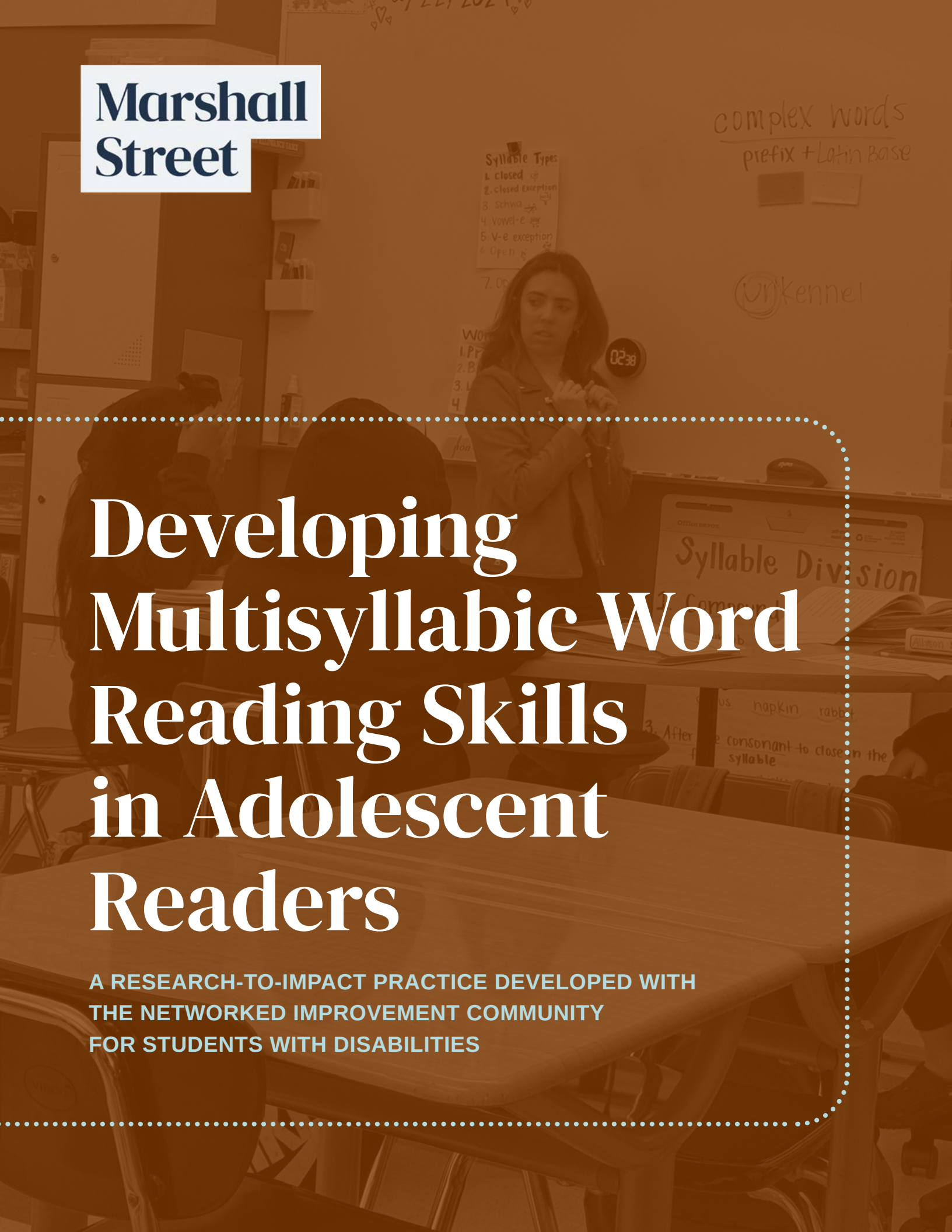
Marshall Street




# Developing Multisyllabic Word Reading Skills in Adolescent Readers

**A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS


5.3..... Practice Overview

5.3 | What is the Practice?

5.4 | Why is this Practice Important?

5.5..... Bringing this Practice to Life

5.8..... Implementation at a Glance

5.8 | Enabling Conditions

5.9 | Steps to Implement

5.10..... How to Implement this Practice

5.10 | Lay the Groundwork

*5.10 | Step 1: Identify Students Likely to Benefit from Interventions in Multisyllabic Word Reading*

*5.10 | Step 2: Select or Design a Systematic Scope and Sequence for Teaching Syllabication Skills*

*5.10 | Step 3: Determine the Setting for the Intervention*

5.12 | Plan the Intervention

*5.12 | Step 4: Identify Anchor Texts to Leverage for Instruction*

*5.12 | Step 5: Prepare for Daily Lessons*

5.13 | Implement the Intervention

*5.13 | Step 6: Introduce the Purpose of Multisyllabic Word Work to Students*

*5.13 | Step 7: Deliver the Word Study Intervention*

*5.17 | Step 8: Provide Ongoing Opportunities for Practice*

5.18 | Monitor the Effectiveness of the Intervention

*5.18 | Step 9: Analyze Student Progress*

5.19 | Practice Snapshot

5.21..... Summary

5.22..... Appendix

5.23 | How to Measure

5.25 | Notes

5.25 | Bibliography

# Developing Multisyllabic Word Reading Skills in Adolescent Readers

**Implementation Level**

- [ ] District/Central Office
- [ ] School
- [ ] Program/Department
- [x] Classroom

**Who Implements**

- [x] Teacher(s)
- [ ] Instructional Coach
- [ ] Principal
- [ ] Central Office Leadership
- [x] Specialist

## Practice Overview

### What is the Practice?

Systematic and explicit instruction for secondary students in the subskills that contribute to fluent and automatic reading of multisyllabic words, including syllabication strategies (how to break multisyllabic words into syllables) and morphological awareness (the ability to recognize and read commonly occurring morphemes, or word parts, efficiently).

