



# Leading the Shift:

Uniting Teams Around  
the Science of Reading

Presented By: Michaelene McKelvey  
June 11, 2026



# Connection Before Content

**Think about a major initiative your district or site has implemented. What made it successful — or caused it to struggle?**



**Implementation**

# Outcomes for Today

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:



Identify the **leadership moves** that support successful Science of Reading implementation



**Evaluate strengths and gaps** within their own literacy systems



Describe how coaching, assessment, intervention, and professional learning **must align**



**Recognize barriers** and strategies for overcoming resistance during implementation

# The CA Literacy Landscape is Changing!



Leadership Magazine  
A publication of the Association of California School Administrators  
Leadership Magazine ACSA Resources  
**Who is in the driver's seat?**  
Using data to drive instructional practices that improve literacy

By Sharon Dunn | September | October 2024



Can you imagine what it would be like in our schools if most of our students were proficient readers? What if the school-to-prison pipeline were diminished due to increased reading proficiency?



**THE ARGUMENT**  
**Illiteracy is a policy choice**  
Why aren't we gathering behind Mississippi's banner?  
KELLEY PAPER  
Sep 26, 2023  
327 47 101  
**Illiteracy is a policy choice**  
Many schools are reintroducing phonics-based reading programs, but that is just one policy change driving the "Mississippi Miracle." (Photo by Josh Chalmers/The Washington Post via Getty Images)  
This month, the Department of Education released its latest edition of the *National*



**EdSource**  
MEME AUDIO & VIDEO SPECIAL PROJECTS RESOURCE ABOUT  
California's Reading Dilemma  
**New law changes how California kids learn to read**  
Gov. Newsom signs bill to revamp reading instruction in California  
DILNA LAMBERT  
PUBLISHED: OCTOBER 9, 2023  
6 COMMENTS  
f x in p  
REPUBLISH  
Melissa Ramirez, a first grade teacher at Lookout Elementary in Oak, holds up a student while students lay and spell the word "wink." (File photo, 2022)  
Credit: Andrew Serna / EdSource

