

SACRAMENTO COUNTY READS

Rights. Equity. Access. Diversity. Success.

Sacramento County READS

Just the Facts

Sacramento County Office of Education

EDUCATION EMPOWERS

Initiative Overview

Sacramento County READS is a countywide initiative aimed at improving literacy outcomes for all Sacramento County learners.

MISSION

Sacramento County invests in the development and implementation of collaborative systems of teaching and learning, partnerships, programs, and support services—grounded in the science of reading—that promote reading and literacy success for all learners within our community.

VISION

All learners in Sacramento County will meet yearly age- and grade-appropriate reading and literacy milestones to become proficient readers, thus allowing them to access post-secondary opportunities, employment, and fully participate in their community and our democracy.

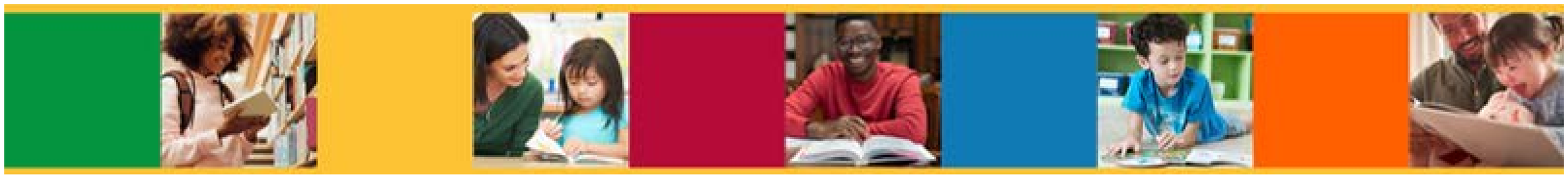
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



GOALS

- Build a sense of urgency to **support a countywide campaign** focused on improved literacy outcomes.
- Create connections between **community leaders and organizations** to support literacy within local contexts and countywide.
- **Engage families** in opportunities and experiences that promote literacy.
- Convene LEA teams in a **community of practice** to develop knowledge and skills, build capacity, and create coherent systems that support improved literacy outcomes.
- **Share best practices** and resources.

Learn more at:
scoe.net/SacramentoCountyReads



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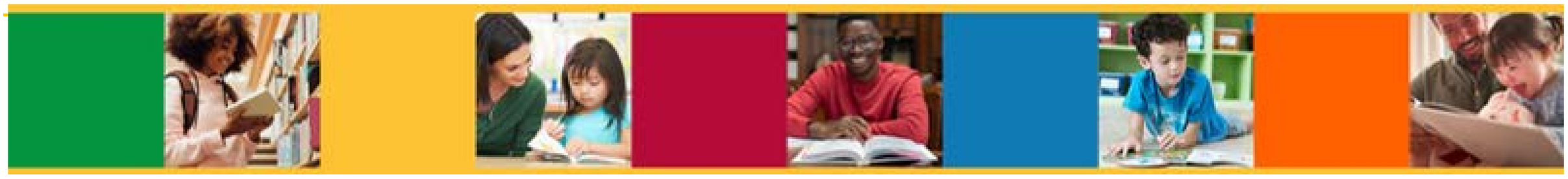
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Empower Youth Through Literacy
Join the Movement for a Brighter Future

Literacy levels greatly affect people's economic and health outcomes—poor reading skills are linked to higher unemployment and higher rates of incarceration. The Sacramento County Office of Education is dedicated to making sure all students in the county can read proficiently by the time they graduate high school, so they can fully engage in their communities and participate in our democracy.



Recent test results in Sacramento County show a serious need to improve reading skills. Over 44% of students are not reading at grade level, and there are big gaps in reading performance between different student groups. Only 22% of foster youth, 20% of homeless students, 25% of African American students, 11% of English learners, and 16% of students with disabilities are meeting or exceeding the state standards for English Language Arts.

To ensure that all children learn to read in Sacramento County, reading instruction must be based on proven research and our schools and classrooms must be set up to provide support to those students who need additional help to learn to read. Studies show that when students are identified early through universal screening, they are less likely to need intensive help as they get older.

