching and have access to participate in them directly. Caregivers and educators who coach others will help them develop deep knowledge, implement components with fidelity and provide supportive feedback to embed new practices so they are sustained over time. The purpose of coaching is to support deep implementation and sustained use of evidence-based strategies.

At a minimum, center and program staff who have coaching roles should regularly self-assess and seek to expand their skills in three broad areas: **systems coaching, instructional coaching** and **supportive coaching with families and caregivers**. The three broad areas of coaching should be intentionally supported within the program's improvement or action plan.

Educators who provide systems coaching must be able to:	Educators who provide instructional coaching must be able to:	Educators who provide coaching support for caregivers and families must be able to:
• **Analyze systems-level data, including program-wide and adult implementation data to inform coaching and professional learning needs.** • **Facilitate collaboration to develop, roll out and revise the program's improvement or action plan.** • **Assist teams in using an effective collaborative problem-solving process.** • **Plan, deliver and evaluate data-driven professional development.** • **Support program administrators.**	• Analyze student data to inform next steps. • Facilitate collaborative problem-solving to design language and literacy instruction. • Serve as a consultant to teachers and reading specialists to build their knowledge of language and literacy content knowledge and evidence-based instructional methods. • Model evidence-based language and literacy strategies in the contextualizing of evidence-based strategies across domains, disciplines and daily routines. • Consult regarding prioritizing content and strategies, identifying appropriate resources, enhancing or developing the use of instructional routines and suggesting social-emotional and behavioral support strategies.	• View coaching and modeling with families as shared learning. • Develop consistent opportunities for coaching and modeling language and literacy practices with families (for example, a coaching opportunity for early care may be a moment of modeling and conversation at drop off or pick up or developed through home visiting). • Create coaching experiences with caregivers and families that model supportive, joyful, intentional back-and-forth interactions. • Respectfully model intentional language and literacy strategies with families and brainstorm how strategies fit naturally within their daily routines (for example, parentese during diapering, reading aloud at naptime and serve and return communication during lunch or playtime).

The amount of coaching support required by a program may fluctuate throughout implementation. More coaching support will be needed in the initial stages. Coaching should be viewed as shared learning. Over time, the knowledge and skills needed for language and literacy improvement will shift from the person who has been doing the coaching to early childhood program administrators, classroom teachers, families and caregivers and community members.

Want to Learn More?

Implementing Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement: Resources for School Leaders provides more supports for **high quality instruction.**

POST-READING SELF REFLECTION

Component	Use the "traffic light scale" to evaluate your center or program's current level of implementation. **Red** – Exploration **Orange** – Installation **Yellow** – Initial Implementation **Green** – Full implementation	Using the scale below, determine how important this component is to you. **Red** – Not at All **Orange** – Somewhat **Yellow** – Very **Green** – Extremely
Simple View of Reading		
Oral Language and Vocabulary		
Phonological Awareness		
Print Knowledge		
Effective Language and Literacy Instruction for All Learners		
Supporting Instruction with Professional Learning and Coaching		

Nonnegotiable #2: Key Beliefs and Dispositions

All educators in a Language and Literacy Ready School must:

- Commit to the belief that all learners can grow in language and literacy skills and presume competence of all learners;
- Understand that learners' social and emotional well-being is as important as the emergent and early literacy skills they acquire;
- Believe that a warm, responsive environment with predictable routines and expectations are important to learners' language and literacy development.

Early care and education culture is guided by strong and engaged leadership. The program director and leadership team can provide an environment of collaboration where staff, families and community members are empowered to participate in school decisions. This begins with the presumed competence of all learners, equal valuing of social-emotional well-being and emergent literacy skills and a belief in the importance of a warm, responsive environment with predictable routines and expectations.

An environment of collaborative problem-solving creates a positive culture where everyone – children, families, and staff – are learners and are given the opportunity and responsibility to participate in building and sustaining the schoolwide language and emergent literacy model. The early care and education culture presume the competence of parents and caregivers as partners in their child's learning. Family, caregiver, teacher and community partnerships are integrated into the literacy improvement planning process.

Creating a Collaborative and Welcoming Culture

Child outcomes are enhanced when family members and program, center or school staff share responsibility for learning. Family members need options for meaningful involvement in their children's education, learning and school decisions. Program staff should seek and respond to family members' interests and engagement in a culturally sustaining manner. Programs can partner with community members, businesses and organizations to articulate and reach common goals on behalf of children and families.

Inclusive and equitable program culture ensures all children, families and staff know they belong. All children have access to and fully participate in the general education curriculum and early literacy and language curriculum. Program-wide systems of language and literacy instruction, as well as quality adult-child interactions, promote optimal outcomes for all, including those with the need for intensive support. Effective use of adult-child responsive interactions, assessments and modes of communication, and flexible use of

resources are structures that support meeting children where they are and moving them forward.

Culturally responsive educational practices guide educators to address or remove social barriers that cause disparities in student achievement. Educators who are mindful of these barriers take steps that mitigate the effects of negative cultural stereotypes on child performance. When educators can clearly articulate their shared beliefs and common expectations, they have a collaborative basis from which to make decisions about teaching and learning. At the heart of any effective early learning system is strong agreement on a shared purpose and embracing all learners. Improving literacy and language achievement is a common goal that unites schools, families, cultures and communities.

Early childhood educators can support family members to foster their children's language and literacy development by:

- Honoring each child's home language
- Encouraging families to speak at home in the language that is the most comfortable for them
- Providing families with knowledge, skills and materials that allow them to support their children's learning at home
- Connecting families to community resources
- Providing and honoring alternate means of communication (for example, sign language or technology devices)
- Making materials available in the families' home languages

Evidence-based instruction is effective for all children and essential for those who are marginalized or historically underserved, such as children from poverty, children of color, children with disabilities and children from different cultures. When young children are not achieving, schools and programs should analyze the various beliefs and systems that are operating to produce that negative outcome. It is through the open analysis and improvement of the educational systems that equity will be possible.