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets” - W Edwards Deming

CA 2025 CAASPP DATA

### Foster Youth



Orange

79.8 points below standard

Increased 7.4 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 15,621

### Homeless



Orange

68.9 points below standard

Maintained 1.5 Points

Number of Students: 126,044

### Long-Term English Learners



Orange

104.5 points below standard

Increased 5.1 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 146,718

### Students with Disabilities



Orange

89.4 points below standard

Increased 6.2 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 451,804

### African American



Yellow

51.3 points below standard

Increased 7.5 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 144,153

### American Indian



Yellow

45.4 points below standard

Increased 3.6 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 12,317

### English Learners



Yellow

59.9 points below standard

Increased 7.6 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 782,925

### Hispanic



Yellow

33.7 points below standard

Increased 5.7 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 1,661,135

### Pacific Islander



Yellow

29.3 points below standard

Increased 5.4 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 12,008

### Socioeconomically Disadvantaged



Yellow

35.3 points below standard

Increased 5.5 Points Ⓞ

Number of Students: 1,934,593

# Leadership Moves that Matter Most

**Create urgency without creating panic**

**Build a coalition of teacher leaders**

**Over Communicate the vision**

**Model learning alongside staff**

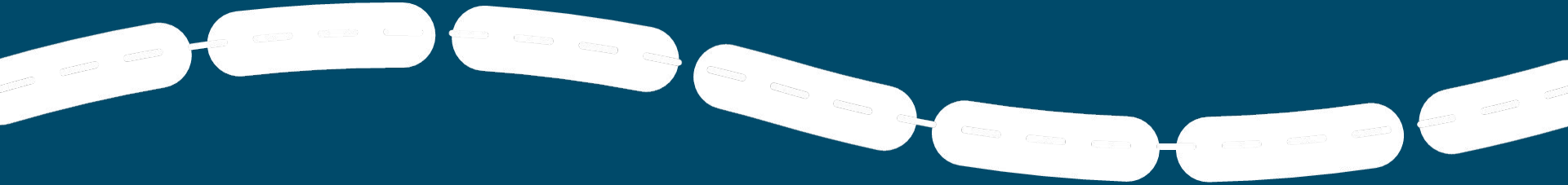
**Remove barriers quickly**

**Monitor implementation, not just compliance**

**Celebrate small wins publicly**

**Stay the course when enthusiasm dips**

# Our Journey

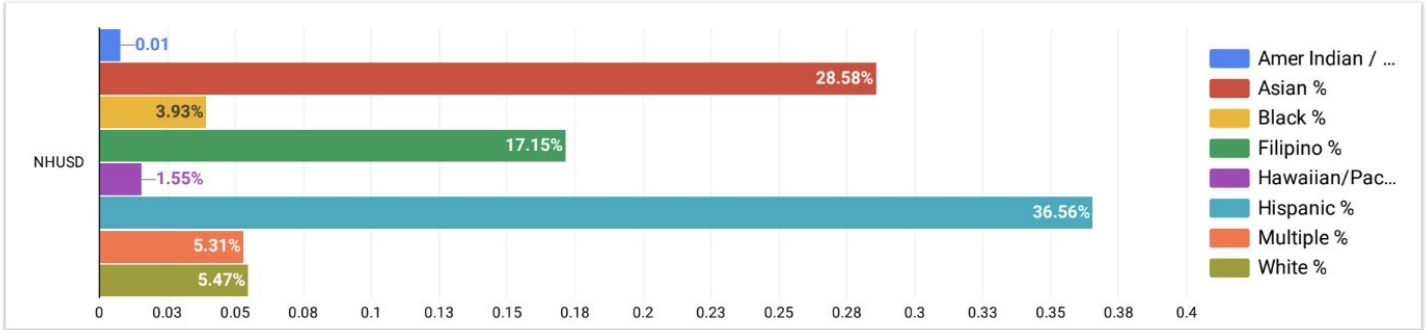


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# Who We Are



Student Enrollment 2024-25 by Ethnicity - Total Enrollment 10,056

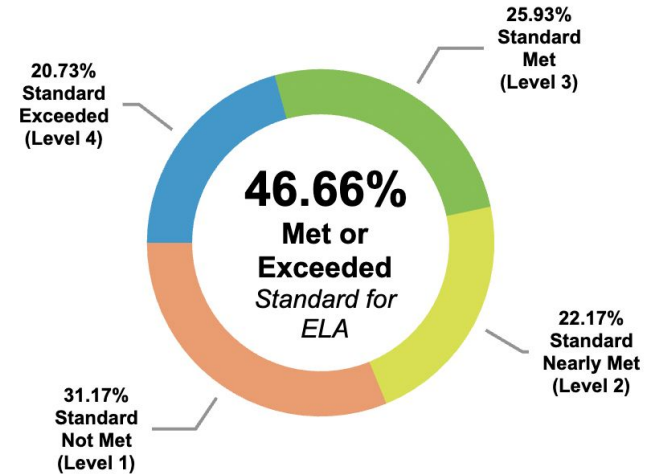


| Site  | EL %   | FRPM % | Foster % | Homeless % | Unduplicated % |
|-------|--------|--------|----------|------------|----------------|
| NHUSD | 16.04% | 57.28% | 0.18%    | 1.20%      | 61.18%         |

# Create a Sense of Urgency

- Use student outcome data to establish the need for change
- Make literacy outcomes visible and impossible to ignore

|                       |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| NWEA Achievement 2022 |       |
| First                 | 52.29 |
| Second                | 50.49 |
| Third                 | 47.43 |
| Fourth                | 50.67 |
| Fifth                 | 51.13 |



# Pause for Reflection

## Step 1: Audit

Circle (or mentally note) one area where your system is **strongest** and one area where it may have **gaps**.

## Step 2: Collaborate

### Share with a partner:

*"Which item on this list would create the biggest improvement if strengthened?"*

# Audit your Literacy System

Ask yourself:

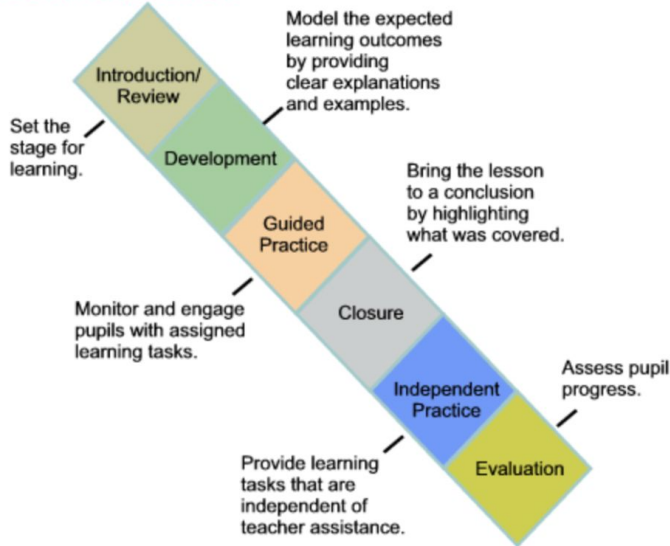
- Are intervention and Tier 1 instruction aligned?
- Do all grade levels use common literacy language?
- Do assessment results drive instructional decisions?
- Can administrators identify literacy look-fors?
- Are coaches, interventionists, and classroom teachers working from the same framework?
- Are there competing literacy initiatives?

# Use A Common Walkthrough Tool

3a What instructional strategies were observed (e.g., direct instruction, modeling, guided practice, questioning, scaffolding, checks for understanding, cooperative learning, use of academic language, differentiation, UDL)?

4. What depth of knowledge was expected? \*

## Direct Instruction



## Webb's Depth of Knowledge

### DOK Level 1 (Recall)

**Verbs:** arrange, calculate, define, draw, identify, list, label, illustrate, match, memorize, recognize, tell, ...

**Focus:** on specific facts, definitions, details, or procedures

**Note:** there's one correct answer, and a combination of Level 1s does not make it a Level 2

### DOK Level 2 (Skill / Concept)

**Verbs:** categorize, cause/effect, classify, compare, distinguish, estimate, graph, interpret, modify, predict, relate, show, summarize, ...