The Sacramento County READS initiative is designed to address these challenges and together with educators, community partners, and families and caregivers, ensure that we change outcomes for our young people.

The following beliefs guide our work:

CENTERING THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

We believe that family involvement is key to helping children become strong readers. When families actively support their child's reading journey – by talking and reading together, encouraging a love for books, and staying engaged with their progress – children are more likely to develop strong literacy skills. This foundation not only boosts academic success but also fosters confidence, critical thinking, and a lifelong love for learning.

A COMMITMENT TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

We commit to promoting diversity in language and culture while providing resources aligned to evidence-based reading methods to boost student engagement and success. We prioritize continuous learning and coaching for educators and staff at all levels, using assessments, including universal screening, to guide instruction. Our goal is to build a strong educational system where effective reading practices are implemented from early childhood, to high school, through adult education, ensuring that all students, inclusive of language, background, or disability, have access to high-quality materials and instruction.

PRIORITIZING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

We pledge to support community literacy programs, especially those that provide access to diverse books for a wide range of readers, and encourage family involvement, to build a culture of reading and lifelong learning. We are committed to partnerships that strengthen literacy efforts and ensure that every child and youth in Sacramento County has an equal chance to succeed in reading.



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The Science of Reading: The Basics

Learning to read is not a natural process like learning to speak. The human brain is not hard-wired to read. Reading and writing are human inventions, and they must be explicitly taught.

The science of reading is well-established, providing clear insights into how our brains learn to read. Here are a few highlights about what *The Science of Reading* IS and is NOT.

The Science of Reading IS . . .

RESEARCH

Research, over time, from multiple fields of study using methods that confirm and disconfirm theories on how children best learn to read.

This body of research continues to grow.

MULTILINGUAL AND ENGLISH LEARNERS

The Science of Reading is based on thousands of studies from around the world, including research on students who speak languages other than English. This research shows that all students, including those who are learning English or speak other dialects, benefit from the same reading instruction.

Good reading instruction includes teaching sounds, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and understanding texts. For students who speak other languages, it's also important to include their home language and give extra support to help with speaking and understanding.

5 BIG IDEAS ABOUT READING

Reading Instruction that benefits all students includes these **essential components**:

- **Phonemic Awareness** - The ability to identify and play with individual sounds in spoken words.
- **Phonics** - Understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds to form letter- sound relationships and spelling patterns.
- **Fluency** - The ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly, with enough speed and expression.
- **Vocabulary** - Knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly.
- **Comprehension** - The ability to understand what you are reading.

The Science of Reading is NOT . . .

A PROGRAM OR A PRODUCT THAT YOU CAN BUY

The Science of Reading is NOT a specific product or program you can buy. It is a body of research and evidence that informs our approach to teaching reading.

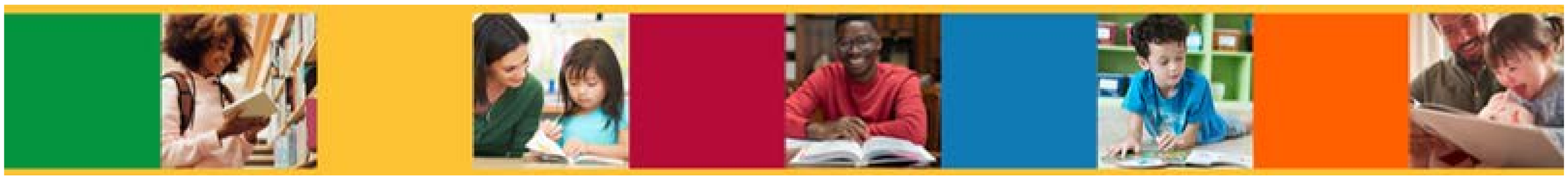
ONLY ABOUT PHONICS

Phonics is a necessary part of teaching reading, but it is just one of the five big ideas that should be taught so all children can learn to read. The goal is for students to have the skills to choose what they want to read and enjoy independently.

A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH

Teaching reading isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. While all students need to learn the same set of skills, some students will need extra help in addition to grade-level instruction. Using data to find students' strengths and weaknesses is key to supporting each learner to become a strong reader.

