

An Update on Elementary Literacy (June 2023- updated version coming soon)

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We hope the information below gives an overview of the literacy programs we have in place at Chickering Elementary School and Pine Hill Elementary School. If you have additional questions, please contact Dr. Deb Reinemann, Chickering principal, Dr. Barbara Brown, Pine Hill principal, or Denny Conklin, Assistant Superintendent. Thank you to our elementary literacy coaches who helped create this document.

What has guided Dover-Sherborn's philosophy to literacy?

Dover-Sherborn utilizes the [MA DESE ELA Frameworks](#) and specifically focuses on aligning curriculum and instruction to the 11 Guiding Principles for English Language and Arts and Literacy outlined on page 18 of the frameworks document. We have also utilized research on reading, writing, speaking and listening in order to inform the essential components of a literacy program that meets the needs of all students (see below).

What are the essential components of an elementary literacy program?

In kindergarten and first grade, brief and engaging phonemic awareness instruction helps students understand and manipulate the sound structure of English. Research shows phonemic awareness is fundamental to successful acquisition of phonics. ([more on Mass Literacy](#))

- Phonemic awareness activities are quick word games that help students develop the ability to:
 - Isolate particular sounds (for learning letter-sound correspondences);
 - Put sounds together into whole words (blending for reading);
 - Take the sounds in a word apart (segmenting for spelling); and
 - Manipulate sounds to become more flexible (if I can read “lap,” I can read “flap”).
- Phonemic awareness activities are strengthened when graphemes (letter/s) are used and explicitly linked to phonics.
- Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers utilize the [Heggerty Phonemic Awareness](#) program to facilitate the development of phonemic awareness. In addition, the Revised Units of Study (RUOS) K-2 have optional phonological awareness extension activities that teachers can utilize.
- Phonemic awareness instruction may be utilized as part of reading interventions across the grades.

In K-2 classrooms, explicit, sequential phonics instruction is integral to teaching students sound-symbol correspondences for reading and spelling. ([more on Mass Literacy](#))

- [Wilson Foundations](#) is a research-based synthetic phonics program that uses a multisensory approach to teach and reinforce foundational skills for reading, spelling, and handwriting.
- Decodable texts and the revised reading units of study support students in their awareness and application of phonics in connected text.
- Teachers can differentiate foundational skill instruction through small groups during readers' workshop and the use of Lexia Core5, a [research-proven](#) adaptive learning program. Students in K-2 have access to Lexia and may work in the program on below, at, or above grade-level skills.

Fluency practice is embedded in Foundations and the Revised Units of Study K-2. Fluent reading is associated with improved comprehension, and opportunities to work on fluency help students consolidate the foundational skills they have learned. ([National Reading Panel Report, p 3-8](#))

- Reading fluency is accurate, rapid, expressive oral reading, which is facilitated by efficient word recognition (National Reading Panel).
- The Foundations program includes activities for developing automaticity and fluency at the word, phrase, and passage levels. These activities reinforce the phonics and high-frequency words taught explicitly to students and model appropriate phrasing of connected text.
- The revised reading units of study K-2 include specific teaching points to encourage fluency, including: rereading of texts, scooping words into phrases, and reading with expression. In addition, during readers' workshop, students read aloud with a partner, during which teachers may provide corrective feedback and modeling.
- Print exposure is important in facilitating fluent reading and readers' workshop provides a structure for immersing students in text and motivating students to read independently ([p. 26 Motivating Children to Read](#))
- **Shift in Practice** - Teachers are shifting their approach to teaching high-frequency or "trick words," using routines to draw students' attention to graphemes that are regular and those that are irregular and need to be "learned by heart" or memorized. This represents a shift from past practice, during which students worked to memorize high-frequency words by sight.

Comprehension of texts is facilitated through explicit teaching of reading strategies during mini-lessons. Using a gradual release method of instruction, teachers model a strategy, guide students through practicing the strategy, and then provide opportunities for independent application.

- The National Reading Panel Report identified the benefits of teaching students strategies that promote active engagement with texts, such as summarizing, questioning, predicting, clarifying, using background knowledge, and visualizing while reading. Teaching of these strategies recurs across the reading units of study ([National Reading Panel](#)).
- Many teaching points support active self-regulation and self-monitoring while reading. Students are supported in recognizing when comprehension has broken down so they can work to repair understanding.
- Students interact in reading partnerships, book clubs, and research clubs to discuss their reading. Cooperative learning structures, where students interact using taught reading strategies, are shown to increase reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, p. 267).