**Focus:** on applying skills and concepts explaining how or why

**Note:** there's one correct answer

### DOK Level 3 (Strategic Thinking)

**Verbs:** assess, cite evidence, compare, conclude, construct, critique, develop logical argument, differentiate, formulate, hypothesize, investigate, revise, ...

**Focus:** on reasoning and planning in order to respond complex and abstract thinking required defending reasoning or conclusions

**Note:** multiple answers or approaches

### DOK Level 4 (Extended Thinking)

**Verbs:** apply concepts, analyze, connect, create, critique, design, prove, ...

**Focus:** on complex reasoning, planning, and thinking make real-world applications in new situations

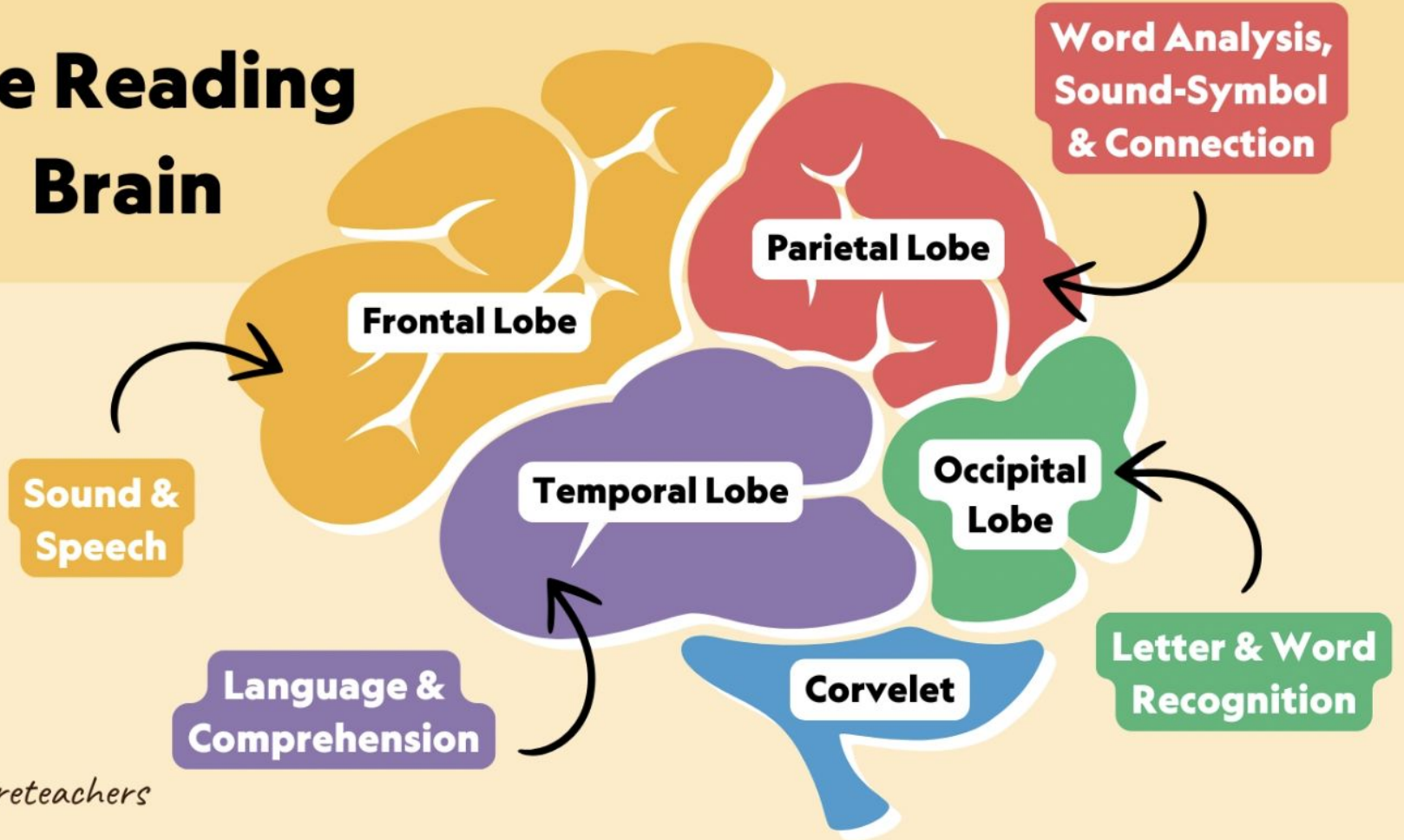
**Note:** has multiple answers or approaches often requires extended periods of time with multiple steps

# Build A Shared Understanding: The Science of Reading

1. Learn alongside teachers
2. Create common language around Literacy Instruction
3. Start with our why: Focus on student needs
4. Connect every decision back to improved outcomes.