Child outcomes are improved when educators:

- Embrace and honor each child's home language or mode of communication
- Warmly include all learners, including those who have disabilities or who learn differently
- Have high expectations for children from all backgrounds
- Presume the competence of each child and family
- Use resources flexibly
- Promote positive social and academic growth
- Collaborate with colleagues, families and community members

The following two essential components of creating a collaborative school culture often are overlooked when implementing literacy improvement efforts:

1. **Data-based decision-making.** A structured, data-based decision-making process focused on language and literacy that can be applied during meetings at all levels of the system. Programs should have a timely and family-friendly process to share data-based decision-making with families. Details on implementing the collaborative problem-solving process can be found in later sections of this guide.
2. **Communication.** Effective two-way communication is required for the true engagement of all stakeholders. At all levels of the educational system, processes must be in place for the flow of information. One of the first responsibilities of district and program leaders is to identify the purpose of communications, as well as the audience for various communications and how and when information is sought from and provided to family members, community partners and program staff.

Collaborative Problem-Solving Teams

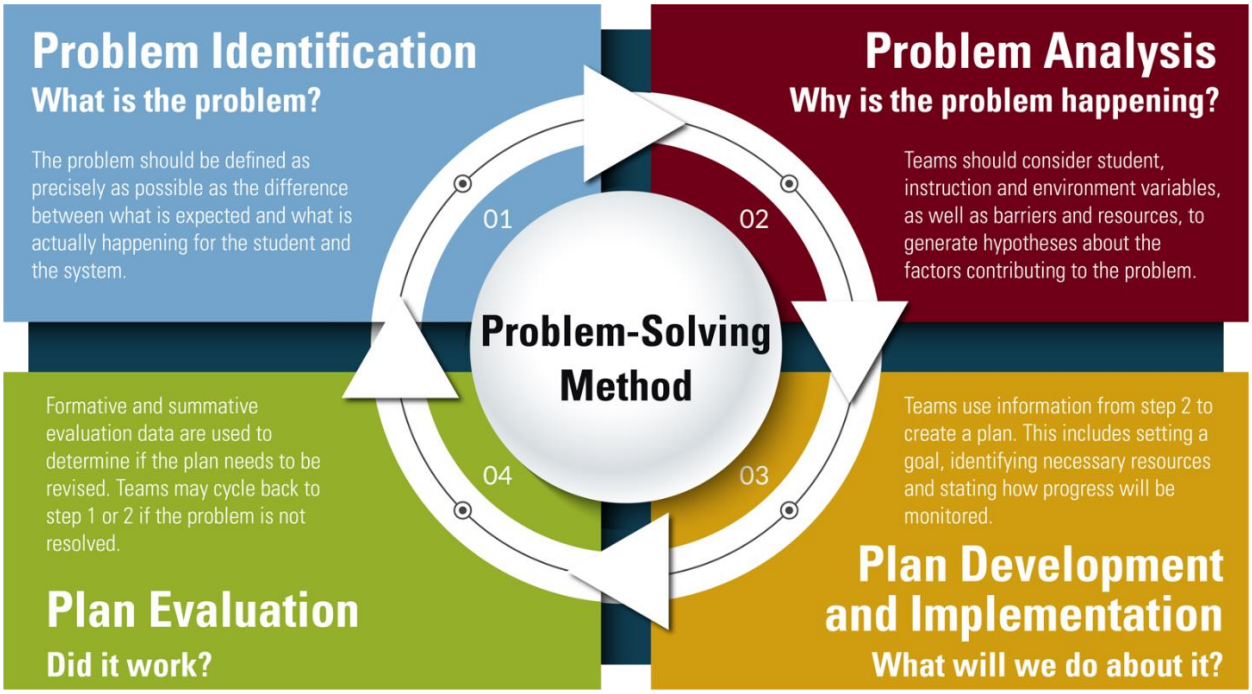
Implementation of Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement and Ohio's Ready Schools Guide for Language and Literacy requires the effort of teams of educators, families and community partners working collaboratively at multiple levels to support improving literacy outcomes for all learners — including birth through kindergarten-entry learners. Establishing a collaborative partnership between the school system and the many early childhood settings that serve their future students is an important opportunity for increasing the effectiveness of the support provided to young children.

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT TEAMING

Teams are more effective and efficient if they use a collaborative problem-solving process, sometimes referred to as data-based decision-making. Collaborative problem-solving is a structured decision-making process for using data to answer questions about systems and students. When all team members use the common structure of collaborative problem-solving, results can be obtained for students more efficiently. It provides a common routine and way of thinking about problems that, once learned, can free up time to think creatively about solutions. Collaborative problem-solving is used throughout each early childhood teaming structure to ensure effective implementation and to make the program or instructional decisions (e.g., the Language and Literacy Leadership Team, Teacher-based Teams and Individual Assistance or Child Study Teams).

Team members have more time to focus on resolving problems during collaborative problem-solving team meetings when they feel safe, understand the purpose and process and have common routines so they don't have to spend time thinking about what to do next. Several examples exist in educational literature — most follow a plan-do-study-act cycle. Collaboration and collaborative problem-solving processes inherently require the belief that working together toward strengthening language and literacy outcomes is a valuable endeavor.

The common steps and questions teams ask at each step in the iterative cycle of collaborative problem-solving are below.



Teams use student or child data and implementation data in the collaborative problem-solving process to create, implement and evaluate program action plans. Multiple teams work in parallel at the systems or program level *and* the classroom or child level. Both types of teams, classroom-level teacher-based teams and systems/program-level teams, use the collaborative problem-solving process to identify, analyze and resolve barriers to improving the language and literacy skills of young children.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Language and Literacy Leadership Team (LLLT) engages in collaborative problem-solving to guide the language and literacy work of the school, program or center. To improve language and literacy outcomes, all educators must collaboratively accept responsibility for meeting the needs of all children, including those with the most complex needs. The LLLT's vision, mission and set of core beliefs about teaching and learning should be clear and concise and communicate the direction of the early care and education program's system. The vision should be based on the presumed competence of families and all learners and the belief that all children can grow their skills in language and literacy. The literacy improvement processes and resulting program action plan(s) must align with the clearly articulated and publicly shared vision, mission and core beliefs. These action plans serve to operationalize the vision. Collaborative teams at every level align to the vision and mission and share data so the LLLT can lead the work of creating, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and adjusting or revising aligned action plans.

