



# **BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY INSTRUCTION PRESCHOOL-GRADE 1**

Prepared for Mountain View Whisman School District

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# INTRODUCTION

Mountain View Whisman School District (MVWSD) is dedicated to ensuring students receive effective, research-based reading instruction in Prekindergarten through Grade 1 so that they have the literacy foundation needed to excel academically for their educational careers. Research finds that students undergo vital brain development before the age of six. In early elementary school when students' neurological pathways are rapidly forming, a quality literacy education can embed key competencies within students' brains that help them thrive in reading, writing, comprehension, and academic learning.<sup>1</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted schools' ability to provide rigorous, continual literacy instruction, causing students around the country to fall behind in reading, with younger students most impacted. Teachers, schools, and districts who were already working to integrate modern literacy research into their curricula experienced the further challenge of closing widening literacy proficiency gaps.<sup>2</sup>

To provide students with rigorous reading instruction and close literacy proficiency gaps, MVWSD seeks to ensure grade-level curricula utilizes developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, and that content and standards are aligned across grades. In selecting and aligning rigorous curricula, MVWSD can ensure that students' literacy knowledge builds on past learning as they progress from Prekindergarten to Grade 1 so that when they enter Grade 2, all students will be proficient and dynamic readers. To help MVWSD implement effective early literacy reading instruction, Hanover Research (Hanover) created the following report exploring best practices for teaching foundational literacy skills and aligning curriculum across grades. Specifically, this report contains the following sections:

- **Section I: Early Literacy Best Practices** outlines different reading instructional strategies and discusses which strategies are most effective in helping students become proficient readers.
- **Section II: Early Literacy Implementation** explains how to align literacy standards across Prekindergarten through Grade 1 so that students' reading knowledge builds systematically and sequentially.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover recommends that MVWSD:



**In Prekindergarten classrooms, employ mostly whole language approaches to help students acquire key literacy competencies, while also integrating play-based phonics lessons to impart word, sound, and language fundamentals.** Prekindergarten students learn literacy best through self-directed and teacher-facilitated explorations, but also benefit from regularly occurring, small-group direct instruction in phonological and print awareness. Refer to Figure 1.4 on page 9 of this report for key features of a whole language instructional approach.



**In Grade K and Grade 1 classrooms, utilize a science of reading approach, where whole language strategies are paired with more formal phonics instruction to teach students decoding and comprehension.** Grade K and Grade 1 students benefit from systematic phonics instruction that builds sequentially to provide students with a foundation of reading fundamentals, while also learning vital comprehension and language skills that gives rich context to the words students are learning to read. MVWSD can consider Hanover's Educator Learning Center (ELC) to support

<sup>1</sup> Kelley, S. "Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy." UCONN Neag School of Education. 2021. <https://education.uconn.edu/2021/10/20/best-practices-in-early-childhood-literacy/>

<sup>2</sup> Fischer, A. and E. Syverson. "Building a Better K-3 Literacy System. Policy Brief." *Education Commission of the States*, Education Commission of the States, 2020. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED607857> [2] Mader, J. "'The Reading Year': First Grade Is Critical for Reading Skills, but Kids Coming from Disrupted Kindergarten Experiences Are Way Behind." *The Hechinger Report*, 2021. <http://hechingerreport.org/the-reading-year-first-grade-is-critical-for-reading-skills-but-kids-coming-from-disrupted-kindergarten-experiences-are-way-behind/>

professional learning needs on The Science of Reading approach and teaching core reading skills and competencies.



**Vertically align Prekindergarten through Grade 1 literacy standards and teaching strategies to maximize students’ ability to acquire a strong reading foundation.** Prekindergarten students practice foundational skills such as recognizing letters, learning to distinguish between the sounds in words, and using invented spelling so that in Grade K they are prepared to match letters sounds with letters, sound out words, and correctly spell words. In Grade K, students need to learn to recognize different sounds in words, as well as internalize letter sound relationships, to read basic words that consistently follow letter-sound rules such as “bat” and “chair.” In Grade 1, students need to learn how complex patterns of sound can create multi-syllabic words in order to spell and sound out new words that follow and break letter-sound rules.

HANOVER RESOURCES TO ASSIST WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS	
<a href="#">Research Brief: The Science of Reading<sup>3</sup></a>	Defines the Science of Reading and provides evidence on how the Science of Reading supports literacy.
<a href="#">Vendor Scan of Elementary Literacy Programs<sup>4</sup></a>	Identifies effective K-5 literacy programs, aligned with the science of reading, that the district can adopt as an alternative to its current literacy curriculum. Hanover includes characteristics, features, benefits, and secondary reviews of these programs.
<a href="#">Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Tool Scan<sup>5</sup></a>	Reviews the degree to which early learning programs are designed to achieve educational outcomes—including language and cognitive development, social-emotional development, self-regulation, and other foundational skills for learning.
<a href="#">K-3 Literacy Risk Indicators<sup>6</sup></a>	Provides indicators of risk and assessments to assess indicators of risk amongst K-3 literacy students.
<a href="#">Instructional Coaching Research Brief<sup>7</sup></a>	Outlines how schools can set up effective literacy coaching programs to help teachers implement literacy best practices.

## KEY FINDINGS



**Schools successfully bridge reading gaps and generate equitable academic outcomes by shifting away from balanced literacy strategies, and instead, infusing structured phonics-based instruction into the curriculum.** Most early education teachers in the United States use balanced literacy strategies to teach reading, where they conference with individual students while they read aloud and provide a strategy such as sounding a word to help the student when they misread. However, balanced literacy strategies, while meant to integrate whole language and phonics strategies, often do not incorporate structured, continual phonics instruction. In contrast, science

<sup>3</sup> “RESEARCH BRIEF: THE SCIENCE OF READING.” Hanover Research, 2022.  
<https://hanoverresearch.secure.force.com/customerportal/reportDetail?active=Research&documentId=a0r1T00000q9mgrQAA&Redirect=Research>

<sup>4</sup> “VENDOR SCAN OF ELEMENTARY LITERACY PROGRAMS.” Hanover Research, 2022.  
<https://hanoverresearch.secure.force.com/customerportal/reportDetail?Redirect=Research&documentId=a0r1T00000qmx9XQAQ&active=Research>

<sup>5</sup> “KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT TOOL SCAN.” Hanover Research, 2023.  
<https://hanoverresearch.secure.force.com/customerportal/reportDetail?Redirect=Research&documentId=a0r1T00000qn0DwQAI&active=Research>

<sup>6</sup> “K-3 LITERACY RISK INDICATORS.” Hanover Research.  
<https://hanoverresearch.secure.force.com/customerportal/reportDetail?Redirect=Research&documentId=a0r1T00000oCZE1QAQ&active=Research>

<sup>7</sup> “INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING RESEARCH BRIEF.” Hanover Research, 2020.  
<https://hanoverresearch.secure.force.com/customerportal/reportDetail?Redirect=Research&documentId=a0r1T00000pIIYrQAO&active=Research>

of reading methods of instruction centers vital phonics skills, increasing the number of students who learn to read proficiently.



