

CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint

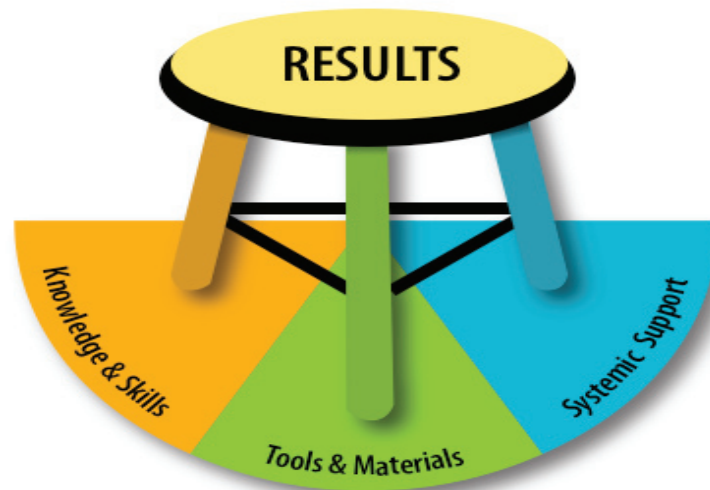
The CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint is based on the three-tier model at all levels. The assumption is this model informs the district's relationship to the sites, the sites' instructional organization for literacy, and classroom instruction. This model is also consistent with **IDEA 2004** and **Response to Intervention (RtI)**.

For implementation of a robust literacy program to be effective, it must become the focus of everyone's work. The leadership personnel at all levels are crucial to successful implementation leading to real and sustained achievement gains. The CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint outlines a vision of an organizational structure and commitment level that will enable all children, including children of color and poor children, to learn to read early and use reading as a skill to continue learning at a high level. It also includes the components necessary to intervene with struggling adolescents in order to prevent the cycle of failure that begins as early as second grade and accelerates from fourth grade onward.

Components for Success

Critical to the successful implementation of the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint are three main elements:

- **Professional development** to build and strengthen foundational skills and knowledge
- **On-site capacity building** to drive implementation deep
- **Effective products and resources** to support robust instruction



Systemic Capacity and Organizational Leadership

The research on schools that have successfully improved literacy achievement for all students consistently shows that the leadership makes a vital difference. Schools and districts that raise achievement for all schools have strong vertical alignment between and among the “actions of district leaders, school principals, and classroom teachers” (EdSource, *Similar Students, Different Results [SSDR]: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?*, June 2006, p. 14). This alignment takes into account the following practices:

- Strong district leadership and support focused on improving student achievement
- A redefinition of the principal’s role to focus on the evaluation and continual improvement of school and student achievement
- Teachers and their school leaders taking responsibility for student achievement of state standards (EdSource 2006)

In addition to a tightly aligned vision, expectations, and leadership focus, districts that produce and sustain high achievement among all populations have prioritized students and demonstrated that priority by clearly and persistently communicating high expectations that are measurable and consistent across the system, and by holding all educators accountable for those expectations. In such districts, no incongruent messages exist between the superintendent and cabinet, or between district administrators and those who supervise principals.

Research also consistently points to the importance of two other districtwide systemic elements: implementing a coherent, standards-based instructional program and using assessment data to improve instruction. These findings have been supported by Reading First evaluations, studies most recently conducted in California, findings by the Dana Center in Texas, and myriad other current evaluations.

Implementing a Coherent, Consistent Standards-Based Instructional Program

In the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint, the district is expected to implement the same reading/language arts curriculum program at all elementary schools, one core program at all middle schools, and one core program at high schools. These core programs, forming the basis of Tier 1 in a three-tier model, may or may not be commercial programs but do need to be systematic and well designed. In addition, the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint includes an intensive intervention program for struggling older students and effective schoolwide instruction to support acquisition of academic vocabulary, content vocabulary, and comprehension. Consistent with full implementation, the district will provide clear guidelines for program pacing, for supplemental support for struggling students, for time allocations for literacy, and for the approach to English-language learners. Within a three-tier model (Tier 1 as the core program, Tier 2 as extra targeted support and supplemental materials, and Tier 3 as an intensive intervention), the district will ensure that all students receive the assistance they need to realize high literacy achievement.

Building a Comprehensive Assessment and Intervention System

Student achievement information is crucial. In the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint, in addition to the state-required standards-based test, the district will implement the following:

- Curriculum-based measures of reading (consistent with Reading First)
- Specific literacy program curriculum-embedded assessments
- Reading diagnostic tests
- Screening and placement tests as needed

In an effective program, assessment is used to inform instruction for both large groups and individuals. Administrators at all levels and teachers will use the information from these assessments. Furthermore, a district data plan must be implemented across the system to ensure consistent comparisons and consistent expectations. Using the data, the district will develop a plan of intervention for staff, schools, and students.