Action plans created at each level inform the work of teams at the other levels. For example, obstacles related to rigid service delivery that are encountered by teacher-based teams when planning for an individual child or group of children may inform the program or system leadership team of proposed schedule changes.

TEACHER-BASED TEAMS

Teacher-based teams (TBTs) are teams that meet regularly and are in place to analyze data to plan instruction across or within classrooms. They should include:

- The program staff who are engaged in supporting the children (for example, the classroom teacher, caregivers, support staff, home visitor, and related service personnel)
- At times, a coach or specialist

ROLES AND ACTIONS

TBTs are charged with critical tasks related to children's learning, with attention to screening and assessment analysis, decision rules, curriculum decisions, explicit and intentional instructional practices, intervention practices and, at times, family engagement. TBT members meet regularly and use the collaborative problem-solving process to:

- Analyze classroom-level data (screening, progress monitoring) to inform intentional instructional practices;
- Utilize child data and decision rules to plan interventions;
- Communicate and model high expectations with each other;
- Coach, model and support each other in data analysis as well as the implementation of instructional practices and
- Plan for a welcoming and inclusive environment for all learners, including children who are English learners and children with disabilities.

INTERVENTION ASSISTANCE TEAMS OR CHILD STUDY TEAMS

Intervention Assistant Teams (IATs), which may be referred to as Child Study Teams or another name in some programs, are child-specific teams that form when a child has received Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction that has been effective for other children but not for this individual. The IAT may form, change the membership and/or dissolve over time as the needs of a child change. The meaningful engagement of family members is critical.

ROLES AND ACTIONS

The critical function of the IAT is to use a child's observational, screening, diagnostic and progress monitoring data in the collaborative problem-solving process to design, implement and evaluate instruction and adult interaction and implementation that will support a child

to reach language and literacy goals. Each child's IAT plans the explicit and individualized instructional support that characterizes intensive support.

A key role of a child's IAT is to coordinate instruction across the tiers of instruction (universal, targeted and intensive instruction), particularly as different personnel may be involved in providing those levels of support. If intensive support is required for a student to make progress and a disability is suspected, the IAT may provide information for or serve on the Multifactored Evaluation (MFE) team and may become a part of the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) team or the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team. The membership of the team of a student may shift over time to accomplish the practical and legal requirements of moving through the special education evaluation process.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEAMS

Although each type of team uses different data sources at different levels of the system, they share several common strategies for operating. Effective teams share a stated purpose. They have clear expectations for behavior, defined roles and responsibilities, a structured meeting agenda and a data-based decision-making process.

Sample Meeting Norms for Effective Teams

- Start and end on time.
- Come prepared to meetings.
- Follow the agenda.
- Respect opinions of others.
- Contribute
- Focus on team purpose.

Want to Learn More?

Implementing Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement: Resources for School Leaders provides more supports on **key beliefs and dispositions.**

POST-READING SELF REFLECTION

Component	Use the "traffic light scale" to evaluate your center or program's current level of implementation. **Red** – Exploration **Orange** – Installation **Yellow** – Initial Implementation **Green** – Full implementation	Using the scale below, determine how important this component is to you. **Red** – Not at All **Orange** – Somewhat **Yellow** – Very **Green** – Extremely
Creating a Collaborative and Welcoming Culture		
Collaborative Problem-Solving		
Teaming: Language and Literacy Leadership Team		
Teaming: Teacher-Based Team		

Nonnegotiable #3: Family Partnerships

All educators in a Language and Literacy Ready School must:

- Recognize the learners' families have a significant role in their learners' language and literacy development and
- Provide structures for educators to intentionally share support and resources with families that foster their learners' language and literacy development.

Meeting the Needs of Families

High-quality family engagement in Ohio's early learning programs must reflect each program's diversity. Family members might include parents, caregivers, grandparents, friends and relatives. Families may live together or apart, change housing frequently or include many generations. Families may speak English or they might speak other languages. In 2019, the Ohio Department of Education reported that 110 different languages were spoken by students and their families. Schools and early care and education programs that build successful family engagement recognize the strengths of each family and the hopes and dreams they hold for their children. There are many terms associated with family, school and community partnerships. Engagement entails commitment, synchronization, support and action. It is through engagement with families, schools and communities that Ohio's students will receive the language and literacy support they need for a bright future.

Research informs that a shift from reliance solely on traditional forms of family engagement in schools (events at the school building, reactive communication, in-person conferences) to research-based effective practices yields engagement with higher impact. Research should drive family engagement planning conversations and implementation with school teams and may lead to reframing communication and relationship practices.

Engaging Families and Community Partners on Teams

Program personnel can create conditions that promote engagement with families and community partners. Family engagement can be viewed as systemic practice. To accomplish this, programs can work with families and community partners to use collaborative problem-solving to analyze socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic barriers to family engagement and consider how programs may hinder or encourage engagement.

Family and community members must be provided with an environment that supports them to feel comfortable engaging. It is not acceptable for them to be present but just sit quietly during meetings. Programs can increase the comfort level of family and community members

through regular, ongoing positive interaction and attention to building relationships with families and communities.

