

Early and Targeted Literacy Support

A Guide for School Leaders

All students deserve access to a high-quality education tailored to their learning needs. **Early and targeted literacy support** is critical for student success within and beyond the classroom. School leaders play an integral role in ensuring that students within their schools have access to the support they need. With this guide, school leaders can identify and put in the structures in place to effectively support all students.

What is Early and Targeted Support?

Students who struggle in the general education classroom need different support at different times. Early and targeted support is critical for students who struggle with literacy in grades K-5. Early and targeted support aims to match the right kind of support, to the right students, at the right time. In this guide, we define **early and targeted support** as:

Early

A systematic process is used to identify student needs as soon as they struggle to meet developmental literacy benchmarks or grade-level reading standards.

Targeted

Needs are identified by assessing students' [foundational literacy skills, vocabulary, and knowledge](#) against grade-level and developmental literacy benchmarks.

Support

Evidence-based interventions, supports and/or services are provided to address to the identified need(s) and adjusted over time to accelerate student progress.

Early and Targeted Support is:

- A problem-solving process to match the right support, to the right kid, at the right time
- Tightly aligned to core instruction and grade-level literacy benchmarks
- A schoolwide commitment to the learning of every child

Early and Targeted Support is not:

- Only applicable to young children
- Accomplished by a single teacher
- A reactive process only deployed once a student falls behind
- Intended to delay identification of students with disabilities





What structures are needed?

Effective early and targeted literacy support requires schoolwide structures around the collaboration, identification, design, and delivery of instruction. This section describes key actions that leaders must take to develop structures to ensure that all students receive the support they need, when they need it.

Start with a Baseline

The foundation of literacy development for all students is daily, high-quality instruction on grade-level curriculum grounded in the science of reading. Instruction should focus on [foundational literacy skills, vocabulary, and content knowledge](#). School leaders should engage in the following activities to establish a baseline.

Purchase HQIM

Ensure access to and use of [high-quality](#), standards-aligned, grade-level literacy curriculum and aligned assessments.

Offer PL

Provide curriculum aligned professional learning for all staff implementing the HQIM, including service providers and support staff (e.g. paraprofessionals).

Gather the Team

An effective schoolwide support team includes experts across key disciplines who collaborate frequently to monitor student learning outcomes and ensures that struggling students receive the support and interventions they need to succeed. To gather the team, school leaders should do the following.

Identify Experts

Identify schoolwide experts, including a teacher from each grade level, a building leader, and key specialists (e.g. literacy coach, special educator, speech provider).

Offer Tools

Provide the resources needed to launch team collaboration including identifying a team lead, collaborating on planning, and observing the team in action.

It's important to note that the schoolwide support team is not charged with exactly the same work as a special education team. However, it should include key members, such as a service providers like speech therapists or a school psychologist.

This overlap ensures alignment and continuity between early and targeted support and special education services.





Protect the Time

Schoolwide support teams must have frequent and focused time together to collectively analyze data, identify learning needs, create support plans and monitor progress. To protect time, school leaders should do the following.

Publish a Schedule

Create a bell schedule that allows time for the team to meet.

Communicate

Ensure all staff are clear on the purpose of and how to engage with the schoolwide support team during the bell schedule.

Establish Expectations

Define the goals and outline the intentional activities that will occur in the bell schedule, such as observation and coaching.

Ensure Access to Effective Data

In order to accurately identify when and why a student may need additional support in the process of learning to read, schoolwide support teams must have access to multiple sources of student-specific data from high-quality measures such as universal literacy screeners* and curriculum-aligned assessments. To ensure access to reliable data use, school leaders should do the following.

Audit Assessments

Lead the evaluation of existing diagnostic and curriculum based* data sources to ensure a limited number of high-quality tools being used.

Share Data

Provide access to key student data such as attendance, disciplinary referrals, and grade and building-level assessments.

Collaborate with Families

Ensure information about what assessments are used, why they are used, and students results is readily available for all families.