### Key Terms for this Practice

**Syllabication and morphological awareness** are two important skills that proficient and fluent readers apply in order to decode unknown multisyllabic words.

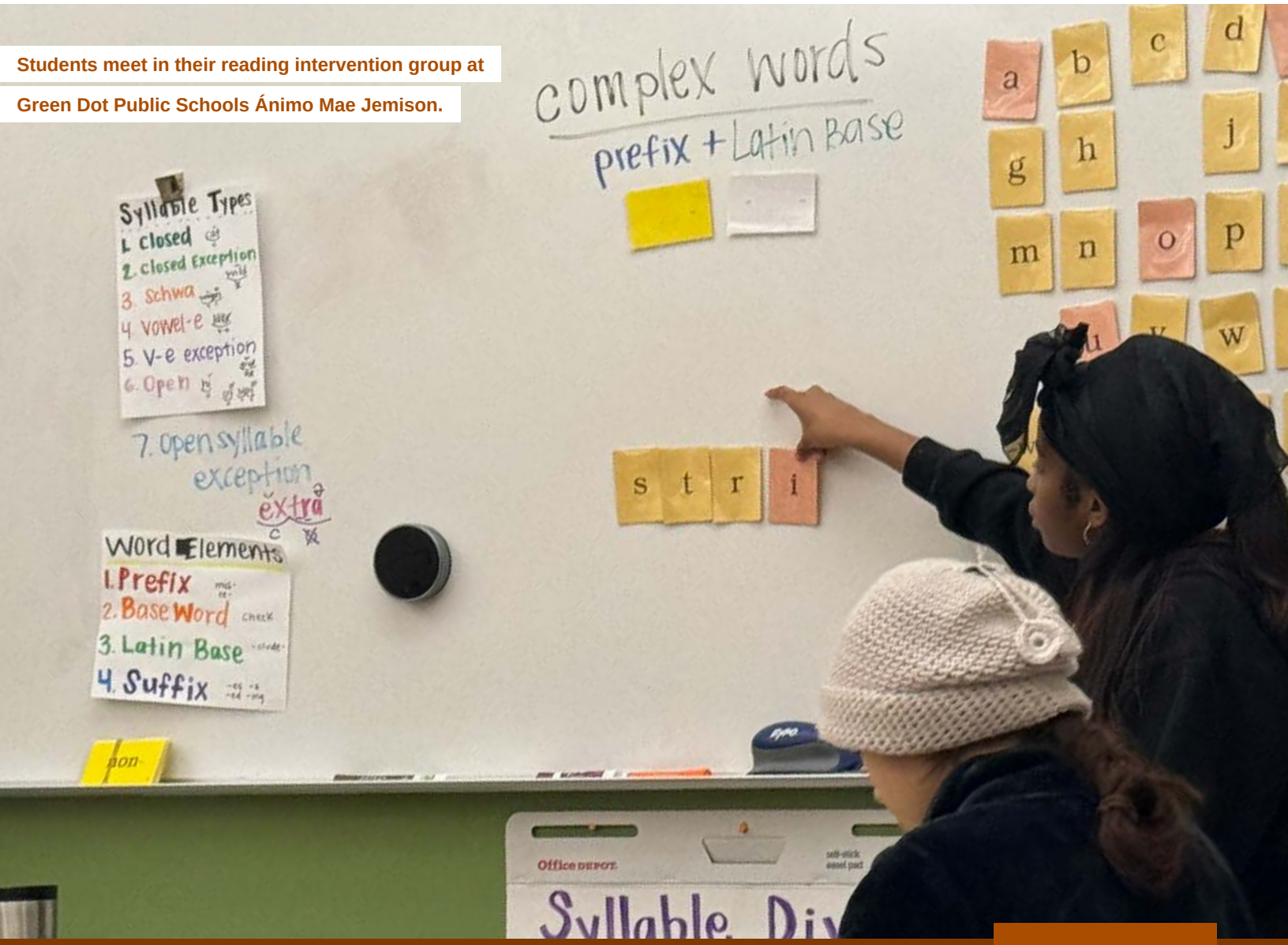
**Syllabication** refers to dividing multisyllabic words into individual syllables, each of which contains one vowel sound. Syllable division principles generalize how and where to break a multisyllabic word into syllables. See **How To: Teach Syllabication** for more.

**Morphological awareness** refers to an understanding of how morphemes — that is, the smallest meaningful parts of words, like prefixes, suffixes, and roots — contribute to word meaning. See **How To: Teach Morphological Awareness** for more.

