

Essential Practices in Early Literacy

System Diagnostic

Instruction Partners' early literacy system theory of action

If we support partners by diagnosing where support is needed in early literacy, then they can effectively implement components of the essential practices creating a system that is oriented towards effective early literacy support, which results in students being provided with strategic instruction improving student mastery of foundational early literacy skills and benchmarks.

How to use this tool

This document is designed to support leaders in reflecting on how the essential practices are currently implemented in their systems and to measure their growth over time. It can also be used to collect artifacts aligned to each indicator to inform key action planning and next steps across the system.

Users should review the [essential practices overview](#) prior to using this tool.

To edit this resource electronically, we suggest the following:

- Make a copy of this document (File > Make a copy).
- Share the document with the appropriate team members (select “Share” in the upper right-hand corner).



Essential practices self-assessment and notes

Essential practice 1: Vision

Establish a vision for early literacy instruction that is anchored in both the science of reading¹ and the belief that all students can and will read independently and proficiently by the end of 2nd grade.

Indicator	On a scale from 1–4, how present is this indicator within your system?	Notes/Artifacts to support rating
The school system has a written vision for early literacy that clearly communicates both a commitment to using the science of reading and the mindset that all students can be readers by the end of 2nd grade.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
All stakeholders have a clear understanding of the vision, including their individual role in working towards that vision, which is reflected in team communication, collaboration, and instructional decision making.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	

¹ Instruction Partners defines the science of reading as a systematic and explicit foundational skills program as well as content-rich knowledge building.



Essential practice 2: Materials

Use standards-aligned and coherent curricular materials effectively to facilitate data-driven instruction anchored in the science of reading.

Indicator	On a scale from 1–4 how present is this indicator within your system?	Notes/Artifacts to support rating
Tier 1 curricular materials are anchored in the science of reading and include both a systematic and explicit foundational skills program as well as content-rich reading materials that support knowledge building.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Tier 1 curriculum aligns to the assessments and instructional resources used in the school(s) and across the system.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Teachers seamlessly use curriculum-embedded assessments and curriculum-provided support materials to drive whole-group and small-group instruction and strategically move students towards reading proficiency.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Tiered intervention programs are structured and systematic; they amplify and accelerate learning from Tier 1 materials.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	



Essential practice 3: Data

Use quality data and assessment resources consistently, cohesively, and strategically to drive instructional decision making for all students.

Indicator	On a scale from 1–4 how present is this indicator within your system?	Notes/Artifacts to support rating
The assessment system in place includes: • a universal screener that assesses all students’ proficiency towards grade-level benchmarks at least three times per year; • a diagnostic assessment that pinpoints the specific skills students have mastered and/or where they need further instruction and practice; • progress monitoring tools to determine how students are progressing against their individual goals and learning targets; and • formative assessments from the curriculum to assess if students are learning what is being taught. –	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	



Established data cycles outline how data will be collected, analyzed, and used by teachers and the early literacy team. Data cycles include: • monitoring student progress against their individual goals using data from multiple sources, including universal screener, progress monitoring, and classroom formative data and teacher observation; • determining the effectiveness of instruction and/or interventions and making adjustments as needed to support student mastery; and • adjusting tier placement for students based on clear entry and exit criteria for intervention, with an emphasis on exiting students as flexibly and quickly as possible.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Nationally-normed, predictive, grade-level benchmarks determine student growth targets and on-grade-level performance.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Each student has explicit goals they are working towards, and those goals are transparent between teachers, students, and families.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	



Student data is disaggregated by demographics to ensure the needs of priority groups ² are centered when making all instructional decisions.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Families and caregivers are well informed of their child’s progress to goals and play an active role in supporting their child in their journey towards reading proficiency.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	

²Instruction Partners has identified the following four priority groups: students of color, students in poverty, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.



Essential practice 4: Team

Build a well-trained and specialized early literacy team to facilitate a flexible and equitable early literacy program that systematically moves students towards reading proficiency.

Indicator	On a scale from 1–4 how present is this indicator within your system?	Notes/Artifacts to support rating
Each school has an early literacy team in place. Members include (but are not limited to) district and school leaders, coaches, teachers, interventionists, and coordinators of English language learners and special populations, each of whom understands their role and responsibilities. Leaders at both the school and district levels are responsible for effective implementation.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Early literacy team members are well trained and have strong content knowledge and a clear understanding of how to productively use data to move all students towards reading and writing proficiency.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Members of the early literacy team evaluate and refine intervention implementation and resources through data analysis cycles and walkthroughs.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
The early literacy team uses data analysis of interventions in combination with Tier	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly	



1 data to plan for ongoing professional learning opportunities, coaching support, and supplemental materials needed for effective implementation.	2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Team members from across the school and/or system strategically support small-group Tier 1 instruction and intervention to ensure students meet their goals.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
All adults supporting the early literacy program engage in ongoing professional learning, including training and coaching in the science of reading and the specific curricular resources being used.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	



Essential practice 5: Time

Maximize and direct all available time to continuously improving the effectiveness of instruction and intervention, including ongoing adult professional learning.

Indicator	On a scale from 1–4 how present is this indicator within your system?	Notes/Artifacts to support rating
School and system schedules provide no less than 120 minutes each day for students to engage in Tier 1 literacy instruction and receive necessary tiered interventions.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
The schedules of the early literacy team regularly allow them to conduct collaborative whole-group and small-group instruction walkthroughs, meet and analyze data, and reflect on intervention program effectiveness.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
All adults who support the early literacy program allocate time to receive weekly, ongoing professional learning.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	
Teachers, coaches, and leaders reserve time to engage in data cycles.	4 — Fully 3 — Mostly 2 — Somewhat 1 — Not at all	



Final reflection

Based on your system reflections above, which essential practice(s) and/or specific indicators would you prioritize in the coming school year? Why?