To learn more . . . Science of Reading: Defining Guide



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Early Literacy Skills

Early literacy skills are the foundational abilities that children begin to develop before they start formal reading and writing instruction and are the essential content needed to become proficient readers and writers. These skills are important for future academic success and are instructional priorities in the early years of schooling.



What are Early Literacy Skills?

ORAL LANGUAGE

- Knowledge and skills that we use to produce and understand spoken language.
- Develops naturally.
- An ongoing process developed through use of language.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- Recognize, hear, and play with the sounds in spoken language.
- Understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds.

LETTER KNOWLEDGE

- Ability to recognize letter shapes and then connect these shapes to letter names.
- Ability to name the letters and ultimately know their sounds.
- Ability to form the letters.

WHY?

- Foundation of all literacy skills.
- Develops the ability to understand and use language.

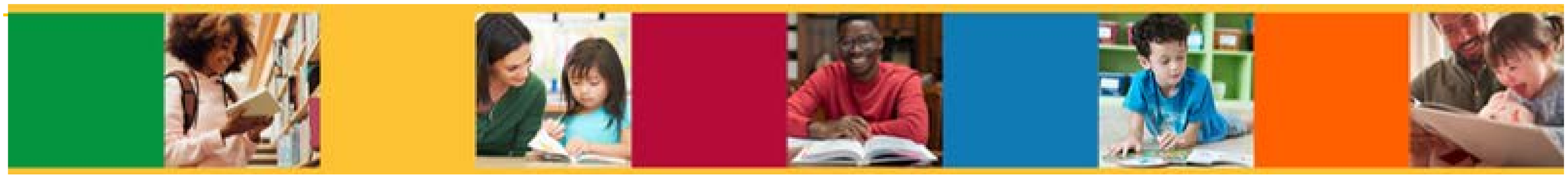
WHY?

- A strong predictor of future reading proficiency.
- Gives children a foundation for learning to identify sounds as they learn to read and spell.

WHY?

- A strong predictor of success in learning to read.
- Allows children to remember the forms of written words and see words as sequences of letters.

To Learn More . . . Early Literacy Development



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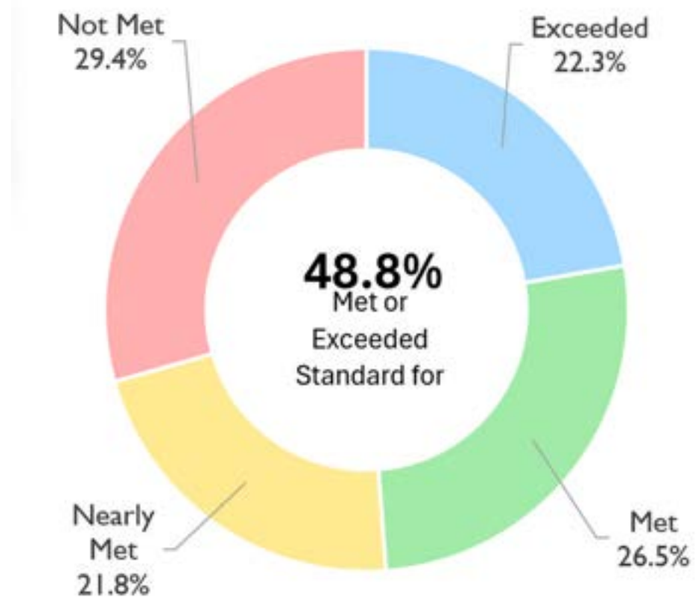
Spring 2025 Student Performance Overview
English Language Arts in Sacramento County

