

Partnering with Parents on Reading Instruction

Hi, my name is Wendy Lundsgaard. I am a literacy specialist, former elementary school teacher. I'm a board member of Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota. And I am a soon to be school board member in the western suburbs of Minneapolis. Welcome to Partnering with Parents on Reading Instruction.

This video is part of a series providing support for effective reading and writing instruction in elementary schools. It has been prepared for principals and other school leaders by the Minnesota Principals Academy at the University of Minnesota and HELP, the Higher Education Literacy Partnership of Minnesota. Thanks for being here.

So today I'm gonna have you do two simulations to get a brief understanding of what it would feel like to struggle to read and write. We're gonna be talking a little bit about assessment and identifying students, how parents can be supported, interventions, and the importance of progress monitoring.

So to kick it off, we're going to start with the first simulation. The purpose is to learn about how difficulty with decoding affects comprehension. So what I'm gonna do is ask you to, let's take a look.

We're going to take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the phoneme translation that you see in bold in the middle of your screen. And then you are going to use that key to read the passage below. So what I would like you to do, I'd like you to take a few minutes. Pause here. Take a few minutes to attempt to read the passage. And then when you are finished, come back. And I will give you a few things to think about. Welcome back. So some things to think about after participating in that simulation. How did it feel to read the story? What was difficult about it? How did you figure out how to read the words? How might a student respond in a similarly challenging classroom situation? What if you were asked to read this text aloud? How would that feel? So think about our students who are having difficulty with decoding a passage. When we ask them to read aloud how that feels. Or we ask them just to read it quietly to themselves. They know they can't read it. And if they can't decode it, we're spending so much time with our working memory just to figure out the words that students aren't even able to comprehend what they're reading. So something to consider.

The second simulation. The purpose is to experience the impact limited spelling and word choice have on writing.

So again, I'd like you to take a few minutes to write a paragraph about what you did yesterday. Keep this screen up, but I am going to ask you to pause. As you are writing, you cannot use the following words: a, and, be, and so on. While spelling words. I want you to substitute "t" for every time you would use the letter "b", and "a" for every time you would use the letter "o". So take a couple of minutes, pause here and write your paragraph, keeping these things in mind. Ok. So now that you have finished writing your paragraph, what were you thinking about while you were writing? How did you decide what to write? How did having to think about spelling and word choice affect your writing? How did you feel while you were trying to write the

paragraph? Do you feel this paragraph that you wrote was a true reflection of your abilities and intelligence? How would you feel if you had to read this page to the class or exchange papers with another student to read it? So difficulty in reading and writing will affect students in all academic areas in school. We're not gonna go through additional simulations, but just a few other things to consider.

Background knowledge affects students' comprehension. So if you look at this, if the known relationship between variables...you can read this. If you don't have any background knowledge from basic college math, this would be a difficult paragraph to comprehend. You might be able to read all the words and understand the structure of the sentences. But possibly the vocabulary, some of the concepts might keep you from understanding the passage.

Another area that can impede comprehension, the structure. Very often students are used to noun, verb. I went to the store. But if you look at a sentence like this, which comes from a fourth grade textbook, you see that the verb doesn't come until the end. So this is also very important to be teaching to the students. A lot of different things that can factor into students not being able to comprehend.

And what you're left with are students that are frustrated and have low self-esteem. And parents who are at a loss, who know something's wrong but have no idea how to fix it and how to help their students. Which is why the leadership at the schools is so important. To help the parents, to walk them through the system, to help them navigate, how to help their kids and how the school will help their kids. They're going to be going on a journey that they have never been on before, didn't expect to go on. Especially those who may have older kids who have gone through the school system with no problem. So it's really important that we are partnering with these parents to help them.

Just some quick background about some federal and state laws that are really important to consider. The first is the Federal Child Find law mandate under IDEA that requires local schools to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who are in need of special education or other related services. This is the responsibility of the schools.

In Minnesota State law, screening and identification for students who are not meeting grade level standards. We need to be screening them for dyslexia. This is not a dyslexia diagnosis. This is not telling the parents that this is necessarily what's wrong with your child or any disabilities they may have. This is saying there are risk factors and this is what we're seeing and sharing that with the parents.

