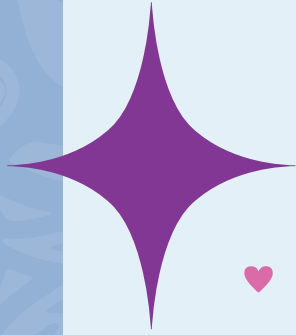




Joyful Literacy



Joyful Foundational Literacy Skills PreK-1st Grade

Pamela Spycher, PhD





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Suggested citation: Spycher, P. (2025). *Joyful foundational literacy skills: PreK-1st grade*.

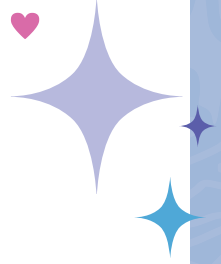
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This resource was developed through funding from the Sacramento County Office of Education, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the California Department of Education, and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West at WestEd.

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◆ Introduction

The ability to read and write is among humanity’s greatest accomplishments and enjoyments, and being able to understand and engage with a range of text types is critical to success in a society that is ever changing. Helping young children “crack the code” of written language and become independent readers and writers—who also love literacy—is one of the most important roles of a teacher in the early years of schooling. Teachers of young children must ensure that each of their students develops strong foundational literacy skills because without this foundation, they may experience academic challenges, frustration, and lifelong negative outcomes.

This resource discusses the development and instruction of foundational literacy skills, with a particular focus on how to help children learn to decode and encode words quickly to support their independent reading and writing. Given the period during which this foundational literacy skills instruction needs to take place, the primary audience for this document is preschool/transitional kindergarten (PreK/TK¹) through 1st grade teachers and those who are there to ensure teachers’ professional growth and success, such as instructional coaches, principals, pre- and in-service teacher educators, administrators, and curriculum designers.

In addition, the guidance in this resource may be useful for educators who support students in 2nd grade and beyond because some students in those later grades come to school with learning needs that involve foundational literacy skills (e.g., newly arrived immigrant students who are learning English for the first time). Appropriate modifications should be made for all students based on their ages, primary languages, abilities and disabilities, and other characteristics. This resource takes the perspective that joyful learning and a whole child approach should frame foundational literacy skills instruction for children of all ages.



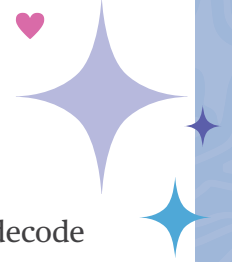
1 PreK/TK includes transitional kindergarten (TK) in TK-12 programs and preschool (PreK) programs serving 4- and 5-year-old children.

◆ Literacy: The Bigger Picture

Being able to read, write, present on, discuss, and perform texts can be enjoyable, enlightening, and rewarding. Reading literary texts, such as stories and poems, can ignite imaginations, offer access to new worlds, help people understand themselves better, and deepen empathy for other people. Reading a range of informational texts—such as science articles, biographies, and opinion pieces—enriches minds and contributes to deeper knowledge about specific topics and subjects. Knowledge is power, and the more a person can obtain through reading a variety of literary and informational texts, the deeper the well they can draw on to understand how the world and humanity work. Ultimately, reading widely can help realize the immense power each person has to shape their lives, their relationships, and the world.



Opportunities to powerfully engage with texts are limited if one has not “cracked the code” of fluent decoding and encoding. This effortless is the ultimate goal of foundational literacy skills instruction so that children’s brains are free to focus on meaning making, effective expression, and



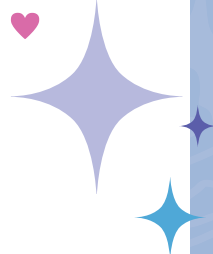
content knowledge building. Therefore, it is critical for all children to develop the ability to decode and encode independently as early as possible, preferably no later than the middle of 1st grade. One effective way of teaching decoding and encoding skills is through small-group decodable reading lessons, and this is the primary focus of this document.

In the early grades, these teacher-directed lessons involve the use of short books with words that have letter-sound correspondences that children are ready to blend together in print, along with some high-frequency words the children are learning to recognize. These little books are not designed to be great literature or conveyors of deep knowledge. Rather, they are fundamental stepping stones toward independent decoding and encoding. As part of a coherent foundational literacy skills program, small-group decodable reading lessons can ensure that all children gain independence with the code as early as possible and begin their journeys as independent and critical readers of a variety of text types across the disciplines.

Organization

This document has three main sections: (a) evidence-based guidance for teaching foundational literacy skills; (b) a classroom example showing the research in practice; and (c) a resources section with an instructional routine, tips, templates, and terms. In addition, an Appendix provides links to suggested free resources for deeper study. The first section begins with a summary of recommendations from research and an overview of children’s foundational literacy skills learning progression across the PreK/TK through 1st grade continuum. Emphasized in this section is the importance of designing and differentiating instruction based on assessment data and considering the language profiles of multilingual children who have been identified as English Learner (EL) students not yet fully proficient in English. Next, a classroom example is provided to illustrate how teachers can design teaching and learning experiences that put the research recommendations into practice. The classroom example also includes a step-by-step process for teacher-facilitated, small-group lessons.

This resource focuses on foundational literacy skills taught in English. While many of the recommendations transfer to instruction in other languages, multilingual education teachers should inform themselves about what is specific to teaching foundational literacy skills in languages other than English.



◆ Section 1: Evidence-Based Guidance for Teaching Foundational Literacy Skills

Research on Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction

Foundational literacy skills are those that allow children to decode and encode words when reading and writing. They include **letter knowledge**, **print concepts**, **phonological awareness**, **phonics and decoding**, and **fluency**. Attention to foundational literacy skills is a key element of a comprehensive approach to early literacy teaching and learning, which includes a caring and playful literacy environment and attention to children’s steady development of both higher order and foundational literacy skills. Figure 1 outlines this comprehensive and joyful approach to early literacy.

Figure 1. Joyful Literacy: A Comprehensive Approach

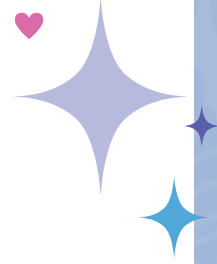
Young children need:

A **caring and playful environment** that places children’s sense of belonging, meaningful engagement, and interaction with peers as foundations of literacy learning.

Higher-order literacy skills, which includes reading comprehension, critical thinking, oral language, vocabulary, and writing.

Foundational literacy skills, which includes letter knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and decoding, and fluency.





The *California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework* (ELA/ELD Framework) (California Department of Education, 2015) and five Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse (IES WWC) Practice Guides (Baker et al., 2014; Burchinal et al., 2022; Foorman et al., 2016; Gersten et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2012) served as the primary evidence base for this resource. The ELA/ELD Framework provides guidance on evidence-based, culturally and linguistically responsive, and standards-aligned ELA/literacy and ELD instruction, including foundational literacy skills instruction, and places a special focus on Multilingual and English Learner students. The five IES WWC Practice Guides distill the most current evidence-based research on foundational literacy skills instruction. This combined research base, which (along with Shanahan et al., 2010) forms the “sciences of literacy,” recommends the following foundational literacy skills instructional and assessment practices (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Foundational Literacy Skills: Evidence-Based Instructional and Assessment Practices

Instruction

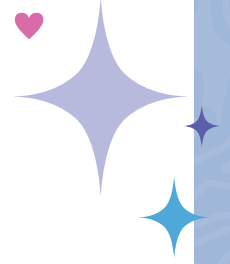
- Develop awareness of the segments of sound in speech and how they link to letters.
- Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, write words, and recognize words.
- Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.
- Provide differentiated reading instruction for students based on assessments of their current reading levels.
- Provide daily time to write for a meaningful purpose.
- Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction.
- Differentiate instruction for children classified as English Learner students and children with differing abilities.

Assessment

- Screen all students for potential reading difficulties at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year.
- Regularly monitor the progress of and assess children.
- Monitor more closely children who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities.
- For English Learner students, use home language and ELD assessment data when interpreting results.

Intensified instruction

- Provide intensive and systematic instruction in small groups to students who score below the benchmark on universal screening.
- Monitor students' progress daily in intensive small-group instruction.
- Assess students' progress at least once a month. Use these data to determine whether students continue with intervention.
- For children still making insufficient progress, schoolwide teams should design an intervention plan.



Developing Independence as Readers and Writers

Young children need to achieve “independence with the code”—that is, the ability to decode and encode on their own—by the middle of 1st grade. Children in PreK/TK begin by learning the building blocks of sounds, letters, and characters. As their knowledge develops, children put these skills together to decode and encode words independently. Because the timely development of foundational skills is so critical to both literacy and overall academic learning, children should be monitored closely to ensure that they achieve independence with the code as quickly as possible, using appropriate assessment processes and tools.

What does it take to decode in English? First, children need to be phonemically aware (most importantly, able to blend and segment phonemes),² understand the alphabetic principle,³ and be able to use this combined knowledge to generate and blend sounds from the various categories of letter-sound and spelling-sound relationships in the English language. Sequences of letter-sound instruction usually start with children learning the sounds of consonants and short vowels and then systematically progressing to consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. This is followed by learning long vowels and, as used in words ending with an e, consonant blends, diphthongs, and the various ways to represent sounds from high-frequency to rarer words. By 2nd grade children should be familiar with most spelling patterns and the sounds they generate and be able to decode two-syllable words accurately.

decode:

the ability to apply knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly blend sounds together and pronounce written words

encode:

the ability to break a spoken word into each of its individual sounds and write the letters that represent those sounds

A child sounds out, or decodes, a new word by connecting the letters or letter combinations with the sounds they represent and blends those sounds into a recognizable spoken word with its attendant meaning. Children need constant practice in decoding new words representing the letter-sound and spelling-sound patterns they have already learned. Once a child decodes a word

2 Phonics terms are explained in [Resource C](#).

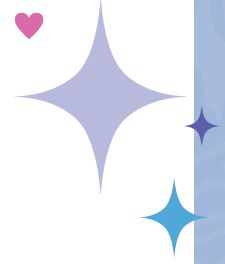
3 The alphabetic principle is the understanding that written words consist of sounds (phonemes) represented by letters and letter combinations (graphemes). This is different from knowing letter names.

several times, this sound-symbol-meaning package becomes established, and from then on, when the child encounters the word in print, the meaning is automatically understood the way a familiar word spoken is understood.

