

Early Literacy Update February 2024

In order to support MVWSD's Strategic Plan goal of providing effective and consistent instructional practices that meet the needs of all students, our district has created an early literacy team.

Third grade marks the shift of learning to read to reading to learn, meaning that reading shifts from a focus on decoding words and making sense of words on a page to reading as a tool for learning new information. Therefore, it is critical that students are reading at grade level by the time they reach third grade. In Spring 2023, only 67% of our district's second graders were reading at grade level (Tier 1), according to iReady Reading diagnostic 3. Additionally, there is a need across the district to align our instructional practices with evidence-based instruction and the Science of Reading.

In response to the data, MVWSD placed an increased focus on supporting early literacy through the formation of an early literacy team. In addition to a Director of Early Literacy, the team includes 5 reading intervention (RI) teachers and 5 instructional assistants (IA). The team supports foundational reading skills development through reading intervention, professional development, and family education and engagement. The team also supports the shift to structured literacy, evidence-based instructional practices, and the Science of Reading through collaboration with principal and coach teams and providing professional development for leaders and teachers.

Although the Science of Reading has become more widely discussed in the last few years, it is not new. The Science of Reading is based on over five decades of research across many disciplines on how our brains learn to read, why some people have difficulty learning how to read, and the type of instruction that works the best for the most students.

Scarborough's Rope provides a helpful visual representation of skilled reading. Skilled reading is the product, or outcome, of both language comprehension and word recognition. There are several components that make up word recognition and language comprehension. Skilled readers become increasingly automatic with their word recognition skills and increasingly strategic in how they use language comprehension. It is important to note that word recognition is not biologically natural. Our brains are not wired for reading--we must develop that area of our brain through explicit teaching and practice. Language comprehension, however, is biologically natural--the majority of people are able to develop speech naturally and it is developed and nurtured through both explicit and implicit teaching. Scarborough's Rope is a helpful model to understand how to effectively plan for first, core instruction as well as to determine the best way to intervene when a student is having difficulty. Since reading comprehension is the outcome of automatic word recognition and strategic language comprehension, we can target our reading intervention on the individual strands of the reading rope that are weaker. Reading comprehension difficulties are often a result of either undeveloped word recognition or limited vocabulary and background knowledge.

Reading Intervention Work to Date

The early literacy team's approach to intervention is to provide data-driven tiered support following our district's Universal Data Cycle calendar as part of our Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This means that groups are formed based on several data sources including iReady, reading difficulty screeners, and other early literacy assessments. Each intervention cycle lasts for 8-9 weeks. Students' progress is monitored throughout the cycle. At the end of each cycle, students are given a post-assessment to determine continued need for or exit from reading intervention. Our RI team utilizes a systematic, evidence-based multimodal approach for teaching, reteaching, practicing, and reinforcing foundational word recognition skills.

iReady Diagnostic 2 data shows that reading students are making progress on the targeted foundational skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and high frequency words. There were double digit reductions in the percentage of students scoring in Tier 3 in several areas.

Highlights include:

- -22% 2nd grade phonological awareness
- -25% 1st grade phonics
- -23% 1st grade high frequency words
- -30% 1st grade overall

Additionally, there were double digit gains in the percentage of students scoring in Tier 1 as well:

- +26% kinder phonological awareness
- +13% 1st grade phonics
- +25% 2nd grade high frequency words
- +18% kinder overall

The reading intervention team is able to provide reading intervention services for almost every student who was flagged for reading difficulty on the iReady dyslexia screener. In total, the team is providing services to approximately 40% of the students in grades K-2 at the early literacy sites. It is important to remember that every K-2 student at the early literacy sites receives targeted literacy support during the dedicated intervention block--either from the reading intervention teacher or from their classroom teacher. The reading intervention teachers collaborate monthly with the classroom teachers to serve as a resource on early literacy strategies and to help progress monitor students.

Disaggregating the data by site, students at Monta Loma and Theuerkauf generally made more gains on iReady than students at Castro and Mistral. Many of the students at Castro are newcomers; they receive support from both the newcomer program and reading intervention. Reading intervention teachers set interim goals for each intervention cycle. The majority of students are making progress on those interim goals.

The reading intervention program is responsive to student data. The team was able to exit 50 students from reading intervention who were at or near proficiency in phonological awareness and phonics and serve new students with demonstrated need. Additionally, because of the student performance growth, the team was able to consolidate some of the reading intervention

groups at Monta Loma. Staff was redeployed to provide additional support at Castro and to serve a small number of 3rd and 4th graders at Castro, Mistral, and Monta Loma.

Additional Work To Date

In addition to providing reading intervention, the early literacy team is also supporting professional development and family engagement. Leaders and coaches have received several professional development sessions to understand the science of reading and the corresponding instructional shifts. The Director of Early Literacy will continue to collaborate with site leaders to plan for differentiated site-based science of reading professional development this spring, in preparation for the implementation of new curriculum in the fall.

Teachers are receiving professional development on the science of reading and instructional shifts in several ways. Each school site will engage in professional development this spring. Additionally, teachers may attend an after school professional development series that dives deeper into evidence-based strategies that teachers can use now in their classrooms with our current curriculum. Professional development has been provided for all levels, from PK/TK to middle school.

The early literacy team has also been supporting families as partners in literacy development through a pilot program at Theuerkauf. During our monthly Family Reading Club, 1st and 2nd grade reading intervention students and their families meet to build community, learn and practice an at home activity to support literacy, and receive a set of personalized, take-home decodable books that contain easily-accessible video support in both English and Spanish. Topics for these Family Reading Club nights have been how to practice reading and spelling irregular words, how to improve working memory, the 44 sounds of the English language, and reading fluency.

Considerations

The early literacy team was formed to address the foundational skills needs of our most underperforming schools. The purpose of reading intervention is to fill gaps so that students can more fully access the general education curriculum. However, the success of reading intervention is contingent on the success of core, first instruction. Reading intervention is also focused on one strand of reading--not the whole process. Students continue to need lots of oral language development and vocabulary and to gain content knowledge in order to be skilled readers.

There is a lot to learn about the science of reading and the corresponding instructional shifts. The focus of this year's professional development is to understand some of the key principles within the science of reading so that sites can make a smooth transition to the new textbook.

Next Steps

The early literacy team will continue to monitor progress throughout the remaining data cycles. The team will collaborate with sites through monthly collaboration and the MTSS process. The team will support sites with science of reading professional development and provide input on

early literacy to the Reimagining Castro Educational Roundtable project. The Board will receive another update on early literacy at the June 13th Board meeting.