Program staff can support families' feeling of belonging by:

- Providing resources for communicating with families who don't speak English
- Providing more frequent, targeted communication as instruction becomes more intensive
- Offering resources for families to support their children at home and to help families feel a part of the classroom community
- Informing families of their children's progress promptly
- Supporting families to understand information about skills, assessments and instruction
- Listening and providing information related to each family's interest or concern

Program staff can increase trust with concrete behaviors such as:

- Sharing meeting agendas ahead of time
- Explicitly asking for input from all team members, including families and community partners
- Avoiding "parking lot" discussions and "the meeting before the meeting"
- Minimizing the use of educational jargon
- Valuing each other's contributions
- Ensuring open and visible two-way communication
- Participating in professional learning and coaching together
- Celebrating together

When early care and education programs engage community partners, they facilitate opportunities to problem-solve and consult with each other on local planning. This promotes networking around shared supports and challenges and understanding of the efforts of each entity. Examples of community entities that share the goals of early learning programs include libraries, after-school programs, cultural institutions, health care providers, businesses and philanthropical and faith-based institutions.

Table 6. Early care and education programs partner with the community and family in support of literacy.

Research-Based Ways that Families Promote Early Literacy	School & Community Practices to Support the Implementation
Communicate high expectations for learning	Communicate positive expectations for families and children
Make reading enjoyable	Encourage families to have fun with language and literacy
Use home language	Support literacy in the home language Incorporate families' cultures and interests
Communicate with the child's teacher	Help families understand their children's progress
Read stories and talk about them together Talk about letters and their sounds Draw pictures and write words and letters	Equip families to share reading, language and literacy at home Create roles for families that support literacy in the school
Visit the library and have books at home	Provide families with books and other resources

Want to Learn More?
Implementing Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement: Resources for School Leaders provides more supports on **family partnerships.**

POST-READING SELF REFLECTION

Component	Use the "traffic light scale" to evaluate your center or program's current level of implementation. **Red** – Exploration **Orange** – Installation **Yellow** – Initial Implementation **Green** – Full implementation	Using the scale below, determine how important this component is to you. **Red** – Not at All **Orange** – Somewhat **Yellow** – Very **Green** – Extremely
Meeting the Needs of Families		
Engaging Families and Community Partners on Teams		

Nonnegotiable #4: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

All educators in a **Language and Literacy Ready School** must:

- Implement high-quality instruction and interventions that are aligned to children's needs across all domains of learning;
- Develop an assessment plan to identify predictive indicators or skills of emergent and early literacy;
- Ensure there is a system of tiered supports available to all children who do not meet developmental or benchmark criteria for language and literacy skills;
- Monitor and document each child's progress, which may inform decisions about any changes in instruction or goals for a child; and
- Establish and maintain a comprehensive support system that includes support for children with social-emotional and behavioral challenges.

Three-Tiered Model of Instructional Supports

A language and literacy Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a school-wide or program-wide framework that supports language and literacy outcomes for all children. MTSS involves efficiently targeting effective instruction to support children's needs based on universal screening and diagnostic assessments. Schools and early care and education programs also assess their resulting data to ensure human, environmental and instructional resources are in place to meet the language and literacy needs of all learners.

Rather than waiting for children to fall behind before providing targeted communication, language and literacy support the MTSS model provides the process to identify risk early and to intervene immediately with added intentional, targeted instruction. By focusing first on meeting the needs of most children through an effective system of universal core instruction (an effective Tier 1), programs can better serve children with more complex needs (additional strategic/intensive support with Tiers 2 and 3).

Language precursors and literacy skill development are critical parts of child development and are predictors of later success in school and life.

Language (the method of communication) includes receptive, expressive and social language. Literacy (the use and understanding of printed symbols, letters and words) includes listening comprehension, oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness/concepts, written language, alphabet knowledge and text/word comprehension.

Table 7. Three-Tiered Model of Instructional Support in Early Language and Literacy to prevent later reading difficulty.

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Description	**Core Instruction**	**Strategic and Targeted Instruction**	**Intensive Instruction**
Who receives	All children	Some children who haven't responded to *effective* Tier 1 instruction	A few children who haven't responded to *effective* Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction
Who delivers	Classroom teacher/caregiver with support for differentiation and planning for universal design for learning	Classroom teacher/caregiver with the support of others determined by the school	Teacher/caregiver or specialized personnel determined by the school
What	Evidence-based language and literacy instructional practices implemented with fidelity	Evidence-based supplemental language and literacy instructional practices implemented with fidelity	Individualized evidence-based supplemental language and literacy instructional practices implemented with fidelity
Group size	Combination of the whole group and small group (3-7 children)	2-5 Children	1-2 Children
Time	Tier 1 Language and literacy intentional instruction is threaded through lessons, daily routines and play environment.	Tier 2 Increasing instructional dosage (time) is spent with targeted/strategic lessons as well as throughout the daily routines and play environment in addition to Tier 1 supports.	Tier 3 Intensifying dosage (time) and individualized intervention (1:1). Intervention is woven throughout the daily routines and play in addition to Tiers 1 (& 2) supports.
Assessment	Universal screening three times per year; quarterly for programs that operate 12 months	Progress monitoring at least every other week	Progress monitoring weekly
Regular and ongoing engagement with parents and caregivers	Information, materials and events about communication skills, language and literacy learning, curriculum, goals and ways to support development at home including ways to receive feedback from families and caregivers	Information, materials and events matched to the communication, language and literacy needs of specific children, ways to support development at home and receive feedback from families and caregivers	Information, materials and training matched to the communication, language and literacy needs and goals of individual children, ways to intensify support at home and receive feedback from families and caregivers

TIER 1 UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Tier 1 intentional instruction is delivered throughout the daily routines for all learners in the early care and education setting. Families are informed of the goals and methods of instruction and are engaged as partners in learning.

Universal instructional supports are foundational teaching and caregiving practices that are necessary to support the successful development of language and literacy skills for all learners from birth to kindergarten entry. The strategies found in this tier of instruction include intentional and responsive adult-child interaction, well-designed language and literacy play environment and interactions-supportive ecosystem, and infusion of strategies into daily routines and instruction for all children. Core emergent literacy and language content include vocabulary and oral Language, phonological awareness and print knowledge across all three tiers of instruction. These core content areas provide a foundation for children to move across the continuum to learn to read and be successful in school.

