



The North Carolina State Improvement Project

Improving Instruction for Students With Disabilities

Guidelines for Selecting an Effective Program

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Use the following when evaluating programs for teaching students who are experiencing difficulty acquiring reading and spelling skills. Please record your answers on separate paper and include with your implementation plan:

Content and methodology of the reading program

1. Is the program based on scientific research? If so, how is this documented? Are there actual studies of the effectiveness of the specific program? If so, please describe the studies (e.g., give references for the studies; characteristics of students studied; inclusion of comparison groups; summary of results).
2. Does the program include training in phonological awareness? Describe the scope and sequence of the skills taught. Include the manner in which these skills are taught (e.g., embedded within the decoding program; separate but coordinated curriculum).
3. Does the program teach decoding skills (word attack). Describe the scope and sequence. Are the skills ordered from simplest to most complex: For example, beginning with simple word types (e.g., CVC) and word length (e.g., three phonemes) and moving systematically to more complex words (e.g., number of phonemes in words, position of blends and digraphs, vowels with more than one spelling or sound, multi-syllable words)? Pay particular attention to how multi-syllable words are taught (e.g., all patterns taught for single syllable words and then multi-syllable words presented; single and multi-syllable words for each pattern taught in sequence; syllable division strategies/rules directly taught). Are all aspects of word structure taught (e.g., phonics, syllables, patterns, roots, affixes)?
4. Does the program teach encoding (spelling) skills? Are these closely coordinated with decoding?
5. Are irregular/sight words specified and taught in distinct ways for both reading and spelling? Are the irregular words tied directly to the reading materials? For several units in the reading program, look at the percentage of irregular words that must be mastered and give the range.
6. Does the program include decodable reading material? What is the nature of such material (word lists, sentences, paragraphs, stories)? How much decodable material is provided? Calculate the actual total number of words provided for student practice for two or three units of study. How decodable are the materials? Calculate the percentage of regular words for two or three passages. There should be at least 75 to 80% decodable words particularly in the beginning stages of instruction.

7. Does the program include specific training in fluency? What is the nature of this training? Are specific goals for fluency included?
8. Are vocabulary development and reading comprehension taught directly? What types of strategies are taught?
9. Is instruction in syntax included?
10. How and when is written language instruction provided? How is it integrated with reading instruction?
11. Does the program use multisensory strategies? Is the instruction explicit, systematic, and sequential?

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Additional questions:

1. What types of teacher training opportunities are provided? Is follow-up/coaching support available? What is the cost per teacher of the training?
2. What materials are required for successful implementation of the program? What is the per pupil cost? Are there optional supplemental materials? Is supportive software available?
3. What assessment instruments are available for placement and ongoing monitoring of progress? Are there guidelines for determining mastery of skills? How could these be used for IEP development and reporting to parents?

Note: These guidelines were developed based on *A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis* by Deborah Simmons and Edward Kame'enui. National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators.



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