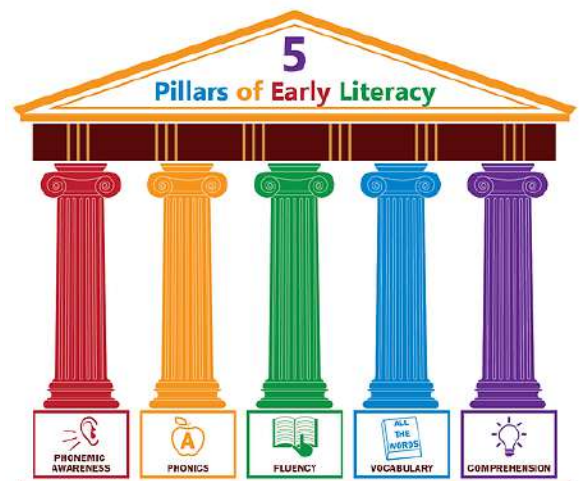


# Somerville Public Schools

## Elements of Successful Literacy Instruction

A good introduction to literacy needs a strong foundation. The building blocks of effective reading instruction, as defined by the [National Reading Panel](#) and reinforced by the latest research on literacy development and dyslexia, include phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Together, these five pillars make up the components of successful reading instruction by shaping learners' brains to learn to read and understand the written English language.



Several key principles guide our literacy program in SPS:

- All five pillars are needed to develop successful readers and writers, so all students should have opportunities to receive instruction in each of the five areas. Some pillars might be emphasized more in some grades than others (e.g., more phonological awareness in grades K and 1) and vary as a child develops (e.g., more comprehension than phonics in higher grades).
- All students, not just multilingual learners, should have opportunities to develop their oral language skills each day across all content areas.
- All students should have whole-class and small group learning opportunities that develop their reading and writing skills.
- Student assessment data should determine the course of small group instruction.
- Student groups should be flexible and change according to current assessment data.
- Students can use word lists and decodable (controlled) texts when learning discrete phonics skills, but should have regular opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge to authentic texts.
- Developing proficient readers and writers is a community effort involving administrators, classroom teachers, specialized educators, paraprofessionals, students, and families.

Structuring an effective and research-based literacy and language arts block in the classroom (Tier 1) is the first step to laying a good foundation for student literacy skills. When a student is struggling in reading, we assess what pillars are strengths and weaknesses so we can create an intervention plan to move the student forward (Tier 2). Let's take a closer look at what these five pillars are and how they work together to build the foundation for effective literacy instruction.

# 1. Phonological Awareness

**What it is:** *the ability to hear, identify, manipulate, and substitute phonemes—the smallest units of sound that can differentiate meaning—in spoken words*

**What it means:** Teaching phonological awareness means instructing students to identify and manipulate the approximately 44 phonemes in the English language. It doesn't require students to be able to read or even see printed letters to grasp this concept; it's all about the sounds that word parts make. Essentially, phonological awareness instruction begins by teaching students to hear and manipulate the larger parts of words (syllables), then moves to the smaller parts of words (individual phonemes).

**Why it matters:** Phonological awareness is a strong predictor of long-term reading and spelling success, which is why there are explicit whole class lessons included in the SPS curriculum. Phonological awareness development must be quickly followed by the introduction of phonics. Teaching sounds along with letters of the alphabet helps students better understand how phonological awareness relates to reading and writing. This allows them to connect what they hear and say to the written letters on the page.

**Examples:** Children who are proficient in phonological awareness know what words are, how to break them into syllables, how to create rhyming words, and how to segment, blend, and manipulate sounds in words. This sets the stage for students to eventually map their knowledge of sounds onto printed letters—an essential skill for reading and writing. In the SPS curriculum, phonological awareness is taught in Kindergarten and first grade. The Tier 1 curriculum includes instruction in rhyming, beginning sounds, and manipulating syllables and phonemes. Visuals are used to support student learning. The Tier 2 small group intervention is based on the Heggerty PA curriculum.

