

What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

“Reading failure is too often treated like a mystery when, in many districts, it is a systems problem. Jessica Hamman gives leaders a clear path from knowing better to doing better. *Roadmap to District Literacy Success* is not another literacy slogan; it is a practical guide to the systems, instruction, intervention, coaching, and follow-through that make change real. This book is for leaders who want to do more than talk about literacy improvement; they want to be about the work.”

Kareem Weaver, Executive Director, FULCRUM, Oakland, CA

“Helping every student become a skillful reader, writer, and speller is a complex process. Teachers at every grade level need clear guidance and sustained support to get this done. The support they need includes having the knowledge of how to teach literacy to all students, access to high-quality materials, and the time to get it all done! This wonderful book by Jessica Hamman provides clear, detailed, and practical information for building and district leaders to guide and support teachers in the classroom to achieve literacy success for all! I will be recommending this book widely.”

Jan Hasbrouck, Consultant/Researcher, JH Educational Services/Read Washington, Seattle, WA

“Over more than a century, literacy research and evidence from successful practice have gradually, if sometimes erratically, converged on several well-supported findings: that language is the basis for literacy; that foundational literacy skills are needed to link oral language sounds to their written representations; and that background knowledge and ongoing language development are essential for students to develop into fully literate beings. This helpful and hopeful book provides a roadmap, tools, concepts, and knowledge that can help lead the way.”

Claude Goldenberg, Nomellini & Olivier Professor of Education, Emeritus, Stanford University, Seal Beach, CA

“Jessica Hamman’s *Roadmap to District Literacy Success* is a highly readable, practical guide to implementing and sustaining science of reading-based school reform. Hamman has extensive experience in educator professional development and facilitating school improvement, and those qualities are evident throughout this valuable book. Readers will especially appreciate her guidelines on choosing an evidence-based core reading curriculum, her attention to the needs of different types of school districts, her explanation of barriers to successful implementation and how to overcome them, and her insightful discussion of special education issues.”

Louise Spear-Swerling, Professor Emerita, Department of Special Education, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT

“Jessica Hamman has written a masterpiece that provides literacy leaders with a clear and comprehensive guide for integrating the science of reading, the science of implementation, and the science of learning in the service of improving reading proficiency for all students. *Roadmap to District Literacy Success* is exceptional in its scholarship, depth of knowledge, and practical application. Hamman takes both aspiring and experienced literacy leaders on a purposeful journey—from examining their current understanding of reading science and its translation into classroom practice, to identifying gaps in knowledge and leadership capacity. “

Reid Lyon, Ph.D., Former Branch Chief, NICHD, NIH;
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Education Policy
and Leadership, SMU; Distinguished Scientist Emeritus of Cognition and Neuroscience,
Center for Brain Health, UT-Dallas; Senior Advisor, The HUB @Drexel University

“The practical advice and guidance that Jessica Hamman shares in this book are taken squarely from her having walked the walk of school and district change. The reader can tell that her ‘magic wand’ is clarity of purpose, tact, empathy, and wisdom accrued from experience—in addition to many useful tools. This kind of down-in-the-trenches know-how will be of great interest to school leaders who are navigating change.”

Louisa Moats, Ed.D., President, Moats Language Essentials, LLC,
Sun Valley, ID

“A must-have book on successful leadership and implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction. This excellent resource includes case studies and practical tools to help school leaders support educators and effectively implement literacy initiatives.”

Elsa Cardenas-Hagan, President, Valley Speech,
Language and Learning Center, Brownsville, TX

“This book provides exactly what education leaders need to be able to enact and more importantly sustain effective literacy practices in their schools.”

Linda Diamond, Author and Education Consultant;
Executive Director, Evidence Advocacy Center, Menlo Park, CA

The Roadmap to District Literacy Success

To students who struggle, and to the educators who support them.

The Roadmap to District Literacy Success

A Practical Guide for School Leaders

Jessica Hamman

Foreword by Nancy Hennessy

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Literacy

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CONTENTS

The Leader's Roadmap	xi
Foreword	xiii
<i>by Nancy Hennessy</i>	
Acknowledgments	xv
About the Author	xvii
ORIENTATION: An Introduction to This Resource as a Tool on Your Literacy Leadership Journey	1
Owning Literacy Leadership	3
How to Use This Book	4
How Did We Get Here and Where Are We Going?	4
Four Magic Questions to Unlock Literacy Research	6
How Do Students Learn to Read?	7
Why Do Some Children (and Adults) Have Difficulties Learning to Read?	7
How Can We Help Children Learn to Read?	8
For Which Children Are Which Teaching Approaches Most Beneficial at Which States of Reading Development?	9
What Role Can School Leaders Play?	9
Key Terms to Establish a Common Language	10
The National Reading Panel	10
Evidence-Based vs. Research-Based Practice	11
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Instruction	11
Phonics Instruction	12
Decoding	13
Encoding	13
Reading Fluency Instruction	13
Vocabulary Instruction	13
Comprehension Instruction	14
Writing Instruction	17
English Learners and Multilingual Learners	19
Dyslexia and Reading Difficulties	19
Structured Literacy	23
What's in This Book?	25

CHAPTER 1: Determine Your Starting Point: Where Are We? And Where Do We Need to Be?	31
Determine Your Starting Point	31
Audit Your School Systems to Get a Clear Vision of Reality	33
Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Intervention Audit	34
School Systems Audit	34
Assessment Practices Audit	37
Instructional Practices Audit	39
Intervention Practices Audit	42
Establish a Vision and Mission for the Work	45
Vision vs. Mission	45
Build Alignment With Your Team	47
Pit Stop—Prepping for Departure	53
 CHAPTER 2: Create Conducive School Systems: Preparing for District Literacy Success	 59
A Short History of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)	61
The “Wait to Fail” Approach	62
Response to Intervention (RTI)	62
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)	63
Understanding MTSS and RTI Frameworks	63
Systems for Optimal Teaching and Learning	66
Assessment Systems	66
Instructional Systems and Materials	70
School Calendaring for MTSS/RTI Implementation	71
District Calendaring for MTSS Implementation	77
Professional Development and Coaching Systems	78
 CHAPTER 3: Establish Assessment Protocols	 85
Data-Based Decision-Making and Using Evidence-Based Assessments	86
The Development of Literacy Assessment	88
Universal Screeners and Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM)	89
Diagnostics	93
Phonological/Phonemic Awareness Diagnostic	94
Phonics Diagnostics	95
Build a Healthy Data Culture	97
Barriers to a Healthy Data Culture	97
Data Talks	101

CHAPTER 4: Ensure Comprehensive Core Instruction (Tier 1)	115
The History of Literacy Instruction	116
Structured Literacy	119
Sample Structured Literacy Lesson	122
High-Quality Core Instructional Materials	128
PreK	130
Kindergarten Through Fifth Grade: Reading	132
Kindergarten Through Fifth Grade: Writing	135
Designated English Learner Instruction and Materials	136
Supplemental Programs and Materials	137
Adoption	138
Implementation	143
Collaboration and Planning Time	144
Professional Learning	144
Monitoring and Observation	145
 CHAPTER 5: Ensure Effective Intervention (Tier 2)	 153
Setting Up Effective Tier 2 Intervention Systems	154
Intervention Staff	155
Intervention Models	156
Scheduling	157
Delivering Effective Intervention	162
Assessment	163
Instruction	163
Intensifying Intervention Through Progress Monitoring and Data-Based Decision-Making	166
 CHAPTER 6: Ensure Effective Individualized Instruction (Tier 3)	 181
Understanding Tier 3: Individualized Instruction, Special Education, and Your Role as a School Leader	182
A Short History of Special Education and Its Role in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)	183
Understanding Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	184
Understanding Eligibility Determination	186
The IEP Process for Students With Specific Learning Disability in Reading and/or Writing	186
Referral	187
Evaluation	189

Collaborating With the Team on the IEP	192
Goal Creation	195
Test Your Knowledge	201
Encouraging Staff Awareness of SLD Accommodations	203
Chapter 6 Appendix	214
CHAPTER 7: Implement and Sustain	219
Establishing Targeted, Ongoing, and Job-Embedded Professional Development	220
Training Leaders	221
Training Educators	222
Creating Coaching Systems	224
Training Coaches	225
Literary Knowledge and Instructional Best Practices	225
Coaching Skills and Models	226
Pit Stop—Creating Optimal Conditions for Change	235
Chapter 7 Appendix	243
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion and Next Steps	251
References	255
Index	265

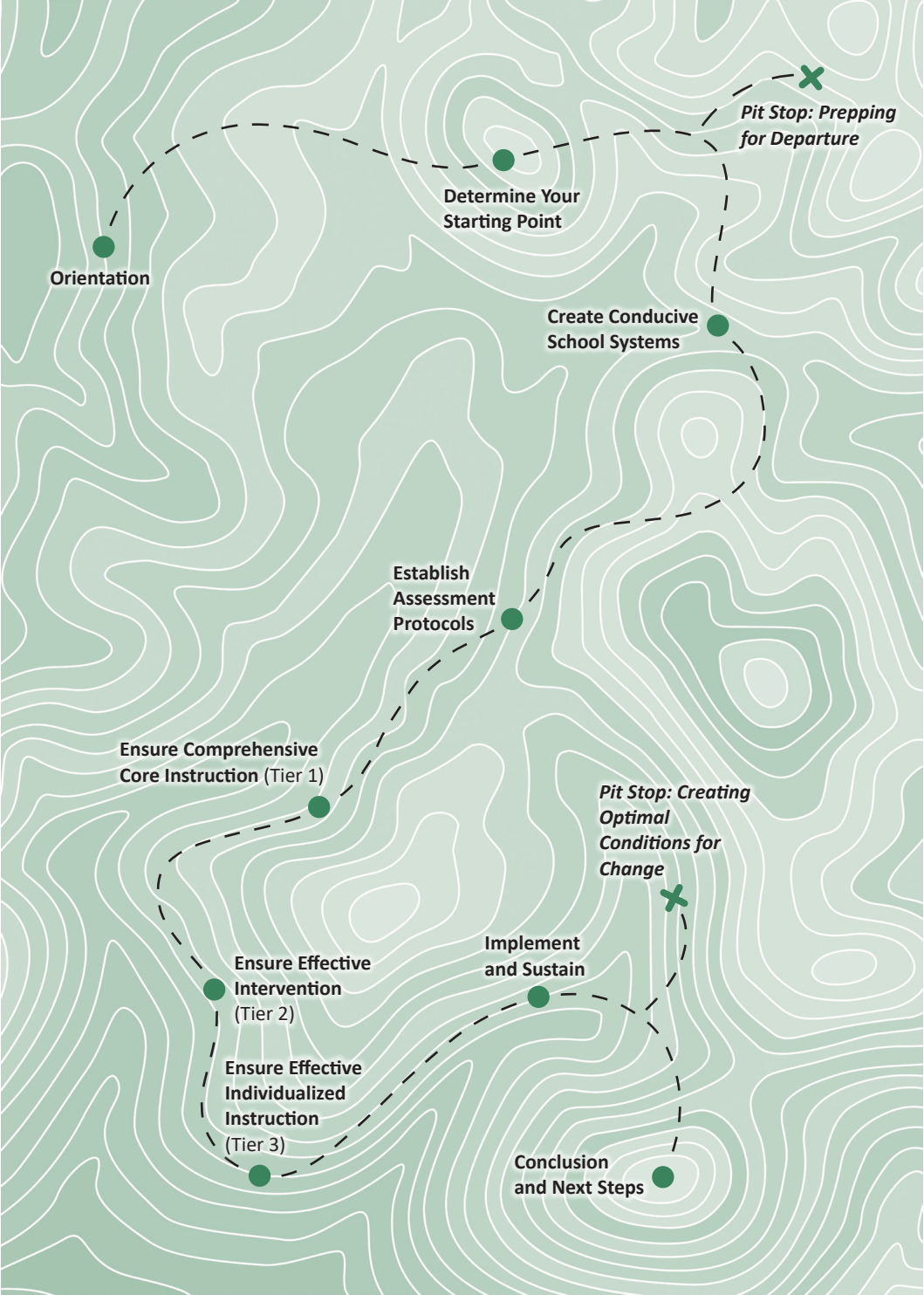


Visit the companion website at
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for downloadable resources.

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Links may also be accessed at the URLs provided along with the QR codes.

Figure 0.1 • *The Leader's Roadmap*



District Literacy Roadmap. Illustration by Luke Bair. Copyright © 2026 Glean Education.

FOREWORD

Over the past several years, compelling evidence has emerged that significant changes in literacy instruction are necessary if our students are to leave school literate. At the same time there is a clear recognition on the part of educators that change in their settings is both challenging and complex. They realize that any shift in educational philosophy and practices requires not only knowledge and skills but a pathway to accomplishing change. While the Science of Reading provides much needed information on reading proficiency, potential difficulties, and effective approaches, it alone is not sufficient to accomplish the necessary changes. The Science of Implementation identifies additional factors that lead to successful student outcomes, including effective innovations, implementation methods, and enabling contexts. Essential contributors to these factors include building instructional competency, creating supportive structures and systems, and having informed leadership. This book acknowledges the importance of both sciences. It also recognizes the critical role of literacy leaders and the need to support them by providing access to the knowledge and skills necessary for literacy success.

Jessica Hamman's personal and professional experiences have resulted in a deep commitment to ensuring that educators have the capacity and competency to deliver effective instruction for all students. Her own work as a teacher and interventionist as well as the work she has done with multiple districts providing professional learning opportunities is evident on every page of her book. While we often think of the educators who directly deliver instruction as the primary audience, Jessica realized those in leadership roles also need this knowledge. And she recognized that literacy leaders need more if they are to create the culture, resources, systems, and structures that support implementing and sustaining change. Those same experiences taught her that knowledge, while necessary, must be accompanied by a guide for action. Any time we set off on a new journey, whether literal or transformative, having a visual guide for arriving at the destination is particularly helpful. On the surface, a roadmap provides direction, markers, and potential stops, as well as detours and distance to the destination. But it also allows for a shared understanding of the goal, commitment to the journey, and indicators of progress along the way.