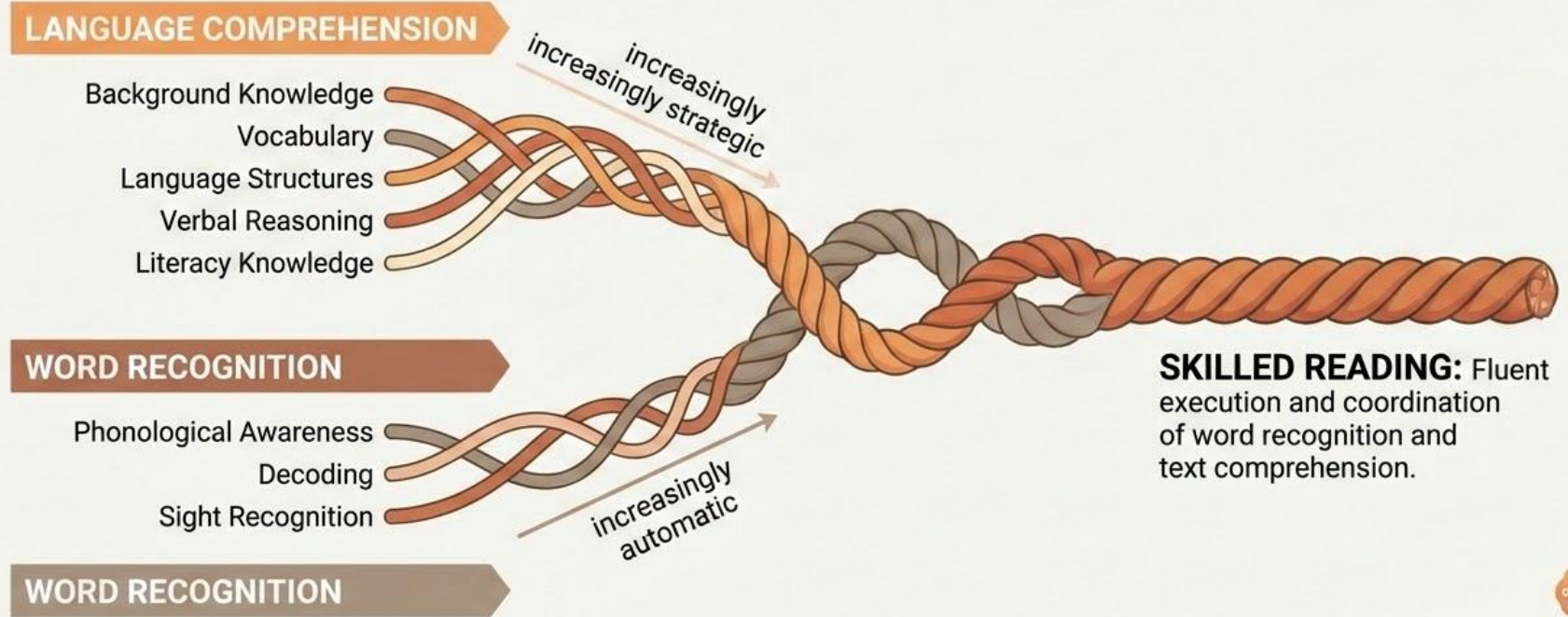


# The Reading Brain



# What is the science of reading

## Scarborough's Reading Rope



# Implementation Plan



# Used a Phased Roll Out instead of All at Once

Implemented by cohorts over multiple years:

- Kindergarten first plus ELA/ELD Curriculum Leaders 1st-2nd grade piloting and learning alongside our Kinder teachers.
- Then 1st–2nd grade
- Then 3rd–5th grade

Allowed time to pilot, refine, gather feedback (surveys after every PD and twice a year), and build internal expertise before scaling districtwide.