Knowledgeable Educators

Professional development is critical in equipping teachers and school leaders with the research-based knowledge they need to design their literacy program, select the right tools, and develop support systems. The most effective school implementation designs take into account the need for ongoing professional development in order to create and sustain a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Teachers

To facilitate ongoing learning, teachers need time to learn. Professional development needs to be multidimensional to be effective. It can occur in traditional workshop settings and seminars, at school during collegial meetings, and within the classroom. At the start of implementation of a new literacy program, educators must have sufficient training to understand how to use the required components. Subsequently, they will need ongoing coaching support within their classrooms, and from time to time review of critical program routines. Student data will reveal whether a need exists for extensive review and retraining across a system or whether individual teachers will benefit from targeted assistance. Coaches are integral to ongoing professional development and support.

Principals and Their Supervisors

Just as teachers need support in the form of ongoing coaching, principals need similar support to be able to maintain a high level of instructional leadership with their staff. Principals and central office personnel must know their literacy programs well to ensure precise implementation. Building principals, district supervisors, and other centralized literacy staff need to be trained in the basic program as well as receive mentoring focused on observing instruction. Regular monthly principal and supervisor (area superintendents or executive directors) meetings as well as meetings with a coach will support the principals. Furthermore, the principals and supervisors need the opportunity to participate in regular calibration observations to ensure consistency of program use. Regular data study is an essential part of providing focused leadership

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support. Data study should occur at the central office with the superintendent participating as well as at school sites. The principals are ultimately responsible for implementation at the sites. But central administrators and the superintendent ensure that principals are held accountable. Supervisors (who evaluate principals) have the essential function of guiding and supporting the principals. This includes celebrating successes, collaborating closely, and strategically applying intervention.

In one district, the executive directors (equivalent to supervisors or area superintendents) meet each week with principals at the least successful schools. During these meetings they review data from the ongoing assessments, visit classrooms, and discuss plans for improvement. The supervisors meet monthly with schools that are making progress but still have a need for improvement. They also meet monthly with the strong schools for the purposes of giving praise and collaborating with principals on identification of model classrooms for videotaping and observation visits by teachers at the least effective schools.

Literacy Coaches and Specialists

In addition to site-based coaches, who are vital in providing ongoing classroom support, a robust district approach to literacy implementation includes a select number of literacy specialists at the central office. This group makes up a sort of triage team to use to support struggling schools along with the principals and their supervisors. These educators not only need to be knowledgeable in the selected programs, but also must be able to support site-based coaches, principals, and often classroom teachers directly. They also need to understand the assessments and interpret the results, as well as observe and provide feedback in a coaching model.

Resources and Tools

Teachers need the best possible instructional tools, and those resources need to be readily available. Not all reading programs are alike. Many published programs claim to be based on research; few, however, actually live up to that claim. For beginning readers, research clearly supports the need for explicit instruction in phonemic awareness skills, decoding skills, vocabulary, and comprehension, all supported by appropriate texts and good literature.

In addition, recent investigations of struggling adolescent readers also confirm that high-quality programs are essential for students who are falling seriously behind their peers (Center on Instruction, *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents*, 2007). One of the strongest findings in the 2006 EdSource study of California elementary schools was a correlation between a school's Academic Performance Index score and it having a coherent curriculum and instructional program. Researchers have identified selection and implementation of a well-designed, research-based core reading program as the first step in a model designed to prevent reading difficulty in most students. Once a school selects such an instructional program, it is crucial that the program be fully implemented with high fidelity. This finding applies not only to elementary schools, but to middle and high schools as well. A study in the Pasadena Unified School District in California showed extraordinary achievement gains for all populations in all four high schools when a coherent, proven instructional curriculum program was fully implemented.

Levels of Autonomy Based on Results

In the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint, the leadership at all levels must use data to drive decisions at all levels. The levels of assistance, supervision, autonomy, and scrutiny will vary based on student achievement data and regular classroom observations. Three categories of student achievement, consistent with the three-tier concept in the reauthorization of IDEA (Response to Intervention model) and in Reading First, will form the basis of the levels of support: benchmark, strategic, and intensive.