**Diagnostics are used to uncover additional skill gaps as identified by a universal screener while curriculum-based assessments are used to monitor ongoing progress toward key literacy goals.*

**Select a valid and reliable [universal literacy screener](#) to identify students at-risk in one or more foundational reading skills. Effective universal screeners are brief, easy to administer, and aligned to key grade-level and developmental literacy skills.*





Define the Focus

All staff in the building must know the difference between **targeted supports** and **intensive interventions**, and leaders must ensure staff have the capacity to effectively deliver both. To define the focus, school leaders should do the following.

Targeted Support Actions

- Ensure staff can design [scaffolds and supports](#) as part of the ELA curriculum.
- Establish the use of [flexible groups](#) based on student needs (e.g. decoding, fluency).
- Ensure the integration of [accommodations](#) from students' individualized education programs (IEPs).

Intensive Intervention Actions

- Use a diagnostic to identify needs and recommend individualized instruction.
- Use a research-based structured reading program for persistently struggling students using systematic and explicit instruction to teach phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency.

Targeted supports ensure access to the existing grade-level literacy curriculum while intensive interventions are offered in addition to existing literacy curriculum to fill foundational gaps in literacy knowledge.

Enhance Intervention Supports

Early and targeted supports are most effective when they are provided by the staff with the most expertise and relevant skills to support specific student needs. To enhance intervention supports, school leaders should do the following.

Offer Programs

Purchase [intensive intervention](#) program(s) that address the specific foundational reading skill gaps.

Protect Time

Add time* in the bell schedule for students to access supports.

Maximize Staff

Ensure that skilled personnel* are matched with student need.

**Consider creating a schedule that includes 20-30 minutes of flexible time each day to be used for intervention.*

**Consider leveraging paraprofessionals trained in the reading curriculum to provide extension of learning while ensuring reading interventionists provide intervention.*





How will the team problem solve?

Early and targeted support is a recursive problem solving process that requires strategic schoolwide coordination. After establishing necessary structures, school leaders ensure the adoption and use of a problem solving process. This section describes key actions to enact a problem solving process.

Define the Process

The work of a schoolwide support team must be guided by a clearly defined problem-solving process focused on increasing student success through the use of targeted supports as early as possible. The schoolwide support team can engage in the following activities to define the process.

Set a Cadence

Establish weekly and quarterly meetings* to focus the team.

Set Intentions

Select or develop [step-by-step protocols](#) to guide data analysis and to develop and monitor targeted support plans.

Weekly Action Meetings

The team is focused on immediate actions to support students over the next week including reviewing key data, identifying specific student needs, creating a plan of support, and coordinating resources.

Quarterly Instructional Insights

The team is focused on identifying schoolwide and classroom trends to identify professional learning needs of teachers and/ or identify gaps in resources needed to support high-quality classroom instruction.

Document and Monitor

Schoolwide support teams must have efficient processes for monitoring progress and documenting intervention plans over time to make evidence-based decisions. The schoolwide support team can engage in the following activities to document and monitor.

Update Data

Ensure data are captured and regularly updated so all staff can easily see and interpret progress.

Adjust Supports

Recommend changes to supports over time, based on data including continuing, discontinuing, or intensifying.

Share Findings

Develop requirements and regular checks for sharing assessment and intervention data with families as students progress.





When and how should evaluations be considered?

As teams monitor student performance, they may notice that the early and targeted support is not having the intended impact. This should be met with reflection and adjustment on the system and practices within. However, there are times when additional support may be sought for an individual student. It is at this time that the schoolwide support team may consider a referral for a [special education evaluation](#).

If a student is referred for an evaluation for special education, schools should continue providing early and targeted literacy support. To facilitate this process, schools should engage in the following activities.

- ✓ Develop structures for collaboration between members of the IEP team and the schoolwide support team, including regular data-sharing and progress reviews.
- ✓ Support continued monitoring of the student's progress and adjust services and supports in collaboration with the IEP team, and/or flag key data to the IEP team to consider as they adjust services and supports.

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