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Major Components Needed in a Literacy Curriculum to Promote Student Success

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Major Components Needed in a Literacy Curriculum to Promote Student Success

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

This school improvement plan focuses on what components are beneficial in a literacy curriculum to promote success in students' reading skills and improve FAST Test scores. Research has found phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, writing, and science of reading concepts should be included in a literacy curriculum to be effective. These components will help find a new literacy curriculum for a school district. In all success, an effective literacy curriculum will be found with creating a system to look through to find an effective literacy curriculum, piloting, and analyzing data. The objective in the end is to discover a literacy curriculum to promote student success in literacy and improve FAST Test scores.

Keywords literacy, curriculum, FAST Test, phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, science of reading, writing

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Major Components Needed in a Literacy Curriculum to Promote Student Success

Literacy is one of the most important subjects for students to learn. In life, there are many situations when people need to use literacy knowledge or skills. “An importance has been placed on reading outcomes in statewide assessments because of the features of reading competence for later school success like graduating high school, college, and the employment world” (Missal et al., 2019). Literacy instruction is an important aspect of a child's education. In the Forest City School District, the Journeys literacy curriculum is the curriculum being used now. With the Journeys literacy curriculum, some literacy components are missing, which caused most teachers to supplement materials to improve students' literacy skills. As a K-4 elementary school this coming fall, the district will start looking for a new literacy curriculum with all the literacy components needed to improve students' FAST Bridge Early Reading Assessment.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to find what literacy components are the most essential to look for in a literacy curriculum/program to improve literacy test scores on the FAST Bridge Early Reading Assessment. This school improvement plan will help the Forest City Elementary School District find what components to look for to benefit students in a literacy curriculum or program. The goal is to find a literacy curriculum or program to help students improve their literacy skills, so they perform well on the FAST Bridge Early Reading Assessment.

The research for this project was retrieved from the DeWitt Library on the Northwestern College database and Google Scholar. The articles were written within the past ten years and were peer-reviewed. While searching for research, the author focused on finding articles that were elementary literacy-based, what components make an effective literacy curriculum, and effective elementary literacy practices. The studies found are from all around the world with

most being from the United States focusing on students in prekindergarten through fourth grade. The scope of this research is to focus on the components that would make an effective literacy curriculum to help raise students' assessment scores.

Literacy has multiple different components to it. Research has found that teaching these components in literacy are the most important phonological awareness, phonics, phonemic awareness, writing, read-aloud, comprehension, and technology. “The science of reading involves studying how reading operates, develops, is taught, shapes academic and cognitive growth, affects motivation and emotion, interacts with context, and impacts context in turn” (Graham, 2020) Reading has a multitude of various aspects to look at when instructing children for them to develop their skills. Digging deep into reading instruction will help students gain their literacy skills to become better readers. Differentiation is a big part of instructing literacy. “Student literacy achievement increased when teachers were supported to differentiate their literacy instruction, particularly for letter-word and writing outcomes” (Puzio et al., 2020) Supporting students where they are in literacy will help them succeed later in school.

In the Forest City Elementary School District, it is believed if the right components are found in a literacy curriculum or program it will help students' FAST scores improve. Looking at a literacy curriculum the components to be the most essential are phonics, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, stories to read, and writing. These components will help students improve their FAST scores and gain better literacy skills for life.

Review of the Literature

Phonics

Research by Double et al. (2019) was conducted on seeing if phonics influences student's reading comprehension. To conduct this research Double et al. (2019) assessed students on reading forty words with a combination of real words and nonsense words. If the students do not pass the phonics assessment in the first year, they will have to take it again the next year. Once the students reached year five in school, the students took a Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessment. Double et al. (2019) looked at the data from the PIRLS assessment and the students who failed the phonics assessment the first year they took it wanted to observe if there was a correlation between phonics and reading comprehension. The study found that students who failed the phonics assessment on the first try did not score as well as those who did on the PIRLS. "There is evidence that phonics interventions are more effective at improving reading performance during the early stages of reading development" (Double et al., 2019). Therefore, phonics instruction is an important piece of literacy to improve students' reading comprehension.

