EFFECTS OF A NON-SYSTEMATIC PHONICS PROGRAM ON EMERGENT AND EARLY READERS

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ABSTRACT

The following study was conducted in a small rural school district whose primary source of phonological instruction is a basal reader and in which there were a growing number of students who were referred for care referral packets or tier three intervention services due to a lack in phonological processing deficits. Students in the second grade were administered the Phonological Awareness Test, in which mean scores were compared using a correlation matrix to determine if there is an interrelationship between students using a non-systematic phonics program and the growing number of tier three intervention and care referral students. An effective phonics program is fundamental whether the focus is prevention or intervention. Findings from evidence based research show that a systematic phonics program is essential in reducing incidences of reading failure in early readers. In contrast, many school districts still employ the use of a non-systematic or basal reading program in the general education classroom for the purpose of providing foundational and developmental reading instruction. This study confirms the ineffectiveness of a non-systematic phonics program as shown in the phonics abilities of students which have been instructed with such a program and the direct relationship it shares with those who are determined to be at risk for reading failure.
INTRODUCTION

*Background, issues and concerns.*

There have been concerns with the increasing number of students who are placed in tier 3 interventions and the number of Care Team Referrals in a rural elementary school. Three years ago this rural district adopted the basal reading series, *Imagine It*, by McGraw Hill. The school also implemented a RTI model. The number of students placed in tier 3 interventions and the number of care packet referrals has increased over the past two years. Students referred to tier 3 and the Care Team lack the necessary phonics skills to decode words and be successful readers. As children practice decoding strategies the skill becomes more automatic. This automaticity is the foundation for reading fluency, an essential component of reading. Tier 3 intervention students should receive explicit and embedded interventions in small groups which are targeted toward the individual’s needs. In order for these students to show meaningful gains, an explicit phonics program must be implemented and used with fidelity. This small rural district implements the basal reading series within its intervention periods with more direct and specific targets. The expected outcome is to go back and re-teach concepts that seem most difficult for those students receiving tier 3 intervention services using the same program as to not create larger holes as they progress through grade level content within the series. Concerns over the structure, and effectiveness of the basal reading series grow as the number of students who qualify for tier 3 intervention increase as well as those who do not show adequate progression throughout the tier 3 intervention period become referred to Care Team for testing for Special Education eligibility. The continued use of a non-systematic and ineffective phonics program could place older readers, as research suggests, at a risk for lifetime reading difficulties.
Practice under investigation.

The practice under investigation will be looking at the number of tier 3 and Care Team referrals made in the past two years. There will be an investigation to examine if there are an increasing number of students lacking phonetic skills. If there is an increase, phonics research will be studied to see if there is a correlation between inadequate phonics instruction and the use of an unsystematic phonics program such as a basal reader.

School policy to be informed by study.

Phonics is one of the five components to a balanced literacy program. Other components such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are affected directly by a lack of phonemic deficits, creating reading difficulties. If there is a correlation between using an unsystematic phonics approach and inadequate phonics abilities in students, then the district should look at using a direct systematic phonics approach to correct these deficits.

Conceptual underpinning.

Phonics is a cornerstone of literacy and a skill that is taught and develops after children are aware of the sounds, or phonemes that compose words. Phonics is an understanding that there is a predictable relationship between sounds of spoken language and letters of written language. Phonics skills include the knowledge of specific printed letters, their correspondence with associated sounds, and the application of these letter sound correspondences to reading words. Students will not recognize every word they see. It is important for them to learn strategies that allow them to figure out these words. Strategies such as decoding, analogy to known spelling patterns and structural analysis allow students alternative methods to decoding words. Because many words do not have a phonetic spelling, it is paramount that students are taught these skills and strategies in a scaffolded approach that leads to fluent decoding and eventually fluency in
reading. Research conducted by The National Reading Panel, concludes that word-reading skills is strongly enhanced by systematic phonics instruction when compared to non-phonics instruction for kindergarteners and 1st graders as well as for older struggling readers. (NRP Subgroup Report page 2-94)

Statement of the problem.

If there is a correlation between the growing number of tier 3 and care packet referrals and the lack of a systematic phonics program, then teachers need to implement a systematic phonics approach to improve student’s phonetic abilities and enhance children’s success in learning to read.

Purpose of the study.

To investigate if a significant number of students in tier 3 interventions and a significant number of care-referral packets are due to a lack of a direct systematic phonics program in a rural elementary school.

Research questions.

RQ#1: Is there a relationship between the number of tier 3 interventions students and care packet referrals to the use of a non-systematic phonics program or basal reader?

Null hypothesis.

