We want all students to
✓ read grade level text with a reasonable level of understanding;
✓ be able to do this fluently, so that reading the text doesn’t take an inordinate amount of time;
✓ find pleasure in reading, which means reading a book like we read books, without having to struggle with the words, and be able to focus on the meaning.

Children’s Reading Comprehension Depends on…
• how well they read the words on the page.
• how much knowledge they have and how well they think.
• their previous experiences with reading and how motivated they are to understand the text.
• the interaction between the text, reader, and larger context.

Potential Stumbling Blocks to Becoming a Good Reader
• Difficulty learning to read words accurately and fluently.
• Insufficient vocabulary, general knowledge, and reasoning skills to support comprehension of written language.
• Absence or loss of initial motivation to read, or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading.

Learning Disabilities
Students can have a learning disability in the following areas:
• Listening, thinking, speaking, or communicating
• Reading with comprehension
  • 85% of students with LD have significant difficulties in reading.
• Writing legibly and with meaning
• Spelling
• Performing mathematical calculations or problem-solving
Dyslexia

- Contrary to popular belief, dyslexia is *not* a problem of letter or word reversals (b/d, was/saw) or of letters, words, or sentences “dancing around” on the page.
- Dyslexia...
  - dys = not, lack of, bad, ill, difficult
  - lexia = words, reading, language

Simply put, dyslexia is a significant difficulty in reading, also known as a specific learning disability in reading.

What are the most critical problems for students with reading disabilities?

The *first problem* is an extreme difficulty mastering the use of “phonics” skills as an aid to early, independent reading because of difficulties with the skills of blending and analyzing the sounds in words (phonemic awareness) leading to problems learning letter-sound correspondences.

Converging research has revealed the fundamental cause of most cases of dyslexia—the presence of weakness or lack of talent in phonological language processing which is not necessarily related to a person’s IQ.

What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological awareness is the conscious awareness of or sensitivity to the sound structure of language. PA includes the ability to detect, match, blend, segment, or otherwise manipulate the sounds in spoken language.

Levels of Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term used to explain several levels of metalinguistic skill.

The term is often—but incorrectly—used interchangeably with phonemic awareness. *Phonemic awareness* refers only to the most sophisticated level of phonological awareness.

*The Word Level* – the ability to isolate individual words from the speech flow.

*The Syllable Level* – the ability to blend and segment chunks within words.

*The Onset-Rime Level* – the ability to manipulate intrasyllabic units.

*The Phoneme Level* – the ability to manipulate individual sounds within words.
The second problem many poor readers have is the slow development of the “sight vocabulary” necessary for fluent reading because of limited exposure to text and the lack of strategies to reliably identify words in text. Fundamentally, these problems arise from the underlying lack of talent in phonological language processing.

This second problem often leads to a very persistent and difficult to remediate gap in reading fluency between students with RD and their peers.

**What do we mean by differentiated instruction?**

- Instruction designed to meet the needs of all students in a classroom
- A way of thinking about our students and our instruction that focuses on mastery rather than coverage
- Acknowledges not all students learn at the same rate or need the same amount of explicit detail
- Instruction that is adaptive to meet the changing needs of students
- Accomplished through ongoing assessment of students and flexible grouping strategies

**Teachers provide adjustment in**

- intensity of instruction,
- degree of explicitness,
- amount of scaffolding during guided practice,
- amount of independent practice.

**Critical questions to ask when planning differentiated instruction are:**

- What does this student or group of students already know?
- What do they need to know or be able to do?
- What would be the best way to teach that to this particular child or group of children?
  - How explicit should the instruction be?
  - How much support do these students need?
  - What is the best grouping strategy for this lesson?

