

Mountain View Whisman School District

Agenda Item for Board Meeting of June 13, 2024

Agenda Category: Discussion Agenda

Agenda Item Title: Early Literacy Update

Responsible: Dr. Cyndee Nguyen - Director of Early Literacy

Background: 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 had created an early literacy team. The team supported foundational reading skills development through reading intervention, professional development, and family education and engagement. The team also supported the shift to structured literacy, evidence-based instructional practices, and the Science of Reading through collaboration with principal and coach teams, providing professional development for leaders and teachers, and hosting family reading nights.

Reading Intervention Work to Date

The early literacy team's approach to intervention was 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 were formed based on several data sources including i-Ready, reading difficulty screeners, and other early literacy assessments. Each intervention cycle lasted for 8-10 weeks. Students' progress was monitored throughout the cycle. At the end of each cycle, students were given a post-assessment to determine continued need for or exit from reading intervention. Our RI team utilized a systematic, evidence-based multimodal approach for teaching, reteaching, practicing, and reinforcing foundational word recognition skills.

i-Ready Diagnostic 3 data shows that reading intervention students have made progress on the targeted foundational skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and high frequency words. In iReady, tier one (green) means a student is scoring on or above grade level, tier two (yellow) is one grade level below, while tier three (red) is two or more grade levels below. Our goals in reading intervention are to decrease the number of students in tier three and increase the number of students in tier one.

There were double digit reductions in the percentage of students scoring in tier three in several areas. Highlights include:

- -41% 2nd grade phonics
- -41% 1st grade phonics
- -33% 2nd grade high frequency words
- -43% 1st grade overall

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

- +42% kinder phonological awareness
- +41% 1st grade phonics
- +39% Kinder overall
- +38% 1st grade overall

The reading intervention team was 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 has provided services to approximately 50% 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 received targeted literacy support during the dedicated intervention block--either from the reading intervention teacher or from their classroom teacher. The reading intervention teachers collaborated monthly with the classroom teachers to serve as a resource on early literacy strategies and to help progress monitor students.

The reading intervention program was responsive to student data. The team was able to exit 77 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.

Disaggregating the data by site, students at Monta Loma and Theuerkauf generally ended the year with more students scoring in tier one on iReady than students at Castro and Mistral.

However, students at Castro made incredible growth. Many of the students at Castro are newcomers; they received support from both the newcomer program and reading intervention. Some highlights for Castro:

- +59% (from 0%) tier one 2nd grade phonological awareness
- +56% (from 0%) tier one Kindergarten phonics
- -50% tier three 1st grade phonics
- -59% tier three 2nd grade high frequency words
- -55% tier three 1st grade overall

The growth for Castro students in many of the grade levels and domains exceeds the average growth from the four early literacy sites. Even with the growth in the second grade, the data shows that there will still be a need for many of the rising second graders to continue receiving intervention support in third grade.

The reading intervention students at Mistral also made growth, although the growth was not as large as at Castro. Because students at Mistral are receiving core language arts instruction in both English and Spanish, it is expected that growth will be slower in the early grades. Some highlights for Mistral include:

- 0% in tier three 1st grade phonological awareness, phonics, and overall
- -61% tier three 1st grade high frequency words
- -33% tier three 2nd grade phonics

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. Reading intervention is also focused on one strand of reading--not the whole process. Because skilled reading is a product of strong word recognition and language comprehension, students also need lots of oral language development, vocabulary, and content knowledge in order to be skilled readers.

In order to plan adjustments for next year's early literacy program, the team reviewed the findings from a Vanderbilt University study as well as feedback and lessons learned from this school year.

Vanderbilt University Study

Three graduate students from Vanderbilt University completed a program evaluation of MVWSD's early literacy efforts. Their capstone project is titled, "From Phonics to Fluency: Mapping Early Literacy in Mountain View Whisman School District." Through a series of interviews, surveys, and observations conducted in late November, and through document reviews, the team found that:

- Tier 1 and Tier 2 literacy instruction was not aligned. The Orton-Gillingham (OG) curriculum was implemented with fidelity in reading intervention classrooms, but not in general education classrooms. District structures did not support integration of OG between general education and reading intervention. Additionally, teachers reported that they required more adequate tools to teach literacy.
- Parents would like to participate in more school-led literacy activities and workshops.
- Parents and teachers agreed that culturally relevant practices are incorporated into early literacy instruction.