|                                | Year 0 (22-23)  | Year 1 (23-24)   | Year 2 (24-25)  | Year 3 (25-26)   | Year 4 (26-27)   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| Co-Hort 1<br>Kinder            | <p>All ELA/ELD Curriculum Leaders, Kinder teachers, TOSA and Admin participate in the SOR PD from Santa Clara County</p> <p>Phonics Program Review Summer 2023 to pilot 23-24</p> | <p>Purchase UFLI and pilot in all Kinder classrooms plus ELA/ELD CL rooms.</p> <p>Administer BPST 4 to monitor foundational skills.</p> <p>TOSA hired to help support</p> <p>PD topics: Use of 4 modified days so all Kinder Teachers are in the room together.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review instructional routines (8 steps)</li> <li>Purchase Decodable Books, PD on Series</li> <li>Progress Monitoring</li> <li>Small Group Instruction based on skill not reading levels.</li> </ol> <p>Summer work with voluntary teacher leaders to reflect on UFLI and its usage (data from google form reviewed)</p> | <p>Grading and Assessment Task Force to revamp report card foundational skills and assessments.</p> <p>Continue to expand expectations for UFLI.</p> <p>PD for new hires (SOR as well as UFLI implementation)</p> <p>Continued progress monitoring PD (weekly checks with UFLI as well as BPST 4)</p> <p>Support switched from whole class to small group instruction.</p> <p>How to use UFLI for Far Below Students.</p> | <p>2 TOSAs hired and .6 Admin on Special Assignment</p> <p>Purchase of two additional resources:</p> <p>Project Read to provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress monitoring support through UFLI</li> <li>Decodable Resources to continue to support small group instruction.</li> </ol> <p>LaPrea Decodables purchased K-2 to provide more hands on decodable books to use in small group instruction.</p> <p>PD focus on upper half of Scarborough's Rope:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 Day lesson plan template on SOR and Wonders curriculum.</li> <li>PD focus on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehension strategies</li> <li>Building Background Knowledge</li> <li>Write to 2 sources</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p>Partner with the Reading League: All TOSAs and ELA/ELD CL trained:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using Data to create skill based groups.</li> <li>6 Step lesson plans for interventions.</li> </ol> <p>mCLASS Dyslexia Screener adopted and implemented Oct. 2025.</p> <p>Amira AI tutoring available for all K-2 to be used for independent practice as well.</p> | <p><b>Wonders Whole Group and Small Group Instruction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on comprehension strategies.</li> <li>Small group instruction and independent practice that focuses on those comprehension strategies.</li> <li>LaPrea Decodables for K-2nd</li> <li>Language Development (focus on ELD to support all)</li> </ul> <p><b>UFLI Progress Monitoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly use</li> <li>Project Read to form small groups</li> </ul> <p><b>Replace Amira with Project Read Tutor(?)</b></p> <p>Assessment Type/Purpose -How to use mCLASS, Progress piece<br/>Pilot: Project Read Tutor</p> <p>UFLI Expansion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TDWL Spanish 1st grade (second semester) and continue to support 2nd grade.</li> </ol> <p>Possible Focus on Introducing the Science of Writing?</p> |
| Co-Hort 2<br>1st and 2nd grade |   | <p>All 1st-2nd Grade Teachers participate in SOR PD. Ten topics</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overview of SOR</li> <li>Assessments and Small Groups</li> <li>Phonological Awareness</li> <li>Alphabetic Principles</li> <li>Daily Decoding Routines</li> <li>Applying Daily Decoding Routines</li> <li>Sight recognition Words</li> <li>Sight recognition words #2</li> <li>Background Knowledge and Vocabulary</li> <li>Language structures,</li> </ol>  | <p>Purchase UFLI and materials all 1-2 grade teachers</p> <p>Administer BPST 4 to monitor foundational skills.</p> <p>TOSA hired to help support</p> <p>PD topics: Use of 4 modified days so all Teachers are in the room together.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review instructional routines (8 steps)</li> <li>Purchase Decodable Books, PD on Series</li> <li>Progress Monitoring</li> </ol>            | <p>Partner with the Reading League: All TOSAs and ELA/ELD CL trained:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using Data to create skill based groups.</li> <li>6 Step lesson plans for interventions.</li> </ol> <p>mCLASS Dyslexia Screener adopted and implemented Oct. 2025.</p> <p>Amira AI tutoring available for all K-2 to be used for independent practice as well.</p>  |  |

# Removed Barriers Quickly



# Built Capacity through ongoing PD

## Practical Focus

Structured PD around specific instructional practices rather than broad theory alone.

## Diverse Delivery Models

Used modified days, staff meetings, release days, coaching cycles, and model lessons, synchronous/asynchronous options.

## Core Focus Areas

- Instructional routines
- Decoding routines
- Small group instruction
- Progress monitoring
- Comprehension strategies
- Language development

## Long-Term Sustainability

Ensured PD was sustained over multiple years instead of isolated trainings.

# Matched Resources to Instructional Priorities

Selected and implemented aligned instructional resources:

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>UFLI</b>   | <b>decodable texts</b>  | <b>Project Read</b>  | <b>mCLASS</b>   | <b>Amira</b>  |
| Phonological Foundations  | Structured Practice   | Comprehensive Literacy   | Data-Driven Insights  | AI Reading Coach  |

Ensured resources supported the instructional vision instead of competing initiatives.

# Created a Data-Driven Intervention System

## Universal Assessment

Established systems using BPST-IV and mCLASS for robust progress monitoring.

## Skill-Based Grouping

Used data to create specific skill-based small groups rather than general reading levels.

## Structured Intervention

Developed systems using 6-step lesson plans and standardized templates.

## Shifted Conversations

Moved teacher focus from general "levels" to identifying "specific skill deficits."

# Embedded Coaching and On-Site Support



## Implementation Coaching

Hired TOSAs and administrative support positions to provide dedicated coaching.



## Collaborative Support

Used push-in support, walkthroughs, debriefs, and collaborative planning sessions.



## Consistency Tools

Created walkthrough tools to monitor consistency across classrooms and sites.



## Support & Calibration

Focused on support and calibration rather than a compliance-only mindset.



# Pause for Reflection

**How do you currently know whether implementation is actually happening in classrooms?**

**What do you notice about how you gauge implementation?**



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# Measuring Implementation Fidelity



# Prioritized Leadership Alignment

## Collaborative Training

Trained administrators alongside teachers to ensure shared understanding.

## Site-Specific Planning

Developed localized rollout plans in direct partnership with site principals.

