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ABSTRACT
          Meant to guide administrators and teachers as they strive to
meet Governor George W. Bush's goal for all students to read on grade level
by the end of grade 3, this booklet presents descriptions of components of a
research-based beginning reading program. The first section describes 12
essential components of a beginning reading program. In this program,
children should have opportunities to: (1) expand their use and appreciation
of oral language; (2) expand their use and appreciation of printed language;
(3) hear good stories and informational books read aloud daily; (4)
understand and manipulate the building blocks of spoken language; (5) learn
about and manipulate the building blocks of written language; (6) learn the
relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written
language; (7) learn decoding strategies; (8) write and relate their writing
to spelling and reading; (9) practice accurate and fluent reading in
decodable stories; (10) read and comprehend a wide assortment of books and
other texts; (11) develop and comprehend new vocabulary through wide reading
and direct vocabulary instruction; and (12) learn and apply comprehension
strategies as they reflect upon and think critically about what they read.
The second section describes 8 classroom and campus factors that support
effective reading instruction: careful use of instructional time; effective
instructional practices; sound instructional materials; reading
opportunities; a variety of assessment tools; a positive campus climate;
professional development; and sound administrative practices. (Contains 73
references.) (RS)

Beginning Reading Instruction

Components and Features of a
Research-Based Reading Program

Texas Reading Initiative

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Components and Features of a
Research-Based Reading Program

1996

Texas Reading Initiative

Beginning Reading Instruction

In January 1996, Governor George W. Bush announced his reading initiative for the state of Texas. The Governor's goal is for all students to read on grade level by the end of Grade 3 and continue to read on grade level throughout their schooling. Reading is central to a child's experiences in school. How well children learn to read sets the foundation for future success. The Texas Education Agency, in collaboration with the Governor's office, is in the process of assisting school districts and teachers with the information and tools needed to ensure that all Texas boys and girls are successful readers.

We recognize that our schools are faced with a variety of challenges when it comes to teaching reading. Although there are many children who come to school ready to read, there is an ever growing population of children coming to our schools who have barely even seen a book, much less had the thousands of hours of lap reading, vocabulary building, and positive experiences with letters and sounds that are so essential to learning to read.

The scientific research of the past decade illuminates the way children learn to read and how we can enhance that process. Texas must provide a balanced and comprehensive reading program in our schools for every child - each and every child. The purpose of this document is to provide teachers and administrators with useful information to consider when evaluating reading programs or when structuring the reading program on their campus. Local control is a fundamental tenet of our educational system in Texas. This document is not meant to prescribe any particular methodology or curriculum; rather, it is meant as a guide.

It is incumbent upon us as educators to be open to what works best for our children regardless of time, methodology or other factors. Many schools have in place successful reading and writing programs that embrace the features outlined in this document and I applaud those schools. I ask you to examine your efforts and make any necessary changes to meet the challenge of having all children readers.

Mike Moses
Commissioner of Education

Reading is central to learning - in school, in the workplace, and in everyday life. For many children, learning to read and write during early school experiences is a pleasurable and even a thrilling experience, for themselves, for their parents, and for their teachers. But for children who do not make good progress in these early grades, learning to read is difficult and is associated with both present and future failure. Children who do not learn to read well in the first and second grades are likely to struggle with reading throughout their lives.

Nationwide, estimates of how many children in American schools that do not read well vary. In Texas the information is clear. The 1996 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) results reveal that at least 20 percent of Texas students do not read well enough to be described as proficient readers.

Governor Bush has described these children as an at-risk population in the making. His challenge to the schools of Texas is clear. All third grade children must read at grade level or better, and maintain grade level or better achievement in reading until they finish school.

Can this challenge be met? Fortunately, during the past decade compelling research reveals a clearer and deeper understanding of the abilities that lead to success with reading and writing, and about how children learn to read. This knowledge is useful to parents, teachers, and ultimately to the children. This knowledge has direct implications for preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades, programs of reading instruction, and most particularly for those children who have trouble learning to read.