Based on these findings, the Vanderbilt team recommended the following actions:

- Embrace the Science of Reading
- Cultivate culturally relevant instruction
- Empower parents as partners
- Equip educators with professional development in OG curriculum
- Revise the school schedule
- Establish Professional Learning Communities
- Ensure sustainability and long-term impact

Reading Intervention Lessons Learned

In addition to the findings and recommendations from the Vanderbilt team, the MVWSD early literacy team reflected on the lessons learned this school year.

The reading intervention team paired reading intervention teachers with an instructional assistant. This allowed the RI team to serve more students. Although the IAs were skilled and received ongoing training and coaching support, they could only teach a portion of the lessons (red words and fluency) while RI teachers focused on the more rigorous portions of the lessons (interleaved practice, articulation, encoding and decoding, and reading connected text). Ideally, the students would spend more time on the lesson components that the RI teacher was teaching than on the components that the IA was teaching; however, because the students split their time

between the RI teacher and the IA through a rotation, they had shorter time blocks to practice key skills.

Reading intervention was scheduled during the RTI/STEAM block so that students would not miss core, first instruction. However, as a result, intervention groups were limited to the students in a single classroom. That means that first graders in two different homerooms could not be grouped together for RTI. Additionally, students that needed reading intervention were not spread evenly across classes, so RI may have been “full” for students who needed support in one homeroom, but “open” for students who needed less support in the other homeroom.

The success of reading intervention is contingent on its alignment with strong core, first teaching. There was a misalignment between the type of instruction that students were receiving in Tier 1 and in reading intervention. Classroom teachers used the adopted curriculum, Benchmark Advance, which utilizes a balanced literacy approach and prompts students to use picture clues and visual memory to read. Reading intervention teachers used Institute for Multi-Sensory Education Orton-Gillingham (IMSE OG), which utilizes a structured literacy approach that explicitly teaches orthographic mapping and prompts students to use phonics to read. The research shows that for reading intervention to be most effective, Tier 2 instruction should be an additional dose of instruction that is more targeted and more intense, rather than a fundamentally different program.

Because the research shows that early intervention leads to better student outcomes, the team started the year intervening with students in grades K-2. However, intervening with Kindergarteners in the first trimester of school was less effective, as students had not yet received their first “dose” of instruction. Additionally, the data showed that there were third graders who could still benefit from reading intervention.

The team piloted a Family Reading Night program at Theuerkauf. Parents and their children were invited to monthly workshops in which families gathered to build community, parents learned and practiced a reading activity they could do with their children, and students left with a package of decodable readers. At Vargas, Principal Taylor implemented a similar Family Reading Night program; however, they met three times a year instead of once a month. Additionally, one of the RI teachers facilitated three parent education workshops at Landels. The team found that the programs that met less frequently (Landels and Vargas) actually had greater average attendance than the program that met every month (Theuerkauf).

Next Steps

Based on the data, Vanderbilt study, and lessons learned, the team will make some adjustments to the program for the 24-25 school year.

Instead of an early literacy team that is composed of RI teachers and IAs, the team will be replacing the 5 IAs with one additional RI teacher. This means that RI teachers will have slightly larger RI groups and that the team will be able to expand their support to Vargas School.

Castro, Mistral, and Theuerkauf will implement a multi-grade level RTI block. RI teachers will push in to provide intervention during these grade level RTI blocks. This structure will allow for

more targeted intervention groups and increased collaboration and alignment between classroom and RI teachers.

Next year, elementary teachers will implement the Amplify CKLA ELA curriculum. CKLA uses a structured literacy approach and places a heavy emphasis on systematic, explicit word recognition instruction and knowledge building. The foundational skills instruction follows OG principles. Teachers will receive ongoing support through district and site-based PD sessions, coaching, and district-wide grade level Literacy PLCs. RI teachers will co-facilitate Literacy PLCs with coaches and a lead teacher, creating more alignment across schools and across tiers of instruction. Because we know that Tier 2 instruction is most effective when it is an increased dose of more targeted and intensive instruction, our RI teachers have already begun the work of aligning their Tier 2 intervention with the Amplify CKLA strategies. This alignment is made easier because all classroom teachers will be utilizing the same type of instruction.

Our current end of year i-Ready data shows that there are still rising third graders who need additional reading support. Therefore, the team will begin the year providing intervention for first through third graders. After i-Ready diagnostic 2 and the winter dyslexia screener in November, the team will exit the third graders and begin intervening with Kindergarteners who show risk for reading difficulties.

Next year, we will also need to adjust and systematize early literacy assessments to better identify student needs and monitor progress. The team will also expand family literacy events and workshops to additional sites.