Improving Reading Interventions: A School Improvement Plan

Ivy Leitch

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Improving Reading Interventions: A School Improvement Plan

Ivy Leitch

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

This school improvement plan was driven by the researcher’s interest in improving literacy interventions due to an ineffective curriculum. This plan focuses on the essential components of literacy interventions, which research found are phonics, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and the science of reading. These components will increase literacy skills in all elementary grades and potentially increase FAST scores. As the district purchases a new literacy curriculum in 2026, these components should be at the forefront of their decision.

*Keywords: science of reading, curriculum, literacy*
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Improving Reading Interventions: A School Improvement Plan

Introduction

A strong literacy foundation is essential for academic success. According to the Education Development Center (EDC), one of humankind’s greatest intellectual achievements is creating concepts and being able to read. Reading and writing improves our learning capabilities (EDC, 2016). When children learn to read, they can expand their thinking and find their identity in this world. Children who do not learn to read or master early literacy skills and alphabet knowledge fall behind their peers. Those same students cannot comprehend or read at grade level (Brown, 2014). "To read is to understand better, and to understand is the greatest gift of a being human.” Not knowing how to read can increase the chances of individuals falling into poverty, committing more crimes, and overall well-being (EDC, 2016).

Our current reality is that many children entering school need to gain the foundational literacy skills typically learned through consistent exposure to being read at home. They need to come to school with the prerequisite skills, such as knowing their letters or sounds. Research says that twenty-five percent of caregivers never read with their children (Logan et al., 2019). Furthermore, early experiences that children receive in preschool prepare them for their future academic success. Building the foundation for literacy development in young children includes but is not limited to reading to children, exposing children to print concepts, phonemic and linguistic awareness, teaching the alphabet, and promoting vocabulary development (Brown, 2014).

This school improvement plan aims to identify essential components required for literacy intervention to replace the currently ineffective curriculum being utilized in our school. In 2018, Forest City Elementary scored approximately 50% proficient in reading, according to the Department of Education. This was two years after the school implemented the Journeys literacy
curriculum (Journeys, n.d.). This literature review was researched using scholarly journals and articles from Northwestern College's DeWitt Library. All the articles and journals were published in the past decade. The scope of the research was primarily from elementary schools focusing on the lower grades. Instead of focusing on a single grade level, expanding the grade levels allowed for more research focused on literacy interventions. Research was done on what skills should be taught in literacy interventions to make them effective, what teachers need to do to support their students during interventions, and what special education teachers can do to support the classroom teacher during interventions.

The author believes four main topics are essential for students' literacy skills success. These topics include phonics, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and the science of reading. The author believes that when the educators at Forest City Elementary focus on teaching phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological skills aligned with the science of reading, students reading scores and reading skills will improve.

The author organized the literature review by key essential topics for improving literacy interventions and students' literacy skills. The literature review will begin with phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness. Next, it will focus on the importance of the science of reading. Lastly, it will focus on literacy interventions.

Review of Literature

Phonics

The goal of phonics instruction is for children to understand that letters and letter combinations are connected to sounds they hear in words. Letters and sounds have a relationship, and phonics instruction is both visual and auditory (Bottari, 2023). In the Netherlands, children at the age of four studied and attended kindergarten for two years. Thirty-seven schools throughout the Netherlands participated in the study. The schools were in rural and urban areas. Kindergarten
students received incremental phonics instruction and assessed their phonological awareness and letter knowledge. Lessons were the same across students, but adjustments could be made to accommodate students' needs. In Grade 1, students were studied in the first five months on a word decoding assessment. The focus was on incremental phonics instruction, where children gradually learned letter-sound correspondence. The purpose of the study was to track the development of word decoding skills in children receiving phonics instruction and analyze factors within kindergarten assessments that predict success in reading in Grade 1. According to the findings of the study, student accuracy developed quickly, efficiency continued to improve over time, children's accuracy and time remained stable, and decoding led to new words. The study emphasized that the rapid development of word decoding skills in early phonics instruction for kindergarten students can predict a child's reading success. Furthermore, incremental phonics positively impacted kindergarten students’ literacy skills (Schaars et al., 2017).

