

Prekindergarten Practice: Build Children's Knowledge of Letters and Sounds

Purpose

This document provides prekindergarten educators with information about a high-leverage, evidence-based practice recommended in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guide, [Preparing Young Children for School](#).¹

Introduction

Building children's knowledge of letters and sounds is an evidence-based practice with a strong level of evidence for student achievement and a critical foundational skill for early readers. Page 46 of the practice guide states:

Exploring and identifying the sounds of language is important for developing literacy. Awareness of the sounds of language, also referred to as phonological awareness, is essential for helping children begin to understand that words are made of sounds, and that when blended, those sounds make words. Children's early knowledge of letters and sounds will help children learn how to read words and may contribute to their development of other literacy skills, like spelling... Preschool teachers can help children begin to understand the often-complex relationship between sounds and letters. Teachers can help children learn to listen for sounds and connect them to the letters they see. With practice and repetition, children will be able to recognize many letters and identify some of the sounds those letters make.

For more information, see [Resources for Educators](#) on the WWC.

ESSA Level of Evidence

ESSA levels of evidence are the result of a synthesis of current evidence-based research. Below is the level of evidence for this recommendation:

- **Tier 1 – Strong Evidence**

¹ [What Works Clearinghouse/IES Practice Guides](#) provide recommendations for educators of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes. WWC/IES Practice Guides were developed by a panel of literacy experts based on reviews of research, practitioner experiences, and expert opinions.

Contact Information:

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See the [full practice guide](#), [Practice Guide Review Protocol: Preparing Young Children for School](#), and [Studies Reviewed for the Preparing Young Children for School Practice Guide](#) for more information about specific studies and an overview of the evidence for this recommendation. For more information about levels of evidence, see the REL document [ESSA Tiers of Evidence: What You Need to Know](#).

How to Carry Out the Recommendation

Listed below are ways to [build children’s knowledge of letters and sounds](#). See the pages of the guide referenced next to each instructional practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

- Initially focus on listening for sounds in words (46-47).
- Intentionally introduce a new letter and its sound (47-49).
- Use materials and activities that allow children to practice identifying letters and their corresponding sounds (49-50).
- Include print throughout the classroom to provide additional opportunities to discuss letters and their sound (50-51).

Connections to Literacy Essential Practices

[Literacy Essentials](#) provide evidence- and research-based approaches educators can use to support early literacy. This resource was introduced to Vermont through work done with [Dr. Nell Duke](#) and includes classroom practices teachers can use daily to implement the recommendations in the WWC practice guides. See the page number referenced next to each Essential Practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

[Literacy Essential Practices for Prekindergarten](#)

- **Essential #1:** Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play and throughout the learning environment (3)
- **Essential #2:** Read aloud with reference to print (3)
- **Essential #4:** Play with sounds inside words (4)
- **Essential #5:** Brief, clear, systematic, and explicit instruction in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and how the letters are shaped and formed (5)
- **Essential #6:** Interactions around writing (5)
- **Essential #8:** Provision of abundant reading, listening, and viewing material in the classroom (6)
- **Essential Practice #9:** Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children’s language and literacy development that informs their education (7)