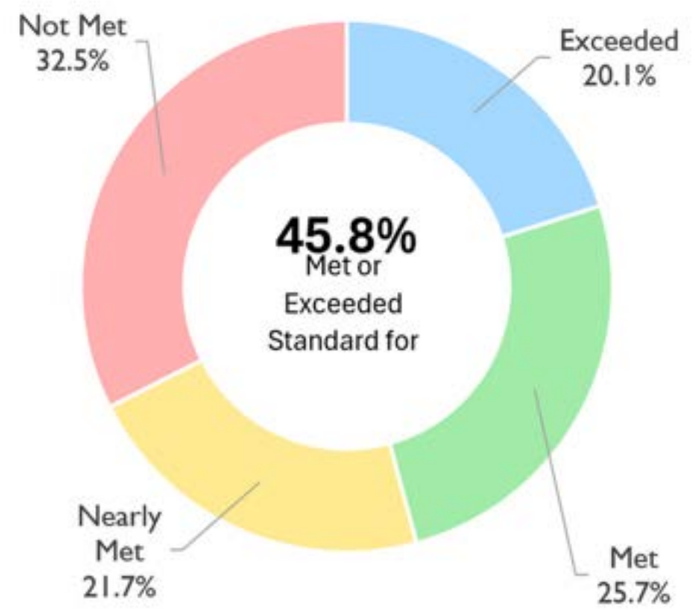
All students in grades 3–8 and 11 take the state tests in English language arts (ELA) and math. These tests are called the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments and are a part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) system. The CAASPP is designed to help teachers, students, and families understand what students know and can do, and to help students prepare for college and careers.

What do the scores mean? Students receive an overall score and an achievement level. There are four different achievement levels:

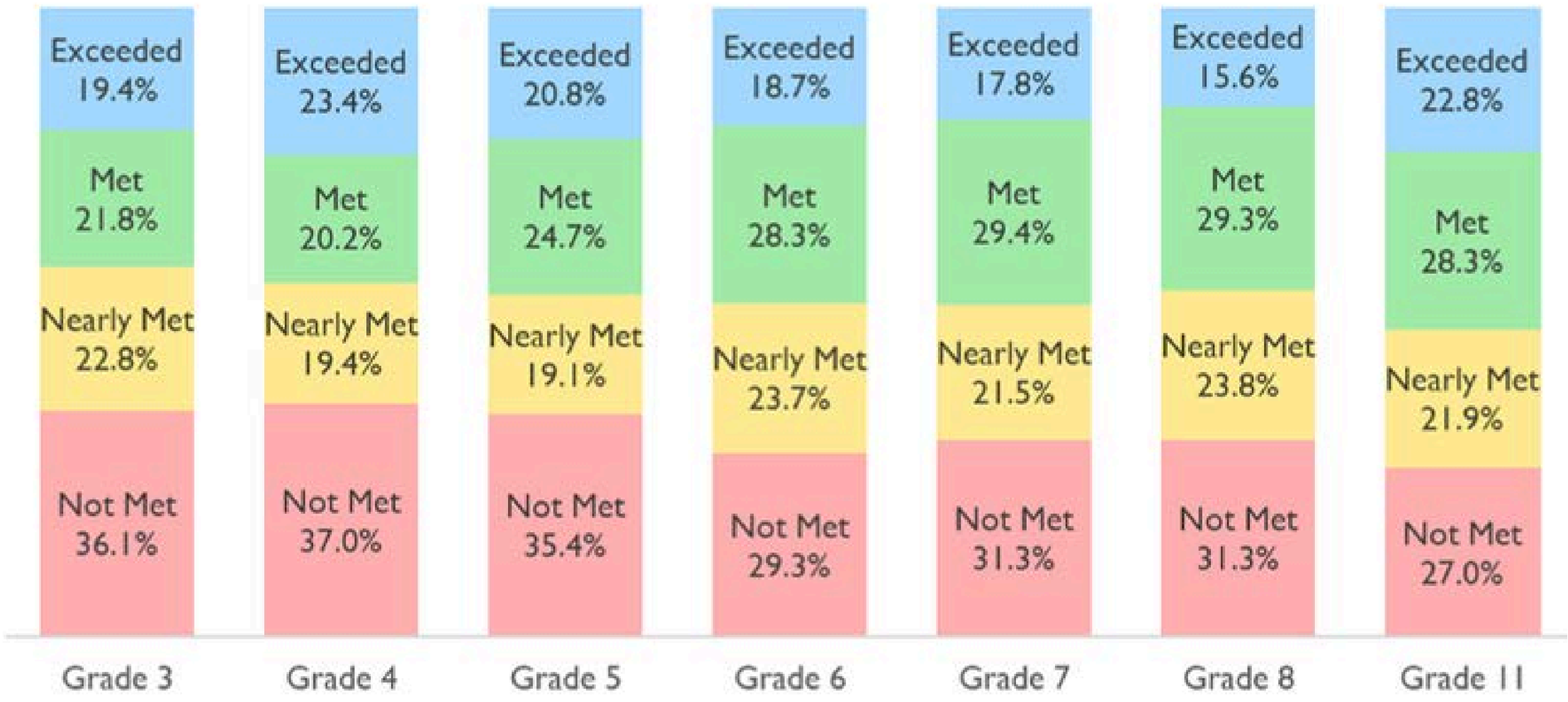
- Level 4: Standard Exceeded
- Level 3: Standard Met
- Level 2: Standard Nearly Met
- Level 1: Standard Not Met