What are the components of a research-based beginning reading program? This document presents descriptions of these components. Some will be familiar while others may be new. It is important to realize that the presence of only a few components in a program will not assure that every child will become a reader and writer. Rather, it is the orchestration of these components by teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers that will enable us to meet the Governor's challenge.

The following document is meant to guide administrators and teachers as they strive to meet the Governor's challenge. The first section describes twelve essential components of a beginning reading program. The second section describes classroom and campus factors that support effective reading instruction.

The twelve components are arranged in an order that could imply a sequence of instruction. However, these components should not be considered as rigid, sequential categories; rather, they are interrelated. Teachers work with their students on several components at a time, and children are helped to see the importance of these relationships. For example, when teachers read library books aloud in their classrooms, students make connections between reading and writing, expand their own spoken and written vocabularies, and observe proficient and fluent reading.

Children develop as readers throughout the early years of schooling. Because children bring such a variety of knowledge and experience to their classrooms, grade level differentiations or expectations are not given with each component. Research indicates that good readers learn these elements of reading, perhaps at home, perhaps on their own, or as a consequence of instruction. A teacher's task is to find out what students do understand, what they need to learn, and what needs to be provided in the classroom. Research also shows that for children whose first language is not English, instruction in the first language may be needed as a foundation for learning to read and write in English.

This document is based on a number of research reports and studies. Those who wish to examine this research base more fully may refer to *Beginning Reading Instruction: A Review of Research* which will be available from the Texas Education Agency through the Publications Office in late summer, 1997. In addition, a shorter bibliography of resources begins on page 16.

I want to thank Jean Osborn from the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, Sharon O'Neal, Cathy Davis and Lanny van Allen from the Texas Education Agency, and Nancy Roser from The University of Texas at Austin. In addition, I gratefully acknowledge the advice of representatives from the Education Service Centers. Finally, special thanks goes to Christine Joosten who cheerfully worked to produce this document.

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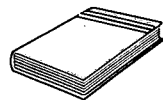
Twelve Essential Components of Research-based Programs for Beginning Reading Instruction

Research-based programs for beginning reading instruction in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade provide balanced, well-organized instructional plans and practice opportunities that permit all children to make sense of reading. Some children begin school with a well developed understanding of many aspects of reading and become accomplished readers with minimal instruction. Other children need a great deal of careful and meaningful instruction to become accomplished readers. As children learn to read, they learn how spoken and written language relate to each other. For this to happen, the components of the reading program, including the instructional materials selected for classroom use, must relate to one another and be orchestrated into sequences of instruction that engage all children and meet their needs. The following are twelve of the essential components of research-based programs.

1. Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of oral language

Children's comprehension of written language depends in large part upon their effective use and understanding of oral language. Language experiences are a central component of good reading instruction. Children learn a great deal about the world, about themselves, and about each other from spoken language. Kindergarten and first-grade language instruction that focuses on listening, speaking, and understanding includes the following:

○ Discussions that focus on a variety of topics, including problem solving
○ Activities that help children understand the world, in and out of the classroom
○ Songs, chants, and poems that are fun to sing and say
○ Concept development and vocabulary-building lessons
○ Games and other activities that involve talking, listening and, in particular, following directions

2. Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of printed language

Children's appreciation and understanding of the purposes and functions of written language are essential to their motivation for learning to read. Children must

become aware that printed language is all around them on signs, billboards, and labels, and in books, magazines, and newspapers and that print serves many different purposes. Reading and writing instruction that focuses on the use and appreciation of written language includes the following:

- Activities that help children to understand that print represents spoken language
- Activities that highlight the meanings, uses, and production of print found in classroom signs, labels, notes, posters, calendars, and directions
- Activities that teach print conventions, such as directionality
- Activities in which children practice how to handle a book–how to turn pages, how to find the tops and bottoms of pages, and how to tell the front and back covers
- Lessons in word awareness that help children become conscious of individual words, for example, their boundaries, their appearance and their length
- Activities in which children practice with predictable and patterned language stories

3. Children have opportunities to hear good stories and informational books read aloud daily

Listening to and talking about books on a regular basis provides children with demonstrations of the benefits and pleasures of reading. Story reading introduces children to new words, new sentences, new places, and new ideas. They also hear the kinds of vocabulary, sentences, and text structures they will find in their school books and be expected to read and understand. Reading aloud to children every day, and talking about books and stories, supports and extends oral language development and helps students connect oral to written language.