**Schools that train teachers in a science of reading approach experience more success in ensuring science of reading-aligned curricula yield academic gains.** Years of research find that science of reading instructional strategies have the most impact on improving students' reading ability in comparison to other common instructional methods. However, implementing science of reading in the classroom can be difficult for teachers, as it requires them to utilize new instructional methods and integrate diverse literacy activities into the curriculum. Training teachers in science of reading, as well as providing teachers with time to collaborate on best practices across grade levels, helps improve curricular implementation and student reading outcomes



**Prekindergarten teachers help students make vital literacy gains by facilitating engaging, interactive, and holistic literacy activities.** A research article records an example of a literacy-rich prekindergarten lesson where students learn about flowers and seeds from the teacher, and then engage in centers where they plant seeds, read books about flowers, and use oral language skills during in dramatic play time in the garden. In this example, students are gaining print awareness and learning that information from a book can be useful in real life, while building their schemas on plants.



**Fostering academic language skills in Grade K students helps prepare them for reading success in Grade 1.** Academic language helps students understand, discuss, read, and write about new concepts and ideas. Students who begin Grade K with low academic language proficiency often experience reading challenges. Schools should use targeted activities to help Grade K students grow their academic language capabilities, such as teaching students vocabulary words they need to discuss academic content or exposing students to informational texts regularly. Students develop the strongest academic language skills when they are guided to connect themes across texts or use their background knowledge to enhance their understanding of texts.



**While Grade K students learn reading building blocks to become beginner readers, Grade 1 students need in-depth instruction to become competent and fluent readers.** To correctly read and understand a text, students need to participate in literacy-rich activities throughout the school day so that they know how to read individual words, but also can comprehend the greater meaning of a text. This includes reading independently, shared classroom reading, writing independently, interactive writing, and other classroom activities.



**Schools integrate key literacy competencies into already existing curricula by providing students with supplemental reading and writing activities that target skill- and knowledge-based competencies.** To accomplish this, schools can incorporate literacy activities into already existing lessons, or individual teachers can provide students with literacy activities who need targeted support.

# SECTION I: EARLY LITERACY BEST PRACTICES

The following section describes the most effective literacy strategies schools should use to teach students to read, and outlines which specific reading strategies and skills should be taught in Prekindergarten, Grade K, and Grade 1 respectively.

## LITERACY STRATEGIES OVERVIEW

While students need both Whole Language and Phonics instruction to learn to read, the method schools should use to integrate and implement these instructional strategies remains ambiguous. Furthermore, strategies commonly used to teach reading are not mutually exclusive, making the process of choosing an effective reading curriculum more challenging.<sup>8</sup> Figure 1.1 outlines literacy approaches used by school districts to help school districts choose the literacy strategy or curriculum that is right for them.

Figure 1.1 Literacy Instructional Approaches

Whole Language	Balanced Literacy	Phonics	Science of Reading	Structured Literacy
A method of teaching children to read by recognizing words as whole pieces of language. Language is taught as a complete system of making meaning, with words functioning in relation to each other in context, instead of broken down into letters and decoded.	A variation of the whole-language approach that emphasizes exploring literature organically but includes the explicit instruction of phonics in small doses.	An instructional method that teaches the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language, correlating sounds with letters to sound out the word on the page.	A vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading that includes the five fundamental pillars: phonics (connecting letters to sounds,) phonemic awareness (identifying distinct units of sound,) fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.	Emphasizes the highly explicit and systematic teaching of all important components of literacy including foundational skills (phonics, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (reading comprehension).



Sources: Edsource, Reading Horizons<sup>9</sup>

Phonics involves teaching students to read through methodical instruction of the parts of words, whereas whole language instruction teaches students to read words in the context of narratives. Balanced literacy, Science of Reading, and Structured Literacy methods attempt to bridge Phonics and Whole Language methods so that students learn decoding building blocks while also actively absorbing comprehension and fostering a love of reading. Balanced literacy emphasizes whole language instruction over phonics, science of reading emphasizes phonics over whole language instruction, and structured literacy provides an extremely scaffolded reading intervention for students with learning disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

**Schools looking to bridge learning gaps and generate equitable academic outcomes should employ reading programs that emphasize phonics instruction.** Most early education teachers in the United States use

<sup>8</sup> Schwartz, S. "Why Putting the 'Science of Reading' Into Practice Is So Challenging." *Education Week*, 2022.

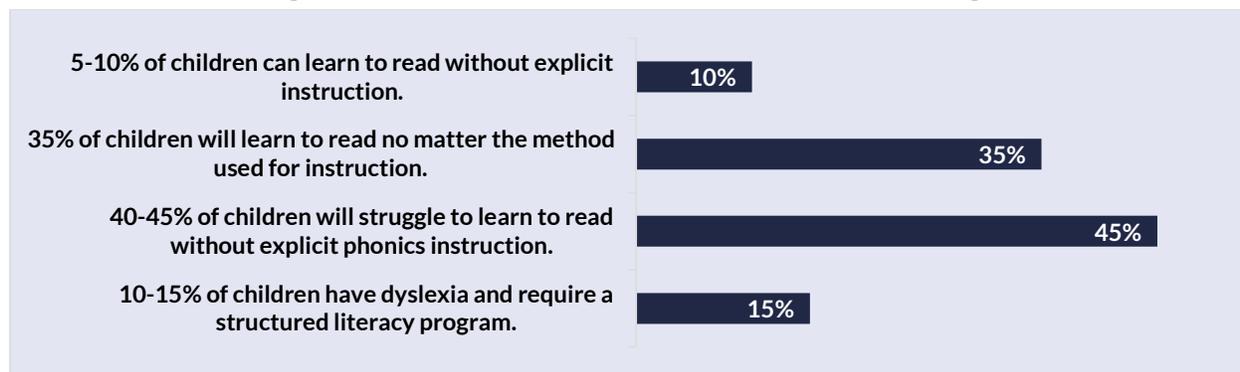
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-putting-the-science-of-reading-into-practice-is-so-challenging/2022/07>

<sup>9</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from D'Souza, K. "A Movement Rises to Change the Teaching of Reading." EdSource, 2022. <https://edsource.org/2022/a-movement-rises-to-change-the-teaching-of-reading/675989> [2] "Reading Wars: Phonics vs. Whole Language Reading Instruction." Reading Horizons. <https://www.readinghorizons.com/reading-strategies/teaching/phonics-instruction/reading-wars-phonics-vs-whole-language-reading-instruction>

<sup>10</sup> D'Souza, Op. cit.

balanced literacy strategies to teach reading, where they conference with individual students while the students read aloud, and provide a strategy such as sounding a word to help the student when they misread. However, balanced literacy strategies, while meant to integrate whole language and phonics strategies, often do not incorporate structured, continual phonics instruction. Balanced literacy’s lack of formalized phonics instruction leaves many students without the vital building blocks they need to learn how to read.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1.2 outlines what percentages of students read with different interventions to help districts strategically decide how to use literacy resources.

