

**Merton Act 20 Frequently Asked Questions**  
Communicated via Primary Smore in Spring 2024  
Revised 12.2.24

**What is Act 20?**

On July 19, 2023, Governor Tony Evers signed the 2023 Act 20 reading legislation into law. This law moved the state toward phonics-orientated literacy instruction and received bipartisan support and a nod of approval from the DPI. This law aligns Wisconsin with dozens of other states.

**How is Act 20 going to affect Merton Primary School?**

Act 20 is a large bill with many implications for school districts. Our legal council gave us a list of 73 action steps over the next few years. Below is a list of the most important implications for our Merton families and community members:

- A local evaluation of the existing early literacy curriculum- Even before Act 20 was passed, the District's curriculum renewal and design process had us reviewing our current literacy program and instruction.
- All Kindergarten-Third Grade Students in Wisconsin will take the same state-selected reading readiness screener with no parent opt-outs.
- ANY student beneath the 25% percentile on the State screening assessment will receive a "personal reading plan" including parent partnerships.
- A change to our current retention and promotion policy.
- Summer school requirements
- Required teacher and administrator training.

**Reading Readiness Screener Information**

Portions taken from DPI Website

**What are the new reading readiness screener requirements?**

A single reading readiness screener will be administered to Wisconsin students in 4K (four-year-old Kindergarten) through grade 3 beginning in the school year 2024-2025, three times per year.

**What will the new readiness screener be?**

After following the state of Wisconsin's procurement process, the Department of Administration selected **aimswEBPlus** as the required fundamental reading skills and universal reading screener.

**What will be assessed on the new reading readiness screener?**

Act 20 states that learners in 4K must be evaluated on phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. Act 20 states that learners in 5K through grade 3 must be evaluated on phonemic awareness, decoding skills, alphabet knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and oral vocabulary.

**Can parents opt out of the new reading readiness screener requirements?**

No. Families cannot opt their child out of this requirement.

**What notification is required for families?**

Beginning in the winter of 2024-2025 school year, provide parents and families with the results of the reading readiness screener no later than 15 days after the assessment is scored in an understandable format that includes all of the following:

- The child's score on the reading readiness assessment.
- The reading readiness assessment assessed the child's score in each early literacy skill category.
- If available, the child's percentile rank score on the reading readiness assessment.
- The definition of “at-risk” and the score on the reading readiness assessment would indicate that a pupil is at-risk.
- A plain language description of the literacy skills the reading readiness assessment is designed to measure.

Aimsweb assessment results will be sent home through our new data warehouse system, NextPath. Additional information on how to access the results will be given after your child takes the assessment via Skyward Messenger. i-Ready results will be available in Skyward via the student portfolio. .

**What happens after the universal screening assessment is given?**

The law requires school districts to administer a separate “diagnostic assessment” to each student who scores below the 25th percentile on the universal screener; and any time that a parent or teacher suspects that the student has characteristics of dyslexia.

The good news is in Merton, we have already been doing this best educational practice. Our staff reviews our students’ data after each i-Ready screening and after running records during our professional development time. All students that we have currently scored under the 29th percentile have been given additional diagnostics to see if they need additional support in reading and mathematics.

### **Why does the law require additional diagnostic assessments to be given?**

Occasionally, student scores from one screener may fall below the 25th percentile and require additional diagnostic screening. This can happen for a variety of reasons, and it does not necessarily mean that the student is struggling. Measurement error, inherent in all assessments, can contribute to a score. Scores can also be affected by things like stress, distractions, lack of sleep, anxiety, hunger, interruptions, taking it in a different place, or testing accommodations/support. Using the “total picture” of what we know about a student will guide your next step.

Additional diagnostic assessments are longer and more in-depth than the screening assessments and may or may not be standardized. While screeners are quick assessments of basic skills, diagnostics can provide clarity to a student’s specific patterns of strengths and needs.

If universal screeners are similar to taking a child’s temperature check to identify problems briefly and cost-effectively, diagnostic assessments are similar to more comprehensive blood tests or diagnostic imaging to dig deeper into a problem. Do they have strep throat, a cold, or maybe an ear infection? Here is one of my [favorite videos](#) from Dr. Craig Pohlman, Director of Mind Matters, to help explain.

