



Reading Education Aligned to Data and Science

Start the Dialogue - Questions to Start Conversations with District Leadership and Staff

School districts with effective reading instruction and improving proficiency rates have three things in common:

1. They provide training to teachers on reading instructional practices that are aligned to the Science of Reading.
2. They provide support to teachers in their classroom so they can implement what they learned in their training.
3. They provide high quality instructional materials that are aligned with the evidence-based practices and support that teachers are receiving.

Lesson Learned from Mississippi: Teachers who were not consistently implementing what they learned in their training sessions were less effective. Proficiency rates improved when teachers were provided with hands-on support and modeling (e.g. coaching) in the classroom and when instructional materials were aligned with evidence-based practices.

These are the essential elements for school districts that are taking a systemic approach to aligning reading instruction to the Science of Reading.

- Educators and Leaders
- Curriculum
- Assessments and Reporting Structures
- Interventions for Struggling Readers
- Resources

We encourage you to engage with your district leadership and staff to learn more about their approach to improving reading instruction in your district's classrooms. **The following questions developed by our expert board can help guide your conversations.**

Educators and Leaders: Teachers and school leaders must be in lock step to ensure that teachers receive proper training and resources and are supported in implementing changes to instructional practices.

- How are the superintendent and administration publicly communicating about the need and use of practices aligned with the Science of Reading (SOR)?
- Are school board members knowledgeable and aware of the need for evidence-based practices aligned with the SOR?
 - **What actions are you taking to ensure budget funds are supporting teacher training and instruction in the classroom coupled with coaching support and aligned resources?**
- Are senior administration leaders qualified to lead a shift to instructional practices aligned to the SOR?
 - Have district administration leaders and staff been trained in the SOR?
 - Do the staff with reading responsibilities have experience leading a change process for implementing a shift to the SOR in a school setting?
- Are teachers being trained in the SOR? (Such as the highly popular [LETRS training](#))

Educators and Leaders continued:

- How are teachers being supported in implementing what they learned in their training programs?
 - Are trained teachers being supervised by someone certified who is knowledgeable and proficient in the SOR?
 - Are teachers being supported by coaches in the classroom who have been trained in the SOR?
 - How does the district determine the qualifications of those conducting professional development and whether they are aligned with and effective at providing SOR training?

Curriculum - Selecting high quality instructional materials involves effective curricula for reading instruction which is critical to improving the reading proficiency of students. If school district staff conduct a comprehensive review to ensure the curriculum for the schools is truly aligned to the Science of Reading (SOR), this can save educators time searching for materials and ensure that all students in the district are benefiting from the same instructional practices.

- What reading curriculum is being used in the school district?
 - Is the country's reading curriculum aligned to the SOR? How do you know?
 - Is every school using the same curriculum?
 - Does the school district have a process to vet curriculum? As the SOR is gaining momentum, **many programs are saying they are aligned to SOR but, in reality and implementation, they are not.**
 - **What criteria is the district using to assure that curriculum resources and provider services do, in fact and in practice, align with SOR?**
- Does the school district have a process for monitoring whether the reading curriculum and materials are being used in the classroom align to SOR?
 - Is there a consistent application of curriculum that is aligned to the SOR?
 - Are classroom observers trained in identifying practices that are ineffective or misaligned with best, evidence-based practices?

Assessments/Reporting Structures - Measuring progress is critical for determining whether or not a school district's approach to reading is effective. Because Mississippi had an effective monitoring process in place, the team was able to identify a breakdown between the training teachers received and their implementation of what they learned in the classroom.

- Are the reading assessments that are being used aligned to the Science of Reading?
- Do the assessments monitor a student's progress in developing their foundational reading skills?
- Have all educators and administrators been trained on how to use the data from the assessments to improve instructional practices as well as identify students who need additional support?
- How are district staff monitoring assessment data and using it as part of a continuous improvement process?

Interventions - Effective interventions are critical to transform struggling readers into proficient and fluent readers. Too often, school districts purchase "off the shelf" interventions that are not necessarily aligned to the needs of struggling readers. The 2019 11th grade drop in reading proficiency from 40% to 20% is a stark illustration of the lack of effective support for struggling readers.

Interventions continued:

- What reading interventions is the school district using?
 - Are the reading interventions being used available to all schools in the district?
- Are teachers trained in reading interventions?
- Is data being collected to monitor student's progress who are receiving interventions?
- How does the district tailor interventions to the identified reading needs of students?

Resources: The reading crisis is not a matter of a lack of resources but instead a problem of using the wrong resources or a lack of effective practices in using resources aligned to the Science of Reading (SOR). The Mississippi findings are an excellent illustration. While teachers were properly trained, they were not effectively implementing what they learned in their classrooms. Once this disconnect was identified and additional resources provided, proficiency rates increased.

- How is your school district using Maryland LEADS funding to improve reading instruction?
- What are district staff doing to determine how to leverage the Blueprint resources that will be coming to the district to improve reading instruction?
- How are federal and state funds being used to improve reading instruction by implementing the Science of Reading (SOR)?
- Is the school district engaging with stakeholder organizations to develop plans to improve reading instructions?
- Equally important, what resources are you discontinuing because they do not align to the SOR?
- Will the school board earmark funds in your budget specifically for additional resources aligned to the SOR.
 - Is the school board willing to provide additional funds specific to improving reading?
 - Will you provide additional funding to support school district staff in vetting curriculum and aligned resources to ensure they are research based and aligned to the SOR?