



# LITERACY

## TOOLKIT

We are on a journey to improve literacy in New Mexico. Combating the literacy crisis and improving literacy instruction in the Land of Enchantment is our top priority. Today marks the start of the next phase of our journey, and to make the progress our students deserve, we need YOU to join our effort.

For parents, there is a lot to learn and gaining the information you need to help in your child's literacy journey can be overwhelming. In this toolkit, you will find information and resources to get involved and help us combat this crisis. Together, we can make a difference for New Mexico students.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Last year's results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that more than half of New Mexico's 4th graders (52%) score **below** basic in reading.

*Scoring below basic means students have only partial mastery of basic reading skills.*

- State assessment results show that only 1 in 3 New Mexico students are proficient readers and meet the reading expectations for their grade level.

## TYPES OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Before taking action, it's important to understand the different types of literacy instruction and what they mean.



### Structured Literacy

Structured literacy emphasizes explicit, systematic teaching that focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In this type of instruction, teachers carefully structure important literacy skills, concepts and the sequence of instruction to facilitate children's literacy learning and progress as much as possible. This approach is helpful for all students and can be beneficial not only for students with reading disabilities, but also for other at-risk students including English learners and struggling adolescents ([IDA, 2019](#)).

*Explicit teaching means that concepts are clearly explained and modeled. The actions of the teacher are clear, direct and visible.*

*Systematic teaching means lessons are carefully planned and sequenced. It also means that the lessons build on what students have already learned and move from simple to complex.*

**NewMexicoKidsCAN is focused on ensuring every student across New Mexico receives instruction aligned with structured literacy.**



### Whole Language

Whole language is an approach to literacy that involves teaching children to read by recognizing words as whole pieces of language. The main idea of whole language is that children construct their own knowledge and meaning from experience and that phonics is not essential to the learning process. Whole language assumes reading comes naturally, like speech.



### Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy came about in the early 1990's as a way to "blend together" aspects of whole language instruction and phonics. According to the creators of the most popular balanced literacy curriculum, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, balanced literacy is a "philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments using various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Although balanced literacy includes phonics, it is often not systematically incorporated nor taught explicitly, leaving students with a vast range of phonics mastery. There is no one clear definition of "balanced literacy" though over 68% of educators reported using balanced literacy in their classrooms in a [2019 survey conducted by EdWeek](#).

**One of the ways to recognize that your child is in a balanced literacy or whole language classroom is if the teachers are NOT saying "sound it out" or encouraging parents not to say "sound it out." Without an explicit and systematic approach, many children will not learn to read effectively.**

## OTHER IMPORTANT LITERACY TERMS



### Three Cueing

Three cueing is a common practice used in balanced literacy classrooms. The three cueing system promotes using semantics (context clues, pictures, background knowledge), syntax (use of language patterns), or graphophonic cues (the sound of the first letter of the word) to figure out words. For example, when a child comes to a word they don't know, the teacher may encourage that child to think of a word that makes sense by asking, "Does it look right? Does it sound right? Does it make sense?" These "cues" are used instead of encouraging the child to "sound it out."

Research has shown that three cueing takes the focus away from the words themselves and decreases the likelihood that students will use their understanding of letter sounds to read through the word piece-by-piece. Three cueing encourages looking at images and guessing, instead of decoding. Children may identify words correctly in the short term but this does not build a foundation for children to become proficient readers.



## Science of Reading

The phrase, “science of reading” is used to reference the culmination of 40 years of evidence-based research that demonstrates the most effective reading instruction. This research explains that our children need structured literacy to become strong readers. The research suggests that the best approach will include explicit and frequent instruction on both foundational skills (e.g., decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression).

The “science of reading” is not a curriculum, nor an instructional method. It is the scientific evidence that should inform our teaching methods and instructional materials choices.

You now have some background knowledge of key literacy terms and what they mean. We now want YOU to be involved in combating the literacy crisis and creating change for New Mexico students. Below are ways **you** can learn more and actions you can take to support your child’s literacy development.

## STEPS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LITERACY CRISIS

We know learning about the different forms of literacy and what they mean for your child’s development can be overwhelming! We suggest turning to the experts to learn from them. Below is a collection of great resources that make learning about literacy easy to understand and interesting.

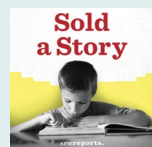
### STEP 1: LEARN FROM A LOCAL TEACHER



Want to hear a New Mexico educator explain how she transitioned from teaching balanced literacy to structured literacy in her own classroom? In this episode, you will hear from local teacher, Bella Chandler, about her own literacy journey. Find this episode of New Mexico Rising, by searching “What I Knew To Do Was Entirely Wrong” wherever you get your podcasts.

[Listen to episode 4 of our podcast, New Mexico Rising](#)

### STEP 2: LISTEN TO THE SOLD A STORY PODCAST



Reporter and producer Emily Hanford hosts this award-winning podcast which has galvanized conversations across the country over how our children are learning to read. This podcast helps listeners understand how poor literacy instruction hurts teachers, students, and families. It is a MUST LISTEN.

