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EARLY LITERACY PLAYBOOK

A game changer for school and system leaders

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Early Literacy Playbook

Introduction

To familiarize yourself with the playbook's design, optimal use, and key players, we highly recommend reading this short introduction in its entirety before making copies of the playbook's phases (see the links at [the end of this document](#)).

Why did we make the playbook?

We know that educators want to provide quality, equitable educational experiences for all students in their schools. But we also know that's easier said than done.

In early 2020, we began our own investigation into the research and practice of foundational literacy education to identify the most critical elements of high-quality, effective early literacy programs. In winter 2021, we released the five [Essential Practices in Early Literacy](#), which identified everything that we had learned about the components of effective early literacy programs: 1) an early literacy **vision** grounded in the science of reading; 2) high-quality **materials** that attend to foundational skills, knowledge building, and vocabulary instruction; 3) routine **data** practices that enable educators to keep a real-time pulse on student progress and make informed instructional decisions; 4) a well-informed and skilled **team** that has the resources it needs to support educators and students; and 5) sufficient **time** for educators to engage in ongoing professional learning and early literacy responsibilities. We broke each of the five essential practices into indicators that described measurable qualities of each practice so leaders could reflect on the extent to which each was implemented in their building or district.

The Essential Practices in Early Literacy provided a clear vision for education leaders looking to improve K–2 reading proficiency across their building, district, or state. The Early Literacy Playbook provides a path to bring that vision to life.

This playbook provides ready-to-use, step-by-step guidance—including templates and examples—that early literacy leaders and educators can use to strengthen and monitor early literacy in their school or system, whether they're implementing the essential practices from scratch or tuning up what they already have in place.



How did we decide what to include?

Everything in the playbook is based on our research and work implementing the essential practices with our early literacy pilot partners. We've learned a lot about what it takes to do this work well, but we also know that we still have more to learn as we continue to pilot our early literacy model with more partners in different contexts. True to our commitment to share what we learn, as we learn it, this document represents the best of what we know now about how leaders can strengthen early literacy in their schools and systems. However, we expect this to be the first of many iterations of this playbook. We'll update it routinely as we continue to learn more.

We also recognize that the years-long, school-based partnerships that informed this playbook are challenging to translate to two-dimensional documents. We've done our best to break down the journey of implementing the essential practices into easy-to-follow sequential action steps, but we acknowledge that—though the content of the documents is based on our research and shoulder-to-shoulder work in schools—the formatting is not.

We would greatly appreciate any feedback schools or systems have about their experience using the playbook, including its accessibility and user friendliness. Please submit any feedback and suggestions you have through [this form](#).

What's in the playbook?

The playbook is composed of four *phases*, representing distinct bodies of work that build on each other:


- Phase 1: Strategize, Plan, and Launch
- Phase 2: Implement Professional Learning
- Phase 3: Implement Data and Strategic Intervention
- Phase 4: Reflect and Refine


Each phase contains a series of *action sets* (i.e., tables) that are designed to strengthen one or more essential practice indicators through a series of *action steps* (i.e., rows in the tables). In the graphic below, you can see the full list of indicators that appear in each phase. Practices with asterisks represent ongoing work and appear in multiple phases. See [Essential Practices in Early Literacy](#) for more detailed information about each practice and its indicators.





Phase 1

 1A: Vision statement
*1B: Roles and responsibilities


 2A: Tier 1 instructional materials
2B: Alignment of materials, assessments, and resources
2C: Culturally, linguistically relevant materials
2D: Tiered intervention programs
*2E: Strategic, data-driven instruction

 3A: Assessment system
3B: Assessment for MLs


 4A: Diverse, purposeful team
*4B: Knowledgeable, skilled team
*4C: Ongoing professional learning

 5A: Instructional time
5B: LIEP time
5C: Collaboration time
5D: Professional learning time
5E: Data cycle time

Phase 2

 *1B: Roles and responsibilities


 *2E: Strategic, data-driven instruction


 *4B: Knowledgeable, skilled team
*4C: Ongoing professional learning
*4D: Strategic, collaborative supports

Phase 3


 *1B: Roles and responsibilities

 *2E: Strategic, data-driven instruction


 3C: Student goals and targets
3D: Data cycle process
3E: Data disaggregation
3F: Communication with families/caregivers