# Why is this Practice Important?

Often, older students who are not yet reading grade-level texts fluently and accurately can decode single-syllable words but have difficulty decoding multisyllabic words.[1] Because the majority of words that secondary students encounter in grade-level texts are multisyllabic, slow and effortful reading of these words is a significant impediment to comprehension of the overall text. This barrier to meaningful participation in grade-level instruction grounded in complex texts contributes to the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers.[2]

Word study instruction, or instruction in word analysis and word recognition, is often recommended as an essential focus of instruction for secondary students with reading disabilities.[3] Word study intervention can improve reading outcomes for struggling students by teaching them to be flexible decoders and to access word analysis and word recognition strategies.[4] Explicit instruction designed to build morphological awareness has been shown to be especially helpful for English language learners[5] and secondary students with disabilities.[6]




Students meet in their reading intervention group at Green Dot Public Schools Ánimo Mae Jemison.




# Bringing this Practice to Life

## HOW UNCOMMON USED WORD STUDY TO BUILD READING FLUENCY

*At Uncommon Charter High School (UCHS) in Brooklyn, New York, Literacy Innovation Specialist Val Dutta co-teaches Academic Prep with Giovanni (Gio) Zaccheo, a UCHS special education teacher and department chair. Academic Prep is a reading intervention class for 9th grade students with reading disabilities designed to build the foundational reading skills necessary to facilitate meaningful engagement with grade-level content and texts. The case study below opens with a scene describing a typical interaction in Academic Prep, where word study has become integral to reading instruction.*

### Uncovering a Need

Chance, a 9th grade student, is reading aloud a passage about social activism:

> CHANCE: Social activism refers to the use of… dee… del… delibate?
>
> GIO: *[listening carefully, prompts Chance]* Let's pause and break this down. How many consonants are between the two vowels?

Gio and Chance work to break the word *deliberate* into syllables, and soon the text Chance is reading has been marked up with divisions: *de.lib.er.ate*. They continue:

> GIO: Let's read the word by syllables. Then try for the real word and be careful, there are a few schwas in this one.

CHANCE: De…lib…er…ate… *[He recognizes the word as one he is familiar with.]*

CHANCE: Deliberate! *[starting again]* Social activism refers to the use of deliberate actions to bring about social change…

This interaction represents the instruction that Chance and his Academic Prep classmates are receiving in explicit strategies for recognizing and decoding multisyllabic words. This focus on multisyllabic word reading was the result of deliberate, data-driven planning on the part of Val and Gio.

It all began at the start of the 2022–23 school year when Val administered an **Oral Reading Fluency Curriculum-Based Measurement** (ORF CBM) to the students enrolled in Academic Prep to more deeply understand their reading skills and needs. She then met with the Networked Improvement Community literacy content expert, Genevieve Thomas, to analyze the results.

Genevieve and Val noticed that students were largely successful with single-syllable and high-frequency words, and the vast majority of errors on the ORF CBM were made with multisyllabic words. Students didn't seem to have a strategy to attack these longer words and the "slow down" caused by these inefficiencies was interfering with their ability to read the passage fluently. Val and Genevieve acknowledged that, if students were encountering these roadblocks when reading a relatively short, isolated passage, they were almost certainly facing even more challenges with the longer and more complex texts they were seeing in their content area classes — challenges that would prevent a cohesive understanding of the ideas in the text. It was clear that building proficiency with multisyllabic word reading would need to be a key goal of instruction in Academic Prep.

Val and Gio decided to focus first on explicitly teaching syllabication — that is, the principles for where to divide a multisyllabic word into syllables — starting with basics and, over the course of several weeks, moving from less to more complex concepts. They worked with Genevieve to develop a progression of instructional targets. (See **How To: Teach Syllabication** below for a detailed instructional progression.)

## Building the Skills for Reading

Val and Gio began by teaching students the concept of open and closed syllables. First, they provided many opportunities for students to practice reading open and closed syllables in isolation. As students became more automatic and fluent in this practice, Val and Gio began to teach students the basic syllabication principles they could use to break multisyllabic words into individual syllables. Automaticity with reading those isolated syllables — that is, their quick and precise recognition — would free up students' working memory for more

### Syllabication Basics

**Open syllables** end in a vowel sound, and the vowel sound is long (like the sound of *a* in the first syllable of paper: [pā]). **Closed syllables** end in one or more consonants, and the vowel sound is short (like the sound of *a* in the first syllable of rabbit: [răb]).

Open and closed syllables comprise almost 75 percent of English syllables and thus comprise "the building blocks of polysyllabic decoding."[7]

complex word analysis. Val and Gio were careful to teach one syllabication strategy at a time and to give students extended opportunities to practice in isolation before teaching a new strategy.

**Word Study**: Let's break these up!

***Vowels are A, E, I, O, U***

1. **opposing**
2. **traditional**
3. **certified**

*Words are selected from an anchor text for syllabication practice in an Academic Prep lesson plan.*

After Val and Gio explicitly taught all the syllabication strategies in isolation, they transitioned to providing students with opportunities to practice syllabication when reading connected texts. The Academic Prep course leverages one anchor text in each lesson, and students develop various reading skills, including syllabication, through this text.

## Seeing Results

As a result of the explicit instruction and extended opportunities to practice and apply syllabication strategies, Val and Gio noticed an improvement both in students' accuracy of multisyllabic word reading and in their confidence as readers. The 2022–23 end-of-school-year administration of the ORF CBM indicated that all students in the Academic Prep course were reading text with 98–100% accuracy. Describing the results of the practice, Gio shared, "Students have seen growth and are building their confidence in reading. I'm seeing students volunteer to read who I never would have thought at the beginning of the year would be reading in front of the whole class."



# Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. **Enabling Conditions** describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. **Steps to Implement** presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in How to Implement this Practice below.

## Enabling Conditions

### Prerequisites

#### INFRASTRUCTURE

- Assessments and data tracking practices that indicate who might benefit from intervention in multisyllabic word reading
- Curricular resources and/or instructional guidance that includes evidence-based interventions for developing multisyllabic word reading skills
- Initial educator training in the implementation of the intervention

Dedicated time for the instruction to take place (likely within an existing reading intervention time)

#### CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE

- Teacher agency to plan and implement reading interventions within existing classes/schedules. For example, teachers have the autonomy both to plan for literacy interventions based on student needs and to determine when and where in the instructional day those interventions are best scheduled.
- Teacher ownership of reading skill development in all students

### Recommended Materials

- Authentic texts from core content courses for word study practice and application
- A list of commonly-occurring prefixes, suffixes, and root words to teach
- Evidence-based word study scope and sequence

**The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)** is a website maintained by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. The WWC provides accessible information about the scientific evidence on programs, products, and practices and is an excellent resource for educators looking for evidence-based programs.

CORE's Teaching Reading Sourcebook provides comprehensive guidance on the research behind each of the key elements of effective reading instruction coupled with practical recommendations for implementation. It includes a chapter on multisyllabic word reading and is an excellent resource for identifying and defining evidence-based reading strategies.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Staff Commitment** | • Ongoing teacher coaching to support the continued refinement of instructional planning and implementation<br>• Possible financial commitment if engaging an external partner or if purchasing a packaged curriculum |
| **Recommended Time Allocation** | **TEACHERS**<br>• Time to participate in training (2–3 hours, ideally divided over multiple sessions)<br>• Time to implement (minimum 5–10 minutes daily), ideally three times a week<br>• Time to participate in data-based instructional decision-making (review progress-monitoring data, plan intervention adjustments based on student progress, and document decisions)<br>• Time to engage in ongoing coaching conversations<br>**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**<br>• Time to develop and implement training (if doing training internally) or to vet and select an external partner for training<br>• Time to provide real-time coaching and engage in coaching conversations (or to identify an external partner to lead this aspect of the work)<br>• Time to support data-based instructional decision-making |

# Steps to Implement

### LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- [ ] Identify students likely to benefit from intervention in multisyllabic word reading
- [ ] Select or design a systematic scope and sequence for teaching syllabication skills
- [ ] Determine the setting for the intervention

### PLAN THE INTERVENTION

- [ ] Identify anchor texts to leverage for instruction
- [ ] Prepare for daily lessons

### DELIVER THE INTERVENTION

- [ ] Introduce the purpose of multisyllabic word work to students
- [ ] Deliver the word study intervention
- [ ] Provide ongoing opportunities for practice

### MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION

- [ ] Analyze student progress

# How to Implement this Practice

## Lay the Groundwork

### Step 1: Identify Students Likely to Benefit from Interventions in Multisyllabic Word Reading

Use data from universal screening and diagnostic assessments to identify students who are likely to benefit from intervention in multisyllabic word reading (see **Guiding Literacy Interventions Through Tiered Assessment** for more guidance).

Identify students for whom a combination of the following statements are true:

- They perform poorly on grade-level assessments of reading comprehension.
- They read grade-level texts slowly (below a rate of 120 correct words per minute) and/or inaccurately (below an accuracy rate of 95%).
- They have mastered single-syllable word reading (i.e., these students know the relationships between letters and sounds and are able to apply this knowledge to read isolated single-syllable words).
- They have difficulty reading words with more than one syllable fluently and automatically.

### Step 2: Select or Design a Systematic Scope and Sequence for Teaching Syllabication Skills

Advanced planning is required to select or design a systematic scope and sequence for teaching syllabication skills. Instruction should progress from less to more complex concepts, generally starting with teaching open and closed syllables and then teaching syllabication strategies. See **How To: Teach Syllabication** below for a recommended scope and sequence of instruction and **Further Learning** for additional instructional guidance.

### Step 3: Determine the Setting for the Intervention

Determine the setting in which to implement the practice. Potential settings include the following:

- Within a scheduled reading intervention class (e.g., Read 180) for students who are not yet reading at grade level
- In 1:1 conferences or in small groups of students with reading disabilities within a resource room, learning center, or other environment dedicated to specialized instruction
- In core content classes, like science and social studies, using vocabulary words from the course

## PROS AND CONS OF CURRICULUM VS. STRATEGIES

Some schools may decide to utilize a structured curriculum to build students' multisyllabic word reading skills, rather than designing their own. When using a curriculum, educators will sometimes need to adapt or supplement the curriculum to meet the needs of students.

| | Pros | Cons |
|---|---|---|
| **Curriculum** | Well-designed curricular programs for teaching multisyllabic word reading will have a systematic scope and sequence, potentially reducing the planning load for teachers.<br><br>Curricular programs can provide a helpful starting place for new teachers and may represent a reduced training load.<br><br>Many curricular programs include in-program teacher supports that help build teacher knowledge as they teach the program. | Curricular programs may feel disconnected from grade-level instruction and content.<br><br>There is generally a cost for purchasing and maintaining curricular resources. |
| **Strategies** | Strategies can be applied to authentic texts that students are reading in their content area classes, which can support transfer of skills.<br><br>The time to teach and practice strategies can be flexibly adjusted to fit within existing class structures. | Strategy instruction may require more initial and ongoing teacher training and coaching, particularly if teachers are not knowledgeable about reading instruction.<br><br>Strategy instruction may require a more significant planning load (choosing words from texts, for example) for teachers. |

There are many commercially available programs that use evidence-based practices to systematically and explicitly teach word study, including programs like **REWARDS** and **SIPPS Challenge**. To accelerate progress for nonproficient secondary students in our priority population in both skill development and grade-level course mastery, the NIC prioritized using an **instructional sequence** and authentic texts from content area courses.

