

7.14.20

Notes For The Parent Version of An Introduction to the Science of Reading

Slide 1 An Introduction to the Science of Reading for Parents

Thank you for joining us to talk about how we teach reading at Acme Elementary. We are learning more about what research says about how children learn to read, how to make sure every student learns to read, and what to do when students struggle with learning to read. The research we are exploring is referred to as the science of reading.

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Parents: You and your child's teacher have a powerful goal in common – teaching your child to read! This is such an essential skill that it is important that you and your child's teacher are on the same page (pun intended). We want to make sure our students have the best possible instruction so they can all become readers. We would like you to partner with us in this journey – a journey that is based on the effective practices that can be used at school and at home.

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Why should we base our instruction on the science of reading?

Because there is a documented sequence of steps that reliably, efficiently and safely produces skilled readers. Although science hasn't yet answered all of our questions about reading, there is evidence, collected over decades on all types of children in all types of schools, in a variety of languages, that can inform our work.

Research shows that children who start with low word reading skills tend not to catch up. This is why we want to provide support as soon as any of sees a concern. We no longer see the value of taking a "wait and see" approach, or thinking the student will "grow out of it".

Over time struggling readers spend less time reading, which means they don't learn as many word meanings and

don't have as many opportunities to develop comprehension strategies,

which often ultimately results in a negative attitude toward reading

So rather than waiting until students struggle with reading, there are things we can do in pre-K, K and 1st grade that will ensure more students become readers. And when older students struggle with reading, there are specific ways we can support them and get them back on track.

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One reason we have been learning about the research on reading is because we aren't satisfied with our students' progress. One way we track student growth is with screening assessments that measure student knowledge of sounds in spoken words, matching sounds to letters, naming letters, reading words and passages. Last year, we started with about half of our

kindergarten students on track and ended the year with only a few more on track. In other districts that are similar to ours, the percent of kindergarten students who are on track increased quite a bit – even doubled! We decided there must be something about the way they are teaching, or something about what the teachers know in those other districts, that we could learn from.

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I'd like to share with you some information we have been learning recently about how children learn to read, why some struggle, and how we can join together to make sure everyone at our school learns to read – including your child.

One thing we have learned is that reading is not a skill that children will naturally or automatically develop. Reading is not like talking or walking, which are skills that happen without directly teaching them. Reading has to be taught. The way to create a reader is by helping students learn how letters represent the sounds we speak. To read, we have to “recycle” neural pathways that are used for vision, memory, and language into new networks for reading. Some children learn to read more easily than others, and some children struggle with the process. This means we should act right away if we are concerned about a student.

There are things we can watch for when children are young that will tell us if they are likely to struggle with learning to read. When we see these signs of risk, we will be ready to provide support, and that can make a big difference. We will be watching for these signs and we want you to watch for them too. Catching these risk factors early is important, so if you are concerned, say something to your school. We don't just want to wait and watch – we actually want to teach these critical skills to students so they WILL become skilled readers.

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There are 2 essential skill areas that have to come together in the creation of readers. They are understanding spoken language and decoding print.

The foundation of reading is understanding spoken language. When students have grade level skills in oral language and in decoding they are likely to understand what they read– having one without the other isn't good enough
oral reading fluency provides the bridge
To reading comprehension.

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It is important for students to know and use lots of words. We think of this as their word knowledge or vocabulary. Reading starts with being able to understand the meaning of words, knowing how to understand and communicate ideas through talking, and knowing how sentences work. Listening and talking are important foundations for reading.

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There is one aspect of reading that we have learned a lot about recently, and that is how important it is for students to be able to understand and work with spoken words at the level of the individual sounds. The sounds in the words we speak are called phonemes. Being able to blend sounds into whole words and being able to take spoken words and say the separate sounds are essential building blocks of reading. Students who can blend sounds into words and take words apart into separate sounds, are more likely to be good readers and spellers. Phonemic awareness is a reading skill that can be developed even before your child recognizes all his or her letters or can attach sounds to the letter. Phonemic awareness is an activity we can do with our eyes closed!