It is recommended that these categories identify the autonomy, support, and intervention needs of schools and classrooms. The following tables show the differing supports at the different units of focus. Table 1 describes the unit of the classroom in terms of the categories. Table 2 describes the unit of the school as a whole. Before determining if a student needs intervention, the principal must ask this question: Is the pattern of achievement such that the data points to an instructional and teaching issue rather than individual student needs? Likewise, the district leadership must ask if the data reveals a site issue that warrants increased monitoring and support.

In order to successfully implement a data-driven systemwide approach, the district leadership must regularly meet to analyze school-level and classroom data. These monthly or at least quarterly data study sessions will serve as the vehicle to do the following:

- Identify schools with a large number of classrooms realizing poor results
- Identify schools and individual teachers achieving strong results
- Develop a monitoring process and plan to work closely with schools producing limited results
- Design districtwide staff development if the data warrants
- Develop a principal mentoring plan
- Determine the levels of autonomy provided to each district school

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Table 1: Classroom Unit

Category	Characteristics/Evidence	Intervention
Benchmark and Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least 80% of the students are on target on designated ongoing assessment measures: program tests (includes CBM and program tests). ■ Observation visits confirm that the teacher is teaching the program as designed; there is high fidelity to the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intervention is needed for those students who are not meeting benchmark targets. ■ Lessons may be videotaped for use in trainings and by colleagues. ■ Teachers, principals, and supervisors and others may visit classrooms.
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More than 25% but fewer than 50% of the students are not meeting designated benchmarks. ■ Observation visits reflect that the teacher is not always consistently implementing the program; fidelity to the specific program is spotty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Principals, coaches, and others visit classrooms and observe and provide feedback. ■ Principals arrange for demonstration lessons and visits to other classrooms. ■ Principals consult with teachers on issues of program implementation and data use.
Intensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Over half of the students are not meeting the benchmarks. ■ Classroom observations confirm that the teacher is not implementing the programs; fidelity to the adopted program is low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intensive coaching and model lessons are provided by site and district coaching staff and external experts at the principals' request. ■ Principals provide explicit direction to teachers. ■ Principals seek assistance from regional superintendent coaches as well as external experts. ■ Principals arrange for visits to model classrooms and lots of collegial support.

Table 2: School Unit

Category	Characteristics/Evidence	Intervention
Benchmark and Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ About 80% of the classrooms have students performing at benchmark or above on designated assessments. ▪ Observations confirm that the teachers are following the program with high fidelity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principals and supervisors and others visit these schools to see effective models. ▪ Videos are made at these sites. ▪ Classrooms from these sites receive visits from strategic and intensive sites. ▪ Successes are celebrated.
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More than 25% but fewer than 50% of the classrooms in the school have fewer than 80% of their students reaching benchmark targets. ▪ Observation visits confirm that program implementation is inconsistent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principals and supervisors meet monthly to identify a strategic intervention plan, visit classrooms, and monitor assessments and interventions tried. ▪ Site coaches, outside experts, and district coaches at the request of supervisors and principals provide model lessons and coaching. ▪ Teachers are sent to visit benchmark schools and to watch videos.
Intensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over half of the classrooms in the school have fewer than 50% of their students meeting benchmark targets. ▪ Observation visits confirm that program implementation is poor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principals and supervisors meet weekly to review a strategic plan for reading, review and plan from assessments, and visit classrooms. ▪ Site coaches, external experts, and district coaches at the request of supervisors and principals provide regular model lessons and coaching. ▪ Teachers are sent to visit benchmark schools and to watch videos.

CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint Expectations

In order to implement the CORE Literacy Improvement Blueprint, the following district-level commitments are needed.

1. The district will complete an initial Organizational Assessment to determine readiness for the work project, organizational capacity, and current literacy conditions.
2. The superintendent and/or district leadership will meet monthly with the superintendent executive coach and CORE District Implementation Advisor to develop a coherent literacy plan that lays out a timeline for implementing fully a three-tier approach at all levels.
3. The superintendent will communicate the literacy plan to all leadership and throughout the system and will be the driver of the work. This will include a structure for literacy leadership at the central office.
4. The district will commit to one of the following options, depending on the conditions:
 - If there is presently no coherent and consistent curriculum across elementary, middle, or high school sites, the district will select during the first year of work such a curriculum to implement the following year consistently as a **core program** across elementary, middle, and high school sites.
 - If there is presently no coherent and consistent curriculum across elementary, middle, or high school sites, the district will select as a starting point either elementary, middle, or high school, and choose a core program and intensive intervention to initiate at that level and then phase in other levels.
 - If there is an agreed-upon core curriculum across sites at designated levels, the district will focus on full implementation of that program (or programs).
5. The district will agree to implement a three-tier model with a robust core (Tier 1) program, Tier 2 supports, and a proven intensive intervention for significantly behind students in grades 4–12. This may require one to two years, including selection and implementation of programs.
6. The district will work with the CORE District Implementation Advisor to design and begin in the first year to implement a coherent assessment system that includes the following at a minimum:
 - Selecting and implementing at the elementary level curriculum-based measurements such as DIBELS or AIMSweb (or others as identified by district and CORE) and program-embedded tests on a timeline and schedule to be developed, and selecting at the middle/high school level a screening/placement tool for accurate determination of intervention or core need
 - Establishing regularly scheduled data study at the central office level to include the superintendent, at least four times per year
 - Establishing selected sites at each level as appropriate to the plan for demonstration and intensive development—at least three to five elementary sites, at least two middle schools, and at least one high school selected on the basis of need and willingness to have others visit and to fully participate