Children also need to learn to automatically recognize a significant list of high-frequency words with either irregular or uncommon spelling-sound patterns (e.g., the, some) for which decoding is less useful because these words are needed for sentences to make sense in decodable texts (e.g., *The cat has some hats*). Children need to expand their vocabularies so that more words can be recognized automatically by being decoded and understood. Finally, learning how to spell the words that consist of the spelling-sound patterns being introduced reinforces learning the alphabetic principle.







As children learn to decode an increasing number of words, this frees them to think about the meaning of what they are reading. Accomplishing the skill of decoding is empowering for children, and being able to unlock the meanings in words, sentences, and entire books can make learning to read joyful.

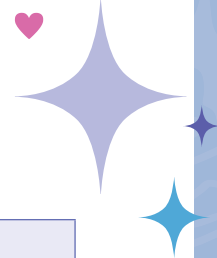







English is orthographically complex compared to more phonemic written languages such as Spanish. English has approximately 43 sounds but only 26 letters, so some sounds are represented by letter combinations such as “th” or “sh.” In contrast, in Spanish there are just about the same number of sounds as letters. In English there can be several ways of representing a sound, such as the long sound *ā* (e.g., in the words fate, bait, way, hey, straight, freight), and some letter combinations can represent different sounds in different words (such as “ough” in tough, through, and ought). This complexity can be confusing for many students and is the reason why instruction should start with simple patterns and build to the more complex ones as students develop the idea of how the alphabetic principle is used in decoding words.

In the area of encoding, children move through predictable stages as they develop from producing unrecognizable scribbles in PreK to producing letter strings to producing many recognizable words by 1st grade. Squiggles and approximations of letters and words (often seen in PreK/TK and early K) count as writing, and children should have ample opportunity to apply their emerging writing skills as this practice helps them progress to the next stage. The “Stages of Emergent Writing” table (Figure 3) illustrates young children’s typical development in writing.

Figure 3. Stages of Emergent Writing

Stage	Description	Example
Drawing	Drawings that represent writing	
Scribbling	Marks or scribbles the child intends to be writing	
Wavy scribbles or mock handwriting	Wavy scribbles that imitate cursive writing and have a left-to-right progression; the child pretends to write words	
Letter-like forms or mock letters	Letters and marks that resemble letter-like shapes	



Stage	Description	Example
Letter strings	Strings of letters that do not create words, written left to right, including uppercase and lowercase letters	
Transitional writing	Letters with spaces in between to resemble words; letters/words copied from environmental print; letters often reversed	
Invented or phonetic spelling	Different ways to represent the sounds in words; the first letter of the word or beginning and ending sounds represent the entire word	
Beginning word and phrase writing	Words with beginning, middle, and ending letter sounds; short phrases	
Conventional spelling and sentence writing	Correct spelling or words, generally the child's name and words such as <i>mom</i> and <i>dad</i> ; sentences with punctuation and correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters	

Note. Byington & Kim, 2017.

Foundational Literacy Skills Learning Progressions

As explained in the previous section, young children begin their foundational skills development with gaining phonemic awareness and learning about letters and sounds and how sounds are linked to letters. As their knowledge develops, they put these skills together to decode and encode words, and this provides the foundation for their development of more advanced skills as they progress through the early elementary years. By understanding the progression of skills in children's language and literacy development across the PreK/TK through 1st grade continuum, teachers can better support individual children in becoming confident and joyful readers and writers who love literacy.

Foundational literacy skills development occurs along a continuum, and literacy standards help teachers ensure children make steady progress along this continuum. Standards (sometimes called “learning foundations” in PreK/TK) are end-of-year outcomes that, with appropriate instruction, all children should be able to attain, with some exceptions based on individual characteristics. Some children will progress in achieving the standards at a faster rate, and therefore teachers should refer to standards from higher grade levels so that students continue to progress. Some children may start their learning process at a point at which it makes sense for the teacher to use standards from lower grade levels with the understanding that the end-of-year high expectation for all children is achievement of grade-level standards.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 indicate foundational literacy skills standards across the PreK/TK through 1st grade continuum to demonstrate how most children will develop specific skills along a learning progression (e.g., phonological awareness). Special considerations for multilingual children not yet proficient in English include understanding the similarities between the child’s home language and English and knowing whether a child already has developed foundational literacy skills in their home language. In addition, ensuring that children understand the meaning of words used in foundational literacy skills instruction (e.g., when learning to blend phonemes or decode words) is critical. (See “[Resource D. Considerations for Children Classified as English Learners](#)” for additional guidance.)



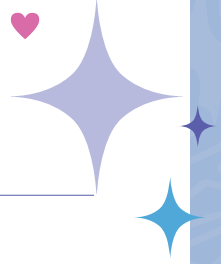


Table 1. Foundational Literacy Skills: PreK Through 1st Grade Learning Progressions—Phonological Awareness

PTKLF: LLD		CCSS ELA: RFS	
3 to 4½ Years Old	4 to 5½ Years Old	Kindergarten	Grade 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTK.Early.2.1. Match words that have the same first sound in speech, with adult support or the support of pictures or objects. • PTK.Early.2.2. When presented with two single-syllable words (such as “sand” and “box”), blend them into a compound word in speech with adult support or the support of pictures or objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTK.Later.2.1. Isolate and pronounce the first sound of a word, with adult support or the support of pictures or objects. • PTK.Later.2.2. When presented with syllables and individual sounds, blend them into words in speech with adult support or the support of pictures or objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFS.K.2.a. Recognize and produce rhyming words. • RFS.K.2.b. Count, pronounce, blend, and segment syllables in spoken words. • RFS.K.2.c. Blend and segment onsets and rimes of single-syllable spoken words. • RFS.K.2.d. Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme (consonant-vowel-consonant, or CVC) words. (This does not include CVCs ending with /l/, /t/, or /x/.) • RFS.K.2.e. Add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one-syllable words to make new words. • RFS.K.2.f. Blend two to three phonemes into recognizable words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFS.1.2.a. Distinguish long from short vowel sounds in spoken single-syllable words. • RFS.1.2.b. Orally produce single-syllable words by blending sounds (phonemes), including consonant blends. • RFS.1.2.c. Isolate and pronounce initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in spoken single-syllable words. • RFS.1.2.d. Segment spoken single-syllable words into their complete sequence of individual sounds (phonemes).

Note. “PTKLF: LLD” refers to *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations: Language and Literacy Development* (California Department of Education, 2024); “CCSS ELA: RFS” refers to California’s *K-1 Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS ELA): Reading Standards for Foundational Skills* (California Department of Education, 2013).



Table 2. Foundational Literacy Skills: PreK Through 1st Grade Learning Progressions—*Alphabets, Phonics, and Word Recognition*

PTKLF: LLD		CCSS ELA: RFS	
3 to 4½ Years Old	4 to 5½ Years Old	Kindergarten	Grade 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTK.Early.2.4. Match some letter names to their printed form (e.g., recognize the first letter of their name). • PTK.Early.2.5. Recognize that letters or characters have sounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTK.Later.2.4. Match many letter names to their printed form (e.g., recognize the letters in their name and many of the letters that frequently appear on materials with peers’ names). • PTK.Later.2.5. Accurately identify or produce sounds associated with several letters or common characters with adult support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFS.K.1.d. Recognize and name all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet. • RFS.K.3.a. Demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary sounds or many of the most frequent sounds for each consonant. • RFS.K.3.b. Associate the long and short sounds with common spellings (graphemes) for the five major vowels. Identify which letters represent the five major vowels (Aa, Ee, Ii, Oo, and Uu) and know the long and short sound of each vowel. • RFS.K.3.d. Distinguish between similarly spelled words by identifying the sounds of the letters that differ. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFS.1.3.a. Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs. • RFS.1.3.b. Decode regularly spelled one-syllable words. • RFS.1.3.c. Know final -e and common vowel team conventions for representing long vowel sounds. • RFS.1.3.d. Use knowledge that every syllable must have a vowel sound to determine the number of syllables in a printed word. • RFS.1.3.e. Decode two-syllable words following basic patterns by breaking the words into syllables. • RFS.1.3.f. Read words with inflectional endings.

Note. “PTKLF: LLD” refers to *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations: Language and Literacy Development* (California Department of Education, 2024); “CCSS ELA: RFS” refers to California’s *K-1 Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS ELA): Reading Standards for Foundational Skills* (California Department of Education, 2013).

