



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Amy Clouter

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

Information on SPS Literacy Initiative

I. Summary

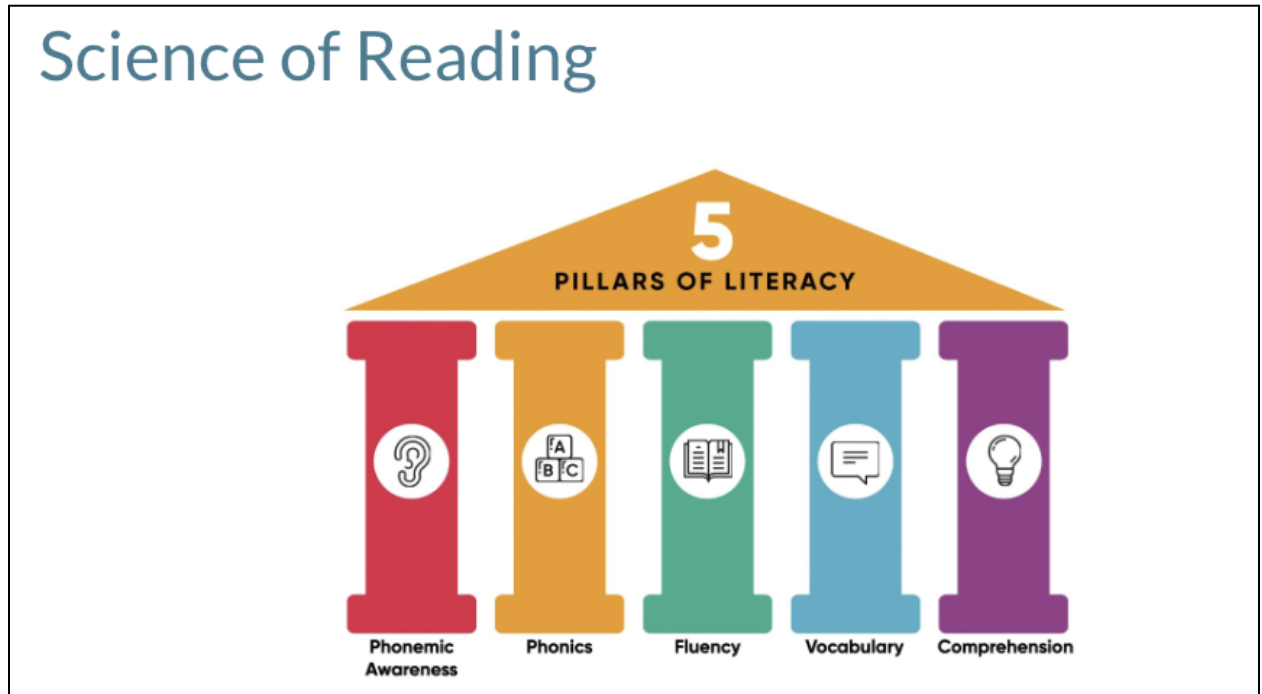
A school district is a system designed to foster learning. In order for all students to benefit, several components must be successfully integrated, including:

- access to high quality curriculum materials
- high expectations for content mastery
- strong instruction,
- deep student engagement and
- effective and aligned assessment practices

