



## A Roadmap for Teaching All Students to Read

Dear Vermont Educator,

Great news! Across Vermont and the nation, people are talking about teaching *all students* to read! Achieving this goal will help ensure a child's future of personal, educational, and professional growth. Fortunately decades of scientific reading research has shown that [95% percent of students](#) can learn to read with highly-effective, evidence-based instruction.

Imagine a school or district as a four-legged stool. Each leg is essential for students learning to read:

1. **Teacher preparation:** Teachers need direct training and coaching to grow their expertise in the five components of reading, especially in phonemic awareness and phonics to help students “crack the code” of literacy. Most preservice training has emphasized the top strands of the Reading Rope, and the vocabulary and comprehension areas of the Five Components of Reading. Unfortunately, to the detriment of many students, most preservice programs have overlooked the bottom strands. Application of research across disciplines is driving important changes to inservice training and higher education. Every elementary and English Language Arts teacher, special educator, and reading specialist requires this expertise to teach our complex, rule-based English language, identify gaps, and provide immediate corrective feedback that improves student understanding and skills.
2. **Student learning:** In the classroom, all students receive direct, explicit, multimodal, and cumulative instruction to attain mastery in the five components of reading. Teachers instruct children to link speech sounds with letters and letter combinations that develop decoding, spelling, fluency, and comprehension. This mental process stores information and grows vocabulary for long-term use, skills essential for learning at all ages. Understanding morphology (the meaning of word parts, such as prefixes *ex-*, *pre-*, *sub-*;

roots **chron, spect, tract**; and suffixes **-ion, -ly, -ous**) strengthens decoding, spelling, comprehension, and lexical quality. Students falling behind receive targeted instruction to close underlying gaps in alignment with grade-level curriculums for a double-dose of skill building.

3. **Targeted assessments:** Schools need to adopt brief, reliable, valid, normed-based assessments for early identification of children falling behind in basic literacy skills, and to identify the 10-20% of those with dyslexia, who will need ongoing instruction and support. Progress assessments at least 3x/year continually monitor reading performance. Normed assessments include (A) phonemic awareness, (B) letter naming, (C) letter sound correspondence, (D) real- and nonword reading, (E) oral text reading accuracy and rate, (F) reading comprehension, and (G) spelling. For handwriting, including proper pencil grip and letter formation, teachers can use criterion-based measures. In third grade, teachers can incorporate keyboarding using an effective program so typing becomes as second-nature as handwriting. Individual student performance on assessments drive instructional decisions, strategies, and groupings in the classroom, intervention, and services in all grade levels, PreK – 12.
4. **Equity:** Evidence-based assessment and instruction significantly improve reading performance for children of color, children from low-income families, children with special needs, and English Language Learners.

A school or district reading plan must avoid disproven, though commonplace, approaches that are ineffective and actually harm student reading. These include color overlays, repeated reading without structural word analysis, and 3-cueing, also called MSV (meaning, structure/syntax, and visual). Omnipresent curricula, such as Calkins' Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell's programs, are much criticized in reading science journals for neglecting to provide an evidence-based instructional sequence.

### **Why change reading instruction and assessment NOW?**

Once among the top 10 in reading, Vermont now ranks 21st in the nation. **Currently only 1 of 3 third graders reads on grade level.** What's more, the proportion of those reading at the lowest level in Vermont – below basic – widened from [27% to 39% during 2002-2022](#). This decline predates the pandemic and includes many non-disabled children. Fewer than 1 in 5 low-income students read proficiently. Only [6% of children in special education](#) (1 in 16) are proficient readers though more than three-quarters receive literacy services. Racially diverse and English Learners have been disproportionately harmed when taught with disproven reading methods.

**Closing the literacy achievement gap will improve our schools and cost less.** When schools effectively teach all students to read and write, [behavior, attendance, and school climate](#) greatly improve. Decades of research has found poor reading associated with [mental-health problems](#),

increased likelihood of [failing and dropping out of school](#), [reduced employment opportunities](#), greater [need for public assistance](#), [incarceration](#), [poorer health outcomes](#), [homelessness](#), and [shorter life expectancy](#). These outcomes not only devastate families, but are costing a fortune to address.

**We all want children to love to read, *but you can't love what you can't do*.**

**Real change in reading instruction supports equity.** A love of reading requires both strong foundational skills *and* immersion in background knowledge, vocabulary, and good literature. Over many years, an absence of consensus on best practices resulted in English-speaking countries getting caught up in [whole-language trends](#) that have failed millions of children. Today we have definitive evidence from randomized control trials conducted around the world that improves teacher preparation, instruction, and assessment, all of which place equity at the forefront.

A successful school roadmap includes adopting the tools and enlisting the support of organizations with strong track records in teaching all children to read. Behind every effective tool are well-trained teachers who pivot instruction based on student learning needs. Here are a few helpful resource recommendations that support evidence-based literacy practices. Thank you for your commitment to Vermont students.

Curriculum & Assessment	Teacher Training
<a href="#">The 95 Percent Group</a>	<a href="#">AIM Pathways</a>
<a href="#">Acadience</a>	<a href="#">Children's Dyslexia Centers</a>
<a href="#">DIBELS 8th Edition</a>	<a href="#">HILL for Literacy</a>
<a href="#">Equipped for Reading Success</a>	<a href="#">Institute for Multi-Sensory Education</a>
<a href="#">Foundations</a>	<a href="#">Keys to Literacy</a>
<a href="#">Heggerty</a>	<a href="#">Lexia LETRS</a>
<a href="#">National Council on Teacher Quality</a>	<a href="#">The Reading League</a>
<a href="#">The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation Tool</a>	<a href="#">The Stern Center</a>
<a href="#">Wilson Learning Systems</a>	<a href="#">University of Florida Literacy Institute</a>

Sincerely,

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