**Figure 1.2: Literacy Outcomes Based on Instructional Strategy**



Source: Edsource<sup>12</sup>

When instructing English Learners (ELs), schools should help students achieve mastery in their first language while teaching second language competencies. This is because first language proficiency creates a literacy foundation that aids in second language learning. Whenever possible, teachers should provide students with opportunities to listen, speak, and read in their primary language, with writing instruction as well if students’ primary language shares an alphabet with English.<sup>13</sup>

**Schools should train teachers in a science of reading approach to help all students become proficient in literacy.** Years of research find that science of reading instructional strategies have the most impact on improving students’ reading ability. However, implementing science of reading strategies in the classroom can be difficult for teachers, as it requires them to utilize new instructional methods and integrate diverse literacy activities into the curriculum. Oftentimes, districts that provide science of reading-aligned curricula without training teachers in science of reading strategies do not see improvements in student outcomes because teachers do not have the knowledge or time to incorporate new content and methods into their classrooms. Training teachers in science of reading, as well as providing teachers with time to collaborate on best practices across grade levels, helps improve curricular implementation and student reading outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

## GRADE-LEVEL STRATEGIES

The following subsections discuss which literacy strategies are best suited for Prekindergarten, Grade K, and Grade 1 reading instruction.

### PREKINDERGARTEN

**Prekindergarten students require mostly whole language approaches to gain key literacy competencies, with short, play-based phonics lessons to learn word, sound, and language fundamentals.** In Prekindergarten, students learn the complex concept that specific symbols form letters, letters form words,

<sup>11</sup> Schwartz, Op. cit.

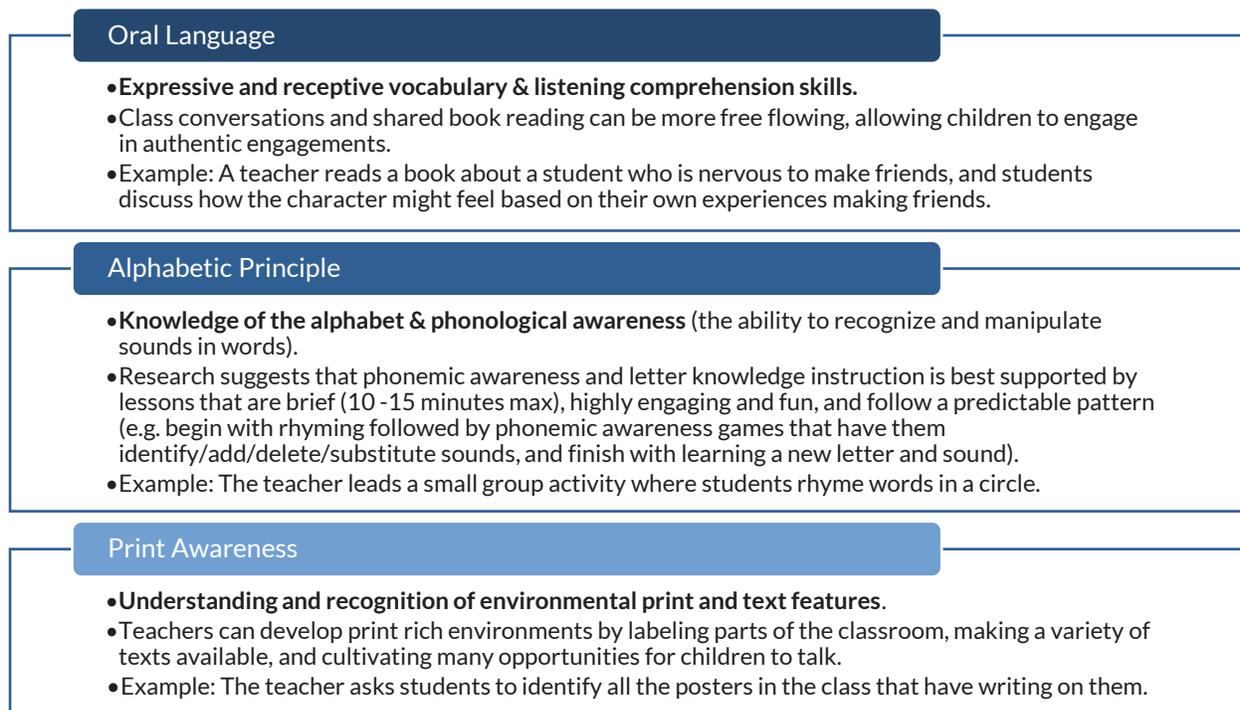
<sup>12</sup> Figure content verbatim from D’Souza, Op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Kelley, Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz, Op. cit. [2] D’Souza, Op. cit. [2] “An Explanation of Structured Literacy, and a Comparison to Balanced Literacy.” Iowa Reading Research Center, 2019.

and those words have meaning to create stories. Furthermore, students learn that they can use their own background knowledge and ideas to help them understand stories. Students master foundational literacy concepts at different rates; some may start connecting pictures in books with corresponding text while others may start to see that letters have corresponding sounds.<sup>15</sup> Figure 1.3 summarizes key concepts Prekindergarten students need to master to successfully learn to read in Grade K and Grade 1.

**Figure 1.3 Prekindergarten Literacy Competencies**



Source: UCONN Neag School of Education<sup>16</sup>

**Teachers can help students make vital Prekindergarten literacy gains by facilitating engaging, interactive, and holistic literacy activities.** When integrating literacy activities into daily classroom life, teachers should move beyond simple literacy routines, such as spelling the word “Monday” every Monday and should instead facilitate student-led co-created literacy learning. For example, students can share ideas in a read aloud, leaf through books independently, and write using invented spelling. Teacher-directed learning is also important but should only be a component of Prekindergarten reading instruction. A research article records an example of a literacy-rich prekindergarten lesson where students learn about flowers and seeds from the teacher. They then engage in centers where they plant seeds, read books about flowers, and use oral language skills during in dramatic play time in the garden. In this example, students are gaining print awareness and learning that information from a book can be useful in real life, while building their schemas on plants.<sup>17</sup> Figure 1.4 outlines engaging instructional strategies teachers can use to instill vital literacy competencies in students as a part of Prekindergarten classroom instruction.

<sup>15</sup> Kelley, Op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Figure content mostly verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Casbergue, R.M. “Ready for Kindergarten? Rethinking Early Literacy in the Common Core Era.” *Reading Teacher*, 70:6, 2017. pp. 644 A literacy rich preschool classroom promotes students’ ongoing engagement with language throughout their –646. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=122848506&site=ehost-live>

Figure 1.4 Engaging Prekindergarten Literacy Instructional Strategies



### LITERACY-RICH ENVIRONMENTS

A literacy rich Prekindergarten classroom promotes students' ongoing engagement with language throughout their school day, which promotes understanding of everyday print (e.g., food labels, street signs, clothing logos, etc.) and allows for independent reading activities. Literacy rich classrooms include:

- A library nook with a recommended 5 books per child with illustrations that are about everyday experiences, favorite topics, or skills (e.g., ABCs, rhyming) that take about 10-15 minutes to read with children.
- Labeled classroom parts (e.g., sink, table, etc.) which provide multiple opportunities for letter and word recognition and an understanding of how print is related to the environment.
- Play areas that incorporate literacy-related materials (e.g., cookbooks, maps, notebooks) that allow children to develop an understanding of how literacy is central to everyday life.