# Plan the Intervention

## Step 4: Identify Anchor Texts to Leverage for Instruction

Leveraging grade-level ELA or content area texts for word study instruction can support comprehension of grade-level material, improve students' ability to transfer syllabication skills and morphological knowledge to unique texts, and support motivation to read increasingly complex texts. Choose an anchor text (for example, an article related to a topic of instruction in a World History class or a passage from a novel in an ELA class) from which target words for word study instruction will be selected.

## Step 5: Prepare for Daily Lessons

Carefully select, in advance, words from the selected anchor text. Ideally, after initial syllabication strategies have been explicitly taught, students practice syllabication and morphological awareness — explained further in the **How To** sections below — with three to five words daily. Consider the following guidance when selecting words for instruction:

- Choose words that align with the specific syllabication strategies that have already been taught. For example, if students have learned only one pattern for syllabication division, choose only words that include that pattern.
- Once students have learned all of the syllabication division rules, choose words with different patterns to provide practice with a variety of syllabication strategies.
- When initially teaching syllabication division rules, choose words that "follow the rules." Once students become more proficient with the division principles, introduce words that are "rule breakers" (e.g., words that include a schwa).
- For teaching morphological awareness, choose words that include affixes that have high instructional value. Consider using vocabulary words for syllabication and morphology work. For example, if *autocracy* were a vocabulary word in a World History class, the teacher might have students first practice syllabication — by dividing the word into syllables, reading the word by syllables, then reading the full word — and then teach them the meaning of the prefix *auto-*.

When planning for daily lessons, practice syllabication of the target words to identify any potential misunderstandings and prepare scaffolds and explanations. If teaching a specific prefix, suffix, or root that has meaning, craft the language to explain the meaning (e.g., "The affix *auto* means *self*.")

# Implement the Intervention

## Step 6: Introduce the Purpose of Multisyllabic Word Work to Students

Explain to students that it can be challenging to read long words that are unfamiliar, especially when taking on the entire word at once. However, when readers have strategies for breaking words apart, they can more easily read those smaller "word parts" and then put them together to read the whole word. Introduce the idea that many word parts appear frequently in text, so becoming fluent with those commonly occurring word parts (or morphemes) can help build reading fluency.

A teacher might use the following sample script to introduce word study when taking the strategies approach described above:

> *We're starting a new practice — breaking words into syllables. We'll learn rules for how to break big words into smaller parts so we can tackle the words part-by-part.*
>
> *We will practice breaking words apart three times a week using words from the stories we are reading in class. The point of this is to help us become stronger readers and to help us better understand what we are reading. Often, the first time we try to read a big word that we haven't seen before, we aren't quite sure how to read it correctly. We spend a lot of our brain's energy trying to read those words, and we don't have much energy left over to think about what the words mean. I know that's true for me when I come across complex words in my reading. If we have strategies to break apart those big words, it's a lot easier to read the small parts and then put them together to read the whole word. There are also lots of word parts that show up over and over in lots of the words we read. When we practice reading those common word parts, it becomes easier and more automatic to recognize them even in big words.*

## Step 7: Deliver the Word Study Intervention

Using the chosen vocabulary words and selected texts, deliver the word study intervention. Both syllabication and morphology strategies should be employed in this step, though the depth of focus on each skill may vary in lessons. This step is broken into detailed explanations for **How To: Teach Syllabication** and **How To: Teach Morphological Awareness**.



Research suggests that word study instruction can positively impact student reading, even in short increments of 5–10 minutes daily. Explicit instruction should be provided at least three days per week.

# How To: Teach Syllabication

## TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO READ OPEN AND CLOSED SYLLABLES.

Follow this sequence for teaching open and closed syllables:

1. Explain that a syllable is a smaller part within a larger word and each syllable contains one vowel sound.
2. Write a closed syllable (e.g., [man]) on a board and ask students to read it.
3. Explain that [man] ends in a consonant, which makes it a closed syllable. Closed syllables always end in a consonant, and the vowel sound in a closed syllable is always short.
4. Write 3–5 more closed syllables on a board and ask students to read them. Point out that each syllable ends in one or more consonants, and that the vowel sound in each syllable is short.
5. Write an open syllable (e.g., [pā] as in *paper*) on the board. Tell the students that the syllable is [pā] and ask them to read the syllable. Explain that [pā] ends in a vowel, which makes it an open syllable. Open syllables always end in a vowel, and the vowel sound in an open syllable is always long.
6. Write 3–5 more open syllables on a board and ask students to read them. Point out that each syllable ends in a vowel, and that the vowel sound in each open syllable is long.