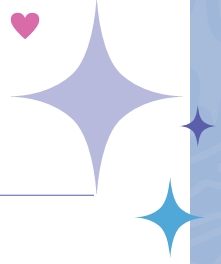
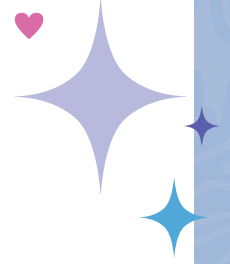


Table 3. Foundational Literacy Skills: PreK Through 1st Grade Learning Progressions—*Writing Conventions*

PTKLF: LLD		CCSS ELA: Language	
3 to 4½ Years Old	4 to 5½ Years Old	Kindergarten	Grade 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTK.Early.4.4. Write using scribbles that resemble letters or characters and are distinct from pictures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTK.Later.4.2. Write, with adult support, a few recognizable letters that are intended to represent their corresponding sounds. PTK.Later.4.4. Write a few recognizable letters or characters to represent words or ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L.K.2.c. Write a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds (phonemes). L.K.2.d. Spell simple words phonetically, drawing on knowledge of sound-letter relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L.1.2.d. Use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and for frequently occurring irregular words. L.1.2.e. Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.

Note. “PTKLF: LLD” refers to *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations: Language and Literacy Development* (California Department of Education, 2024); “CCSS ELA: Language” refers to *California’s K-1 Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS ELA): Language Standards* (California Department of Education, 2013).



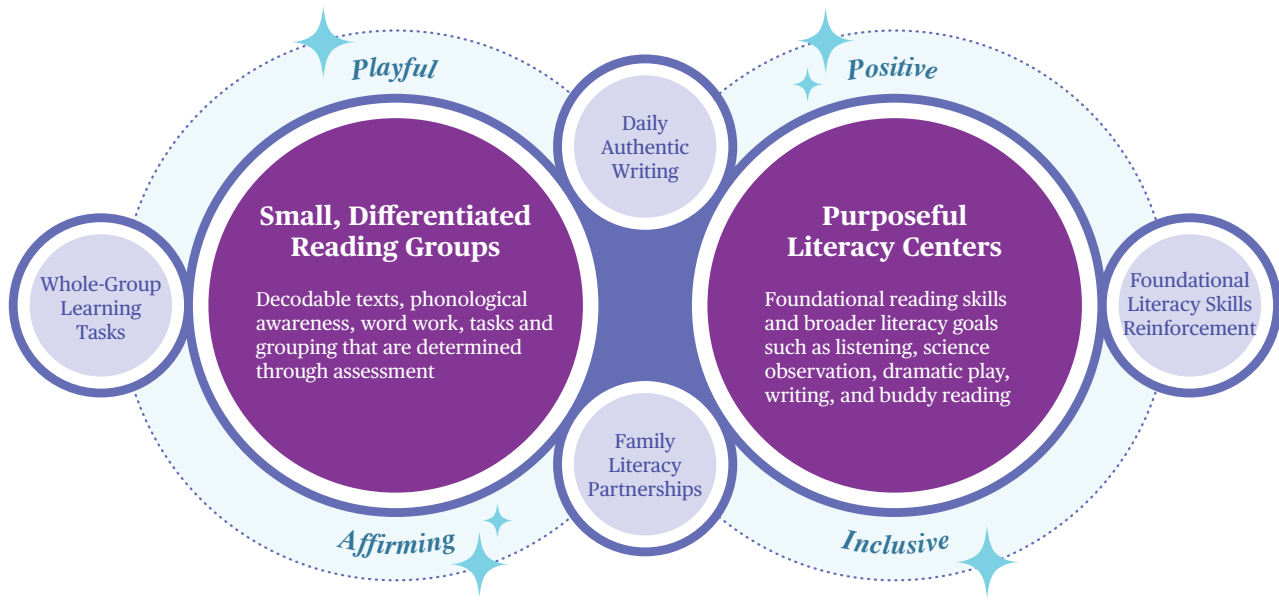
Foundational Literacy Skills Learning Experiences

The context for developing foundational literacy skills is key. As demonstrated by work cited in the “Research on Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction” section, children benefit from learning in environments that are positive, respectful, affirming, playful, and inclusive. For example, integrating more singing, chanting, movement, creativity, and game-like tasks into foundational literacy skills learning tends to make the learning more engaging and motivating for young children. Supporting children to engage in self-directed learning can let them know they are capable learners and have agency over their own learning. Celebrating children’s successes throughout the day, even in small ways, can validate their hard work. “Baking in” specific scaffolding strategies can help mitigate children’s frustration. Cultivating a foundational literacy skills learning environment where each child feels seen, safe, supported, and joyful can help ensure their steady literacy learning and development.

Instruction should also be tailored to each child’s observed and assessed strengths and needs and be adapted in a timely manner based on ongoing (minute-by-minute, daily) formative assessment practices and on other assessments to regularly monitor progress. In the early years of schooling, there may be wide variation in children’s foundational literacy skills, and instruction that is responsive to each child is critical for their success. Instructional time and approaches should match children’s needs. For example, children who appear to be developing foundational skills at a slower rate may benefit from an increase in individual or small-group instructional time. Careful observation and an intentional assessment system help teachers to know where specific and intensified reading instruction is needed. Children who already have achieved the end-of-year foundational literacy skills standards should have the opportunity to excel beyond that skill level. Differentiation—personalized learning based on children’s identified needs—is essential, and small-group reading instruction is the most effective way to provide this differentiated attention.

Figure 4 represents various intersecting and overlapping learning experiences designed to facilitate children’s foundational literacy skills development in the early years of schooling. The figure is not meant to indicate that foundational literacy skills instruction is the primary or largest focus of early literacy teaching and learning. Rather, the figure is intended to help teachers consider those learning experiences that, working together, will support children to develop strong foundational literacy skills as part of a comprehensive early literacy program.

Figure 4. Learning Experiences for Developing Foundational Literacy Skills



The two largest elements in the figure are “small, differentiated reading groups” and “purposeful literacy centers” because they often take up the bulk of teachers’ planning time in the area of foundational literacy skills instruction. The other four elements in the figure—daily authentic writing, whole-group learning tasks, foundational literacy skills reinforcement, and family literacy partnerships—are key contributors to children’s foundational literacy skills development. Each element of the figure is described in more detail below.

Small, Differentiated Reading Groups:

- ✦ Critical to children’s foundational reading skills development are small, teacher-led, differentiated reading groups. The teacher assigns these groups based on results from a comprehensive assessment system that includes standards-aligned screening, progress monitoring assessments, and observations of students as they grow in their independence with the code. The learning tasks vary according to assessed needs, and the composition of the groups changes based on children’s progress toward achieving standards. The teacher is not in a fixed “literacy center” but instead has the flexibility to gather children from their various independent literacy centers and work with them for the duration of time required.

Purposeful Literacy Centers:

- ✦ While the teacher is working with small groups, other children engage in purposeful literacy centers that cultivate their developing language and





literacy skills. They may be working on forming or matching letters at the “word lovers” center, writing stories in the “authors’ café,” reading decodable books in the “book nook,” or writing observations in science journals at the “science lab.” One important literacy center in PreK/TK through 1st grade is the “dramatic play area” where the children can dramatize stories the teacher has read aloud using props, puppets, or figures. Children may even craft original skits collaboratively. In the early grades, independent literacy centers are not just important for developing literacy skills. They are also important opportunities for young children to learn through play and exploration and to develop their collaboration and negotiation skills as they engage in self-directed learning tasks with their peers.

Daily Authentic Writing:



- ◆ Daily writing, multiple times throughout the day and across the disciplines, is critical for foundational skills development. Writing reinforces foundational reading skills and is an important means of communication and effective expression. Children should have ample opportunity throughout the day to engage in authentic writing, such as journal writing, picture labeling, and story writing, in addition to the occasional more structured writing (such as practicing writing letters of the alphabet or practicing spelling during decoding lessons). Very young children may draw and label their pictures; the teacher can transcribe their messages and then read the message together with the child. This reinforces the idea that people write to communicate with one another and that children have important things to say.

Whole-Group Learning Tasks:

- ◆ Some foundational literacy skills activities are done in whole groups. These include singing silly songs (and emphasizing rhyming or word play), chanting or chorally reading poems, or playing fun word games (such as guess my word: /b/ - /a/ - /t/). These tasks can easily be done during transitions. These experiences should benefit all children in some way, whether the goals are linguistic or social and emotional in nature. For example, even children who are already decoding fluently and do not “need” support with phonological awareness development benefit from singing daily because this is a fun and joyful task that can promote a positive classroom culture.



Foundational Literacy Skills Reinforcement:

- ◆ This is done in both planned and spontaneous ways throughout the day. For example, teachers might strategically plan to point out recently taught letters or words on billboards or signs while the class takes a walking field trip. During interactive read-alouds or shared writing experiences,

teachers can strategically highlight letters or letter patterns. The opportunity to reinforce foundational literacy skills also frequently arises spontaneously during learning activities, and teachers should capitalize on these teachable moments.

Family Literacy Partnerships:

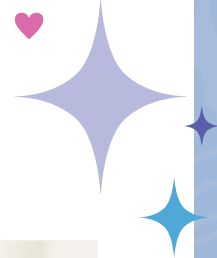
- ◆ As the research shows, when parents and families are viewed as partners in early literacy development, children benefit. Teachers might invite parents into the classroom to work with children at literacy centers, read books aloud to small groups or the whole group, or teach the children songs from the family’s culture or community. Teachers can send playful foundational literacy skills activities home, along with materials such as letter cards for matching uppercase and lowercase letters. This should be balanced with support for parents to engage their children in rich interactive read-alouds using complex texts and other language-rich activities that promote early learning and positive home-school connections.