4. Children have opportunities to understand and manipulate the building blocks of spoken language

Children's ability to think about individual words as a sequence of sounds (phonemes) is important to their learning how to read an alphabetic language. Toward that understanding, children learn that sentences are made up of groups of separate words, and that words are made up of separate sounds.

Indeed, research has shown conclusively that children's phonemic awareness, their understanding that spoken words can be divided into separate sounds, is one of the best predictors of their success in learning to read. Instruction that promotes children's understanding and use of the building blocks of spoken language includes the following:

∘ Language games that teach children to identify rhyming words and to create rhymes on their own

∘ Activities that help children understand that spoken sentences are made up of groups of separate words, that words are made up of syllables, and that words can be broken down into separate sounds

∘ Auditory activities in which children manipulate the sounds of words, separate or segment the sounds of words, blend sounds, delete sounds, or substitute new sounds for those deleted

5. Children have opportunities to learn about and manipulate the building blocks of written language

Children must also become expert users of the building blocks of written language. Knowledge of letters (graphonemes) leads to success with learning to read. This includes the use, purpose, and function of letters. Instruction that helps children learn about the essential building blocks of written language includes the following:

∘ Alphabetic knowledge activities in which children learn the names of letters and learn to identify them rapidly and accurately

∘ A variety of writing activities in which children learn to print the letters that they are learning to identify

∘ Writing activities in which children have the opportunity to experiment with and manipulate letters to make words and messages

6. Children have opportunities to learn the relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written language

Increasing children's awareness of the sounds of spoken language and their familiarity with the letters of written language prepares them to understand the

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alphabetic principle -- that written words are composed of patterns of letters that represent the sounds of spoken words. Effective instruction provides children with explicit and systematic teaching of sound-letter relationships in a sequence that permits the children to assimilate and apply what they are learning. Instruction that helps children understand the alphabetic principle and learn the most common relationships between sounds and letters includes the following:

- Alphabetic awareness activities in which children learn that printed words are made up of patterns of letters
- Lessons in sound-letter relationships that are organized systematically and that provide as much practice and review as is needed
- Activities in which children combine and manipulate letters to change words and spelling patterns

7. Children have opportunities to learn decoding strategies

Efficient decoding strategies permit readers to quickly and automatically translate the letters or spelling patterns of written words into speech sounds so that they can identify words and gain rapid access to their meanings. Children must learn to identify words quickly and effortlessly, so that they can focus on the meaning of what they are reading.

Research indicates that good readers rely primarily on print rather than on pictures or context to help them identify familiar words, and also to figure out words they have not seen before. For this reason, it is important that children learn effective sounding-out strategies that will allow them to decode words they have never seen in print. Some strategies of decoding instruction focus primarily on the relationships between sounds and letters; others combine letter-sound practice with word families, with word parts (for example, onsets and rimes), and with blending activities. More advanced decoding strategies focus on structural analysis, the identification of root words, and prefixes and suffixes.

Instruction should introduce "irregular" words in a reasonable sequence and use these words in the program's reading materials. It is important to realize, however, that essentially all words must become "sight words" -- words children identify quickly, accurately, and effortlessly.