Literacy leaders will find that *The Roadmap to Literacy Success* provides them with not only the what but also the why and how of the change necessary for reaching their destination. The book's introduction prepares all for the journey by identifying the rationale, visiting the research base, and surfacing the essential understandings. It also

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

provides a preview of the nine chapters and two pit stops they will be visiting on their way to literacy success. These necessary stops directly address reading proficiency, reading difficulties, multi-tiered systems of support, assessment protocols, effective tiered instruction, and implementation of innovation. While each chapter is chock-full of information, a major emphasis is on the provision of resources for immediate use, including practical tools, examples, and even the timelines necessary to do the work. Educators, including literacy leaders, often work in isolation, but every stop calls for collaboration, and the case studies, embedded in each chapter, build connections to the reality of doing this work. Additionally, the importance of processing learning and identifying the need for additional information is addressed through reflection questions at the end of the chapters.

While Jessica has written a book for literacy leaders, I would suggest this is a useful tool for other audiences as well, such as parents, board members, and policy makers. She has succeeded in paving the road from research to effective instructional and implementation practices. Her book is a practical guide for action, but I think it is more than that. We all know how important it is that our students acquire reading proficiency. This work gives us the tools, but it also provides the courage to keep working at reaching literacy success for all!

Jessica, thank you for all you do and the privilege of sharing my thoughts on this valuable contribution to the field.

—Nancy Hennessy, MEd
Literacy Consultant & Author
The Consulting Network

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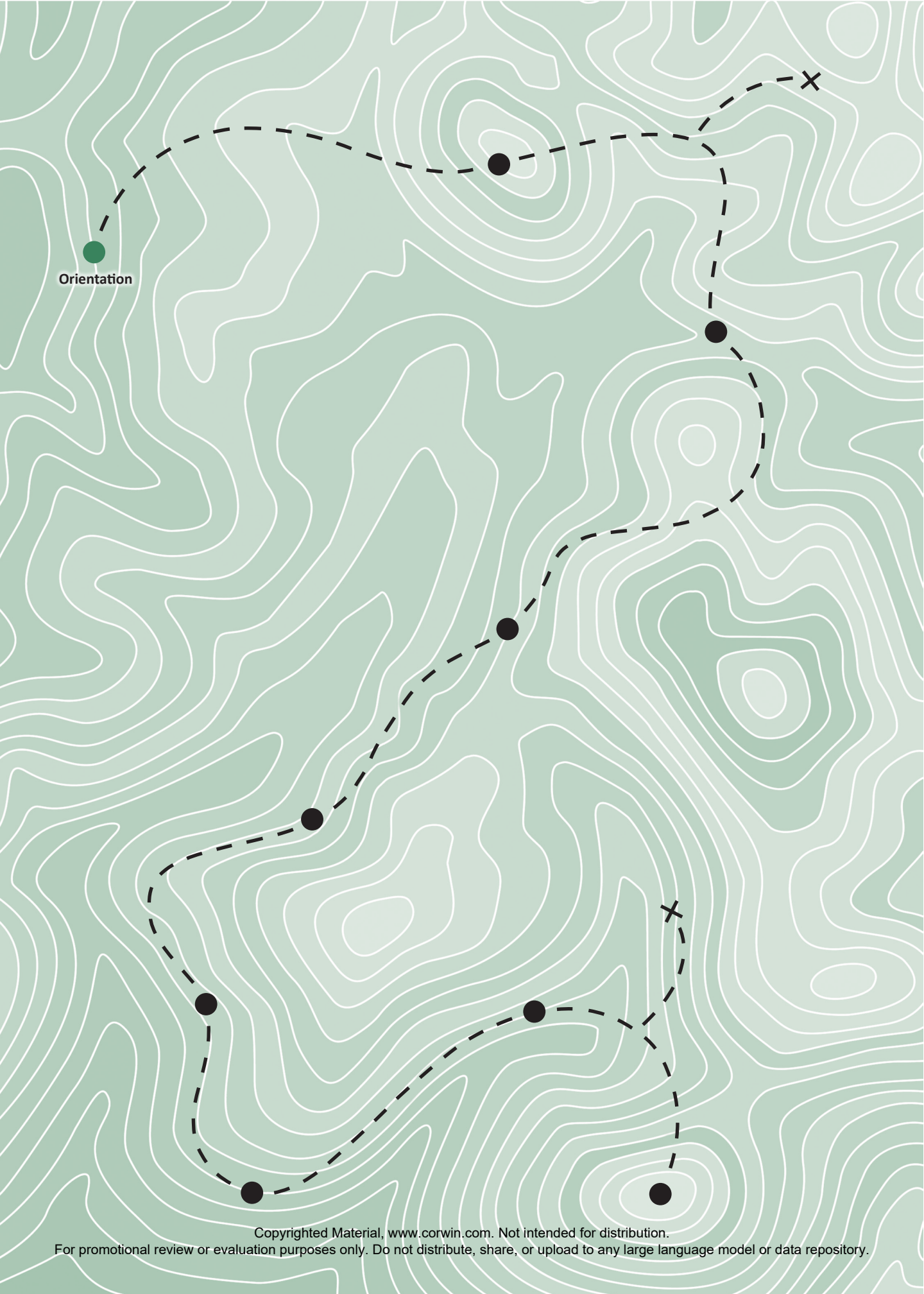
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Author photograph by Roxanne Bryant

Jessica Hamman, MA, is the founder and CEO of Glean Education, an organization that partners with schools, districts, and state education agencies to strengthen educator expertise in Structured Literacy, RTI/MTSS implementation, and school improvement. With over 25 years of experience in the field, Jessica is widely recognized for helping educators make the shifts necessary to achieve measurable and sustainable literacy change.



Orientation

Orientation

An Introduction to This Resource as a Tool on Your Literacy Leadership Journey

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

—Lao Tzu

In 2014, I was an interventionist in a Northern California school district looking to refresh my skills in Structured Literacy. I researched training options but found refresher courses inconvenient and expensive, costing, on average, 30% more than I made each month as an interventionist. That very year, I was also advocating for my eldest son, who was a struggling reader, in the same school district. His teacher also wanted to take a training to bone up on her skills. As colleagues and friends, we applied for a grant together to take the training, but our grant was denied, so we didn't get to take the training. This felt unacceptable.

I started building something that would level the playing field and make teacher training in Structured Literacy accessible (in both cost and availability) for educators like me. I created an organization that would provide training for teachers that would meet them on their terms and not cost them a month's salary. Like many teacher-preneurs, I had passion and a vision, but I also had an insecurity about whether this work mattered to anyone but me.

I received one of my first district contracts to train the teachers at a small rural school district in the Sierra Nevada mountains, about 120 wooded miles north of Lake Tahoe. The team wanted support shifting practice toward Structured Literacy to improve outcomes for their students, especially their struggling readers.

They asked me to kick off our work together with a full day of professional development in late August for 150 of the district's teachers, classroom aids, school psychologists, and school leaders. In a call with the assistant superintendent, she explained that the work would be an uphill battle. Her teachers were firmly rooted in an approach called Reading Recovery, one aligned with the Three-Cueing system, an approach ideologically different than Structured Literacy, the one she was hiring me to train in.

I can't put a number on how much time I spent preparing for that talk, but I would estimate several hundreds of hours. Eventually, late August arrived; after one last run-through the night before, I closed the computer. In preparing so hard, I was trying

to control something I had no control over; how it was going to be received—that was out of my hands.

With the summer sun peeking over the mountains the next morning, I stood before the district’s educators and began training, asking them to be open and curious. I shared, “This is just the start of our work together. Perhaps you’ll hear something that will pique your interest, invite you to explore more, or challenge you to consider your current practice and apply some things you will learn, if you choose.”

The presentation carried on well for the next few hours, diving into the research on reading acquisition and the cognitive processes and skills necessary for literacy, when I looked up and saw a table in the back of the room full of people with concerned looks on their faces. All members were shaking their heads, visibly upset. I released the room to a reflection and walked straight over to that table and asked them what their roles were within the district. They began responding around the table:

“I’m the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.”

“Director of Student Services.”

“Elementary Principal.”

“Middle School Principal.”

“High School Principal.”

“District Coach.”

“SPED Director.”

I paused. The whole leadership team was at this table. I asked what was coming up for them. They looked at one another, prompting each other to be the one to speak. Then the Special Education director began:

“I’ve been teaching for 35 years. I’ve been a SPED director for 15 years.” She paused and said, “I have never learned this before.” She shared that they were all discussing how many children they must have missed, how many years they lost because they didn’t have this information. “I’m sad, and I’m mad, but mostly,” she added, “we are grateful that you are here. And we want to learn more.”

Although I was hired to work with the teachers, I realized very quickly that this work was only going to be effective if it supported the leaders as well. The district leaders were key to instructional change—they were responsible for setting up the systems and building the capacity for improved outcomes—but they were often the ones who received the least attention and support.

Over the next decade, I saw this play out over and over again. Leaders had to lead, and yet they had no clear, concise map to take them to where they were going. This book aims to be that map.

OWNING LITERACY LEADERSHIP

I find that many school leaders undervalue the role they play in student literacy outcomes. It's common to hear a district or school leader saying, "I trust my teachers. They are the experts on their students, and I let them do their thing." While trusting your staff is no doubt important, it's critical to understand what your staff knows and does to ensure it's in alignment with your understandings, values, and knowledge of best practices. The truth is that school leaders have a strong influence on instructional effectiveness by setting the optimal conditions for success for both teachers and students.

Research supports this as well. A study on the correlation between principal knowledge and intervention success for students with reading disabilities found that there was a direct correlation between leaders' knowledge and student outcomes; leaders' knowledge was, in fact, more influential on outcomes than their leadership style. In schools where principals had a deep understanding of Structured Literacy instruction and interventions aligned with the research-based recommendations from the National Reading Panel, students did measurably better than students at schools where the principal did not have the same knowledge (Schraeder et al., 2021).

Since leader knowledge is so important to student outcomes, one would imagine that preservice training would properly prepare leader candidates with the background knowledge to build the systems that meet students' needs. But this is often not the case. Many leaders, like the ones sitting at my table that day, do not get adequate training in preservice programs. They must instead rely on inservice training to supply the knowledge and skills to make an impact. That has its downsides; leaders are often not lucky enough to be in a school that provides high-quality professional development and allows the school leaders to be present in that training, which is often marketed to and directed at classroom teachers.

Leaders should not have to rely on luck to ensure they have the knowledge and skills they need to guide their team toward student literacy success. This book was written with school and district leaders in mind. While many of the anecdotes and case studies to follow refer to public schools, this work is equally applicable to private school settings. In fact, in my consulting work, I've found that private schools undergoing changes to their assessment, instruction, and intervention systems may see student impact even more quickly, as their decisions are often less constrained by the funding structures and bureaucratic processes common in public education.

It shouldn't matter how, when, why, or where you start this work. The thing that matters is that you've begun the journey.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is meant to be a guide—one that lays a foundation of high-level background knowledge and low-level practical skills needed for your leadership journey. Designed as a roadmap, this book outlines nine (9) stops along the way—each stop designed to support you in exploring a particular destination on the roadmap to district literacy success. Along the route, you will also encounter two Pit Stops—brief, important detours that explore ideas and insights closely connected the concepts in that chapter. You'll see the roadmap, shown in Figure 0.1 (see page xi), throughout the book to help orient you on your journey.

In this book, we will explore the Why, the What, and the How of each topic to build your knowledge base. We'll dive into composite cases, real success stories from the field, and Tools You Can Use Tomorrow. Each chapter ends with key takeaways, discussion questions, and an opportunity for reflection to help you think about what you've learned and what to do with it. This book is meant to be earmarked and used with your team as you design and implement systems for success.

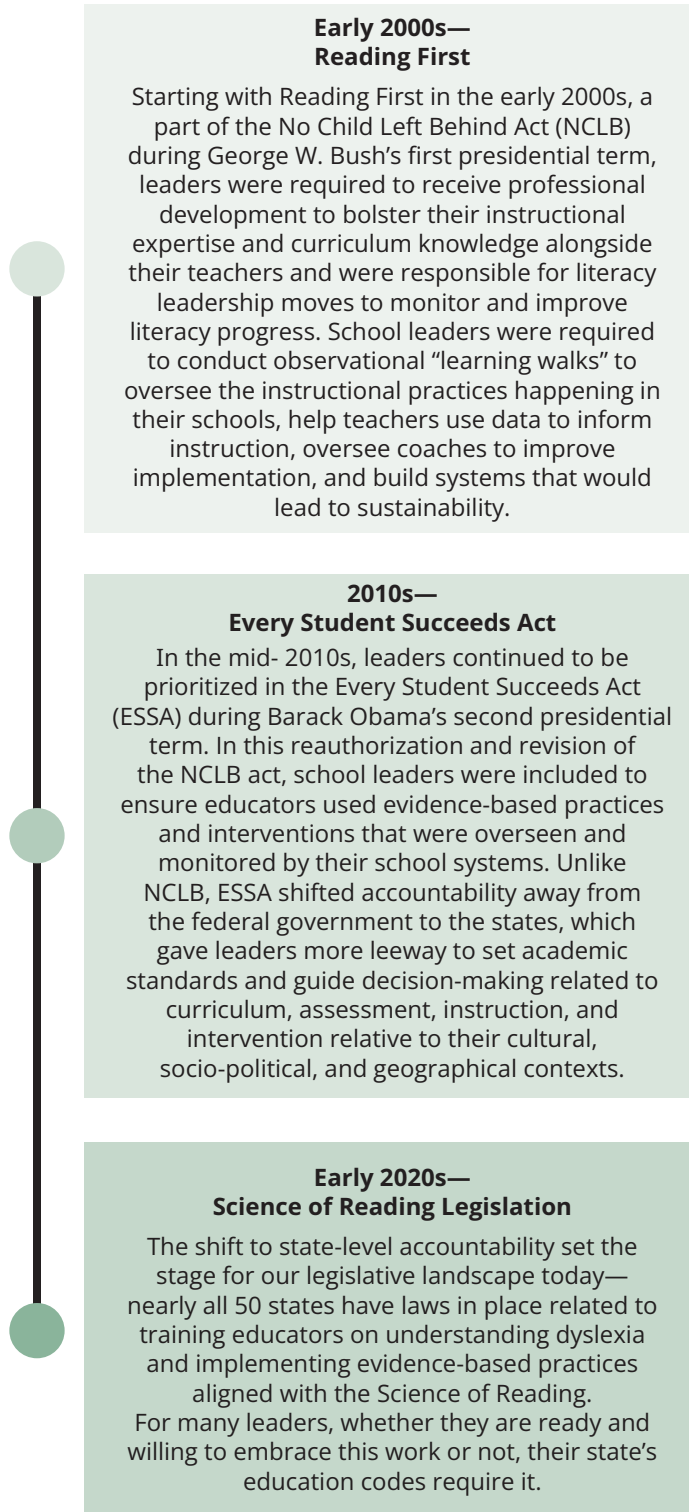
Where there is a leader, there is a team. I've created this book so that the work lives beyond the page. Bring your copy to your district admin meetings, plot through the sections together, use it to challenge your team in the way systems, practices, and procedures for literacy are set up in your district, and use it as a roadmap to bring others along with you. Check out the materials on the companion website (companion.corwin.com/courses/DistrictLiteracySuccess) for many of the resources included in this book.

HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Over the past several decades, the educational landscape has changed, and legislation at the federal and state levels has been passed acknowledging the crucial role leaders play in literacy success (see Figure 0.2).

You may have come to this work because you believe you are in a system that needs to change to get your students where you need to be, or you may have come to this work because of new legislation or mandates in your state or district. Either way, you're in the right place! Change is hard. Asking others to change is even harder. How do you not only get this change to happen but also get the teachers to want it? This book is meant

Figure 0.2 • Timeline of Literacy Legislation Since 2000



Source: Glean Education. Used with permission.

to guide you through topics that will challenge your preconceived beliefs, provide you with a new perspective, and ask you to evaluate your current practices. Additionally, this book is meant to make you a more informed consumer as you encounter the information, services, materials, and products that come your way on your literacy leadership journey and, importantly, a more prepared leader when supporting your staff. Ultimately, the goal is to build your knowledge of the research-based systems and evidence-based practices that create a context in which teachers have the tools they need to ensure every student on your school site has their best possible chance to reach literacy proficiency.

Is this the only resource you'll need on literacy leadership? Of course not! Whenever I deliver a training, I share that I'll consider the training a success if participants leave with more questions than when they started. I believe it's this intrinsic curiosity that makes lasting change. I hope that this will be just the start of your journey, which can feel daunting. But I'm confident you are up for the challenge because you've taken the steps to find and open this book. You've already made the first move. Now let's get started.

FOUR MAGIC QUESTIONS TO UNLOCK LITERACY RESEARCH

From 1992 to 2005, Dr. Reid Lyon was the chief of the Child Development and Behavior branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He worked closely with the White House as an education advisor during the George W. Bush administration to address the need for research around educational policies related to reading proficiency, learning disabilities, and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Dr. Lyon, in a statement to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on Reading and Literacy Initiatives, offered four research questions to share the rationale for funding research through NICHD. These questions were:

1. How do students learn to read?
2. Why do some children (and adults) have difficulties learning to read?
3. How can we help children learn to read?
4. For which children are which teaching approaches most beneficial at which states of reading development? (Lyon, 2002)

With these questions guiding research backed by federal funding, the United States began to dive deeper into the answers backed by research and evidence that could

ultimately be applied in the classroom. However, even with all the evidence pointing in the direction of what worked best for children, Dr. Lyon found that a major barrier remained: “The toughest challenge we have is in moving the science to the development of teachers and their preparation, such that what they learn is actually objective and is based upon converging evidence rather than philosophies, belief systems, or appeals to authority” (Lyon, 2021).

So, let’s give you some quick answers to these complex questions to provide a starting point for our work together. We’ll dive further into each of these questions throughout the chapters that follow.

How Do Students Learn to Read?

We now know from research that students learn to read by connecting the sounds of our language with the written symbols in our writing system, also called our orthography. The word *orthography* is derived from the Greek *ortho*, a combining form of *orthós*, meaning straight, upright, or correct, and *graph*, a combining form of *graphos*, meaning drawn or written. *Orthography* translates historically and literally to “correct writing.”

Through direct and explicit instruction in orthography, students learn to map phonemes (speech sounds) to graphemes (written symbols). This foundational skill enables them to blend sounds into words, read words within sentences, and eventually read connected text with increasing accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

As they become more skilled readers, they can read more complex words and, to understand what they are reading, they call upon their language comprehension skills to give the word meaning. A proficient reader can both decode and comprehend what they have read.

Why Do Some Children (and Adults) Have Difficulties Learning to Read?

We now know from research that there are at least three core processing deficits that contribute to reading difficulties:

1. Phonological processing: the ability to manipulate the sounds of language
2. Rapid automatized naming: the ability to name objects, letters, numbers, or colors in rapid succession
3. Orthographic working memory: the ability to recognize, store, and retrieve visual representations of words in short-term memory for later use

Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN)

Rapid automatized naming (RAN) is the ability to name objects, letters, numbers, or colors in rapid succession. RAN was first identified as a risk factor in reading and spelling difficulties in the mid-1970s and early to mid-1980s by Dr. Martha Denckla from Harvard Medical School, Dr. Rita Rudel, and Dr. Maryanne Wolf, who was at the time Denckla's doctoral student at Harvard Graduate School of Education. They discovered that the speed at which students rapidly name familiar items like letters, numbers, colors, and objects strongly predicted later reading difficulties (M. Wolf, personal communication, September 11, 2025). This research revealed a core processing skill that was different from phonological awareness (PA). For many years, up to the present, PA was largely looked to as the only deficit that contributed to reading risk.

Later, when Dr. Wolf was at Tufts University, she and a colleague, Dr. Patricia Bowers at the University of Waterloo, asserted that two or more different deficits could be present in a student. They used the term *double-deficit hypothesis* to both include PA deficits and to suggest that RAN was a separate weakness that could be caused by multiple other impediments that increase a student's risk of reading and spelling deficits (Wolf & Bowers 1999). Wolf and Bowers did not suggest that there were only two deficits; rather, they wished to highlight the heterogeneity of dyslexia through their research on RAN and the other naming speed task, Rapid Alternating Stimulus (RAS) test, which required more attention. More recently, Wolf's research shows how RAN speed can predict fluency issues across all languages tested, including other orthographies such as Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew. In fact, there are now more than 8,500 studies of RAN that illustrate its universal predictive capacity. Most of this work shows how multiple deficits are present in individuals with dyslexia; indeed, the combination of RAN and PA weaknesses is characteristic of the most impaired readers. This combined research also underscores the way in which students experience dyslexia on a spectrum, where some have mild difficulties, while others have severe trouble with acquiring reading and spelling skills (Norton et al., 2012; Wolf et al., 2024).

How Can We Help Children Learn to Read?

We now know from research that the earlier we support students by assessing and teaching the foundational skills for reading, the better outcomes they will have. And yet, we still have a wait-to-fail approach in our schools. To prevent reading failure, we need to assess students with universal screening and benchmark tools and deliver explicit, systematic, cumulative, and sequential instruction in the foundational skills of reading (more on that to follow) by an informed teacher with appropriate materials aligned with evidence-based approaches. Research suggests that instruction should teach the skills related to decoding and language comprehension explicitly, systematically, cumulatively, and sequentially.

For Which Children Are Which Teaching Approaches Most Beneficial at Which States of Reading Development?

We now know from research that explicit, systematic, cumulative Structured Literacy instruction is critical for students at risk for reading difficulties, but we also know that this approach benefits all children, not just those at risk. This was established in the National Reading Panel Report (NICHD, 2000) as well as research from Linnea Ehri and colleagues (2001) in a peer-reviewed meta-analysis that showed that students who received phonics instruction showed positive effects on reading that persisted even after instruction ended. Additionally, students who received phonics instruction earlier in their academic career had greater effects than students who received phonics instruction after first grade (Ehri et al. 2001). Research from Maggie Snowling and Charles Hulme (2025) demonstrates how explicit, systematic, cumulative language instruction supports students' oral language skills, like vocabulary, grammar, and listening comprehension. Snowling and Hulme's studies show that a student's risk of reading difficulties and dyslexia significantly decreases when language difficulties are absent. These studies suggest what many of us know to be true anecdotally: the earlier we support students with systematic phonics and language instruction, the less likely they are to struggle with reading difficulties.

WHAT ROLE CAN SCHOOL LEADERS PLAY?

School leaders play a major role in this work toward student reading proficiency. When they understand the evidence, they can help move their teachers, regardless of previous experience, training, or ideology, toward research-based best practices. It's not easy, but it is important.

The first thing a leader must do is better understand the evidence base themselves. This is no small task because the field, once you dive into it, is vast. It's nearly impossible to know all you need to know to make informed decisions. And even when you do have background knowledge, some organizations and publishers understand the social and political movements toward structured approaches and claim, erroneously, that they align.

When supporting a school district with a curriculum adoption a few years ago, I was present for a sales pitch from a popular publisher. Although they had shared all the common buzzwords we were looking for, I saw red flags in the design of the program. I stayed after to chat with the salesperson and better understand the curriculum's design and scope. Not realizing that I was present to support the district with Structured Literacy alignment, she shared that "even though they have words like *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, and *decodable books*, our curriculum is still very whole language.

We simply added those words so your leaders would be able to check that box and still move forward.”

My goal in this book is to help you become not only a more informed consumer of the content you’ll be coming up against but also a more informed leader as you work with your team to build their capacity for delivering the type of instruction.

KEY TERMS TO ESTABLISH A COMMON LANGUAGE

As a leader, you are expected to know it all. In your role, you manage people, systems, schedules, programs, materials, and equipment. Depending on your background before your role in administration, you may have never taught in an elementary classroom. Even if you did, you may not have had literacy training that aligns with research-based best practices. Before we get started diving into this roadmap, we should review some of the terms essential to the knowledge base that will help guide this work. Under each set of terms, we have resources that you can use to dive deeper, should you or your team be interested. What follows are some key terms we will be discussing throughout the book.

The National Reading Panel

In 1997, concerned with the mounting evidence of the lack of reading and writing skill proficiency among students in the United States, Congress convened a panel to review the research that had been done on reading instruction up to that date. Three years later, members published their findings in the National Reading Panel (NRP) Report, a 449-page document that summarizes the research findings up to that point and provides recommendations for instructional practice based on the effectiveness of the research findings. The NRP Report found five instructional components contribute to proficient reading:

1. Phonological awareness
2. Phonics
3. Reading fluency
4. Vocabulary
5. Comprehension

Timothy Shanahan (2005), a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, wrote a companion document titled *The National Reading Report: Practical Advice for Teachers*.

The document explains the importance of the National Reading Panel and its relevance to the field and helps to translate the report's findings in a way that helps educators use them in practice.

Evidence-Based vs. Research-Based Practice

Throughout your years in education, you have no doubt heard these terms used to explain a curriculum, tool, or approach. But you may not have a clear sense of what they mean, how they differ, and why it matters. There's a lot of information about these terms in the academic realm, and their distinctions matter. The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University (2025) defines the terms as follows:

- **Evidence-based practice:** This refers to a practice that has consistently shown beneficial effects on student achievement in research studies. A positive effect is established from data that indicates a statistically significant result when researchers studied a particular type of instruction, intervention, or other variable. The effect was decidedly positive to the participants, as opposed to neutral or negative.
- **Research-based practice:** This refers to a practice that has shown beneficial effects on student achievement in some research studies, but in other studies, it may have shown no beneficial effects.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Instruction

First, what it is: *phonological awareness* is the ability to manipulate the sounds of language. Phonological awareness examples are alliteration (matching the initial sound of a word with subsequent words), rhyming (matching the end sound of a word with subsequent words), or segmenting the words in a sentence or syllables in a word. Phonological awareness is a larger skill than *phonemic awareness*, which is the ability to manipulate the sounds within a word. Phonemic awareness examples are blending sounds within a word (b-a-t → 'bat') or segmenting ('bat' → b-a-t) as well as insertion (say 'pat,' now add an /s/ at the beginning of the word → 'spat') and deletion (say 'spat,' now remove the /p/ → 'sat').

Phonological and phonemic awareness instruction is key to preventing and remediating reading difficulties. Instruction is most impactful when phonemes (speech sounds) and graphemes (written symbols) are present in instruction and when it's delivered early in a student's educational career, with kindergarten being the optimal time.

Three resources that are useful in better understanding phonological and phonemic awareness and its implications for instruction and intervention are the following:

- The Institute of Education Sciences' (2019) free practice guide titled *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* demonstrates the evidence base behind teaching phonological awareness and offers practice recommendations.
- David Kilpatrick's (2016) *Equipped for Reading Success: A Comprehensive, Step-by-Step Program for Developing Phonemic Awareness and Fluent Word Recognition* provides assessments (the PAST test—a diagnostic tool to determine student needs regarding phonological and phonemic awareness skills) and strategies for instruction.
- C. Melanie Schuele and Naomi D. Murphy's (2014) *The Intensive Phonological Awareness Program* provides an overview of the skill and an easy-to-implement intervention for students with phonological awareness deficits.



Scan the QR code to access the IES practice guide on K–3 reading.

<https://qrs.ly/edhcnn9>

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction builds students' automaticity and fluency in linguistic skills so they can read and write proficiently. Phonological awareness is the ability to manipulate the sounds of language, and this can be done without letters present. *Phonics* is the act of connecting a letter to its corresponding sound. Research indicates that the most effective method of teaching phonics is when skills are introduced systematically from the least to most complex and cumulatively by including a review of previously learned concepts as new ones are introduced. To teach phonics, teachers need both linguistic background knowledge and the materials to deliver effective instruction.

