Spring 2024

School Improvement Plan: Enhancing Foundational Skills Instruction

Alexis Weber

Follow this and additional works at: https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters

Part of the Early Childhood Education Commons
School Improvement Plan: Enhancing Foundational Skills Instruction

Alexis Jasper
Northwestern College
EDU635- Capstone
Dr. Angila Moffitt
May 2024
Abstract

Research indicates that phonological awareness ranks among the most crucial abilities and predictors of future success in reading. Additionally, studies have highlighted the correlation between phonemic awareness and reading proficiency, as well as the deficiency in both pre-service and in-service teachers' understanding of fundamental language constructs. In response to these findings, a school improvement plan has been devised, incorporating a supplementary phonemic awareness program aimed at enhancing students' knowledge and skills in this area. Moreover, the plan entails bolstering teacher expertise through tailored training sessions and further professional development opportunities tailored to address specific needs. This initiative will contribute valuable insights by comparing the proficiency levels of Lambert Elementary students with those of their counterparts in the local AEA and the state of Iowa, as well as analyzing historical data and growth trends within the school over the academic year. Successful implementation of this program is expected to result in notable advancements in students' foundational literacy skills proficiency.

Keywords: phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, language constructs, teacher knowledge
## Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 2
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 4
Literature Review.................................................................................................................... 6
School Profile....................................................................................................................... 11
  Community Characteristics.............................................................................................. 11
  School District Characteristics....................................................................................... 12
School & Vision.................................................................................................................... 12
Student Learning Goals....................................................................................................... 13
Student Performance........................................................................................................... 13
Parent Involvement............................................................................................................ 14
Curriculum & Professional Development........................................................................... 14
Needs Assessment .............................................................................................................. 15
Data Analysis .................................................................................................................... 16
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................... 16
  School Strengths ............................................................................................................ 20
  School Challenges ......................................................................................................... 20
Action Plan........................................................................................................................ 21
  Purposed Improvement Plan ......................................................................................... 21
  Steps to Solve the Problem ......................................................................................... 22
Implementation of School Improvement Plan ................................................................. 24
  Timeline ......................................................................................................................... 24
  Staff Responsibilities .................................................................................................... 25
  Monitoring .................................................................................................................... 26
  Barriers & Challenges .................................................................................................. 27
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 28
References ......................................................................................................................... 29
School Improvement Plan: Enhancing Foundational Skills Instruction

Incorporating a targeted and systematic foundational skills curriculum into daily instruction is crucial to enhancing early literacy skills and fostering a strong foundation of student success. Kindergarten students are expected to recognize letter sounds and names, write, and read by the end of the year. Research has suggested that the most important skill students are taught is phonological awareness (Gellert, 2017). Phonological awareness is a term that merges sentence awareness, word awareness, syllabication, rhyming, and phonemic awareness (Kenner, et al. 2017). These areas serve as an essential part of how students learn to read successfully. In the early stages of development, children will develop phonological skills. When reading instruction is taught before foundational skills are developed, there becomes a problem in developing proficient reading abilities (Gellert, 2017). Lambert Elementary’s growth area is literacy scores. The school improvement plan will help increase literacy scores from kindergarten through fourth grade. Lambert Elementary test scores have shown there is a lack of foundational skills across all grade levels.

Lambert Elementary’s school improvement plan’s purpose is to address the lack of teacher knowledge around literacy foundational skills, show the importance of literacy foundational skills in elementary school, and the link between foundational skills to reading abilities. This plan will provide professional development for teachers to enhance their knowledge of literacy foundational skills. According to Iowa School Performance Profiles, it states that 72.78% of students at Lambert Elementary are proficient in literacy (Iowa, 2024). This data shows that there is a lack of literacy skills.

As children continue to grow, they become speakers. As they become speakers, the children need exposure and practice of the phonemes used in spoken and written language. The
literature reviewed stated that children need phonemic awareness before they can conquer phonics and writing or mapping of their spoken language. However, these skills will come easier to some students than others. If early intervention is provided to children, it can help before reading difficulties appear (Rachmani, 2020; Goldstein, et al. 2017).