Like Schaars et al. (2017), Levin (2020), used decoding skills to help students read unfamiliar words. Levin researched how phonics instruction can promote proficiency in reading with nonsense words and sight words. There were two separate groups of second-grade students. The first group of second-grade students received systematic phonics instruction during the first few months of school. A few months later, they received regular classroom instruction. The second group of students first received regular classroom instruction and then systematic phonics, consisting of phoneme-grapheme correspondence, word recognition, and phonemic awareness instruction. The findings showed that the group given systematic phonics instruction first showed more significant improvement in reading unfamiliar words than students who received systematic phonics instruction second (Levlin, 2020).
Double et al. (2019) researched whether phonics influences reading comprehension, assessing students on reading forty words, a combination of nonsense words and actual words. Students who did not pass the assessment were assessed the following year. In students’ fifth year of education, they were assessed on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The students who did not pass the assessment the first time were observed to see if there was a correlation between phonics and reading comprehension. The study results showed that students who did not pass the phonics assessment the first time also did not score well on the PIRLS assessment. "There is evidence that phonics interventions are more effective at improving reading performance during the early stages of reading development (Double et al., 2019, p. 1222)". In other words, phonics instruction is a vital component of literacy and students’ success with literacy.

Vadasy et al. (2021) also studied phonics and whether the rate at which students learn letter sounds and letter sound patterns matters. There were two separate groups in the study. The first group was taught at a fast rate, while the second group was taught letter sounds and letter patterns at half the rate as the first group. Regardless of the pace of the instruction, both groups were given identical instructions. Each group was given a pre-assessment and a post-assessment. The assessments consisted of writing the sounds heard, matching initial sounds (i.e., beginning sounds,) segmenting words, blending words, reading words, spelling, and speed of naming letter sounds. Another study determined whether teaching students single- or multiple-letter sounds was more effective. The findings of this study showed that teaching single-letter sounds was more effective than teaching multiple-letter sounds at once. However, teaching multiple letter sounds was most effective for children who needed a challenge. This study proves that the pace
Improving Reading Interventions

at which students are taught phonics skills matters, and teaching letter sounds and patterns at a fast rate is best (Vadasy et al., 2021).

Boldrini et al. (2023) discussed the importance of Flexible Phonics. Flexible phonics (FP) is a non-commercial reading resource created by Amy Fox and Robert Savage. FP is centered around providing students with a strategy for mispronunciation self-correction via phonics and authentic children’s books (i.e., real books) to grow students’ confidence and motivation. Again, FP supports learning grapheme to phoneme rules by teaching the rules right away and linking to multiple examples in the texts. Components of Flexible Phonics include direct mapping, teaching vocabulary knowledge, mispronunciation correction, and differentiation. The authors conducted an intervention with a small group of 82 at-risk readers. The intervention followed the FP curriculum and found that the students in the FP group made more significant progress (5 months more) in reading than the control group. The authors encourage teachers to replace sight word instruction with FP content (Boldrini et al., 2023.).

Phonemic Awareness and Phonological Awareness

Phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are also essential components of the literacy curriculum. Phonemic Awareness (PA) is oral and auditory and “is the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds, called phonemes” (Bottari, 2023). Phonemic awareness does not involve print or letter names. Eccles et al. (2021) studied whether skills in music (pitch and rhythm) and hearing sounds in noise are linked to the child’s ability to understand and work with sounds of language (i.e., phonological awareness). They also researched if there is a strong connection between music and auditory tests, which may show a risk of children’s reading problems. The study found that children between the ages of five and seven, who better recognized pitch, rhythm, and hearing within noisy backgrounds, tended to
have better foundational reading skills. The research suggests that tests focusing on pitch, rhythm, and hearing in noise could be used to screen children who struggle with reading and help design programs to improve reading skills (Eccles et al., 2021).