The study by Vadasy et al. (2021), was to distinguish if the rate of how to teach the letter sounds and letter sound patterns mattered. The study had two separate groups, in one of the groups the teacher taught the letter sounds and patterns at a fast rate. In the second group, the teacher taught the letter sounds and patterns at half of the rate as the fast group. Even though both groups were being taught at different rates, the study made sure all the instruction was the same. Both groups took a pre-and post-assessment. The assessments given were writing the sounds you hear, matching beginning sounds, segmenting, blending, spelling, reading words, and how fast the students can retrieve the letter and the sound. Vadasy et al. (2021) found that

students taught the letter sounds and patterns in the fast group did better on the assessments than those taught the letter sounds and patterns in the slower-paced group. Once Vadasy et al. (2021) found the fast-paced group of instruction performed better on the assessment, they performed another study on instructing single letters and mixed letter sounds. The results of the research showed that the single-letter sound group was better for students who are lower skilled and for English learning students. The mixed letter instruction was better for the students who did well on the pretest. It was a way to challenge the students. Thus, this study shows it makes a difference in the pace of how to teach phonics to benefit the students. Examining Double et al. (2019) study, they found phonics instruction is an essential component to gaining successful reading comprehension skills. Vadasy et al. (2021) established the pace at which phonics instruction is taught. Comparing both studies, it shows phonics instruction is important for future reading skills and it also shows the pace at which phonics is taught matters. The pace at which phonics is taught will help promote later reading skills.

For this present study, Schaars et al. (2017) identified if the phonics instilled in the curriculum was explicit and systematic for word decoding. To start this study Schaars et al. (2017) assessed the students at the end of kindergarten to see where the students would need to start in the phonics instruction in first grade. Each teacher in this study was using the “Learning to Read Safely” phonics curriculum. During the study, they were using this phonics curriculum with fidelity. Every three to four weeks the teachers would give the students a one-minute decoding assessment to see where their students are at with what they have learned. After five months of the phonics curriculum, teachers gave their students a national standardized word decoding assessment. Schaars et al. (2017) found with this curriculum after a month of implementation students are already starting to develop decoding skills and it continues to grow

as the lessons are being taught. “Children should be able to read any regular word in their language as soon as they have mastered baseline word decoding skills” (Schaars et al., 2017). Comparing this study to Double et al. (2019) and Vadasy et al. (2021), they all specify how important phonics skills are to becoming a successful reader in the future. In other words, following the word decoding lessons in the curriculum will eventually help students master their decoding skills.

In this phonics analysis, Levlin (2020) studied how phonics instruction can promote reading proficiency with nonsense words and sight words. Levlin (2020) had two separate groups of second graders. One group received systematic phonics instruction the first few months of school and the next few months they received regular classroom instruction. The second group of students received the instruction in reverse order. The systematic phonics instruction ensured second-grade students could decode CVC words. Once they could do that, they could move on to CCVC words. As they kept growing their skills, they would keep on moving on to the next skill. “In summary, both groups made larger improvements on both reading measures after systematized phonics (large effect sizes) than after classroom instruction (small to moderate effect sizes)” (Levlin, 2020). When the students were in the systematic phonics instruction group, they outperformed each other on the assessment. With this study, Levlin (2020) thinks with students learning nonsense words and the patterns of words will help students with learning sight words. This study compares to Schaars et al. (2017) by using decoding skills to help students be able to figure out other words they have not practiced. To put it another way, using systematic phonics instruction helps improve students' reading ability as they keep developing their skills.

Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness

Skibbe et al. (2016) studied how much phonological awareness and phonics are in a literacy curriculum. The intervention test was to dig deep into the curriculums and compare what curriculums follow the standards and how much phonological awareness and phonics are included in the curriculum. To compare the curriculums, Skibbe et al. (2016) made a code to be able to see how much the curriculum aligns with the standards. The research found out of all the curriculums looked at only one curriculum-related letter to sounds. Individualizing the instruction was not found in any of the curriculums, but how to teach it in a small group was. Every curriculum varied in the amount of phonics and phonological awareness in them but did not have all the skills to support strong development of phonics and phonological awareness. “In particular, curricula should incorporate more advanced PA skills (e.g., blending and segmenting) in addition to more attention to letter-sound relationships” (Skibbe et al., 2016). In other words, in this study, curriculums need to add more phonological awareness and phonics. Even though both can be hard to teach and even for children to comprehend, we need to push students to become better readers.

Research by Mesmer et al. (2022) was conducted to gather information about the newest scientific way to teach phonological awareness and phonics. In this research, Mesmer et al. (2022) analyzed correct verbiage, sound walls, sequence, context clues, decoding, and high-frequency words. Through other teachers, Mesmer et al. (2022) learned what the most effective way to teach phonological awareness and phonics is. The research found teachers should not be saying what sound does this letter make, instead teachers should say how do you spell this. Otherwise, students may reflect letter sounds to the sounds around them in their environment. Sound walls are beneficial for students to see the correct way their mouth should be when they say letter sounds. Mesmer et al. (2022) found no right way to sequence phonological awareness