Phonological awareness is an important skill developed early in a child’s life. The phonological and phonemic skills that children develop are foundational pieces in helping children learn how to read (Gellert, 2017). Teacher knowledge and a lack of a solid phonemic awareness curriculum is a problem that many run into.

Peer-reviewed research articles were found using the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College and were written within the last ten years. The research studies have been peer-reviewed and were not limited to a specific geographic region. The articles included keywords such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, teacher knowledge, and interventions. Research focused on the impact of phonemic awareness, teacher knowledge gaps, and phonemic awareness interventions.

A foundational piece in learning how to read is phonological awareness. These discoveries are valued for early childhood classrooms setting the foundation of reading skills. When phonemic awareness skills are not taught before reading instruction, it can lead to students falling behind their peers. With early intervention, it can provide students with the opportunity to prevent further reading difficulties and gain skills that were lacking prior (Goldstein, et al. 2017). Phonemic awareness is a predictor of reading achievement in children. Teachers will need to be provided with the knowledge to teach these important skills to students to create successful readers (Kenner, et al. 2017).
Review of the Literature

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

The two crucial areas of reading are phonological and phonemic awareness. Rehfled (2022) explains that these areas are a key component of early literacy and are great predictors of future reading abilities. Phonological awareness includes a variety of skills such as rhyming, syllabication, word awareness, sentence awareness, and phonemic awareness (Kenner, et al. 2017). Phonemic awareness is an auditory skill of identifying and manipulating sounds within a word. Over the years, it has become known that phonological and phonemic awareness are serious factors in learning to read. A variety of students at different age levels were taught the importance of these skills.

Rehfled (2022) conducted meta-analysis research on phonemic awareness intervention on students with a possible reading disability. This study focused on 138 students in grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Phonological interventions used incorporated work at the phonemic level and incorporated other literacy skills. Phonemic awareness instruction had the strongest effect on kindergarten and first-grade students. However, older grades showed benefits as well. The results showed that early intervention on phonological skills will benefit students in the future. Rehfled (2022) also suggested that there be further research on the length and frequency of providing these interventions to students.

Early intervention in phonemic awareness and phonological awareness skills has shown positive impacts on students (Rice, 2022). Rice (2022) researched the best instructional practices and their impact on student success. Over 3,600 students from preschool to first grade participated in this study. The study focused on intervention duration, who or what provided the
intervention, and younger students benefitted from the phonemic awareness intervention. The types of interventions tested were teacher-led instruction, parent-led instruction, and computer-led instruction. Students who received early, explicit phonemic awareness instruction benefitted significantly compared to their peers who did not receive phonemic awareness instruction. The outcomes were consistent regardless of who or what instructed the students on phonemic awareness skills and suggested using a computer to teach phonemic awareness instruction to students.

When providing early intervention on phonemic awareness instruction it is important to embed articulation placement strategies to help students develop these skills. Becker and Sylvan (2021) conducted research on targeting articulation when instruction phonemic awareness and the benefits it had on developing phonemic awareness skills in preschool-aged children. Outcomes suggested a benefit to using articulatory placement strategies with phonemic awareness activities. Outcomes also indicated a large difference in phonemic segmentation and reading phonemically spelled words and nonwords when comparing baseline to articulatory placement. By incorporating phonemic awareness interventions with articulatory placement strategies, the results have shown a larger difference in student outcomes compared to a traditional reading program.

Phonological awareness is strongly related to spelling (Bar-Kochva, 2019). Bar-Kochva (2019) studied the relation between spelling and reading of Hebrew. Phonological awareness is relevant to the spelling of orthographies with a variety of phonological representations. The study indicates relations of kindergarten and first-grade rapid-naming and first-grade phonological awareness with second-grade spelling of Hebrew. The study supports that phonological awareness is relevant to spelling development, whether phonemes are entirely or
partially represented in writing. Rapid-naming has been shown to be predictive in the development of literacy skills as soon as kindergarten. Students developing strong phonological awareness skills early on have shown strong spelling skills. Phonological and phonemic awareness are crucial parts when learning to read. If there is a lack of phonological or phonemic awareness in a student, the student may experience reading difficulties. It is very important to build these foundational skills in students early on in their education.