In Sacramento County, 45.8% of students have met or exceeded the ELA performance standards for their grade level. The goal for all students is to reach the Standard Met or Standard Exceeded level, which means they met the expectations for their grade level.





Sacramento County English Language Arts Results By Grade Level



To learn more . . .

2024-2025 Smarter Balanced ELA and Mathematics Test Results at a Glance - CAASPP Reporting

Parent Guides to Understanding California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress



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Supporting Older Striving Readers
Strategies for Success

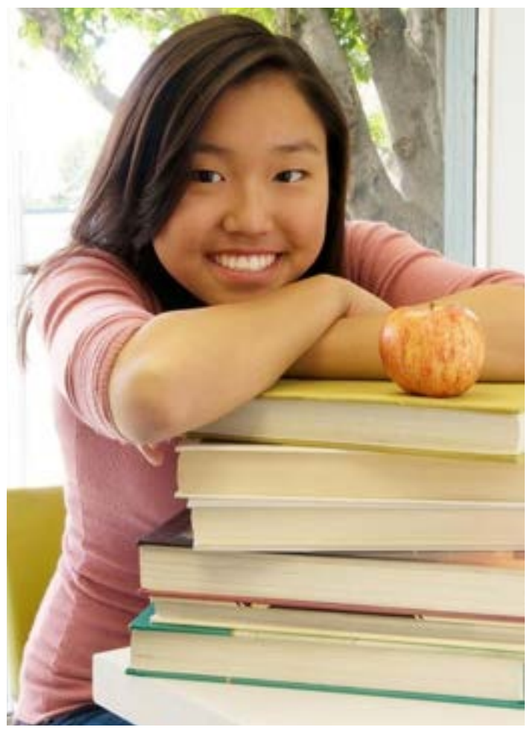
As students move up the grades, skilled reading is necessary for school success in all content areas. Beyond school, reading proficiency is vital for success in work, life, and civic engagement. The grim statistic in Sacramento County reveals that only 45% of 8th grade students are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations. What that means is that 55% of adolescents in our county are not able to read complex text proficiently.

Early success in reading tends to lead to further skill development, while children who struggle early on often fall further behind. This widening gap occurs because proficient readers gain more opportunities to practice, while struggling readers miss out on these critical experiences.

What are common challenges for older striving readers?

Struggling readers often have decoding issues, in particular difficulty breaking down longer words. They often have slow or choppy reading that impacts their understanding and they struggle with grade-level text. The less they read, the more limited their vocabulary, which impacts understanding of content and leads to frustration, disengagement, and lack of motivation and confidence.

What can be done for older striving readers?



Students who are reading below grade level and need extra help to catch up with their classmates require targeted interventions that address both foundational skills and grade-level content. These interventions may include:

- Explicit and systematic phonics and word study instruction targeted to students' specific needs
- Explicit instruction and a routine for breaking down larger words
- Fluency practice to focus on improving accuracy, rate, and expression
- Vocabulary building in context and content-area subjects
- Active reading strategies like summarizing, questioning, and visualizing
- High-interest texts that are age-appropriate and aligned with student interests
- Small group or one-on-one interventions to personalize learning