or phonics if the whole school is teaching the same sequence the students will not get confused. When everyone is on the same page it makes learning easier for the students. Mesmer et al. (2022) established looking at context clues in the book is not going to help students with their word reading skills. To build excellent quality decoding skills, students need to use what they have learned to establish what word they are trying to read. Decoding and high-frequency words can go together. As an early childhood teacher, it is important to teach the students how to decode. High-frequency words go with decoding because instead of making students memorize words by sight, they teach them how to decode the word. Mesmer et al. (2022) and Skibbe et al. (2016) both emphasize how important phonological awareness and phonics are for students to become excellent readers. Comparing both research findings, Skibbe et al. (2016) dug into how much phonological awareness and phonics are in curriculums and Mesmer et al. (2022) go into detail about what makes phonological awareness and phonics so important in teachers' instruction. Another way to put this research is how teachers instruct literacy to their students matters. Teachers need to make sure they are up to date on the new scientific research on how to teach literacy to make sure they are the most effective literacy teacher to improve their students' skills.

An analysis was done by Brown et al. (2021) to determine what type of phonological awareness was being used in Utah's early childhood classrooms. Brown et al. (2021) contacted multiple teachers in Utah's school districts to see what type of phonological awareness they use in their classrooms plus all the supplemental materials. Once they gathered all that information, they dug deep into the phonological awareness program. Every two weeks the researchers would gather data on the phonological awareness they were seeing with the students. Brown et al. (2021) found with the phonological awareness programs the Utah school districts use lack in the

orthographic mapping component. The scope and sequences did not have any rhyme or reason for them. Brown et al. (2021) found working on phonological awareness in small groups was the best way to work on it. In other words, teachers need a strong phonological awareness program to help their students become strong readers. Before getting a phonological awareness program, teachers or districts need to do their research and dig deep into the program and see what components the program has or does not have. This study is similar to Mesmer et al. (2022) for emphasizing teaching in a set reason for the scope and sequence or at least having the school on the same scope and sequence. Having a set scope and sequence when teaching phonological awareness will be beneficial for students when they are learning the same scope and sequence throughout the school.

In the study by Rehfeld et al. (2022), phonemic awareness instruction and its effects on students who are struggling with literacy instruction data were looked upon. Rehfeld et al. (2022) looked through multiple studies of phonemic awareness data and separated them into distinct groups of grade level, social economic status, involved literacy skills, etc. to determine what is the best strategy to instruct students who may be struggling. Once the studies were separated into their distinctive groups, the researchers coded the data to be able to look at it all together. Rehfeld et al. (2022) found students will become better readers when phonemic awareness is started in kindergarten and continued through grade school. Students are more likely to struggle with literacy if it is not taught right away in their educational career. Another finding from Rehfeld et al. (2022) is there was not a distinctive gap between teaching phonemic awareness in small or large groups, but there was a larger gap between instructing students in small groups instead of just large groups. In other words, when students are taught phonemic awareness in small groups and at the beginning of their educational career, they are going to be more

successful in reading. To help students who may be struggling with reading, may need more help with their phonemic awareness skills. This study is similar to Brown et al. (2021), they both talked about how small-group instruction has a bigger impact on students learning than large-group instruction. Giving students small group instruction there are fewer students in the group, which gives the teacher more time to focus on students who may be struggling and can review information.

Writing

In this study, Graham (2020) studied if reading and writing instruction would be beneficial for students if they were intertwined with one another. The intervention tested was students receiving writing and reading instruction together at their set literacy time. The other group was receiving just literacy instruction. Graham (2020) found when writing and reading instruction are instructed together students improve their comprehension and writing skills. “The finding that students became better readers as a result of more writing is consistent with both the shared knowledge and rhetorical relations theories” (Graham, 2020). In simple terms, researchers have found that writing and reading go hand and hand. They found that when you teach both together, writing and reading instruction both have improvements. When students get a mix of literacy and writing instruction it will help improve their reading and writing skills.

In this writing analysis by Graham et al. (2018), they studied if it would be effective to have balanced reading and writing instruction. Each study was coded in a way researchers can see what program would be the best one for a reading and writing curriculum. That way they can tell if the two together would be beneficial. The method Graham et al. (2018) used was to have six different criteria for the different research papers that were already made to help see what papers were going to be included in the study or excluded. The criteria the papers had were

reading and writing together, involving preschool through twelfth grade, writing in English, part of a quasi-experiment, and assessment data for writing and reading. Graham et al. (2018) found that reading and writing can go hand in hand with each other. Learning to read can help you write and learning to write can help you read. This study was similar to what Graham (2020) found. Graham (2020) and Graham et al. (2018) both found it would benefit students to have reading and writing instruction instructed together. Writing and reading skills will improve when they are instructed together. Simply put, when reading and writing instruction are taught together it will benefit students' future in reading and writing.

