



Evidence-Based Literacy Interventions for Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Introduction

Reading in school is critically important for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) because they are not always afforded access to the necessary structure and/or communication skills for reading in their homes prior to enrolling in PK-12 programs. This translates into students who are DHH being significantly out-performed by their hearing peers in the area of literacy (Luckner et al., 2006; Marschark et al., 2009; Easterbrooks & Beal-Alvarez, 2012; van Staden, 2013). The achievement gap between students who are DHH and their nondisabled peers is evident in longitudinal analysis of Florida Department of Education standardized assessment scores in the area of English/Language Arts. The reasons for this phenomenon are as varied and intricate as the students themselves. They all point to one indisputable conclusion: the status quo is not working and a change to literacy instruction for students who are DHH is needed.

Federal and State Compliance

The need for evidence-based literacy instruction is supported by both federal and state initiatives. Laws and statutes regarding this need apply to all students, including those who are DHH, though the approaches are often highly specific due to the nature and severity of various hearing levels. The highly-specialized and unique needs that manifest with hearing-related disabilities must be adequately addressed to provide this low-incidence population with equitable access to literacy instruction.

Federal Guidance

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) “challenges state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to improve student outcomes by addressing the student-,



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teacher-, and school-level factors that drive achievement gains.” ([Florida Center for Reading Research, n.d.](#)).

The ESSA “emphasizes the use of **evidence-based** [emphasis added] activities, strategies, and interventions” to drive educational achievement ([U.S. Department of Education, 2016](#)). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) has provided further guidance titled “[Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#)” on the term “evidence-based” and using evidence-based interventions, activities, and strategies as found in ESSA. The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) section 77.1 of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) states, “**Evidence-based** means the proposed project component is supported by one or more of strong evidence, moderate evidence, promising evidence, or evidence that demonstrates a rationale.” ([34 CFR 77.1\(c\)](#)).

Florida Guidance

[Section 1011.62\(8\)](#), Florida Statutes (F.S.), supports highly-specialized, intensive reading instruction based on individual student need, and that the instruction must be “research-based reading instruction that has been proven to accelerate the progress of students exhibiting a reading deficiency.”

[Section 1008.25](#), F.S., also outlines the need for school districts to assist schools and teachers with the implementation of explicit, systematic, and multisensory reading instruction and intervention strategies for students promoted with a good cause exemption, which research has shown to be successful in improving reading among students who have reading difficulties.

[Section 1011.67\(2\)](#), F.S., states that each district shall submit a plan to the Commissioner of Education that “supports fidelity of implementation of instructional materials programs” and that the materials used for core reading materials and **reading intervention materials** used in kindergarten through grade 5 meet the requirements laid out in section 1001.215(8), F.S.



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Section 1001.215(8), F.S., states:

“[Districts] Work with the Florida Center for Reading Research to identify **scientifically researched and evidence-based reading instructional and intervention programs that incorporate explicit, systematic, and sequential approaches to teaching** [emphasis added] phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension and incorporate decodable or phonetic text instructional strategies. Reading intervention includes **evidence-based strategies frequently used to remediate reading deficiencies** [emphasis added] and includes, but is not limited to, individual instruction, multisensory approaches, tutoring, mentoring, or the use of technology that targets specific reading skills and abilities.”

The **Florida Center for Reading Research** (FCRR) outlines information on “ESSA Evidence-Based Interventions for School Improvement Guides” on their [website](#). Districts may apply the guide “**Implementing Evidence-Based Literacy Practices**” to determine which of these programs might be appropriate for students who are DHH.

Rationale and Resources

Luckner et al. (2006), claimed that “without well-developed literacy skills, students cannot participate fully in classroom learning.” Each child, regardless of hearing, has the right to equal access to the classroom and all learning activities, in this case evidence-based literacy instruction. Students who are DHH often need explicit and specially-designed instruction in literacy.

In the consideration of evidence-based literacy strategies or interventions specifically designed for students who are DHH, the empirical evidence is scarce. More research is needed on instructional methods specific to means of auditory access and communication modality. Until such a time that a robust body of research is available, it is vital that teachers use the programs that are evidence-based for students who are DHH with fidelity to the contemporary research that is available. With that in mind, it is imperative that educators consider that students who are DHH are unique in their learning needs. Therefore, simply using an evidence-based intervention or curricula that



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was normed for students without disabilities may not be enough. Careful consideration of a student's individual needs must be taken into account when selecting evidence-based interventions or curricula specifically for students who are DHH or their non-disabled peers in order to close the achievement gap and to optimize student outcomes.

The following are evidence-based interventions and curricula designed for the specific task of improving literacy for learners who are DHH. The highly-specialized needs related to language needs of students who are DHH are key components of each of these programs.

- [Bedrock Literacy - Sight Word Strategy](#)
- [Explicit Contextualized Vocabulary for DHH](#)
- [Fairview Learning](#)
- [Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading](#)
- [Foundations for Literacy](#)
- [Reading Milestones](#)
- [Strategic and Interactive Writing Instruction \(SIWI\)](#)
- [Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons paired with Visual Phonics](#)
- [Visual Phonics](#)

Evidence for ESSA

The Center for Research and Reform in Education (CRRE) at Johns Hopkins University School of Education offers guidance on ESSA evidence-based programs, interventions, strategies, and curricula on their website [Evidence for ESSA](#), in their [Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#), and their [Best Evidence in Brief](#) newsletters.



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