### INTERACTIVE READ ALOUD

Interactive read alouds are consistently ranked as the most impactful activity on Prekindergarten students' literacy development. This form of reading allows students to develop understandings of the concepts of print (i.e., book features like titles, dialogue, etc.) while they practice listening comprehension. During interactive read alouds, teachers should engage students in compelling conversations about the story. Skills students can practice during interactive read alouds include:

- Completion: Completing a sentence with familiar word(s).
- Recall: Remembering some aspect of the story (e.g., words, pictures, character, plot).
- Open ended: Requires more than just a one- or two-word response.
- "Wh" prompts: Who, what, when, where, why.
- Distancing: Connecting the story with children's background knowledge.



### PRINT REFERENCING

Print referencing is a strategy that can be incorporated during any literacy activity but is most often used during interactive read alouds to point out important and interesting ideas about print. Teachers can use this strategy to highlight the relationships between letters and sounds, to teach students new concepts of print, and to instruct new vocabulary. Print referencing techniques include:

- Asking questions about the print (e.g., What do you notice about the word 'red' on this page?).
- Offering comments about print (e.g., I see the date on the newspaper the man is reading).
- Tracking the print while reading.



### INTERACTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Oral language skills are highly correlated to future reading ability. Teachers can actively incorporate dynamic conversation opportunities into circle times, shared reading, meals, play, and other classroom activities. These conversations give children models of speech, teach them new vocabulary words, and offer them the opportunity to practice their own speech. To help build students' oral language capacity, teachers can engage in:

- Recasting: Restating what the child said with more detail or correct language (e.g., child says, "Milk" and the teacher responds, "I want milk please!")
- Expanding: Adding details to the child's statement (e.g., child says, "Baby cry" and the teacher responds, "The baby is hurt so she's crying")
- Open-ended questions: Asking the child to expand their statement (e.g., child says, "I'm sad" and teacher responds, "Why are you sad?")
- Extended reciprocal and responsive conversations: Engaging in multiple extended questions and responses with children.



### SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

Prekindergarten students can learn many literacy skills through play and reading, but some skills and knowledge require explicit instruction from a classroom teacher. Small group instruction is well suited to Prekindergarten

students' attention spans and varying development patterns, where teachers can pay close attention to students' individual needs and adapt instruction accordingly. Skills and knowledge teachers can impart in small groups include:

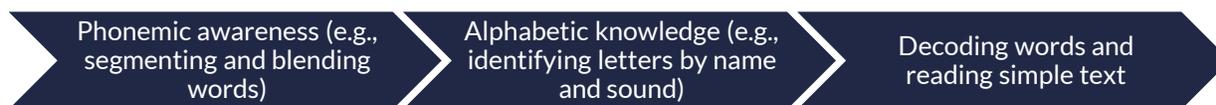
- Alphabet knowledge: Directly instruct letter names and sounds together and use memory aides.
- Phonological awareness: Pair with alphabet instruction and build in phoneme manipulation tasks like identifying, blending, and segmenting.
- Vocabulary: Directly instruct new words, allow for multiple interactions with the words, provide opportunities for students to use them, and post the words in the classroom. Teachers can also instruct vocabulary through book reading by introducing three new words, describing them using student friendly language, relating them to topics kids already know, and making them “come alive” through pictures or movements during book reading.
- Writing: Provide many different opportunities for children to engage in written expression; this may include: letters, stories, picture captions, etc. Allow students to use invented spelling or attempt to represent words in print on their own.

Source: UCONN Neag School of Education<sup>18</sup>

## GRADE K

**Kindergarten students require a science of reading instructional approach to successfully learn key literacy skills, where whole language strategies are paired with phonics instruction to teach students decoding and comprehension.** In Grade K, reading instruction becomes more formalized than in Prekindergarten, and structured literacy lessons take up more of the school day. By the end of Grade K, most students should be able to read age-appropriate stories and texts.<sup>19</sup> Figure 1.5 outlines recommended reading skills progression for Grade K students to help schools plan curricular shifts.

**Figure 1.5: Grade K Reading Skills Progression**



Source: *Assessment for Effective Intervention*<sup>20</sup>

To successfully teach Grade K students literacy, schools should use or create curricula where reading skills build on one another, so that students can use prior knowledge to understand new concepts. For example, students need to learn the sounds of different letters before they are able to understand how vowel teams work together to form different vowel sounds. For students that have difficulty acquiring reading skills, teachers should employ a structured literacy approach where they demonstrate reading skills and provide students with feedback in the moment.<sup>21</sup> Figure 1.6 outlines phonics standards schools should focus on for Grade K students.

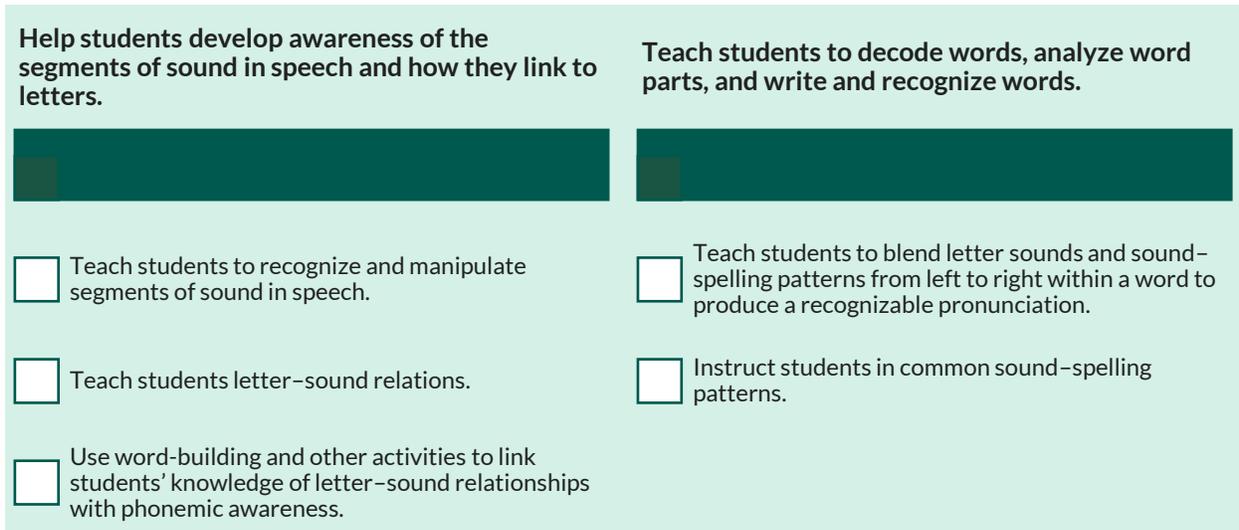
<sup>18</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Kelley, Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Clemens, N.H. et al. “Predictive Validity of Kindergarten Progress Monitoring Measures across the School Year: Application of Dominance Analysis.” *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 44:4, September 2019. p. 241. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1230620>

<sup>20</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Phonological Awareness and Phonics Instruction Rubric.” *Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest*, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2021. p. 3. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED614296>