[Listen to the Sold a Story podcast](#)

### STEP 3: SEE WHAT BALANCED LITERACY LOOKS LIKE



Want to see what poor instructional practices look like in action? Watch the Purple Challenge videos. These videos explain how three cueing and balanced literacy can show up in your child's books and reading assignments. Tune in to better understand what these poor instructional methods may look like when your child reads and how you can help at home.

[The Purple Challenge Part 1](#)

[The Purple Challenge Part 2](#)

## ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

You have the knowledge, now we encourage you to act! We recommend taking the following steps to support your child's literacy development. Actively engaging with your child's teacher, principal, and administrators will ensure you and your child's school create a collaborative effort to help your child read proficiently.

### 1. Email your child's teacher to get two key pieces of information.

First, begin by asking what curriculum they are using to teach reading in your child's classroom. Next, ask if your child is reading at their grade level. If not, ask to clarify the level at which your child is reading. Consider using the example email below.

New Message — ↗ ✕

Recipients

Subject

*Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms (insert teacher's last name),*

*Thank you so much for all the effort you put into my child's learning! As we begin to prepare for the summer, I have a couple of questions.*

*As I've begun to learn more about reading to be a more effective supporter of my child's reading journey at home, I've learned a lot about different instructional methods. To better understand how [insert name of child] is learning to read at school, can you please tell me the name of the reading curriculums you use in your classroom?*

*Is [insert name of child] currently reading on grade level? If not, at what grade level is [insert name of child] reading?*

*I appreciate you sharing this information with me so that I can ensure [insert name of child] receives all the support they need this summer to start next school year off on a strong foot.*

*If this would be easier to discuss over phone, or in person, I'd be happy to find a time for us to connect. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you.*

*[insert signature]*

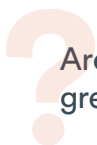
## 2. Check to see how your child’s reading curriculum stacks up!

Now that you know which curriculum is being used in your child’s classroom, see how it is rated. Start with the list of high quality resources that received the “Structured Literacy Designation” from the New Mexico Public Education Department:

- Amplify ELA, Amplify Education, Inc., 2017-2019
- CKLA, Amplify Education, Inc., 2017
- HMH New Mexico Into Reading, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021
- myPerspectives, Savvas Learning Company LLC, 2022
- myView, Savvas Learning Company LLC, 2020
- OUR EL, Open Up Resources, 2016
- SpringBoard, The College Board, 2021
- Wonders, McGraw Hill, LLC, 2020

Each of the above curriculum received a score of 90% or above on the structured literacy portion of the review and are recognized as having high-quality support for the components of structured literacy. For more information on this list, [click here](#).

If you do not see your child’s curriculum on this list, check the [Colorado list](#), or read the curriculum review on [EdReports](#).



Are the materials used by your child’s teacher on one of the lists above? If so, this is great news for your student and there is no need to continue with the additional steps!


## 3. Email your schools principal to ask what the adopted K-2 reading curriculum is for the district. Once they respond, compare that curriculum to the list in step 2.


Curricular decisions are often not a teacher level decision, so it’s important to reach out to your child’s principal to better understand who is in charge of choosing curricular materials and how you might help support the school in adopting materials that are better aligned to structured literacy.


## 4. If your child’s school or district is not using materials aligned with structured literacy, follow up with your teacher and school administrators and ask them to consider transitioning to structured literacy.


Need help communicating with your child’s teacher or school staff about this, or learning more about the curriculum used to teach reading in your child’s classroom? Reach out to [info@nmkids.org](mailto:info@nmkids.org) and we will help you find the best next step

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR CHILD'S LITERACY INSTRUCTION

 **BAD SIGN** - look out for the term “balanced literacy.” Balance sounds appealing, but this term indicates instruction that assumes reading comes naturally and often does not include enough time teaching phonics.

 **GOOD SIGN** - you want your child’s literacy instruction to be described as “explicit” and “systematic.” This is an indication that your child’s school is teaching structured literacy, foundational skills (e.g., decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression).

 **BAD SIGN** - when you’re at your child’s school, pay close attention to what’s displayed on the walls. Is there a poster encouraging students to guess at words or ask themselves “does it look right, does it sound right, does it make sense?” Perhaps there is a “word wall” with words listed by the alphabet, regardless of the sounds those letters represent? These can be signs of ineffective literacy instruction.

 **GOOD SIGN** - Look for direct teacher-led instruction in your child’s classroom and encouragement to “sound it out.” This is a sign that your child is being taught how to decode words which is an important foundational skill of being able to read effectively.

## SUMMER READING

- It’s time to start planning for the summer. To help support your child’s reading this summer, our colleagues at Learning Heroes have formulated a list of key questions to ask your child’s teacher. You can find the full list [here](#).
- The Dion’s/Albuquerque Isotopes Club Read program is back for its 20 year anniversary. Students in preschool through 5th grade can earn free pizza, books, Albuquerque Isotopes tickets, and more by completing the reading challenge. The program runs April 3 - July 23. For more information, click here: <https://www.dions.com/community/club-read-program>

We hope you found this resource to be helpful in supporting your child’s literacy journey. If we can help in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out.



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