

**A Campaign to Reach the Early Reading Goals of the Oregon Literacy Framework**  
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In my view, the Oregon Literacy Framework is an excellent guide to teaching reading. This paper attempts to call attention to the importance it gives to teaching foundational knowledge and skills in grades K-3, with an emphasis on k-2. It reviews the goals, urgency and what needs to be done in these grades in order to meet goals. (Excerpts from the Oregon Literacy Framework that pertain to k-3 grades are presented in centered smaller print)

## **Goals**

The over-arching goals of the Oregon 2009 Literacy Framework were clearly stated right from the start.

The State Board adopted the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework (December 2009) as guidance for the State, districts, and schools to support reading proficiency, a requirement of the Oregon Diploma. The purpose of the Framework is to ensure students are

- Reading grade-level text or above by end of first grade
- Developing grade-level or above reading skills K-12 across all classes
- Receiving intensified instruction to help them read at grade level, if they are *not*.

The emphasis throughout the Framework is in K-3 prevention of reading difficulties.

This literacy framework emphasizes that the “architecture of reading instruction” must be well designed and executed throughout K-12. For schools, the critical period of teaching students to decipher a new symbolic system—an alphabetic writing system—generally takes place from kindergarten through grade 2. ... The guidance in the Framework provides a step-by-step approach to the state, districts, and schools on how to use evidence based literacy instruction to ensure that all students read well.

### **Moving Forward**

Making sure **all** students read as soon as possible after they enter school, and that they continue to read at grade level or higher each year of school, is critical because **reading well increases the likelihood that students will do well in school.** **Grade K-3** teachers provide timely and critical reading foundations and interventions. Intervening early to bring students to grade-level is the most helpful to students because being a grade-level reader or higher positively impacts students’ lives and their school career.

The major purpose of reading instruction is to ensure that ALL students read at grade level or higher each academic year, no later than in grade 3..... **Learning to read at grade level as soon as possible after entering school is optimal.** When students are reading at grade level or higher in **grade 3**, they have the foundational reading skills firmly in place to begin learning challenging content the next year in **grade 4**.

### **Three reasons why success in meeting these goals is so important.**

1. Common sense, backed up by research.

It’s reasonable to see that any child that has not learned to read by the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will have a high chance of having further difficulties in learning to read throughout school, including HS. This of course will have repercussions in other subjects. It also will have repercussions in the over-all school life of the child. Having many children behind in reading adds to the complications and cost of school management.

The Oregon Literacy Framework repeatedly stresses the importance of successful teaching in the early grades.

Early literacy experiences set the stage for later academic success. It is critical that children learn to read at grade level prior to grade 3; if they do not, the chances are reduced that they will learn to read at grade level, and great that they will fall further behind each year (Juel, 1988). Students who read at grade level

early in school substantially improve their opportunities for long-term success both inside and outside of formal school settings (Finn, Gerber & Boyd-Zaharias, 2005).

For those students who are not successful readers by grade 3, it will be more difficult for them to direct their academic attention on developing reading comprehension strategies or on using their reading skills to develop subject- area knowledge. **After grade 3, the odds are against students becoming grade-level readers without intense intervention.** Therefore, what schools do to teach children to read in the early years of schooling matters greatly. **Poor literacy skills** - which prevent students from keeping up with the curriculum - **are cited as one of the most common reasons for student dropout** (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003).

Many studies support this common sense notion. In the 1980's, Keith Stanovich showed how those children who do learn early get better and those who do not, get worse, ie, the Matthew effect, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." (Keith Stanovich, 1986) In another series of studies, reported by Stanovich, and Anne Cunningham, (Cunningham, A. and Stanovich, K. 1998) found that Children who accumulate high levels of reading volume do so because they begin sooner. This volume of reading, in and by itself, has a powerful effect on future learning. In a unique ten-year longitudinal study, the authors found that all three standardized measures of first grade reading ability (decoding, word recognition, and comprehension) predicted eleventh-grade reading volume even after eleventh-grade reading comprehension ability had been separated out. First grade reading performance was even a stronger predictor of reading volume than IQ measures.