Effective decoding instruction is explicit and systematic and can include the following:

○ Practice in decoding and identifying words that contain the letter-sound relationships children are learning to read and need for reading and writing
○ Practice activities that involve word families and rhyming patterns
○ Practice activities that involve blending together the components of sounded-out words
○ "Word play" activities in which children change beginning, middle, or ending letters of related words, thus changing the words they decode and spell
○ Introduction of phonetically "irregular" words in practice activities and stories

8. Children have opportunities to write and relate their writing to spelling and reading

As children learn to read and write words, they become aware of how these words are spelled. Increasing children's awareness of spelling patterns hastens their progress in both reading and writing. In the early grades, spelling instruction must be coordinated with the program of reading instruction. As children progress, well organized, systematic lessons in spelling will be beneficial. Activities for effective spelling instruction should include the following:

○ Activities that are related to the words that children are reading and writing
○ Proofreading activities
○ An emphasis on pride in correct spelling
○ Lessons that help children attend to spelling conventions in a systematic way
○ Activities that surround children in words and make reading and writing purpose-filled

9. Children have opportunities to practice accurate and fluent reading in decodable stories

The words in decodable stories do emphasize the sound-letter relationships the children are learning. While many predictable and patterned books provide children with engaging language and print experiences, these books may not be based on the sound-letter relationships the children are learning.

Decodable stories provide children with the opportunity to practice what they are learning about letters and sounds. As children learn to read words, sentences, and stories fluently, accurately, and automatically, they no longer have to struggle to identify words and are free to pay closer attention to the meaning.

Research asserts that most children benefit from direct instruction in decoding, complemented by practice with simply written decodable stories. Further, for some children this sort of systematic approach in critical. Stories should "fit" the child's reading level. Beginning readers should be able to read easily 90 percent or more of the words in a story, and after practice should be able to do so quickly, accurately, and effortlessly.

10. Children have opportunities to read and comprehend a wide assortment of books and other texts

As children develop effective decoding strategies and become fluent readers, they must read books and other texts that are less controlled in their vocabulary and sentence structure. They learn to use word order (syntax) and context to interpret words and understand their meanings. Soon, they become enthusiastic, independent readers of all kinds of written material including books, magazines, newspapers, computer screens, and more! Providing children with a great many books, both narrative and informational, is of primary importance. Classroom and campus libraries must offer children a variety of reading materials, some that are easy to read and others that are more challenging and of increasing difficulty and complexity. Children need access to many books that travel home for reading with family members. Classrooms that ensure wide reading provide the following:

o   Daily time for self-selected reading
o   Access to books children want to read in their classrooms and school libraries
o   Access to books that can be taken home to be read independently, or to family members

11. Children have opportunities to develop and comprehend new vocabulary through wide reading and direct vocabulary instruction

Written language places greater demands on children's vocabulary knowledge than does their everyday spoken language.

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In fact, many of the new words children learn in a year are learned from concrete and meaningful experiences from being read to and as they read on their own.

It is obvious that the number of new words children learn from reading depends upon how much they read and that the amount children read varies enormously. Therefore, it is important that teachers read aloud to children and encourage them to do a great deal of voluntary and independent reading. In addition, during reading instruction, children should be encouraged to attend to the meanings of new words. Activities that promote the acquisition of vocabulary include the following:

○   Wide reading of a variety of genres, both narrative and informational
○   Instruction that provides explicit information both about the meanings of words and about how they are used in the stories the children are reading
○   Activities that involve children in analyzing context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in a reading passage
○   Discussions of new words that occur during the course of the day, for example in books that have been read aloud by the teacher, in content area studies and in textbooks
○   Activities that encourage children both to use words they are learning in their own writing, and to keep records of interesting and related words

12. Children have opportunities to learn and apply comprehension strategies as they reflect upon and think critically about what they read

Written language is not just speech written down. Instead, written language offers new vocabulary, new language patterns, new thoughts, and new ways of thinking. Comprehension depends on the ability to identify familiar works quickly and automatically, which includes fluent reading, as well as the ability to figure out new words. But this is not enough.

Comprehension also depends upon the understanding of word meanings, on the development of meaningful ideas from groups of words (phrases, clauses, and sentences) and the drawing of inferences. It also depends upon the demands of the text (its concepts, its density), and the knowledge the reader brings to the text. The discussion of good books with their friends and classmates is one avenue for making these connections.