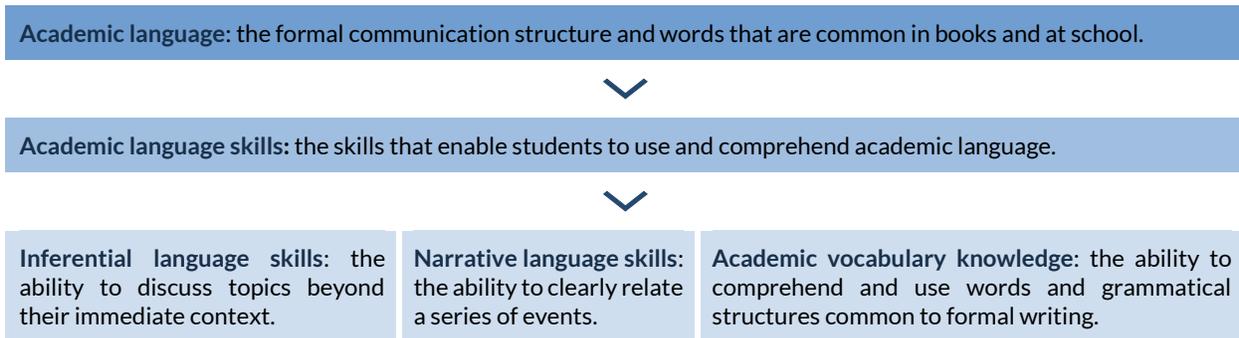
Figure 1.6 Grade K Phonics Standards



Source: What Works Clearinghouse<sup>22</sup>

**Schools should teach Grade K students academic language skills so that they can comprehend grade-level texts and scholarly conversations as they progress to Grade 1.** Academic language helps students understand, discuss, read, and write about new concepts and ideas. Students who begin Grade K with low academic language proficiency often experience reading challenges. Schools should use targeted activities to help Grade K students grow their academic language capabilities, such as teaching students vocabulary words they need to discuss academic content or exposing students to informational texts regularly. Students develop the strongest academic language skills when they are guided to connect themes across texts or use their background knowledge to enhance their understanding of texts.<sup>23</sup> Figure 1.7 outlines components of academic language to help schools plan academic language lessons and activities.

Figure 1.7 Academic Language Components



Source: What Works Clearinghouse<sup>24</sup>

**Schools should use progress monitoring to track student reading growth and provide targeted interventions.** Grade K students acquire reading skills at different rates, and benefit from targeted instruction that is specialized to their reading level. To track student learning, teachers should progress monitor student growth throughout the school year.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, teachers should screen students for

<sup>22</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid., p. 1.

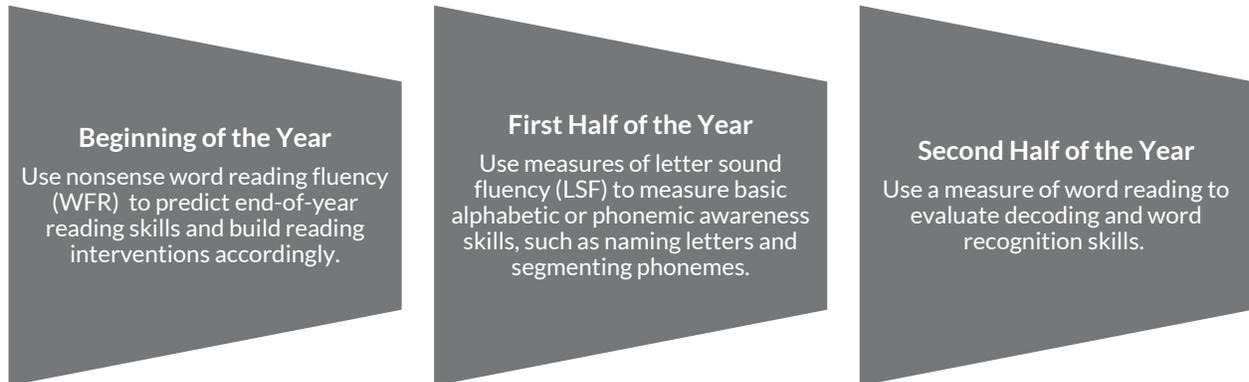
<sup>23</sup> “Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade.” What Works Clearinghouse, 2016. pp. 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Clemens et al., Op. cit., pp. 242–253.

reading difficulty at the beginning of the school year, provide targeted interventions to students who need them, and regularly track student growth to discern which students may need more intensive reading support.<sup>26</sup> Figure 1.8 outlines recommended progress monitoring methods from a 2019 study to help districts select progress monitoring tools and streamline progress monitoring practices.

**Figure 1.8 Recommended Grade K Progress Monitoring**



Source: *Assessment for Effective Intervention*<sup>27</sup>

## GRADE 1

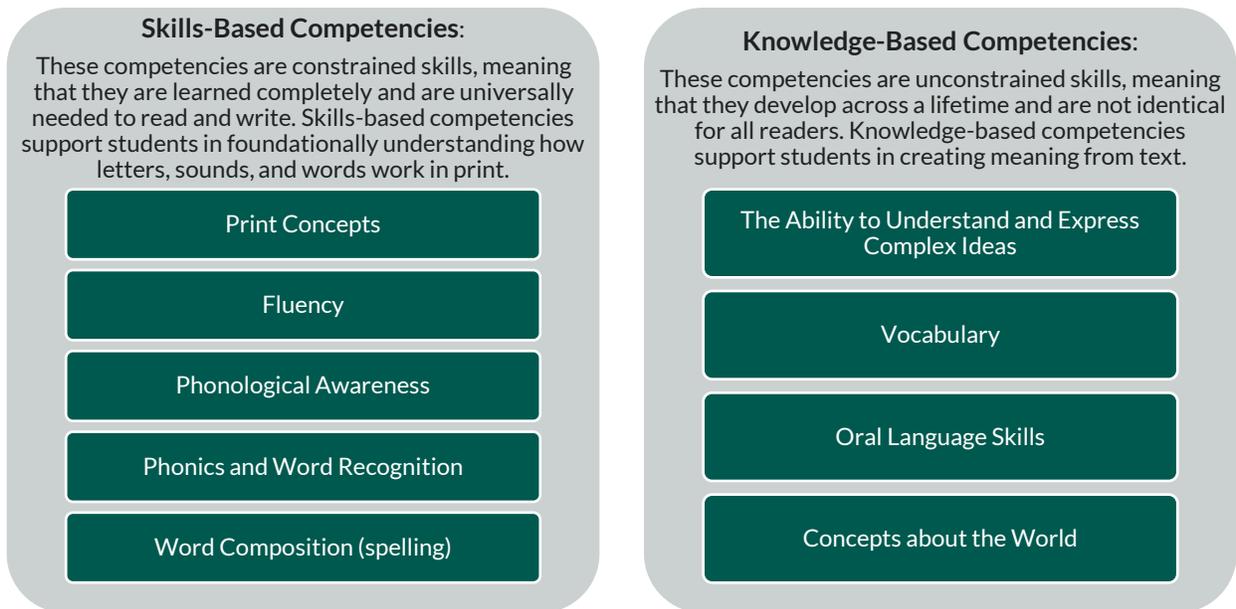
**Grade 1 students require a science of reading approach, where reading fluency and reading comprehension skills are taught in isolation and in tandem to produce dynamic and multi-faceted readers.** Grade 1 literacy instruction should build on Grade K literacy instruction by continuing to provide readers with phonetic knowledge and deep literacy understandings.<sup>28</sup> Figure 1.9 outlines the components of “skills-based competencies” and “knowledge-based competencies” to help schools build and assess their Grade 1 reading curricula.