Scaffolding for Multilingual Children

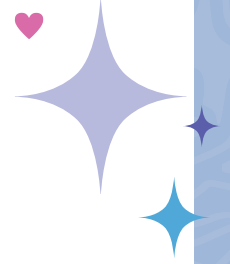
As supported by the research cited in the “Research on Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction” section, multilingual children identified as English Learner students should be able to develop foundational literacy skills at the same pace as their non-EL peers as long as appropriate scaffolding is provided. Working from an assets orientation and additive stance, teachers should be aware of which foundational skills their English Learner students already have in their home languages and which of those skills are transferable to English so that valuable instructional time is not wasted. For example, since phonological awareness transfers across languages, children who have these skills in their primary languages do not need to have them retaught in English. A child who can orally blend sounds together in their primary language does not need to relearn the skill of orally blending sounds in English, although they may need to learn sounds that are not in their primary language.

In addition, teachers should be aware of those foundational skills that do not transfer across languages and take this into account in instructional planning. For example, the writing system in Arabic is quite different from the writing system in English, so even if a child whose primary language is Arabic is familiar with print concepts in Arabic, this knowledge does not transfer directly to knowledge of print in English. Thus, they are likely to need instruction in learning the Latin alphabet for English, as compared or contrasted with Arabic. Teachers can work closely with school and district language specialists to obtain and understand this information.



When to Teach Foundational Skills in English

Some English Learner children are learning in classrooms where English is the language of instruction, and others are learning in bilingual programs where time is devoted to instruction in the primary language and also in English. For English Learner children who are learning in classrooms where English is the language of instruction, the development of foundational literacy skills in English is addressed during ELA instruction, with particular considerations included based on their language profiles. During “designated ELD instruction” (a small amount of time set aside during the regular school day), foundational skills that children are learning in ELA may be reinforced, but direct instruction of foundational skills is not the focus of this protected time. For children enrolled in a bilingual program, foundational literacy skills in English may be introduced and reinforced during designated ELD. However, for the most part, designated ELD instructional time should be devoted to developing the academic vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and discourse practices that children need for comprehending and conveying understanding of ELA and other disciplinary content, provided in meaningful, interactive, and grade-appropriate ways. For additional considerations for foundational skills instruction for English Learner children, see [Resource D](#).

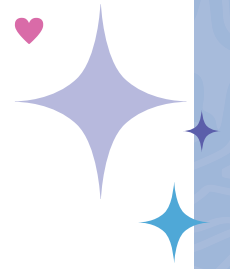


Attending to Meaning When Decoding

Great care should be taken to ensure that EL children—and all children—who are learning to decode in English understand that it is important to attend to meaning when they read. Some EL children may not know the meaning of the words they are decoding, so teachers can support their meaning-making while decoding by anticipating which words or phrases the children may not know and briefly explaining what the words mean before the students read. However, this decision depends on the instructional context. For example, when teaching children to apply some letter-sound correspondences that they have learned to read in isolated words, a teacher would not define the words immediately in advance because the children may not draw on their foundational skills knowledge to decode but rather on what the teacher just defined. However, if children are reading decodable (or other) texts or encoding words, then explaining the meaning of vocabulary in advance is typically appropriate.

As they are learning to read connected text, some students may want to race through the text, decoding as quickly as they can. These children benefit from gentle reminders that the ultimate goal of reading is to make meaning, not just to accurately decode and read as fast as one can. Accordingly, children can be gently encouraged to slow down and pause periodically to think about what they read, which is an important skill for all readers of all ages.





◆ Section 2: Classroom Example

This section provides an illustration of teaching and learning tasks that support children’s decoding and encoding development. The example reflects guidance from research and provides a view into a teacher’s practices, including planning, the establishment of independent learning centers, assessment decisions, and small-group instruction. While the example is fictional, it is based on observations of many different teachers who understand how to put research into practice. The example takes place in kindergarten, but the ideas provided are applicable to instruction across the PreK/TK through 1st grade continuum. Following the kindergarten example is a snapshot of a TK classroom at the same school.

Mr. Khang’s Kindergarten Classroom

Near the end of the school year, the children in Mr. Khang’s kindergarten class are flourishing in the rich learning environment he has established for them. At the beginning of the year, he had guided the children to create class norms for positive interaction, and at the start and end of each day throughout the year, the children have come together in a community circle on the carpet to process feelings, problem-solve issues, and share about joyful experiences. Mr. Khang provides a range of daily literacy activities in his classroom, including interactive read-alouds, shared writing experiences, daily journal writing, the singing of rhyming songs, vocabulary learning, integrated literacy and arts activities, and small-group reading instruction that is differentiated based on needs identified through assessment. Some foundational literacy skills development occurs in whole-group settings through fun rhyming chants and poems and through games and songs focused on letters and words (e.g., the A-B-C song). More explicit foundational literacy skills instruction is provided in small groups and with individual children based on learning needs.

Establishment of Independent Learning Centers

Mr. Khang spent the 1st month of school preparing his young students to interact positively with their peers in independent learning centers. In the 1st couple of weeks, as the class was coming together as a community, he modeled how to do each learning center task, sometimes by dramatizing and explaining the tasks himself and sometimes in a “fishbowl” format in which several children dramatized a learning task while the others watched. Mr. Khang then worked with most of the students in whole-group lessons, while a small group of four or five children worked independently at one learning center while being monitored and supported by a paraprofessional or parent volunteers. Over the course of a month, each child had multiple opportunities to work at all of the different learning centers and with different peers.



Mr. Khang prepared the paraprofessional and parent volunteers to monitor the centers, rotating around the room and assisting as needed to support the children in gaining independence with the process. He emphasized that they should provide encouragement to the children as the children engaged in the independent tasks and be mindful to not overly correct the children because the goal was self-directed learning.

Gradually, Mr. Khang shifted the balance so that, since the 2nd month of school, he has been able to work with a small group of three to five children while the other children work in small groups or pairs at seven different independent centers (described below). Each week, the children refer to a chart that shows each day's center groups. Mr. Khang groups his students strategically so the children can socialize with and learn from many different peers, not just those who are at the same reading level. Each child has a "learning centers folder" with space to collect their work and a recording sheet they use to record what they did at each center.

Mr. Khang set up the independent learning centers in his classroom to help the children develop important language and literacy skills and a sense of autonomy. The centers allow Mr. Khang to work with small, differentiated reading groups so that all students make steady progress toward and achieve the end-of-year foundational literacy skills standards. The time Mr. Khang invested at the beginning of the year to ensure children would truly work independently at the centers while he is working with small groups or individuals and the norms and routines he established to promote positive interactions have made the classroom learning experience both joyful and efficient.

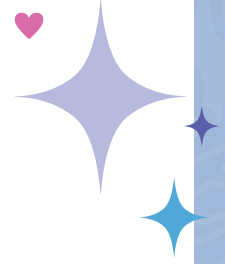
Independent Learning Centers

Understanding that in the early years of schooling, play and talk are essential for learning and that children need to have opportunities to explore and inquire, Mr. Khang established the following core independent learning centers:

Word Work Center:

- ◆ Children can practice their phonics, decoding, and high-frequency word reading skills through playful activities that rotate each week, based on assessed needs. For example, one group might be "letter detectives" tasked with finding specific letters on a list and exploring the walls, charts, and books in the room to find them. Another group might be tasked with building "short a" words using a pocket chart and preprepared sentence strips.



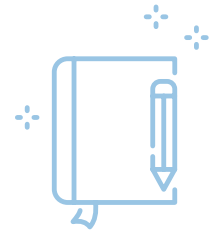


Dramatic Play Center:

- ◆ Children can invent and act out familiar stories, stories they make up, or everyday life experiences using a puppet theater, a dress-up chest, a playhouse, or other realia provided.

Writing Center:

- ◆ Children collaborate on writing and illustrating stories or poems or informational posters, writing and performing skits, and trying other types of writing. They can use a felt board and figures of people and animals to “stage” their stories before or as they write them.



Post Office Center:

- ◆ Children write letters to their classmates and other members of the school community. They can place their letters in “mailboxes” provided for each child, the teacher, and other people in the school community. (Mr. Khang ensures all children receive letters over the course of a week.)

Listening Center:

- ◆ Children can listen to books on audio, such as recordings of stories, poems, and informational texts, and discuss them with one another and write and draw about them.

Library Center:

- ◆ Children can enjoy reading books together in a cozy corner in the room that includes many different kinds of books, comfortable floor cushions, and stuffed animals. Children are first asked to practice reading their decodable books, and then they are free to choose other books they want to explore.

Science Center:

- ◆ The children can explore science topics that are part of a larger unit of study. For example, during a unit about ecosystems, the children observe and discuss what is happening in a terrarium and record and label their observations and questions in their science journals, which stay in a crate at the center.

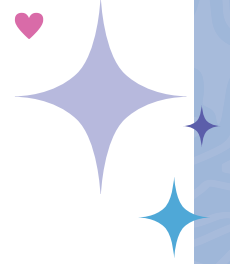


Small-Group Reading Instruction Format

Mr. Khang has a kidney-shaped reading table where he meets with small groups of children primarily for skills-based decodable reading lessons (as opposed to the mixed-ability groups he assigns for the learning centers). However, sometimes the small-group instruction may focus on language development or comprehension if children are in need of additional attention in those areas. The reading table is not a learning center through which the children rotate. Instead, Mr. Khang invites his students to the reading table from different learning centers so that he can provide them with the differentiated instruction they need for the amount of time he deems appropriate. Sometimes, his small groups consist of only one or two children, and he may need only 10 minutes or less with them. Most of the time, however, he works with groups of four or five children for about 10-15 minutes, depending on the needs of the group. He does not necessarily see every group or every student each day, and the groups change about every 3 weeks (sometimes even more frequently) based on Mr. Khang's ongoing observations and progress monitoring assessments of students' skills.