After teaching students the generalization, provide daily opportunities to practice reading isolated open and closed syllables until students consistently read both syllable types accurately. This can be a brief warm-up before engaging in syllabication division work.

Note that students are often more proficient in reading closed syllables and need more practice reading open syllables. Some students may need to be retaught short and long vowel sounds before they are ready for open- and closed-syllable instruction.

## TEACH SYLLABICATION DIVISION STRATEGIES.

Teach students the basic syllabication division strategies, moving from less complex to more complex. The most useful syllabication strategies to teach are explained in the table on the following page.

## How To: Teach Syllabication (continued)

| Division | Description | Rule | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **VC/CV** | Two consonants between two vowels | When two consonants come between two vowels, the word will be divided between the two consonants. | rab.bit<br>nap.kin |
| **V/CV**<br>or<br>**VC/V** | One consonant between two vowels | When one consonant comes between two vowels:<br>• 75% of the time, the word will be divided before the consonant.<br>• 25% of the time, the word will be divided after the consonant. | pa.per<br>ti.ger<br>riv.er<br>mag.ic |
| **VC/CCV**<br>or<br>**VCC/CV** | Three consonants between two vowels | When three consonants come between two vowels, a consonant blend (two consonants that represent two distinct sounds) or digraph (two consonants that represent one sound) is included and is kept together. | hun.dred<br>ath.lete |

Use a gradual release sequence to teach each syllabication strategy:

1. Explain the syllabication division rule.
2. Model dividing 1–2 words using the division rule and explaining your thinking. After dividing the word, read each syllable and then read the full word.
3. Practice dividing 2–3 words along with students, asking them where to divide the word, and then asking them to read each syllable and read the full word.
4. Provide students with 3–5 words to divide and read independently or with a partner.

Teach one syllabication division rule at a time, and introduce the next only when students are consistently dividing words correctly, reading the syllables accurately, and reading the full words accurately.

## How To: Teach Syllabication (continued)

### TEACH STUDENTS TO BE FLEXIBLE DECODERS.

Once students are proficient with the rules for dividing and reading multisyllabic words, teach students the concept of "flexible decoding."

Explain that the syllabication division rules will help them read many words, but in some cases, it won't lead to the exact pronunciation of a word. In such cases, readers need to be flexible and think about whether the unfamiliar word sounds like a word they've heard before. This is because English can be a complicated language and it doesn't always follow the rules.

Provide an example, sharing your thinking aloud. For example, a teacher might write the word *classify* on a board, and use the following script:

> *Let's look at an example of a word that doesn't follow the rules. Now, you may know this word, but remember that our syllabication rules help us read words we don't know, so I'm going to pretend I don't know this one. Following my syllabication rules, I'm going to divide this word like this:* clas.si.fy. *Based on my open and closed syllables, I would read these syllables as [clăs-sī-fī]. Hmm… does that sound like a word I know? Oh, it sounds like [clăs.sə.fī]! Breaking this word into syllables didn't get me to the exact pronunciation, but it got me close enough that I could match it to a word that I know and that makes sense.*

One reason the pronunciation of a multisyllabic word may not match its syllable-by-syllable pronunciation is that it has a schwa. A schwa is a vowel sound that is distorted in the unstressed syllable (such as the second syllable in the *classify* example above), and the schwa occurs frequently in multisyllabic words. Teach students the definition of *schwa* and include words with a schwa in practice.

One reason the pronunciation of a multisyllabic word may not match its syllable-by-syllable pronunciation is that it has a schwa. A schwa is a vowel sound that is distorted in the unstressed syllable (such as the second syllable in the classify example above), and the schwa occurs frequently in multisyllabic words. Teach students the definition of schwa and include words with a schwa in practice.

## How To: Teach Morphological Awareness

Morphemes are the smallest meaningful parts of words, like prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Instruction in morphology should co-occur with syllabication instruction. When words selected for syllabication practice include commonly occurring morphemes, use the following process to build students' morphological awareness (see **Further Learning** for a resource listing commonly occurring morphemes):

1. Teach students the meaning and pronunciation of commonly occurring morphemes. Focus on one morpheme at a time.

   Isolate the morpheme from the full word and teach students its pronunciation and, if applicable, its meaning. For example:

   > *Today we are going to learn the word part* rupt*, which means "to break."*

   Ask students to read the morpheme *rupt*.

2. Ask students to read a word that includes the morpheme by syllables then read the full word.

   > *Let's read a word that has this word part in it.*

   Ask students to read *bank.rupt* by syllables.

3. If it is a morpheme that holds meaning, engage students in a conversation about what the full word might mean based on the meaning of the morpheme.

   > *If* rupt *means "to break," what might* bankrupt *mean?*

4. Provide students with 3–5 more words that include the target morpheme, and instruct them to read by syllables, read the full word, and discuss.

## Step 8: Provide Ongoing Opportunities for Practice

Once the discrete multisyllabic word reading skills have been taught, provide students with many opportunities to practice applying the skills with new and authentic words. This is important whether students have been taught syllabication using anchor texts or a structured, commercially available program. Students should be explicitly encouraged to apply these skills not only during multisyllabic word reading instruction but also in their independent reading when they encounter a multisyllabic word they don't know.