<sup>26</sup> “Phonological Awareness and Phonics Instruction Rubric,” Op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Clemens et al., Op. cit., pp. 252–253.

<sup>28</sup> “Teaching Literacy in Tennessee.” Tennessee Department of Education. pp. 1–8.  
[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching\\_literacy\\_in\\_tn\\_update\\_4\\_9\\_18.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching_literacy_in_tn_update_4_9_18.pdf)

**Figure 1.9 Grade 1 Literacy Competencies**



Source: Tennessee Department of Education<sup>29</sup>

Schools should use a response to intervention model to support students who are below grade level in reading. Districts, schools, and teachers struggle to create and implement reading interventions because it can be hard to tell if students' reading difficulties stem from a learning disability, lack of foundational knowledge, or another factor. To streamline effective Grade 1 reading interventions, teachers can provide the bottom 20 percent of readers with an intervention that will support all readers no matter the root of their challenges, and then students that make minimal growth can be referred for additional services. Interventions that help all students marry foundational reading skills with comprehension competencies to help students reach grade level. Reading interventions are also most effective if they are research-based and aligned with school reading standards.<sup>30</sup> Figure 1.10 outlines a framework for integrated reading interventions to help schools choose rigorous reading interventions for students.

<sup>29</sup> Figure content verbatim from *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Solari, E.J., C.A. Denton, and C. Haring. "How to Reach First-Grade Struggling Readers: An Integrated Instructional Approach." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 2017. pp. 150–152.

**Figure 1.10 Integrated Reading Interventions Framework**

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	TEXT READING	COMPREHENSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide direct, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics to all students who need it.</li> <li>▪ Teach phonics elements in a carefully planned order; teach easier elements before more difficult ones.</li> <li>▪ Introduce sound-spellings in an order that will allow students to read words and sentences very early in their programs.</li> <li>▪ Provide instruction in small groups to increase at-risk students' opportunities to respond and receive feedback.</li> <li>▪ In small-group instruction, teach only the sound-spellings and other objectives that students in the group need to learn.</li> <li>▪ Provide extended opportunities to practice.</li> <li>▪ Include many hands-on activities using manipulatives such as plastic letters.</li> <li>▪ Carefully monitor students' practice and provide timely feedback so they do not practice their mistakes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have students read and write connected text for meaningful purposes every day.</li> <li>▪ Teach students to apply the same word identification and comprehension skills and strategies they are learning while reading connected text.</li> <li>▪ Have students engage in supported reading with teacher modeling, scaffolding, and feedback on these skills and strategies.</li> <li>▪ Model and prompt students to self-monitor and correct errors. Guard against the use of ineffective strategies, such as guessing words. Allowing a struggling reader to persist in a guessing strategy is setting them up for failure.</li> <li>▪ Employ a variety of fluency building approaches.</li> <li>▪ Have students read attractive informational and narrative text that allows them to apply the skills and strategies they are learning.</li> <li>▪ Provide both decodable and non-decodable text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Directly teach comprehension strategies through listening comprehension.</li> <li>▪ Provide comprehension instruction in whole-class and small-group formats.</li> <li>▪ Introduce and practice one strategy for several lessons before you introduce a new one. Start with easier strategies and progress to more abstract ones.</li> <li>▪ Model comprehension strategies through think-alouds.</li> <li>▪ Provide guided practice through read-alouds.</li> <li>▪ Provide timely corrective and positive feedback and scaffolding.</li> <li>▪ Provide cumulative practice that requires students to apply previously taught strategies along with newly introduced strategies.</li> <li>▪ Prompt and question students to encourage them to consistently apply the same strategies whenever they read connected text.</li> </ul>

Source: Teaching Exceptional Children<sup>31</sup>

**While Grade K students learn reading building blocks to become beginner readers, Grade 1 students need in-depth instruction to become competent and fluent readers.** To correctly read and understand a text, students need to participate in literacy-rich activities throughout the school day so that they know how to read individual words, but also can comprehend the greater meaning of a text. This includes reading independently, shared classroom reading, writing independently, interactive writing, and other classroom activities.<sup>32</sup> Research from the Tennessee Department of Education outlines key literacy activities Grade 1 students should engage in to acquire necessary reading competencies, as outlined in Figure 1.11 to help school districts plan effective reading curricula.

<sup>31</sup> Figure content verbatim from *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>32</sup> "Teaching Literacy in Tennessee," *Op. cit.*, pp. 9–41.

**Figure 1.11 Rigorous Grade 1 Literacy Activities, Where Students Should...**

<b>Engage with large amounts of text.</b>	Students should spend a substantial portion of their day listening to, reading, thinking, talking, and writing about texts. The more time students spend reading and listening to text, the greater their improvement in vocabulary and comprehension. Additionally, regular practice reading is essential to develop students' fluency and word recognition
<b>Read complex texts.</b>	Complex texts are texts that provide an appropriate level of rigor aligned with grade level expectations. The complex texts selected should represent a range of narrative and informational genres to support students' development of knowledge and vocabulary. Providing students with access to complex texts generates opportunities to build students' literacy skills while simultaneously building their world knowledge and vocabulary.
<b>Think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing.</b>	Teachers should give students ample opportunities to read and reread texts and respond to questions that require them to go back into the text and engage in discussions with peers. Teachers can further support this process by guiding students through text-based discussions. Authentic classroom discussion allows students to share and expand their thinking and use language in new ways. Specifically, discussions about texts provide opportunities for students to collaboratively build knowledge that in turn supports and strengthens their writing. Students' overall reading development is supported when they have opportunities to respond to text verbally and then in writing.
<b>Develop writing skills in connection to reading.</b>	Writing helps students develop proficiency as readers, writers, and thinkers. These skills should be taught through mini lessons in connection to text, rather than in isolation. Authentic opportunities to write in response to text provides a vehicle through which teachers can support students in developing writing skills. Reading and listening to texts assists students in thinking like writers, while intentional and direct instruction assists students in developing the skills of writers. Opportunities for authentic writing also support students' understanding of sentence composition, which in turn supports their reading proficiency
<b>Practice foundational literacy skills in reading and writing.</b>	Every reading and writing experience should provide students with an opportunity to develop multiple skills-based competencies. Teachers should provide explicit and systematic instruction on foundational skills, such as: print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, word composition, and fluency. Once students receive instruction in particular skills based on a carefully planned sequence, they will progress more quickly when provided with opportunities to apply those skills in the context of authentic reading and writing as opposed to isolated skill and drill work.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Ibid., p. 7.

