LEARNING TO READ
A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

Fall, 2015

FOR MANY, LEARNING TO READ IS DIFFICULT…WHY?

1. Science of Reading

For those of us who learned to read easily, it's difficult to understand why it would be hard for others. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has studied reading development and the difficulties involved with learning to read for over thirty-five years. Research has shown that approximately 70-80% of children will learn to read smoothly and effortlessly. For the rest, it will be one of the hardest struggles they face. But why? Reading is a code that has to be deciphered. While speaking is a natural human process; we are born to learn spoken language, reading is not. Neuro-science has shown through the use of MRIs and fMRIs, that in order to learn to read, our brains are required to make new connections. Many of us do this easily. However, for approximately 20-30% of us, this means reading skills have to be taught in a more **direct, systematic, explicit, and structured** way.

2. Early Identification and Prevention

The earlier we identify a student at risk for reading difficulties, the sooner we can intervene appropriately. Screening all students (e.g. DIBELS Next; AIMSweb) throughout the school year provides information to identify students who are not reaching specific benchmark goals that predict future reading success. If a student does not reach a benchmark, then specific, immediate interventions can be provided to address their needs. However**, our first line of defense is providing ALL students in the early grades with systematic, scientific-based instruction of the basic early literacy skills, led by a knowledgeable teacher.**

3. The Need for a Strong Foundation in Early Literacy

Building a strong foundation in early literacy from infancy is the key to growing successful readers. These components, along with using a multi-sensory language approach aide in the instruction of early reading.

A strong foundation of early literacy instruction would include:

- **Oral Language Development:** Oral language is the building block to learning to read. It is where children learn how language works. Being involved in conversations, children begin to learn the rules of language and are exposed to the sounds that make up words. Speaking with others also allows them to "bump into" many words, growing their vocabulary.
- **Phonological Awareness:** This is a broad term that means the ability to play with words in many ways: recognizing rhyming words, producing rhyming words, separating words in sentences, blending syllables together, segmenting syllables, and breaking words into sounds.
- **Phoneme Awareness:** This is the ability to break words into all their spoken sounds. Once students can separate words into their sounds, they have the foundation to attach each sound to its corresponding letter symbol(s). **This sound-symbol association is vital!**
- **Phonics:** This involves teaching the symbols that correspond to sounds in words. **This essential skill** not only aides reading, but also writing, and spelling.
- **Reading Aloud:** When hearing stories, children are exposed to language and vocabulary they may not hear in casual conversations. It gives them a sense of how a story is structured. Additionally, talking about these stories provides an opportunity to work on comprehending what is read…the ultimate goal.

4. Multisensory Structured Language Approach

According to the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC), the goal of multisensory language programs is to develop a student's independent ability to read, write and understand language. Multisensory instruction is **direct, explicit, systematic and sequential**. It actively engages students in the learning process by using visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile methods (VAKT) simultaneously. Using this approach to teach the core components of learning to read helps the brain make critical connections needed to master the basic subskills of reading. Once students are able to decipher the reading code, they are on a smoother path to **reading to learn** content. When the reading code becomes automatic and fluent, the student has more thinking space to comprehend what they read.

5. Quality Teacher Preparation

In 1997, The National Reading Panel was formed, tasked by Congress to review all available research and provide, with evidence, an analysis of the best methods for teaching reading. This resulted in the creation of their report, *Teaching Children to Read* which included the five areas of reading being more clearly defined (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), more comprehensive reading programs developed and adopted, and increased teacher knowledge in these areas. However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), student reading scores have not changed dramatically in the last 15 years. How can this be? In an interview located on the website, Children of the Code, Dr. Reid Lyon, the former Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) stated, "The toughest challenge we have is in moving the science (of reading) to the development of teachers and their preparation…" Additionally, Dr. Louisa Moats, in her article titled, *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science,* points out the need for better teacher preparation, "The fact that teachers need better training to carry out deliberate instruction in reading, spelling, and writing should prompt action rather than criticism. It should highlight the chronic gap between what teachers need and what they have been given**." Quality teacher preparation is paramount to quality reading instruction** and can dramatically decrease reading difficulties in young students.

6. Working Together

Together, teachers and parents armed with knowledge and opportunities to communicate, can be an impactful team in a child's reading progress. We hope the information provided in this document as well as the resources below support the beginning of a powerful, collaborative partnership. Dr. Timothy Shanahan, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, shares a helpful guide that highlights the role of the parents as a child's first teacher, http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2012/01/httpssites.html#links.

7. Resources Mentioned Above

- National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD)
- DIBELS Next
- AIMS web
- International Dyslexia Association (IDA)
- International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC)
- Children of the Code
- *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science,* by Louisa Moats
- Dr. Timothy Shanahan-Parent Resources

8. Additional Resources

- Reading Rockets (resources for teaching reading - includes a tab for parents)
- https://littoolkit.aap.org/forprofessionals/Pages/home.aspx (toolkit from the American Academy of Pediatrics)