## **How we assess it:**

- Informal observations during SPS Phonological Awareness lessons
- DIBELS 8 PSF (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency) - Developed by the University of Oregon and administered to all Kindergarten and First Graders, this subtest measures how well students can break a spoken word into its component sounds (e.g., "mat" - /m/ /a/ /t/)
- PAST (Phonological Awareness Screening Test) - A diagnostic assessment for students who need additional phonological awareness support. It provides information about a student's strengths and needs in the following areas: syllable deletion, onset-rime deletion and substitution, and phoneme deletion and substitution. The results are used to determine where in the SPS Heggerty PA Intervention instruction should begin.

## 2. Phonics

**What it is:** *the ability to understand that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (the letters that represent those sounds in written language) in order to associate written letters with the sounds of spoken language*

**What it means:** Phonics instruction teaches students how to build relationships between sounds and letters or letter combinations and how to use those relationships to read and write words.

**Why it matters:** While the English language has many irregular spellings and exceptions to phonetic rules, about 80 percent of English words are phonetically regular. Phonics teaches students letter patterns, irregular spellings and exceptions so that they are able to spell and read words fluently.

**Examples:** Children who are proficient in phonics are able to associate specific sounds with letters and letter patterns, and use letter patterns to spell and decode known words and novel words. In the SPS curriculum, phonics is taught in grades K-3. In grades K-2, the Tier 1 curriculum is FUNdations, a structured phonics program that explicitly teaches students to convert letters into sounds (phonemes) and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words. Teachers use both physical manipulatives and the provided Google Slides to teach FUNdations. In grade 3, the Tier 1 curriculum includes Foundations Flashback (a review of previously learned FUNdations concepts) and Phonics in Focus, which teaches advanced phonics concepts such as reading and spelling with schwa. Teachers have Google Slides and student workbooks to teach both Foundations Flashbacks and Phonics in Focus. Tier 2 small group phonics instruction follows the FUNdations sequence and includes decoding and encoding real and nonsense words and reading words both in- and out-of-context. Tier 2 phonics instruction may continue in grades 3-5 based on student needs.

### **How we assess it:**

- FUNdations Unit Assessments - These assessments are embedded into each unit and allow teachers to gauge how well students are applying what they are learning in phonics to their spelling.
- DIBELS 8 - Across the district, SPS uses subtests from DIBELS 8 (administered 3 times a year) to assess students' phonics knowledge and to drive instruction and intervention.
  - LNF (Letter Naming Fluency) assesses students' ability to recognize individual letters and say the letter names.
  - NWF (Nonsense Word Fluency) assesses letter-sound correspondence and the ability to blend letter sounds into words.
  - PSF (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency) assesses students' ability to segment two- to six-phoneme words into their individual phonemes.

- WRF (Word Reading Fluency) assesses students' ability to read a list of progressively harder words that both follow phonics rules and have unpredictable patterns (also known as trick words).
- Quick Phonics Screener - Educators might administer a phonics screener to figure out what specific phonics patterns students need to learn next as a part of whole class or small group instruction.

### 3. Fluency

**What it is:** *the ability to read with speed, accuracy and proper phrasing and expression.*

**What it means:** Fluency is the ability to read as well as one speaks and to make sense of what is being read without having to stop or pause to decode words. Readers must be fluent at the word level, phrase level, and sentence level. Fluency includes accuracy, expression and phrasing, and rate of reading. Fluency is different from memorization, which can occur when students interact with the same text so frequently that they can repeat it without reading.

**Why it matters:** Developing fluency is critical to a student's motivation to read. When students struggle to sound out letters and words, reading can become a laborious and exhausting task, and students may begin to perceive reading as a negative activity. Fluency is also critical in supporting comprehension. In order to better understand what they have read, students need to read fluently.

**Examples:** Children who are fluent readers can recognize and decode words accurately effortlessly. They can group words into appropriate phrases and attend to punctuation to make meaning. They can change their voice to show feeling and expression when reading. In grades K-2 Tier 1 fluency instruction is addressed in FUNdations word and sentence reading. It is also practiced in the Independent Reading Lessons. In Tier 2 small group fluency instruction, teachers focus on specific student needs: automaticity, accuracy, expression and phrasing, and/or rate. Tier 2 small group fluency instruction may continue in grades 3-5 based on student needs.