Four books that can help educators build their knowledge base to better understand the linguistic structure of English and how to approach phonics are the following:

- Denise Eide's (2012) *Uncovering the Logic of English: A Common-Sense Approach to Reading, Spelling, and Literacy* provides a clear and concise explanation of the layers of language and reasons for our orthographic and spelling variations.
- Louisa Moats's (2020) *Speech to Print* gives a robust overview of all the concepts educators need to know to be proficient reading teachers.

- Bill Honig, Linda Diamond, and Linda Gutlohn's (2018) *Teaching Reading Sourcebook* supports teachers with a comprehensive understanding of each component of reading instruction, with practical implications for teaching them.
- Suzanne Carreker and Judith Birsh's (2019) *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills Activity Book* (4th ed.) provides teachers with a comprehensive resource on literacy instruction.

Decoding

Decoding refers to the act of seeing a grapheme and connecting it to its corresponding phoneme. Decoding is reading.

Encoding

Encoding refers to the act of hearing a phoneme and connecting it to its corresponding grapheme. Encoding is spelling.

Reading Fluency Instruction

Reading fluency is defined by Jan Hasbrouck, a nationally recognized researcher, and her colleague Deb Glaser (2019) as the ability to read text with reasonable accuracy, at an appropriate rate, and with suitable expression that leads to accurate and deep comprehension and motivation to read.

Two resources that support educators' understanding of how to build reading fluency skills in students are:

- Jan Hasbrouck and Deb Glaser's (2019) *Reading Fluency: Understand. Assess. Teach.* gives educators an understanding of reading fluency as a skill, as well as how to measure and teach it.
- Martha Hougen and Susan Smartt's (2020) *Fundamentals of Literacy Instruction & Assessment, PreK–6* is a compilation of articles on each literacy skill, including reading fluency, and demonstrates how important it is to integrate instruction so that all literacy skills are explicitly taught as well as the way those skills contribute to accurate and efficient reading fluency.

Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction is a key aspect of effective reading instruction with a well-established research base. Explicit vocabulary instruction is particularly important for

multilingual learners and adolescent struggling readers. Teachers explore all three tiers of vocabulary (Tier 1: Everyday Language, Tier 2: Academic Language, Tier 3: Specialized, Subject-Specific Language) to support receptive comprehension and expressive language.

Three resources that support educator understanding of what there is to know about vocabulary instruction and how to teach it include the following:

- Institute of Education Sciences' (2008) free practice guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* establishes the evidence base around vocabulary instruction (which was a launch pad for many subsequent studies in recent years).
- Isabel Beck et al.'s (2013) *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* allows for a deep investigation into why vocabulary instruction is important and how to build it systematically in your students.
- Anita Archer and Charles Hughes's (2010) *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching* dives into not just the why but also the how of explicit vocabulary instruction.



Scan the QR code to access the IES practice guide on adolescent literacy.

<https://qrs.ly/ydhcnnd>

Comprehension Instruction

Comprehension is a complex skill. Fundamentally, *comprehension* is the ability to understand and make meaning from spoken or written language. In education, we need to explicitly build a student's capacity to make meaning from their environment, either through what they are learning through speech (language comprehension) or what they are learning through reading (reading comprehension).

Research by Philip Gough and William Turner (1986) established a framework for understanding reading comprehension called the Simple View of Reading (see Figure 0.3). Through this formula, $\text{Decoding} \times \text{Language Comprehension} = \text{Reading Comprehension}$, their research sought to establish that when you cannot decode or you have an inability to comprehend, the result is reduced reading comprehension.

Figure 0.3 • The Simple View of Reading

Source: Glean Education. Used with permission. Adapted from Gough & Turner (1986).

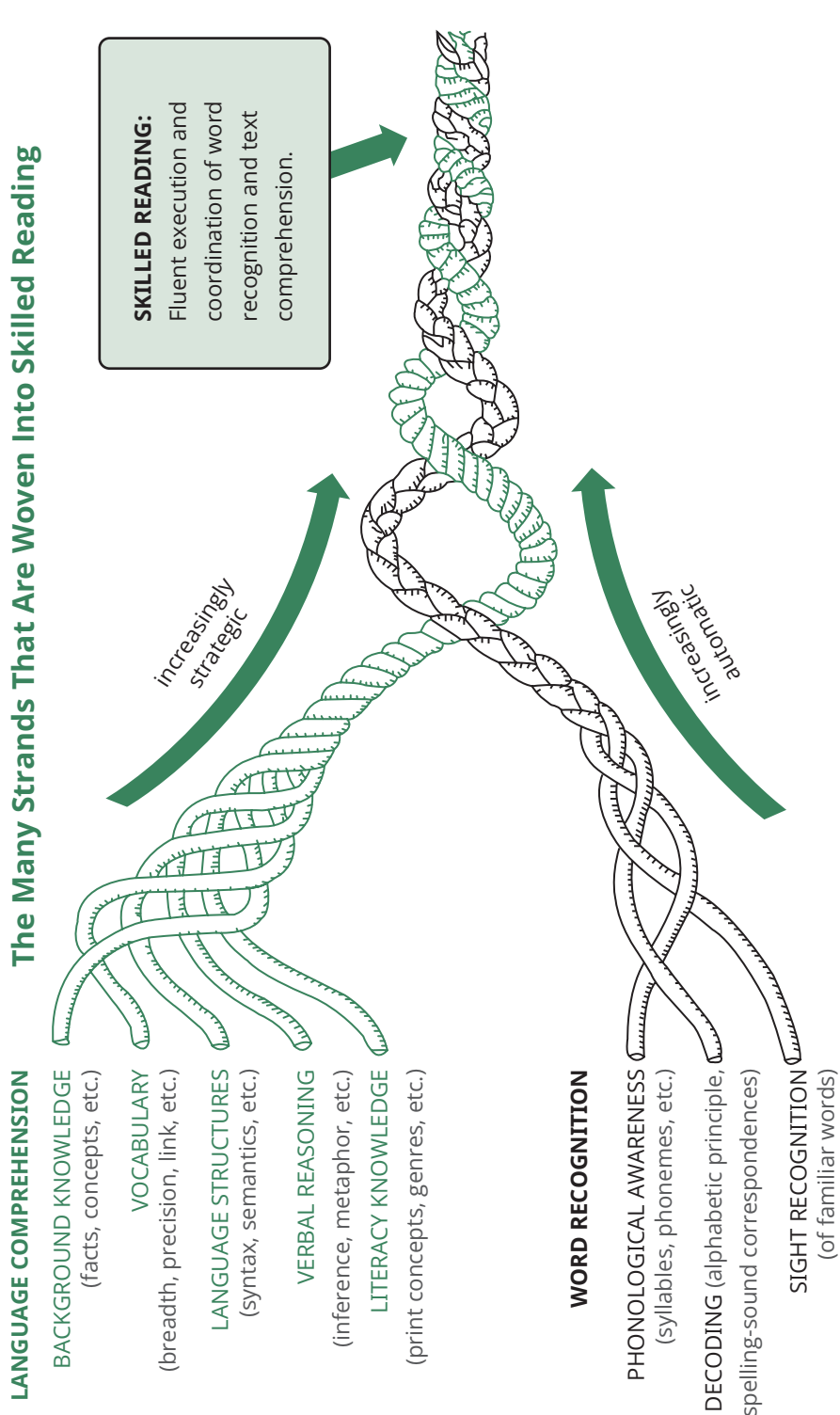
This research establishes a foundation upon which our understanding of reading comprehension can be built, but other models have helped us engage with the complexities of each side of the simple view formula to better understand how to build those skills. In 2001, Hollis Scarborough created a model that provides a visual representation of the complex skills that contribute to both sides of the simple view and the subcomponent skills that must be mastered in order for skilled reading to take place. You've likely heard this called the Reading Rope (shown in Figure 0.4). These are the subcomponents:

- **Background Knowledge:** Refers to prior knowledge that students bring to a learning environment. Research suggests that background knowledge is a powerful tool in comprehension because it helps make new learning stick.
- **Vocabulary:** Refers to concepts related to making word-level meaning.
- **Language Structures:** Refers to concepts related to making sentence-level meaning, such as morphology, syntax, and semantics.
- **Verbal Reasoning:** Refers to concepts related to inferential language such as metaphors, similes, and idioms.
- **Literacy Knowledge:** Refers to concepts related to print in long form, such as text types, genres, and text structures.

Two resources that support educator understanding of reading comprehension and how it can be taught to students are the following:

- Nancy Hennessy's (2020) *The Reading Comprehension Blueprint: Helping Students Make Meaning from Text* gives educators an understanding of the five layers of reading comprehension (vocabulary, syntax and sentence structure, text structures, background knowledge, and levels of understanding and inference) and how to teach them. The accompanying activity book is helpful to put the ideas into practice.
- Natalie Wexler's (2019) *The Knowledge Gap* dives into the research on background knowledge and its relationship to comprehension and learning.

Figure 0.4 • Scarborough's Reading Rope



Source: Used with permission of Guilford Publications, Inc., from Scarborough, H. (2001). "Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory and practice." In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy research* (Vol. 1, pp. 97–110); permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Writing Instruction

Writing is a critical aspect of literacy—it’s the way we express our understanding, communicate our needs, and convey our point of view. While much has been written about the Science of Reading instruction, less so has been written about the Science of Writing instruction. As a result, some program publishers had largely cornered the market on writing instruction until a backlash came as consumers realized that it was not based on evidence-based practices.

There is indeed a significant body of research related to the importance of explicit writing instruction for students, and the evidence base is clear. According to Joan Sedita, author of *The Writing Rope* (Figure 0.5), like comprehension, effective written expression is a complex skill made up of subcomponent skills that students need to master in order to engage in skilled writing. These are the subcomponents:

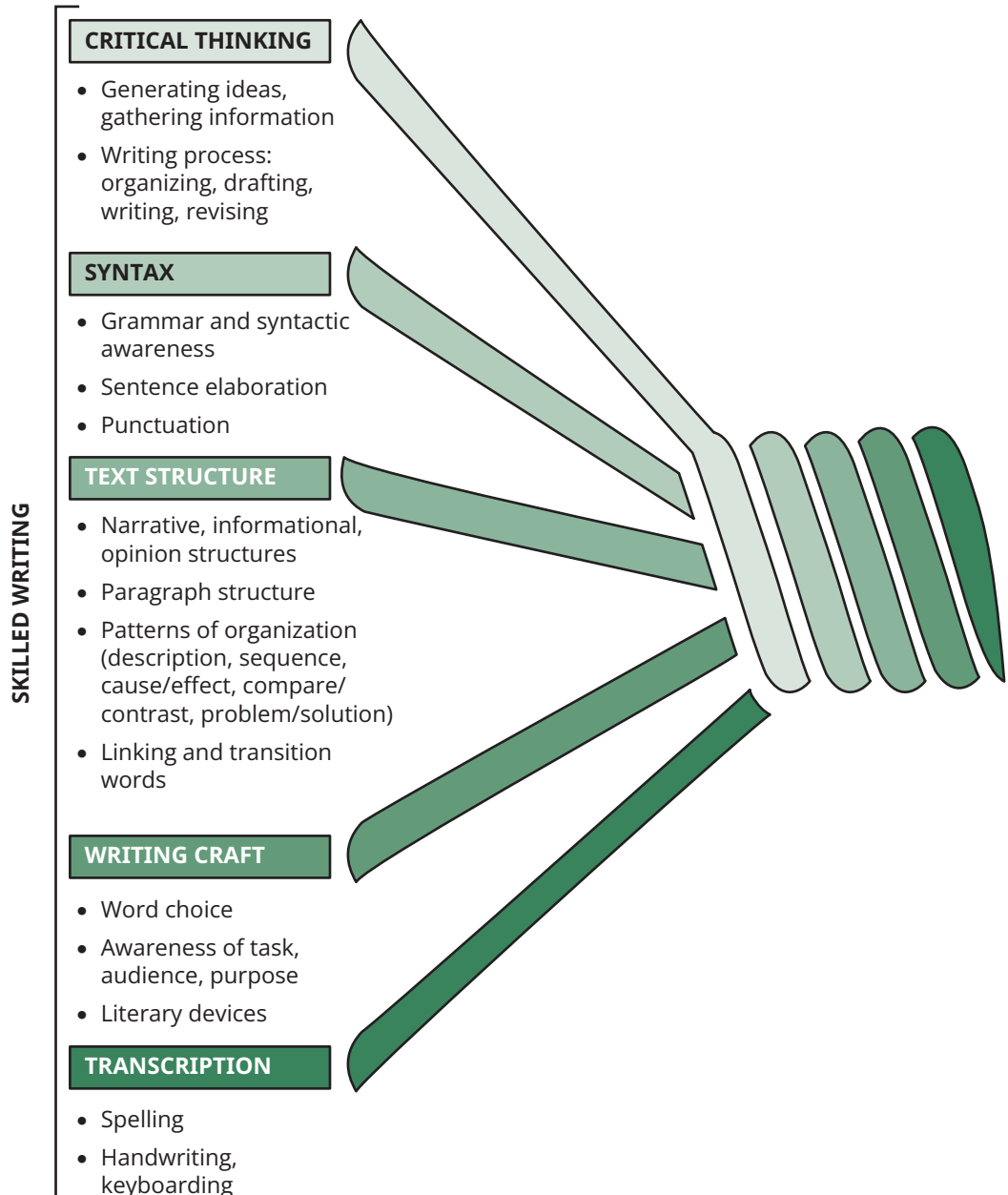
- **Critical Thinking:** This refers to a writer’s ability to generate ideas and convey meaning.
- **Syntax:** This refers to a writer’s ability to know, utilize, and manipulate sentence structures to convey meaning.
- **Text Structure:** This refers to a writer’s ability to know, utilize, and manipulate genres and text structures to convey meaning.
- **Writing Craft:** This refers to a writer’s selection of word choice; awareness of task, audience, and purposes; as well as the use of literary devices.
- **Transcription:** This refers to a writer’s ability to transcribe their thoughts efficiently through handwriting, typing, or dictation with appropriate spelling to convey meaning.