Some universal screeners that are recommended through the Minnesota Department of Education website: aimswebPlus, DIBELS, FAST Bridge Early Reading, STAR Early Literacy. There are others. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is not a universal screener, despite the fact that they say they are. It does not identify what deficiencies the students are facing. So that is not a universal screener.

We want to tell the parents. If a child has dyslexia, we want to define it. There are myths around dyslexia e.g. that students read backwards or see the words backwards and that's not the case.

They see the letters in the words exactly as the rest of us do. They just don't know that sound symbol connection. So they can't decode it. If it's not dyslexia and it's something else, visual processing or an auditory processing, whatever it is, we need to help the parents define what that is so that we can tailor interventions to meet the needs of those students.

Something at Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota that we have created and can be found on our website under resources for parents is an IEP/504 binder. This is really important for parents to be able to house all of the documents that they're gonna be receiving. School documents are the foundation for the story of who the child is as a reader and a student. And so by having these binders, we can see, hey, this, this test score or this assignment, this was not just a one-off. We see a pattern here. So all documents, all test scores, all assignments can be housed in this binder. So if you can direct parents here, there's a link on the website that they can just hit print, and it has all of the tabs needed to house all of the documents. In addition, there's also a very short video that explains to parents how to use this binder. But it's gonna be really important for parents to have a place for all of their resources, notes for meetings. Who was at these meetings? Who are the players who's working with my children or my child? So this is a great resource for parents.

Rowing harder doesn't help if the boat is headed in the wrong direction. You're treating the child you have in front of you. We need to identify the student's most pressing needs and determine which interventions are going to directly impact those needs. So if e.g. your school uses a certain intervention for K-3 or 2 and a different intervention for 3-5, that isn't necessarily going to be the most effective way to address the needs of those students. Because you may have a fifth grader who needs the intervention that a kindergartener needs. And so we need to be choosing and using interventions that directly target students' most pressing needs. We also need to maximize our intervention time with the students. So that if a student can understand the passage if read to that child. Then in my intervention time, I don't need to be working on comprehension and strategies. And maybe not even vocabulary. I need to be targeting decoding if that is what is holding back the child from comprehending the text. Or is it phonological and phonemic awareness? Is it even more foundational? Or is it letter recognition? So I am not, in my interventions, providing a balance of instruction that is not going to be the most effective use of time with the student. We need to be targeting those interventions and whatever is used to intervene with those students, it is really important for everyone to understand why is that intervention being chosen? Why is that instruction being used? And how will it help that student? What is it going to target and what progress do we expect to see? And I can't reiterate that enough, that I see in many, many interventions, maybe a sprinkling of phonics for five-ish minutes and then 15 min on comprehension, when the student needs a full 20 to 30 min of just decoding. So that is gonna be really important and it's gonna be the most effective use of everyone's time.

We want to be thinking about how are we differentiating? And there are many, many decision trees out there that you can choose from. Acadience Learning has a really great one that takes into account phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension and vocabulary, background knowledge, and so on. This is a little more general, but I think it's a good start. So when we're thinking about if the issue is reading comprehension, student is not comprehending at grade level, we need to look at why and which pathway are we going to take for intervention? So if

we're talking about word recognition, thinking of Scarborough's reading rope, we're talking about word recognition, then we need to go back. Is the issue at fluency? Maybe the student can decode, has excellent sight word recognition, but just needs to work on fluency, than that's where we start. If they're not fluent, we go back. Is it because of a decoding? If the answer is they cannot decode, then that is where we start. If they can't decode because they don't have solid phonological awareness proficiency, then that's where we start. So you get the point. So we need to look at each pathway and decide what is going to be the best bang for our buck. Now, if it's strategic knowledge as well, if we only have a short period of time with students, then we need to start at pathway one if that is where. It could also be a pathway three issue. But we need to start at the most foundational level for intervention so that students can be able to read independently quickly. And as they move from pathway to pathway through interventions, if they master word recognition and then it becomes possibly a strategic knowledge, then that's where we, that's where we move. But we have to start with the most foundational skills. And again, not doing a balance of all of it. Because if a student can't decode, then he or she will never be able to read independently and never be able to comprehend. So targeting instruction to the most pressing needs.