In thinking about how to answer these questions, it is helpful to consider the range of instructional approaches and child/content characteristics.
### Considerations in Choosing an Instructional Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>more explicit</th>
<th>more implicit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The student…</strong></td>
<td><strong>The student…</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Has limited experiences with topic or skill</td>
<td>✓ Has abundant experiences with topic or skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Lacks prior knowledge</td>
<td>✓ Has a lot of prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Is extrinsically motivated</td>
<td>✓ Is intrinsically motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Experiences initial failure</td>
<td>✓ Experiences early success</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The content…</strong></th>
<th><strong>The content…</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Is sequential</td>
<td>✓ Is conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Requires task-specific strategies</td>
<td>✓ Can be done with general problem-solving strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Is complex</td>
<td>✓ Accuracy is not important; focus is on process, not product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Must done with a high level of proficiency</td>
<td>And instructional time is limited.</td>
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**Students with or at risk for a reading disability** need instruction that is more explicit, more intense, more individualized delivered by the most highly-skilled professionals available
Ways to provide the intensive instruction struggling readers need

- Small group work with the classroom teacher
- Small group work with a reading resource teacher
- Small group work with a special education teacher
- Small group work with an aide or paraprofessional
- Individual work with computer assisted instruction
- Individual work with volunteers
- Individual work with classroom or cross age peers

Considerations for Designing Effective, Intensive Small-Group Instruction

1. **Frequent assessment and analysis of student performance** to drive instruction.

Without frequent assessment and analysis of student performance to drive instruction, small-group instruction is less effective at meeting individual student needs. Without assessment data to show us the students have mastered the skill or knowledge, it is easy to slow down and give them “just a little bit more practice” rather than pushing on. We have no time to waste with struggling readers and need to move as quickly as we can to catch them up to their peers.

Purposes of Assessment

- Screening
- Diagnosis
- Progress monitoring
- Achievement Outcomes
2. Provide **explicit, systematic instruction driven by student needs.**

Following a scope and sequence is important for providing high quality instruction, but the intensity of the instruction and the rate at which teachers cover the material is determined by ongoing assessments of the students.

**Systematic instruction** is instruction that follows a sensible order and progression. In reading and writing, it is instruction that is coordinated and organized so that the logic and order of the alphabetic system are revealed and that students have the prerequisite skills and knowledge they need to learn new material.

...the goal of **systematic instruction** is one of maximizing the likelihood that whenever children are asked to learn something new, they already possess the appropriate prior knowledge and understanding to see its value and to learn it...

Adams, 2003, p.74

**For example, here is coordinated, systematic instruction (1st Grade)**
- **Core Reading Program**
  - Phonics—focus on learning to connect /a/ with the vowel diagraph ai
  - Sight word practice on would, should, could, pain, tail
  - Word list practice with sight words and words that spell /a/ with ai
  - Decodable connected text with ai and other previously-learned combinations
- **Spelling & Writing**
  - Spelling list of same high frequency words as in reading and words with the common phonograms –ain and –ail.
  - Focus on finding words that spell /a/ with ai in own writing
  - Adding the same high frequency words and examples of the –ail and –ain pattern to the word wall with discussion of how this spelling is similar and different to the previously-learned spelling – ay for the sound /a/

**Here is uncoordinated, unsystematic instruction (1st Grade)**
- **Core Reading Program**
  - Phonics—focus on learning to connect /a/ with the spelling ai
  - Sight word practice on again, said, could, give
  - Connected text that is not decodable and encourages prediction and use of context as word identification strategies or
Decodable text with words spelling /a/ with ay and /e/ with ea or some other pattern not being taught in phonics

Spelling & Writing
- Spelling list of words from the connected text based on importance to the meaning of the story or a list of high frequency and patterned words different from what is taught in phonics
- Focus on finding words that spell /a/ with ai in own writing
- Putting thematic words from science on the word wall.

**Explicit instruction** is instruction that does not leave anything to chance, and it does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire “on their own.”

- **In phonics**, explicit instruction means that teachers directly demonstrate, model, and teach the connections between the letters in print and the sounds in words in a systematic, comprehensive fashion.
- **In vocabulary**, it means that the meanings of words are directly taught using student-friendly language and explicitly practiced so that they are accessible when children are reading text.
- Explicit instruction also means that teachers demonstrate their thinking and processing as expert readers to show their students the *specific strategies* needed for successful decoding, comprehension, and understanding of vocabulary.

3. Because most struggling students have difficulty making the connections between print and sound, an emphasis on developing **phonological awareness** and understanding of the **alphabetic principle** is essential.

4. Every small group intervention should have strong reading-writing **connections**. Writing the patterns and sight words that are being learned for reading provides additional practice and an opportunity to understand how our language is organized.

5. Every child needs a chance to apply the skills they are learning immediately in a meaningful context. We need to explicitly connect what students learn in isolated skills lessons to their purposeful reading and writing.