



Roles and Responsibilities: Aligning to Science of Reading Practices

**Strategies for District, School, and Classroom Leaders to
Successfully Implement Science of Reading Best Practices**

Introduction	3
District Leaders	4
Site Leader	6
Classroom Teachers and Interventionists	8

Introduction

This guide provides specific, structured questions, considerations, and action steps for district leaders, school site leaders, classroom teachers, and interventionists to catalyze the implementation and support best practices of the Science of Reading.

Educators know that young students' learn-to-read years are crucial for later achievement in school and beyond. Studies have shown that students who leave grade 3 without knowing how to read have higher dropout rates and lower earning potential than their classmates who have acquired basic phonics, decoding, and comprehension skills. While there always has been general agreement on why early literacy is so important, until recently, there has been substantial disagreement on how to help students achieve foundational reading skills. That is changing.

Through decades of research, academic experts, research scientists, and literacy professionals have identified a strategic and intentional design of structured learning experiences that have been proven to produce reading literacy at scale. This approach is aligned with Science of Reading best practices. Many school districts have incorporated some strategies based on the Science of Reading in their teaching practices in recent years, but few districts have had all the elements combined in a manner that research has shown to be most effective. Helping educators transition to these these research-based practices, which may differ from classroom practices they have embraced for years, is challenging.

Nonetheless, district and school leaders are urging classroom teachers to adopt Science of Reading aligned instructions to mitigate persistent opportunity gaps, and to address decades of lackluster reading results demonstrated by NAEP and other high-stake tests. The urgent task before administrators is to disseminate these practices to teachers, support them so they can implement with fidelity, and monitor progress.

ROLE:

District Leaders

Top Considerations as Districts Transition to Science of Reading-Aligned Instruction



Developing a common understanding and shared goal:

How can we communicate to all community members and stakeholders that decades of data and research have informed Science of Reading practices that will produce effective outcomes for student learning?



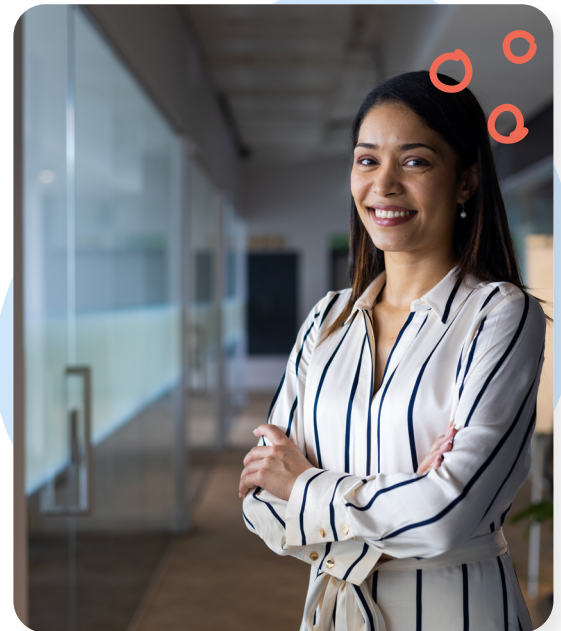
Generating stakeholder buy-in: How can we establish a culture that reinforces the implementation of a curriculum and pedagogy grounded in the Science of Reading across the community of teachers, coaches, parents, and administrators?



Allocating resources: Which tools and resources do we have in place—including time, materials, personnel, and professional learning—to support the implementation of programs that are aligned to the Science of Reading? And, which resources are no longer supporting high-quality practice and should be eliminated?



Targeting declining reading performance with urgency: How do we use principles aligned to the Science of Reading to quickly address persistently low reading performance?



QUICK TIP

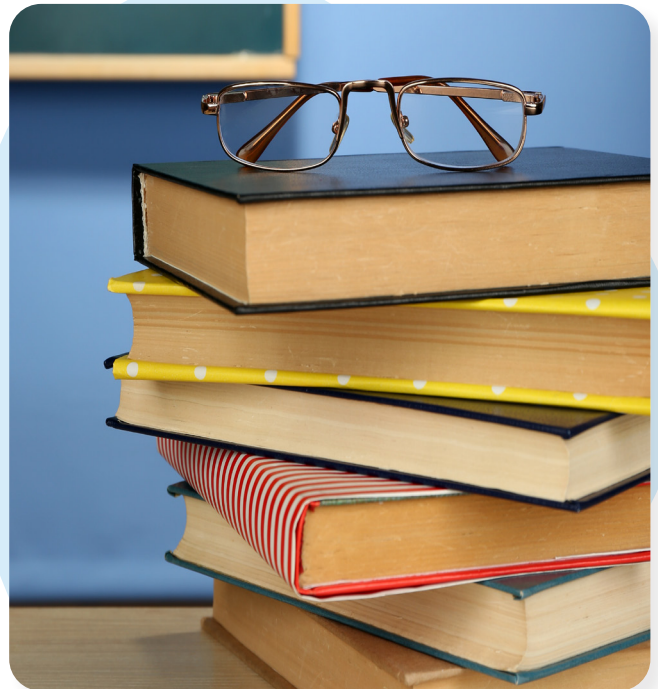
Communicate using clear benchmarks of developmental appropriateness and individual performance data. The Science of Reading defines the sequence of skills, goals, and resource allocation that will produce measurable impacts on students. It provides guidance on the content to be taught and the steps necessary to meet those outcomes. District leaders should communicate expectations and progress in a way that is tightly aligned to this sequence of skills and these developmental milestones.