Young-Suk Kim et al. (2013) researched the relationship of phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness concerning vocabulary-to-word reading and spelling with first-grade students from a southeastern state. First graders' phonological, orthographic, morphological awareness, expressive vocabulary, word reading, and spelling were assessed. The research found that all three linguistic awareness skills predicted word reading abilities, which agrees with Eccles et al.’s findings (2021). All three types of linguistic awareness are essential in early reading development. Students’ vocabulary knowledge only supports reading development; it is optional. Phonological and orthographic awareness predicted students’ spelling ability. However, vocabulary did not predict reading or spelling (Ray et al., 2022). The authors believe that literacy is essential for everyday life and life skills.

Contrary to Eccles (2021) and Young-Suk Kim (2013) studies, which highlight the importance of linguistic knowledge over computers, an intervention guide by Rice et al. (2024) discussed the importance of computer programs as an intervention. Using the intervention guide, they researched preschoolers to first-grade students. The authors found that specific computer phonemic awareness (PA) programs and instruction by parents are adequate resources in addition to teacher instruction. Computer programs with adult interaction and child learning support were found effective. No specific programs were identified in the study; however, it was suggested that students use 15-20 minutes a day for three to five days a week. This could be done at school, small groups, or home. They provided parents with specific PA skills to supplement their
students' learning. The authors found that short daily doses of 15-20 minutes for four to five days a week showed good improvement (Rice et al., 2023).

Keesey et al. (2015) researched kindergarten students who were below the 25th percentile on Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and could not segment vowel-consonant (VC) or consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. The study aimed to determine the effects of word box interventions designed to teach phoneme segmentation, letter-sound correspondences, and spelling skills on three at-risk kindergartners. Students were measured on repeating sounds in words, matching letters to sounds, and spelling nonsense words with short vowel sounds. The findings showed that the word box intervention effectively improved the kindergartener's performance in all three areas and confirmed alphabet knowledge occurs through explicit instruction of letter-sound correspondences rather than only exposure to print (Keesey et al., 2015.)

**Science of Reading**

Another essential component of a literacy intervention is making sure it is science of reading based. "The science of reading refers to a body of research from the fields of education, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience that explains how individuals learn how to read and best practices for reading instruction (The science of reading: The basics, 2022).” In a study by Silverman et al. (2020), kindergarten to fifth-grade students were analyzed on the effects of comprehension literacy interventions. For Silverman et al. (2020) to conduct the study, they coded multiple articles by design, outcomes, participants, and intervention characteristics. Researchers analyzed the methods and outcomes for each study to see how interventions affect literacy comprehension. This study found that interventions helped students increase reading comprehension and affected how teachers implemented interventions.
All grade levels had equivalent results. Researchers suggested that teachers mix in other skills so that students receive a wide range of skill practice. Decoding and language comprehension are separate skills that develop at various stages for each child. While decoding comes first, effective comprehension development requires combining different skills.

Hudson et al. (2021) studied whether a science of reading program prepared teachers to teach phonics and phonological awareness. The authors researched different studies that focused on teacher training impacting teacher knowledge of reading skills. Most studies showed noticeable improvements in teachers' understanding of sound-based skills after the training and their knowledge of how sound and letters connect. When teachers improve their knowledge, students' reading skills increase (Hudson et al., 2021). Hudson et al. (2021) compared student assessments from teachers who received literacy training to those whose teachers needed training. The authors found that the students whose teachers received training performed higher on their assessments. Researching different studies proves that teachers adequately trained in the science of reading will increase their students' phonological awareness, phonics, and phonemic awareness skills.

Toste and Lindstrom (2023) also researched various interventions by different researchers. The interventions focused on teacher education programs that equip teachers with a deep understanding of the science of reading and explicit and systematic reading instruction, which other authors in this literature review have recommended. “The science of reading should guide decisions about teaching and learning, but it is also important for teachers to understand that it does not necessarily provide all the answers” (Toste & Landstom, 2023, p. 84).

A study by Roberts (2021) investigated the most effective approach for teaching letter sounds and names to preschoolers. The study compared three methods: learning letter names
first, learning sounds, and learning both simultaneously. The research found that learning letters and sounds together was the most beneficial method. This approach allows children to instantly connect the visual representation of a letter name with its corresponding sound. This association is strengthened by practicing them together through games, activities, and repeated use. The findings align with research done by Silverman et al. (2020), which emphasized the importance of integrating related skills within interventions. Children learn letters and sounds more effectively when taught simultaneously rather than focusing one at a time (Roberts, 2021).