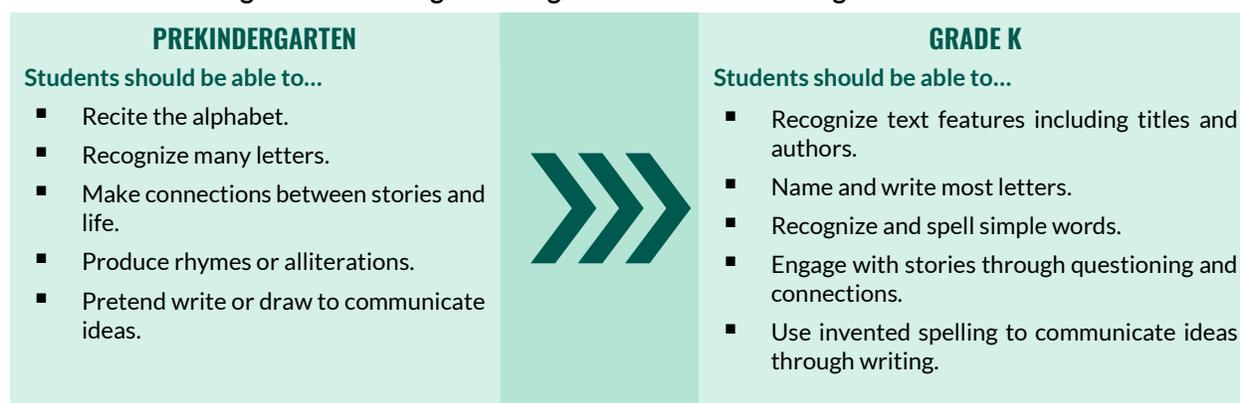
## SECTION II: EARLY LITERACY IMPLEMENTATION

The following section outlines how to align Prekindergarten with Grade K standards as well as how to align Grade K with Grade 1 standards. This section focuses on phonics standards, as they are most needed for students to learn to read proficiently but most commonly left out of early elementary classrooms.

### PREKINDERGARTEN AND GRADE K ALIGNMENT

Schools should align Prekindergarten and Grade K literacy standards and teaching strategies to maximize students' ability to acquire a strong reading foundation. When curricula and teaching methods are aligned, students experience fewer emotional and learning challenges as they transition between grades, allowing them to absorb deeper literacy knowledge. When standards are not aligned, teachers often spend too much time teaching foundational skills in Grade K that students have already mastered in Prekindergarten, leaving less time for vital grade-level learning students need to become dynamic readers.<sup>34</sup> Figure 2.1 outlines how reading skills progress from Prekindergarten to Grade K to help districts plan curricular scopes and sequences that build upon one another as students move through grades.

Figure 2.1: Reading Skill Progression from Prekindergarten to Grade K



Source: UCONN Neag School of Education<sup>35</sup>

Research finds that to maintain the literacy gains students make in Prekindergarten, and to continue those gains throughout the primary grades, schools should align literacy standards from Prekindergarten through Grade 3.<sup>36</sup> Standards should extend learning from the previous school year, and should avoid reteaching concepts.<sup>37</sup> In the process of aligning standards, districts should also invest in teacher professional learning, so that educators are using consistent methods to teach reading throughout students' schooling.<sup>38</sup> Figure 2.2 provides in-depth reading standards progression from Prekindergarten to Grade K to help districts plan lesson sequences that embed important reading skills.

<sup>34</sup> Sproul, J. "New Study Highlights the Need for Better Alignment Between Pre-K and Kindergarten." New America, 2022. <http://newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/new-study-highlights-the-need-for-better-alignment-between-pre-k-and-kindergarten/>

<sup>35</sup> Figure content verbatim from Kelley, Op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> "Preschool Through Third Grade Alignment and Differentiated Instruction." United States Department of Education, 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/p-3-alignment-differentiated-instruction/report.pdf> p. vii-x

<sup>37</sup> "California's Transitional Kindergarten: The Connective Tissue Between Preschool and Kindergarten." Development and Research in Early Math Education, 2022. <https://dreme.stanford.edu/news/california-s-transitional-kindergarten-connective-tissue-between-preschool-and-kindergarten>

<sup>38</sup> "Preschool Through Third Grade Alignment and Differentiated Instruction." United States Department of Education, 2016. p. vii-x <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/p-3-alignment-differentiated-instruction/report.pdf>

**Figure 2.2 In-Depth Foundational Reading Standards Progression**

PREKINDERGARTEN	GRADE K
<b>PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS</b>	
Students investigate and demonstrate a growing understanding of the sounds and intonation of language and can recognize rhyming words.	Students identify and produce rhyming words, identify syllables in spoken words, manipulate syllables within a multisyllabic word, segment spoken one-syllable words into individual phonemes.
Students perceive the differences between different similar sounding words and can produce a word that begins with the same sound as a given pair of words.	Students recognize spoken alliteration or groups of words that begin with the same spoken onset or initial sound.
Students separate a normally spoken four-word sentence into individual words.	Students identify individual words in spoken sentences.
Students blend syllables into words and combine words to make a compound word and can delete a word from a compound word.	Students blend syllables to form multisyllabic words.
Students can segment a syllable from a word.	Students can segment multisyllabic words into syllables.
Students can blend onset and rhyme to form familiar one-syllable words with and without pictorial support.	Students blend spoken onsets and rhymes to form simple words.
Students recognize and blend spoken phonemes into one syllable words with pictorial support.	Students blend spoken phonemes to form one-syllable words.
<b>PHONICS</b>	
Students recognize and produce at least 20 distinct letter sounds in the language of instruction.	Students identify and match letters and sounds.
N/A	Students use letter-sound relationships to denote, including VC, CVC, CCVC, and CVCC words.
N/A	Students recognize that new words are created when letter are changed, added, or deleted.
N/A	Students can identify and read at least 25 high-frequency words from a research-based list.
<b>PRINT AWARENESS</b>	
Students move from scribbles to some letter-sound correspondence using beginning and ending sounds when writing.	Students correctly spell VC, CVC, and CCVC words.
Students use letters to make words or parts of words.	Students spell words using sound-spelling patterns.
N/A	Students correctly spell high-frequency words.
N/A	Students identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book.
Students demonstrate understanding of print directionality including left to right and top to bottom.	Students can hold a book right side up, turn pages correctly, and know that reading moves from top to bottom and left to right.
Students can distinguish between elements of print including letters, words, and pictures.	Students recognize that sentences are comprised of words separated by spaces and recognize word boundaries and can tell the difference between a letter and a printed word.
Students can name at least 20 upper and at least 20 lower case letters in the language of instruction.	Students can identify all uppercase and lowercase letters.
Students can write their own name using legible letters in proper sequence and use appropriate directionality when writing.	Students develop handwriting by accurately forming all uppercase and lowercase letters using appropriate directionality.

Source: Texas Education Agency<sup>39</sup>

Schools should implement strategies beyond aligning curricula to ensure students experience a smooth transition from Prekindergarten to Grade K. For example, schools should ensure that Grade K students continue to receive similar amounts of free play or choice time as they do in Prekindergarten, so that they are

<sup>39</sup> Figure content mostly verbatim from “Early Childhood Vertical Alignments.” Texas Education Agency. pp. 6–11.  
[https://startsmarttexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early\\_Childhood\\_Vertical\\_Alignments\\_FV.pdf](https://startsmarttexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early_Childhood_Vertical_Alignments_FV.pdf)

able to use expressive language and storytelling to continue building vital whole-language competencies.<sup>40</sup> Figure 2.3 outlines general strategies schools can use to successfully transition students from Prekindergarten to Grade K.

**Figure 2.3 Prekindergarten to Grade K Transition Strategies**

Gradually shift the amount of choice time and structured instructional time student receive from grade to grade, so that they do not experience a dramatic decrease in choice time or a dramatic increase in structured instructional time.