Readers develop a knowledge of different genres, text structures, and text features through engaging in genre-based units of study in reading and writing.

- Across K-5 reading and writing units, students learn about narrative and expository text structures. Students are taught about narrative story elements and the story arc. In nonfiction units, they learn informational text structures (chronological, descriptive, cause and effect, problem and solution, and compare and contrast). Knowledge of these text structures helps students attend to and organize the most important information.
- Through the reading units of study, students learn the "nuances of subgenres" like historical fiction, fantasy, and narrative nonfiction texts. They learn how books of these genres "tend to go" and

how to approach them as strategic readers. For example, in third grade, students learn they can read biographies through the lens of a story and to learn information about a topic or time period.

- During nonfiction research clubs, students learn to research science and social studies topics, using nonfiction text structures and note taking strategies (boxes and bullets, T-charts) to summarize information. These units build students' background knowledge within a particular topic.

The workshop model for reading instruction is an approach that allows for differentiation to meet and engage all learners, while ensuring, during mini-lessons, that all students receive direct instruction using grade-level mentor texts.

- All students are rallied around a focused mini-lesson with application to independent reading.
- Teachers then meet with students individually or in small groups to offer differentiated, targeted instruction designed to move students along their own developmental reading trajectories. Students may receive targeted instruction through thematic book clubs, individual conferences, small groups that center around a particular strategy/skill and application to text.
 - This provides students with ample opportunity to push beyond grade-specific standards and boundaries if they are ready.
 - Similarly, students who need foundational skill instruction can receive this in small groups within the context of their classroom reading block.

What literacy programs do our elementary students use?

- Phonics
 - [Foundations](#) (K-2); integrated throughout grade 3 based on student need
- Phonemic awareness
 - [Heggerty](#) Phonemic Awareness (K - all students, Gr 1-2 Tier 2)
- Word Study
 - [Words Their Way](#) (Gr. 4-5 Pine Hill)
 - [Spelling Connections](#), Word Study Approach (Gr. 4 Chickering) - pilot
- Reading
 - [Units of Study in Reading](#)
 - Revised Units of Study K-2 launched in the 2023-2024 school year.
- Writing
 - [Units of Study in Writing](#) (Pine Hill)
 - [Empowering Writers](#) (Chickering)

How were these programs selected?

In 2010, Pine Hill began working with literacy consultants to integrate the workshop model into their practice. In 2018, Pine Hill began piloting the Units of Study as a means of formalizing their model; they were officially adopted in 2019. Simultaneously, Foundations was adopted as the phonics curriculum providing for a comprehensive literacy program.

In the absence of a reading program, Chickering piloted a few Units of Study in 2020. After attending the Reading Institute at Teachers' College and implementing a few units, participating teachers shared tremendously positive feedback.

Having consulted with literacy directors and curriculum coordinators in like districts, and in an attempt to bring consistency to reading instruction across our two elementary schools, Chickering adopted the Units of Study for Reading in 2021. (Note: Units of Study are used in Acton-Boxborough, Belmont, Brookline, Lexington, Lincoln, Medfield, Needham, Newton, Sudbury, Wellesley, Weston and Westwood).

The Units of Study published updated K-2 units in 2022 that further integrate the Science of Reading into practice; the new units have been adopted at both Chickering and Pine Hill. These, together with the evidence-based programs outlined above (Foundations, Heggerty, and word study programs like Words Their Way) provide for a comprehensive literacy program at the elementary level.

The district's literacy roadmap can be found [here](#).

How are we monitoring the effectiveness of our literacy programs?

A variety of assessments are utilized to measure progress, identify trends in student learning data, and determine the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.

- In K-3rd grades, DIBELS mCLASS Amplify, [a DESE approved screening tool](#), is used to assess important foundational subskills. These screening assessments look at rapid naming (a risk indicator), alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonic decoding, word identification, and oral reading fluency and accuracy.
- Dyslexia Screening Measures are in place in K-3rd grades to identify students who show potential indicators of dyslexia, such as weak phonological awareness, underdeveloped phonics skills, or rapid naming difficulties, so that early and targeted intervention can be provided. When students are flagged by the dyslexia screening, parents are notified and an intervention plan is put in place. These Dyslexia Screening Measures are in line with the [guidance that MA DESE has provided](#).
- Running Records, which provide a reading level, are administered across grades K-5. Running records are a system of texts that increase in complexity. Teachers listen to students read a portion of a text aloud to assess their reading accuracy and fluency. Then, they ask the student a series of questions to assess their literal and inferential comprehension. Running Records give teachers information about what kinds of texts and teaching points they can utilize for instruction. While the assessment provides an instructional level for students, it is only one source of information used by teachers to match and support students with complex texts.
- Informal curriculum-based measures such as Foundations Unit Tests, Phonics Assessments, Spelling Inventories, written responses to reading, and writing samples are utilized.