TIER 2 STRATEGIC INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Tier 2 is described as strategic and targeted language and literacy instruction. Some children who are at risk on the universal screening assessment receive targeted Tier 2 support **in addition** to Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 can be provided by the teacher, teaching assistant/paraprofessional or other instructors such as speech pathologists and reading specialists. Tier 2 is small-group instruction that is specifically tailored to the needs of children in the group. Tier 2 groups are provided in addition to and aligned with the Tier 1 instruction. The purpose of Tier 2 is to provide more instructional time (dosage) and intensity to children who are at risk so they will catch up and reach expectations.

Universal screening data are used to articulate the needs of children in the program and design Tier 2 instruction that is differentiated to meet those needs. The curriculum for Tier 2 must focus on the specific skill deficits of the students in the small group and be sufficiently effective to cause students to catch up to standards or developmental milestones. Tier 2 instruction is more explicit and strategic. It includes more opportunities to respond and practice, is delivered at a brisk pace, includes immediate affirmative and corrective feedback and uses cumulative review over time.

Birth to kindergarten-entry core emergent literacy and language content includes vocabulary and oral language, phonological awareness and print knowledge. Tier 2 language and literacy evidence-based strategies are designed and delivered to strategically meet those targeted developmental and language skills (skills a child is struggling with) to support and advance language and literacy learning.

TIER 3 INTENSIVE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Tier 3 language and literacy evidence-based strategies are designed and delivered to intensively meet those developmental and language skills that will support and advance a

child's communication, language and literacy learning. Tier 3 language and literacy evidence-based instructional strategies are intensively delivered in an individualized and explicit manner and utilized consistently across each care setting, daily routine or classroom opportunity so each child can advance through the language and literacy learning continuum.

For children with significant learning needs to most benefit from Tier 3 Intensive Support the instruction must be:

1. More systematic
2. More explicit
3. Focused on prioritized skills or content
4. Inclusive of additional opportunities to respond
5. More individualized than Tier 2 instruction

The nature of early childhood education settings may require creative problem solving when finding a location, time and scheduling for Tier 3 Intensive Instructional supports. However, providing these supports within the important developmental window from birth through kindergarten entry will provide the foundational skills needed for later school success.

Intensifying and Fading Supports

INTENSIFYING SUPPORT

One goal of the three-tiered model of prevention is to get children to benchmark milestones through the least intensive instructional support possible. The instruction at Tier 1 should be so well matched to the needs of the children that it causes most children to reach expectations. However, some children will need additional support at Tier 2 to reach those goals. A small number of children will need the most intensive additional support at Tier 3 to reach the target goals. Decisions about intensifying instruction can be made by TBTs. Intensification should be thought of in terms of the type and amount of instruction rather than thought of as layering on a different program (although sometimes that is necessary). The most intensive instruction should be reserved for students with the most need — those who have not made progress with instruction that has worked for most other children.

Instruction is thought to be more resource-intensive when it includes:

- More intentional adult-child responsive interactions throughout daily routines
- More planful play opportunities
- More frequent instructional sessions
- Longer instructional sessions (if appropriate)
- More immediate corrective feedback
- Intentional use of the child's mode of communication (e.g., sign language, device) and consulting other professionals to inform technology or other adaptive support needs

FADING SUPPORT

Some students will benefit from short-term experience with intensive instructional support. Others have an ongoing need for intensive support. Not all children who need intensive support are students with disabilities. Student teams can use progress monitoring data to test the possibility of fading support. Decisions about intensifying and fading support should be guided by district/program-wide decision rules for moving between the tiers that are grounded in data.

DECISION RULES

Teams benefit greatly from having clear and consistent decision rules about how data are used at key points in the collaborative problem-solving process. Decision rules may be established at the district or program level. All early learning programs and elementary schools in a district need to have the same decision rules, as staff and students may travel across buildings. The specific decisions and consistent parameters for making them may evolve. Listed below are a few of the key decisions that may arise, along with a few sample "rules."

Sample Tier 1 Decision Rules:

- Effectiveness of instruction, judged by percent at benchmark or target
- Fidelity of assessment, judged by the percent of assessors trained to criterion
- Fidelity and evidence of effective core instruction, intentional instruction and adult-responsive interaction, as noted through developmental observation, surveys, or assessment

Sample Tier 2 Decision Rules:

- When to consider a change to instruction or instructional supports, judged by the number of data points below the aim line
- Was instruction implemented with integrity?
- Is the strategic instruction and playful instructional supports, intentional instruction and adult responsive interaction having a positive impact?
- Do the data indicate a need to provide additional or different supports? Should the strategic intervention continue or be revised?

Sample Tier 3 Decision Rules:

- Was instruction changed after progress monitoring indicated the need?
- When to remove Tier 2 supports (child is now receiving only Tier 1), when to remove Tier 3 supports (child is now receiving Tier 1 plus Tier 2) or when to refer for further evaluation or special education evaluation?
- When to fade support?

- Are the intensive instructional supports and playful instructional supports, intentional instruction and adult responsive interaction having a positive impact as noted through developmental observation, surveys or assessment?
- Is the child moving along the communication, language and literacy continuum?
- Do the data indicate a need to provide additional or different or more intensive support? Should the intensive instruction, intervention or adaptation continue or be revised?
- Who else needs to be consulted?

Aligned System of Assessments

An aligned system requires a comprehensive and coordinated system of assessments that informs the work of system-level and child-level teams as they engage in collaborative problem-solving. Multiple sources of data are needed in a language and literacy improvement model, including child data, adult implementation data, fidelity data and input from stakeholders. Assessments, including school-wide universal screening, progress monitoring, diagnostics, informal assessments and communication or language observations are foundational to a vibrant Multi-Tiered System of Support. Real-time language and literacy assessment data drive the decision-making about instruction, intervention and extension. Implementation of an assessment system and its fidelity is the responsibility of the early childhood program director or principal. However, LLLTs provide the guidance, funding and time to make this possible.