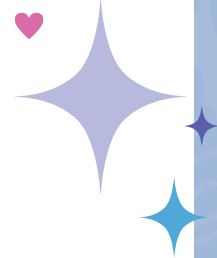
Sometimes during the year, Mr. Khang may use rich literary trade books with small groups to promote language development (including students' understanding and use of general academic



and domain-specific vocabulary), listening comprehension, meaning making with a more sophisticated text (such as identifying the book’s themes or life lessons), and a love of reading. These complex literary texts (e.g., *María Mariposa* by Karla Arenas Valenti and Ana Ramírez González, 2024) are the same culturally affirming and highly engaging books he reads aloud to the whole class. In the small-group setting, he is able to attend more closely to the children as they discuss some of the comprehension questions and emphasize vocabulary or new phrasing to support their language development. For some students—such as English Learner children or students with special needs—this smaller group setting provides a more equitable opportunity to engage with the complex texts and prepares them to be more confident when engaging with the texts as a whole class.

Mr. Khang knows how important decodable readers are in the early years of schooling. The decodable books Mr. Khang uses for his foundational reading skills small-group lessons contain words that have letter-sound correspondences that the children already know and are ready to blend together in print. The books also contain high-frequency words that the children already know or are still learning to recognize. With the decodable books Mr. Khang uses, the children are able to work out the words, even if they have not seen the exact words in the books before, because they have already mastered the letter-sound correspondences for all of the letters and letter combinations in the book and have the phonemic-awareness skill of blending sounds into words. As soon as children know a handful of consonant letter-sound correspondences and just one vowel letter-sound correspondence, they can begin decoding.

In decodable readers, each sentence is typically on a page by itself and is accompanied by a simple illustration. The illustration is there to help the children confirm that they decoded accurately. The text in decodable readers is controlled, which provides children with opportunities to practice and master the important skill of accurate and fluent decoding. An example of the type of controlled text a decodable reader might have is “A Cat and a Rat. A cat sat on a mat. The cat had a nap. A rat ran to the mat.” Decodable readers are not great literature in terms of vocabulary, plot, and themes, but they serve an important purpose in helping children to “crack the code” of independent reading.



Assessment and Planning

The PreK/TK through 1st grade teaching team at Mr. Khang’s school meets frequently to collaborate on lesson planning, analyze student writing, review foundational skills assessment data, and reflect on their own practice. At the beginning of the year and then once every 2 months thereafter, the team meets to discuss the results of several foundational reading skills assessments they administer to each of their students until the students achieve the skills. They use the following assessments:

- ✦ several phonological awareness assessments (rhyming, blending, segmenting)
- ✦ a basic phonics skills test (letter-sound knowledge, single-word decoding)
- ✦ a letter-naming assessment with lowercase and uppercase letters
- ✦ a high-frequency words assessment
- ✦ a connected-text decoding assessment with books at a range of different decoding levels
- ✦ a name-writing and dictation assessment

The teachers are released for a half day at least three times a year—with a substitute overseeing their classroom—so they can assess their own students. The battery of assessments (which varies by child since some children may achieve certain skills before others) takes about 10-15 minutes to administer per child at the beginning of the year and less time as the year progresses and students achieve an increasing number of skills. The writing assessment is also done three times a year and is meant to complement the monthly writing samples, daily writing in journals, and other writing the teachers use to monitor the children’s progress so that they can plan instruction accordingly.

To keep on track with differentiating instruction for students as they work toward the end-of-year goals, the teachers rely on these common assessments and on their day-to-day observations, notes on children’s progress, and the authentic writing that students do daily. Each teacher has a spreadsheet with a row for each child’s name and a column header for each assessment. Having all the students and their assessment results visible on one page allows the teachers to identify where each student is in their trajectory of learning for each skill. Using color coding to identify children’s skill levels (e.g., blue for “ahead of expected progress,” green for “making expected progress,” purple for “not yet making expected progress”), the teachers can group students for differentiated, small-group instruction and can track progress over time. The teachers rely heavily on their formative assessment practices: the day-to-day, minute-by-minute careful observation of students and the correlating timely and appropriate actions based on interpretation of students’ strengths and needs.



The team deliberately discusses evidence of student learning from various sources, including English language proficiency assessments and individualized education programs (IEPs), and prepares accordingly to capitalize on the learning strengths and to address the needs of each student. Since the school has a dual immersion strand, half of the teachers teach foundational skills in English and the other half in Spanish. While the teachers understand that there are differences in the details of foundational skills instruction in the two languages, they find it powerful to collaborate on the common areas of instruction, including assessment processes, pedagogical practices, and ideas for independent learning centers. The team has built strong professional relationships, and the teachers rely upon one another to support their mutual professional growth.

Mr. Khang and his colleagues use framing questions to plan for small-group reading instruction. The team also uses a common routine and lesson planning template (see [Resources A](#) and [B](#)) for each small-group lesson to keep them on track with learning tasks and pacing.

Framing Questions for Planning Decodable Reading Lessons

Questions for All Children:

- ◆ What skills do my students bring to this lesson?
- ◆ What should students be able to do by the end of the lesson?
- ◆ Which foundational literacy skills standards am I addressing?
- ◆ What are some culturally affirming approaches I can incorporate?
- ◆ What types of accommodations or modifications will individual students need?
- ◆ How will I monitor children’s learning during instruction?
- ◆ How can I partner with families on the goals of this lesson?

Additional Questions for English Learner Children:

- ◆ What are children’s levels of English language proficiency?
- ◆ What home language knowledge can I connect to during this lesson?
- ◆ What words might be new for some students and need a brief explanation?

Note. Adapted from the California ELA/ELD Framework (California Department of Education, 2015).



Small-Group Reading Instruction in Action

In this day's lesson, Mr. Khang meets with five small reading groups as the rest of the students work collaboratively at the independent learning centers. For their small reading groups, the children have been grouped with students of similar reading skills based on progress monitoring assessments and ongoing observations, and each group is using a different decodable text that matches the students' skills. At this point in the year, Mr. Khang knows that one reading group has exceeded the grade-level standards, most of the children are on track to achieve the grade-level standards, and two students are below grade-level standards and are therefore receiving significant extra attention from Mr. Khang to ensure that they will soon be on track too.

The first group Mr. Khang meets with consists of five children who are on track. The children know that when Mr. Khang calls each group, they are to tidy up their learning center materials and quietly proceed to the reading table. As the first group of children arrives at Mr. Khang's table, they know they will engage in a familiar routine that promotes efficiency and allows Mr. Khang to work with more reading groups each day.

The following list outlines the steps of this predictable routine, and then an explanation of each step is provided. [Resource A](#) provides an annotated explanation of each step, and [Resource B](#) provides a planning template.

Small-Group Decodable Reading Instruction Routine

- ◆ **Step 1:** Reread the familiar decodable text and introduce the new text (~3 minutes)
- ◆ **Step 2:** Play phonological awareness games (~1 minute)
- ◆ **Step 3:** Play phonics and word recognition games (~2 minutes)
- ◆ **Step 4:** Read the new decodable text (~5-7 minutes)
- ◆ **Step 5:** Discuss comprehension questions (~1 minute)
- ◆ **Step 6:** Do a quick dictation (~3 minutes)
- ◆ **Step 7:** Practice reading the new text independently (multiple times)

Note. Times are approximate.



Step 1:

Reread the familiar decodable text and introduce the new text. As the first group of children arrives at Mr. Khang’s table, they immediately open their folders, take out the decodable book they have been reading with Mr. Khang the past couple of days, and begin reading the book out loud at their own pace as Mr. Khang leans in to listen to each child. This is an opportunity for Mr. Khang to make sure the children are ready to move on to the next text.

Mr. Khang then introduces the new text by showing them the cover of the book, reading the title, and telling them briefly what the book is about. Mr. Khang’s learning target for the day’s lesson is for the children to be able to read the new short “o” words and two new high-frequency words in the book, and he informs the children of this goal. He encourages them by saying he knows they will be able to meet this challenge and reminds them he is there to support them to do so.

Step 2:

Play phonological awareness games. Next, he prepares the children to successfully practice decoding words in the written text by having them orally blend and segment some of the words they will encounter.

Mr. Khang: We’re going to play the blending game.

Children: Yay!

Mr. Khang: Listen to me as I remind you how to play the game. /m/ /o/ /m/ /z/, moms; /p/ /o/ /t/ /s/, pots. Okay, ready to play? [The children nod and say yes.] /m/ /o/ /p/ /s/

Children (in unison): Mops!

The children play the blending game with five more words, and then Mr. Khang tells them they are going to play the segmenting game.

Mr. Khang: Okay, you just put all those words together; now let’s see if you can take them apart into their little sounds, or segment them. Ready? Hops.

Children: /h/ /o/ /p/ /s/

The children play this game with several more words. Mr. Khang notices that one child, Jada, is having difficulty with the segmenting game. He supports her by slowing down his pronunciation of the words and, for one word, segmenting the word orally with her individually.



Step 3:

Play phonics and word recognition games. Next, Mr. Khang continues to preview the new decodable words the children will encounter in the text by showing them a list of words with a short “o” on a small handheld whiteboard. He knows through assessment that the children know the sounds of all of the graphemes⁴ they will encounter in the new text, so he does not need to spend time practicing letter-sound identification. He models decoding the first word while tracking it with his finger. Then he has the children decode the same word with him, first slowly and then at a fluent rate. He invites the children to practice decoding each word in the list first slowly, grapheme by grapheme, and then at a fluent, normal rate after decoding them.

Next, Mr. Khang previews the high-frequency word in the book (“some”), which is new for the children. He writes it on the whiteboard, telling the children that the word is a “tricky word” and not yet decodable for them, so they’ll need to outsmart it! He then plays a game with them to help them memorize the spelling of the word in a fun way. The children spell out the letters of the word orally and then say the word as though cheering at a sports event.