## Core Competencies

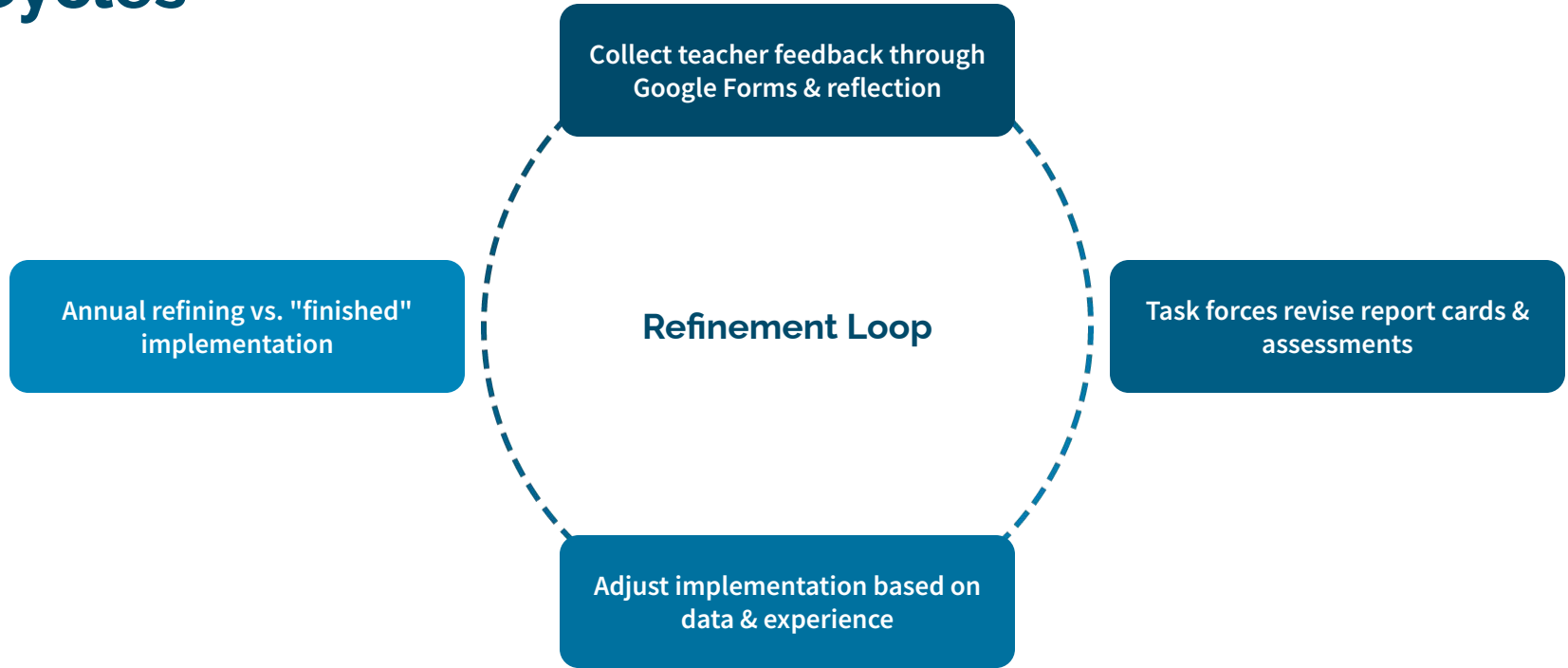
Ensured administrators understood both:

- The research behind Science of Reading
- Practical classroom look-fors

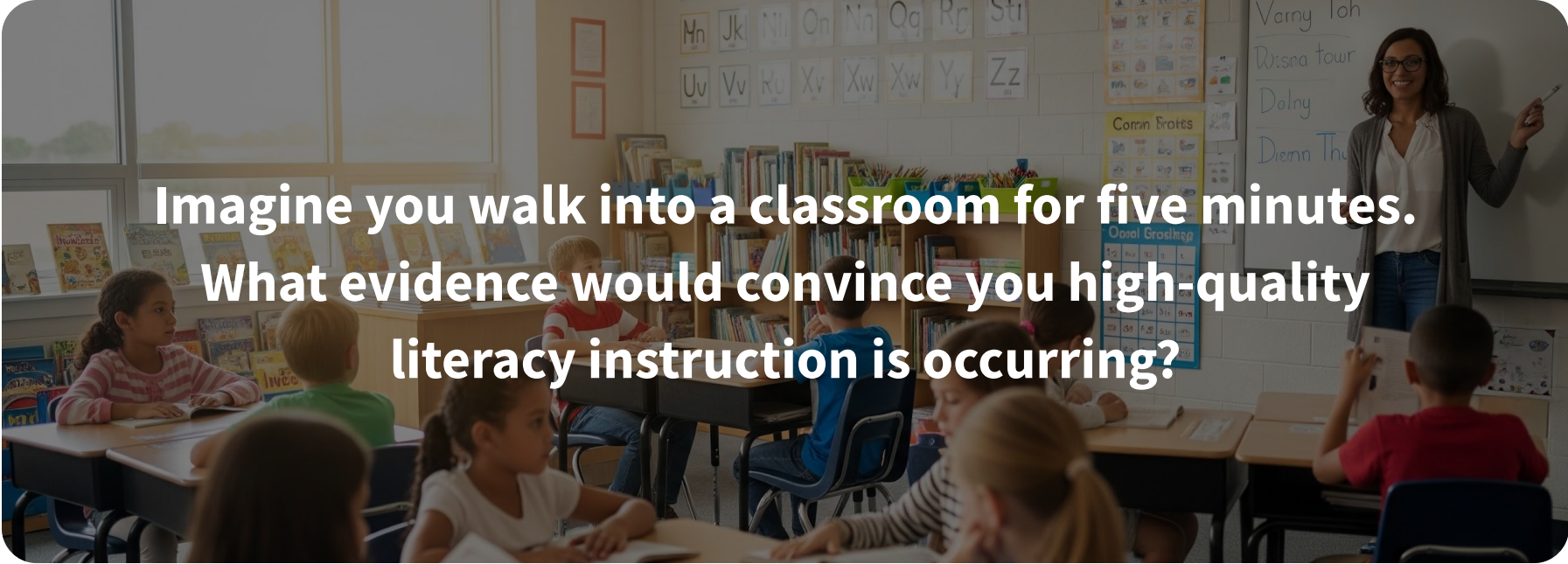
## Districtwide Consistency

Used leadership cohorts and walkthrough tools to maintain standards.

# Created Continuous Feedback and Refinement Cycles



# Pause for Reflection



**Imagine you walk into a classroom for five minutes.  
What evidence would convince you high-quality  
literacy instruction is occurring?**

# Science of Reading Look-Fors

When administrators visit classrooms they should see:



Explicit modeling



Student response routines



Decoding instruction



Language-rich discussions



Use of decodable texts



Frequent checks for understanding



Skill-based small groups



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# LACOE Walk Through Tool & UFLI Checklist



Los Angeles County  
Office of Education

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Phonological Awareness Instruction Walkthrough Tool *Instructional Look-Fors*

### Reminders:

1. Phonological awareness activities should be sound-based only (no letters/words at first).
2. The activities below will not all be seen during 1 lesson, and they are suggestions of what might be seen in a classroom but are not exhaustive.

| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Phonological Awareness Activity Observed                                      |
|-------------------------------------|---|
|                                     | Rhyming   |
|                                     | Alliteration  |
|                                     | Sentence Segmentation   |
|                                     | Syllable Work   |
|                                     | Onset/Rime Work   |
|                                     | Phoneme-level work: (blending, segmenting, adding, deleting, shifting sounds) |
|                                     | The Vocabulary Routine  |
|                                     | Other:  |

| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | As Evidenced By   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
|                                     | Thumbs up/down  |
|                                     | Clapping/tapping sounds, syllables, words   |
|                                     | Word play/game  |
|                                     | Word chains (changing a sound within a word to create a new one, orally/auditorily) |
|                                     | Elkonin boxes/sound lines   |
|                                     | Multimodal activity (movement-based, etc)   |
|                                     | Other:  |



## Implementation Fidelity Checklist

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

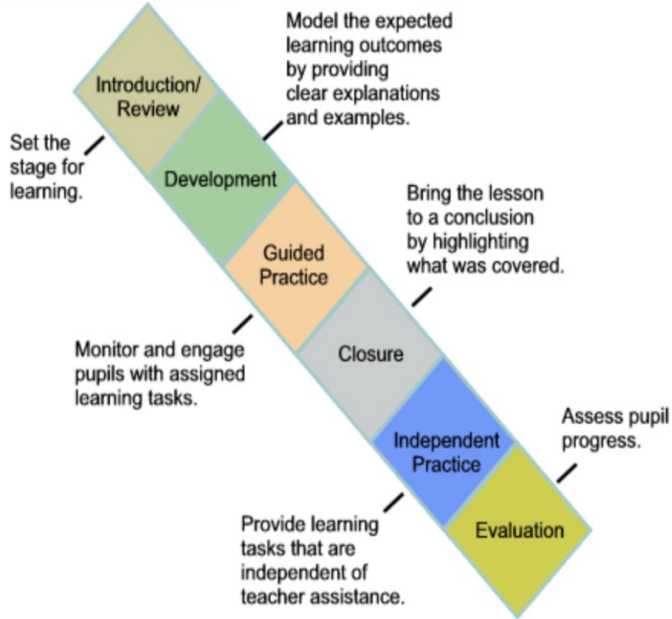
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

|  | Lesson Components   | Notes |
|--|---|-------|
| <b>General</b>                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher used <b>blendable sounds</b> throughout the lesson.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher maintained student <b>engagement and attention</b> .<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provided <b>general and behavior-specific praise</b> .<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provided <b>corrective feedback</b> , as needed.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provided appropriate <b>scaffolding</b> , as needed.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher maintained appropriate <b>lesson pacing</b> .<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher used efficient <b>routines and transitions</b> . |       |
| Lesson Number:<br>New Concept:             |   |       |
| <b>Lesson Part 1</b>                       |   |       |
| <b>Step 1: Phonemic Awareness</b> (~2 min) | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provided <b>phoneme blending</b> practice.<br>Total words presented: _____   |       |
| Start:                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provided <b>phoneme segmentation</b> practice.<br>Total words presented: _____   |       |
| End:                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <b>segmented words</b> correctly (e.g., /s/ /t/ /l/ /m/ /p/).  |       |
| Total Duration:                            |   |       |
| <b>Step 2: Visual Drill</b> (~3 min)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher presented <b>previously taught graphemes</b> .<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher prompted student <b>choral response</b> (e.g., ck spells /k/).<br>Total graphemes presented: _____  |       |
| Start:                                     |   |       |
| End:                                       |   |       |
| Total Duration:                            |   |       |