The research was done by Ray et al. (2021) to find out if handwriting had an impact on kindergarten students' literacy skills. Ray et al. (2021) analyzed multiple different articles on handwriting and literacy to see if there was a relationship between the two. The research has found reading and writing together have made it beneficial for students to learn. Writing correlates with literacy and kindergarteners learning letters and sounds. Ray et al. (2021) found proof between learning and writing. It will help students remember or make a correlation between their learning and what they are writing. This article follows Graham et al. (2018) and Graham (2020) by uncovering research on the correlation between writing and literacy. All three of these articles highly suggest incorporating writing with literacy instruction. To put it another way, students would be at an advantage if teachers taught literacy and writing together to help them make a correlation between their literacy skills and writing.

For this present study, Lombardi (2021) researched if the preschool curriculum and orthographic mapping affect early literacy ability and upcoming reading and writing assessments. This study took two years to perform. Lombardi (2021) had multiple countries be a part of this study and take an assessment before the students started the school year and at the

end of the school year to see if the preschool curriculum and orthographic mapping were working. Not every country uses the same curriculum. Although they were not using the same curriculum, they were still able to predict the outcome of their reading and writing skills at the end of first grade. Lombardi (2021) found if the students produced a high score on the TALK Assessment in preschool still produced a high score in the end of first grade, which meant if students produced a high score in preschool, it would mean the students will perform well in reading and writing. In other words, if students performed well on the preschool assessment teachers can assume the students will have a high performance rate in reading and writing in the later years of school. Comparing this study to Graham et al. (2018), Graham (2020), and Ray et al. (2021), this study predicted the future reading and writing skills of students whereas the other studies compare literacy and writing instruction together. All the studies were looking at what reading and writing skills best benefit students.

Science of Reading

A study was conducted by Hudson et al. (2021) on whether a science of reading program prepares teachers to teach phonics and phonological awareness. Hudson et al. (2021) researched different studies on how to prepare teachers for the science of reading program to improve phonics and phonological awareness. Studies had teachers receive professional development in literacy and have them take what they learned to their students. Hudson et al. (2021) compared students' assessments from teachers receiving literacy professional development to teachers' students who were not receiving professional development. Hudson et al. (2021) found the students in the class with the teacher receiving professional development outperformed the students in the class with the teacher not taking any professional development. Researching different studies has found if teachers are adequately trained in the science of reading it will

boost students' phonological awareness, phonics, and phonemic awareness skills. When teachers keep up with their literacy knowledge and training it will benefit their students in their classroom. Teachers want what is best for their students and will do what it takes to help their students grow academically.

In this science of reading analysis Silverman et al. (2020), analyzed K-5 grade students on the effects of comprehension interventions in literacy. To conduct the study Silverman et al. (2020) coded multiple articles by design, intervention, participants, and outcomes. Researchers analyzed all the studies' methods and outcomes to see how interventions can affect literacy comprehension. Silverman et al. (2020) found interventions can help students grow in reading comprehension and it makes a difference in how teachers implement the interventions. There was not any dissimilarity between grade levels. Silverman et al. (2020) recommended having teachers during the intervention period mix in other skills to make sure the students are getting a wide range of skills with the intervention they are practicing. Also, studies have found decoding and language comprehension are two separate skills. The two skills are developed at separate times in the learning process. Once decoding is mastered then the language comprehension piece will start to develop. One way of saying it is when doing interventions on comprehension to ensure teachers are using various skills that coincide with comprehension. Students will get more out of the intervention when multiple skills are being used to promote comprehension. The science of reading pushes decoding but also promotes comprehension.

Research by Roberts (2021) was done to conduct a study on what the best approach was for students to learn their letters and sounds. Do students do better with learning the sounds first or letters first or both at the same time? The intervention Roberts (2021) tested is what letter instruction is best for students to learn the letters and sounds. The method used was to separate

the preschoolers into three groups to figure out what is the best method to learn the letter names and sounds. One group was learning letter names first. One group was learning sounds first and the last group was learning both at the same time. Roberts (2021) found that learning the letters and sounds together is beneficial when you practice them, play games or activities to retrieve their knowledge of them, and keep practicing names and using the sounds. In other words, when teaching letters and sounds together students will be able to notice what name and sound the letter makes quicker than when you teach just one of the skills at a time. Practicing letter names and sounds together will help them visualize and hear the sound that correlates with the letter created. This study coincides with Silverman et al. (2020). Silverman et al. (2020) established when doing interventions to use skills that go along with the intervention being worked on. Roberts (2021) detected students learning letters and sounds together promoted growth in knowing them. They both suggest learning skills together promotes greater success.

