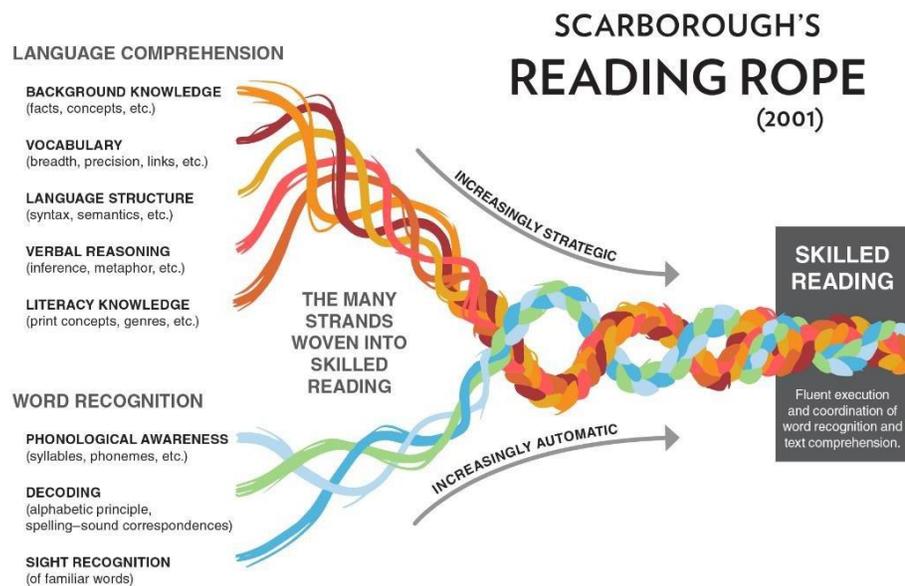


Shifting Gears: ECUSD #7 is changing the way we teach reading.

District #7 is dedicated to providing every child with high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction. This begins in our classrooms, specifically by giving our students the foundational skills necessary to become lifelong learners. Decades of research called "The Science of Reading" is guiding us on this journey, and we are just beginning.

Scarborough's Reading Rope is a visual representation of the complexity of the skills necessary for one to become a skilled reader. The rope consists of both a lower and an upper strand. Throughout the current school year, our focus will be on the "Word Recognition" part of the rope. In the spring, teachers will begin to explore the "Language Comprehension," or upper part of the rope more in depth with the goal to begin implementation of new materials to support these skills at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year.



Hopefully the information below will help you understand why some things may look different than ever before in your child's classroom.

Phonemic Awareness: A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in our language. The word "cat" has three phonemes /c/ /a/ /t/. The word "chat" also has three phonemes /ch/ /a/ /t/.

Strong phoneme awareness facilitates growth in printed word recognition. Even before a student learns to read, we can predict with a high level of accuracy whether that student will be a good reader or a poor reader by the end of third grade and beyond (Good, Simmons, and Kame'enui, 2001; Torgesen, 1998, 2004). Explicit teaching of phonemic awareness during the early years of school can help to prevent future reading problems for many students. However, struggling decoders of any age can work on phonological awareness, especially if they struggle to blend or segment phonemes. Students in our K-3rd grade classrooms will have daily Phonemic Awareness lessons which focus on listening to and manipulating the individual sounds in our language.

Explicit and Systematic Phonics: Phonics instruction helps children learn the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. Children are taught, for example, that the letter *n* represents the sound /n/ and that it is the first letter in words such as *nose*, *nice*, and *new*. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words and to begin to read with fluency.

Our school district adopted *Open Court Reading* for Grades K-3. Daily phonics instruction is both systematic and explicitly taught. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for children to apply what they are learning about letters and sounds to the reading of words, sentences, and stories. Research has shown that when students are taught phonics explicitly and systematically, it significantly improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.

Students in 4th & 5th grade will have daily lessons which focus on word analysis skills. *Open Court Word Analysis Kits* develop critical reading skills that enable students to approach new words and more complex texts. Students will learn about morphemes, the smallest units of meaning, and how they are used to identify new words and build vocabulary; focus on prefixes, suffixes, and base words individually and in context; read a variety of passages at progressive levels for practice in reading independently and focus on vocabulary and fluency.

Decodable Readers/Passages: Students in K-3 may come home with books or passages that look quite different than what you're used to if you've been in our district previously. Students are given these materials intentionally to practice the phonics skills that they are learning in class. We are building a strong foundation in the area of phonics, and it is essential that students are given multiple opportunities to strengthen their new phonics skills.

Spelling: Word study is an approach to spelling instruction that moves away from a focus on memorization. The approach reflects what researchers have discovered about the alphabetic, pattern, and meaning layers of the spelling system of our language. During word study, teachers use a variety of hands-on activities, often called word work, to help students actively explore these layers of information.

Open Court Reading pioneered the practice of explicit instruction in sound-spelling relationships and the development of unique Sound/Spelling Cards. Each card represents a common English sound and contains the most common spelling or spellings of that sound, as well as a picture that helps students recall the sound.

Many discussions will be happening this year about how we teach spelling. Traditionally, many teachers have given pre-tests at the beginning of the week along with activities to practice spelling words throughout the week with a post-test on Friday. The "why" behind our spelling instruction is to explicitly teach the way words work in our English language rather than rote memorization of patterns. Assessments will begin to shift to focus on more of a diagnostic analysis of student spelling errors to inform instructional decisions in the classroom.

Assessment: Teachers will use assessment data to help differentiate instruction within their classrooms. Teachers, support staff and administrators will meet to review the data collected and make decisions regarding levels of support for students.

Even more essential than a new curriculum is the ongoing professional development, knowledge building and instructional coaching that is happening in each K-5 building. Teachers are being provided with continued support via a grade-level coach and a district literacy coach. In-depth discussions are happening frequently to work through the growing pains that inevitably come with implementing a new program. Be patient with us as we navigate this change. There will be bumps along the way and adjustments will be made as we learn and grow in our study of the Science of Reading.

For more information and tips on helping your child with these skills at home:

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness: <https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-topics/phonological-and-phonemic-awareness>

Phonemic Awareness: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/tips-teaching-your-child-about-phonemes>

Reading 101: <https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-101-guide-parents>