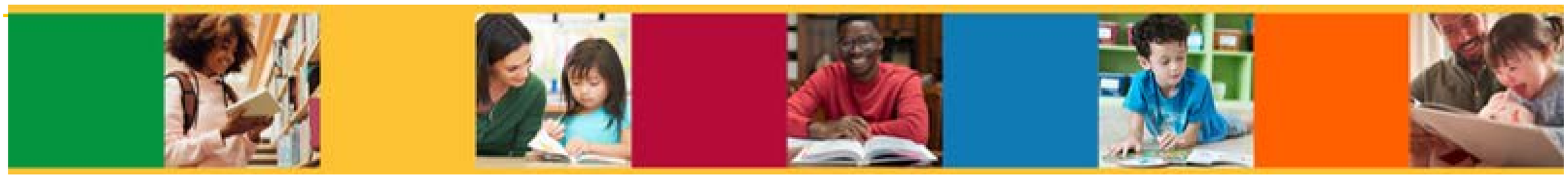
What is the role of social-emotional support, family, and community?

- Acknowledge and address the frustration and disengagement many older struggling readers feel and incorporate praise and recognition of small successes to build confidence.
- Provide a safe and supportive environment for students to take reading risks without fear of failure or embarrassment.
- Encourage families to engage with reading at home through discussions, family read-alouds, or shared reading of high-interest materials.
- Highlight community resources like libraries, after-school tutoring programs, or reading clubs that offer additional literacy support.

To learn more . . .

Is the "Matthew Effect" Affecting Your Child's Desire to Read?

When Older Students Can't Read



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Board Resolution No. 24 -18

Guiding Principles to Improve Literacy Outcomes

The Sacramento County Board of Education unanimously adopted Resolution No. 24-18, which affirms the Board's commitment to improving literacy outcomes for all students in the region. Knowing what's at stake for all learners, this action is transformational and marks a significant step in addressing the urgent need for literacy improvement across Sacramento County.

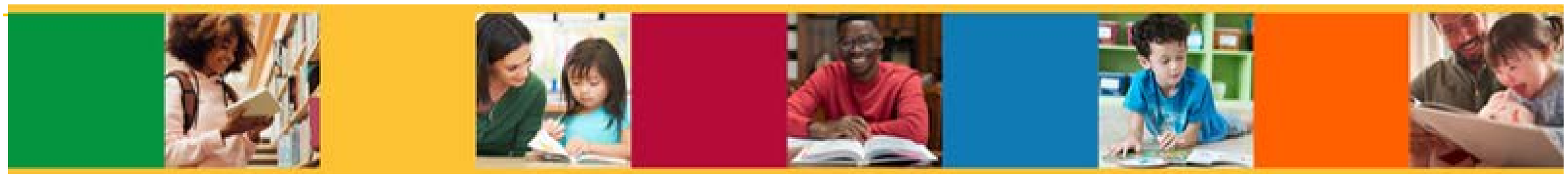


The Sacramento County READS Guiding Principles, grounded in the science of reading, aim to create an educational system where every student—regardless of background or disability—has equitable access to high-quality literacy instruction. As resolved by the Sacramento County Board of Education, these principles emphasize inclusive instruction, linguistic and cultural diversity, leadership development, and community engagement. By promoting equitable access to instructional materials and fostering collaboration with families and community partners, these principles provide a framework for improving literacy outcomes and ensuring reading success across the region when implemented with fidelity.

Guiding Principles

1. Design educational systems where science of reading practices thrive from early learning through adult education.
2. Ensure equitable access to high-quality instructional materials and practices for every learner, inclusive of all languages, backgrounds and disabilities.
3. Promote linguistic and cultural diversity in reading and literacy education.
4. Allocate resources to support implementation of science of reading aligned practices.
5. Develop and empower literacy leaders at all levels of the organization through ongoing professional development and coaching.
6. Utilize comprehensive literacy assessment systems, including universal screening, to inform instruction.
7. Address individual student needs through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, using data-based decision making and continuous improvement.
8. Engage family and community partners in opportunities and activities grounded in the science of reading.
9. Hire well-trained educators aligned to the Sacramento County READS mission and vision.