Such discussions will help children to appreciate and reflect on new aspects of written language and on the wide, wonderful world of print. For children to receive the greatest benefit and enjoyment from their reading, they must receive comprehension strategy instruction that builds on their knowledge of the world and of language. Comprehension strategy instruction can include the following:

o   Activities that help children learn to preview selections, anticipate content, and make connections between what they will read and what they already know
o   Instruction that provides options when understanding breaks down (for example, rereading, asking for expert help, and looking up words)
o   Guidance in helping children compare characters, events, and themes of different stories
o   Activities that encourage discussion about what is being read and how ideas can be linked (for example, to draw conclusions and make predictions)
o   Activities that help children extend their reading experiences through the reading of more difficult texts with the teacher

SUMMARY

As these components are translated into classroom experiences, children will have opportunities to talk, read, and write in the many ways they use language both inside and out of the classroom. Because the language arts (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are so interrelated, children must be given the opportunity to practice the strands of language arts in connected and purposeful ways.

Classroom experiences that offer children opportunities to write for real life reasons include having children write letters of invitation to parents and other community members to visit their classrooms, or writing letters of thanks to individuals and organizations that have contributed to their school. Children write to record newly acquired information, to reflect on what they are learning and to organize their ideas. They also work in groups to write reports on special topics.

Classroom experiences that offer children opportunities to read, listen and speak for real life purposes include the reading of "everyday" notes, news, messages, lists, labels, and the reading of compositions and reports written in the classroom. In such classrooms, reading, writing, listening, and speaking become important and meaningful to every child.
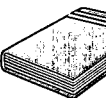
Eight Features of Classrooms and Campuses that Support Effective Beginning Reading Instruction

Many factors contribute to the overall success of a beginning reading program. These factors require a total school effort and cannot be accomplished without the support of the school administrators. The following is a list of those classroom and campus features that support a successful reading program.

1. Careful Use of Instructional Time

○ While language arts practice occurs throughout the entire school day, significant time must be protected for and dedicated to reading and language arts instruction. Many campuses dedicate a substantial amount of time each morning for reading and language arts instruction (*e.g.*, 90 minutes or more). Some children need additional assistance and are provided instruction that is based on their specific needs.

○ Language and concept development activities are an important part of the classroom curriculum.

○ Language arts instruction includes daily reading aloud and discussion of high-quality literature, both fiction and nonfiction.

○ Systematic instruction in reading begins as early as kindergarten and continues throughout the primary grades. This careful, consistent instruction is based on thoughtful evaluation of data obtained from classroom observations, formal and informal assessments, and samples of student work.

2. Effective Instructional Practices

○ Teachers organize flexible and purposeful groups that are based on children's instructional needs. Membership in these groups changes as the children progress or as they experience difficulty.

○ Teachers provide instruction that involves both frequent interactions with children and constructive feedback.

○ Children read at an appropriate level in their programs of instruction, and teachers adjust their instructional practices according to how well and how quickly the children progress.

○ In first- and second-grade classrooms, children who are having difficulty learning to read are provided with additional reading instruction in a small group or tutoring setting. In addition, before-school or after-school sessions and summer school classes are provided for all children who need extra help. Such instruction is coordinated with the programs the children are engaged in during the regular school day and based on continual and thoughtful analysis of each child's progress and needs as a reader and writer.

3. Sound Instructional Materials

Research-based criteria are used to select the instructional materials that provide the structure for the classroom reading program. These criteria establish the need for systematic instruction and sufficient practice in a number of aspects of beginning reading. These aspects include the following:

phonemic awareness: Children learn how to divide spoken words into individual sounds and to blend spoken sounds into words.

alphabetic knowledge: Children learn to recognize, name, and write letters.

alphabetic principle: Children learn that sounds can be represented by letters, and to recognize the most useful sound-letter relationships.

decoding strategies: Children learn blending and other decoding strategies that permit them to sound out new words and identify them quickly.

spelling and writing: Children write using their knowledge of printed letters and the sounds they represent. Because knowledge of letter-sound patterns contributes to reading success, spelling instruction is coordinated with the program of reading instruction. Knowledge of and practice in correct spellings also contributes to more effective writing.