 *4B: Knowledgeable, skilled team
*4C: Ongoing professional learning
*4D: Strategic, collaborative supports
*4E: Strategy evaluation

Phase 4

 *1B: Roles and responsibilities

 *2E: Strategic, data-driven instruction

 *4B: Knowledgeable, skilled team
*4C: Ongoing professional learning
*4E: Strategy evaluation
4F: Strategic planning and support

 Vision

 Materials

 Data

 Team

 Time

 Multi-phase work



The action sets and steps in the playbook are intentionally designed and sequenced—they’re based on research, best practices, and our own work in schools—but they aren’t prescriptive. Schools and systems have unique needs, so we’ve designed the action plans to be easily adaptable (i.e., a series of editable Google Docs), enabling users to easily customize (i.e., alter, omit, or add) action steps in accordance with their context. However, based on our experience testing the essential practices in the field, we highly suggest that leaders attend to all of the action sets in each phase before progressing to the next.

At the end of the first three phases, there is a checklist that represents the major work of the phase. Regardless of how your team chooses to modify the plans, we recommend that you check off each list item before proceeding. The items in each checklist serve as the foundation for the subsequent phase.

Finally, it’s important to note that, even after a team has completed an action plan, they may need to revisit part of it at some point in the future if they find that a structure or element needs to be revamped or strengthened. To facilitate continuous improvement, at the end of Phase 4, we linked this comprehensive **rubric**. Leaders can periodically complete the rubric to assess how well each of the essential practice indicators is implemented in their school or system. If they find that there are indicators that are not fully implemented, they can return to the specific action sets that are designed to strengthen those indicators.

Who are the players?

Various players own action steps throughout the phases. Below are our definitions:

1. **School and/or system leader(s):** The leader(s) responsible for overseeing and orchestrating the implementation of school and/or system (i.e., district) decisions (e.g., a principal, an early literacy programming director, a superintendent).
2. **Early literacy team (roughly 10 people):** The entire group of stakeholders that provides input on early literacy initiatives and instruction, including school and system leaders, coaches, teachers, interventionists, and coordinators of special populations (e.g., MLs).
3. **Early literacy leadership team (roughly three people):** A subset of early literacy team members that is responsible for ensuring that early literacy initiatives are implemented effectively and continuously improving, makes recommendations to school/system leaders, and leads the early literacy team.
4. **Early literacy educators:** All teachers responsible for facilitating early literacy instruction to students in grades K–12 (e.g., classroom teachers, ML and SPED teachers, early literacy interventionists).



5. **Early literacy stakeholders:** All members of the school community responsible for supporting students in K–2 literacy, including—but not limited to—instructional coaches, district team members, educational assistants, early literacy educators, and the early literacy team.

Note: Where one of these groups is listed in bold before an action step, it is best practice to assign a specific person to lead that step. An “owner” column is included in the table to make these notes.

How do you get started?

Links to each of the four phases are available below. It may be helpful to open, make a copy of, and briefly review each before you get started. However, we urge you not to be overwhelmed by the scope of the four phases. Building and implementing robust, effective early literacy structures and strategies is not an overnight process. Based on our own work in schools and systems, we would expect working through all four phases to take multiple years. We would not, however, expect it to take multiple years for schools and systems to see results. The phases are designed to generate continual progress that builds on what’s already in place—every step of the way.

Phase 1: Strategize, Plan, and Launch

Phase 1 outlines the preliminary steps that early literacy teams can take to strengthen and monitor early literacy in their school or system—it focuses on laying a stable foundation that leaders and their teams can leverage as they support teachers in planning and facilitating strategic, effective, and engaging early literacy instruction.

Phase 2: Implement Professional Learning

Phase 2 focuses on strengthening professional learning to ensure that leaders and teachers have the tools and skills they need to implement and monitor strategic, effective, and engaging early literacy instruction.

Phase 3: Implement Data and Strategic Intervention

Phase 3 focuses on developing leaders’ and teachers’ capacity to use data to better understand students’ progress at the system, building, and classroom levels in order to strengthen students’ instructional experience and ensure that all students are reading proficiently by the end of 2nd grade.

Phase 4: Reflect and Refine

Phase 4 focuses on monitoring and improving all of the work that leaders and teams completed in the first three phases.