Mr. Khang: Okay, ready to do the word cheer?

Children: Yeah!

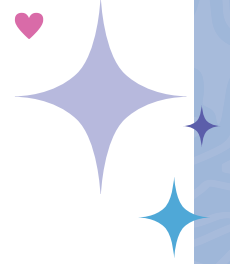
Mr. Khang: Okay, watch and listen. I’ll do it first; then, you chime in with me. “S” - “o” - “m” - “e!” “S” - “o” - “m” - “e!” “S” - “o” - “m” - “e!” “Some, some, some!”

Mr. Khang feels the children are ready to practice reading the new short “o” words and high-frequency word all together in a connected sentence, so he writes the sentence on the whiteboard:

Mom hops on some pots.

The children practice reading the sentence with Mr. Khang a few times, first focusing on decoding the words and then on reading with more expression. He repeats this process with several other sentences until the children feel prepared to successfully put their preparation into practice and read the new decodable text.

4 Graphemes are spellings for individual phonemes. Consonant graphemes include single consonants (e.g., p, t, n), consonant digraphs (e.g., th, -ng), and combinations with silent letters (e.g., -bt, wr-), as well as some oddities (qu-, x). Vowel graphemes include single vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and other vowel combinations (e.g., ai, igh, ou, oi).



Step 4:

Read the new decodable text. Mr. Khang hands each child a copy of the new decodable text,⁵ and the children read it out loud at their own pace, not in unison. Mr. Khang has noticed that when the children read in unison, they tend to imitate what they hear the other children saying rather than decode the words for themselves. The children track the words with their fingers to help them remember to focus on reading each word and not skip words.

Mr. Khang leans in and listens to each child as they read and provides differentiated levels of support as needed. He also takes notes on how the children are reading so that he can refer to his notes when planning the next series of lessons. At one point, Jada gets stuck on the word “hops” and is having difficulty putting the last two sounds together.

Jada: ho- p, hop, hop- s, hop- s. Can you help me?

Mr. Khang: You’re doing the right thing by blending the sounds together. Can you blend the last two sounds a little faster?

Jada: ho-, hop, hop- s, hop- s.

Mr. Khang: Would you like to sound it out together?

Jada and Mr. Khang sound out the word together, and then Mr. Khang asks her to go back and read from the beginning of the sentence. Jada still sounds out the word in a somewhat choppy way, but Mr. Khang anticipates that with more practice with this text, she will be able to read the word fluently very soon. He quickly notes this interaction and leans in to listen to the other children.

Some children finish reading the text more quickly than others do. If they do, they know to go back and begin reading from the beginning with Mr. Khang’s encouragement to especially focus on reading with expression this time.

Step 5:

Discuss comprehension questions. Once all of the children have finished reading the text at least once, Mr. Khan asks them a few literal comprehension questions about it just to ensure that they are attending to meaning making. He asks them about who the main characters were and what they did in the book.

⁵ Decodable readers are not intended for developing deep comprehension but rather for developing the ability to accurately and fluently decode. However, it is important to dissuade children from racing through a text without understanding what they read and to reinforce the idea that the goal of reading is to make meaning.



Step 6:

Do a quick dictation. At the end of the lesson routine, understanding that writing promotes the development of foundational reading skills, Mr. Khang dictates a short sentence for the students to write. Today, the sentence he dictates is the same one the children read together in Step 3 of the lesson (“Mom hops on some pots”). Mr. Khang watches as the students write their sentences and then asks each student to read them aloud to him before they leave the table.

Step 7:

Practice reading the new text independently. Mr. Khang hands each child a photocopied version of the new text they just learned to read. They know that before they go to their next independent learning center, their job is to practice reading the book out loud at least two times at their tables or anywhere else in the room where they are comfortable. All the children keep their small-group reading books in their learning center folder, and they know their first task when they go to the library center is to practice reading the most current book at least once. Many children choose to reread texts from previous weeks as well.

Mr. Khang takes about 10 minutes to observe children at their various independent learning centers. He first takes a moment to listen to a few students in the library center as they practice reading the decodable texts in their folders and then notices which books they select for themselves. He then uses a clipboard to take notes on what he observes them saying and doing. On the clipboard is a chart with a cell containing each child’s name and a place in which to record the date and some observation notes. These observation notes will inform Mr. Khang’s planning of future lessons.

Partnering With Families

Each week, Mr. Khang sends home a copy of the same decodable books the students are reading at school so that they can also practice reading the books at home. The books go home in a large bag that also includes previously read decodable books. Mr. Khang has found that the children enjoy rereading the books to their younger siblings and other family members, noting that rereading familiar texts not only boosts their confidence but also helps them improve their fluency.

The children’s families have expressed that having the decodable books at home has helped them to understand what their children are learning at school and gives them a concrete focus to help their children develop as readers. The book bags also contain complex literary and informational



texts the children choose from the school library and home activity guides for parents and families for shared reading experiences and creative expression activities connected to the books. Mr. Khang encourages multilingual children in his class to also select books in their home languages to promote the children’s ongoing multilingual development.

Ms. Costa’s TK Classroom: Teaching Letter Names and Sounds

Ms. Costa was Mr. Khang’s student teacher the previous year and uses similar teaching practices and routines with the children in her care. Currently, she is working with the children in her class on recognizing letter names and sounds. In addition to leading small-group reading instruction, Ms. Costa prepares the following activities for her children.

A-B-C Center:

- ◆ Children can use materials to practice writing, forming, and building letters. These materials include paper and crayons, sand, salt, play dough, pipe cleaners, beans, and blocks.

Categorizing:

- ◆ Children use objects, such as toys, that begin with a certain letter to categorize the items by their beginning letter sound.

Letter Detectives:

- ◆ Children search for items that begin with specific letters in the classroom, on the playground, or during nature walks.

Letter Games:

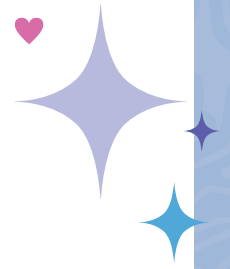
- ◆ Children play with letter puzzles and games, such as games matching uppercase and lowercase letters, matching letters printed in different fonts, or matching a letter with an object that clearly begins with the letter. The matching games are made from paper, clothespins, plastic eggs, or paper plates or are drawn on whiteboards or with sidewalk chalk on the concrete.

Rapid Naming:

- ◆ Using cards with individual letters on them or using letter tiles or pieces from letter puzzles, the children name the letters that appear as quickly as they can.

Letter Race:

- ◆ Children listen to a word the teacher calls out, run to a pile of letters on the floor, and look for



the letter the word starts with; then they run back to their original spots.

Alphabet Maze:

- ◆ Many objects are placed on the floor. Children have to find items that begin with the letter the teacher calls out and avoid paths that contain items that begin with other letters.

Letter Sorting:

- ◆ Children sort through many versions of four to five different letters (e.g., letters on small cards, magnetic letters, different color letters). They have to group the versions together by the same letters.

Letter Circling:

- ◆ Children circle one or more preidentified letters every time the target letter or letters appear on a large piece of paper containing many words.

Musical Letters:

- ◆ Children stand in a circle on the carpet, which features the alphabet going all the way around the edge and on which each letter has a picture of an object or animal next to it. When the music starts to play, the children march around the edge of the carpet. When the music stops, they stop on a letter. Each time the music stops, the teacher calls on two or three children to identify the names of the letters they have stopped on. Then, the whole class makes the sound of each letter together.

The next time the PreK/TK through 1st grade teachers meet to share, plan, and reflect, Mr. Khang brings his notes from the small reading group lessons and his observations of the independent learning centers. Mr. Khang discusses his notes from Jada's reading group and shares some initial concerns he has about her progress. Ms. Costa suggests that he consider meeting with Jada individually to provide extra practice in segmenting words with consonant blends and digraphs. The group helps Mr. Khang make a plan for Jada for the next week and to report on her progress at their next meeting. Ms. Costa asks if she can visit her colleagues' classrooms to observe how they teach foundational literacy skills in small groups.

The team decides to ask the principal for release time so they can all visit one another's classrooms. They are eager to continue to strengthen their professional skills, and they understand that through their mutual support they can help all children read and write independently by the middle of 1st grade.

◆ Section 3: Practical Resources

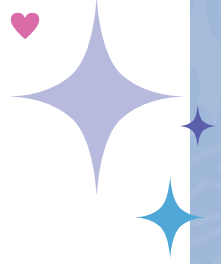


Resource A. Routine for Small-Group Decoding Instruction

This resource provides a quick view of the small-group reading instruction process for students learning to decode in English, which is described in more detail in the “Small-Group Reading Instruction in Action” section earlier in this paper. For students learning to decode in other languages, the steps would be similar, but teachers would need to make adjustments based on language differences and students’ exposure to the language. All times are approximate.

Step 1:

Reread the familiar decodable text and introduce the new text (~3 minutes). Have the children begin reading the familiar decodable text they have read previously, and listen carefully to each one by leaning in to ensure each student is ready to move on to the next text.



Step 2:

Play phonological awareness games (~1 minute). Have the children, with your guidance, orally blend and segment words that will appear in the text, as well as words with similar structure. Be sure to point out any sounds that are new. This activity should be quick and fun and should feel like a game.

Step 3:

Play phonics and word recognition games (~2 minutes).

