

Four-Step Literacy Health Check for Schools and Districts (K-5 version)

STEP 1

Analyze Your Data

An overall reading proficiency level below 95% is a signal for action. Here are key areas to investigate:

What percentage of 3rd–5th graders are proficient readers on your state test?

- If less than 95%, examine foundational reading skills.

Do you have adequate data on the foundational skill abilities of all K–5 students?

- Pay close attention to data for grades 4–5. Some assessments provide decoding scores for these grades without directly assessing this critical skill.

Can all 4th and 5th graders decode multisyllabic words easily?

- An oral reading fluency (ORF) rate **below** 90 words correct per minute (wcpm) may indicate weak decoding skills and a need for targeted foundational literacy support.
- An ORF rate **below** 75 wcpm points to a need for intensive foundational skill intervention.

STEP 2

Observe Classroom Practices

Visit K–5 general education and intervention classrooms with these questions in mind:

Are teachers dedicating enough time to explicit instruction across all five pillars of reading?

- Ensure instruction covers phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

How much time is spent on explicit, teacher-directed instruction each week?

- Students should receive **at least 150 minutes** of **explicit** instruction each week.

- If instruction is delivered in small groups, calculate the minutes of direct instruction time per student.
 - For example, in a 100-minute daily literacy block with four groups, each student receives up to 25 minutes of direct instruction per day. If the group meets 2–3 times per week, students may receive only 50–75 minutes of direct instruction weekly.
 - Note that time spent on independent activities may not effectively target specific skills.

Does teacher-led instruction include systematic, explicit, cumulative lessons in phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding?

- Many teachers focus on guided reading during teacher-led instruction.
- Until students can decode multisyllabic words with some fluency (90 wcpm+), they may need explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding. Is this a focus of direct instruction for those who need it?

Are teachers allowing time for both types of practice?

- First, are students getting **purposeful practice** to reinforce recently taught skills? For example, are they using decodable texts to apply new decoding skills or graphic organizers for comprehension strategies?
- Second, do students engage in **ongoing independent reading practice** with “just-right” connected texts matched to their skill level?

Are you leveraging educational technology to personalize instruction and practice?

- It is not possible for one teacher to personalize instruction and practice for every student.
- Technology can support differentiated reading practice and provide teachers with data to guide instruction.



STEP 3

Review Your Literacy Materials

Examine your K–5 core reading programs and intervention materials.

Are they grounded in the science of reading?

- Ensure they follow a structured literacy approach with explicit instruction in all five pillars of reading.
- Look for systematic, cumulative scope and sequence plans.
- Verify that materials are age-appropriate materials for upper elementary students with foundational skill gaps.
- Ensure that multisensory strategies are incorporated, especially for K–2 students and those receiving Tier 3 and/or special education support.

Practice Resources:

- Use decodable texts and other materials to reinforce skills post-instruction.
- Avoid predictable texts or overly complex materials in classroom libraries.
- Enable access to independent reading practice with just-right connected texts to integrate skills, enrich vocabulary, and build background knowledge.

Assessment Tools:

- Use screeners to identify students who need intervention, including those at risk for dyslexia.
- Monitor progress with benchmarks and formative assessments to guide instruction and measure growth.

STEP 4

Evaluate Access and Resources

Develop a strategic plan to meet all students' literacy needs, considering available staff and time.

Are all students who need support receiving it?

- Ensure staffing levels allow for small-group or 1:1 intervention as needed.

Should you consider whole-class or large-group interventions?

- If the majority of students need intervention, it's likely a Tier 1 issue.

Professional Learning and Support:

- Ensure staff are trained in structured literacy and multisensory strategies, particularly for young learners (K–2) and those needing intensive intervention.
- Consider training paraprofessionals to assist with literacy instruction and provide ongoing professional learning and support for all staff.

Every student deserves to be a confident, capable reader. Prioritize providing the right resources and interventions to 100% of your students.

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