An analysis by Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt (2021) was done to determine what components follow or are missing from the science of reading instruction. To conduct this analysis Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt (2021) dove into multiple different resources about the science of reading. They researched how all the components in the science of reading can help benefit all students learning. Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt (2021) found the science of reading does not have all the parts involved in it to become a successful reader. Some of the parts they found were missing are textual dexterity and literate dispositions. Students need to be able to refer to what they are reading in their life and be able to comprehend what they are reading. Knowing what they are reading, students also need to have self-motivation, excitement, and a positive outlook on wanting to read. Teachers will need to do more literacy professional development to make sure they are well-trained in all the components of the science of reading to

benefit all their students. In other words, educators should not always look at what components will help students be able to read. They should also look at what is going to make reading fun and exciting to make them want to read all the time. The Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt (2021) study is different than the other studies by looking at what more we could add to the science of reading to make it a solid instructional program. The other studies (Hudson et al. (2021), Silverman et al. (2020), and Roberts (2021)) all studied what the science of reading already has to offer to make students successful. This study looked at reading as a whole and what more the science of reading could offer to benefit all students.

School Profile

School Characteristics

In Northern Iowa is the Forest City Community School District. The Forest City Community School District is made up of the Forest City Elementary School (Preschool-4), Forest City Middle School (5-8), and the Forest City High School (9-12). According to the State of Iowa (2022), the Forest City Community School District had 1,069 (K-12) students enrolled in the 2022-2023 school year. The students were 82% white, 9.7% Hispanic, 4.5% multi-racial, 2.2% African American, 0.2% Hawaiian/Pacific American, and 0.1% Native American. The school district has 16.1% of students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The student body is composed of 2.8% of students who are English Language Learners. The school district is formulated with 37.2% of students on a Free and Reduced Lunch Plan.

Student Performance

Per the State of Iowa (2022), the Forest City Elementary Schools student achievement average in language arts is 52.2/100 and in math is 48.71/100. The state average is 50/100 for both language arts and math. The school surpassed the language arts state average and was close with the math state average. In language arts, Forest City Elementary School was 76.32% proficient. The state average proficiency is 70.84% in language arts, which means the school is above proficiency. In math, Forest City Elementary School was 68.42% proficient. The state average is 64.97%, which means the school is above proficiency in math too. According to the State of Iowa (2022), the state gave Forest City Elementary School a High-Performance overall rating.

Student and Community Characteristics

The Forest City Community School District is located in Forest City, IA. It is thirty miles northwest of Mason City, Iowa. According to the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), Forest City has a population of 4,285 people. The Forest City community population is 86% white, 4% African American, 1% American Indian, 1% Native Hawaiian, 2% Asian, and 6% mixed races. The median family income is about \$69,000 and the median housing cost is \$122,500 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

Parents Involvement

The Forest City Community Schools parents have access to infinite campus to check their children's attendance for all grade levels and middle and high school students' parents can check their child's grades. Another way parents and the school can communicate with one another is through School Messenger. Teachers can send pictures of assignments or work their child has done. The district uses School Messenger to notify parents of any upcoming important dates or

valuable information they need to know. Parents can communicate through it to ask teachers about an assignment or any questions they may have. The elementary school has three class parties a year. Parents can donate party materials for the parties. Every year, parents can attend three of their child's conferences. The beginning, middle, and towards the end of the year. During the school year, a month before each conference teachers send out midterms. Parent involvement is always a top priority to let them be a part of their child's learning experience.

School Mission & Vision

The Forest City Community School Districts mission is “To provide each student the opportunity for a 21st-century education” (Forest City Schools, n.d.). The Forest City Community School District strives to prepare students for the workforce and to challenge students to be the best they can be. “The Forest City Elementary Schools mission is committed to providing a safe, student-centered learning environment that engages students in a challenging purposeful curriculum” (Forest City Schools, n.d.). The Forest City Elementary School follows Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) to help create students to be respectful, responsible, safe, and their best. The Forest City Community School strives to put students' best interests first.