In a more recent report by researcher, Connie Juel, several studies are summarized that identify the affect of not learning to read in the early grades on later school learning. (Connie Juel, 2006) Seventy-four percent of children who were poor readers in third grade remained poor readers in the ninth grade and most poor readers never catch up on their reading. (Francis, et al. 1996)

Marilyn Adams claims that "For the majority (of high school students), the level of challenge recommended within the Core Curriculum State Standards (CCSS) is currently out of reach." (Marilyn J. Adams, 2012,) This reveals the urgency of having high standards that are achieved in the early grades.

2. Failure can be prevented. We now know how to successfully teach almost every child to read by the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. It's a matter of execution, implementation, and resources. The answer can be found in the newly adopted Core Curriculum Standards (CCSS). (Louisa Moats, 2012, Susan Brady, 2012, Monique Senechal, Gene Ouellette, and Donna Rodney, 2006). The Oregon Framework is clear on this as well.

We know more about literacy— particularly reading—than any other subject in education. In the past 30 years, researchers have amassed an extensive amount of information about how children become literate, and the strategies we can use to help them succeed in literacy development and achievement.

The reality is that much more scientific evidence exists about what schools can do to teach students the literacy skills they need in reading than all other areas of literacy combined. In reading, we know what to teach and when to teach it. We know what strong reading instruction looks like in the classroom and we know how to support teachers to provide that instruction. Also, **early intervention is timely, and as such, it is the most efficient and cost-effective.**

Within the last decade, we have witnessed scores of studies and reports demonstrating the level of successful teaching that is possible in the early grades of k-2. (Raynere, K., Foorman, B.R., Perfetti, C.A., Pesetsky, D., & Seidenberg, M. S., 2001, Clark, R., Kirschner, & Sweller, J., 2012, Rosenshine, B. 2012)) It is estimated by researchers that the percent of children with reading disabilities can be radically reduce from 20% to 3-5% of the general school population if modern, research-based instruction is put in place in these grades. (personal

communication, Pam Bell, Ph.D, Program Director, Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, The University of Texas at Austin, 2012, Fletcher, J.M. & Lyon, R. 1998)

3. Finally, modern technology has provided another level of urgency for increasing successful teaching of early literacy. We now know, through modern fMRIs of the brain, that most reading difficulties are caused by weaknesses in the part of the brain that enables oral communication. We also know that careful teaching can strengthen these locations in the brain, especially during the window of opportunity of the developmental ages of 5-7. (Papanicolaou, A. C., Simos, P. G., Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Foorman, B., Castilla, E. M., and Sarkari, S. 2003)

A recent review, published in the Handbook of Reading Research, Volume IV, stated, “Intervention studies have shown that the brain activation profiles of struggling readers can be normalized following intensive interventions.” (Roberts, Theresa A., Christo, Catherine, and Shefelbine, John A. 2011)

### What needs to be done to accomplish the goals?

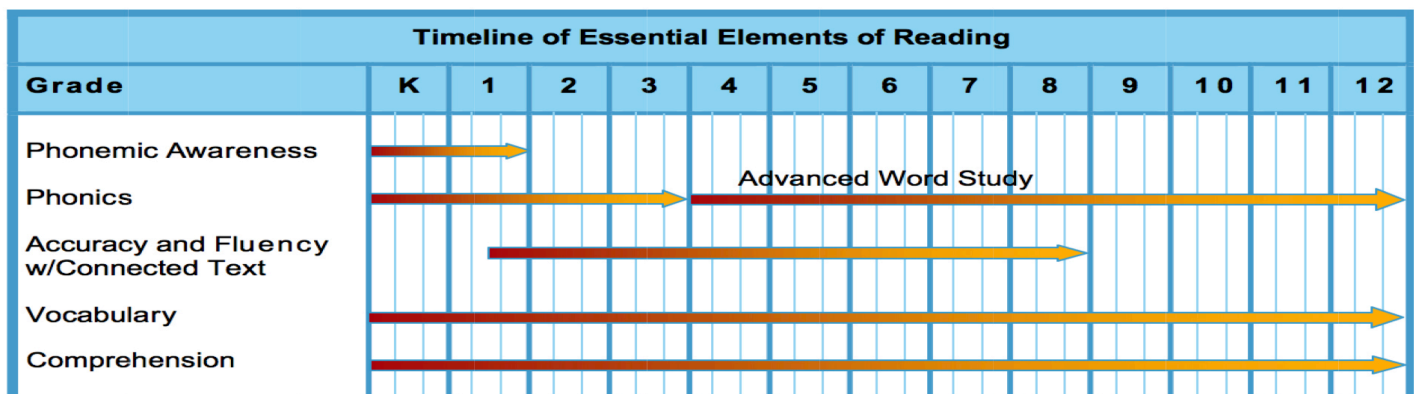
The largest section of the Framework is about instruction and how these goals can be met. The Framework recommends the implementation of a comprehensive reading program with a Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

