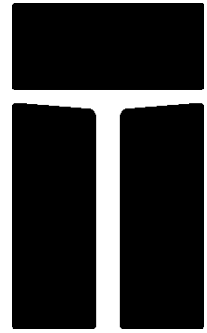


# K-3 Literacy in the Twinsburg City School District

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At Twinsburg City School District, we are deeply committed to delivering on the promise of education and equipping every child with the ability to read -- and read well! Learning to read is such an essential skill to not only find success in school and to thrive in society, but to also experience the joy that reading brings to life. We want every child to be successful in reading!

We are learning more about what research says about how children learn to read, how to make sure every student learns to read, and what to do when a child encounters difficulty in learning to read. The research that we're learning about and implementing is called the Science of Reading.

## **When We Know Better, We Do Better!**

The reading scores of American children have remained somewhat stagnant for over 40 years! Each year, the data shows that only about 35% of 4th graders (measured on the NAEP) are proficient in reading! Twinsburg City School District's annual data fares much better than that. Twinsburg City School District want more for our students. The research is telling us that while reading is more challenging for some students than others, with evidence-based reading instruction, nearly every child can become proficient by the end of 3rd grade. With the research available to us now, we can realistically set 95% proficiency as our goal in three years.

Decades of research have determined that reading occurs in a specific way in the brain in all people. It does not occur naturally the way that speech does. The process must be taught. It is a process of building neuro-pathways in the brain that link sounds of speech to written symbols or letters. The strings of letters are attached to meaning, and then those 'letter strings with meaning' are stored in the brain's "letterbox" for later retrieval that is instantaneous and effortless. This process is called orthographic mapping and it is our goal to help our students build a giant 'letterbox' of instantly retrievable words. That translates into fluent reading and subsequent comprehension. Guessing at words based on context does not aid in orthographic mapping, phonic decoding does.

## **The Science of Reading**

"The body of work referred to as the "science of reading" is not an ideology, a philosophy, a political agenda, a one-size-fits-all approach, a program of instruction, nor a specific component of instruction. It is the emerging consensus from many related disciplines, based on literally thousands of studies, supported by hundreds of millions of research dollars, conducted across the world in many languages. These studies have revealed a great deal about how we learn to read, what goes wrong when students don't learn, and what kind of instruction is most likely to work the best for the most students."

- Dr. Louisa Moats

# A New Path in the Twinsburg City School District

If your family has been a part of the Twinsburg City School District for some time, you'll notice some changes in how we teach reading; if you're new to Twinsburg City School District, jump on board, it's going to be a fantastic journey! It's an exciting time to be in education as we align our instruction with the Science of Reading!

Listed below are some points of research that we will be addressing as we embark on a new school year at Twinsburg City School District.

**Code Emphasis in Primary Grades.** This means that grades K-2 especially will focus on acquiring the skills to crack the code of our alphabet to the speech sounds in English. (There are 44 speech sounds in English and 150 ways to read and spell them!) Kids must first learn to decode/sound-out words before they can understand the meaning of text, therefore, we will emphasize instruction in 'cracking the code' in grades K-2.

**Explicit and systematic phonics instruction.** We will have an order or continuum of phonics skills, progressing from simple to complex, that will be followed throughout the early grades. Students will progress through the continuum as they master skills. In the intermediate grades (4-6), word study will continue with more grammar and morphology (learning about word parts such as Greek and Latin roots).

**Early intervention.** If we see any signs that your child may be struggling with the foundational skills of reading, we will not take a 'wait and see' approach; we will immediately implement interventions and monitor their progress. The best solution to the problem of reading failure is early identification and intervention.

**Phonemic Awareness.** This is the ability to get to the individual sounds in words by listening and to identify and manipulate those sounds orally. While this skill will be emphasized in grades K-2, we will make sure all students at Twinsburg City School District have this necessary foundation. Students in the intermediate grades may need to practice these skills until they have firmed up this foundation of reading. Don't be surprised if you have a 4th - 6th grader who will be working on phonemic awareness! This is an area that the research has indicated is hugely important!

**Decodable Readers.** Our early readers will be working with decodable readers. These are books or passages that only include words that the students can 'decode' (sound-out) according to the skills they have been taught thus far. Our kids need practice with the phonics skills they are learning and these books and passages provide that practice. So be aware that at times, your primary students may be bringing home a sheet of paper with a passage for practice rather than a book.

**Guided Reading Levels.** Your child will not be assigned a reading level, such as A, or M, or R (any level AZ) as in the past. Early reading instruction will include lots of phoneme manipulation, phoneme grapheme mapping, and syllable types activities. From there, students work on morphemes such as prefixes and base words. At this point, students should be strong decoders, and they can learn about morphology, syntax, and semantics. The ultimate goal is reading comprehension and all the components lead to this goal.

**Leveled Readers.** Your child will not be assigned a reading level that corresponds to a letter of the alphabet. They will work with a variety of text. Some text may address specific phonics needs, some may be grade level text to build knowledge that is pertinent to their grade level, some may be interest-based, some will be at a determined level for fluency practice, but they will not be confined to a certain 'level.' Students will not bring home books with patterned sentences that are easily memorized.

**Three-cueing system.** This is the practice of teaching kids to identify words by using strategies other than decoding. In the three-cueing system, students are taught that they can identify a word by deciding if it makes

sense, if it would structurally/grammatically 'fit' in a sentence, or if it looks right rather than closely examining the phonics patterns in the word and sounding it out. This is a practice that the research has indicated that we must abandon. Your child will not be taught to check pictures to identify words or make guesses based on the first letter they see. We want our students to look at every letter in the words, apply phonics knowledge, and sound words out!

**Comprehension.** The ultimate goal of all reading instruction is for students to understand what they read. The model of The Simple View of Reading demonstrates that reading comprehension occurs only when students have both Decoding/Word Recognition Skills and Language Comprehension skills. Children need the essential skills to get the words off the page as well as knowledge, vocabulary, and a good understanding of how our language works in order to comprehend what they read. We must provide instruction that will help students achieve these goals.



**What is Structured Literacy?** Explicit, systematic teaching that focuses on phonological awareness, word recognition, phonics and decoding, spelling, and syntax at the sentence and paragraph levels.

**The components of Structured Literacy are:**

- Phonology: Rhyming, counting words in spoke sentence, and clapping syllables in spoken words.
- Sound-Symbol Association: Must be taught and mastered in two directions – visual to auditory (reading) and auditory to visual (spelling).
- Syllable Instruction: Instruction includes the six basic syllable types in the English language.
- Morphology: Curriculum includes the study of base words, roots, prefixes, and suffixes.
- Syntax: Study of the sequence and function of words in a sentence.
- Semantics: The curriculum (from the beginning) must include instruction in the comprehension of written language.

We now know a great deal about how the brain develops as we learn to read and what instructional practices are most effective for all children. We are committed to stop doing what doesn't work and be guided by scientific research to ensure that we deliver on the promise of literacy for every Twinsburg City School District student. Again, it's an exciting time to be in education and we need you parents as our partners!

Respectfully,

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Misty Johnson, Principal, Samuel Bissell Elementary School  
Jennifer Farthing, Director of Curriculum