Two resources that support educator understanding of writing instruction and how it can be taught to students are the following:

- Joan Sedita’s (2023) *The Writing Rope* provides educators with a foundation for understanding the complexities of writing instruction and what steps they can take to explicitly teach and enhance the skill in their students.
- Judith Hochman and Natalie Wexler’s (2024) *The Writing Revolution 2.0: A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades* dives deep into syntax and sentence structure to support students with understanding, expanding, and extending their sentences for more complex written expression.

Figure 0.5 • *The Writing Rope*

The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing



Source: Sedita, J. (2019). *The Writing Rope*. Rowley, MA, Keys to Literacy. Reprinted with permission from Joan Sedita. All rights reserved.

English Learners and Multilingual Learners

Students who are English learners are developing proficiency in English as a second language; students who are multilingual learners are developing proficiency in English in addition to other languages.

Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not always synonymous. *English learners* typically refer to students who qualify for language support services because they are learning English. *Multilingual learner* is a broader term that may include English learners, former English learners, and other students who use or are developing proficiency in multiple languages.

In this book, the term *multilingual learner* is used whenever possible to emphasize students' linguistic strengths while recognizing that readers may encounter both terms in research, policy documents, and educational practice.

It is important to note that this book focuses on district literacy success for students learning to read and write in English and does not address bilingual or dual-language education, a topic deserving of its own specialized treatment. Readers interested in bilingual education and biliteracy development can look to one of the following experts and their work in the field, including Claude Goldenberg and Rhoda Coleman (2010) and Goldenberg and Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan (2023).

Dyslexia and Reading Difficulties

Due to new legislation across the United States, dyslexia and reading difficulties are top of mind for many educators. Even after 150 years of research on the subject, much confusion and misunderstanding remain.

Some people may be surprised to learn that research into reading difficulties and dyslexia dates back to the mid-to-late 1800s, when physicians began to observe curious symptoms in their patients related to speech, reading, and writing. One of these physicians, Dr. Adolf Kussmaul, began compiling, analyzing, and synthesizing case studies on the topic in order to better understand the issues at play and help the field identify the phenomena. In his work *Disturbances of Speech: An Attempt in the Pathology of Speech*, he cited a case that became an important part of his work. Dr. Kussmaul shared a patient study from a Belgian physician named Charles Van den Abeele. Dr. Van den Abeele treated a 45-year-old woman who experienced a stroke and subsequently lost the ability to process the written word. "Two months after the [stroke], she discovered that she could no longer read printing and writing. She saw the text, distinguished the forms of the letters, and could even copy the text, but was incapable of translating the words into spoken words and thoughts" (Van den Abeele,

as cited in Kussmaul, 1877, p. 772). Based on this case, Kussmaul named this condition “word blindness,” and researchers began to consider the implications of this in other ways.

Around the same time, a German ophthalmologist named Dr. Rudolf Berlin observed patients who complained of symptoms that included headaches and difficulty with reading print. In his case, like Kussmaul’s, these were patients who initially could read but had sustained some sort of brain damage through injury or disease that resulted in the reading problems.

Berlin coined the term *dyslexia* (*dys* meaning “difficult” and *lexia* meaning “word”) and shared it widely beyond his professorship in Stuttgart. Like his colleague Dr. Kussmaul, he believed that these difficulties resulted from some sort of aphasia or neurological disorder, but because his work was mainly with adults, the impacts of reading difficulties were not yet investigated until a few decades later.

In 1896, Dr. William Pringle Morgan, a British physician, began to write about young patients who struggled with text not after a brain injury but rather as they tried to acquire reading. He wrote,

Percy . . . , aged 14— . . . [a] bright and intelligent boy, quick at games, and in no way inferior to others of his age. His great difficulty has been—and is now—his inability to learn to read. This inability is so remarkable, and so pronounced, that I have no doubt it is due to some congenital defect.

He has been at school or under tutors since he was 7 years old, and the greatest efforts have been made to teach him to read, but, in spite of this laborious and persistent training, he can only with difficulty spell out words of one syllable.

. . . His father informs me that the greatest difficulty was found in teaching the boy his letters, and they thought he never would learn them. No doubt he was originally letter blind (*cacitas litteralis*), but by dint of constant application, this defect has been overcome.

(Pringle Morgan, 1896, p. 1378).

Research continued along this topic over the next several decades into the neurobiological origins of this difficulty. But it was not until 1937 when Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a physician and professor of neurology and neuropathology at Columbia University, published his book *Reading, Writing, and Speech Problems in Children* that practitioners started considering not just what was causing developmental dyslexia from a neurological standpoint but also how one might help to resolve it.

In 1929, Anna Gillingham, a school psychologist and educator, collaborated with Dr. Orton and colleague Bessie Stillman to create the manual *Remedial Training for Children With Specific Disability in Reading, Spelling, and Penmanship*, which later became the *Orton-Gillingham Manual*. The manual detailed an approach, not a program, for supporting children with language-based disabilities who showed difficulty acquiring reading and writing skills. The hallmarks of the approach were that the components of reading, writing, and spelling were taught sequentially, cumulatively, and systematically, and that instruction was diagnostic and prescriptive, meaning that initial diagnostic assessments were applied at the start of instruction to identify target skills and progress monitoring assessments were applied throughout to establish skill mastery.

In the initial thinking of its designers, the Orton-Gillingham method was developed to support one-on-one instruction, but as the field started to see the gains students were making in individualized instruction through this method, Orton-Gillingham practitioners began to apply the approach to small groups and whole classes. Subsequently, programs were built on the method, some of which are still available today, to allow teachers to use a scripted curriculum that would allow them to teach the approach without the burden of planning each lesson. Although the Orton-Gillingham method has grown and evolved, it serves as a foundational approach to a broader concept, Structured Literacy, which is widely used today.

Still, there was a lot of misinformation about reading difficulties and dyslexia, even as the field was growing in its understanding of how to support them (see Figure 0.6). In the late 1990s, concurrent with the work of the National Reading Panel, the International Dyslexia Association drove an initiative led by then-president Emerson Dickman to gather a consensus committee to create a definition for dyslexia. The first definition was published in 1996, followed by a revision in 2002.

The definition of dyslexia created by the International Dyslexia Association in 2002 and adopted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is below. Notice how in this version, the group wrote the definition based on current research at the time that showed there was one core deficit. Subsequent research indicates that there is more than one deficit that likely contributes to risk of reading difficulties. But notice, too, how the definition points out that a student's difficulty is often unexpected and can persist even when effective classroom instruction is provided (meaning that there is a need for more intensive instruction for those students).

Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (Lyon et al., 2003)

Figure 0.6 • *Dyslexia Myths*

Dyslexia Debunking Myths



- **Not** the result of growing up without books in the home
- **Not** correlated with intelligence
- **Not** reading words backwards or upside down
- **Not** more common in boys than girls
- **Not** related to vision (related to phonological processing)

Sources: Glean Education. Used with permission. Adapted from National Institutes of Health. (2011, November 3). *NIH-funded study finds dyslexia not tied to IQ* [Press release]. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/newsroom/releases/110311-dyslexia-iq>; Puglisi, M., Hulme, C., Hamilton, L., & Snowling, M. (2017). The home literacy environment is a correlate, but perhaps not a cause, of variations in children's language and literacy development. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 21, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2017.1346660>; Schumacher, J., Hoffmann, P., Schmal, C., Schulte-Körne, G., & Nöthen, M. M. (2007). Genetics of dyslexia: The evolving landscape. *Journal of Medical Genetics*, 44(5), 289–297. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jmg.2006.046516>.

In 2025, the International Dyslexia Association convened another committee to revise the definition, which was expanded to include additional research since the last publication and to include the impacts of the disorder on other languages outside of English. The result is below. (Note: Definitions are often being updated, so for the most up-to-date version, please visit the International Dyslexia Association website at <https://dyslexiaida.org/>)

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers. The causes of dyslexia are complex and involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences that interact throughout development. Underlying difficulties with phonological and morphological processing are common but not universal, and early oral language weaknesses often foreshadow literacy challenges. Secondary consequences include reading comprehension problems and reduced reading and writing experience that can impede growth in language, knowledge, written expression, and overall academic achievement. Psychological well-being and employment opportunities also may be affected. Although identification and targeted instruction are important at

any age, language and literacy support before and during the early years of education is particularly effective. (International Dyslexia Association, 2025)

For some educators, these official definitions can feel dense. This summary from Louisa Moats and Karen Dakin (2008) can feel more accessible and applicable to their daily experience:

Dyslexia is one kind of language-based problem that can fall anywhere on the spectrum between annoyance to severe limitation. It affects more than reading and is usually experienced for life. It is more common than any kind of learning disability. And, it responds to expert, informed instruction—the provision of which remains our greatest challenge. (p. 1)

Much of what we know today about dyslexia has evolved as a result of continued work in the fields of cognitive neuroscience, linguistics, and education. We now know more about the cognitive processing deficits that contribute to reading risk.

Here are a couple of resources that offer more information about dyslexia and reading difficulties:

- David Kilpatrick's (2015) *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* is a research review of the research on assessment and instruction for struggling readers up to 2015.
- Sally Shaywitz's (2020) *Overcoming Dyslexia* provides a research-based overview of dyslexia and the academic implications for students who struggle with it.

Structured Literacy

In July 2014, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) coined the term *Structured Literacy* to unify all the terms being used to describe evidence-based literacy instruction. For decades, educators have used many different terms to discuss a common approach: *Systematic Instruction*, *Structured Phonics*, *Phonics-Based Instruction*, *Synthetic Phonics*, and *Multisensory Instruction*. All of these terms represented an approach that was began with the Orton-Gillingham method—an approach rooted in the research of Samuel T. Orton and grounded in practices devised by Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman to prevent and remediate students' struggles with reading acquisition. The IDA realized that having so many terms to represent one approach was confusing the field and had the potential to dilute the impact this evidence-based approach had and could have on the field. In establishing the term *Structured Literacy*, the IDA established a common language for the field to use for publishing and policy. In 2025, the organization created a definition for Structured Literacy to ensure the field had a common understanding of the approach.

Structured Literacy is a comprehensive, integrated approach to reading and writing instruction that directly and systematically builds on and develops oral language while explicitly teaching the structure of written language. Using this research-based approach, educators integrate the teaching of the foundational and higher-order skills and knowledge needed to develop proficient reading comprehension and written expression.

Within one lesson aligned with Structured Literacy, a teacher will move through phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (both language and reading). Teachers will expose students to new concepts and skills explicitly, directly, systematically, and cumulatively. Teachers will include newly taught skills in future lessons to review until mastery is achieved.

Stanford University professor emeritus Claude Goldenberg has shared widely about Structured Literacy's effectiveness with English learners and multilingual learners who need both decoding support (especially if their native language has a different alphabet) and language comprehension support. Structured Literacy is a good fit because these elements are integrated into each lesson, providing a language-rich learning experience for students working to understand and engage with the new code. English learners need the same instruction as non-English learners when they are learning to read and write, but they also need sufficient English learner development instructional support because they are learning to speak and understand at the same time they are working to read and write in their new language.

Some resources that offer an in-depth understanding of the Structured Literacy approach and the background knowledge needed to teach it effectively are listed here:

- Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman's (1960) *The Gillingham Manual: Remedial Training for Children with Specific Disability in Reading, Spelling, and Penmanship* is the original manual that established the Orton-Gillingham Method from which Structured Literacy was born. Reading this manual can help an educator understand the foundations of the approach.
- Suzanne Carreker and Judith Birsh's (2019) *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills* is a comprehensive text that features chapter authors that dive into different topics, including Chapter 2, titled "Structured Literacy Instruction," by Mary L. Farrell and Nancy Cushen White, and Chapter 18, "Designing the Learning Environment and Planning Multisensory Structured Literacy Lessons," by Judith R. Birsh, Jean Schedler, and Robin Anderson Singer.
- Louisa Moats's (2020) *Speech to Print* is the groundbreaking book that covers phonology, morphology, and syntax and discusses how language structure underpins reading and writing instruction.

- Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan's (2020) *Literacy Foundations for English Learners: A Comprehensive Guide to Evidence-Based Instruction* shares how Structured Literacy principles support multilingual learners' language and literacy development.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

Now that we've laid a foundation, we're ready to take the next step and begin our journey together. First, an orientation to the roadmap.

Table 0.1 • An Orientation to the Roadmap

Chapter	Questions	Common Barriers	Opportunities
Chapter 1 Determine a Starting Point	What does my school need in place to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all student learners?	- We have varying levels of knowledge at the school site. - We have some teachers steeped in practices that don't align with research. - We have materials that don't align with research. - We have systems that don't align with research.	- Consider target areas for professional learning. - Determine which teachers, practices, and systems need support to build alignment with research and evidence-based practices.
Chapter 2 Create Conducive School Systems	What are Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI), and why do they matter to district literacy success? How should our school day look to ensure our struggling and thriving students are all getting what they need? What are the differences between the tiers?	- We have scheduling complexities due to our unique context (large urban, small rural). - We don't have staff to run Tier 2.	- Compare research-based best practices in RTI with your current practices. - Consider staffing needs to support alignment with research-based practices. - Determine whether shifts in individual classroom schedules and/or the master schedule are necessary to build alignment across the school and/or district.