Implementing the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework means implementing a framework fully aligned with Oregon’s Response to Intervention Initiative (Or-RTI). Or-RTI integrates high-quality instruction, assessment, and intervention in a way that allows schools to match the level of intensity and instructional support to student needs in reading and in reading across the instructional areas. In its deepest conceptualization, **RTI is a comprehensive system of instruction that is designed to match student services with student need.** In this way, it is completely consistent with the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework which is designed to meet the needs of ALL students.

The major features that need to be in place in an RTI framework can be found throughout the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework. Important highlights are:

- Using scientifically-based programs and practices in the general education classrooms
- Developing a multi-tiered support system that incorporates prevention and early intervention services
- Implementing a reliable and valid comprehensive assessment system
- Using student data for making a range of instructional decisions, including student responsiveness to instruction and intervention.

The Framework recommends that instruction should focus on the essential elements of reading, which for k-3 includes phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The following figure show when the essential elements for reading instruction are taught across the grade levels.



Instruction should also use research-based strategies, programs, and materials that target these essential elements of reading and **differentiate instruction based on what supports students need to reach reading goals**. Decisions on what instruction is most appropriate for a given class or group of students should be based on placement tests, daily lesson performance data and periodic mastery tests. The guidelines on this part are clear in the Framework.

**A careful analysis of student reading data will allow schools to understand the extent to which the specific problem an individual student is experiencing is occurring in the context of an underlying strong system of reading instruction or in a system that is in need of overall improvement.**

If the student’s progress is not adequate, the **sequence of decision-making is as follows**. A student may not be making adequate progress for three reasons. First, the level of support the school believes is being provided to the student is not occurring. .... Second, the quality of the instructional support is not equal to what the staff believes the student needs to be successful. .... Third, the instructional support plan is being implemented as intended, and with expected quality, yet the student is still not making sufficient progress. In this case the team decides to make a change in the student’s plan to increase the intensity of the support.

When student progress is not adequate, and schools have determined that the instructional support is being implemented as intended, **the school needs to consider ways to increase the intensity of the support provided to the student in an effort to increase progress**.

The table below includes implementation features that can be adjusted to increase the intensity of instruction.

Implementation Elements	Alterable Variables Chart Specific Adjustments				
	Less intense				More intense
<b>Time for Instruction</b>	Increase student attendance	Provide instruction daily	Increase opportunities to respond	Vary schedule of easy/hard tasks/skills	Add another instructional period (double dose)
<b>Program Efficacy</b>	Preteach components of core program	Use extensions of the core program	Supplement core with appropriate materials	Replace current core program	Implement specially designed program
<b>Program Implementation</b>	Provide model lesson delivery	Monitor implementation frequently	Provide coaching and ongoing support to teacher	Provide additional professional development	Vary program/ lesson schedule
<b>Grouping for Instruction</b>	Check group placement	Reduce group size	Increase teacher-led instruction	Provide individual instruction	Change instructor
<b>Coordination of Instruction</b>	Clarify instructional priorities	Establish concurrent reading periods	Provide complementary reading instruction across periods	Establish communication across instructors	Meet frequently to examine progress

Classroom instruction initially starts with a core reading program. In **grades K-5/6**, a core program is a basal reading program, the following features, that can be purchased for use as the basis of reading instruction.

The strategies, programs, and materials are constructed in a manner aligned to the best research evidence available on design of instruction. When possible, strategies, programs, and materials should be supported by evidence from experimental research that clearly demonstrates their effectiveness; that is, a program has actual scientific evidence of effectiveness that has been demonstrated through a well-designed study

that clearly describes how the research was conducted. The term “**evidence-based**” is used here to describe these types of strategies, programs, and materials. In the absence of an evidence-base, then strategies, programs, and materials are used that have been designed based on components that scientific research has verified as effective. While the exact program itself may not have been evaluated, it is based on components and techniques proven effective in other research studies. The term “**research-based**” is used here to describe these types of strategies, programs, and materials.