Universal screening is an essential component of a tiered system of instructional support. Before implementing a tiered model, early childhood program leaders should adopt a formal universal screening assessment and process or evaluate the one currently being used.

Early language and literacy assessment results inform next steps. Families, community partners, early childhood professionals and school district personnel are united around the common goal of improving the communication, language and literacy skills of young children. As stakeholders analyze language and literacy assessment data, they better understand the level of skills children have, the impact of intentional instruction on those skills and the specific goals they all want children to achieve.

Multiple sources of data support decision-making. LLLTs are responsible for creating an assessment system that includes tools for decision-making for each site to implement at the systems and student levels. Multiple sources of data are needed in a schoolwide literacy model, including system-level data that includes implementation data, child-level data and input from stakeholders. Systems data from the Ready Schools Language and Literacy Assessment Tool, combined with adult implementation data and other pertinent data including child outcome data, are used within the collaborative problem-solving process to develop program action plans aimed at increasing child language and literacy outcomes. Assessments are used to make decisions in the collaborative problem-solving model at two levels as displayed in the chart below.

Table 8. Assessments are used to make decisions in the collaborative problem-solving model at two levels

System-level	Child level
• Information about literacy systems, operations, environment and processes that can either support or hinder effective instruction (such as schedule, grouping practices, and district policies) • Information about adult implementation (such as walk-throughs)	• Information about a child and groups of children

SYSTEM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

Ohio's Ready School Guide for Language and Literacy offers the Language and Literacy Assessment Tool (LLAT) to help leadership teams evaluate and improve their literacy system. The LLAT identifies effective practices and programs, areas needing improvement, and future implementation needs. It also considers existing language and literacy data.

Adult implementation data can inform the system-level assessment. Adult behavior in early childhood classrooms is crucial for language and literacy development. Program directors should use brain and research knowledge to analyze child data, coach and support teachers, and hold them accountable for evidence-based practices. Teams should evaluate existing measures and research tools to measure adult implementation. Instructional observation assessments can provide feedback on teacher-child interactions and practice effectiveness.

CHILD-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

As discussed earlier, the skills that indicate reading ability at the end of first grade include phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge and oral language. Babies, toddlers and preschoolers lay the foundation for these skills by engaging in back-and-forth conversations with adults, communicating through sounds, gestures, facial expressions and words, all while interacting with their surroundings through strong relationships with significant adults. All of these are crucial for language, literacy, and eventually, reading. It is essential to intentionally teach, monitor, and assess communication, language, and literacy skills in early childhood settings. Frequent monitoring helps educators adjust instruction, environment, and adult interactions to support language and literacy learning when children face difficulties. Over time, instruction can have a significant impact on children's learning.

A comprehensive approach to language and literacy assessment. An effective assessment system includes formative assessment, screening all children for risk of reading difficulty (universal screening), an instructionally relevant diagnostic assessment that informs language and literacy instruction (diagnostic assessment), ongoing formative tools that guide

real-time changes to instruction (progress monitoring) and summative assessments that can be aggregated to examine trends and patterns.

Babies and toddlers should be observed for progressing through language and literacy and communication developmental milestones using a **standardized method** to screen, gather and document information. Parent and caregiver questionnaires are a useful addition to better understanding a child's social communication, language and literacy development. Often a child's medical information is helpful as well. Progress monitoring information is crucial to planning intentional instruction and the next steps.

Programs should analyze the tools they are already using for programmatic requirements. Are social communication, language and literacy markers found within current existing tools? Are screenings or parent surveys that include language and literacy data already in place?

1. Universal Screening. Answers the question: **Which students and systems are at risk?**

What is Screening? Universal screening assessments are brief, standardized, reliable and valid direct measures of essential literacy skills that both indicate and predict the overall reading (language and communication) health of all children. Standardized developmental, language and social communication screening measures provide useful information, especially for infants and toddlers. Effective universal screening assessments are direct measures of essential early communication, language and literacy skills. The goal is to identify the level of skill in these key domains that predicts future reading comprehension.

What is the Goal of Screening? The goal of universal screening is the early identification of children who may not be on track to reach communication, language and literacy outcomes so they can be supported to reach important future literacy benchmarks.

Who Should Be Screened? All children who have the response capabilities required by the assessment should be screened with materials that match the age or year of school of the student. Individual decisions should be made about the appropriateness of screening students with hearing impairments, students who stutter, English learners and students with significant cognitive and sensory impairments. Standardized developmental, language and social communication screening measures and surveys can provide useful information for these children.

Who Collects Screening Data? Screening assessments can be conducted efficiently by teams of educators that include administrators, related service personnel, reading support staff, early childhood classroom teachers and paraprofessionals. Parent survey information (communication, language, social) provides helpful screening information.

Who Uses Screening Data? Screening assessment data are used by LLLTs and SPTs (Child Study Teams) to identify the problem at step 1 of the collaborative problem-solving process. Screening data are used by early childhood classroom teachers to understand the magnitude of need present in their classrooms and programs. In addition, teachers use screening data to

direct intentional support to individual children who may be at risk of communication or language difficulties leading to future reading difficulties.

Table 9. Scheduling Universal Screening

Time of Year	Suggested Timing
Beginning of Year	About two weeks after the start of school (or after enrollment)
Middle of Year	One to two weeks after the winter break
End of Year	Two to four weeks before the end of the school year

Additional Universal Screening Scheduling Considerations:

- Plan roughly the same number of instructional days between the beginning and middle-of-the-year screening as between middle and end-of-year screening; 12-month programs should screen quarterly
- Balance considerations of screening as soon as possible so data can be used against letting students settle in after breaks
- Collect all screening data across the program within a two-week window
- Allow an additional week to enter scores and generate reports to use for decision-making

Table 110 Criteria that must be met for assessments used for universal screening

Criteria	Description
Standardized	The assessment is given and scored under standardized conditions (such as directions, timing, prompts and scoring rules).
Brief	Testing time should be minimized.
Direct	Children should be asked to produce the desired behavior (for example, point to or name a letter, produce a sound or provide a verbal response).
Reliable and Valid	The test should measure what it claims to measure. Consistent results should be demonstrated over time and across assessors.
Indicator	The test should indicate the essential early language and literacy skills
Predictive	Performance on the screening assessment should predict important future language and literacy outcomes.
Useful Reporting	The scores should be able to be reported immediately after students are assessed and include reports for individuals and groups of students.

