CONNECTICUT'S
K-3 Literacy Strategy

Every Connecticut student has the right to read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

CONNECTICUT
Education

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Overview

In June 2021, [An Act Concerning Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items to Implement the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023](#) was passed and includes laws to support the reading success of students across Connecticut. This legislation is often referred to as the "Right to Read" bill. This bill established the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success (Center) within the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). The activities of the Center are informed by the [Reading Leadership Implementation Council](#) (Council). The Council includes members appointed by the Governor of Connecticut, members of the Connecticut House of Representatives and Senate, Black and Puerto Rican Caucus of the Connecticut General Assembly, and the Commissioner of Education.

One of the Center's central activities is to develop a kindergarten through grade 3 reading strategy to assist in the provision of comprehensive literacy supports to all students. Connecticut has a longstanding commitment to reading success and a history of important reading initiatives that informed the development of *Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy*. Some of these initiatives include the Connecticut Blueprint for Reading Achievement, Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI): Connecticut's Framework for RtI (Response-to-Intervention), Connecticut's Partnership for Literacy Success (i.e., CT K-3 Literacy Initiative[CK3LI]), Connecticut's Early Reading Success Initiative, Connecticut's Research-based Universal Screening Reading Assessments for Grades K-3, ReadConn (K-3 Reading Skills Professional Development Series), the Science of Reading (SOR) Masterclass, and others.

Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy is also aligned with, and draws from, current important developments and initiatives in the field of reading research and practice, including the Science of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), Structured Literacy Instruction, Accelerated Instructional Approaches, students with a specific learning disability (SLD)/Dyslexia, and Multi-Generational Frameworks. The References and Resources section at the end of this document includes information about many of the initiatives and resources that informed the development of *Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy*.

The Center developed *Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy* with guidance from the Council. Although not exhaustive, the resources and information provided in this document create a road map for the Center and stakeholders to improve practices and methods of a comprehensive, multi-tiered educational learning system that includes culturally responsive, scientifically based, evidence-based literacy practices, strategies, and structures. *Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy* will continue to grow and adapt to be responsive to new research, additional stakeholder dialogue, and the evolving needs of Connecticut students.
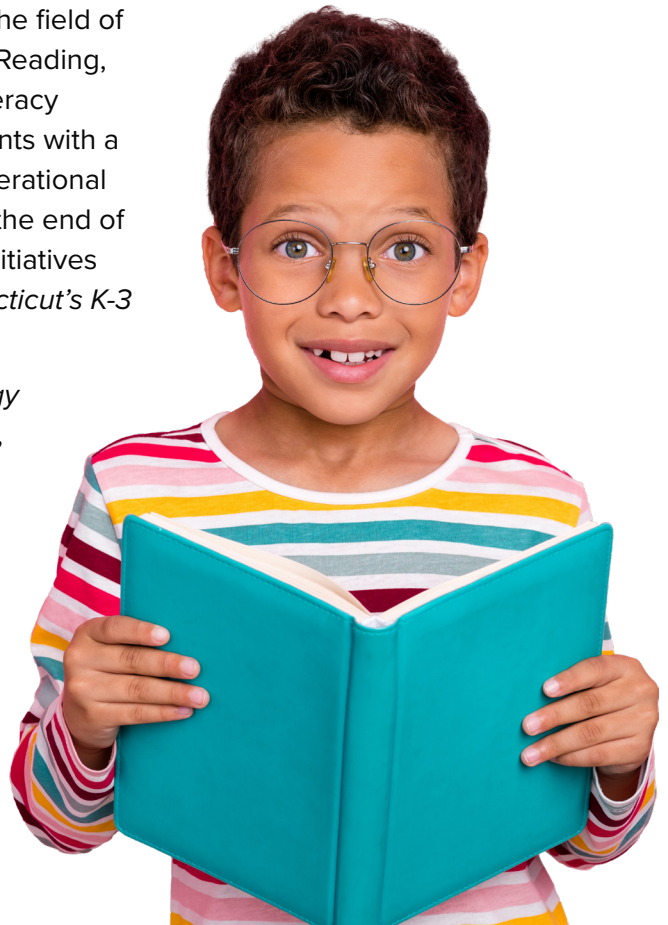
Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy

Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy advances the vision of the Center to ensure every Connecticut student is reading at or above grade level by the end of grade 3.

Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy is a comprehensive framework that prioritizes culturally responsive, scientifically based, evidence-based practices in reading instruction, intervention, and assessment implemented within a coordinated schoolwide or districtwide system of supports. Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy promotes success for all students and includes the following critical conditions:

- sustainable literacy leadership and schoolwide literacy systems;
- effective scientifically based, evidence-based literacy classroom instruction and supplemental intervention;
- sensible literacy assessment practices;
- high-quality coaching and professional learning to achieve equity for all learners; and
- multigenerational approaches to building authentic family engagement and whole family literacy well-being.

Specific Actions that Support Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy

The Center offers the following specific actions for building comprehensive literacy supports in Connecticut that enable high-quality, culturally responsive, comprehensive K-3 literacy education informed by the science of reading.

Actions to Support Sustainable Literacy Leadership and District and Schoolwide Literacy Systems

- Establish a district literacy leadership team (i.e., superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, principals, special education director, director of multilingual learners, etc.) dedicated to building and sustaining scientifically based, evidence-based literacy practices and systems across schools and grades.

- Support school-based literacy leadership teams in building and sustaining culturally responsive, scientifically based, evidence-based literacy practices and systems. Team membership may include but is not limited to the following: principal, assistant principal, literacy coach, general education teachers from each grade level, special education teachers, multilingual learner specialists, reading specialists, and parent engagement coordinators.

- Create and implement a district literacy plan and individual school-based literacy plans based on the results of a diagnostic needs assessment process. This process includes analyzing student literacy assessment data, reviewing current literacy goals and benchmarks, examining assessments and instructional materials, creating observable and measurable goals, and establishing a timeline of clearly specified activities.

- Prioritize K-3 literacy through the coordination of supports, alignment of literacy initiatives, and allocation of the resources and time needed to implement district and school literacy plans and activities. This may include, but is not limited to:
    - investing in high-quality, scientifically based, evidence-based assessments, interventions; and classroom instructional materials, tools, and resources;
    - evaluating and adjusting master schedules;
    - inventorying current school space, staff roles and responsibilities, and resources;
    - supporting administrators with coaching, observing instruction, and supervision of interventions;
    - protecting time for monthly district-level and grade-level literacy planning and implementation meetings; and
    - prioritizing literacy professional learning and coaching.
- Ensure a consistent and coordinated literacy vision across the district by aligning district and school literacy plans to district policies, strategic plans, portrait of the graduate, etc.
- Include multigenerational approaches when building authentic family engagement opportunities.

Actions to Support Effective Scientifically Based, Evidence-based Literacy Classroom Instruction and Supplemental Intervention