#### **How we assess it:**

- Across the district, SPS uses subtests from DIBELS 8 (administered 3 times a year) to assess students' fluency and accuracy.
  - WRF (Word Reading Fluency) assesses students' ability to read a list of progressively harder sight words that include words with irregular pronunciations as well as common words with regular pronunciations.
  - ORF (Oral Reading Fluency) assesses students' reading rate and accuracy when reading a grade level passage.
- Running Records or F&P Benchmark Assessments provide the opportunity to listen to children read in order to gain information about students' fluency, accuracy, monitoring and self-correction, and comprehension.

## 4. Vocabulary

**What it is:** *the body of words that students understand and use in their conversation (oral and receptive vocabulary) and recognize in print (reading vocabulary)*

**What it means:** Vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension. A reader cannot understand the meaning of a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Vocabulary can be absorbed or learned both orally and through print. Most vocabulary is learned through everyday experiences while engaging in conversations, read alouds, or independent reading. School experiences that intentionally include rich conversations and explicit vocabulary instruction can greatly support children's vocabulary development.

**Why it matters:** In order to comprehend a text, a student must know the meaning of the words they are reading. Beginning readers use their oral vocabulary to make sense of words they see in print. If students encounter an unfamiliar word while reading, their reading is momentarily interrupted until the new word is added to their mental vocabulary. Explicit vocabulary instruction and word-learning strategies can help build a flourishing vocabulary and improve reading fluency and comprehension.

**Examples:** In the SPS curriculum, vocabulary is directly introduced in the K-5 Genre Units. Students are introduced to vocabulary in the Interactive Read Alouds by seeing it in context, reading a definition, and seeing examples. Students are supported in using new vocabulary throughout the Genre Units in their verbal and written responses.

### **How we assess it:**

- Informally, teachers assess students' ability to learn and use new vocabulary in the context of Interactive Read Alouds, class discussions, and writing.
- District Unit Assessments assess content vocabulary found in various texts (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc.), as well as academic vocabulary found in directions and questions.

## 5. Comprehension

**What it is:** *the ability to understand, remember, and interpret what has been read—this is the purpose of reading*

**What it means:** Students with developed reading comprehension abilities can predict, infer, make connections, and analyze what is being read. Reading comprehension requires a good foundation in listening comprehension, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary as well as the ability to monitor understanding while reading. Comprehension is not the same as decoding words; students who recognize and decode words on the page, but don't know what the words mean, are not comprehending. Without comprehension, reading can be a pointless exercise in word calling.

**Why it matters:** The purpose of reading is comprehension—getting meaning from written text. Students who comprehend what they read are often active and strategic readers who can recognize where their understanding breaks down and apply specific strategies to gain understanding such as rereading, looking at text features, or figuring out the meaning of an unknown word. Students with strong comprehension can listen and respond to ideas being discussed about a text. They can also use a variety of strategies to comprehend different kinds of texts or to read for different purposes. Ultimately, reading comprehension can lead to learning, enjoyment, and success in school and life.

**Examples:** In the Tier 1 curriculum, comprehension is taught in the Genre Units. Students are introduced to the elements of each genre, for example: character, story arc, theme, the structure of nonfiction texts or the elements of poetry. Using mentor texts as examples, students explore each of those texts deeply by retelling, talking about, and analyzing the text. Beginning with an Interactive Read Aloud students build their listening comprehension, implement comprehension strategies, and share their understanding through discussions and writing about texts. Furthermore, based on assessment data, teachers work with a small group of students, using decodable or authentic texts, to teach specific strategies such as inferring, identifying main idea, etc.

**How we assess it:**

- Running Records or F&P Benchmark Assessment provide the opportunity to listen to children read in order to gain information about their ability to monitor and correct their understanding during reading, as well as their overall comprehension of the text after reading.
- District Unit Assessments assess students' comprehension of a variety of texts in different genres.

## Writing

**What it is:** *the ability to compose coherent text to communicate ideas and information*

**What it means:** Students with developed writing skills use their knowledge of phonics, vocabulary, text structure and comprehension to organize and develop text that communicates their ideas.

**Why it matters:** Writing is a fundamental form of communication that is a basic requirement of daily living. It is also one way students demonstrate their understanding, creativity and knowledge. As students learn to write essays, research papers, narrative texts, opinions, etc. throughout their academic experience, they develop their ability to communicate ideas, positions, arguments, and explanations.