# Monitor the Effectiveness of the Intervention

## Step 9: Analyze Student Progress

Monitor the effectiveness and impact of the protocol by collecting data. This might include assessing student accuracy of reading isolated multisyllabic words and/or ORF CBMs (see ***Strengthening Timely Interventions Through Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring***). Evaluate the effectiveness of the word study intervention by assessing the extent to which word study instruction increases the accuracy and fluency with which students are able to read multisyllabic words.




Students at Green Dot Ánimo Mae Jemison receive small group instruction using the Wilson Reading System.

# Practice Snapshot

## GREEN DOT'S WILSON INTERVENTION

*At Ánimo Mae Jemison, a Green Dot Public Schools California middle school, students with disabilities with the most intensive reading needs are scheduled into an Academic Prep course where they receive small group instruction using the Wilson Reading System (WRS). The implementation of the WRS is enhanced by Green Dot's deep commitment to the program — shown in the collaboration between teachers, counselors, and school leaders to prioritize the needs of this group of students — and by the supportive atmosphere they have built around it. The case study below describes how Green Dot students work with the classroom teacher or trained paraeducator to build word reading skills using the structured literacy program and accompanying materials.*

On a typical day, seven to nine students enter the reading intervention classroom, retrieve their binders from a bookshelf, and sit down around one of two kidney-shaped tables. Looking to the front of the room, students greet their teacher, Whitney, as they open their workbooks to the day's lesson warm-up activity.

The warm-up begins with a word study drill for students to break words into syllables and mark known sounds and word parts (e.g., suffixes) following a routine they've been taught. They place slash marks between the syllables within each word and use a coding system to mark the spelling sounds and morphemes they recognize within the words. Whitney monitors this activity, using the extensive training she has received to support students in their work and to reinforce the positive culture of the classroom. She offers praise to individuals and the group while prompting students to persist when they get stuck.

When this word analysis work is complete, Whitney asks each student to read the syllables aloud and then read the full word. When Whitney notices a student error with a word, she provides an immediate and brief correction. The student re-reads the word correctly and the practice continues.

This process allows a virtuous cycle to be created between students, their teachers, and one another. Often, secondary students who are not yet proficient with reading also struggle with self-doubt, frustration, and negative self-talk. Green Dot's intervention method establishes a learning environment in which taking risks and making mistakes is encouraged and valued as part of the reading process. Students learn to complete the error correction protocol with their teacher's prompting, and eventually, with the support of peer coaches. Corrective feedback is a normalized part of the process.

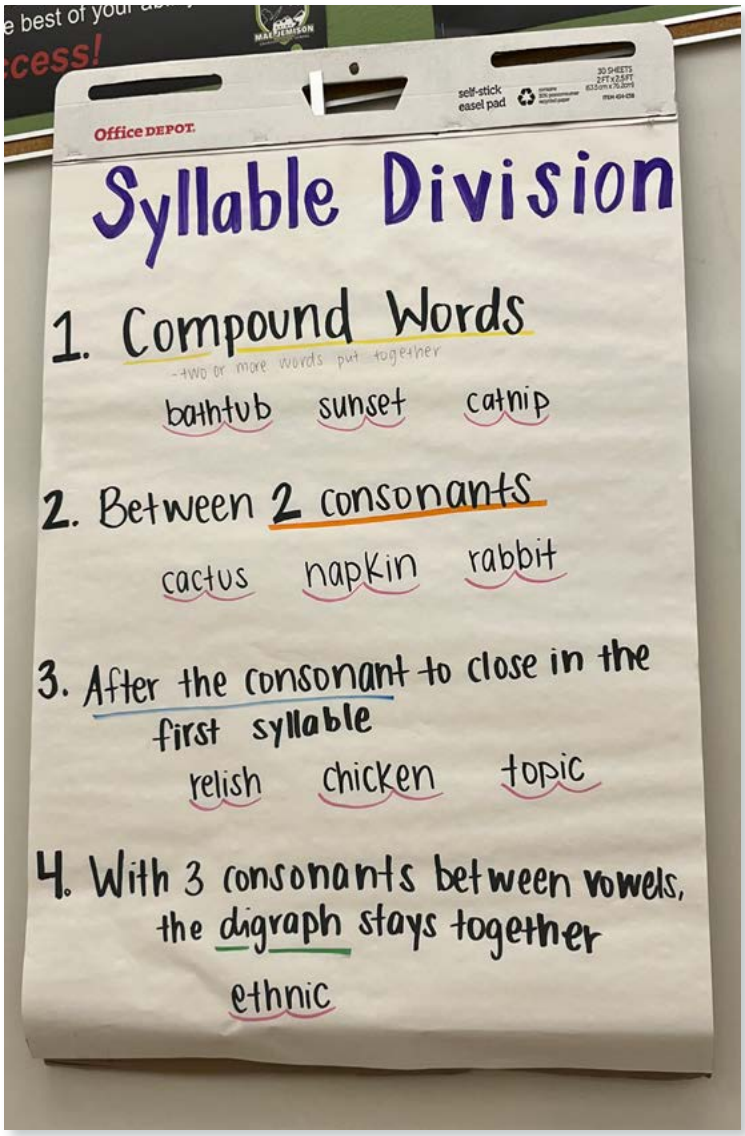
The Wilson Reading System is a teacher-directed instructional program that provides systematic and explicit instruction in the key elements of reading, including word study. At the upper levels of WRS, students learn strategies for reading multisyllabic words, progressing from less complex

tasks — such as reading two-syllable words with two closed syllables — to multisyllabic words including both open and closed syllables and tricky concepts such as the schwa.