CORE's Commitment to You

1. We will assist you in developing your own capacity for effective literacy instruction by building the knowledge and skills of your district literacy administration, coaches, principals, and teachers.
2. We will initiate your services by sending out a team of senior staff for a joint planning and commitment meeting.
3. We will support your literacy implementation by facilitating literacy planning sessions, supporting the development of pacing plans at the determined levels, modeling lessons, coaching, and collaboratively developing focused intervention and action plans based on data, as well as providing you with ongoing communication.
4. We will provide you with contact information for your Client Service representative, as well as the Director of Educational Services, Educational Services Manager, and the assigned District Implementation Advisor responsible for providing your District Implementation Technical Assistance.
5. You will have contact pre-service, mid-service, and end of service with a CORE Manager to review your work implementation as well as monthly summary reports from the lead consultant.
6. We will provide high-quality Educational Consultants to work with you.
7. We will provide timely communications to the contact person you designate. Your assigned consultant(s) will communicate with you in advance of events.
8. We will be on time to all scheduled events.
9. We will deliver the services contracted.

Your Commitment to CORE

District-Level Direct Support

1. The superintendent will communicate to line and middle management staff expectations that will enable this work to succeed. This includes area and regional superintendents and those who directly supervise and evaluate site principals.
2. The district-level administrator(s) directly responsible for student achievement, the regional and area superintendents who evaluate principals, and district literacy staff will participate fully in CORE leadership institutes and activities, being present to learn the material, to answer questions for participants, and to model district commitment to implementation. This includes walk-throughs to observe instruction, data study at the district level, and action planning to intervene and monitor targeted sites. If issues should arise that require higher levels of authority to achieve a successful resolution, CORE will have access to those identified administrators.
3. A single contact person will be designated to work directly and on an ongoing basis with CORE. The goal is for this person to be the same as the designee in #1 above. However, for site-specific work, once scheduled, the principal will become the contact at each site.

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4. Principals and district-designated leadership will support and actively participate in all CORE events, including CORE district and school site implementation visits.
5. The district commits to the development and implementation of a literacy plan, including an assessment plan, a pacing calendar, and a planned schedule of literacy meetings, site work, and district work.
6. Communications to CORE will be timely, including information about event locations and materials needed for demonstration lessons. Communications to district and site staff will be collaboratively reviewed and developed with the CORE District Implementation Advisor.
7. Since this work will be time-consuming and intense, it is important that the focus be consistent and clear. All participants need to be informed about their time commitments.

District-Level Articulation and Site-Specific Implementation Focus

1. The instructional staff involved will have a complete understanding of the work and will have demonstrated to the district support for the work plan. At the site level, teachers who will be involved must be informed and willing to participate in site-level work.
2. The district/schools agree to base reading practices on a solid foundation of reading research and to implement research-based instructional materials. All principals involved will be thoroughly informed and will understand their commitments. Principals and coaches will work with CORE consultants to learn the routines of their selected programs.
3. Because assessment informs instruction, the district/schools agree to track data on student performance and use it to improve instruction.
4. The instructional day will be organized to facilitate effective learning, with students grouped for intensive intervention if needed. About two to three hours will be provided for literacy instruction in the primary grades, about two hours for intermediate grades, and two or more periods for middle and high school intensive intervention if needed. This may not be in place at the start of the work but will be a goal. At the elementary school(s), of this time at least 90 minutes should be devoted to reading. In kindergarten, 90 minutes of literacy instruction is desirable, but 60 minutes may be a starting point for half-day kindergarten.
5. Staff will be prepared in advance for visits and events. Any materials requested by CORE will be provided.