**The Connection of Phonological Awareness and Reading**

Keesy, Konrad, and Joseph (2015) examined the effects of word box instruction and the relation it had on the progression of phonological, reading, and spelling skills of three kindergarteners. The instructional sessions occurred in a classroom with the instructor, Keesy, and the student sitting across from the instructor. The sessions were twenty minutes, two to three times a week throughout the school year. The intervention used word boxes, a counter, preprinted letter cards, dry-erase markers and erasers, and a timer. Students would sound out the word, push up the sounds, and write the letters that correspond with the sounds. The outcomes of this research showed that there is a functional relationship between word box instruction and increased segmenting skills and letter-sound relationship in the three students. The students also showed improvement in spelling and reading. By developing and strengthening segmenting skills, help students segment and blend sounds in unknown words they experience in text and when writing.

Kenner (2017) examined the development of phonemic awareness, specifically segmenting and blending constructs, in two and three-year-old children. Twenty-five two and three years old, for a total of fifty participants, from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and both females and males. Each participant participated in four sessions for each
skill. The skill of segmentation is breaking words into individual phonemes without having to orally produce a response. Students were presented with a picture of a familiar object and were to break the name of the object into pieces. Two puppets were used for students to pick the puppet saying the sounds the ‘right way’. The children also practiced the skill of blending. Children were told one of the puppets was going to say broken words and the students needed to figure out what the puppet was saying. The instructor asked the students to choose the picture that the puppet produced. The outcomes of this research showed by introducing the skill earlier, children were able to perform above chance rates on the phonemic awareness skills of segmentation and blending.

Rehfeld’s (2022) meta-analysis research on phonemic awareness intervention in students with a possible reading disability applies to phonological awareness and reading. The research showed that the early intervention on phonological awareness skills will benefit students in the future. This intervention shows that having an early intervention of phonological skills will help students reading abilities throughout their education.

Bar-Kochva (2019) studied the relation between spelling and reading of Hebrew. Phonological awareness is related to spelling. Phonological awareness is relevant to the spelling of orthographies with a variety of representations. Bar-Kochva’s (2019) study indicates a relationship between kindergarten and first-grade rapid-naming and first-grade phonological awareness with second-grade spelling of Hebrew. This study shows and supports that phonological awareness is important to reading development in children. Building upon phonological skills, helps students strengthen their reading and spelling skills.
Teacher Knowledge of Phonological & Phonemic Awareness

Al Otaiba (2019) researched explicit and systematic approaches to teaching phonemic awareness and word reading skills and the effects of these approaches. The finding of this research shows that teachers having explicit, systematic instruction helps most students understand how speech sounds, or phonemes, map to letters and patterns within words, which can greatly reduce the prevalence of reading problems. This research supports teachers having systematic and explicit instruction will most benefit students and has positive effects on children and their reading skills.

Clark (2017) researched how preservice teachers perform on a teaching knowledge assessment measuring knowledge of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. 87 teachers participated in this research. The pre-service teachers attended one of two universities in the western United States or the Midwest of the United States. The research took place for four years. Clark found that there was a significant difference between the knowledge of teachers between the two universities. The pre-service teachers correctly answered 68% or less of the questions in each category, phonological awareness, phonic, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. These results show teachers were not prepared to teach phonemic and phonological awareness and feel out in all of the areas. This research shows the importance of teacher knowledge and readiness to teach phonemic and phonological awareness.

Purvis (2016) researched the knowledge of pre-service and in-service teachers in language structure. The study examined the effect of language structure coursework that was delivered over seven weeks to 121 New Zealand pre-service teachers in their first year of study. Changes in participants’ phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge were tracked throughout the teaching period. The ability of spelling of pre-service
teachers was compared. The pre-service teachers who demonstrated strong spelling skills responded favorably to the teaching over the teachers who did not have as strong of spelling skills. The results of this study show the development of teacher preparation programs can enhance instructional strategies.