### **Personal Reading Plan Information**

Portions taken from DPI Website

#### **Which students receive a Personal Reading Plan?**

Any child in grades K-3 who scores below the 25th percentile on the reading readiness screener must receive a personal reading plan. **However, it does not necessarily mean that the student is struggling.** Measurement error, inherent in all assessments, can contribute to a score. Scores can also be affected by things like stress, distractions, lack of sleep, anxiety, hunger, interruptions, taking it in a different place, or testing accommodations/support.

#### **What is a Personal Reading Plan?**

Using the “total picture” of our additional assessments, family involvement, and what we know about a student will guide each student’s plan. The plan may be simple or intense based on each student’s needs. The plan may include intensive interventions with our reading team, additional reading groups in the classroom, push-in services with the instruction taking place in the classroom during independent work time, differentiated instruction, or other student support services

The plan must include all of the following:

- The student's specific early literacy skill deficiencies, as identified by the applicable assessment (s).
- Goals and benchmarks for the student's progress toward grade-level literacy skills.
- How the student's progress will be monitored.
- A description of the interventions and any additional instructional services provided to the student to address the early literacy skill deficiencies.
- The programming that the student's teacher will use to provide reading instruction. This programming must align with the definition of science-based early literacy instruction as stated in Act 20 and address the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Strategies parents are encouraged to use to help their child achieve grade-level literacy skills.
- Any additional services available and appropriate to accelerate the student's early literacy skill development.

### **Who creates a Personal Reading Plan?**

Merton school district is responsible for creating the personal reading plan.

### **What is the families' role in the Personal Reading Plan process?**

Every child's first and most important teachers are the families. Families and teachers have important information about a child's skills, preferences, interests, experiences, and needs that can be exchanged in an ongoing relationship. Merton will include the family in the plan development process. We will also provide a copy of the personal reading plan and strategies that can be completed at home to support their child.

## **Reading Curriculum Information**

Portions taken from DPI Website

### **What is required of school districts when it comes to their reading curriculum?**

For all districts that have an elementary school, implementing Act 20 will require the following:

1. A local evaluation of the reading program that includes the district's existing early literacy program; the current methods of providing reading instruction including interventions; and the reading-related instructional materials in use.
2. This review process needs to account for Act 20's prohibitions **beginning in the 2024-2025** school year.

Even before Act 20 was signed into law, the Merton Community School District curriculum review process was already aligned with the updated English Language Arts Standards (2020). Our six-eighth grade program reviewed their program during the 2022-2023 school year, and K-5 during the 2023-2024 school year. We are in a great position to implement this legal requirement.

### **How does a District select reading resources under Act 20?**

School Districts can purchase and implement the curriculum, intervention, or supplementary instructional resource if we can answer yes to both of the following questions:

1. Does the curriculum, intervention, or supplementary instructional resource follow a specific scope and sequence?
2. Does the curriculum, intervention, or supplementary instructional resource require the learner to apply their knowledge of phonics to solve an unknown word?

Districts can also select materials that the Joint Committee on Finance approved on March 11, 2024.

### **What type of early literacy instruction and intervention do schools need to provide?**

Act 20 states that all Wisconsin schools are required to provide science-based early literacy instruction in both universal and intervention settings. Science-based early literacy instruction is defined below.

Instruction that is systematic and explicit and consists of all the following:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Building background knowledge
- Oral language development
- Vocabulary building
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in comprehension
- Reading fluency

Phonics is defined as the study of the relationships between sounds and words; this includes alphabetic principle, decoding, orthographic knowledge, encoding, and fluency.

The Wisconsin Standards for ELA 2020 defines fluency as being composed of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody.

### **Reading Instruction Information**

National Center on Improving [Literacy](http://improvingliteracy.org) (2022). The Science of Reading: The Basics. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Improving Literacy. Retrieved from <http://improvingliteracy.org>.