2. Diagnostic Assessment. Answers the question: **What does each child need to be taught next?**

Who Should Be Given Diagnostic Assessments? Diagnostic assessments can be given to children whose screening data indicates a need for additional support and to those for whom the teacher is unsure what to teach next.

What is a Diagnostic Assessment? Diagnostic assessments are in-depth, dynamic measures of essential language and literacy skills that are linked directly to instruction. Diagnostic assessments typically are untimed and can be formal or informal. The youngest infants and toddlers flagged for diagnostic assessment based on screening results may benefit from the input of a Speech and Language Pathologist.

What is the Goal of Diagnostic Assessment? The goal of diagnostic assessment is to identify a child's current level of skill and find the next skill in the instructional sequence that needs to be taught.

Who Collects Diagnostic Data? Diagnostic assessments may be given by teachers, related service personnel and reading support staff.

Who Uses Diagnostic Data? Diagnostic assessments are used by student teams to plan individual instruction and intervention.

3. Progress Monitoring. Answers the question: **Is the child learning with the current type and amount of instruction or should instruction be adjusted?**

What is Progress Monitoring Assessment? Progress monitoring is the repeated measurement over time to evaluate instructional effectiveness. Formal progress monitoring involves repeating measurement with alternate forms of the same task to measure growth over time. Progress monitoring for systems can involve measuring the growth of implementation and adult behaviors. Early care and education programs may use a **standardized process** of developmental assessment, parent survey and observation to progress monitor language and literacy growth for infants and toddlers to gather information for instructional decision-making. Informal progress monitoring involves targeted teacher observation and judgment about performance over time.

What is the Goal of Progress Monitoring? The goal is to have data that enables decisions to be made with multiple data points so instruction and implementation can be adjusted in real-time if sufficient progress has not been made rather than waiting until the end of the school year.

Who Should Be Given Progress Monitoring Assessments? Formal progress monitoring is used when the instruction has been changed to improve literacy performance. Informal progress monitoring is used with **all** children through observation, checklists and anecdotal notes.

Who Collects Progress Monitoring Data? Progress monitoring assessments may be given by teachers, related service personnel and reading support staff.

Who Uses Progress Monitoring Data? Formal progress monitoring is analyzed and used by leadership teams to monitor the implementation of action plans and by teachers and student planning teams to ensure the effectiveness of instruction for individual students. Classroom teachers use informal progress monitoring to guide daily decisions about instruction.

Figure X. Progress monitoring versus monitoring progress

Progress Monitoring	Monitoring Progress
• Has standardized delivery • Requires valid and reliable tools • Frequency depends on intensity of instruction • Requires ongoing data for interpretation • Used for entitlement decisions • Requires graphed data • Used for students verified as at risk	• Can occur daily • Happens during instruction • Provides immediate data • Often informal • Used for all students • Uses formative assessments • Typically not validated

There are important distinctions between progress monitoring and monitoring progress. Progress monitoring supports sound instructional and programmatic decision-making while monitoring progress supports keeping students actively engaged and checking their progress to determine if a change in instruction is needed. Monitoring progress may be a source of informal or diagnostic data when progress monitoring shows slow or no growth.

4. Outcome Evaluation. Answers the question: **Did we meet our goals?**

What is Outcome Evaluation? Outcome evaluation assessments are summative measures of attaining early childhood language and literacy program expectations. Outcome evaluation can be formal or informal.

What is the Goal of Outcome Evaluation? The goal is to know if program expectations have been met.

Who Should Be Given Outcome Evaluation Assessments? All students should participate in either formal or informal evaluations of their progress and growth across the school year.

Who Collects Outcome Evaluation Assessments? Classroom teachers give outcome evaluations.

Who Uses Outcome Evaluation Data? Leadership teams and student teams can use screening assessments such as Acadience Reading as outcome measures when data are aggregated and trends are examined over time. In addition, existing formal and informal program accountability measures that assess student performance relative to early learning standards also function as outcome measures.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Leading the implementation of a program-wide assessment system is the responsibility of the site director. However, the program wide LLLT provides the guidance, funding and time to make this possible.

Conducting an Assessment Audit. Programs should carefully analyze all the assessments they already use as there may be opportunities to utilize overlapping data to effectively gather and use the most important language and literacy data. For example, early learning programs in Ohio already use the program and implementation assessments (such as ELLCO, SUTQ or a curriculum-based assessment) that may include markers for the implementation of language and literacy best practices that can inform a language and literacy assessment audit. LLLTs are responsible for conducting an audit of the assessment system.

When district teams discover multiple assessments used for the same purpose, they should make decisions to discontinue one of them when possible. When there is no assessment for a purpose or age group, they should select an assessment to fill the gap. **Some assessments, like curriculum-based measures, can be used for multiple purposes, but it is important to consider the reliability and validity of the assessment for these multiple purposes**. For example, curriculum-based measures may, when reliable and valid, be used for both universal screening and progress monitoring.

Training and Ongoing Fidelity Checks. All assessors should be trained in standardized administration and scoring of the assessments, provided with refresher training and checked for the fidelity of test administration at least annually. All staff should be trained in assessment interpretation and how to communicate results to families in ordinary, understandable terms. To reduce error, there should be periodic checks on the accuracy of scoring and the match between scores on test booklets and data system entries.