Each day's lesson generally includes four to eight steps:

- Teach and review concepts for spelling
- Passage reading
- Comprehension
- Sentence reading
- Sound quick drill
- Dictation at the sound, word, and phrase level
- Sound instruction
- Word reading drills

While the Uncommon case study shared above illustrates how evidence-based strategies for developing multisyllabic word reading skills can be implemented without a structured curriculum, Green Dot offers an example of this instruction being provided via a commercially available program. Green Dot students participating in the WRS program have reported that they are able to read more challenging words, have improved their reading fluency, and are reading more in general, both in class and outside of class. Students also report improvements in comprehension and their confidence as readers. Green Dot, seeing the value of the program, is spreading the practice to high schools in its network.



# Summary

English Language Arts standards for secondary students ask readers to engage in deep meaning-making work with complex texts, yet many students enter middle and high school not having had the opportunity to develop the foundational reading skills necessary to engage in this work. This problem is particularly pronounced for Black and Latinx students, students experiencing poverty, and students with disabilities. Many of these readers are able to apply phonic decoding skills to sound out words, yet do not yet read multisyllabic words fluently and automatically. Because multisyllabic words make up the majority of words that secondary readers encounter in text, weak or dysfluent multisyllabic word reading can significantly impact a reader's ability to access and make meaning from complex grade-level texts.

Encouragingly, research suggests that explicit strategies to build multisyllabic word reading skills, including teaching syllabication principles and building morphological awareness, have strong potential to positively impact reading fluency, which in turn leads to improved reading comprehension. These evidence-based practices to support the development of multisyllabic word reading skills are a critical component of a comprehensive plan for reading intervention in middle and high schools, and implementing evidence-based multisyllabic word reading instructional strategies has strong potential to improve student proficiency and automaticity in reading, ultimately providing greater and more equitable access to grade-level instruction and rich, complex texts for all students.

## FURTHER LEARNING

**"What is growth mindset?"**
UNDERSTOOD.ORG

**The Teaching Reading Source Book, 3rd Edition**
(CHAPTER 8, MULTISYLLABIC WORD READING)
CORE

**Root Words, Suffixes, and Prefixes**
READING ROCKETS

**"Using Morphology to Teach Vocabulary"**
JOAN SEDITA

**Morphology Matters: Building Vocabulary Through Word Parts"**
WILLIAM VAN CLEAVE

DEVELOPING MULTISYLLABIC WORD READING SKILLS IN ADOLESCENT READERS

# Appendix

# How to Measure

When implementing literacy instruction for students with disabilities at the secondary level, the following measures should be implemented to support students in growing their literacy skills in fluency and identifying multisyllabic words. At a minimum, these measures are most essential:

| PRIMARY MEASURES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Measure Type** | **Data Collection Type** | **Question Asked** | **Results** | **What does success look like?** | **Examples and Notes** |
| Process | Intervention schedule | Is the intervention taking place at least 3 days per week?<br><br>Yes / No | Number of days per week that the intervention is implemented | Multisyllabic word reading intervention takes place at least 3 days per week. | |
| Process | Observation or teacher report | Are teachers implementing the intervention as intended?<br><br>Yes / No | Percent of teachers implementing the intervention as intended | 100% of teachers implement the intervention as intended. | *As intended* means frequency, duration, and adherence to the specific instructional routines. |
| Outcome (formal; criterion-referenced) | Correct words per minute on Oral Reading Fluency Curriculum Based Measurement | What is the change in the number of correct words per minute for students in the intervention? | Number of words read correctly in one minute on a criterion-referenced CBM passage | Students' progress is sufficient to meet or exceed established goals/targets. | This measure can look at both accuracy and rate to measure progress in decoding skills of students receiving multisyllabic word reading intervention. |

Additional measures can guide a team to know whether the multisyllabic word reading intervention is leading to the desired improvements for students:

| SECONDARY MEASURES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Measure Type** | **Data Collection Type** | **Question Asked** | **Results** | **What does success look like?** | **Examples and Notes** |
| Process | Teacher perception data | Do teachers feel they have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement the instruction? | After training and coaching, teachers report confidence in their ability to implement the instruction (1–5 scale). | 100% of teachers report feeling confident in implementing the instruction. | |
| Process | Student participation | Are students participating in the intervention? | Percent of students who engage in the steps of the intervention | Increasing percent until 100% of students participate in the steps of the intervention | It can be expected that some students may be initially reluctant to participate in a new instructional sequence, but the goal is to build engagement over time. |
| Process | Student perception | Do students who participated in the intervention report increased confidence when reading grade-level texts? | Percent of students who report higher confidence in reading grade-level texts after the intervention than before it | Increasing percent of students who increased their confidence in reading grade-level texts until reaching 100% | |

# Notes

1 Archer, Gleason, and Vachon, “Decoding and Fluency”

2 Gilmour et al., “Are Students with Disabilities Accessing the Curriculum?”

3 Roberts et al., “Evidence-Based Strategies”

4 Scammacca et al., *Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers*

5 Haager and Osipova, “Enhancing Academic Instruction”

6 Harris, Schumacher, and Deshler, “The Effects of Strategic Morphological Analysis Instruction”

7 Shefelbine and Newman, *SIPPS Plus Teacher’s Manual*

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