- *Preview letters and sounds* that the children will encounter in the text, if needed, by using an alphabet chart or cards with pictures (e.g., the letter “b” with a picture of a ball). Point to the letters one by one and say each sound of the letter and then the name of the object with the children. This should be quick and fun.
- *Preview the new decodable words* the children will encounter in the text by showing them the words in writing (e.g., on a whiteboard), saying the sounds of the graphemes while pointing to the graphemes, and then blending the sounds together with the children while tracking the graphemes by pointing at them as the graphemes are blended. Be sure to say each word again at a fluent, normal rate after reading them.
- *Preview new high-frequency words* in the new text by showing them, telling the children what the word is, and then spelling each word and saying it with the children in a fun way, such as by doing a word cheer.
- *Read a connected sentence* together a couple of times. The sentence should include some of the new decodable and high-frequency words.

Step 4:

Read the new decodable text (~5-7 minutes). Have the children read the text out loud at their own pace. They can track the words with their fingers or with a pointer to ensure attention is paid to accurate decoding. Lean in and listen to provide differentiated levels of support as needed. Occasionally comment on the meaning of the text (e.g., “The fox hops on the box? That’s pretty silly!”).



Step 5:

Discuss comprehension questions (-1 minute). Some children will finish reading the text more quickly than others. If they do, have them go back and begin reading from the beginning with encouragement to especially focus on reading with expression this time. Once all of the children have finished reading the text, have them respond to one or two literal comprehension questions to ensure that they are attending to meaning making.

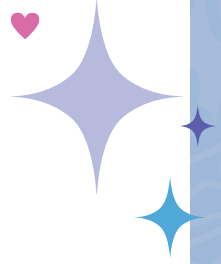
Step 6:

Do a quick dictation (-3 minutes). Select a way for the children to write about what they read. If time permits, have each child read what they wrote to you, and discuss what you notice. Use this writing to inform the next lesson.

- *Oral dictation.* Read a sentence from the text out loud and have each child write it and then reread it.
- *Quick write.* Ask a literal comprehension question that prompts the children to write some of the same decodable words and high-frequency words that appear in the text.

Step 7:

Practice reading the new text independently (multiple times). Have the children place a copy of the text in their folders and practice reading the text at least three times to a friend at the library center that day and each day until they progress to another text.



Resource B. Small-Group Decoding Instruction Planning Template

The following template can be used by teachers to plan foundational literacy skills lessons that use decodable texts. (Note: The time indicated next to each step is just an estimate.)

Learning Target:

Reread the familiar decodable text and introduce the new text (~3 minutes)

Decodable book title:

Observation notes as students read:

Play phonological awareness games (~1 minute)

Words to blend:

Words to segment:

Play phonics and word recognition games (~2 minutes)

New decodable words to preview:



New high-frequency words to preview:

Connected sentence with new decodable and high-frequency words:

Read the new decodable text (~5-7 minutes)

Decodable book title:

Observation notes as students read:

Discuss comprehension questions (~1 minute)

Comprehension questions:

Do a quick dictation (~3 minutes)

Oral dictation sentence and/or question for students to write about:

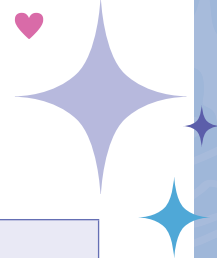


Resource C. Phonics and Word Recognition Terms

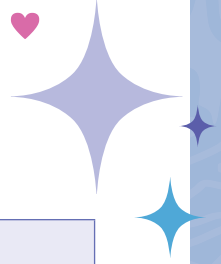
Table 4 provides definitions of key phonics and word recognition terminology, including terms related to morphology (linguistic units that contribute to understanding the meaning of a word). Knowledge of these terms and concepts can help teachers to carefully monitor students' progress in being able to fluently and accurately decode and can help when talking with other teachers and parents about children's decoding progress.

Table 4. Phonics and Word Recognition Terms

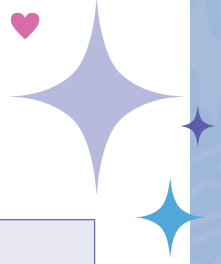
Term	Definition	Example
Consonant	A phoneme that is articulated with partial or complete closure of the vocal track	<i>/b/ in boy</i> <i>/t/ in at</i> <i>/r/ and /n/ in run</i>
Short Vowel	An open phoneme (that is, one for which there is no obstruction of air flow by the tongue, lips, or teeth); short vowels are lax in that there is little tension in the vocal cords	<i>/ă/ in cat</i> <i>/ĕ/ in jet</i> <i>/ĭ/ in kick</i> <i>/ŏ/ in stop</i> <i>/ŭ/ in cup</i> <i>/ŏo/ in book</i>
Long Vowel	An open phoneme; long vowels are tense in that they are spoken with more tension in the tongue muscles	<i>/ā/ in cake</i> <i>/ē/ in feet</i> <i>/ī/ in night*</i> <i>/ō/ in boat*</i> <i>/ū/ in use</i> <i>/oo/ in school</i> * The long /ī/ and /ō/ sounds are classified by some as diphthongs.



Term	Definition	Example
Diphthong	A vowel sound that involves the shifting of mouth position when spoken	/oi/ in <i>boil</i> ; oy in <i>toy</i> /ou/ in <i>out</i> ; ow in <i>cow</i>
Consonant Blend	Two or three adjacent consonants in a syllable, each of which represents a separate sound	/tw/ in <i>twin</i> /sk/ in <i>mask</i> /str/ in <i>street</i>
Consonant Digraph	Two or more consonants that together represent a single sound	<i>sh</i> in <i>ship</i> <i>ch</i> in <i>chin</i> and <i>tch</i> in <i>watch</i> <i>th</i> in <i>this</i> (voiced /th/) and <i>thin</i> (unvoiced /th/)
Grapheme	The letter or combination of letters that represents a single sound (phoneme) (See Letter-Sound Correspondence and Spelling-Sound Correspondence)	<i>f</i> in <i>leaf</i> <i>oa</i> in <i>boat</i> <i>igh</i> in <i>night</i> <i>ough</i> in <i>through</i>
Letter-Sound Correspondence	A single letter and its corresponding sound	<i>m</i> represents /m/ <i>k</i> represents /k/
Spelling-Sound Correspondence	Letter combinations and their corresponding sounds	<i>igh</i> represents /ī/ <i>dge</i> represents /j/
Morpheme	The smallest meaningful part of a word	<i>cat-s</i> <i>un-happy</i>
Affix	A morpheme attached to the beginning or end of a root	See Prefix, Suffix, and Inflectional Ending
Prefix	An affix attached to the beginning of a root word	<i>re</i> in <i>redo</i> <i>un</i> in <i>unkind</i> <i>pre</i> in <i>preschool</i>

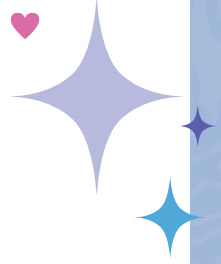


Term	Definition	Example
Suffix	Affix attached to the end of a root word (see Inflectional Ending and Derivation below)	<i>ing</i> in <i>discussing</i> <i>less</i> in <i>useless</i> <i>ful</i> in <i>helpful</i>
Inflectional Ending	A type of suffix that does not change a word's part of speech but does change its tense, number, comparison, or person	<i>ed</i> in <i>jumped</i> ; <i>ing</i> in <i>flying</i> <i>s</i> in <i>dogs</i> and <i>es</i> in <i>wishes</i> <i>er</i> in <i>faster</i> ; <i>est</i> in <i>hardest</i> <i>s</i> in <i>plays</i>
Derivation	A type of suffix that changes the root word's part of speech or grammatical role	<i>ly</i> in <i>swiftly</i> <i>tion</i> in <i>projection</i>
Decodable Words	Words that are wholly decodable on the basis of the letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences already taught	Assuming the relevant letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences have been taught: <i>dog</i> <i>run</i> <i>ship</i>



Term	Definition	Example
<p>Sight Words</p>	<p>Words that are taught as wholes because they are irregularly spelled (see below) or because the spelling-sound correspondences have not yet been taught</p> <p>Regularly spelled words that have been decoded enough times that they are recognized on sight with little conscious effort</p>	<p><i>they</i></p> <p><i>there</i></p> <p><i>could</i></p> <p>Assuming the relevant letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences have been taught and practiced enough times for automatic recognition:</p> <p><i>fish</i></p> <p><i>jump</i></p> <p><i>catch</i></p>
<p>Irregularly Spelled High-Frequency Words</p>	<p>High-frequency words that are not decodable in that the letter-sound or spelling-sound correspondences are uncommon or do not conform to phonics rules</p>	<p><i>said</i></p> <p><i>of</i></p> <p><i>was</i></p> <p><i>come</i></p>

Note. Figure 3.10 of the California ELA/ELD Framework (California Department of Education, 2015)



Resource D. Considerations for Children Classified as English Learners

Learning foundational reading skills in English is different for children whose primary language is not English. Teachers should inform themselves about their students’ language and literacy backgrounds and implement differentiated instructional approaches that ensure appropriate progress toward mastery of foundational reading skills in English. For children in bilingual programs, additional matters need to be considered since many children in these programs are learning foundational reading skills in their primary language (e.g., Spanish) before or at the same time as learning foundational reading skills in English.

Table 5 and 6 outline general guidance for providing instruction to EL-identified children on foundational reading skills that are aligned with the CCSS ELA for Foundational Skills. This guidance is intended to provide a general overview; it does not address the full set of potential individual characteristics of English Learner children that need to be taken into consideration in foundational literacy skills instruction.