There is not a relationship between the number of tier 3 intervention and care packet referrals and the use of a non-systematic phonics program or basal reader.
Anticipated benefits of the study.

If the number of tier 3 intervention students and care-referrals are due to a lack of a direct systematic phonics instruction, the district will have to implement a direct systematic phonics program to improve phonological awareness in students.

Definition of terms.

NRP- National Reading Panel- a panel created by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) through recommendation by Congress in 1997, to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read.

Basal Reading Program- an elementary school textbook series that uses stories and practice exercises to teach reading.

CBM- Curriculum Based Measurement- an assessment approach used for purposes of screening students and monitoring their progress across a core subject area such as reading.

Progress Monitoring- an assessment process that entails the collection and analysis of student data to evaluate academic performance on specific skills or general outcomes.

Research-based instruction- involves educational practices, instructional strategies, and interventions that have been validated as effective through well-designed and independent research studies.

RTI-Response to Intervention- school-wide system of organizing instruction and support resources to deliver high quality instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners and recognized as one of the research based Contracts for Excellence allowable programs.
Tier 3- the third tier of a RTI system. Designed for students not making sufficient progress in tier 2 and is offered in addition to tier 1. Supplemental, individualized and customized intervention provided to students in a smaller group (1:1 or 1:2) and delivered with greater frequency and duration.

Care Team Referral- a team composed of teachers, counselors, special educators and administrators that review teacher referrals based on assessment data, anecdotal notes and recommendations for further testing after all other means to student improvement have been exhausted.

Non-systematic phonics program- does not teach phonics explicitly and systematically; programs include literature-based programs, basal reading programs, and sight-word programs

Systematic phonics program- provides instruction in a carefully selected and useful set of letter-sound relationships and then introduces these relationships in a logical instructional sequence.

Meta-Analysis- A widely used research method in which (1) a systematic and reproducible search strategy is used to find as many studies as possible that address a given topic; (2) clear criterion are presented for inclusion/exclusion of individual studies into larger analysis; (3) results of included studies are statistically combined to determine an overall effect (effect size) of one variable on another.

Summary

A study was conducted to see if there was a link between a growing number of tier 3 and care packet referrals and the use of a non-systematic phonics program. If the correlation test concludes that there is a link, then teachers should implement a systematic phonics approach. Since students need this foundational skill to become proficient readers, it is necessary to help our
emergent readers, as well as help prevent reading difficulties in at-risk students and help remediate reading difficulties in disabled readers. After the study is completed, the school district can benefit by looking at the correlation data to determine if implementing a systematic phonics approach will benefit students.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 1997, Congress asked the NICHD, through its Child Development and Behavior Branch, to work with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in establishing a National Reading Panel that would evaluate existing research and evidence to find the best ways of teaching children to read. The 14-member Panel included members from different backgrounds, including school administrators, working teachers, and scientists involved in reading research. Specifically, Congress asked the Panel to: Review all the research available (more than 100,000 reading studies) on how children learn to read. Determine the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children to read. Describe which methods of reading instruction are ready for use in the classroom and recommend ways of getting this information into schools. Suggest a plan for additional research in reading development and instruction. The National Reading Panel’s research analysis made it clear that the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates: explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and systematic phonics instruction. (NRP Summary, 2000)

Since then many vendors label their programs as having an embedded phonics program, however, not all programs teach the necessary phonics skills children need to become successful readers.

Children need to be able to identify sounds that individual letters and letter combinations make and be able to put those sounds together to make words. Phonics therefore is the term used to represent the aspect of teaching of the letter-sound correspondences for reading, and the sound-letter correspondences for spelling. It is this necessary principle that is applied to whole words that allow children to break down or decode more complex words at more advanced stages. As children gain practice in decoding words, this skill becomes more automatic and is the foundation for reading fluency.
There are many approaches to phonics instruction. The National Reading Panel conducted a meta-analysis studying various approaches and elements that are characteristic of an explicit approach to teaching phonics. The research based findings of the analysis are published in The National Reading Panel’s Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction. The National Reading Panel examined the following forms of phonics instruction.

Analytic phonics is an indirect approach in which the teacher has students work out the letter-sound relationships for themselves by presenting them with groups of words containing the same sound.

Embedded phonics includes analogy phonics and onset-rime phonics which teach students by presenting groups of words which start or end the same way, these approaches are indirect because the focus is not on the individual sounds.

Phonics through spelling teaches students to isolate the sounds in words and apply a set of rules to write them down. In some of these programs students are expected to extrapolate from these rules themselves so they can apply them in reverse when reading, some programs combine this with synthetic phonics.