## **What is Science of Reading (SOR) Instruction?**

### **What it IS**

#### **A Collection of Research**

Research, over time, from multiple fields of study using methods that confirm and disconfirm theories on how children best learn to read.

#### **Teaching Based on the 5 Big Ideas**

- **Phonemic Awareness** - The ability to identify and play with individual sounds in spoken words.
- **Phonics** - Reading instruction on understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds to form letter- sound relationships and spelling patterns.
- **Fluency** - The ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly, with enough speed, and expression.
- **Vocabulary** - Knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly.
- **Comprehension** - The ability to understand what you are reading.

#### **Ever Evolving**

There is new research and evidence all the time. As populations, communities, and approaches evolve, so should practice.

### **What it is NOT**

#### **A program, an intervention, or a product that you can buy.**

The Science of Reading could be considered an approach to teaching reading that is based on decades of research and evidence. It is NOT a specific program.

#### **Phonics-based programs that drill phonics skills.**

Phonics is an integral part of teaching reading based on science, but it is just one of the five big ideas that should be taught so all children can learn to read.

#### **Complete and no more study needs to be done.**

As with any science, it is never complete. We can always know more. More study happens all the time and researchers, teachers, and families can work together to bring the best research into classrooms.

**What type of early literacy instruction is prohibited?**

Act 20 states that three-cueing instruction and curricula are prohibited in grades K through 3. Three-cueing instruction is defined as, "...any model, including the model referred to as meaning, structure, and visual cues, or MSV, of teaching a pupil to read based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues or memory." This prohibition applies when the instructional goal is for the learner to solve unknown words.

**Does this mean that schools are prohibited from providing any instruction in sight words or context clues?**

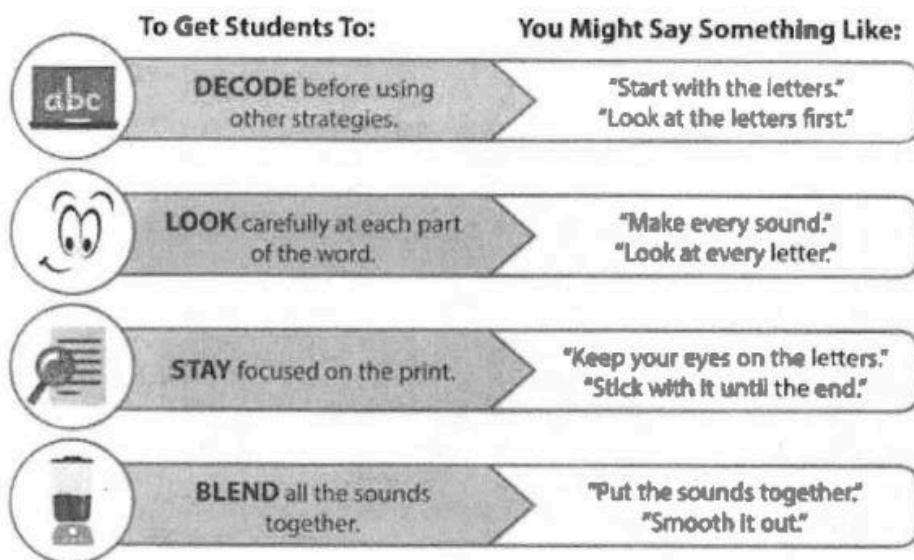
The purpose of delivering instruction in reading foundational skills is to build automaticity in making meaning of written text. When prompting a learner for word-solving, educators should first and foremost be prompting for phonics. The term sight word refers to any word that is read with automaticity (Ehri 2005, 167-188). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the goal of reading instruction is for the majority of words to become sight words.

The WI DPI recognizes that using context clues is an evidence-based instructional approach when the goal is to support comprehension and building vocabulary (Capin et al., 2020; Foorman et al., 2016; Kuhn & Stahl, 1998; Nash & Snowling, 2010).