3a What instructional strategies were observed (e.g., direct instruction, modeling, guided practice, questioning, scaffolding, checks for understanding, cooperative learning, use of academic language, differentiation, UDL)?

4. What depth of knowledge was expected? \*

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(Skill / Concept)

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**DOK Level 4**  
(Extended Thinking)

**Verbs:** apply concepts, analyze, connect, create, critique, design, prove, ...

**Focus:** on complex reasoning, planning, and thinking

**Note:** has multiple answers or approaches

# When Resistance Shows Up

## Common Concerns:



- *"This is just another initiative."*
- *"What we're doing already works."*
- *"We've been through this before."*

## Leadership Responses:



- Return to student outcome data.
- Connect decisions to student needs.
- Listen before persuading.
- Focus on support before accountability.
- Celebrate early wins.

*"People rarely resist improvement; they resist uncertainty."*

# What We Learned About Leading Change

## Lessons From the Journey

### What helped

- Administrators learned alongside teachers
- Clear, consistent messaging
- Coaching over compliance
- Phased implementation
- Shared ownership of all students



# What Was Challenging

Building consensus takes time

Staff moves at different speeds

Old practices are difficult to replace

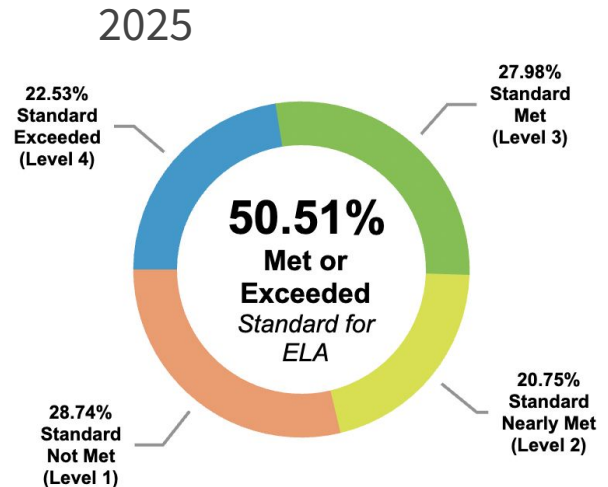
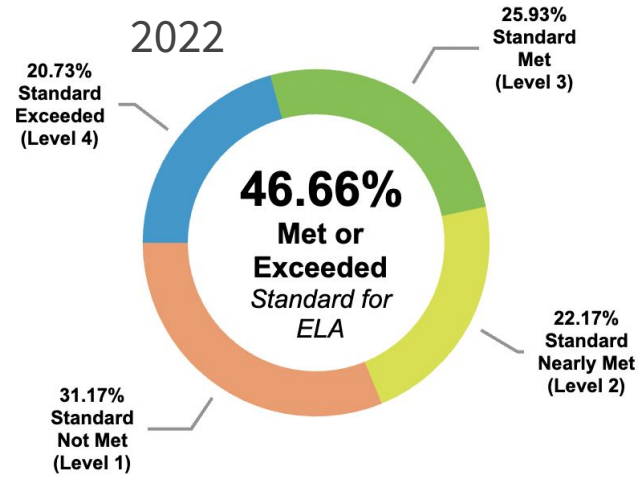
One training never changes practice

Sustainability requires ongoing support



# Go back to the Data

| NWEA Achievement | Spring 2022 | Spring 2026 |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| First            | 52          | 61          |
| Second           | 50          | 64          |
| Third            | 47          | 57          |
| Fourth           | 50          | 61          |
| Fifth            | 51          | 58          |



# If I Could Do it Again

## Start Earlier

- Administrator training

## Invest More

- Coaching capacity

## Communicate More Often

- Staff and families

## Stay Focused

- Fewer initiatives, deeper implementation



# Resources

## Implementation

- [UFLI Foundations](#)
- [Project Read](#)
- [LACOE Science of Reading Resources](#)

## Assessment

- Acadience/mCLASS
- BPST-IV

## Leadership

- [Kotter's 8-Step Change Model](#)
- [Switch by Chip & Dan Heath](#)
- [The Assistant Principal: 50 Critical Questions](#)

## Classroom Look-Fors

- [UFLI Fidelity Checklists](#)
- [LACOE Walkthrough Tool](#)

**Real change doesn't happen because of one presentation. It happens because leaders take the next step.**

**What is one system, structure, or practice you will commit to strengthening when you return to your site?**