- Ensure all students see themselves as capable literacy learners and foster student agency by supporting the student's role in their literacy development.
- Establish/adopt culturally responsive, scientifically based, evidence-informed comprehensive essential learning standards and outcomes for literacy mastery by the end of a grade or grade band that include standards-aligned concepts, skills, and strategies.
- Provide a continuum of support with increasing intensity and/or individualization across multiple tiers of instruction (e.g., Tier I, Tier II, Tier III).
- Provide consistent comprehensive core instruction to all students that includes culturally responsive, scientifically based, evidence-based instructional tools, resources, and instructional practices.
- Deliver systematic, cumulative, and explicit structured literacy instruction.
- Establish and execute small-group scientifically based, evidence-based interventions that supplement core instruction for students at risk for, or experiencing, reading difficulties.
- Respect students' backgrounds and incorporate students' personal knowledge, experiences, and attitudes when teaching.
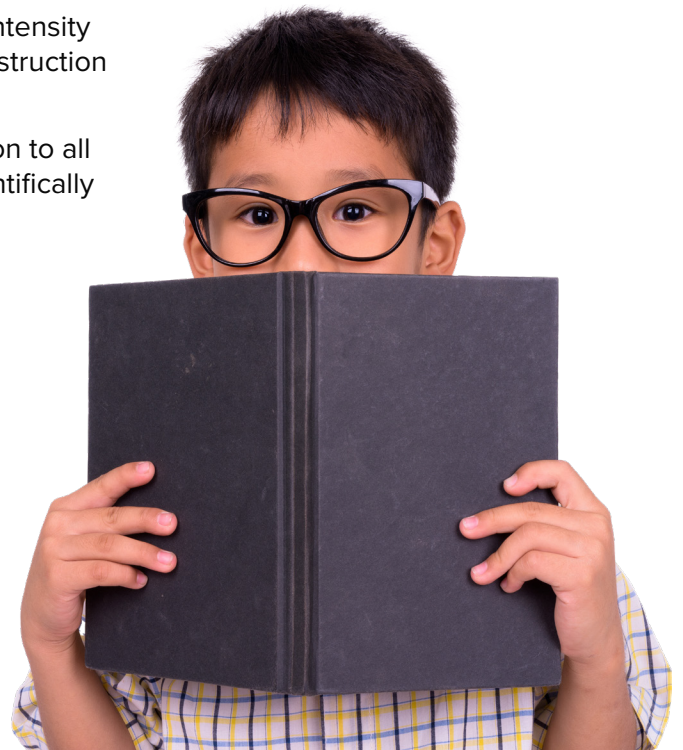
- Develop and implement high-intensity tutoring opportunities and summer school intervention for all students, including multilingual learners, experiencing reading difficulties anchored to scientifically based, evidence-based intervention programs and materials.

- Design and implement long-term, specific, explicit literacy instruction for multilingual learners aligned to formative and summative assessment data in support of explicit research-based literacy practices with a focus on oral language development, comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar.

- Use multigenerational approaches in the establishment of literacy programming and partnerships that focus on each student's literacy education, whole family well-being, and shared responsibility among the staff, families, and community members.

Actions to Support Scientifically Based, Research-based Sensible Assessment Practices

- Implement an effective, scientifically based, evidence-based literacy assessment system for universal screening and progress monitoring students to (a) inform core classroom instructional priorities; (b) identify students requiring supplemental intervention; and (c) monitor student response to intervention over time.

- Universally screen and progress monitor all students on a regular basis using the same universal screening measures to assist in the identification of those experiencing reading difficulties and on a routine basis (i.e., fall, winter, and spring) incorporating progress monitoring tools that are relatively quick assessments and administered frequently (e.g., biweekly, monthly) to measure students' progress during an intervention period.

- Incorporate both formative and summative assessment practices that inform daily instruction as well as capture the extent of growth and performance on the grade-level standards.

- Link assessment results, combined with other sources of student-specific data, with student learning goals and instruction to support student learning.

- Ensure that assessments provide the information required or desired without over-testing students or narrowing curriculum by teaching to the test.

- Administer Connecticut-approved universal reading assessments to assist in identifying, in whole or in part, students at risk for dyslexia or other reading-related learning disabilities.

Actions to Support High-quality Professional Learning Systems to Achieve Equity for All Learners

- Develop a professional learning committee that prioritizes equity in professional learning practices and embraces student assets (e.g., understand student's historical, cultural, and societal contexts).

- Create structures to ensure equitable access to adult learning opportunities and sustain a culture of support for all staff.

- Allocate resources for professional learning and monitor use and impact of resource investments.