Design Features of Strong Core Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide explicit and systematic instruction</li><li>• Provide ample practice on high-priority skills</li><li>• Include systematic and cumulative review of high priority skills</li><li>• Demonstrate and build relationships between fundamental skills leading to higher order skills.</li></ul>



From the "Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis" (Simmons and Kame'enui, 2005)

Each school needs an integrated set of strategies, programs, and materials that are selected and used to meet the needs of the full range of students in the building.

In **grades K-5/6**, this includes a core reading program, supplemental programs and materials, and intervention programs that are specifically designed for students who are well below desired reading goals. Supplemental programs may also be implemented with students reading somewhat below grade level. For students well below grade level, however, intervention programs that focus on foundational aspects of reading development need to be used.

Intervention programs are intense reading programs designed to address **the needs of students who are well below grade-level goals**. Whereas core reading programs in the early grades typically focus on many aspects of literacy instruction including areas such as writing, spelling, and oral communication, intervention reading programs focus more narrowly on the essential elements of reading. To select the most effective intervention programs, schools should identify those programs supported by experimental research (i.e., evidence-based programs).

Intervention programs can be comprehensive. Characteristics of intensive intervention programs are discussed below.

One characteristic of an intensive intervention reading program is that instruction is usually **more explicit and systematic**. A second characteristic is that an emphasis is placed on the concept of **mastery learning**; that is, there are clear criteria for what students must do to demonstrate they have learned learning is that students can only progress through the sequence of learning objectives when they are able to demonstrate competence on the key objectives of the instructional content.

A third important characteristic of an intervention reading program is that student **progress on formative reading goals is carefully monitored**. The ultimate objective is that students will make sufficient progress in the intervention program to **exit the program** and receive their instruction in the core program or in a grade-level reading class. Normally this requires a specific plan for the amount of instructional material teachers will need to cover each day so the students will eventually catch up to the instruction being provided in the core program or grade-level class. The concept of mastery learning is critical in this pacing plan because adequate pacing ensures that teachers cover instructional content and that students master the key objectives.

**Teachers need extensive professional development** to use a core program effectively and with **fidelity**. To that end, it is important to differentiate professional development based on teacher need.

The decision process of assuring that all students receive the instruction they need to make adequate reading progress is referred as “differentiated instruction”. RTI provides a multi-tiered framework to assist in making these decisions.

**Tier 3** – Students who are reading significantly below grade level and are at high risk for long-term reading difficulties.

**Tier 2** – Students who are reading slightly below grade level and are at moderate risk for long-term reading difficulties.

**Tier 1** – Students who are reading at grade level and are low risk for long-term reading difficulties.

**Advanced** – Students who are reading above grade level.

**The purpose of intensive interventions is to accelerate students’ reading development to bring them up to grade-level performance. To do this, Tier 2 and 3 students have to make accelerated reading progress over an extended period of time.**

### **Some special circumstances in assessing progress in grades k-3.**

There is no state testing in grades k-2. Waiting until the end of grade 3 to give the OAKS test is too late. If children fail at the end of grade 3, the harm has been done. Repairing that harm will be difficult and costly. Formative tests need to be used during grades 1 and 2 to check to see if progress is being made and to make instructional decisions before it is too late.

Because the foundation for reading development occurs in grades K-3 and the OAKS in Reading/Literature is not administered prior to grade 3, progress monitoring/formative measures of reading in grades K-2 take on special significance. These measures in grades **K-2** indicate whether students are on track to read at grade level or higher in grade 3, and they may also be used as summative or outcome measures for specific essential elements of reading in grades K-2. In **grade 3**, this summative goal is measured directly by the OAKS in Reading/Literature.

Formative reading goals indicate whether students are **on track** to read at grade level or higher. If students reach or exceed formative reading goals, their chances of reading at grade level or higher are much better than if they do not reach these formative goals. **If students do not reach formative reading goals, they are not likely to read at grade level or higher without intense interventions.**

- In **kindergarten**, formative goals should be set in **phonemic awareness** and **phonics**.
- In **grade 1**, formative goals should be set in **phonics** and **fluency**.
- In **grades 2-8**, and perhaps in grade 9, formative reading goals should be set in **fluency**.
- In **grades 2 through high school**, establishing **comprehension** goals for some students on maze and cloze reading comprehension assessments is important.