manageable, decodable text: Children read words, sentences, and stories that contain the sound-letter relationships they are learning, as well as some "sight" words. Because fluent reading is essential to comprehension, children should practice both oral and silent reading. Children should have easy access to an array of story books and other reading materials that they can read on their own and with others.

vocabulary acquisition: The meanings of unfamiliar words are taught and discussed. Students also acquire word meanings through wide reading.

comprehension and understanding: Students discuss the meanings of everything they are learning to read -- words, sentences, and stories -- with each other and with their teachers and their tutors. They learn comprehension strategies as they learn to read more complex books and other texts.

language activities: Children expand their speaking and listening skills, their background and vocabulary knowledge in formal and informal activities as they engage in storytime discussion, journal keeping, wide reading, and purposeful writing.

4. Reading Opportunities

o   As children develop as readers, they eagerly read books they can comprehend, learn from, and enjoy.

o   Students must have access to classroom and school libraries that contain a large and varied book collection that encourages the development of the following:

wide reading: As children become fluent readers, they read increasingly challenging literature, both fiction and nonfiction, of greater complexity and difficulty. They read daily with partners, in groups, and independently at school and at home.

classroom discussions: Teachers and students engage in meaningful discussions that focus on interpretations of and reflective thinking about what they (and others) are reading and writing. They learn to support their interpretations by relying on the text.

comprehension strategies: As they read various kinds of books and other materials, students learn and practice comprehension strategies, sometimes on their own and sometimes with direct help from their teachers.

5. A Variety of Assessment Tools

Teachers and administrators who regard assessment as informative, select and administer assessments according to the needs of individual students. They conduct ongoing evaluations of student progress to help them plan instruction. Parents, teachers, and administrators are kept abreast of every child's reading progress based on such assessment and evaluations. Children who reveal serious problems in reading often need further assessment. However, the following assessment and evaluations should be used with all children:

screening assessments: During kindergarten and first grade, every student is screened for phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and understanding of basic language concepts.

informal assessments: On a regular basis, children are informally assessed to determine if they are making adequate progress. These assessments can include measures of reading rate and accuracy and story retellings. These assessments are used as a basis for adjusting instruction to the needs of each child.

end-of-year assessments: Every student is assessed at the end of the school year to inform parents, teachers, and campus and district administrators about student progress. These assessments are used to make plans to meet the needs of children and of the campus in the following year.

6. A Positive Campus Climate

Administrators and staff create campuses that are welcoming to their students and their families and that contribute to students' successful progress as readers. Some aspects of positive campus climate include:

attractive environment: Buildings and classrooms are clean, neat, and inviting.

book rich environment: Lots of books are in evidence (and in use) in classroom libraries, and the school library.

student work: Children's written work is displayed in the halls and in the classrooms.

positive staff: The staff is friendly and respectful of every student and is committed to a program of continuous student development from one grade level to the next and to stimulating family involvement.

curricular decisions: Effective practices are maintained and often improved; new ideas are discussed, evaluated, and integrated with existing practice.

student attitudes: Students are proud of their accomplishments and respectful of teachers and of other students.

7. Professional Development

o   Teachers take part in frequent, relevant and continuous professional development that focuses on the implementation of good classroom reading instruction that meets the needs of all students.

o   Teachers have time to work with and to consult each other, to visit each other's classrooms, and to make instructional decisions that improve the coordination of instruction from one grade level to the next.

o   Teachers are given time to practice instructional strategies and are supported throughout the school year.

o   Lead or master teachers are available to coach new and less experienced teachers.

8. Sound Administrative Practices

o   Administrators work to determine that all of the resources of the campus, including staff time, are allocated to meet the goal of successful reading instruction for every student.

o   Administrators either assure or designate responsibility for instructional leadership that includes monitoring students' progress in each classroom and providing help when students are not making sufficient progress.

o   In the professional development process, administrators help teachers focus on the performance of their students.

o   In their words and in their actions, administrators consistently support the components of effective reading instruction.
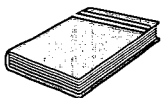
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