- Work with district and school literacy leadership teams to set relevant and contextualized learning goals grounded in literacy research and theories.
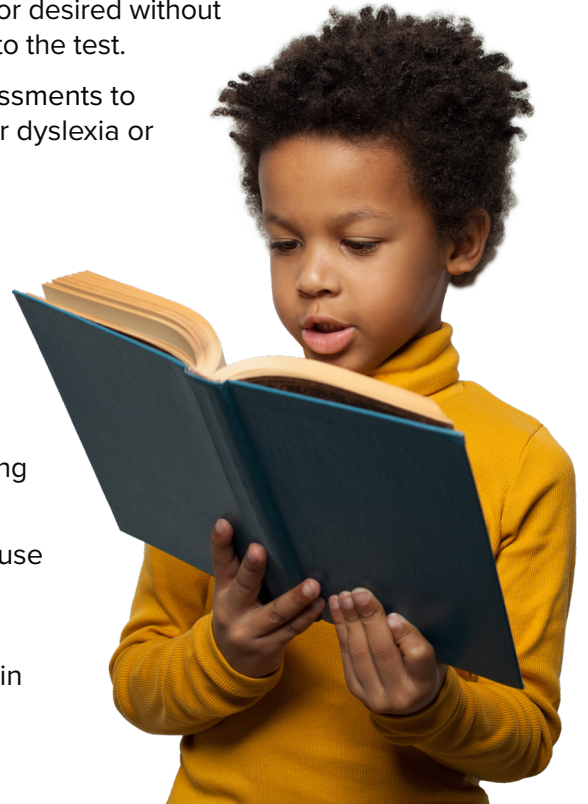
- Build capacity for use of scientifically based, evidence-based instructional practices.

- Align professional learning to scientifically based, evidence-based curricula and instructional materials.

- Ensure schools have access to literacy coaches knowledgeable about tiered, scientifically based, evidence-based literacy assessment, instruction, and intervention.

- Provide dedicated reading interventionists to develop and deliver supplemental and intensive intervention reading plans for any student reading below proficiency and to be responsible for conducting reading assessments as needed.

- Work with external literacy experts to provide professional learning to teachers and administrators in scientifically based, evidence-based reading resources and instruction.

- Conduct learning walks to gather information and reflect upon student learning opportunities; student engagement; and scientifically based, evidence-based literacy practices.

Actions to Support Multigenerational Approaches to Build Authentic Family Engagement and Whole Family Literacy Well-being

- Engage families as experts and identify their needs and goals.

- Build family well-being by working with students and their families together.

- Support the family's role in literacy development and connect families to scientifically based, evidence-based literacy approaches.

- Ensure two-way communication for a shared vision of goals of literacy.

- Focus on addressing the needs of the whole family unit and understanding their multiple dimensions.

- Foster meaningful relationships and build formal and informal networks of support.

- Invest in resources to support family engagement and whole family well-being.

- Coordinate literacy instruction and ensure families receive regular updates of student literacy progress.

Definitions of Terms

Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy includes important scientifically based, evidence-based approaches, developments, and initiatives in the field of reading research and practice. To help the reader, some of these terms are defined below.

Accelerated Instructional Approaches

As the United States Department of Education explained (2021), accelerated instructional approaches incorporate building on what students already know to access new learning.

Scientifically based, evidence-based accelerated instructional approaches include the use of student data to guide instruction; the use of grade-level materials; scaffolding student learning; and the incorporation of tutoring programs, out-of-school time programs, and summer learning and enrichment.

The CSDE Working Definition of SLD/Dyslexia*

Dyslexia is included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) as a specific learning disability (SLD). Dyslexia affects reading, specifically decoding and accurate and/or fluent word recognition and spelling. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and is unexpected and/or inconsistent with a student's other abilities often despite the provision of appropriate instruction. Dyslexia *usually* results from a significant deficit in phonological processing (i.e., a persistent difficulty in the awareness of and ability to manipulate the individual sounds of spoken language).

Typically, students with dyslexia have strengths in areas such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, problem solving, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and social communication (e.g., conversation). Early identification and appropriate instruction targeting the underlying phonological, word reading, and spelling processing deficits that characterize dyslexia may minimize its educational impact.

Essential Clarifications

- Dyslexia is not *primarily* the result of visual, hearing, or motor disability, an intellectual disability, emotional disability, a lack of appropriate instruction, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency.

- Early identification of the characteristics of dyslexia is critical, leading to focused, scientifically based, evidence-based interventions, accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success.

- Without targeted, systematic, and explicit instruction and interventions along with accommodations (e.g., accessible educational materials in content area subjects), students with dyslexia may have:

    – reduced reading experiences that may affect the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge;

    – difficulty with written expression; and/or

    – difficulty learning a second language.

- Students with dyslexia may show additional behavioral and/or emotional reactions to their difficulty with learning to read.