Use common assessments across grades to measure student learning needs and growth.

Implement joint planning time when Prekindergarten, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 teachers can create units and share strategies.

Ensure classroom environments and routines stay consistent across early elementary grade levels, especially for Prekindergarten and Grade K classes.

Employ Grade K readiness standards to help transition students from Prekindergarten to Grade K.

Utilize records transfer, student classroom visits, and parent orientation to make transitions between grades seamless.

Source: United States Department of Education<sup>41</sup>

## GRADE K AND GRADE 1 ALIGNMENT

**District literacy curricula should focus on reading building blocks in Grade K to help students learn to read fluently in Grade 1.** In Grade K, students need to learn to recognize different sounds in words, as well as internalize letter sound relationships, to read basic words that consistently follow letter-sound rules such as “bat” and “chair”. In Grade 1, students need to learn how complex patterns of sound can create multi-syllabic words in order to spell and sound out new words that follow and break letter-sound rules. Figure 2.4 outlines the progression from Grade K reading skills to Grade 1 reading skills to help districts plan curricular scopes and sequences that build upon one another as students move through grades. For more information on how to implement the recommendations in Figure 2.4 visit What Work’s Clearinghouse’s [website](#).<sup>42</sup>

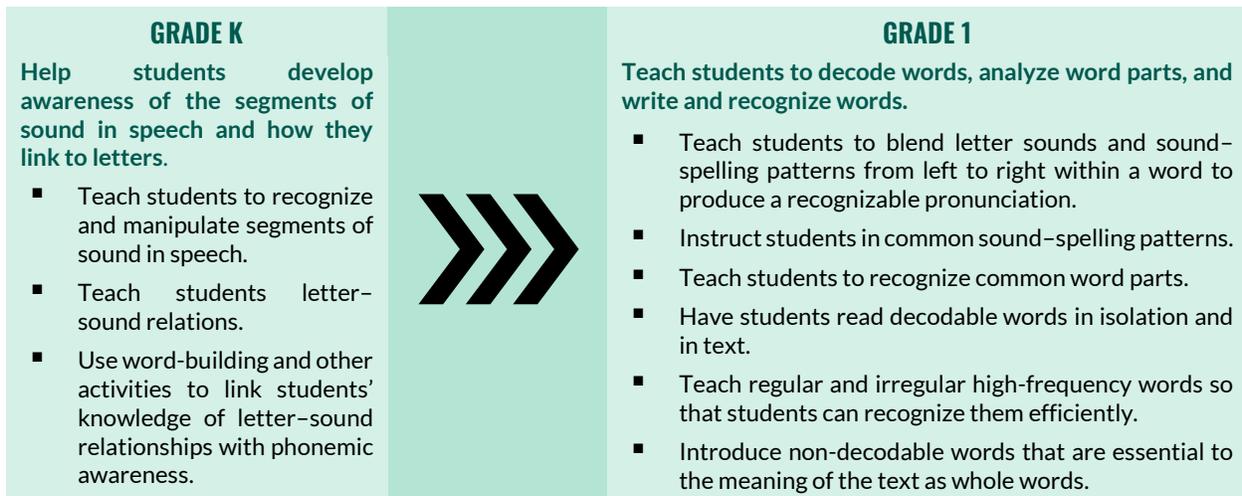
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<sup>40</sup> Sproul, Op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from “Preschool Through Third Grade Alignment and Differentiated Instruction,” Op. cit., pp. 11–13.

<sup>42</sup> “Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade,” Op. cit., pp. 22–30.

Figure 2.4 Reading Skill Progression from Grade K to Grade 1



Source: What Works Clearinghouse<sup>43</sup>

To integrate key literacy competencies into already existing curricula, schools can provide students with supplemental reading and writing activities that target skill- and knowledge-based competencies. To accomplish this, schools can incorporate literacy activities into already existing lessons, or individual teachers can provide students with literacy activities who need targeted support. Figure 2.5 provides an inventory of Grade K and 1 skills that schools can integrate into literacy curricula; items that are starred are only Grade K skills and should, if possible, be mastered by students before they enter Grade 1. Schools can reference Achieve the Core's [website](https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Foundational%20Skills%20Practice%20Strategies.pdf) to find activities that correspond with the below inventory.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "Foundational Skills Practice Strategies." Achieve The Core.

<https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Foundational%20Skills%20Practice%20Strategies.pdf>

**Figure 2.5 Foundational Literacy Skills Inventory**

PRINT CONCEPTS	FLUENCY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ *Letter Recognition: The ability to recognize and name all upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet.</li> <li>▪ Handwriting: Printing upper and lowercase letters clearly and consistently.</li> <li>▪ *How Books and Print Work: Recognizing the features of books (e.g., front and back cover, title, first page, where the text begins, etc.), and how print works on the page (e.g., where to start, reading from left to right, spaces between words, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fluency (any text): The act of reading with accuracy, automaticity, and appropriate rate. Students need some practice with a range of different text types.</li> <li>▪ Fluency (decodables): Same as above, with a focus on decoding words with taught sound and spelling patterns.</li> </ul>
PHONICS AND WORD RECOGNITION	STANDARDS BRIDGING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letter Sound Identification: Recognizing the name of the printed letter and the sound or sounds it represents, on sight.</li> <li>▪ Encoding (out of context): The process of using letter/sound knowledge to represent spoken words in writing.</li> <li>▪ Decoding (out of context): The process of reading words by recognizing the letters and the sounds they represent, and then blending them together accurately. “Out of context” refers to reading words in isolation, or out of the context of connected text.</li> <li>▪ High Frequency Words: Words that occur most frequently in text.</li> <li>▪ Decodable Text (in-context practice): Text that is intentionally constructed, consisting of primarily taught, high frequency words and words that contain taught sound and spelling patterns for students to practice decoding connected sentences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence-Based Writing: Writing about text, using information gained from reading or listening to read-aloud.</li> <li>▪ Retelling/ Rereading Texts Retelling a story orally, reading texts over and over.</li> <li>▪ Knowledge Building: Building knowledge and vocabulary through reading of multiple texts on the same topic.</li> </ul>
PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General Listening: Listening with intention.</li> <li>▪ Rhyming The ability to recognize and produce words (or nonsense words) with endings that sound the same.</li> <li>▪ *Isolating/*Identifying/Blending/Segmenting Syllables Blending involves putting together words from individual syllables; segmenting involves breaking down/taking apart words into their individual syllables.</li> <li>▪ Onset/Rime Onset is the initial phonological unit or sound in a word, and rime is the letter or letters that follow (most frequently, a vowel and end consonants).</li> <li>▪ Isolating*/Identifying*/Blending/Segmenting Phonemes: Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that combine to make up words. Isolating and identifying phonemes involves hearing, recognizing, and naming the individual speech sounds in words. Blending and segmenting with phonemes involves breaking words down into their individual sounds (segmenting) and putting them back together again (blending).</li> <li>▪ Adding/Substituting Phonemes Adding and substituting phonemes involves adding a new phoneme to a word (as in, what word do you get if you add /b/ to “at”) or swapping one for another (take off the /c/ sound in “cat” and add /r/ instead—what word did you make?)</li> </ul>	

Source: Achieve the Core<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid.

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