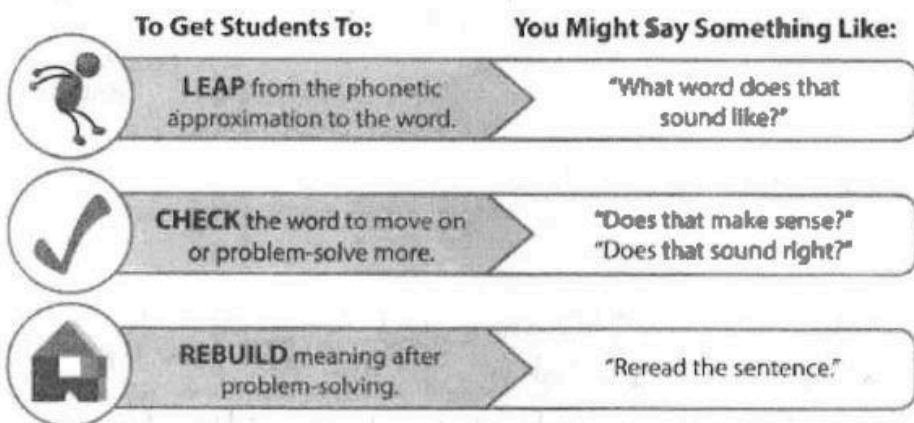
Therefore, instruction in using context clues is allowable and appropriate when the learning goal is related to vocabulary and comprehension skill building.

In a recent professional learning session at Merton Primary, we discussed this shift in instructional practice by using the graphic included in this section.

## Look: Start with the Print



## Leap: Add Context



*Shifting the Balance by Jan Burkins and Kari Yates. Copyright © 2021.*

**I heard that this law requires Districts to change their promotion policies and children are held back if they can't read in third grade. What does that mean for students and families?**

Act 20 requires local school board policy mandates, and a promotion policy is one of those mandates. The law requires DPI to create a model (or example) policy for promoting students from third grade to fourth grade that includes reading achievement criteria. Each school district must adopt and implement



their own policy for promoting students from third grade to fourth grade that includes reading achievement criteria. This policy must be adopted and implemented by July 1, 2025. School districts are already required to have a policy for promoting students from fourth grade to fifth grade and from eighth grade to ninth grade. Merton's current promotion and retention policy 345.4 can be [found here](#), and will be updated to reflect this requirement during the 2024-2025 school year. We do not know what may change in our current promotion or retention practices.

**I know many more pieces to the Act 20 law affect schools. What are some of those other areas?**

- Statewide Literacy Coaches- DPI has funding to hire additional literacy coaches that will be hired through our local CESAs to work in Districts based on data and gaps in the State assessment.
- There are required reading training sessions for all K-3 classroom teachers, reading staff, and administration.
- Data Collection and Reporting- Districts beginning in July 2025 will report several data points. Mostly it includes the diagnostic reading assessments used, the number of identified at-risk students, the number of students receiving and exiting intervention, personal reading plans, and special education referrals.
- Early Literacy Curriculum Council- composed of 9 individuals appointed to the committee, they will review and recommend instructional materials, and advise on hiring the Director of the Wisconsin Reading Center.
- Teacher College Preparation Programs- Universities need to meet new teacher training requirements for anyone licensed beginning July 1, 2025.

**Wow! There are A LOT of changes from this Act 20 legislation. What do you think is most important for Merton families?**

- Act 20 requires the SAME universal literacy screener (assessment) for all Kindergarten-Third Graders in Wisconsin. It will start next Winter 2024-2025 (changed from fall by legislators in April 2024)
- If your child scores below the 25 percentile, Merton will give them additional diagnostic assessments. We will host a meeting to update you about your child's reading and develop a Personal Reading Plan.
- Merton will implement a new literacy curriculum aligned with the Act 20 requirements. Join us for a literacy night next year!
- Merton is prepared! Our literacy team has been working all year in preparation to meet the changes in the law. We are ready to partner with our students, families and community to continue to grow our amazing students.

# The Science of Reading

## The Basics

There are so many pieces to the Science of Reading that it can be difficult to know where to start. Here are a few highlights about what the Science of Reading IS and what it IS NOT. This knowledge will help you on your journey to teaching all children, including those with diverse needs and cultural backgrounds, to read.

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