(Continued)

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

(Continued)

Chapter	Questions	Common Barriers	Opportunities
Chapter 3 Establish Assessment Protocols	What is universal screening? What are benchmark assessments? What are diagnostic assessments? What does my team need to know about using assessments to inform instruction?	- We don't have an assessment system yet. - We have an assessment system, but it's not aligned with research-based best practices. - Teachers assess but don't use the results to inform instruction.	- Determine what assessment tool might be a fit for your district. - Support teachers with professional development in data-driven instruction.
Chapter 4 Ensure Comprehensive Core Instruction (Tier 1)	What does comprehensive and effective core instruction look like? How do I know if our core instruction is evidence-based and aligned with research-based best practices?	- We have a core program, but it doesn't align with best practices. - We have a core program that aligns with best practices, but teachers won't teach from it. - We just adopted a new program, but it's not aligned with research. - Our Tier 1 program is not aligned with our Tier 2 program.	- Consider whether teachers are properly trained to deliver comprehensive and effective core instruction with fidelity. - Evaluate whether evidence-based Tier 1 materials are in place to support instruction - Determine whether the systems are in place to allow teachers to deliver this instruction to their fullest ability. - Review literacy observation walkthrough policies to ensure teacher alignment and instructional fidelity. - Assess the coaching layer to support teachers with instructional effectiveness.

ORIENTATION: AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE

Chapter	Questions	Common Barriers	Opportunities
Chapter 5 Ensure Effective Intervention (Tier 2)	What are the intensification dimensions for intervention (group size, duration, frequency, target skill alignment)? Who should receive intervention? What should be the goals/outcomes?	- We don't have quality materials. - We don't have trained instructors. - We don't have teachers who deliver intervention with fidelity. - We don't have progress monitoring or teachers knowledgeable about data-based decision-making.	- Consider whether interventionists are properly trained to deliver intensive instruction with fidelity. - Evaluate whether Tier 2 instruction is aligned with evidence-based practices across the district. - Evaluate systems and practices for determining students for entrance and exit from support. - Review materials to ensure alignment to evidence-based practices and student skill deficits.
Chapter 6 Ensure Individualized Instruction (Tier 3)	What do I need to know about special education to support stakeholders at my site?	- We don't know enough about special education and/or reading difficulties to be an effective advocate for parents, teachers, or students in the IEP meeting. - We have conflict with parents and families that prohibits us from effectively collaborating.	- Consider target areas for professional learning. - Determine which teachers, practices, and systems need support to build alignment with research and evidence-based practices. - Build an MTSS so that students get high-quality early intervention before special education referrals. - Develop capacity for your special education teachers to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction to students with specific learning disorder.

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Chapter	Questions	Common Barriers	Opportunities
Chapter 7 Implement and Sustain	What do I need to know about change management? How do I support reluctant teachers? How do I encourage early adopters? How do I build change that has staying power?	- We have teachers who are at different stages of the change management cycle, from denial to anger to acceptance. - We have parents who are posing a barrier to implementation. - We have high turnover due to our context, which makes things hard to sustain. - We have new leadership who is less invested than the last and is looking to change things.	- Establish protocols for observation to support instructional fidelity across the tiers. - Establish a professional development plan to ensure knowledge building continues among teachers to sustain progress during periods of turnover. - Maintain materials and update as needed. - Utilize a coaching layer to support instructional efficacy and build organizational capacity.

Ready to get started? In Chapter 1, we'll begin our journey. You will reflect on your organization's current practices and dive into an audit to isolate some focus areas for this work together. At the close of the chapter, there is a quick read about funding this work. Excited to have you here. Now let's hit the road.

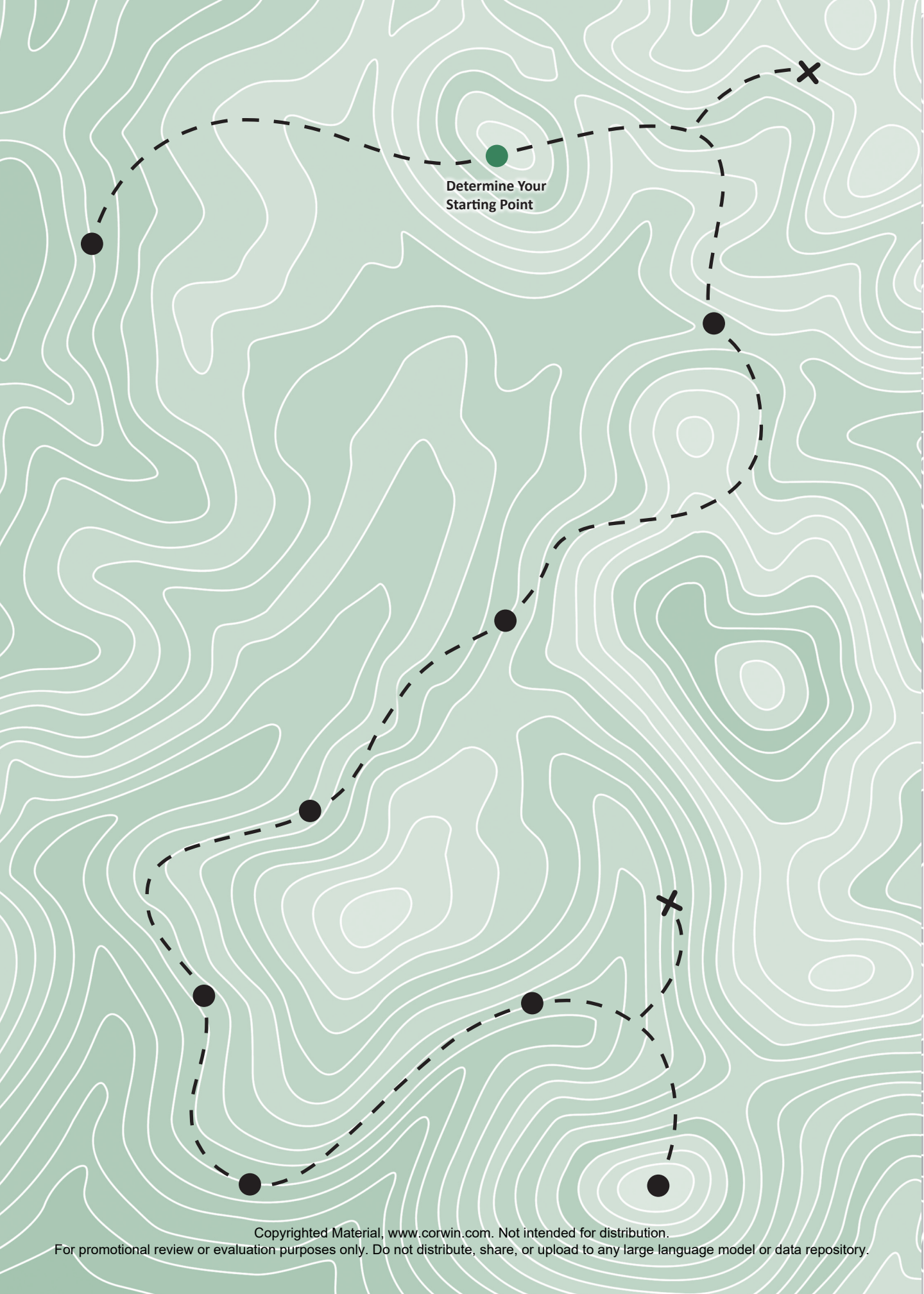
Key Takeaways

- **Effective literacy leadership requires knowledge of research and practice.** Leaders must understand how reading and writing develop and the evidence-based practices that support achievement for all learners.
- **Research-based practices are not necessarily evidence-based.** Leaders must be able to distinguish between programs and practices supported by rigorous evidence versus those that are popular but lack strong validation.

- **Reading and writing instruction must be explicit, systematic, and evidence-based.** Leaders must be familiar with the results of the meta-analysis that culminated in the National Reading Panel report, which identified, from decades of research, five essential components of literacy instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) that are integrated into high-quality reading and writing instruction.
- **Structured Literacy provides a coherent, evidence-based framework for instruction and intervention.** Leaders must be familiar with the history, research base, and theory behind this approach, which has proven to be beneficial to all students, especially for those with risk of reading and writing difficulties and multilingual learners.
- **Strong school systems can set up a district for student literacy success.** Effective literacy instruction is not just about teacher moves. School leaders have a major role to play in setting up their teachers for success in ensuring all students receive appropriate support. This book will set out to support leaders in doing just that.

Discussion Questions

1. As a literacy leader, where do you feel most confident in your understanding of how reading develops, and where do you need to deepen your knowledge?
2. How does your current approach to reading instruction align with the five components identified by the National Reading Panel? Where are the gaps?
3. In your school or district, how are decisions made about what is considered “evidence-based”? What might need to shift to ensure stronger alignment with research?
4. As you preview the chapters ahead, which areas feel most urgent for your context, and how might you begin preparing your team for that learning journey?



Determine Your
Starting Point

Chapter
1

Determine Your Starting Point

Where Are We? And Where Do We Need to Be?

“Awareness is like the sun.
When it shines on things, they are transformed.”
—Thich Nhat Hanh

DETERMINE YOUR STARTING POINT

Everyone starts a journey from a different place. To start your literacy journey, take a moment to reflect on your starting point by answering the questions in Figure 1.1. You’ll be prompted to come back to this reflection later in the book to work through the questions again. At that time, you’ll be able to note how things have shifted, even ever so slightly, and you’ll be asked to reflect on that change and what it means to you. For right now, we are going to focus on our starting point. Don’t worry about where you are headed or how far you need to go. Just think about where you are at this moment.

Figure 1.1 • Reflect on your starting point

Prompt	Response (When Starting)	Response (Later On)
Why are you interested in this work?		
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how comfortable are you with your literacy leadership?		

(Continued)

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

(Continued)

Prompt	Response (When Starting)	Response (Later On)
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how knowledgeable are you about literacy assessment practices?		
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how knowledgeable are you about literacy instruction practices?		
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how knowledgeable are you about multilingual learner instructional practices?		
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how knowledgeable are you about literacy intervention practices?		
On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being <i>not at all</i> and 5 <i>extremely</i>), how open is your team to organizational change?		
What are the three biggest barriers to student literacy progress at this moment?		
What are you most excited about regarding this work?		
What are you most worried about regarding this work?		
What are you proudest of regarding your team?		

Prompt	Response (When Starting)	Response (Later On)
What are you most concerned about regarding your team?		
In 10 years, you are leaving your position, and you can't believe how well things have gone. Your team has been mentioned in national news as a shining star of student proficiency and literacy progress—a model for other districts. Take a moment to describe what this looks like: • What can the students do, and what does their data show? • What can the teachers do, and what does their data show? • What can the leaders do, and what does their data show?		



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AUDIT YOUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO GET A CLEAR VISION OF REALITY

Now that you've reflected on where you are, the next step is to gather concrete information and data on where your team, school, district, and students are starting. An audit is a great tool for evaluating not only how far you have come but also how far you still need to go.



Scan the QR code to see AIR's full RTI rubric.

<https://qrs.ly/6shcnne>

In this section, we will walk through an audit, captured in Figures 1.2 through 1.5 based on the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (American Institutes of Research, 2014). In this audit, you will gather information on the success factors that we'll be diving into in the next four chapters of this book: School Systems, Assessment, Instruction, and Intervention. You can conduct this audit by yourself or with your team to estimate, as best you can, where your team is at this moment. Later in the roadmap, you'll be invited to return to this audit to compare where your team is after your literacy leadership work is underway.

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS/ RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AUDIT

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) are frameworks for identifying and supporting students at risk for difficulties. MTSS refers both to academic and behavioral supports, but in this book we are focusing on academics, specifically literacy. You'll learn more about MTSS frameworks in Chapter 2.

School Systems Audit

Here are a few key definitions to help guide your audit on MTSS/RTI (Figure 1.2):

- Tier 1: Tier 1 refers to comprehensive core instruction. This instruction is systematic, cumulative, and sequential using high-quality instructional materials delivered to all students.
- Tier 2: Tier 2 refers to targeted, intensified intervention. This intervention is also systematic, cumulative, and sequential using high-quality instructional materials. But the interventions in Tier 2 should be targeted to student skill gaps and delivered only to students at risk.
- Tier 3: Tier 3 refers to individualized remediation. This remediation is also systematic, cumulative, and sequential using high-quality instructional materials. But the remediation is individualized for the student's profile of skill gaps and cognitive deficits, which makes it more diagnostic and targeted than in other tiers of instruction.

Figure 1.2 • MTSS/RTI Systems Audit

MTSS/RTI Systems	Scores				
	1	3	5	Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
Schedule	No grade levels have designated time blocks for core instruction, intervention, and data teaming.	Some grade levels have blocks for core instruction, intervention, and data teaming.	All grade levels have blocks for core instruction, intervention, and data teaming.		
Clear Tiers	No grade levels have Tier 2 intensified instruction, either in small groups in the general education classroom or pull-out to an intervention space.	Some grade levels have Tier 2 intensified instruction, but it replaces Tier 1 instruction.	All grade levels have Tier 2 intensified instruction that occurs in addition to and supplements Tier 1.		
Data Teams	No grade levels have RTI data teams that regularly meet to make RTI decisions.	Some grade levels have RTI data teams that regularly meet to make RTI decisions.	All grade levels have RTI data teams that regularly meet to make RTI decisions.		
English Learner Development	No grade levels have structures in place for designated English learner language development or integrated language supports during core instruction.	Some grade levels have either designated English learner language development time or integrated language supports during core instruction, but implementation is inconsistent.	All grade levels have protected, designated time for English learner language development and consistently implement integrated language supports within core instruction across the school day.		

(Continued)

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

(Continued)

MTSS/RTI Systems	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
Professional Development	Few leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support continuous improvement of instructional practice, data-based decisions, and/or delivery of interventions.	Some leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support continuous improvement of instructional practice, data-based decisions, and/or delivery of interventions.	All leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support continuous improvement of instructional practice, data-based decisions, and/or delivery of interventions.		
MTSS/RTI Systems Leadership	Few leaders in the district demonstrate decisions and/or actions that are supportive of the essential components of the RTI framework.	Some leaders in the district demonstrate decisions and/or actions that are supportive of the essential components of the RTI framework.	All leaders in the district demonstrate decisions and/or actions that are supportive of the essential components of the RTI framework.		
Resources	Few resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support RTI implementation.	Some resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support RTI implementation.	All necessary resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support RTI implementation.		



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REFLECTION

Answer the following questions as you reflect on your MTSS/RTI Systems Audit.