Multiple goals within a school year and goals that cut across years, should be set. For example, fluency goals could be established for the beginning, middle, and end of grade 2 Phonemic awareness goals could be set for the middle and end of kindergarten and the beginning of grade 1. In general, formative goals set at the end of each grade are particularly important because they permit schools to determine at key and consistent points in time if students are on track for successful reading.

**When students have not met a formative reading goal, it is critical that schools use that information to improve reading instruction.** The guideline for improving reading instruction is to increase the intensity of instruction in systematic, research-based ways so that students have more and better opportunities to meet or exceed formative reading goals during each school year.

### **So where are we now?**

The authors of the Framework express serious concern about how these guidelines are being implemented.

Despite this strong research base, however, implementation of these strategies has been somewhat uneven. **The paradox is that many students who are graduating from high school but are not well prepared for postsecondary opportunities were actually experiencing difficulties learning to read as early as**

**kindergarten.** These students could have been easily identified at that time, and if scientifically-based instructional interventions had been used, the chances are good that many of them would have acquired the reading skills they needed for a lifetime of learning.

#### **Performance on a “National” Reading Assessment**

The NAEP data offers clear evidence that Oregon is near the bottom of the country for grade 4. Seen in the context of NAEP, 35% of Oregon grade 4 students read **below grade level**. In other words, more than 1 out of 3 students in grade 4 does not have the reading skills necessary to meet Basic (grade-level expectations) on the NAEP. Among grade 4 students living in high poverty environments, 50% are not reading at grade level.

How we perform compared to other states is important to examine. On the grade 4 NAEP assessments, among all 50 states (plus the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education schools, 52 jurisdictions in all), only 16 states had lower overall average scores than Oregon. In other words, 67% of states / jurisdictions had a higher average score than Oregon.

The most recent NAEP scores for 2011 showed Oregon at the even lower 39<sup>th</sup> place in the national state comparison. This would mean that the state has slipped from the 67% to the 75% percent place among other states on the same measurement within only a few years.

Possibly the most alarming statistic on this measurement concerns the achievement gap. Oregon was third from the bottom in the achievement gap between the average scores of those in the top 75<sup>th</sup> percentile to those in the bottom 25<sup>th</sup> percentile. It was tied with California and ahead of only Alaska and District of Columbia. The gap between those groups was 50 test points.

Until 2012, results from the OAKS state test for third graders has been misleading. The national and state scores were inconsistent. The national tests showed that 35% of fourth graders were reading below basic levels on the NAEP tests and the state test indicated only 15% not meeting basic state benchmarks for third graders. The state standard was obviously much easier to meet. When the state standard was adjusted for the 2012 state tests, the results were more consistent with the national tests. The average for third graders in 2012 was 30% not meeting and 70% meeting or exceeding the benchmark. This revealed a more serious problem with k-3 achievement than previously believed.

Some individual district scores on the third grade OAKS results indicate an even more serious problem. In Multnomah county, the five largest districts outside of the Portland district had third grade scores of meeting or exceeding of 50, 65, 60, 56 and 46 percent compared to 74 percent for the Portland district and 70 percent for the state average. This reflects a much higher level of poverty and English Language Learners in the five east Multnomah county districts with a more serious reading problem than the Portland district or the state as a whole.

In these five districts of 56 schools, there were 14 schools with 50% or less students meeting or exceeding (five of these were lower than 40%. The lowest was 15%), and 19 more between 51 and 60%. **This means that 33 schools in these districts were at least 10 points below the state average, which in itself is poor.** By comparison, the Portland district of 67 schools had 7 schools with 50% or less students meeting or exceeding (four below the 40%) and 13 more schools between 51 and 60%. **The Portland district had 20 schools at least 10 points below the state average.**

The Oregon Literacy Framework concludes, even before the 2012 state results were in.

Taken together, OAKS and NAEP reading assessments provide strong evidence that Oregon schools need to do much more in K-12 to prepare stronger readers.

In 1998, in a report on thirty years of research by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Jack Fletcher and Reid Lyon regretted that the research had “not yet significantly affected how children are taught to read in schools, so that a gap continues to exist between what we know about reading and how children are taught to read.” Benita Blachman, a well-known reading researcher, stated in a testimony in Washington:

The tragedy is that we are not exploiting what is known about reducing the incidence of reading failure. Specifically, the instruction currently being provided to our children does not reflect what we know from research. Direct, systematic instruction about the alphabetic code is not routinely provided in kindergarten and first grade, despite the fact that, given what we know at the moment, this might be the most powerful weapon in the fight against illiteracy. (Blachman, B. 1996)

Joseph Torgesen, a leading researcher, in 2003 writes about “The nature of our current reading crises....”.