Synthetic phonics is a program which uses a part-to-whole approach in that they directly teach students the rules to convert graphemes into sounds. These sounds are then blended together to make whole words.

Systematic, explicit phonics programs teach children letter-sound relationships directly in a sequential order from least difficult to more difficult. In systematic phonics instruction is typically modeled by the teacher demonstrating how to blend and segment sounds in words as well as how
to write the letters representing the sounds. As children advance to more complex syllable patterns and learn to decode letter patterns that occur in words. (Brooks, n.d.)

The meta-analysis revealed that systematic phonics instruction enhances children’s success in learning to read and that systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than instruction that teaches little or no phonics. (NRP Summary Report, 2000, p.6) In systematic phonics instruction, increasingly advanced phonics skills are directly and sequentially introduced in a scaffolded approach using explicit instruction, practice and feedback. The meta-analysis supports systematic phonics instruction revealing significant benefits for students’ kindergarten through 6th grade, children having difficulty learning to read, and disabled readers’ reading skills (small effect sizes were found when phonics instruction was implemented with older struggling readers). Its effect size when compared to nonsystematic or no phonics instruction was moderate effect size = .44; (NICHD, 2000). Many subtypes exist within systematic phonics instruction, including programs that focus primarily on letter sound correspondences or programs that focus on larger subparts of words such as word families and onset and rime. The major difference noted between systematic explicit and embedded phonics is the ability to learn letter sound correspondences and decoding skills. Systematic explicit phonics programs focus on these aspects while instruction is given in a well-defined sequence. In contrast, in embedded phonics the teacher generally teaches the letter-sound correspondences along with sight words as the students need them during reading activities. Literature-based and basal reading programs often emphasize sight word reading rather than phonetic decoding. The National Reading Panel or NRP, found no statistically significant difference in the effectiveness of different approaches to systematic phonics instruction. This supports the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction is effective when
delivered through tutoring, through small groups as well as through teaching classes of students (all effect sizes were moderate in the analysis). (NRP Subgroup Report, 2000, pp. 2-93)

All children need to acquire knowledge of the alphabetic system to become skilled readers, regardless of socioeconomic status. There is considerable research evidence that supports a curriculum that targets phonics skills. Meta-analyses following the NRP’s review, such as a 2006 *Elementary School Journal* article, titled Meta-analysis and Reading Policy: Perspectives on Teaching Children to Read; recalculate and review the NRP’s findings. While the significance of the effect varies depending on the specific questions, the impact of systematic phonics instruction is consistently of practical significance. (Steubing, Barth, Cirino, Francis, & Fletcher, 2008). The amount of explicit phonics instruction appropriate for individual students depends upon the student’s needs and abilities. Some students learn phonics generalizations easily and move quickly to practicing phonics and other word recognition skills as they read decodable text and grade appropriate literature. The conclusion drawn from these findings is that systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than non-phonics instruction in helping to prevent reading difficulties among at risk students and in helping to remediate reading difficulties in disables readers. These students who were taught phonics systematically outperformed students who were taught a variety of non-systematic or non-phonics programs, including basal programs, whole language approaches and whole-word programs. (NRP Subgroup Report, 2000, pp. 2-94, 95).

Other more recent meta-analyses draw important conclusions about phonics instruction. First, phonemic awareness and phonic skills are critical for developing word recognition and reading fluency. (Snow & Juel, 2005). Second, explicit, systematic phonics instruction is necessary for most students and seems to work equally well with minority children. (Jeynes, 2008). Children
who are struggling to read, or who may be at risk for reading difficulties in later years, need more intensive systematic and explicit phonics instruction. These students benefit from very explicit instruction focused on letter sounds, decoding and encoding of words. Repeated exposure to phonics generalizations and practice applying this knowledge in reading and writing tasks maybe necessary to enhance the likelihood that these students will learn to read. In fact, one of the most well established conclusions in all of behavioral science is that direct instruction on letter-sound associations and word decoding facilitates early reading acquisition. (Stanovich, 1994).

Dr. Robert E. Slavin, (2013), Director of the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University, and his colleagues examined 97 studies comparing alternative strategies for helping struggling students in the elementary grades to succeed in reading. Ninety of the studies took place in the United States. Key findings of the review were: 1. One-to-one tutoring works. Teachers are more effective as tutors than paraprofessionals; an emphasis on phonics greatly improves tutoring outcomes. 2. Although one-to-one phonetic tutoring for first graders is highly effective, effects last into the upper elementary grades only if classroom interventions continue past first grade. 3. Small-group tutorials can be effective, but are not as effective as one-to-one instruction by teachers or paraprofessionals. 4. Classroom instructional process approaches, especially cooperative learning and structured phonetic models, have strong effects for low achievers (as well as other students). 5. Traditional computer-assisted instructional phonics programs have little impact on reading. Dr. Slavin’s research on effective phonics programs to reach struggling students focuses on whole classroom instruction and intensive one-on-one phonetic instruction for struggling students. This research examines and suggests programs that improve reading achievement for all students. Programs were divided into four categories: reading curricula, technology, instructional process approaches and combined curricula and instructional
process approaches. The conclusion shows that systematic, synthetic phonics is necessary but not sufficient to build strong reading skills without intense professional development. Furthermore, Slavin recommends a scaffolded, scripted program that all teachers use with fidelity.
RESEARCH METHODS

Research design.