- Effective, research-based interventions for phonemic awareness and/or phonics may bring some students with dyslexia to grade expectations in those areas, but the students may still have lingering difficulties in reading fluency, spelling, and/or written expression, which may require intervention.

* The CSDE developed this working definition with input from an external stakeholder workgroup and based it on a review of applicable literature, the IDEA, and current definitions in use by other states, organizations, and legislation.

Culturally Responsive Education

On February 3, 2021, the Connecticut State Board of Education (Board) adopted a Position Statement on Culturally Responsive Education. This position statement reflects the Board's ongoing understanding of the importance of culturally responsive education as a critical part of all curricula, activities, and services. The position statement highlights that a culturally responsive education includes the establishment of a reciprocal relationship of respect between educators and students; thus, cultural backgrounds become the foundation of the knowledge base for learning and academic success.

Additionally, in 2021 the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), and the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) released a joint statement on the importance of a culturally responsive education. This statement includes the commitment that education must continue to evolve to remain relevant to, and reflective of, students' social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds to assist in the development of their lifelong respect and compassion for themselves, their classmates, their communities, and the world around them.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Evidence

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) emphasizes the use of scientifically based, evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions (collectively referred to as interventions) that demonstrate a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes. The criteria for identifying "evidence-based" interventions based on each of ESSA's four levels are as follows:

- *strong evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
- *moderate evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study;

or

- *promising evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
- *demonstrates a rationale* based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention ([*Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments*](#), United States Department of Education, 2016).

Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy incorporates [Connecticut's Literacy Model](#) (CTLM), which was evaluated through a series of rigorous research studies that meet the following ESSA evidence standards and recommendations for selecting evidence-based practices:

- Interventions supported by higher levels of evidence or effectiveness, specifically *strong evidence* or *moderate evidence*, are more likely to improve student outcomes because they have been proven to be effective (e.g., design and provide direct, explicit instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency, develop one-on-one tutoring opportunities, implement explicit vocabulary and oral instruction for multilingual learners, assess all students, incorporate literacy interventions, etc.).
- State education agencies and local education agencies should look for interventions supported by *strong evidence* or *moderate evidence* of effectiveness in a similar setting and/or population to the ones being served.

More specifically, research studies evaluating Connecticut's Literacy Model:

1. meet the ESSA standards for *strong* and *moderate evidence* of effectiveness; and
2. were conducted in schools across

multiple Connecticut districts with broad and diverse student populations to provide evidence of generalizability across other Connecticut schools and districts.

Multigenerational Approach

The multigenerational approach provides a framework for shared literacy outcomes while building whole family well-being and acknowledging families' histories and experiences. This collective approach includes working with children and families "to create a society where every family passes a legacy of prosperity and well-being from one generation to the next" (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2022).

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS is a framework that includes a range of scientifically based, evidence-based supports, programs, and practices, such as data-based individualization (DBI), scientific research-based interventions (SRBI), and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) to address the needs of all students based on a systemwide approach. MTSS integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports to maximize student achievement and improve behavior outcomes. Essential components of MTSS include screening, progress monitoring, high-quality instruction and intervention, and data-driven decision making to drive teaching and learning.

Science of Reading

The science of reading is a term that has recently become popular in the media and in education. The science of reading is defined as the extensive evidence garnered from multidisciplinary research (e.g., education, cognitive science, neuroscience, linguistics, and psychology) pertaining to reading development and reading instruction found to be most effective for the largest number of students (Hanover, 2022; Moats, 2022).

The science of reading highlights the importance of teaching students the following multifaceted reading components:

- phonemic awareness;
- phonics;
- reading fluency;
- vocabulary development;
- reading comprehension; and
- language comprehension (i.e., phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics).

Structured Literacy Instruction

Structured literacy instruction prepares students to decode words in an explicit and systematic manner. Structured literacy "integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing and emphasizes the structure of language across the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), the relationships among words (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse" (IDA, 2019b, 6). This approach not only helps students with specific learning disabilities/dyslexia but can be helpful for many other students as well.

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