We need to be really watching the progress a student has made and communicating this with parents. And not just progress of the student is making, but how does that progress align with his or her peers? And that is going to be critical. The idea of intervention is to catch them up. And so if we look at reading skills, the first graph, we see that Dylan's making progress. Looks great. But then if we look at the progress of Dylan's peers, Dylan is never going to catch up. So what do we need to do as a team? What do I need to do as a leader to ensure that Dylan is getting the correct intervention, the most effective intervention, and time and location and the provider? All of that is really important. And how can we ensure that Dylan is going to be able to catch up? And this slide, this graph on the right, is going to be the most useful so that we are sharing with parents, hey, Dylan's making progress. And we want to see Dylan's progress inching toward the progress of everybody else. And that's the purpose of providing this intervention for the students who need the intervention.

Now, all of this starts with establishing a culture of literacy. And I love, I use these two schools as examples. If you Google either of these schools, you'll hear podcasts where they've been highlighted as really being the leaders in creating this culture of literacy at their schools. So Big Horn Elementary in Wyoming actually really kicked this off on a national level when they were recognized as, hey, look at what they're doing. So they created a newsletter that went home at the beginning of the school year, this was last year, that said, hey, we haven't been doing our best and we can do better. This is how we used to teach reading. And this is how we are going to shift our instruction and our expectations of literacy. And that is really important in letting the parents know what changes are coming. So if parents are used to receiving levels, learning where their students or their child is, reading level D or L. Well, that's not going to happen anymore. And this is why. Or if a child comes home with baggie books every week, well, that's not gonna happen, and this is why. This is what decodables look like and this is why we are making the shift from leveled books to decodables. And then Indiana Area Schools, they put out very similar publication at the very beginning of the school year for their parents. We're going to have links on the HELP website of all the presentations. And so links to these newsletters and additional information about the schools, as well as the podcasts I will make

sure to include. But it's really about establishing that culture of literacy, not just amongst teachers, but also the students and the parents. And I think it's also really important that the students are understanding that literacy isn't just a block, right? Literacy happens all day long. Literacy happens if the Phy Ed teacher puts on the chalkboard the rules of a game. That's literacy, students are being asked to read. And so it's important that all of the teachers understand that we are all in this together for all of the students. And how can we support them? If I am a tenth grade science teacher, I am a literacy teacher because students are gonna be reading vocabulary that they have no idea about. So I, as a science teacher, need to understand the best practices in teaching vocabulary to students for comprehension. The way they read a science textbook is very different than the way they're going to read their Harry Potter books. So we're looking at the structure of the text in a science book is going to be very important. We're all teachers of literacy. I have never been one to take, I'm sure you've heard K-2 or K-3 is learning to read and 3-5 and on up is reading to learn. You're always learning to read whenever the text is complex. Students need instruction and how do they overcome any obstacles a text presents in order to understand it and giving them the tools and the best practices in learning how to overcome those obstacles. And so that is also part of this culture of literacy. And you'll get that in the podcast that I include in the links.

Here are from two of the podcasts that I wanted to pull out two different ideas. Just take a look at. So again, having this mindset that we're all in this together.

It's really important that we are building a foundation for academic success. And interventions, scaffolds for lifelong learning. Again, to reiterate, targeting instruction. We need to be walking the parents through the process. On the Minnesota Department of Education website, there is a dyslexia tab. And in that there's a link for parents on how to navigate the school system. I wish that link didn't exist. But because parents need the schools to help them navigate the school system. This presentation, I didn't want to provide resources for all of you on where you can send parents. My hope is that all of this will be done internally. That the leadership, the interventionists, the resource specialists, everybody can help the parents navigate the system. They're gonna be scared. They're worried, they have no idea. And in today's system, a lot of parents have had to become experts on how to help their students. And we don't want that. We want the teachers who we trust, the schools, we send our students. We want all of this to be taken care of in-house to the extent that it can be and helping these parents navigate the system so that they don't have to go become experts on their own.

So thank you for your time. Again, here are your sponsors and have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you.