The research Washburn (2016) conducted examined pre-service teachers’ knowledge of basic language constructs across four different English-speaking teacher preparation programs. A standardized survey was given to the participants from Canada, England, New Zealand, and the United States of America. All participants were enrolled in an undergraduate university program which led to teacher certification in general education in primary grades. The results of the survey show that pre-service teachers were prepared in areas that were targeted to be crucial in their country. However, pre-service teachers showed a lack of knowledge of the constructs needed to teach early reading skills. This shows there needs to be an emphasis on teaching early reading skills to preservice teachers. Research has shown teacher knowledge and preparation are very important when teaching phonemic and phonological awareness to students.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Lambert Elementary School is in Manchester, Iowa. Manchester sits about 47 miles from Cedar Rapids, 48 miles from Waterloo, and about 44 miles from Dubuque. According to the 2022 Census, Manchester has a population of 5,179, which broke down to about 1,046 people per square mile. In Manchester, 94.8% of people are white, 4.4% are two or more races, and 2.1% are Hispanic or Latino. About 75.3% of the housing in Manchester is occupied by the
owner. The median housing cost was about $111,300. The median household income was $57,969. (U.S Census Bureau, 2024).

**District & School Characteristics**

The West Delaware Community School District is in Northeast Iowa and serves students from the communities of Manchester, Ryan, Dundee, Greeley, and Masonville. The district has three schools with the district, Lambert Elementary School, West Delaware Middle School, and West Delaware High School. Lambert Elementary serves students in grades preschool through fourth grade. According to the State of Iowa, in the 2022-2023 school year, Lambert had 442 students enrolled. The students were 87.35 white, 5.7% Black/African American, 3.2% Hispanic, 2.9% Multi-Racial, 0.5% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native American, and 0.2% Asian. The student body consisted of 55.4% males and 44.6% females. About 13% of the student population was placed on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). It was also noted that 0.5% of the student population were English Language Learners (ELL). About 49.5% of the students participate in Free and Reduced Lunches. (State of Iowa, 2023)

**School & Mission**

The West Delaware Community School District’s mission and vision combines relationships, challenging academics, and 21st-century skills. The district believes in supporting positive student behavior, enhancing adult and student relationships, active student engagement in rigorous learning, and creating learning experiences through real work context while using career readiness skills. At Lambert, they share a vision to build positive relationships to ensure students feel safe, confident, and supported while teaching ethics to prepare students to be contributing members of society (West Delaware CSD).
**Student Learning Goals**

As a building, Lambert participates in state assessments throughout the school year. These assessments include FastBridge and ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress). Both assessments, assess student knowledge and identify learning gaps. Students are assessed using FastBridge three times a year and ISASP once a year. The district also used its progress reports of state standards to assess students on a proficiency scale. When a student is considered proficient, they will receive a ‘3’ on the standard. Each grade level looks at the data to create specific goals for their grade. The Lambert Building Leadership Team (BLT) also looks at the data. BLT uses the data to create specific building goals focused on student learning. For the 2022-2023 school year, the building goal was to achieve 80% of students receiving a score of ‘proficient’ on their progress reports of essential learning standards in each grade level for literacy and math. As the end of the school year approached, some grades achieved the building goal, and other grade levels that did not. As a building, the goal was not achieved and was analyzed by the BLT over the summer months.

**Student Performance**

When looking at school performance, Lambert had an average school achievement of 55.75% in overall performance, passing the state average of 54.81%. Lambert is put at an overall performance of commendable. Lambert scores 50.77% on English Language Arts performance, just slightly above the state average of over 50%. In math performance, Lambert scored 52.09%, just passing the state average of 50%. (State of Iowa, 2023)
Parent Involvement