ROLE:

District Leaders

Take Action:

- 1** Establish a clear, succinct, and available source of definition for the community to understand what is meant by the Science of Reading. This should include a website, district experts to call upon for assistance, and a portfolio of ongoing professional learning for practitioners that is easily accessible.
- 2** Invest in training to ensure that staff understand strategies to align Science of Reading practices, the interplay of each of the different components, and what actions they can take to assist students in progressing to reading fluency. This plan should address the different needs of experienced teachers and new members of the teaching profession.
- 3** Assign site-level experts and partner them with experts from other sites to form a team to collaborate, share ideas, and bring best practices to their building colleagues.
- 4** Ensure that every site leader has an implementable plan to engage teachers in peer-to-peer learning. A powerful learning modality is teachers observing their peers and engaging in reflection on what they have learned. It is important for district leaders to ensure that every building site leader has a plan with a calendar of implementation, data gathering and review, and transparency within their school and among their colleagues.



ROLE:

Site Leaders

Top Considerations as Principals and Site Leaders Implement Science of Reading-Aligned Practices Within Their School



Balancing competing priorities and needs: The new approach to instruction will require additional training. How can we continue to respect this time commitment while also being responsive to the urgency of ensuring students' literacy growth and development?



Communicating a collaborative approach: How can we be explicit with our educators that we are partnering with them to learn best practices, design instruction, and invest in resources to support this transition?



Ensuring fidelity of implementation: How can we ensure that classroom teachers have access to (and allotted time for) necessary resources, ongoing training, professional learning communities, and other forms of support to ensure effective and successful implementation of Science of Reading principles?



Engaging families: How can we engage with families and students through the process and effectively communicate, in a non-technical manner, that reading instruction is shifting to promote better literacy development for students? And, how can we empower families with ways to support their students at home?



QUICK TIP



Ensure that teachers are clear on the new materials and approaches that should be used in the classroom. Teachers may be reluctant to stop using the approach they have deployed for years, even if it has been proven ineffective. Partner with teachers to identify Science of Reading-aligned resources and prioritize providing them for students and classrooms. Persistent use of the right materials will generate growth in student achievement.

ROLE:

Site Leaders

Take Action:

- 1 Become an expert.** Administrators should be knowledgeable on the approaches to instruction aligned to the Science of Reading, what is expected within a grade level, and be able to speak to the developmental stages across grade levels. Equip yourself with all the information you expect your staff to know, spend time reading literature on Science of Reading, and discuss experiences and implementation with other administrative colleagues.
- 2 Define expectations and provide support.** It is essential that teachers know and understand what they need to be doing to promote literacy. These expectations should be reinforced at faculty meetings, in grade level professional learning communities, and with the broader community. Pairing these expectations with meaningful professional learning to help teachers understand the research and plan instruction will lead to a stronger implementation.
- 3 Audit your assessments.** Finding the right cadence of assessment, data review, and refining practice will ensure that students are progressing in their literacy development while not losing critical instructional hours to excessive testing. Some digital reading platforms aligned with Science of Reading practices provide embedded formative assessments that can reduce the assessment burden and provide actionable and meaningful insights



ROLE:

Classroom Teachers and Interventionists

Top Considerations for Classroom Teachers and Interventionists as They Align Literacy Instruction and Student Learning with Best Practices for Science of Reading



Patience and understanding with the process:

How do I approach this transition to Science of Reading principles with an understanding that changing instructional design takes time and practice? How do I have grace with myself and others as we work together to make changes that will benefit students?



Targeting gaps and accelerating learning: How do I utilize these Science of Reading practices and principles to immediately target gaps that have emerged from disruptions in learning so that students do not fall further behind? And, what assessments will I use to identify needs and plan instruction?



Navigating new and old resources: How do I assess which existing resources align with Science of Reading; which do not and should be culled; and what new resources I need in order to ensure that reading instruction fully adheres to the Science of Reading research and principles?



QUICK TIP



Research has shown that implementing Science of Reading principles with fidelity is critical for successful outcomes and significantly improves literacy development. Trust the well-documented process, sequence, and practices to transform learning for your students. Each educator who provides reading instruction is vital to ensuring that all students receive reading instruction and support that is fully aligned with the Science of Reading. With a robust implementation of these principles, schools will see less need for intervention or remediation and students will develop as capable and confident readers and learners.

ROLE:

Classroom Teachers and Interventionists

Take Action:

- 1** Dedicate time to literacy acquisition and improvement. Protect the time allotted for reading instruction and practice to ensure that students do not lose any critical instructional minutes. To maximize the impact of this time, make sure that the materials students are using fully align with the Science of Reading. This includes having students practice with decodable readers or texts rather than leveled books.
- 2** Observe and understand your students' entry skills and identify needs early. Universal screeners help educators to understand where students are from the start and what they need to move forward. A common assessment tool to gauge student skills upon entry to kindergarten, first, and second grade provides clarity to classroom teachers and informs the allocation of supplemental resources and support.
- 3** Provide structured, explicit instruction. The Science of Reading research has shown that literacy development happens in a defined sequence across five foundational components and requires explicit instruction and guidance. Because of this, a systematic instructional approach is required for optimal literacy growth.
- 4** Leverage data to track progress. Many early literacy solutions have formative assessment, progress monitoring, and other types of reporting embedded within the system. Utilizing these types of assessments can provide key insights and real-time data on student progress. And, unlike lengthier diagnostics and assessments, they preserve time for important instruction and practice.



Conclusion

Access these helpful resources to learn more about how you can better support science of reading initiatives in your organization.

- [ExcelinEd Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy Toolkit](#)
- [IES Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- [The Science of Reading Defining Guide](#)
- [Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition from Novice to Expert](#)



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