**Literacy Interventions**

A reading/literacy intervention is a curriculum or a set of practices that help students with reading difficulties or reading disabilities (WWC: Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to intervention (RTI) and multi-tier intervention in the primary grades, 2020.)

McMahon-Morin et al. (2021) wanted to discover if the effect of three types of interventions involving inferencing will improve student's understanding. One group received seven weeks of interactive book readings by a speech and language pathologist (SLP), followed by seven additional weeks of instruction from teachers trained in different PD modalities. The second group received seven weeks of regular instruction from a teacher who solely participated in an initial workshop on interactive book reading, followed by seven weeks of an SLP-delivered interactive book reading intervention. The third group received 14 weeks (about three months) of regular instruction from teachers who participated solely in an initial workshop on interactive book reading. The research found that the group (first group described) who received seven weeks with the SLP and seven weeks with the teacher had the greatest improvement (McMahon-Morin et al., 2021).
In another study, Justice et al. (2015) investigated the application of "theoretical domains framework and integrative framework drawing on behavior change theories to speech-language pathology" (p. 2). Two different studies occurred. In the first study, caregivers read to their children four times a week for 12 weeks (about three months) for 48 sessions total. In study two, caregivers read to their children twice a week for 30 weeks (about seven months) for 60 sessions. The results showed four barriers that affected caregiver's implementation: time pressures, reading difficulties, discomfort with reading, and lack of awareness of the benefit of reading. Both studies had comparable results regarding children's literacy abilities.

Wanzek et al. (2017) examined effective reading interventions for upper elementary school students with reading difficulties. Four hundred fifty-one fourth graders who scored at or below the 30th percentile on the reading comprehension subtest participated. Each group received Passport to Literacy intervention daily for 30-minute sessions for 25 weeks (i.e., about five and a half months) from October to May. The findings suggest that Passport to Literacy improves reading comprehension.

In a study researching early identification and intervention to prevent reading failure by Siegel (2020), children from Vancouver, Canada, were assessed annually from kindergarten through seventh grade. Students were instructed by their general education teacher during interventions—kindergarten and Grade 1 interventions focused on phonological awareness and phonics. Grade 2 through 7 interventions focused on reading comprehension and word analysis strategies. The findings showed a consistent, aligned, and standardized curriculum based on scientific research, and the results were well implemented, resulting in significant improvements in reading (Siegel, 2020).
Kim et al. (2013) researched the relationship between phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness and vocabulary in word reading and spelling with first graders. Three hundred and four students from 28 classrooms in five different schools in southeastern states of the United States were involved in the study. The research found that phonological and orthographic awareness predicted spelling ability. Vocabulary did not predict reading or spelling but did positively influence them. The contributions of those skills to reading and spelling were similar based on students' intervention levels. This suggests that all three types of linguistic awareness are crucial for early reading and spelling development, while vocabulary plays a supporting role. The research highlights the importance of incorporating activities that develop all aspects of linguistic awareness into early literacy instruction and vocabulary-building activities that support reading and spelling development.

**School Profile**

**School Characteristics**

The Forest City Community School District is in Northern Iowa. The Forest City Community School District is made up of Forest City Elementary (four-year-old preschool-4th grade), Forest City Middle School (5th grade-8th grade), and Forest City High School (9th grade-12th grade). According to the State of Iowa, in 2023, the Forest City School District had 1,078 students (K-12) enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year. The students were 81.4% White, 10.3% Hispanic, 2% Black, 0.2% Hawaii/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native American, 1.4% Asian, and 4.5% multi-racial. The school has 50.6% male students and 49.4% female. 15.9% of students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP), 2.7% English Language Learners (ELL), and 39.4% receive Free and Reduced Lunch.
**Student Performance**

Per the State of Iowa (2023), the Forest City Elementary School’s student achievement average in language arts was 53.01/100, and in math was 51.76/100. The state average was 50/100 for both language arts and math. The school surpassed the language arts state average and was close to the math state average. Forest City Elementary was 82.96% proficient in language arts compared to the state average of 71.4%. In math, Forest City Elementary School was 78.79% proficient compared to the state average of 69.5%, which means the school is above proficiency in math too. According to the State of Iowa (2023), the state gave Forest City Elementary School a Commendable overall rating.