Table 5. Foundational Reading Skills Instruction for Students Classified as English Learners, Based on Oral Skills

Children’s language and literacy characteristics	Considerations for foundational literacy skills instruction	CCSS for ELA/Literacy Reading Standards: Foundational Skills
No or little spoken English proficiency	Students will need instruction in recognizing and distinguishing the sounds of English as compared or contrasted with sounds in their native languages (e.g., vowels, consonants, consonant blends, syllable structures).	Phonological awareness Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes)
Spoken English proficiency	Students will need instruction in applying their knowledge of the English sound system to foundational literacy learning.	

Note. California English Language Development Standards, Chapter 6 (California Department of Education, 2014); and California ELA/ELD Framework, Figure 3.11 (California Department of Education, 2015)



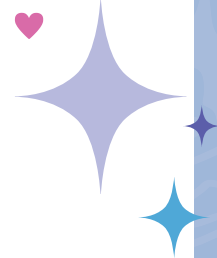
Table 6. Foundational Reading Skills Instruction for Students Classified as English Learners, Based on Print Skills

Student language and literacy characteristics	Considerations for foundational literacy skills instruction	CCSS for ELA/Literacy Reading Standards: Foundational Skills
No or little native language literacy	Students will need instruction in print concepts.	<p>Print concepts</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print</p> <p>Phonics and word recognition</p> <p>Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words</p> <p>Fluency</p> <p>Read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding</p>
Some foundational literacy proficiency in a language not using the Latin alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian)	Students will be familiar with print concepts and will need instruction in learning the Latin alphabet for English, as compared or contrasted with their native language writing system (e.g., direction of print, symbols representing whole words, syllables or phonemes).	
Some foundational literacy proficiency in a language using the Latin alphabet (e.g., Spanish)	Students will need instruction in applying their knowledge of print concepts, phonics, and word recognition to the English writing system, as compared or contrasted with their native language alphabets (e.g., letters that are the same or different or that represent the same or different sounds) and native language vocabulary (e.g., cognates) and sentence structure (e.g., subject-verb-object versus subject-object-verb word order).	

Note. California English Language Development Standards, Chapter 6 (California Department of Education, 2014); and California ELA/ELD Framework, Figure 3.11 (California Department of Education, 2015)

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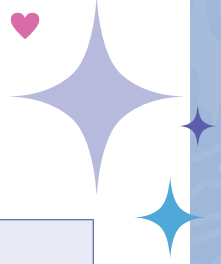


Appendix: Resources for Further Study

Resource	Description and source
<p><u>English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve</u></p>	<p>The ELA/ELD Framework guides California educators' implementation of ELA/Literacy and ELD Standards across the content areas. Foundational Literacy Skills is one of five themes presented in the framework to provide comprehensive ELA/Literacy and ELD instruction. Chapter 3 provides extensive guidance, including vignettes of ELA and ELD instruction, for children in TK through 1st grade.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>Resource Guide to the Foundational Skills of the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects</u></p>	<p>This guide contains excerpts from the California ELA/ELD Framework that are specifically focused on foundational literacy skills standards, instruction, and assessment.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>The Preschool Through Third Grade (P-3) Learning Progressions in Language and Literacy Development</u></p>	<p>The P-3 Learning Progressions show the correspondence between the California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF) in Language and Literacy Development and the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. This resource outlines key skills from preschool through 3rd grade and provides examples of how educators can support developmentally appropriate learning in English and home languages.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>California Literacy Roadmap: Literacy Content Blocks for English-Medium Classrooms for Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Five</u></p>	<p>The California Literacy Roadmap provides guidance to help educators implement effective literacy instruction and apply the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework to classroom instruction. The TK-5 Literacy Content Blocks are instructional guidance emphasizing carefully sequenced initial teaching, targeted practice and reinforcement, timely intervention, and meaningful application across ELA and other content areas.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners With Disabilities</u></p>	<p>This guide is structured to make valuable information readily available to busy educators. It contains lists of key questions addressed in each chapter, sample forms, checklists, illustrative scenarios, tables, illustrations, frequently asked questions, links to additional resources, and other visual and organizational elements to improve the accessibility of the text.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>

Resource	Description and source
<p><u>California Dyslexia Guidelines</u></p>	<p>This document is structured to present technical information in an accessible format by organizing text with introductory chapter bullets, brief paragraphs, graphic elements, and relatively short chapters. Entire books have been written on many of the areas covered by these guidelines, so web links to additional resources are provided at the conclusion of every chapter for readers who want to know more about specific topics.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice</u></p>	<p>This publication presents current evidence-based pedagogy and practices in the areas of developing multilingualism, early education, assets-based environments, English language development, and the creation of systems that support the implementation of these practices. Further, the publication provides a deeper dive into accessing actionable examples of how evidence-based pedagogy and practices may be implemented in districts, schools, and classrooms to positively impact Multilingual and English Learner students.</p> <p>California Department of Education</p>
<p><u>NCELA Teaching Brief: Integrating Language Into Early Childhood Education</u></p> <p><u>NCELA Podcast: Integrating Language Into Early Childhood Education</u></p>	<p>This teaching brief draws upon recommendations from the <i>National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine report Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures</i>. The brief highlights some promising instructional practices that are relevant and important for teachers of young children ages 3-7 who are identified as dual language learners or English Learners.</p> <p>The accompanying podcast explores the four key practices presented in the brief: embracing an assets orientation, promoting multilingual development, providing frequent interaction with complex texts, and teaching foundational literacy skills.</p> <p>National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine</p>
<p><u>Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy</u></p>	<p>This collection contains comprehensive resources for both participants and facilitators. The Participant Guide includes an overview, detailed session plans, self-study readings, activities, note-taking slides, reproducible materials, and a glossary designed for PreK teachers to enhance their understanding and teaching of phonological awareness. The Facilitator Guide and accompanying PowerPoint presentation equip facilitators with the necessary structure, content, and visual aids to effectively lead a team of teachers through emergent literacy sessions.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Southeast</p>

Resource	Description and source
<p><u><i>A Kindergarten Teacher's Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills</i></u></p> <p><u><i>A First Grade Teacher's Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills</i></u></p>	<p>These guides include overviews of evidence-based practices and resources for kindergarten and 1st grade. The guides present four main recommendations with teacher scaffolds and family resources. They cover topics such as academic language, phonological awareness, letter-sound relations, word decoding and recognition, writing, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Southeast</p>
<p><u><i>Empowering Young Readers by Using Assessment Data to Inform Evidence-Based Word Reading Skill Instruction</i></u></p>	<p>These flowcharts help K-2 educators identify student skill reading needs in phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency based on universal screening data. Once the needs are identified, the flowcharts direct educators toward evidence-based instructional practices that can be used to provide reading acceleration targeted to student needs.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Midwest</p>
<p><u><i>A Framework for Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction for English Learners: Instructional Practice and Materials Considerations</i></u></p>	<p>This document is intended to help rethink English foundational skills instruction for English Learners by outlining the supporting research, explaining what teachers should know and do, and providing considerations for the design and selection of instructional materials to support this instruction.</p> <p>The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS)</p>
<p><u><i>Guide to Using a Research-Based Process to Review and Select Early Literacy Assessments</i></u></p>	<p>This slide deck is designed to guide districts and schools through evaluation and selection of literacy assessments. It covers the process of reviewing research-based assessments, the various types of assessments and their specific functions, and the concepts of reliability and validity. It delves into the foundations of early literacy, including literature; research recommendations; and the construction of assessment databases, including how to code for these databases. It also offers practical resources such as checklists and tools.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Midwest</p>
<p><u><i>Rubric for Evaluating Reading/Language Arts Instructional Materials for Kindergarten to Grade 5</i></u></p>	<p>This rubric has been developed to streamline the process of evaluating reading/language arts instructional materials for kindergarten through 5th grade, ensuring they align with scientifically based reading instruction. The document serves as a tool for teachers and educational leaders to gauge the effectiveness of core reading programs and reading intervention programs. It includes guidelines for utilizing the rubric to conduct reviews and make informed choices regarding instructional materials at the state, district, or school level.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Southeast</p>



Resource	Description and source
<p><u>Professional learning communities facilitator’s guide for the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide: Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade</u></p>	<p>REL Southeast developed PLC materials focused on the practice guide that were designed to assist a literacy leader in guiding a professional learning community in applying the recommendations from the practice guide. The materials include a facilitator’s guide, participant activities, and YouTube videos. The facilitator’s guide includes a framework for facilitators to conduct each of the 10 PLC sessions. It also includes participant activities, discussion questions, small- and whole-group activities, and implementation and reflection activities. The participant’s activities include reflection questions, lesson plan examples and templates, video-viewing guides, and sharing opportunities. The videos illustrate practices presented in the foundational reading skills practice guide.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Southeast</p>
<p><u>It Takes a Village: How Community Organizations, Schools, and Families Can Work Together to Support Early Childhood Literacy</u></p>	<p>This documentary comes with a viewing guide. It was produced in partnership with the Chicago public broadcasting station WTTW. The 20-minute video shows how community organizations can support the development of children’s early literacy skills.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Midwest</p>
<p><u>Supporting Michigan Learners Toward Excellence in Reading</u></p>	<p>This film, a collaboration with Detroit Public Television, delves into the effective methods employed by two school districts in Michigan to boost early reading skills among students. The film showcases insights from the Detroit Public Schools Community District and the Chippewa Hills School District, detailing their approaches to enhancing literacy. Viewers learn about the emphasis on high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction in Detroit, structured around the science of reading, while Chippewa Hills focuses on tailoring research-based strategies to meet the unique requirements of individual students through data-driven personalization. It includes a video guide that provides additional context, prompts for discussion, and resource links.</p> <p>Institute of Education Sciences (IES), REL Midwest and PBS</p>