

December 5, 2018

Addendum to Report submitted June 11, 2018

On November 29, 2018 Mary Jo Terranova and Jessica Kazigian, Education Specialists from CREC, visited Center School in Litchfield to review recommendations made in June 2018. Classroom observations were done at each grade level and during an intervention period. Additionally, seven focused interviews occurred with teachers, interventionists and special education teachers.

The evidence for each of the original recommendations is as follows:

Literacy Instruction (original recommendations):

1. Provide all students in K and 1 with direct instruction in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness.
2. Provide all students in K through 2 with explicit phonics instruction that includes a handwriting component that links letter/sound correspondence to letter formation.

Evidence:

- Direct instruction in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness was evident in classrooms we visited and referenced by teachers in one-on-one interviews.
- We visited each grade level and saw students and teachers engaged in a variety of multi sensory activities.
- As evidenced in classrooms, we saw teachers modeling beginning and ending sounds, students blending sounds to make new words, substitutions and omissions in words, students were given opportunities for partner and individual practice.
- Teachers reported the collaborative creation of a grade level scope and sequence, aligned with Common Core grade level standards and the Fountas and Pinnell pacing guide. Collaborators included the K-3 Literacy Content Coach grade level teachers, and the Supplemental Skills teachers.
- Irene Fountas also created a continuum of literacy skills that supports the program and is utilized by teachers. This includes phonics, word word and literacy progressions.
- As evidenced in classroom observations, teachers were providing explicit instruction using the Gradual Release model and differentiated small group instruction and activities based on classroom observations and data.
- Handwriting is taught daily in Kindergarten, weekly in Grade 1, and as a center activity for all students in Grade 2.
- Feedback was continually given to individual students, and was positive, corrective and immediate. This suggests teachers have diagnostic descriptive minds with regard to understanding print concepts, phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, phonics and advance word analysis.
- While results show that most types of phonics instruction can be beneficial for students, there is conclusive evidence that explicit phonics is the most effective and is necessary for those with processing issues.

Training and Support (original recommendations):

1. SRBI-Writing targeted, measurable, specific goals with assessments that directly assess the instruction in intervention. In addition, refining forms to build in targeted goals.
2. General education teachers and reading interventionists require professional development in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and explicit phonics instruction. The teachers and interventionists at the school are highly skilled and professional instructors. However, there has been a significant amount of new information in the state in light of the new legislations regarding reading instruction and the identification of students with specific disabilities in the area of reading. This training would help staff implement a model of continuous improvement in the area of language arts instruction.

Evidence:

- Teachers reported in interviews they received technical assistance in the creation of grade level scope and sequence.
- Teachers also received professional learning and resources from Fountas and Pinnell in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and explicit phonics instruction;
- Teachers participate in data team meetings to discuss all students.
- School administration uses a shared document to collect data to help with writing targeted SMART goals to impact instruction and track students in the tiered interventions.
- School-based data teams are examining trend lines of students in tiered intervention to determine if students are making progress to meet the goal.
- Data teams and Administration updated the Intervention Student Profile with targeted SMART goals to focus the intervention and collect targeted data.
- Teachers look at student data in regular data team meetings. After a child has been in an intervention for at least six weeks, the last four data points are evaluated. If a student's last four data points are above the student's goal line, the intervention is ended or a new goal is set. If the last four data points are below the goal line, additional interventions are added. If there are points above and below the goal line, the intervention is continued.

Intervention and Instruction (original recommendations):

1. Interventionists should review current interventions to verify evidence of effectiveness. For example, current research on Reading Recovery finds that it "provides extensive opportunities for reading connected text. It is more limited in its phonic decoding instruction and does not correct the poor phonemic awareness skills that are limiting struggling readers". (Kilpatrick 2015) While the program teaches strategies to address decoding, fluency and comprehension, a thorough review of peer reviewed research does not endorse it as a highly effective method of intervention for students with word level reading difficulties.
2. Universal screens should be used as a guide for instruction and instructional decisions. It is okay to use a different screen for K-3 than for 4-12. The data has to be useful to instruction and decisions. For example screens in Kindergarten need to be linked to the foundational skills that they are supposed to have at the end of the grade. The district needs normed, curriculum based measures that assess letter name fluency, letter sound fluency and phoneme segmenting and blending.

Evidence:

- A review on Reading Recovery shows that there is conflicting research.
- Intervention teachers use a hybrid approach when data indicates they are not closing the achievement gap. They also use Foundations, LLI and Words their Way.
- Interviewed teachers and interventionist reported using:
 - DIBELS
 - Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)* now accounts for how frequently letters appear in both upper- and lower-case forms.
 - Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF)* now accounts for both word frequency and the number of phonemes in a word.
 - Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)* now accounts for the frequency of spelling patterns.
 - Word Reading Fluency (WRF)* is now part of the DIBELS assessment system.
 - Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)* only requires one passage per benchmark period and passages are now written by experienced authors.
 - Maze passages are now written by experienced authors and include several other improvements.
 - Fountas and Pinnell assessments
 - Spelling Inventory (Pearson-Words Their Way)

Additional Comments:

- Margie Gillis, researcher, author and founder of Literacy How has this direct quote in one of her articles: “Simply put, I believe that it is the teacher, not the program, who teaches the child to read. A skilled teacher can take a weak program or a poorly written activity and make it work. Conversely, an inexperienced and uninformed teacher can be handed an excellent program or a tried-and-true set of materials and use them ineffectively”.
- All of the teachers that we observed were dedicated to teaching children to read in a positive and engaging climate that was literacy-rich.
- Center School has a structured approach to literacy. Structured Literacy Instruction is the umbrella term used by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) to unify and encompass evidence-based programs and approaches that are aligned to the Knowledge and Practice Standards and are effective for students identified with Specific Learning Disability (SLD)/Dyslexia (most commonly known as Orton-Gillingham or Multisensory Structured Language). This approach is beneficial for all children learning to read but is essential for students with SLD/Dyslexia. Structured Literacy instruction is supported by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) for students with this reading disability.