**Examples:** Students who are proficient writers write fluently in a variety of subjects (math, science, social studies, etc.) for a variety of purposes. In the SPS curriculum, writing is taught in

the Genre Units as well as with Writing Units. In the genre units students are introduced to writing about texts. In the writing units students are introduced to writing in various genres including narrative, opinion, expository and informational writing.

### How we assess it:

- District Unit Assessments assess students' writing about texts.
- Students' writing is evaluated and revised in each of the writing units.

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*Note: this article borrows the structure and outline from Wierman's article referenced below.*

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# Appendix - Example Screenshots From SPS Curriculum

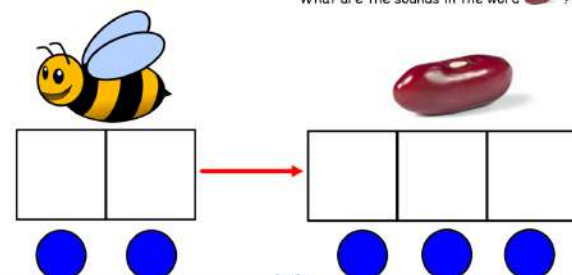
## Phonological Awareness

### Kindergarten PA Week 10

**Segmenting**



What are the sounds in the word ?

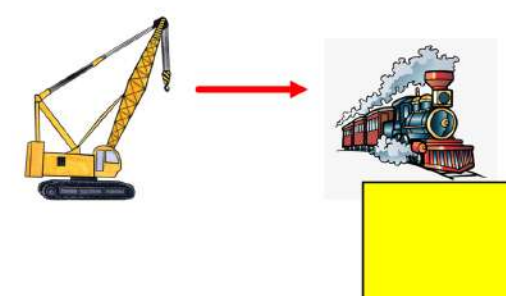
There is one more sound in . What are the sounds in the word ?



### First Grade PA Week 10


**Substituting**

Say . Now say  but instead of /cr/ say /tr/.



### Kindergarten Heggerty

SPS Heggerty Phonological Awareness Intervention Kindergarten



### First Grade Heggerty

**Substituting Phonemes** Use 2 felt squares to represent the blend, or 1 to represent the digraph, and a rectangle to represent the rest of the word. Switch the first square(s) with another color felt square(s) to show the substitution.

T: flower S: flower T: change /fl/ to /sh/. The word is? S: shower

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Word Change to Response	Word Change to Response	Word Change to Response	Word Change to Response	Word Change to Response
ship /sh/ ship	share /sh/ share	shirk /sh/ shirk	shake /sh/ shake	chain /ch/ chain
these /th/ these	shop /sh/ shop	chore /ch/ chore	shove /sh/ shove	shade /sh/ shade
sheep /sh/ sheep	chin /ch/ chin	these /th/ these	chain /ch/ chain	wheat /wh/ wheat
wheat /wh/ wheat	sheet /sh/ sheet	shark /sh/ shark	cheese /ch/ cheese	they /th/ they
chick /ch/ chick	wheel /wh/ wheel	thumb /th/ thumb	show /sh/ show	thank /th/ thank

**Adding Phonemes** Use 1 rectangle of felt to represent the rest of the word, add a felt square to show the added phoneme.

T: /b/ S: /b/ T: add /g/ at the beginning. The word is? S: go

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Word Add Response	Word Add Response	Word Add Response	Word Add Response	Word Add Response
-ed /sh/ shed	-ill /ch/ chill	-at /ch/ chat	-ear /ch/ cheer	-or /sh/ shore
-if /wh/ whiff	-eat /wh/ wheat	-air /sh/ share	-red /th/ thread	-ease /th/ these
-at /th/ that	-out /sh/ shout	-ink /th/ think	-ease /ch/ chase	-ace /ch/ chase
-in /ch/ chin	-itch /wh/ which	-alm /sh/ shame	-ick /th/ thick	-rub /sh/ shrub
-ale /wh/ whale	-ill /wh/ while	-eek /ch/ cheek	-ape /sh/ shape	-eat /ch/ cheat

**Deleting Phonemes** Use 1 square of felt for the first phoneme and 1 rectangle of felt for the rest of the word, take away a felt square to show the deleted phoneme.