Current Student Learning Goals

In the Forest City Elementary School, each grade level Professional Learning Team (PLT) creates SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) goals in literacy. Each grade level gets to choose what type of SMART goal they want to focus on. Every grade level must have at least one goal for their students to meet. In kindergarten each year teachers have a goal to get 80% of students to know all the uppercase, lowercase, and sounds of each

letter. This goal has been met each year. Multiple strategies were used to meet this goal. In the future, the PLT will create a SMART goal for each subject. Along with the SMART goal, teachers look at their student's FAST score which is given three times a year. If students did not make the benchmark, then progress monitoring and intervention are needed. The goal is to have most of the class pass the FAST test. This does not happen every year to have most of their class pass the FAST test. Data is inspected to see what more teachers can do in their instruction to help their students pass the FAST test. Preparing student goals is important to help look out for the student's best interest and to give them the best education they can receive.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Professional Development

The Forest City Elementary School uses the Journeys Reading Curriculum for grade levels K-4. Kindergarten-Prep uses the Big Day Curriculum for literacy. The Forest City Elementary School will be implementing the Bridges Math Curriculum in the upcoming school year. In the past, for a math curriculum, the school used Envisions or supplemental materials. There are several types of assessments being used FAST, Star Reading, Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP), and classroom assessments for conferences. The FAST Test is given to students k-4 and takes place three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring. Students in grades 2-4 take the Star Reading assessment throughout the year. The ISASP is assessed once in the spring for students in grades 3-4. Classroom assessments are done throughout the year. Report cards are given out three times a year for parents to see their child's progress. In kindergarten, the teachers prepare assessments for midterms to give to parents before they see their child's report card at conferences. The Forest City Community School District has professional development weekly. Teachers meet with their team members to discuss assessment results, curriculum, and instruction. As a district, the staff has been learning how to

have effective PLT meetings and what data to look at during those meetings. Curriculum, assessment, and professional development are predominant in helping teachers provide the finest instruction to students.

Needs Assessment

The Forest City Elementary School has a lot of strong aspects and educators, one area of improvement is their literacy curriculum. Currently, they use the Journeys Curriculum for literacy. The Journeys Curriculum has been great to provide teachers with scope and sequence and a commonality amongst grade levels. Some strong components the teachers detect the curriculum does not have plenty of are phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, phonics, and writing. Teachers are using supplemental materials to fill the gaps that Journeys does not provide. Phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are the only components where all grade levels are using the same supplemental materials. To grow students' phonemic awareness and phonological awareness the Forest City Elementary School implemented Heggerty for daily instruction. "Research has consistently demonstrated that for early elementary students and older struggling readers, explicit instruction of foundational literacy skills provides students from a wide variety of backgrounds with the greatest opportunity to learn to read proficiently" (Hudson et al., 2021). Since teachers are supplementing materials to provide students with the best literacy instruction, it is proposed that the Forest City Elementary School begins its search for a new literacy curriculum. Finding a curriculum with these components will prevent supplementation, help grade levels know what each grade level is teaching, and have a smoother transition between grade levels.

According to Thoma (2021), "To provide high-quality Tier 1 instruction, teachers must be well versed in research and balanced literacy to make the best choices for their students within

a particular context” (Thoma, 2021). Teachers need to be kept up to date on the most recent evidence-based literacy practices. That way they will be able to provide students with the best instruction. Thoma (2021) suggests the most important components to include in a literacy curriculum are phonics, fluency, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary. Hunt et al. (2022) recommends having a literacy program with phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonemic awareness. When looking at a new literacy curriculum, it is important to consider these components, especially since two studies have found these to be essential to a literacy program. Once a new curriculum is chosen, teachers must be trained in how to use it to benefit our students.

Data Analysis

Data

Data was looked at from the Forest City Elementary School in the school year of 2022-2023. The following assessments were examined FAST Early Reading compared to Central Rivers AEA Schools and all schools in Iowa, the grade level FAST Early Reading percentages, and the Iowa School Performance Language Arts Proficiency.

Figure 1 shows in the fall of the 2022-2023 school year Forest City Elementary School did not meet the benchmark or outperform the elementary schools in Iowa and Central Rivers AEA elementary schools by 3%. In the winter of the 2022-2023 school year, the Forest City Elementary School did not outperform Central Rivers AEA elementary schools and the state of Iowa elementary schools by 10%. Benchmark was not achieved by either Forest City Elementary School, Central Rivers AEA Elementary Schools, or the state of Iowa elementary schools. In the spring of 2022-2023, the Forest City Elementary School did not meet the benchmark of 80% of

students proficient. The Forest City Elementary School was outperformed by 13-14% comparing the Central Rivers AEA Elementary Schools and the state of Iowa elementary schools.

Figure 1 FAST Early Reading

FAST Early Reading						
	Fall 2022-2023	Benchmark	Winter 2022-2023	Benchmark	Spring 2022-2023	Benchmark
Forest City Elementary School	60%	80%	56%	80%	51%	80%
Central Rivers AEA Schools	63%	80%	66%	80%	64%	80%
Iowa Schools	63%	80%	66%	80%	65%	80%

In Figure 2 it shows how many students were proficient in the FAST Early Reading Assessment at the Forest City Elementary School. Looking at the students proficient in kindergarten, each FAST Assessment given fewer students were proficient in the Early Reading FAST Test. The first-grade data shows it had around 70% of proficient students. Examining the second-grade and third-grade data, the grade levels grew in the number of students who were proficient in their early reading skills. The fourth-grade data shows the grade level had around 64% of students proficient in early reading skills throughout the school year.