Increasing demands for higher levels of literacy in the workforce require that we do better than we have ever done before in teaching all children to read well.

**Factors that limit literacy outcomes in the United States.**

1. Many elementary schools are not organized or focused in ways that most effectively promote literacy in all children.
2. Teachers often do not possess the special knowledge or teaching skill to effectively teach children who experience difficulties learning to read.
3. Many families and neighborhood environments do not provide experiences that prepare children to learn to read well.
4. Many schools do not really expect children from low wealth or minority backgrounds to learn to read well.
5. Teachers often do not have adequate materials or instructional time available to them to effectively promote literacy in all their children.
6. There is significant variability in the language-based required for learning to read “soft bigotry of low expectations”.

## **Recommendations**

Torgesen continues with these recommendations.

**Schools must do three basic things in order to leave no child behind.**

1. Increase the consistency with which high quality instruction is delivered in every k-3 classroom.
2. Continuously assess growth in critical reading skills beginning in kindergarten to identify children lagging behind.
3. Provide supplemental, individualized interventions for children who are struggling to learn to read.

By Individualizing interventions, Torgesen means intensive instructional plans, programs and strategies that match individual needs. He does not call for more 1 on 1 tutoring.

## **Summary: In my view.**

The Oregon Literacy Framework is an indication that serious progress has been made at some level of reading instruction. However, the most recent testing results indicates that far more progress is needed to close the gap between research knowledge and practice. Continuing the process of improving instructional practices is not easy. Clearly, teachers are working harder and harder.



In my view, the necessary improvements will require increased understanding of the specialized nature of teaching beginning reading increasing the effort. We need to recognize that teaching beginning reading is the most difficult and important teaching task in education. It's also the most heavily researched. Successful teaching at this level requires highly precise procedures and a thorough understanding of how this uniquely human skill is variously acquired at the critical time in a child's life.

As well as numerous other advantages for teaching reading in the early grades, prevention is easier and cost less. It should save large numbers of children from needing expensive special education services for learning disabilities in reading. My recommendations are:

1. **Conduct a state sponsored campaign that stresses the importance and components of k-2 literacy;**
2. use more high quality screening at k and 1<sup>st</sup> grade;
3. use more intensive core programs within the RTI model,
  - a. the percent of k-2 students being instructed by intensive core programs should approximate the same percent of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders from the previous years who failed to meet benchmark;
4. use progress monitoring of k-2 performance such as DIBELS; and
5. provide more teacher training and education throughout the year from year to year until achievement is raised to grade level or benchmark.

#### **Sample description of Intensive Core Program.**

**Intensive-Core Programs:** Instructional materials that provide more intensive instruction on all five components of reading to High Risk students. These materials may replace the regular comprehensive reading program for these students until they are able to participate in regular core curriculum programs. When selecting intervention materials or creating instructional sequences for students having difficulties in learning to read, schools generally include the following characteristics within materials and instruction.

- Instruction provides clear models of what is to be learned. Explanations are concise.
- Language used in teaching exercises is controlled for clarity so that all words said by the teacher are ones students understand.
- New skills are introduced only when students have learned related prerequisite skills previously introduced.
- Skills instruction is carefully scaffold to provide support during initial learning. Students are prompted and helped to apply strategies. The prompting and help is gradually reduced.
- Examples in exercises are carefully selected to include application of only skills that have been previously taught.
- The introduction of skills is sequenced to facilitate student success. Pre-skills necessary for a strategy are introduced before the strategy is presented. Items that are likely to be confused (e.g., the letters "b" and "d") are introduced with sufficient separation so that one skill can be mastered prior to the introduction of the other skill.
- Adequate practice is provided to enable the students to develop ease and fluency in recognizing letters and in applying this knowledge to reading words.
- Adequate review is provided to enable students to retain information.
- Assessment that guides teachers in placing and maintaining students at their instructional levels within the program is incorporated into the materials.
- Frequent progress-monitoring assessments are used to determine if students are mastering what is being taught. In-depth reteaching directions are included for students who do not pass the assessments. Directions for accelerating students are also included throughout the program.