To learn more . . . https://www.scoe.net/sacramentocountyreads

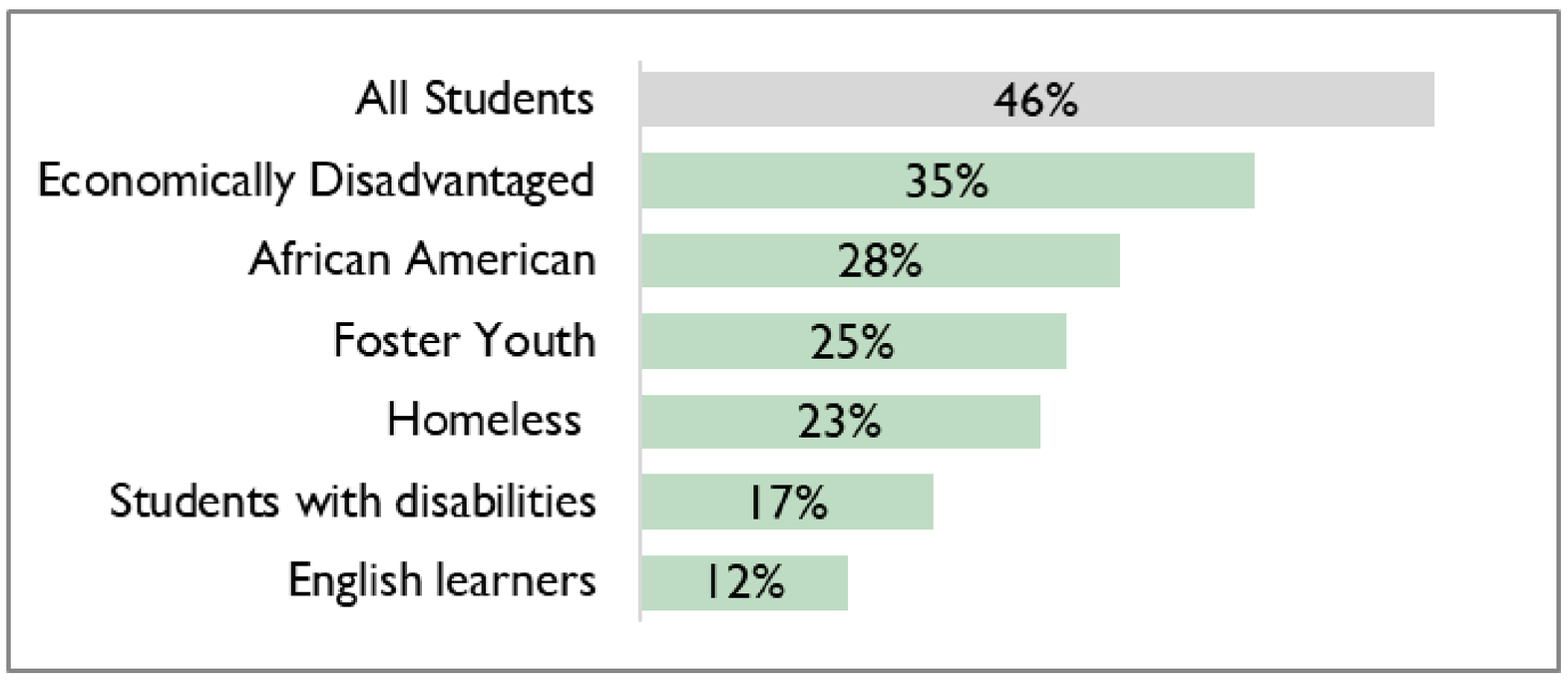


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Addressing the Urgent Need for Literacy Improvement

Recent test results in Sacramento County show a serious need to improve reading skills. Over 54% of students are not reading at grade level, and there are big gaps in reading performance between different student groups.

Sacramento County ELA Performance: Meeting or Exceeding Standards in 2025



A Collaborative Approach

The Sacramento County READS initiative is working to improve literacy for all students and to close the learning gaps for our most at-promise student groups. We are addressing the urgent need for literacy improvement in our county through a collaborative approach between educators, community partners, and families and caregivers.