A correlation study was conducted to see if there was a link to the increasing number of tier 3 intervention students and care packet referrals with the use of a non-systematic phonics program. The independent variable being tested was the non-systematic phonics program, while the dependent variable was the number of tier 3 and care packet referrals. If there is a correlation found between the increasing number of tier 3 and care packet referral students due to phonological deficiencies, the district should be informed and implement a systematic phonics program to increase reading success outcomes.

Study group description.

This rural elementary school has a total enrollment of 196 students with 51.4 percent receiving free or reduced lunch. The average class size is 11 students per classroom teacher. Student ethnicity enrolled are Asian 0.00, Black 1.50, Hispanic 0.50, and White 97.40 percent. This rural school has a total of 24 tier 3 intervention students and 18 care packet referrals out of 81 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through second. Twenty-four second grade students were administered The Phonological Awareness Test (PAT) which is used to assess all the pre-reading skills that are early indicators of reading success in children ages 5-9 and in grades K-4. This particular class of students was chosen as they should have mastered all skills required by state standards in order to pass all subtests administered through the PAT. This test is widely known for its ability to identify children who lack explicit phonological knowledge and have difficulty acquiring sound/symbol correspondences in words. These tests were then scored and
compared with the students’ file records containing intervention and care packet referral data. This data will determine if phonetic difficulties were present in the majority of the students referred and placed in Tier 3 intervention and will examine if those not referred are at risk for phonological deficiencies due to the use of a basal reader.

Data collection and instrumentation.

Twenty-four second grade students were administered the PAT. The Phonological Awareness or PAT test contains 8 subtests based on students’ chronological age and grade level. The subtests assesses the following: A.) rhyming with both discrimination and production, B.) Segmentation in sentences, syllables, and phonemes, C.) Isolation in the initial, medial and final positions, D.) Deletion in compounds and syllables, and phonemes, E.) Substitution with manipulatives and without manipulatives, F.) Blending syllables and phonemes, G.) Graphemes as consonants, long and short vowels, consonant blends, consonant digraphs, R-Controlled Vowels, vowel digraphs, and diphthongs, and H.) Decoding in VC words, CVC words, consonant digraphs, consonant blends, vowel diagraphs, R-Controlled vowels, CVCe words and diphthongs. Student test were then scored producing a raw score, age equivalency, percentile rank and standard score. These subtests scores were then added to produce a total raw score, age equivalency, percentile rank and standard score. Standard or mean scores of subtest were then used in a correlation matrix to note deficiencies in phonics abilities based on grade level standards. Student files were then examined to obtain information regarding intervention levels and care team request to compare with the PAT test results. No student files were accessed before testing was completed and scored, as to not know an actual amount of tier 3 intervention or care referrals in the second grade. Examination of student files revealed there were 9 tier 3 intervention students in the second grade with 4 of them being referred to the care team. The mean scores of the each of the eight
subtests were computed for the basal reading group as well as for the Intervention 3 and Care referral group. These mean scores for each subtest were then used for the correlation matrix.

Statistical analysis methods.

A correlation coefficient test was conducted to find if there is a relationship between the phonics abilities of an increasing number of tier 3 intervention and care packet referrals and the abilities of those who use a basal or non-systematic phonics program. The mean scores of all 8 subtests contained within the Phonological Awareness Test were calculated. The scores were then broken into two categories, the independent variable was the scores from those who are currently using the basal program, and dependent variable was the scores from those who have received tier 3 intervention or care referral packets. The mean, r value, R², and p-value were determined to see if there was a relationship between the use of a non-systematic phonics program and the increasing number of tier three intervention students and care referral packets. The Alpha level was set at 0.25 to test the null hypothesis: There is not a relationship between the number of tier 3 intervention and care packet referrals and the use of a non-systematic phonics program or basal reader.
FINDINGS

