

Teaching Kids How to Read at Simon Elementary School

A LETTER FROM HEATHER BAKER, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

OUR PROMISE



At Simon Elementary School, we are deeply committed to ensuring that every child learns to read, and learns to read well. Learning to read is an essential skill to not only find success in school and to thrive in society, but to experience the joy that reading brings to life.

We want every child to be wildly successful in reading, and to love reading!

We are learning more about what research says about how children learn to read, how to make sure every child 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.

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

When We Know Better, We Do Better!



The reading scores of American children have remained somewhat stagnant for over 40 years! Each year, the nation’s data shows that only about 35% of 4th graders (measured on the NAEP) are proficient in reading. Simon Elementary’s annual data fares much better

than that; we typically show that about 60% of our students are proficient in reading based on MAP. We're not satisfied with that progress!

While the nationwide trend has been to accept that that is the way it is, we at Simon want more for our kids. 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.

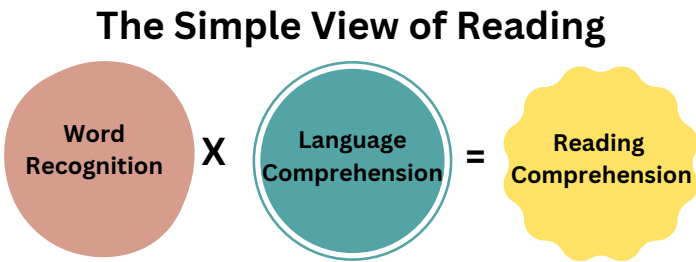
Decades of research have determined that reading occurs in a specific way in the brain in all people. It does not occur naturally the way that speech does. The process must be taught. It is a process of building neuro-pathways in the brain that link sounds of speech to written symbols or letters. The 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.

A New Path to Reading at Simon



If your family has been a part of Winnebago School District for some time, you'll notice some changes in how we teach reading; if you're new to Simon Elementary, 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 path to teaching reading at Simon Elementary School:



Code Emphasis:

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

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.

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.

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.'

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!

Reading Groups:

Students will still be pulled to work with their teacher in groups, but they will not be grouped by a reading level letter. Instead, students will be grouped according to various reasons: needs in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, writing projects or knowledge building/interest, but they will not be grouped based on a reading level.

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.

All in for All Kids



At Simon Elementary School, we are All in for All kids, meaning we will do whatever it takes to make sure that every child succeeds. 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 Simon student.