



High-Quality, Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction for All Maine Pre-K to Grade 3 Students

Being literate is an issue of equity. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are gatekeepers for learning and for participating productively in today's world. Brain research conducted over the past several decades has revealed the processes involved in becoming literate and has underscored the aspects of instructional practice essential for promoting strong beginning reading and literacy abilities.

The brain is most sensitive to language and literacy development during the first 10 years of children's lives. When the adults who impact children's literacy development – parents, caregivers, educators – understand and provide the kinds of experiences necessary to build a literate foundation and have the skills and resources to do so, the benefits can be immense.

The human brain is prewired to acquire oral language (listening and speaking) when stimulated through interactions like engaging in conversations and listening to stories/books. The neural pathways necessary to read and write are more effectively and efficiently constructed by the brain through explicit and systematic instruction. The brains of young learners need to connect the sounds of language (phonology) to visual letters and words (phonics). The brain must also connect its sound and visual sections with the region that stores vocabulary and knowledge. To build strong vocabulary and knowledge, children must have regular and rich content experiences.

As part of [Maine's Whole Student Approach](#), the Maine Department of Education strongly advocates that during the Pre-K to Grade 3 span local programming include intentionally planned experiences that facilitate literacy development. Instruction should be both explicit (clear explanations with examples) and systematic (presented in an intentionally planned sequence). Literacy instruction should also be aligned to Maine's learning standards ([Maine's English language arts standards](#) and [Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards](#)) and well-integrated with interdisciplinary study and project-based learning opportunities. For students who are multilingual learners, literacy instruction should be responsive to factors of first and second language acquisition. The [WIDA English Language Development Standards](#) work in tandem with the English language arts and other content standards to ensure acquisition of academic language and content successfully and simultaneously. Pre-K to Grade 3 educational experiences related to beginning reading and literacy for all students should include:

Essential Literacy Content

- Phonological awareness and play with word sounds (PK-1).
- Letter-sound relationships/phonics to support both decoding and encoding (K-3).
- Word analysis strategies (especially phonemic decoding with monitoring for meaning, K-3).

- Reading fluency development with connected text (including accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, 1-3).
- Vocabulary development well connected to content study and knowledge building (PK-3).
- Comprehension development with grade level books/text (e.g., text structure knowledge, comprehension strategy use, genre knowledge, PK-3).
- Handwriting (PK-3) and keyboarding (2-3) development.
- Text composition/written expression (e.g., planning, drafting, revising, and editing strategies; text structure, genre and craft knowledge; spelling and sentence construction strategies; capitalization and punctuation, PK-3).
- For multilingual learners, primary languages utilized as assets to support English language and literacy development, including explicit connections between phonologic, syntactic, and orthographic structures.

Emphasis of High-Quality, Evidence-Based Core Instruction

The table below indicates, through its shading, the changing emphasis placed on essential components of literacy instruction across the Pre-K to Grade 3 span as well as the focus of components at various points along the typical learning progression. Time frames for literacy development may vary for students as they build proficiency.

	PreK	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Phonological Awareness	BLENDING & SEGMENTING	ADDITION, DELETION & SUBSTITUTION			DICTATION
Phonics	LETTERS, SOUNDS & COMBINATIONS		MULTISYLLABIC WORDS		WORD STUDY
Vocabulary	SPEAKING & LISTENING		LISTENING, READING & WRITING		READING & WRITING
Fluency	SOUNDS & WORDS		WORDS & CONNECTED TEXT		CONNECTED TEXT
Comprehension	SPEAKING & LISTENING		LISTENING, READING & WRITING		READING & WRITING
Writing	DRAWING, SCRIBBLING & LETTER STRINGS		TRANSITIONAL WRITING & INVENTED SPELLING		CONVENTIONAL SENTENCES

Systematic and Explicit Core Instructional Practices

- Systematic (presented in an intentionally planned sequence) and explicit (clear explanations with examples) instruction in phonological awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), word analysis, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written composition/expression.
- Oral language and knowledge building through interactive read alouds of age-appropriate books/texts (print and digital), extended conversations, and content study that draws connections to home cultures, languages, and experiences.
- Abundant access to culturally responsive and grade appropriate literacy materials and opportunities for authentic use throughout the school day.
- A mixture of strategically planned whole group, small group, and individualized instruction, using flexible, differentiated grouping strategies informed by observed and assessed strengths and needs.
- Frequent opportunities for reteaching and distributed practice.
- Deliberate efforts to promote motivation and engagement in literacy learning.
- Deliberate efforts to partner with families in promoting literacy development.

Evidence-based Assessment

- Tracking student literacy growth with formative and interim assessments, including evidence-based screeners of early literacy skills in K-2 to identify risk for reading difficulties including characteristics of dyslexia.
- Utilizing learning targets/benchmarks for appropriate literacy achievement at each grade level.
- For multilingual learners acquiring English, recognize that performance on English literacy assessments may be closely linked to level of English language proficiency and may require additional data comparing growth in both languages.

Additionally, employing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for all students across the Pre-K to Grade 3 span within schools is strongly advised. This includes:

- Consistent use of evidence-based core (tier 1) programming, instructional practices, assessment practices and language of instruction within and across grade levels for all students.
- Opportunity for collaborative examination of student assessment to make instructional decisions.
- Timely layers of intervention support that supplement core instruction.
- Shared responsibility for all students' growth through regular progress monitoring.
- Ongoing professional learning to support educators' knowledge and skills related to beginning reading and literacy pedagogy.

Resources drawn upon in the development of this guidance document:

[Literacy for ME 2.0: Maine's Statewide Literacy Plan](#)

[What is the Science of Reading?](#)

[Cortex in the Classroom: Advancing the Science of Reading in the Early Years](#)

[The Science of Reading Progresses: Communicating Advances Beyond the Simple View of Reading](#)

["Both and" Literacy Instruction K-5](#)

[Literacy Essentials](#)