Figure 2 Forest City Elementary FAST Early Reading

Forest City Elementary FAST Early Reading						
	Fall 2022-2023	Fall Benchmark	Winter 2022-2023	Winter Benchmark	Spring 2022-2023	Spring Benchmark
Kindergarten	74%	80%	66%	80%	41%	80%

First Grade	72%	80%	70%	80%	68%	80%
Second Grade	41%	80%	44%	80%	46%	80%
Third Grade	53%	80%	55%	80%	57%	80%
Fourth Grade	62%	80%	66%	80%	64%	80%

Figure 3 shows data from the Iowa School Performance Profiles (2022). Examining the past five years of the percentage of students proficient in language arts, the percentage of students has outscored the average percentage of students in Iowa elementary schools. Around the COVID times, the percentages had dropped some, but now the percentages are starting to grow.

Figure 3 Iowa School Performances on Language Arts Proficiency

Iowa School Performances on Language Arts Proficiency					
Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Forest City	75.24%	75.22%	COVID	73.76%	76.32%
Iowa	77.04%	69.81%	COVID	68.95%	70.84%

School Challenges

Looking at the data, there are some challenges the Forest City Elementary School faces. When examining Figure 1, Forest City Elementary School did not outperform Central Rivers AEA or the state of Iowa. Although looking at Figure 3, the data showing Forest City being proficient in language arts by being more proficient than the state of Iowa, it is distinguished by examining Figures 1 and 2 Forest City needs to investigate getting a new literacy curriculum that has all the components to help the students be proficient in literacy. As stated above, “Research has consistently demonstrated that for early elementary students and older struggling readers, explicit instruction of foundational literacy skills provides students from a wide variety of backgrounds with the greatest opportunity to learn to read proficiently” (Hudson et al., 2021).

Students need the foundational skills of phonemic and phonological awareness, phonics, and writing to help them become successful readers.

School Strengths

In Figure 3 Forest City has been outperforming Iowa when looking at language arts as a whole district. In every year except for 2018, Forest City has outperformed the state of Iowa in being proficient in language arts. Even though the percentages dropped a bit after COVID, the following year the proficiency rate rose 3%. Another strength of examining Figure 2 is most of the grade levels besides kindergarten are around the same percentage of students proficient in literacy. That means few students are falling below the fall FAST proficiency level. First grade is the only grade level closest to reaching benchmarks for all three assessments on the FAST Test. In Figure 1 in the fall FAST Test Forest City was only 3% away from having the same proficiency level of students passing the FAST test.

Action Plan

Purposed Improvement Plan

This improvement plan is to research what components will be essential to help the Forest City Elementary School find a literacy curriculum to improve students' FAST Test scores. After analyzing the review, literacy is an important aspect for children to learn how to read and have teachers being fully knowledgeable about the topic (Hudson et al., 2021). According to Hunt et al. (2022) and Thoma (2021), it is crucial to have phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary components in a literacy curriculum. From the research, having some of the science of reading and writing in a literacy curriculum will make students beneficial literacy skills to be successful readers. Skibbe et al. (2016), Graham (2020), and Silverman et al. (2020) all used a system to find out what the best way to do literacy research is.

When a set system is made, it makes it easier to know what aspects of the curriculum to look at. Not only looking at the components of the curriculum but also how many of the literacy components are good and have a lot of materials to the components.

Steps to Improvement

The proposed improvement plan is to have a group of teachers from each grade level create a system to look through five different literacy curriculums to see if they have these main five components in a reading curriculum along with writing and science of reading skills. That way they can pick out the best curriculum to benefit students learning. These steps will be taken to find a literacy curriculum to benefit the Forest City Elementary School students' FAST Test scores.

1. Select a team of teachers and staff to pick out a literacy curriculum.
2. Do a book study on important literacy qualities to improve students' literacy skills.
3. Set up monthly meetings to discuss book findings. Use the book findings as a good reminder of what literacy skills are important for students to develop.
4. Create a system on how to pick out an effective literacy curriculum while making sure to include the important components of literacy (phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary).
5. Pick out five literacy curriculums to dig deeper into.
6. Using the system created by the team of teachers and staff to narrow down the literacy curriculums to two of them to fit the Forest City Elementary School and have all the components.
7. Pilot the two curriculums the team of teachers has narrowed down to. To pilot the curriculums, start the pilot a month before the FAST Test. Since there are four teachers in

each grade level, two teachers teach one curriculum, and the other two teachers teach the second curriculum for that month.