- What came up for you as you were working through this chart?
- What sections do you have more questions about?
- What are some areas you are doing well in?
- What are some areas you need to focus on?

Assessment Practices Audit

Here are a few key definitions to help guide your audit of assessment practices (Figure 1.3):

- **Universal Screening:** A brief assessment typically conducted three times a year—beginning of year (BOY), middle of year (MOY), and end of year (EOY)—used to identify students at risk of reading difficulties.
- **Progress Monitoring:** A brief assessment, sometimes the universal screening probe, used to determine if students are making adequate growth. Progress monitoring may be done monthly, biweekly, or weekly, depending on the level of support needed.

Figure 1.3 • Assessment Practices Audit

Assessment	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
Universal Screening (Benchmark)	Few students are screened 3x per year.	Some students are screened 3x per year.	All students are screened 3x per year.		

(Continued)

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

(Continued)

Assessment	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
English Learner Proficiency Assessment	Few students are assessed with English learner proficiency assessments (e.g., WIDA/ACCESS or state ELPA).	Some students are assessed with English learner proficiency assessments (e.g., WIDA/ACCESS or state ELPA).	All appropriate students are assessed with English learner proficiency assessments (e.g., WIDA/ACCESS or state ELPA).		
Progress Monitoring (monthly Tier 2, weekly Tier 3)	Few teachers use diagnostic progress monitoring.	Some teachers use diagnostic progress monitoring.	All teachers use diagnostic progress monitoring.		
Data-Based Decision-Making	Few teachers use data to make instructional decisions.	Some teachers use data to make instructional decisions.	All teachers use data to make instructional decisions.		
Professional Development	Few leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.	Some leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.	All leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.		
Resources	Few resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	Some resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	All resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.		



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REFLECTION

Answer the following questions as you reflect on your Assessment Practices Audit.

- What came up for you as you were working through this chart?
- What sections do you have more questions about?
- What are some areas you are doing well in?
- What are some areas you need to focus on?

Instructional Practices Audit

Here are a few key definitions to help guide your audit on evidence-based instructional practices (Figure 1.4):

- **Direct:** Students engage with highly structured teacher-led lessons that include rapid, step-by-step skill building through modeling, guided practice, and immediate feedback.
- **Explicit:** Students learn concepts through clear teacher-led explanation rather than inquiry or discovery.
- **Structured:** Students engage with lessons that are broken down into small, manageable, and predictable steps.
- **Systematic, sequential, & cumulative:** Students engage with lessons that are sequenced from the simplest to the most complex skills over time. Students are exposed to concepts in a predetermined sequence that aims for mastery of previous concepts before new ones are explored. Students work on concepts in a way that builds upon previous learning. This includes modeling, teacher support, and frequent assessment.
- **Mastery-based:** Students work on concepts until they achieve mastery (which is tested through constant and continuous progress monitoring).

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

- Designated English learner development: Students engage in protected, teacher-led instructional time specifically focused on developing language skills (e.g., oral language, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse) outside of core instruction.
- Integrated English learner development: Students engage in language development throughout core instruction with embedded and intentional supports (e.g., modeling, scaffolding, structured discussion, and academic language use) that make content accessible and build language proficiency.

Figure 1.4 • Instructional Practices Audit

Instruction	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
Curriculum Materials	Few core instructional curricula and materials are current and research-based.	Some core instructional curricula and materials are current and research-based.	All core instructional curricula and materials are current and research-based.		
Standardized Literacy Objectives	Few grades have common literacy objectives.	Some grades have common literacy objectives.	All grades have common literacy objectives.		
Designated and Integrated English Learner Instruction	Few teachers provide designated or integrated English learner instruction.	Some teachers provide designated or integrated English learner instruction, but practices vary.	All teachers provide both designated and integrated English learner instruction aligned with core literacy instruction in a consistent and systematic way.		
Instructional Fidelity	Few teachers deliver direct, explicit, systematic, cumulative, and sequential literacy	Some teachers deliver direct, explicit, systematic, cumulative, and sequential literacy instruction	All teachers deliver direct, explicit, systematic, cumulative, and sequential literacy		

Instruction	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
	instruction during core instruction with fidelity.	during core instruction with fidelity.	instruction during core instruction with fidelity.		
Professional Development	Few leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support the delivery of Tier 1 curricula.	Some leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support the delivery of Tier 1 curricula.	All leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support the delivery of Tier 1 curricula.		
Trained and Informed Instructors	Few teachers have the background knowledge and training in the instructional materials to deliver the program as intended.	Some teachers have the background knowledge and training in the instructional materials to deliver the program as intended.	All teachers have the background knowledge and training in the instructional materials to deliver the program as intended.		
Resources	Few resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	Some resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	All resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.		



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REFLECTION

Answer the following questions as you reflect on your Instructional Practices Audit.

- What came up for you as you were working through this chart?
- What sections do you have more questions about?
- What are some areas you are doing well in?
- What are some areas you need to focus on?

Intervention Practices Audit

Here are a few key definitions to help guide your audit on intervention practices (Figure 1.5):

- **Foundational skills:** Foundational skills are the essential core literacy skills needed to support a student in becoming a proficient reader. Established by the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis, foundational skills for literacy are phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Although these skills are mentioned separately, they can and should be taught simultaneously within a literacy lesson (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).
- **Optimal grouping:** Optimal grouping is the research-based concept that student learning can be accelerated when struggling students receive intensified instruction in flexible, data-driven groups of three to five students (Vaughn et al., 2003).

Figure 1.5 • Intervention Practices Audit

Intervention	Scores			Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
	1	3	5		
Tier 2 Programs and Core Instruction	No Tier 2 programs align with core instruction.	Some Tier 2 programs align with core instruction and focus on some foundational skills that support literacy learning objectives.	All Tier 2 programs align with core instruction and focus on all foundational skills that support literacy objectives.		
English Learner Intervention	Few English learners who need it receive additional targeted language intervention beyond core instruction.	Some English learners who need it receive additional targeted language intervention beyond core instruction.	All English learners who need it receive additional targeted language intervention beyond core instruction.		
Research-Based Intensification Dimensions	No Tier 2 groups are optimal in size, dosage, and skill deficit alignment.	Some Tier 2 groups are optimal in size, dosage, and skill deficit alignment.	All Tier 2 groups are optimal in size, dosage, and skill deficit alignment.		
Trained and Informed Instructors	No interventionists are trained in the intervention and deliver the program as intended.	Some interventionists are trained in the intervention and deliver the program as intended.	All interventionists are trained in the intervention and deliver the program as intended.		
Professional Development	No leaders or staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.	Some leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.	All leaders and staff receive professional development opportunities to support assessment and data-based decision-making.		

(Continued)

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

(Continued)

Intervention	Scores				
	1	3	5	Score (When Starting)	Score (Later On)
Resources	No resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	Some resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.	All resources (funding, materials, professional learning, staffing) are allocated to support comprehensive Tier 1 instruction.		



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REFLECTION

Answer the following questions as you reflect on your Intervention Practices Audit.

- What came up for you as you were working through this chart?
- What sections do you have more questions about?
- What are some areas you are doing well in?
- What are some areas you need to focus on?

“Where there is no vision, there is no hope.”

—George Washington Carver

ESTABLISH A VISION AND MISSION FOR THE WORK

Review your audit on the previous pages and consider your takeaways:

- What jumps out to you?
- What opportunities do you see?
- What barriers are currently present that need to be removed?

Part of the work of being a literacy leader is to set the course for your team’s work. You must do this with a vision that takes you beyond your current reality to a place where you want to be. This work can feel fanciful when you are so commonly mired in the day-to-day work of running a school or district. But it is necessary work. You can only take your team as far as your vision. If you haven’t cultivated a vision, your team will stay right where they are.

Vision vs. Mission

First, let’s get clear on what a vision is and how it differs from a mission. Your vision is the grand idea, the ultimate goal, the highest peak. Your vision is what would happen if everything you could possibly imagine went well. Your vision is what you can achieve if you have all the resources, the alignment, the collaboration, the staff, the funding, the tools, the knowledge, and the good luck. For example, at our organization, Glean Education, our vision is this:

All educators have the knowledge, tools, and systems to deliver high-quality, data-driven literacy and language instruction that ensures all students achieve reading proficiency.

Here are some examples from schools we have worked with in the past to give you an idea of what this might look like:

Example 1

All scholars/students are proficient readers reading on grade level as a result of teachers and curriculum leaders having the capacity for delivering and knowledge of curriculum, core instruction, intervention, and assessment aligned to the Science of Reading.

Example 2

We believe that it is imperative for all scholars to become literate members of society. As a literate learner, our scholars will be able to listen, speak, read, write, and reason effectively; think critically; access and evaluate information; and transfer learning to be college or career ready.

Now it's your turn. If you had everything in place, what would your vision be for the literacy work at your organization? Write it in the space that follows.

VISION

A mission, on the other hand, are a collection of the steps you'll take to achieve that higher vision. This is the work, the day-to-day grind that will get you to that larger goal. For example, at our organization, our mission is the following:

We partner with schools, districts, and states to

- Deliver training that builds knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices
- Deliver coaching to support the implementation of research-based reading instruction
- Deliver consulting to support the creation of school systems that promote data-driven instruction that leads to student literacy progress.

Here are some examples from schools we have worked with in the past to give you an idea of what this might look like:

- Students will be proficient with foundational and critical thinking skills and know what to expect each year with regard to instructional objectives, content,

and rigor. They will experience educational equity and will be prepared for future grades.

- Teachers will deliver equitable, data-driven instruction through a rigorous and aligned curriculum that enables them to differentiate core instruction to ensure all students meet grade-level proficiency and beyond.
- School leaders will feel supported by district administration with the tools and resources they need to have the confidence and capacity to provide clarity to their staff around classroom assessment, instruction, curriculum alignment, and digital practice resources to ensure all teachers and students thrive.

Now it's your turn. If you had everything in place, what would your mission be for the literacy work at your organization?

MISSION

BUILD ALIGNMENT WITH YOUR TEAM

Literacy leadership is part vision and part communication. You could have the most perfect vision and the resources to make it a reality, but nothing meaningful will shift if you can't communicate it effectively to your team. You cannot do this on your own.

In my mind, the greatest work of a leader is to build alignment among your team. This is easier said than done in education because, in many respects, teaching is a solitary practice. How do you get teachers to collaborate, align, and move toward a common goal when they are all so used to guiding their outcomes? Read the case study that follows to learn a real district's strategies for doing just that.

Stories From the Road

How Building School Leader Knowledge and Capacity Drove Change in Bethlehem Area School District (BASD)

.....

Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) is a suburban school district in the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania along the eastern edge of the Appalachian Mountains. With 22 schools and over 13,000 students, it's the sixth largest in the state. In 2017, Dr. Jack Silva, the assistant superintendent and chief academic officer for BASD, began looking at his district's reading achievement levels. He noticed that only 6 out of 10 of their students were proficient on the state reading assessment. He shared, "Over 40% of our students were leaving third grade with less than proficient reading skills. And with the knowledge that the third-grade reading indicator is a very strong correlation with life success, we just couldn't go on that way." They assembled their school principals to present the data. Things would need to change.

The leadership team launched what would become BASD's Reading by Grade Three (RBG3) initiative, focusing on student literacy improvement. The vision? Having 90% of students proficient in reading by the end of the third grade. Creating a "high expectations, high support" environment, BASD set out on a five-year plan to build teacher knowledge, establish effective systems, and deliver high-quality instruction that would ensure students have the foundational reading skills to drive their future academic success.

1. Deliver training to build a common understanding among leaders.

The first thing the team did was deliver training to the 16 district principals to build a common understanding of evidence-based practices. "There were 28 days during the school year when principals came down to the education center," explained Dr. Silva. "We made the leaders instructional experts before we ever started talking about reading with the teachers." Administrators delved into the linguistic structure of English, understanding the cognitive processes behind reading acquisition and what educators need to know to deliver explicit reading instruction—things they may have only been taught briefly or not at all in preservice training. Dr. Silva explained that he put this training in place not just to train his staff but also to get the training himself: "The assistant superintendent needs to know, too. I was aware of the reading wars and a lot of the back and forth between balanced literacy, explicit instruction, and all that. But I didn't know what it meant as far as managing the curriculum, monitoring the instruction, and best assessment practices." Silva explained, "You start with the people who have the responsibility for the results."

2. Be intentional about the rollout.

When it came time to train the teachers, BASD was intentional about the rollout to optimize impact. The school improvement plan was implemented one grade level at a

time, beginning with kindergarten and including a new grade level each subsequent year. “Many instructional initiatives have gone down the drain because they took on too much, too soon, without the degree of intensity and supervision. So I remember speaking to the kindergarten teachers on the first day of school, and I went over everything that I’d just been telling you, that our existing levels of achievement weren’t satisfactory, that we were setting a goal of 90% of all students reading at grade level by the end of third grade, within four or five years. And that the process would start at kindergarten and that we had to get them off to a very good start,” said Silva. The district built teacher knowledge grade level by grade level, starting with the earliest and moving toward later grades to build a strong foundation in literacy from the bottom up. As knowledge among BASD educators grew, it became evident that a new curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading would be needed. “We knew that we were going to have to invest in a new curriculum, but I was unwilling to do that until we had the knowledge behind it,” said Silva.

3. Build collective efficacy by having school leaders and educators learn together.

During year two of the rollout, BASD school leaders followed up their training with another year of training alongside their district staff. According to Dr. Silva, this professional development experience helped to establish a level of comfort between school leaders and educators and created room for teachers to ask questions, adjust mindsets, and try new strategies. “We adopted the philosophy that there is no failure except failing to try,” said Silva. Educators felt empowered to engage in courageous dialogue around the district’s literacy curriculum while considering changes to instructional practice.