In the West Delaware Community School District, parents have a variety of ways they can be involved and stay up to date with their child’s academic progress. The school district uses PowerSchool and JMC to keep parents up to date with attendance, grades, and other announcements. The upper elementary, middle school, and high school use Google Classroom, while the early elementary classroom uses SeeSaw as a communication platform. Student progress reports are sent out three times a year and parents can set up parent-teacher conferences twice a year. The district sends out a monthly newsletter about a variety of things happening throughout the district. Each grade level in the elementary sends out a newsletter specific to the content and learning of the grade. Another opportunity is volunteering; parents can sign up through the volunteer coordinator. Volunteer opportunities can take place at school or home. Parents can also choose to be a part of an organization, like the West Delaware Academic Boost Club (WDABC). Lastly, parents have the option to stay up to date through the district website. Parent involvement is a key factor in their child’s educational needs and success.

Curriculum & Professional Development

Lambert uses a variety of curriculums to focus on math and literacy. In the 2019-2020 school year, Lambert adopted Eureka Math. Eureka is a hands-on curriculum focusing on progressing students through the standards using modules. Before implementing the curriculum, the staff was taken through an intense, detailed professional development. The professional development continued through the first and second years of implementation of Eureka. Lambert uses Wonders for literacy curriculum. In the 2021-2022 school year, the school implemented the 2020 version of Wonders. As stated above, Lambert uses state assessments and progress report assessments to assess students throughout the year. During the 2021-2022 school
year, Lambert focused their professional development on the Science of Reading. This professional development took place during the school year and staff continues to implement their learning since the professional development. In January of 2024, Lambert enrolled in the Lexia LETRS training. This professional development will continue through the 2024-2025 and continue into the 2025-2026 school year.

**Needs Assessment**

Lambert Elementary School has implemented strong curriculums; however, the school could use improvement in its foundational skills curriculum. Lambert currently uses Wonders for its literacy curriculum. Wonders does incorporate foundational literacy skills throughout their weekly units. However, research has shown how students benefit from daily, direct, and explicit instruction (Botts, et al., 2014; Becker & Sylvan, 2021). A suggestion has been made to enhance Lambert Elementary School's literacy program by incorporating a foundational skills program. Phonemic awareness is known to be a vital foundational skill. It has been used to predict future reading abilities in students (Kenner, et al. 2017). To enhance students reading abilities, it is important to implement a curriculum that provides students with the opportunity to master phonemic awareness and other foundational literacy skills. This can be done through a developmentally appropriate curriculum that targets instruction and an early intervention approach for these foundational skills.

Pittman’s (2020) research has shown a lack of teacher knowledge in these phonemic awareness foundational skills. A way to improve teacher knowledge would be professional development that directly relates to the UFLI curriculum that is being implemented. Over the last three years, teachers at Lambert have been participating in professional development regarding the Science of Reading. For the early grades, the professional development focused on
phonemic and phonological awareness foundational skills. Although the professional development of Lexia Letrs will continue for the next two years, it would be beneficial for teachers to participate in professional development regarding the curriculum being implemented. By combining the professional development opportunities, the staff at Lambert Elementary School will increase their knowledge of foundational literacy skills. The students will benefit from the direct and explicit instruction given through a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

**Data Analysis**

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through a variety of assessments throughout the 2022-2023 school year. The data includes yearly historical, and comparative data. The data includes FastBridge state assessments and the school progress report data. The first set of data shown compares data from Lambert Elementary, Keystone AEA, and the Iowa Department of Education (Figure 1). The table shows the percentage of students above or at benchmark on the FastBridge assessments. The goal is for 80% of students to reach the benchmark or be above it.

**Figure 1**

**2022-2023 Comparative Data – Percent At or Above Benchmark on FastBridge Reading Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
<th>Winter 2020</th>
<th>Spring 2021</th>
<th>Spring 2022</th>
<th>Spring 2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Historical data was also collected on Lambert Elementary School (Figure 2). This data shows the percentage of students who reached the benchmark or were above the benchmark on FastBridge reading assessments, earlyReading (K-1), and CBM Reading (2nd-4th). The table is colored to show each grade level to easily see the results of the last three school years.