A correlation coefficient test was conducted to identify if there is a direct relationship between the growing number of tier 3 intervention students and care packet referrals due to a lack of phonics abilities in early readers and the use of a non-systematic phonics program such as a basal reader. The following tables, graphs and charts will depict the findings and determine if there is a relationship and the degree of that relationship between the growing number of tier 3 intervention and care referral early readers in a rural school which uses a non-systematic basal reader as its primary source of phonics instruction.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Mean Scores for Phonological Awareness Test for Non-Intervention and Care Referral Students (Basal Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part A</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>25.77</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>25.43</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part C</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part E</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12.05</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part G</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part H</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 depicts a breakdown of the PAT subtest scores for non-intervention or care referral students (basal group). Each subtest has a listed minimum and maximum score as well as the
median and mean score calculated for each subtest of this group. An overall mean score was calculated from the combined subtest and used in the correlation matrix.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Mean Scores for Phonological Awareness Test for Tier 3 Intervention and Care Referral Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part A</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>18.77</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part C</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part E</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>10.88</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part G</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part H</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 depicts a breakdown of the PAT subtest scores for tier three intervention or care referral students. Each subtest has a listed minimum and maximum score as well as the median and mean score calculated for each subtest of this group. An overall mean score was calculated from the combined subtest and used in the correlation matrix.
Table 3: Correlation Study of Non-Systematic Phonics Program and Phonological Awareness Subtest Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Systematic Phonics Program Subtests (Basal)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention and Care-Referral Subtests</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.19</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a relationship to be considered practical the practicality level must be higher than 10%; the practicality reported in this finding is 95% indicating this relationship is practical. The p-value, calculated at 3.31 E-5, is lower than the Alpha level set at 0.25; consequently the phonics abilities of those students receiving tier 3 intervention and care packets is strongly related to abilities of those using a non-systematic phonics program such as a basal reader. After compiling these relationship indicators, the null hypothesis would be rejected. There is a relationship between the abilities of tier 3 intervention and care packet referrals and the abilities of those who use of a non-systematic phonics program or basal reader.

**Graph 1: Scatter Plot depicting relationship of scores**

The scatter plot above shows the near perfect relationship between the score of the basal readers and the scores of the group who are in tier 3 intervention and care referral process.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes reported in this study reveal that the use of a non-systematic phonics program such as a basal reading program affects the overall ability for early readers to acquire adequate phonics skills that are critical for developing word recognition and reading fluency. The findings show that there is a direct correlation between the use of a non-systematic phonics program and the students who receive tier 3 intervention services and have been referred to the care team. The correlation matrix results indicate that the p-value was 3.31 E-5, lower than the alpha level set at 0.25; therefore, the null hypothesis tested is unequivocally rejected with affirmation. This study involved the entire second grade student population in a rural elementary school which had been using the basal reader as its primary source of phonics instruction since their kindergarten year. The correlation matrix shows not only the relationship between the phonics inadequacies of the basal and intervention/care referral groups, it shows overall that even the students who have not yet entered a tier 3 intervention level or been referred to care team, show deficiencies in phonological awareness and may be at risk for reading difficulties. There is a relationship between the abilities of tier 3 intervention and care packet referrals and the abilities of those who use of a non-systematic phonics program or basal reader.

The conceptual underpinning of the research conducted by The National Reading Panel is solidly supported by these research findings. The NRP’s report made it evident that the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness. Since, phonics teaches students about the relationship between phonemes and printed letters and explains how to use this knowledge to read and spell; students who lack explicit phonics instruction show marked reading deficiencies that place them at risk for reading difficulties as they grow older. The use of non-systematic phonics programs such as basal readers
lack the specific instruction in phonemic awareness to improve word decoding and reading skills. Because phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are primarily delivered in grades kindergarten through third, schools should implement a systematic phonics program early that teaches phonics explicitly by delineating a planned, sequential set of phonic elements and teaching these elements explicitly and systematically. Teachers should deliver this phonemic and phonics instruction with fidelity so students learn the necessary skills needed to decode words in a scaffolded approach.

In conclusion of this study there are further studies that should be conducted. Fortunately, there are many successful and effective programs and delivery systems for teaching phonics systematically. Vendors continuously adapt and change phonics programs in order to meet core standards. These vendors then sell their products to districts as a complete program that meets the states standards. A study could be conducted to see what components actually compose an effective phonics instruction program. Examples may include (a) letter identification and letter sounds (b) teaching long vowels before short, short before long or both at the same time, (c) using decodable text with vowel patterns (d) coding letter sounds when writing and reading (e) English irregularities and (f) re-teaching to struggling readers. Consequently to this research study, schools should ideally investigate and complete their own analysis of their current phonics program addressing the needs of their student population. This research could lead to substantial improvements and benefits for developing readers.
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