The reason working with phonemes is important is because it is the sounds that get represented by letters. To be able to read, students have to know the sounds that go with the letters. This is called decoding, or what we might call cracking the code. Decoding is the second essential skill area that students have to learn to be readers. Students need to know the way letters represent speech. They have to be able to go from sounds to letters to be able to spell and from letters to sounds to be able to read. Knowing the names of letters and how to write them will also help with learning to read. There are patterns to the way letters represent what we say and we will teach children those patterns in an order that will help them become readers.

Once a student can read the word on the page, they can connect it to the meaning of the word, if they already have a strong vocabulary. This connection between decoding the word and understanding what the word means in this sentence is what leads to reading comprehension.

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I'd like to tell you about the things we will be working on at school, and some ideas about how you can support the same skills at home.

We will be emphasizing talking to your child. We will be looking for every opportunity to get them talking to us and to each other. We will be talking about what words mean and encouraging the students to use the new words in their talking and writing.

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We will be reading to our class every day. We will read books that the students aren't ready to read yet independently. These will be books with rich vocabulary, complex sentences, and engaging ideas. Building knowledge on a wide variety of topics is critically important to reading comprehension.

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We will be working with your child in small groups, to focus on the skills they need to learn. We will be doing assessments that tell us exactly what your child needs to learn next.

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We will be giving your child books that let him or her practice the new sound-spelling patterns they are learning. These books are called decodable text. They only contain words with patterns that the students have been taught. Your child will also bring these books home. Wait till you witness the sense of pride your child feels about being able to read these books independently.

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We hope that you will sit with your child when they read the decodable books they bring home. And if you don't have time, let him read to a sibling, a pet, or even to himself in the mirror. Any practice at home will be valuable. If you notice your child getting stuck on a word, prompt him to put his finger under each letter and say the sound, then blend the sounds together. Don't encourage her to skip the word, look at the pictures, or guess based on the rest of the sentence.

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We also hope you will increase the time you spend simply talking with your child. With young children, this might involve narrating their play like a sports commentator, labeling objects around them, or extending what they say into more elaborate sentences. It can be helpful to intentionally use what I think of as \$10 words. Instead of saying you feel happy about something, use a word like "delighted". Ask your child if they feel "fatigued" instead of "tired". Tell your child they are "cherished", not just loved. Children learn an amazing number of new words simply by listening to the adults in their life. Talking with your child will expand their world and expose them to information that will help them be better readers.

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As I mentioned before, we will be working on increasing students' awareness of the sounds in speech. You can support this at home with games you can play during down time (waiting at the doctor, driving in the car or riding the bus, or at meals). You can sing a familiar song but change the first sound in each word to the first sound in your child's name. It might sound like this if your child's name is Sam..."Sinke sinkle sittle star, sow I sonder sut sou sar". You can play a same or different game by asking your child if two words start with the same or different sounds – men and map start with the same sound but map and sat start with different sounds. Or another fun one is to talk like a robot and see if your child can tell what word you are saying m – o – m mom!

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And finally, we encourage you to read to your child. Just like we are doing at school, we want you to read what they can't yet read on their own. Read books that have complex language, interesting characters and an exciting story. Stop and talk about the story or ask questions while you are reading. If you struggle with reading, listening to audio books and talking about what you hear can be just as powerful. Just like talking with your child, reading to your child will expand their world and expose them to information that will help them be better readers.

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If you think your child is struggling, let his or her teacher know. We have learned from reading research that it is important to act early on concerns. Most reading problems can be prevented if caught early. Even severe reading difficulties such as dyslexia can be improved if caught early.

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Some of us teachers weren't taught all of this reading research in college. Some of us are having to unlearn what we were taught about how reading develops and how to teach reading. We have always done our best, but we aren't happy with the results we have gotten. This may sound surprising or even a little frightening. You might hear us talking about reading differently than the way we have in the past. We want you to know that we are committed to learning everything we can so we can be the best possible teachers for your children.

We invite you to learn more about reading with us and to work with your child at home on things that will support what we are doing at school. Thank you!