The following strategies can be used for ensuring quality data collection:

- Provide high-quality professional development on the administration and scoring of reading assessments (which may include developmentally based language or communication assessments).
- Provide brief "refresher" training for teachers and staff who conduct language observations/assessments and reading assessments.
- Have someone "shadow score" alongside individuals collecting assessment data. This individual can provide feedback to the tester about the efficiency of the standardized administration and scoring procedures.
- After testing is completed, choose a random sample of tests (approximately 20%) and check scoring according to the guidelines. If scoring errors are identified on more than 10% of the assessments, recheck all the assessments.

Want to Learn More?
Implementing Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement: Resources for School Leaders provides more supports on **multi-tiered system of supports.**

POST-READING SELF REFLECTION

Component	**Use the "traffic light scale" to evaluate your center or program's current level of implementation.** **Red** – Exploration **Orange** – Installation **Yellow** – Initial Implementation **Green** – Full implementation	**Using the scale below, determine how important this component is to you.** **Red** – Not at All **Orange** – Somewhat **Yellow** – Very **Green** – Extremely
Aligned System of Assessment		
System-Level Assessments		
Child-Level Assessments		
Tier 1 Instructional Supports		
Tier 2 Instructional Supports		
Tier 3 Instructional Supports		
Intensifying and Fading Instructional Support		
Decision Rules		

Summary

The path to becoming a reader begins at birth. Early care and education leaders need a solid understanding of how infants, toddlers and preschool children progress along the language and literacy trajectory, how children learn to read, why some struggle and what can be done to support all children at the emergent and early literacy level.

Program administrators, including early care and education directors and principals, are key leaders of the collaborative problem-solving culture, planning and ongoing implementation processes that are needed to improve the language and literacy outcomes for all young learners and to ensure later successful reading outcomes. Leaders must support teachers and remove barriers to create a coherent multi-tiered system of supports that includes effective teaming, screening, assessment, progress monitoring, decision rules and tiered instructional support so babies, toddlers and preschoolers can begin the journey along that path to later become readers. When administrators are knowledgeable about language and literacy and the science of reading and have the skills to lead their staffs through the collaborative problem-solving process, they can facilitate a system of responsive (adult-child) interactions, professional learning and coaching, science-informed language and literacy intentional instructional practices, assessments, interventions and progress monitoring to create joyful, equitable and responsive learning environments that support teachers and, importantly, all infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families as they travel the trajectory to become readers.

> Early care and education professionals aren't teaching babies, toddlers and preschoolers to read – they are supporting their language and literacy foundation so they can become readers.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Creating a Shared Vision for Language and Literacy Development

EXAMPLE 1

The vision for ABC Early Childhood program is to provide an equitable opportunity to partner with families for each learner to develop the social-emotional, language and literacy skills that will prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond.

EXAMPLE 2

At School A, we believe every child can learn and improve their language and literacy skills. We create a positive learning environment with consistent routines and support for social and emotional development. We educate families on language, literacy, and social and emotional strategies. Our evidence-based and developmentally appropriate instructional practices align with the Simple View of Reading. We monitor growth through regular assessments and provide appropriate interventions to help every child reach their full potential.

Appendix B: Teaming Overview

Type	Who	Meeting Frequency	Tasks
Language and Literacy Leadership Team (LLLT)	• District and building administrators • Teacher and staff representatives from each building • Parent and community representatives	Quarterly (more often at first)	• Set a vision, priorities and expectations • Review data to develop, implement and evaluate an action plan • Review and establish policies so they are supportive of, not barriers to, implementation of the model • Provide support for implementation (funding, PD, coaching) • Guide teacher-based teams
Teacher Based Team	• All early care and education professionals • Related service staff • Coach	Every other week to monthly	• Review classroom level data to develop, implement and evaluate building action plan • Guide student teams
Intervention Assistance Team or Child Study Teams	• Teachers • Parents • Child when appropriate	Yearly or more frequently at first	• Review individual child level data to develop, implement and evaluate student intervention plan

Appendix C: Four Purposes of Assessment

Purpose	Question Answered	Characteristics
Screening	Who needs support?	• Brief • Standardized • Predictive • Indicators
Diagnostic	What support is needed?	• Standardized or not • Specific and detailed • Closely linked to instruction
Progress Monitoring	Is the support working?	• Brief • Standardized • Sensitive to change • Alternate forms at same difficulty level
Outcome Evaluation	Did the support work?	• Standardized • Norm-referenced

Appendix D: Sample Routines

HALF DAY

Time	Activity
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	• Arrival/Morning routine • Small-group instruction for Group 1
8:30 – 9:10 a.m.	Whole-group time/Circle time
9:10 – 9:25 a.m.	Handwashing, diapering/bathroom and snack
9:25 – 10:30 a.m.	• Learning center time • Small-group instruction for Groups 2 and 3
10:30 – 10:45 a.m.	Handwashing and diapering/bathroom
10:45 – 11:15 a.m.	Outside/Gross Motor Activities
11:15 – 11:30 a.m.	Whole-group time/Circle time
11:30 a.m.	Dismissal

FULL DAY

Time	Activity
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	• Arrival/Morning routine • Small-group instruction for Group 1
8:30 – 9:10 a.m.	Whole-group time/Circle time
9:10 – 9:25 a.m.	Handwashing, diapering/bathroom and snack
9:25 – 10:30 a.m.	• Learning center time • Small-group instruction for Groups 2 and 3
10:30 – 10:45 a.m.	Handwashing and diapering/bathroom
10:45 – 11:15 a.m.	Outside/Gross Motor Activities
11:15 – 11:30 a.m.	Whole-group time/Circle time
11:30 – 11:40 a.m.	Handwashing, diapering/bathroom, prepare for lunch
11:40 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.	Lunch
12:15 – 12:30 p.m.	Quiet reading time and prepare for nap
12:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Nap time
2:30 – 2:45 p.m.	Snack and read aloud
2:45 – 3:45 p.m.	Outside/Gross Motor Activities
3:45 – 4:00 p.m.	Handwashing and diapering/bathroom
4:00 – 4:30 p.m.	• Learning center time • Small-group instruction for Group 4
4:30 p.m.	Dismissal

Appendix E: Sample Decision Rules - Preschool