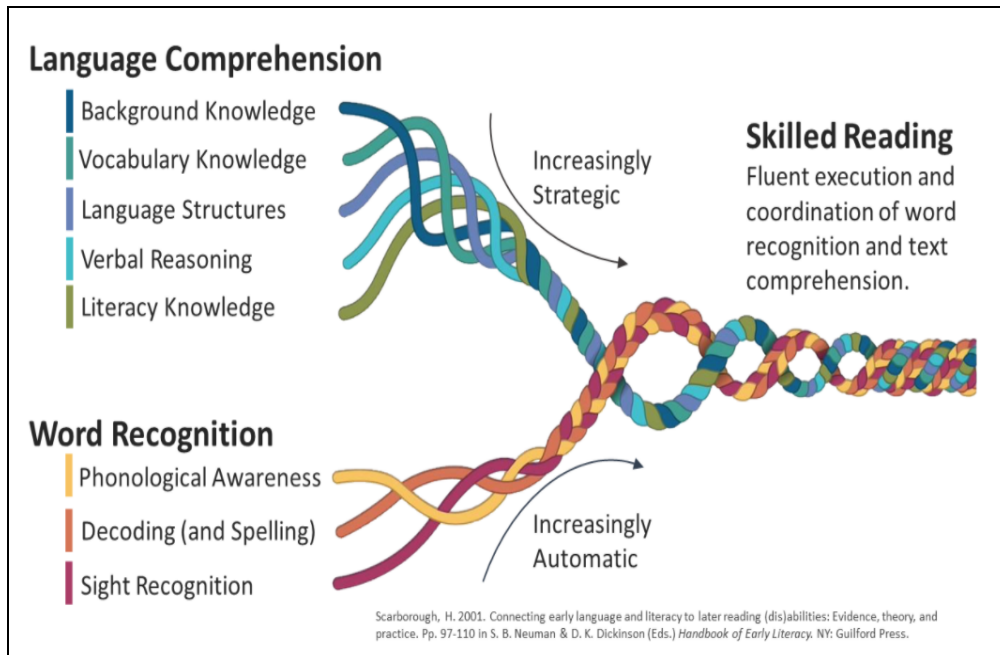
A review and update of our literacy program was in the planning stage as the pandemic hit. Subsequently, a program review within special education and the emerging consensus among reading experts regarding the science of reading further indicated the need to examine our practices and consider updates to methods and materials. Further, the adoption of a universal screening tool (Star assessment) reinforced the notion that the district had additional work to do in order to effectively empower all our students to meet grade level standards. With the return to relative normalcy this year, a cross-district Literacy Council was formed to review emerging needs, reassess curriculum materials and suggest systemic improvements. This memo will describe the current work of this group as well as future plans.

II. Current Context

The science of reading and related research suggests that, unlike the way we learn to learn to speak, human beings are not born knowing how to read. Rather, children have to master different skills to successfully decode and read fluently.



Students in Shrewsbury benefit from skillful educators, high expectations for grade level content and quality teaching. However, we have determined that like many other districts our approach to teaching reading can benefit from more targeted instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary. As the educators on the Council learned more about the latest research, teams at both the Elementary and Middle levels grappled with how best to align our curriculum and materials with other aspects of reading research. Essentially, members of the Council members understood that some aspects of our practice have helped to develop students' skills- and that we needed to more explicitly attend to all of the elements of literacy pictured below:



Scarborough's rope is an information graphic that depicts how the various components of literacy are woven together.

Specifically, students need to develop foundational reading skills (the bottom part of the rope) and background knowledge (the top part of the rope) in order to become fluent readers. The work of the Council has been centered on building a vision of teaching and learning aligned with the research, and evaluating curriculum materials against that vision. We are currently considering four programs that are highly rated by Ed Reports and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), including [Wit & Wisdom](#), [Into Reading](#), [EL Education](#) and [AmplifyCKLA](#).

Once a review of various programs is complete, the Council will become an Implementation team. Beginning in the fall of 2023, a small group of early adopters will field test and then begin using new curriculum materials. Importantly, this group will need to clarify expectations for new teaching practices and identify current practices that our educators should stop doing. The section that follows will depict our plan for district work in literacy for the next three years.

III. Next Steps

First of all, while acceptance into the Mass Tiered Literacy network has enabled the 35 educators on the Literacy Council to learn more about how research and teaching practices intersect, district efforts to improve must first focus on communicating why we are shifting current practices and programs to all staff. Messaging about this shift will begin in April with a districtwide presentation.

Thereafter the district will focus on building professional knowledge and capacity by directing all Shrewsbury educators in grades preK-6 to complete a professional development cycle in Literacy. While a minimum of two educators per grade across the district will implement a new program in 2023-2024 as early adopters, the following year all general educators will implement the new program.