Figure 2

**Historical Data: Percent at benchmark on Fastbridge Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 20/21</th>
<th>Spring 20/21</th>
<th>Fall 21/22</th>
<th>Spring 21/22</th>
<th>Fall 22/23</th>
<th>Spring 22/23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>K</strong></td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building</strong></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last set of data comes from Lambert’s progress reports. Lambert assesses students on standards three times throughout the school year. The goal is for students to be proficient, scoring a 3, by the end of the school year. The standards that are shown in this data are for Reading Foundational Skills from the Iowa Common Core Standards (n.d). The standards listed are grade-level “priority standards”. The scores are taken from grading period three, which is the end of the school year. The reading foundational skills include the areas of print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency. The table (Figure 3) is broken down by grade level, the standard assessed, and the percentage of students who were proficient.

**Figure 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten Standards</th>
<th>Percentage of students scoring a 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.1.d</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.2.a</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.2.b</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.2.c</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.2.e</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.3.a</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.K.3.b</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Standards</td>
<td>Percentage of students scoring a 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grade Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.1.2.a</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.1.2.b</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.1.2.c</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.1.2.d</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.2.3.a</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.2.3.b</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.2.3.d</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.2.4</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.3.3.a</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF.3.4</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Strengths

While looking at Figure 1, a noted strength is how Lambert Elementary compares to both the surrounding AEA and the state level. Lambert has consistently outperformed the other schools with the Keystone AEA each year. At the state level, Lambert has consistently trailed slightly behind or slightly ahead of the rest of the state. Another strength of Lambert’s is the early childhood grade levels are reaching the proficiency goal for reading foundational skills. The upper elementary grades are almost all over 50% of students reaching proficiency except for second grade on standard RF.2.3.b. However, there are a few standards where grade levels are very close to reaching the 80% proficiency goal.

School Challenges

The data shows challenges throughout Lambert Elementary and within each grade level. It can be seen in the data that the upper-grade levels are lacking in foundational literacy skills. As seen in Figure 3, many students in the upper elementary did not reach proficiency by the end of the school year. Even though Lambert scored right at or above Keystone AEA and the state of Iowa, it can be seen the school has been challenged with being consistently proficient in their state assessments across all grade levels (Figure 2). Even though the state assessments do not directly focus on phonemic awareness skills, the earlyReading assessment has subtests focused
on individual skills. The subtests include letter sounds, beginning sounds, segmenting, and other techniques.

**Action Plan**

**Purposed Improvement Plan**

After reviewing the literature and themes, phonological awareness is a crucial piece of student learning. The literature suggested teachers lack the knowledge needed to properly teach phonemic awareness skills to their students. (Pittman, et al. 2020). The proposed improvement plan pursues to help Lambert Elementary staff increase their knowledge of foundational literacy skills, and in return, student knowledge. Lambert will accomplish this by using the University of Florida Reading Institute Curriculum (UFLI), training the staff in the curriculum, using professional development to further teacher knowledge and develop meaningful discussions, and using their student data to assess the effectiveness of the program and school improvement plan.

The University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) has developed an explicit and systematic program that teaches students the foundational skills necessary to be a proficient reader, UFLI Foundations. The UFLI Foundations curriculum follows a carefully developed scope and sequence designed to ensure students systematically acquire the skills needed to learn and apply to each skill with automaticity and confidence. The program is designed to be used for core instruction in the primary grades and for intervention with struggling readers in any grade. UFLI provides teachers with easy-to-follow lesson plans that follow an eight-step routine: phonemic awareness, visual drill, auditory drill, blending drill, new concept, word work, irregular words, and connected text. The first four steps serve as a warm-up and review of
previously taught concepts. Step five is a direct, explicit introduction to the new concept being taught with guided practice reading and spelling of words. Steps six through eight are opportunities for students to apply concepts through different reading and writing activities (UF Literacy Institute). Research has shown using direct, explicit instruction helps students develop and maintain skills more effectively (Beck & Sylvan, 2021).

**Steps to Solve the Problem**

The following steps describe the implementation of the curriculum training, professional development, and student data analysis. After the curriculum has been reviewed by the administration, the staff will be asked to participate in professional development training days before school starts for the school year. These steps will ensure between the staff and administration within the building throughout the school to help solve the lack of foundational literacy skills at Lambert.