T: peel S: peel T: Without /p/, what is left? S: oil

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Word Without Response	Word Without Response	Word Without Response	Word Without Response	Word Without Response
cheer /ch/ ear	shore /sh/ or	shed /sh/ ed	chill /ch/ ill	chat /ch/ at
thread /th/ red	these /th/ ease	whiff /wh/ if	wheat /wh/ eat	share /sh/ air
cheese /ch/ ease	shade /ch/ ace	that /th/ at	about /sh/ out	think /th/ ink
thick /th/ ick	shade /sh/ aid	shale /sh/ ale	which /wh/ ick	shame /sh/ aim
wheel /wh/ eel	cheat /ch/ eat	shark /sh/ ark	shell /sh/ elf	thunder /th/ under

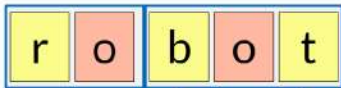


## Phonics

### FUNDations K-2

We can combine syllables in lots of different ways to make new words.

This word has two syllables. What kind of syllable is the first syllable? What kind of syllable is the second syllable?



### Third Grade Fundations Flashback

**Reveal  
Remember  
Repeat**

**ow** and **oe** usually come at the end of a word (or syllable)  
**oa** comes in the middle of a word (or syllable).



### Third Grade Phonics in Focus

#### Learn It



We have learned that when the letter **i** is in an open syllable, it makes the schwa sound /ə/.

an **i** mal  
/ə/

But, if the letter **i** in an open syllable is followed by a **vowel**, it makes the long e sound /ē/.

ra **di** o  
/ē/

### Grade 1 fluency

#### SENTENCE READING



The king can not

sing! The song is

bad.

Does it start with a capital?  
What punctuation do you see? What does the punctuation tell the reader to do?

## Vocabulary

#### Wonderful Words

**PS#14** - in big cities like New York, schools are numbered. PS#14 stands for Public School number 14.



The bus arrives in front of PS#14, and Liam walks towards the front doors.



Liam sees Mr. Paul, the custodian cutting the grass.

#### Guided Practice: Alliteration

##### Canada Geese

by Kristine O'Connell George

Padded drum  
Of beating wings  
Fills the steel gray sky.  
See them stretching, stretching skyward.  
Hear their lonely cry. See them in the windswept  
Autumn. Hear them call  
goodbye.

windswept -  
windy, exposed  
to the wind




Alliteration - beginning sound

## Comprehension

### Compare & Contrast

#### Dinosaurs



Almost all dinosaurs were reptiles that laid eggs and had an upright stance. However, dinosaurs were all different sizes. The Argentinosaurus was the largest dinosaur. It was 130 feet long and as tall as a 7-story building. Just the thigh bone is 8 feet long - longer than any person! In contrast, the smallest dinosaur was the Compsognathus. It is only 3 feet long and weighed about 6 pounds. This is just a little bigger than a chicken.



**Word Meaning**

**compare**

to show how things are alike






both fruit

**Word Meaning**

**contrast**

to show how things are different

different insides

#### I've Been There Before By Olivia Gatwood

when a person is in pain  
sometimes the best cure  
is to hear *i've felt that too*  
from someone else.  
when you cry and your best friend  
puts their hand on your shoulder and  
says, *i've been there before*  
suddenly, you know you are not the only one.  
sometimes, we don't know the people  
we feel for. sometimes, we've never been  
where they are, but we don't need  
to look like each other or speak like each other  
or live like each other to know what it feels  
like to be sad, to be hurt, to be in need of a friend.  
instead, we can simply say the words  
*i understand*, we can make a secret club  
out of our sadness, we can let everyone in  
who wants to join, we can sit in a circle  
and laugh and share, sing over and over  
you are not alone.

**Notice the poetic techniques:**

- Alliteration
- Consonance
- Assonance
- Personification
- Repetition
- Imagery
- Simile
- Metaphor

**What is the tone of this poem?**  
(tone: the emotions the poem is expressing)


**What is the mood of this poem?**  
(mood: the emotions the poem makes the reader feel)

3  
Reread and annotate the poem.

## Writing


### Grade 2

Write a sentence about the picture. Be sure to use adjectives to describe the animal.




The **fluffy, white** rabbit needs an open space to run.

write here:



write here:



write here:

### Grade 4

## Word Choice - Vivid Verbs

**Good writers choose their words carefully – especially verbs.**

Consider the difference:

I got out of the car, and went through the front door of my school.

I jumped out of the car, and dashed through the front door of my school.