**Parents Involvement**

Parents of the Forest City Community Schools can access Infinite Campus to check their children's attendance and grades. This is available for all parents in the district. Another way parents and the school can communicate is through School Messenger. Teachers can send pictures, texts, and emails to parents. Teachers can show parents their child's work. The district uses School Messenger to notify parents of upcoming important dates or cancellations. Parents can communicate through it to ask teachers about an assignment or any questions they may have. In kindergarten, there are three class/holiday parties a year. Parents can donate party materials for the parties. Parents are invited to attend three of their child’s conferences each year. Conferences are in the fall (back-to-school), winter, and spring. Midterms are sent out to parents. Parents' involvement is a top priority of The Forest City Community School District.

**Student and Community Characteristics**

The Forest City Community School District is in Forest City, IA. Forest City is geographically between Des Moines, IA, and Minneapolis, MN. According to the United States Census Bureau, Forest City has 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 et al. Bureau, n.d.).

**School Mission & Vision**

The Forest City Community School District's mission is “To provide each student the opportunity for a 21st-century education” (Forest City Schools, n.d.). The district strives to prepare students for the workforce and challenge them to be their best. "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.). Schools in this district follow the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) to help create respectful, responsible, safe, and best students.

**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 chooses 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 aim to get 80% of students to know each letter's uppercase, lowercase, and sounds. This goal has been met each year so far. Multiple strategies were used to meet this goal. In the future, the PLT will create a SMART goal for writing and math.

Along with the SMART goal, teachers look at their students' FAST scores, which are given three times a year. Progress monitoring and intervention are needed if students do not make the benchmark. The goal is to have most of the class pass the FAST test. Data is inspected to see what teachers can do to help their students pass the FAST test. Preparing student goals is
essential to help look out for the student's best interest and to give them the best education possible.

**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. This year, kindergarten is supplementing with Little Minds at Work by Tara West. The Forest City Elementary School implemented the Bridges Math Curriculum this fall. Several types of assessments are 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 occurs three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring. Students in grades 2nd-4th take the Star Reading assessment throughout the year. The ISASP is assessed once in the spring for grades 3-4 students. Classroom assessments are done throughout the year. Report cards are given thrice yearly so parents can see their child's progress. In kindergarten, the teachers prepare midterm assessments for parents before they see their child's report card at conferences.

The Forest City Community School District has professional development weekly on Wednesday afternoons. 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 essential in helping teachers provide their students with the best possible instruction.

**Needs Assessment**

After analyzing the school profile, it is evident that Forest City Elementary has an excellent staff that puts students first and participates in ongoing professional development. One area in need of improvement is curriculum and instruction. The district currently uses Journeys
for its literacy curriculum. One positive aspect of the curriculum is that scope and sequence allow for common language between grade levels. However, essential components need to be added to the curriculum, which causes teachers at each grade level to supplement their literacy instruction. These components include phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, phonics, and age-appropriate writing; these are essential for students' literacy progress.

Preschool through second-grade teachers have supplemented Journeys with Haggerty at Forest City Elementary (Bottari, 2023). Haggerty curriculum provides daily repetitive practice in the areas missing from the Journeys curriculum through a whole group intervention. In the article, Hudson et al. (2021) discussed the importance of explicit instruction of foundational literacy skills and providing students with a variety of backgrounds and opportunities to learn to read. Since teachers are already supplementing their current literacy curriculum, it is proposed that Forest City Elementary School begin additional literacy interventions to provide daily support for the ineffective curriculum (i.e., Journeys) along with Haggerty for the whole group. Implementing effective and research-based interventions focusing on phonics, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and the science of reading will improve students’ literacy skills.