1. Administration approves curriculum by June 1st, 2024.
2. A survey will be sent to teachers for input on which days would work best for curriculum training at the beginning of the school year.
3. Instructional coaches, the curriculum director, and the principal will schedule an in-person professional development for staff before the start of the school year.
4. Staff will participate in professional development. The professional development will last three hours and include an in-depth understanding of literacy foundational skills, model lessons, discussions about content, and any teacher questions. (UF Literacy Institute)
5. At the start of the school year, the instructional coach will pick a random sample of students from each grade level. The instructional coach will give the sample of students the CORE phonics survey and monitor the students’ weekly assessments for data.
6. Students will complete fall state assessments.

7. Teachers will implement the UFLI curriculum daily in whole group and small group (K-2) and skill-based intervention small groups (3-4).

8. Observations
   a. An instructional coach or the curriculum director will come to observe classrooms implementing UFLI. Kindergarten through second grade will be observed in the whole group and small group setting. Third and fourth grade will be observed only in the small group setting. This will allow teachers to ask for feedback or questions. This will also show if the staff is using the curriculum consistently across the grade level.
   b. This will be completed each quarter of the school year.

9. Staff will participate in professional development throughout the school year. The professional development will focus on teachers’ questions or specific foundational literacy skills.

10. Students will complete winter and spring assessments.

11. The instructional coach will share findings based on the random student sample.

12. Teachers will assess students on a proficiency scale for the essential standards with the goal of 80% of students being proficient in each standard.

13. Staff will use data from the school year. Discussions will take place to examine student growth in skills and their challenges, and compare the data throughout past years.

14. Staff will create an implementation plan for the following school year to ensure the growth in foundational skills continues.
These steps may be adjusted as the school year goes on; it is a strong start to strengthening students’ literacy foundational skills. The steps will allow all staff to be in a consensus about where they are at and where they want to be in relation to their success in state assessments and proficiency of state standards. The steps listed above include curriculum training, professional development, and analysis of student data. Developing a timeline, allocating resources, delegating responsibilities, and overseeing the plan are essential steps to ensure the plan’s success.

**Improvement Plan**

**Timeline**

Teachers and administration must adhere to a structured implementation schedule for a successful school improvement plan. Initially, the administration's approval for the new curriculum adoption by June 2024 is crucial. Next, teachers will receive a survey detailing options for professional development sessions regarding the curriculum. After the curriculum has been adopted, teachers will be sent a survey of dates and times for the professional development of the curriculum. Teachers will choose the time best time and day for a 3-hour professional development that works for their schedule. Training will take place before the 2024-2025 school year starts. In September 2024, the instructional coach will select a random group of students from each grade level, kindergarten through fourth grade, to monitor their weekly assessment scores and give them the CORE phonics survey based on their grade level. The instructional coach will keep a running record of assessment scores to be shared at the end of the year.
Teachers will implement the UFLI curriculum in whole group and small group instruction (kindergarten-2\textsuperscript{nd} grade) or small, skill-based interventions (3\textsuperscript{rd}-4\textsuperscript{th} grade) daily using direct, explicit instruction as outlined in the program. While the teachers are implementing the program, they will be observed at four random times throughout the school year. The staff tasked with observing teachers will focus on ensuring the program is implemented correctly and faithfully. Teachers will actively engage in professional development sessions aimed at enhancing their understanding and implementation of the curriculum. These sessions will be carefully planned based on feedback from teachers during their curriculum implementation process. Teachers will conduct FastBridge state assessments three times throughout the year, fall, winter, and spring. Teachers will also assess students on their grading period assessment at the end of each grading period, and UFLI weekly progress monitoring. Finally, data will be collected throughout the year and analyzed. The data will be used to compare past years to the implementation year.