When the team started training the kindergarten teachers the second year, the district saw the payoff in training their leadership first. “The principals not only sat through the training by themselves in the first year, but in year two, they were with their kindergarten teachers learning again.” When the kindergarten teachers expressed concerns that the students weren’t developmentally ready for this type of instruction, the principals could confidently counter. “They were having those courageous conversations with the kindergarten teacher that the curriculum and science showed, no, we really should be able to get them there,” said Silva. Teachers received the support they needed to make the necessary shifts because the leaders were confident enough in their knowledge base to support the work.

4. Be willing to put in the work and stay the course.

Teachers started becoming very motivated when they saw the progress. “The kindergarten teachers got it rolling. By mid-year, our benchmark assessments were showing us that the students were growing faster than they had been in previous years. And then by the end of the year, 88% of our kindergarten students were at benchmark at the end of kindergarten. We had never been anywhere near that before. The results in

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

the schools didn't correlate to socioeconomic levels, so we had schools with a high degree of poverty that were outperforming schools with very low degrees of poverty, with the variable being not the economic circumstances of the students but the instruction of the teachers," said Silva.

BASD understood there was a lot of hard work and system shifts that needed to be put in place to make a lasting impact. Silva shared, "When our students finish third grade next year, they will have had the very best we could give them. Ultimately, it comes down to whether we are organizationally ready to do what we need to do to provide good quality instruction so that students can be successful. And can we support teachers through that high expectation, high support environment?"

Success followed. Your team can follow, too.

.....

Bethlehem Area School District's journey shows how you can lead change by identifying a need and using it to drive systemic change. The tools below can support your team's efforts in this area.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE TOMORROW

This chapter has shared a number of steps for determining where you are and where you want to go on your literacy journey. On the companion website for this book, you'll find the tools from this chapter in downloadable form that you can use in your work at your school site or in your district:

- Current status reflection template
- Systems, Assessment Practice, Instruction, and Intervention Audit templates

Key Takeaways

- **Auditing current systems is a critical first step toward change.** Leaders must examine current practices related to school systems, assessment, core instruction, and intervention in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of focus. Consider that at this stage of the process, you may not know what you don't know, so your perspective on district strengths and weaknesses may

change over the course of your learning. Keep this process going and revisit it at the start of this book and then at the end to assess how your new knowledge informs your view of where your district is and where it needs to be.

- **A clear vision and mission are important for coherent literacy improvement.** Leaders must drive change by first getting a clear sense of where they want their district to be. Your vision and mission may change over time as your team grows. Remember to revisit it often to reassess if it's the right wording for the North Star that will guide your work.
- **Alignment across school systems, assessment, instruction, and intervention drives impact.** Leaders must understand the role they play in laying the groundwork for creating an environment that supports all learners at the school site. By starting with desired student outcomes, you can work backward to prioritize actions, allocate resources, and maintain focus on the work ahead.
- **Sustainable change requires intentional leadership and systems thinking.** Leaders must actively drive the work, ensuring consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement across all levels of the system. This work isn't easy! But it's worth it because it matters for each and every student who is positively affected by the change you put in place.

Discussion Questions

1. Looking back at your audit responses, where do you feel the greatest sense of urgency, and why? What is one small, concrete action you could take in the next 30 days that would move the needle in that area?
2. What existing beliefs or practices in your district might make it difficult to shift toward Science of Reading–aligned instruction? How might you begin to address those barriers with your colleagues or leadership team?
3. Who in your district or school is already doing this well, even if informally? How might you leverage those pockets of strength as you build momentum for broader change?

3-2-1 REFLECTION

- List three (3) takeaways you have from this chapter.
- List two (2) things you will research or read more about.
- List one (1) thing you will take action on in your current practice.



PIT STOP

Prepping for Departure

How do we plan and pay for where we're headed?

"The secret to change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old,
but on building the new."

—Socrates

If you've ever taken a road trip, you know that the prep can be a huge amount of work. You need to choose a destination, chart a course, and, importantly, figure out a way to pay for it. Although this is the least glamorous and exciting step for many, financing the journey is arguably the most important factor in ensuring this journey becomes a reality. So, before we get you started on the content of this book, we need to acknowledge one critically important fact that will affect your ability to dive into this work wholeheartedly: how exactly is your district going to fund this?

First, let's break down what an endeavor to take on literacy improvement may cost.

Professional Development: Your journey to district literacy success cannot be undertaken without professional development. This can take the form of school leader consulting, educator training, and classroom coaching. This can range anywhere from \$250 to \$10,000 per teacher, depending on the scope and depth of your professional development. If you consider this an ongoing cost, which professional development should be in order to drive deep knowledge building, and the type of ongoing job-embedded support needed to initiate and sustain a serious initiative, you are looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars for professional development alone. Professional development, which we will talk more about in later chapters, can be divided into three areas:

- Training on linguistic/literacy knowledge and content acumen
- Training on programs and/or curricula
- Coaching

New Assessment Systems and Instructional Materials: Many districts adopt new literacy assessments and screeners, along with new curricula or supplementary programs, in their efforts to improve literacy outcomes (you'll read more about this in

Chapters 3 through 6). This can range from a few thousand to several million dollars, depending on what needs to be purchased and the size of your district. The purchase isn't the only cost. If you need to take on new assessment systems and instructional materials, the time, energy, and money put into piloting, adopting, and adequately training/coaching teachers on these systems are quite costly as well.

Staffing: You may already have the staffing in place to execute your district literacy improvement plan, but you may not. You will need someone at the district level to take the lead (often a director of educational services or director of curriculum and instruction). While they may already be staffed, a significant amount of their role will be lent to this endeavor. Districts also may find it necessary to staff their intervention work in a different way. That may mean taking on new interventionists to run their Tier 2 groups. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 7 of this book, it is wise to support all these efforts by implementing coaching. The best way to do this is to build districtwide capacity by staffing district literacy coaches who are in positions to support initiative pull-through and ensure that literacy best practices are happening across the tiers. Coaching can help with instructional fidelity to the curriculum and to evidence-based best practices and can support principals and teachers alike as collaborators who are not evaluative.

Sample Budgets

Budgets needed for literacy success will vary by district size:

- **Small Rural:** Assuming ~500 students, ~30 teachers
- **Medium Rural:** Assuming ~1,000 students, ~60 teachers
- **Small Suburban:** Assuming ~2,500 students, ~150 teachers
- **Medium Suburban:** Assuming ~5,000 students, ~300 teachers
- **Small Urban:** Assuming ~25,000 students, ~1,200 teachers
- **Medium Urban:** Assuming ~150,000 students, ~7,500 teachers
- **Large Urban:** Assuming ~350,000 students, ~25,000 teachers

Table 1.1 shows potential sample budgets for each of these district sizes.

Funding Source

With such a significant investment, there must be prior planning to ensure proper capacity is being built to support the work. In seeing this, it may feel like the journey has stopped before you even get started. But all this work need not come from your general

Table 1.1 • Sample district budgets for literacy improvement

District Size	Professional Development (training, coaching, leader consulting)	Assessment Systems (screeners, diagnostic tools)	Instructional Materials (curriculum and supplemental materials)	Staffing (leadership, intervention, coaching)
Small Rural	\$25k–\$75k	\$15k–\$40k	\$150k–\$250k	\$125k–\$250k
Medium Rural	\$50k–\$150k	\$80k–\$120k	\$750k–\$1M	\$175k–\$200k
Small Suburban	\$100k–\$250k	\$200k–\$400k	\$1M–\$1.5M	\$400k–\$800k
Medium Suburban	\$75k–\$150k	\$600k–\$1M	\$1.25M–1.35M	\$2M–\$4M
Small Urban	\$400k–\$650k	\$800k–\$1.2M	\$3M–\$5M	\$3M–\$5M
Medium Urban	\$1.8M–\$3.2M	\$2M–\$3M	\$5M–\$8M	\$6M–\$10M
Large Urban	\$8.5M–\$14.5M	\$4M–\$6M	\$10M–\$15M	\$15M–\$25M

fund or the district’s reserves (if you’re lucky enough to have them). There are ways to fund this work if you don’t have those resources.

Literacy Grants: Several states run grants that districts can use to fund their literacy improvement work. In past years, states have funded this work through federal grants, like the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grants, in which the U.S. Department of Education gives grants to school districts to work on literacy. Districts may be able to apply for this funding to use in ways the grant has deemed “allowable.” Often, districts can use these funds to purchase assessment systems or instructional materials, interventionist or literacy coach staffing, and professional development.

- **State-Funded:** Some states offer grants for literacy initiatives. An example of this is the Alaska Reads Act.
- **Federally Funded:** Some states have funding from grants at the federal level. A past federal literacy grant was the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant.

District Reserves: Many districts have significant reserves that can be tapped into for instructional imperatives like literacy improvement, particularly to support time-limited investments such as professional learning, instructional materials, universal screening tools, and initial system redesign.

District Education Foundations: Another avenue districts can pursue is education foundations. These are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, separate from a school

THE ROADMAP TO DISTRICT LITERACY SUCCESS

district, that raise money to support the school district's vision, mission, and initiatives beyond what can be afforded by public funds. Additionally, education foundations engage the community in district initiatives.

Education foundations are often started with a specific need in mind, but their broader vision for supporting the district may develop over time as the organization matures and builds relationships with the community and district leadership. Education foundations commonly fund one or more of the following:

- Professional development
- Programs such as the arts, athletics, physical education, STEM, and counseling/mental health
- Extracurricular opportunities like tutoring or after-school classes
- Scholarships
- Child care
- Teacher grants

If your district lacks the resources for a major literacy initiative, an education foundation could be an option. If you have an education foundation in your area, reach out to the board of directors with a proposal. Make sure the board understands the community impact and specifically how much you need in order to drive the work.

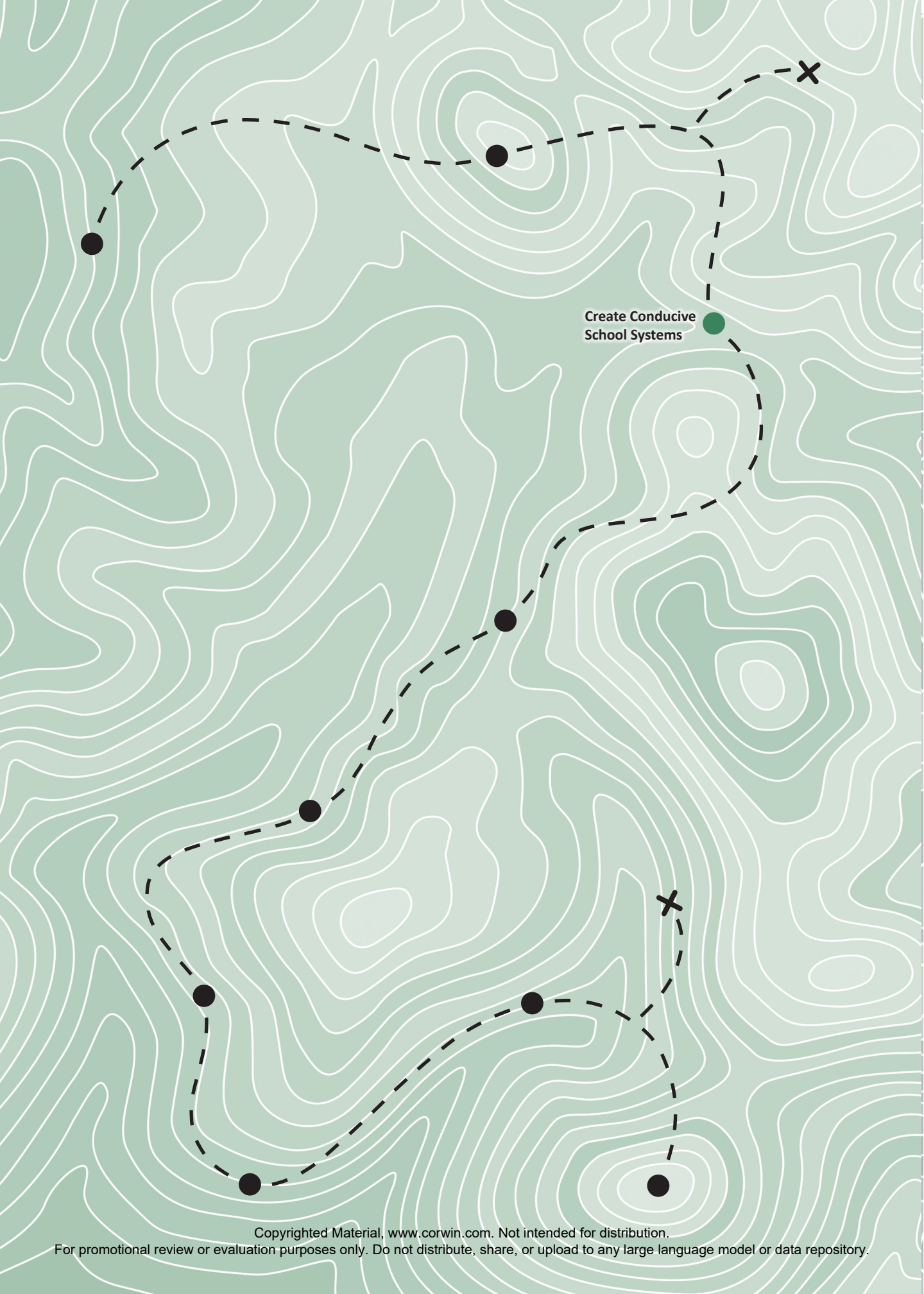
If you don't have an education foundation in your area, you can gather the community to gauge interest in starting one. While leaders typically aren't involved in the foundations themselves due to conflicts of interest, you can gather others to help drive your goals.

You can find more information in these resources on education foundations:

- National Association of Education Foundations (<https://www.educationfoundations.org/>)
- Candid (<https://candid.org/>)
- *Creating Foundations for American Schools*, by McCormick, Bauer, & Ferguson (2000)

Either way, considering the role of funding in any initiative, but especially an initiative as expansive and comprehensive as a literacy initiative, is an essential starting point. Having a plan is critical.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a solid green header bar at the top edge. The paper appears to be part of a notebook or a set of loose-leaf paper.



Create Conducive
School Systems