**School Data and Analysis**

This section provides insight into areas of strengths and weaknesses regarding literacy outcomes. The data that was analyzed was a standardized assessment given to elementary students. Forest City Elementary School’s FAST Early Reading data for the 2022-2023 school year was compared to Central Rivers AEA schools, which Forest City is part of, and all schools in Iowa.

Table 1 shows Forest City Elementary did not meet the benchmark or perform better than the elementary schools in Iowa or the Central Rivers AEA in the fall of the 2022-2023 school
year. The Central River AEA and Iowa schools scored 3% better than Forest City Elementary. There was a more significant discrepancy between the winter and fall scores, with Central River and Iowa schools scoring 10% better than Forest City Elementary. The discrepancy increased in the spring. Forest City Elementary outperformed Central Rivers AEA schools by 13% and Iowa schools by 14%.

Table 1

*FAST Early Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2022-2023</th>
<th>Fall Benchmark</th>
<th>Winter 2022-2023</th>
<th>Winter Benchmark</th>
<th>Spring 2022-2023</th>
<th>Spring Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest City Elementary School</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Rivers AEA Schools</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa Schools</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students who were proficient in the FAST Early Reading Assessment in Forest City Elementary is displayed in Table 2. The kindergarten scores decreased with each testing period. Fall FAST assessment scores were the highest, and spring scores were the lowest. First-grade scores were within 4% of each other but decreased each testing period. Second and third-grade scores increased with each testing period. However, those grades still needed to meet the 80% benchmark. Fourth-grade scores increased from fall to winter but decreased from winter to spring. Again, fourth grade still needed to make the benchmark.
Table 2

*Forest City Elementary FAST Early Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Fall 2022-2023</th>
<th>Fall Benchmark</th>
<th>Winter 2022-2023</th>
<th>Winter Benchmark</th>
<th>Spring 2022-2023</th>
<th>Spring Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays data from the Iowa School Performance Profile (2022). Over the last five years, the percentage of Forest City Elementary and Iowan students proficient in language arts has varied. Iowa Schools outperformed Forest City in 2018, but in 2019-2022, Forest City outperformed Iowa Schools. In 2020, due to COVID-19, there were no scores to be displayed.

Table 3

*Iowa School Performances on Language Arts Proficiency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest City</td>
<td>75.24%</td>
<td>75.22%</td>
<td>COVID</td>
<td>73.76%</td>
<td>76.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>77.04%</td>
<td>69.81%</td>
<td>COVID</td>
<td>68.95%</td>
<td>70.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School Weaknesses**

Examining the research and figures, Forest City Elementary has challenges. Table 1 displayed FAST Early Reading scores for Forest City, Central Rivers AEA, and Iowa Schools. Forest City was outperformed by Central River AEA Schools and Iowa Schools for each testing period. Table 2 shows kindergarten and first-grade scores decreasing with each testing period. Although Table 3 shows Forest City was proficient compared to Iowa schools, they still need to meet the benchmark. All three tables show that Forest City would benefit from literacy support. Students need to learn foundational skills in their early years of education to have a strong literacy foundation for the rest of their lives.
Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Purposed Improvement Plan

This school improvement plan is to research essential components of literacy interventions to assist Forest City Elementary and improve literacy scores due to ineffective curriculum. As mentioned, the school has faced challenges meeting FAST benchmark scores. Improving issues due to an ineffective curriculum with practical and research-based literacy interventions is essential.

Forest City Elementary has the Central Rivers AEA staff to assist in the intervention process. The district does not have a literacy specialist, so Andrea Raber from the AEA works with the district. The school also has a literacy instructional coach, Mallory Hartwig, who has thoroughly researched and is well-educated in literacy. She works with the literacy team, which is finding a new curriculum. The FastBridge website is available for all elementary grade levels. It provides teachers with universal screening, tracking for interventions, and progress monitoring. Teachers will use the website for a general instructional plan to keep track of interventions used. Lastly, teachers will need time. They need time to learn, research with their colleagues, implement that research, and collaborate and meet with their team. The following steps:

1. They adequately train all staff on what components must be included in interventions.
2. Allow planning time for general education teachers to meet with their grade-level teams.
3. Provide time for Special Education teachers to collaborate with the General Education teachers.
4. Monthly check-ins with Andrea Raber from the AEA and Mallory Hartwig to problem-solve and get advice.
5. Create interventions focusing on phonics, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and literature review.