**Staff Responsibilities**

**Administration and Staff Leaders**

The building principal, instructional coach, and curriculum director will be responsible for accepting the UFLI program as a phonemic awareness, phonics, and intervention program. Before June 2024, they will meet to review and approve the school improvement plan to be implemented at the start of the 2024-2025 school year. Once approved, they will set up the training session for staff. The instructional coach will be responsible for gathering a random sample of students to assess in September 2024 and May 2025. The instructional coach will use the CORE Phonics survey based on the students’ grade level and the weekly progress monitoring from a random sample of students. This group will all be responsible for creating
and sending out a Google Form to staff for feedback four times throughout the school year. The feedback from staff will be used to plan professional development throughout the school year. The instructional coach and curriculum director will work together to observe classroom teachers for fidelity checks four times throughout the year. During this time, they will provide feedback to teachers as well. Administration and staff leaders will work together to gather and compare data historically and the growth made throughout the school year.

**Teachers**

Classroom teachers will be responsible for implementing the program with fidelity daily and attending the training for implementing the curriculum. Kindergarten through second-grade teachers will be observed twice for whole-group instruction and twice for small-group instruction. Third and fourth-grade teachers will be observed four times in the small group intervention setting. Teachers will administer state assessments in the fall, winter, and spring assessment periods. They will be asked to fill out a Google Form for feedback about questions or concerns regarding the curriculum. The data from teachers will be used to create professional development for the staff throughout the year. Teachers will also administer grade-level assessments for state standards three times a year, fall, winter, and spring. These assessments are reported to parents once completed. Weekly progress monitoring will be given to students and scores will be collected and monitored by the classroom teacher.

**Monitoring**

The success of the school improvement plan will be monitored through a checklist that will be reviewed monthly. By doing this, it allows staff to ensure they are staying on track for the implementation plan. The effectiveness of the plan will be monitored through the school data
that will be collected throughout the implementation of this plan. The data will be collected from UFLI weekly progress monitoring, state assessments, and progress report assessments. This data will be compared historically and throughout the school year. If the program is deemed successful, it is assumed there will be an increase in student proficiency in the state assessments, state standards, and UFLI weekly progress monitoring. They will also be looking at an increase in student proficiency compared to past years. Reflections from staff will be collected and used to modify or revise the curriculum as needed for the upcoming years.

**Barriers and Challenges**

A common barrier in every school is the time and demand for learning a new curriculum. School administration and school leaders will need to find time to successfully understand and implement the curriculum. School leaders will need to ensure time for discussions about the curriculum and address any questions teachers may have about the curriculum or about how to implement the curriculum correctly. Teachers face another challenge, observations. This may cause teachers to feel nervous or anxious while being observed. The surprise of the observation may also cause teachers to feel anxious or nervous. Administration and school leaders can overcome this barrier by reassuring teachers that this observation is not an evaluation, it is just a fidelity check of the implementation of the curriculum. The last challenge that may be seen is how to successfully implement the curriculum with a variety of factors out of the teacher control. These factors include but are not limited to attendance, behaviors, pull-out times for special education, and other factors. These are challenges to be anticipated with the proposed school improvement plan, however, the teachers and school leaders will work together towards solutions to these challenges if they arise.
Conclusion

Phonemic and phonological awareness skills are perceived to be the foundation of reading success (Kenner, et al. 2017). The research showed themes relating phonemic awareness skills to reading abilities and the lack of teacher knowledge when it comes to terms of basic language constructs. (Martinussen, et al., 2015; Stark, et al.,2016; Washburn, et al., 2016) The problems arise when reading instruction is taught to students before foundation skills are fully developed, lack of teacher knowledge, and a lack of a strong phonemic awareness curriculum. The school improvement plan proposes a focus on phonemic awareness skills and the impact it has on students and their reading abilities, the importance of teacher knowledge related to phonemic awareness, and how to use teachers’ interests to guide professional development. By pairing teacher professional development and direct explicit instruction of phonemic awareness skills, Lambert Elementary School will begin to close the reading achievement gap at their school.
References


Enhancing Foundational Skills Instruction

*Developed for teachers, by teachers, with teachers.* UF Literacy Institute. (n.d.).

https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/