Teachers engage in data teams and progress monitoring meetings to analyze student data and design interventions that are responsive to student needs.

- During W.I.N. (What I Need) Blocks, students who have been identified through literacy screening and diagnostic assessments receive targeted interventions and their progress in response to this instruction is monitored and adjusted accordingly.

What is the Dover-Sherborn curriculum review process like?

- Dover-Sherborn Public Schools engage in a [5-year curriculum review cycle](#) which is a thorough process of reflecting on curriculum, updating ourselves on research/best practices in each content area, and then assessing whether any curricular changes are necessary. Post-COVID we are working to re-establish these cycles.

How is the district adapting its literacy practices?

We have re-examined the three-cueing systems model for reading.

- Proficient readers process letters of a word and match them to the individual speech sound to read; they do not circumvent phonics, even though the process is rapid. The three-cueing systems model for reading does not align with reading research and the compensatory strategies promoted by this model are ineffective (LETRS Volume 1, Moats & Tolman). The three-cueing model maintains that readers use meaning, syntax, and visual information simultaneously to identify words, and the use of these sources of information is equally important. Lucy Calkins and Teachers College have moved away from three-cueing in their revised units of study.
- **Shift in Practice** - Teachers may have been taught to interpret student reading errors using the three-cueing model and to prompt students to attend to context, picture clues, or initial sounds to identify an unknown word. Now, when students make an error in their oral reading, teachers support students with decoding first.
- **Shift in Practice** - The use of decodable text provides students with the opportunity to apply phonics strategies to connected text and minimizes the likelihood that students will encounter words that require them to rely on context clues, partial sound information, or pictures. Previous practice engaged students in leveled text that was not controlled for specific phonics principles, making it difficult for students to practice and apply discrete skills. Now teachers utilize a combination of decodable texts and uncontrolled text when working with small groups ([p. 15-16 A Role for Decodable Books](#)). This upcoming year, the district has purchased the [Geodes](#) decodable texts for grade K and 1 classrooms.

Finally, the Dover-Sherborn Public Schools believes that it is important for students to see themselves and the identities of others in the texts that they engage with; as Rudine Sims Bishop states, books function as [windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors](#) for students as they read. Additionally, in the 2022-2023 school year, the district launched a curriculum audit process to identify strengths and gaps in its curriculum and instructional materials. As part of this curriculum audit, teachers have been examining the reading Units of Study and identifying areas where additional books and materials can supplement the curriculum's recommended texts. For more on the curriculum audit and components of a high quality curriculum, please see the slides from the District's ["Focus on Curriculum"](#) webinar with particular attention paid to slides 15-27.

Glossary of Terms:

- Phonological awareness - The awareness of the speech sound system including word boundaries, syllables, onset-rime patterns, and sounds.
- Phonemic awareness - The awareness of individual speech sounds and the ability to manipulate those sounds.
- Phonics - Code-based instruction that teaches students the sounds a letter or group of letters spell.
- Phoneme - A speech sound. English has 40-44 speech sounds that combine to make words.
- Grapheme - A letter or combination of letters that spells a sound (e.g., a, ay, tch, igh).
- Decoding - The process of mapping speech sounds onto print to read a word, using knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences.
- Encoding - The process of converting speech sounds to graphemes to spell words.
- Fluency- Accurate, rapid, and expressive oral reading, which is facilitated by efficient word recognition.
- Comprehension - Literal and inferential understanding of a text. The [Active View of Reading Model](#), shows comprehension as a complex process assisted by background knowledge, vocabulary, verbal reasoning, language structures, literacy knowledge, and active self-regulation.

For Further Reading:

- [Handbook for Research in Early Literacy, Scarborough](#)
- [The Science of Reading Progresses: Communicating Advances Beyond the Simple View of Reading, Duke & Cartwright](#)
- [National Reading Panel Report](#)
- [MA Dyslexia Guidelines](#)
- [Susan Brady, A 2020 Perspective on Research Findings on Alphabetics \(Phoneme Awareness and Phonics\): Implications for Instruction \(Expanded Version\)](#)
- [Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition from Novice to Expert](#)