8. Have the title teachers assess the students on the FAST Test.
9. Once the grade has completed the FAST Test, look at the two different sets of data in the PLT Teams. Compare the data to see what curriculum will be the best one to use to improve FAST Test scores.
10. As an Elementary Staff observe the data the grade levels have found.
11. Based on the data the staff agrees on a literacy curriculum to use in the elementary school.
12. Go to the Forest City Board of Education to approve the purchase of a literacy curriculum for 2024-2025.
13. Provide professional development to the elementary staff on how to implement the literacy curriculum.
14. Start the implementation of the new literacy curriculum in the fall of 2024.
15. With the implementation of the new literacy curriculum, analyze the FAST Test data over the 2024-2025 school year. Throughout the year, find ways to improve how the literacy curriculum is taught to raise FAST Test scores.

This is a start to improving the FAST Test scores at the Forest City Elementary School. These steps are taken to establish what actions will be needed for improvement. Throughout the process, steps may be added or taken to make the process efficient. Everything will be considered for what is best for students. The administration will take a role in most decisions made. Teachers will be using their knowledge to decide what curriculum will be the best for the

students. The steps followed will help make the improvement process successful for the school and students.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Timeline

The timeline for the implementation of the school improvement plan is three school years. It will take the Forest City Elementary School two years to gain foundational knowledge on literacy, examine literacy curriculums, pilot literacy curriculums, and professional development. At the end of the second year when a curriculum is chosen administration would have to present it to the school board for approval. If the curriculum is approved, in the third year the school will be able to track their data to see if the curriculum made a difference to their FAST Test scores.

Resources

In the first year of the school improvement plan the Forest City Elementary School will be utilizing the Central Rivers AEA. The Central Rivers AEA will be able to provide a literacy specialist to help the Forest City Elementary School with choosing what curriculums will have all the components to help improve students' test scores. At the end of the second year and all the third year when a literacy curriculum is chosen, the school will use the resources the program provides and ask for professional development on how to implement the new literacy curriculum.

Responsibilities

The administration will be responsible for setting up the literacy team, scheduling meetings, and getting the Central Rivers AEA Rep involved in our literacy curriculum process. The administration will also determine a budget, present the curriculum to the school board, and

set up professional development with the whole staff for the new literacy curriculum. The literacy team teachers will report back what they are learning to the rest of their team. They will be responsible for completing a book study and doing extra research on literacy curriculums. Teachers will be responsible for learning from their literacy team teacher, taking data, piloting a literacy curriculum, and implementing the new literacy curriculum with fidelity.

Progress Monitoring

The school improvement plan will be monitored by first using a system created by the literacy team of teachers to pick out a literacy curriculum with all the literacy components to improve students' literacy skills. Second, the teachers will be monitoring their students' FAST Test scores using FastBridge. Each grade level will be piloting two literacy curriculums. Two teachers will be teaching one and the other two teachers will be teaching the other one for a month before the students take the FAST Test. After taking the FAST Test, the grade team of teachers will dig into their students' scores to see if there is a difference in scores from the two literacy curriculums the teachers piloted.

Barriers and Challenges

Some common barriers and challenges are time and allowances. Time is always a common challenge. When schools are on a set timeline but also need more time to dig deeper into a curriculum it can be a challenging task to choose the right curriculum for the students. Teachers may not always have the time to learn a new curriculum if they have a family at home and if there is not enough prep time worked into their everyday schedule. Being on a curriculum team takes a lot of extra time for the teachers to be out of their classrooms going through professional development. Sometimes it takes more time for them to get sub plans ready.

Allowances can be a barrier for school districts. The school could go through professional development and pick out a new curriculum to find out there are not enough allowances for them to purchase the curriculum. The school may have to settle for a cheaper option that does not have all the beneficial literacy components.

Conclusion

In conclusion, literacy is essential for life skills in everyday living (Ray et al., 2022). How literacy is taught is essential for students to become successful readers and use these skills in the workforce. Students need a foundation of literacy skills before they can read (Hudson et al., 2021). Problems can arise when literacy curriculums do not have all the essential literacy components to them, or the components do not have the juiciness to them. The school improvement plan focuses on finding the major components in a literacy curriculum to help students pass the FAST Test. The findings state a literacy curriculum needs to have phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, writing, and a science of reading outlook (Hunt et al., 2021 & Thoma, 2022). Along with needing all these literacy components in a literacy curriculum, teachers need to be up to date on their literacy knowledge (Thoma, 2022). The Forest City Elementary School will be able to gain high FAST Test scores and successful readers when a new literacy curriculum is found with all the major components.

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