Initiative Goals Include

- Building a sense of urgency to support a countywide campaign focused on improved literacy outcomes.
- Creating connections between community leaders and organizations to support literacy within local contexts and countywide.
- Engaging families in opportunities and experiences that promote literacy.
- Convening LEA teams in a community of practice to develop knowledge and skills, build capacity, and create coherent systems that support improved literacy outcomes.
- Sharing best practices and resources.

To learn more . . . https://www.scoe.net/sacramentocountyreads



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Importance of Explicit Reading Instruction for Students with Extensive Support Needs

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Students With IDD Can Achieve Significant Literacy Milestones

Students with extensive support needs, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) such as autism and Down syndrome, have historically been underestimated in their capacity to develop literacy skills. Traditional instructional approaches often limited these students to sight-word recognition strategies, neglecting comprehensive reading instruction. However, recent research underscores that with explicit, systematic instruction, students with IDD can achieve significant literacy milestones, enhancing their academic and life outcomes.

Research indicates that students with IDD benefit from instruction that explicitly addresses each of these areas** [below]**, enabling them to develop robust reading skills.
(Lemons & Balasubramanian, 2025).



Key Components of Effective Literacy Instruction

Aligned with the science of reading, effective literacy instruction encompasses five critical components:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Recognizing and manipulating the individual sounds in words.
- **Phonics:** Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds.
- **Fluency:** Reading with speed, accuracy, and proper expression.
- **Vocabulary:** Comprehending and effectively using a wide range of words.
- **Comprehension:** Grasping the meaning of text and making inferences.

What Is Explicit Reading Instruction?

Explicit reading instruction is a structured, teacher-led approach that involves:

- **Clear Modeling:** Demonstrating specific reading strategies and skills.
- **Guided Practice:** Providing opportunities for students to apply new skills with immediate feedback.
- **Systematic Progression:** Introducing concepts in a logical sequence, building upon previously mastered skills.

This method ensures that instruction is intentional and tailored to individual student needs, minimizing confusion and maximizing learning outcomes.



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Understanding Reading Disabilities and Dyslexia

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What Are Reading Disabilities and Dyslexia?

Reading disabilities encompass a range of challenges in acquiring reading skills, often due to difficulties with phonological processing, decoding, and fluency. Dyslexia, the most common type, affects word recognition, spelling, and decoding. These difficulties can hinder academic success and self-esteem. About 15–20% of the population has a language-based learning disability, and 70–80% of students in special education for specific learning disabilities struggle with reading. Dyslexia affects all genders and backgrounds equally.

Challenges for Students With Reading Disabilities, Including Dyslexia

- **Phonological Processing Deficits:** Both groups often struggle with recognizing and manipulating the sound structures of language, which is crucial for decoding words.
- **Decoding and Fluency Challenges:** Difficulties in translating written text into spoken words and reading with appropriate speed and expression are common.
- **Working Memory Limitations:** Challenges in holding and manipulating information can affect reading comprehension and the ability to follow multi-step instructions.
- **Comprehension Difficulties:** Struggles with understanding and interpreting text can result from the above deficits.

Evidence-Based Practices for Reading Instruction

To support students with reading disabilities and dyslexia, the following instructional approaches are recommended:

- **Structured Literacy:** This approach is explicit, systematic, and sequential, focusing on phonology, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It benefits all students, especially those with reading difficulties.
- **Multisensory Instruction:** Engaging multiple senses (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) enhances memory and learning of written language.
- **Explicit Instruction:** Direct teaching of concepts with clear explanations and guided practice helps students grasp complex reading skills.
- **High-Dosage Interventions:** Intensive, frequent instructional sessions can accelerate learning and close achievement gaps.
- **Professional Development for Educators:** Ongoing training ensures teachers are equipped with effective strategies to support students with reading difficulties.

High-quality, evidence-based reading instruction is essential for ensuring that all students — including those with reading disabilities and dyslexia — have equitable opportunities to become proficient, confident readers. Decades of research confirm that systematic, explicit, and comprehensive approaches to reading instruction not only support students with disabilities, but also strengthen literacy outcomes for all learners.

To learn more . . .

California Dyslexia Guidelines (CA Dept of Education)

Structured Literacy: An Approach Grounded in the Science of Reading

10 Research-Based Tips for Enhancing Literacy Instruction

International Dyslexia Association

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