**Timeline**

In May of 2024, the staff will be given a heads-up on the changes in literacy interventions. By August 2024, Forest City staff will attend professional development on what components must be taught during intervention time. Andrea Raber and Mallory Hartwig will lead the professional development. They will support teachers who may feel overwhelmed and offer suggestions. From August 2024 through May 2025, interventions will be implemented and adjusted as needed. In May of 2025, the district will adopt a new literary curriculum.

After the Fall FAST benchmark, the staff will meet on Wednesdays to set up progress monitoring and determine what intervention(s) are needed. In October, teams will begin to meet. General Education teachers will meet with Special Education Teachers to create the interventions that involve the essential components. Interventions will be implemented daily. Progress Monitoring will take place weekly using the FastBridge website for universal screener. Lastly, each month, teams will collaborate to adjust interventions as needed.

**Responsibilities**

**Administrators**

Administrators, including the elementary principal and superintendent, will allow staff to collaborate with their team and special education teachers on Wednesdays. Staff will not be required to do anything else while they prepare interventions. The administration will also allow the AEA staff to support teachers, the district, and the district's literacy instructional coach.

**Teachers**
Teachers will be required to attend professional development on Wednesdays. If the interventions are research-based and include the essential components, teachers will be given autonomy with what they implement in their classrooms. They will be allowed to ask questions and meet with Andrea Rabor and Mallory Hartwig as needed for support.

**AEA**

The Central Rivers AEA literacy specialist, Andrea Raber, will meet with Forest City Staff at least once a month and be available through email to support staff as needed. Andrea will come with research to back up the essential components and inform staff why change is necessary.

**Data Collection**

At the end of each FAST benchmark during the 2024-2025 school year, staff will analyze the collected data to see if growth is being made. All elementary staff will discuss their findings, and grade-level teams will have time to discuss them. If needed, interventions will be adjusted to improve student growth.

**Barriers/Challenges**

The district faces a few challenges with this school improvement plan, including time, other professional development needs, a new math curriculum in 2024, and a need for more support during interventions. First, time is a barrier. Each grade is given a designated intervention time in their schedule. Some grades may need help finding time each day for interventions and using the time to catch up on other work. Another barrier is other professional development needs. Forest City has a monthly schedule for professional development. One Wednesday a month is provided for Professional Learning Communities (PLC). One Wednesday is used for individual needs, another for building needs, and lastly, a Wednesday for district needs. Finding time on Wednesdays for literacy interventions will be tough. The elementary
school purchased a new math curriculum in the spring of 2024. Teachers are already overwhelmed with organizing and familiarizing themselves with the new math curriculum; adding more to their plate might overwhelm them. Lastly, not all teachers have additional support during intervention times. Teachers would benefit from additional help with the rest of the class to perform effective interventions.

**Conclusion**

Literacy skills are essential in daily life (Ray et al., 2022). When children learn how to read, they can expand their thinking and find their identity in this world. Children who do not learn to read or master early literacy skills and alphabet knowledge fall behind their peers. Those same students cannot comprehend or read at grade level (Brown, 2014).

The author found four main topics essential for the success of students' literacy skills: phonics, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and the science of reading. The author believes that when the educators at Forest City Elementary focus on teaching phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological skills aligned with the science of reading, students' reading scores and reading skills will improve.

The process of how literacy is taught has changed over the years. Schools must stay current on the most effective way to teach to prepare lifelong learners who are successful in life. Not all literacy curriculums hit the essential components of literacy. This school improvement plan focuses on improving literacy interventions due to ineffective literacy curriculums. Educators should stay current on literacy knowledge along with the essential literacy components. Forest City Elementary will increase FAST scores and build lifelong learners/readers once they successfully carry out literacy interventions and eventually replace their literacy curriculum.
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