



Inclusive Literacy:

A Handbook for School Administrators

As a school administrator, you face a pressing challenge: Ensuring all students, especially those with learning differences like dyslexia and developmental language disorder (DLD), receive effective literacy instruction. This challenge is particularly urgent in adolescent literacy, where the stakes are high, the barriers are significant, and the need for immediate action is critical.

This handbook is built on the principle of equity in education. We recognize that true equity extends beyond equal access; it requires tailored, inclusive practices that address each student's unique needs.



As an administrator, you play a vital role in championing and implementing these practices.

This handbook equips you with the **knowledge, strategies, and tools** to lead your schools toward inclusive literacy. You'll gain insight into:

- The current state of adolescent literacy and the diverse learning needs in today's classrooms
- The **science of reading** and its application for students with dyslexia and related learning challenges
- Your role as an instructional leader in driving literacy transformation
- Evidence-based strategies for implementing inclusive literacy practices
- Professional development approaches to support your teachers

With this handbook, you'll be equipped to confidently advocate for and implement science of reading-based literacy instruction that benefits all students, especially those with dyslexia and related learning differences.

A photograph of a classroom with several students sitting at desks, working on laptops and tablets. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Understanding the Adolescent Literacy Crisis

Adolescent literacy presents unique challenges that distinguish it from early literacy instruction. As students transition to middle and high school, they are expected to read and comprehend increasingly complex texts across multiple disciplines. This shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" can be especially difficult for students with learning differences.

Recent data reveal a concerning trend in adolescent literacy, as highlighted by the [2022 NAEP](#) results:

Only
31%
of eighth grade students performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level in reading, down from 34% in 2019.

The situation is more alarming when it relates to students with learning differences.
In 2022, only
10%
of eighth grade students with disabilities scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in reading.

As these performance gaps widen, they have far-reaching consequences, impacting academic performance across subjects, college readiness, and future career prospects.

A photograph of two young men, one with dark curly hair and a beard wearing a white shirt and blue lanyard, and the other with dark hair wearing a green shirt. They are both looking at a large white sheet of paper, with the man in the white shirt pointing at it. The background is a solid teal color with a faint white graphic of a stylized atom or star on the left.

The Science of Reading and Dyslexia

The science of reading represents a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted during the **past five decades across the world**, and its findings have been replicated and refined, leading to a deep understanding of 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.

The 5 Principles of the Science of Reading

1. **Phonemic awareness** is essential for learning to read and spell
2. **Explicit, systematic phonics** instruction is more effective than incidental phonics instruction
3. **Fluency** is essential for both comprehension and motivation
4. **Vocabulary** knowledge is closely linked to comprehension and overall academic success
5. **Comprehension** strategies can be explicitly taught

Structured Literacy, an instructional approach rooted in these principles, has significantly benefited students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities. It offers systematic, explicit instruction that integrates all language skills and emphasizes language structure at every level, from speech sounds to discourse organization.

The evidence supporting the effectiveness of Structured Literacy is robust. Numerous studies have demonstrated students with dyslexia who receive Structured Literacy instruction make **significant gains in reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension** compared to those who receive traditional instruction.



The Role of Administrators in Supporting Literacy

As an administrator, you can drive literacy transformation in your school building. Your position as an instructional leader—effectively the teacher-in-chief—places you at the forefront of educational change. It's an exciting and influential position to hold.

Your leadership has the power to shape [school culture](#), creating an environment that values equity, literacy, and curiosity. This culture is vital for fostering a supportive atmosphere where teachers and students feel empowered to engage with literacy instruction and learning.

Key aspects of your role include:

1. **Setting a clear vision** for literacy instruction in your schools
2. **Allocating resources** effectively to support literacy initiatives
3. Providing ongoing **professional learning** opportunities critical for teachers
4. **Monitoring** and evaluating the **effectiveness** of literacy programs
5. **Advocating** for evidence-based literacy practices at the district and community levels

One of the most significant challenges you may encounter is balancing teacher performance evaluation with coaching and support. While accountability is necessary, modeling a growth mindset and providing constructive feedback can lead to more sustainable improvements in literacy instruction.

Building a Culture of Literacy

Creating a schoolwide culture of literacy is necessary for the success of your inclusive literacy framework. This culture should be guided by the understanding that literacy is a shared responsibility; **every teacher**, regardless of their subject area, plays a role in teaching reading.



Strategies for implementing a **Structured Literacy curriculum** across your schools include:

1. Providing professional learning focused on **Structured Literacy principles** for **all** teachers
2. Integrating literacy strategies into lessons **across all subjects**
3. Developing **cross-curricular** literacy projects
4. Establishing a **common vernacular** for literacy instruction



Addressing gaps in professional development resources within your school may also be necessary.

Consider:

1. Partnering with literacy experts or organizations for ongoing support
2. Utilizing online resources and webinars
3. Establishing a learning community focused on literacy
4. Encouraging teacher-led workshops and [knowledge sharing](#)

A critical component of this culture shift is fostering a learner's mindset among staff—and that starts with you. Encourage your teachers to see themselves as continuous learners by seeing yourself the same way, modeling curiosity and openness to new research and teaching methodologies.



Evidence-Based Strategies for Implementation

Evidence-based strategies are essential for teaching students with dyslexia and other learning differences. Here are some practical tips for school administrators:

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1. Spotting and identifying key practices during classroom observations:

- Explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics
- Multisensory and multimodal teaching techniques
- Frequent opportunities for guided and independent practice
- Use of visual aids and graphic organizers
- Differentiated instruction based on student needs

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2. Engaging teachers in conversations centered on instructional practices and student progress:

- Adopt a guided coaching model rather than an evaluative approach
- Ask open-ended questions about instructional choices
- Encourage reflection on student data and progress
- Provide specific, actionable feedback

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3. Facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs) focused on Structured Literacy:

- Establish regular meeting times for PLCs
- Provide guiding questions or topics for discussion
- Encourage the sharing of successful strategies and challenges
- Use data to drive discussions and decision-making

When implementing new curricula:

1. Ensure adequate **training** is provided before implementation
2. Begin with a **pilot** program to identify and address potential issues
3. Seek ongoing **feedback** from teachers and students
4. Be prepared to offer ongoing **support** and problem-solving tactics



Specialized Tools & Training for Educators

The importance of **professional learning based on the science of reading** cannot be overstated. It equips teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively support all students, especially those with dyslexia or other learning differences.

Specialized tools and programs can significantly enhance your school's literacy instruction. When evaluating potential solutions, look for programs that offer:

1. Personalized literacy instruction based on the science of reading, specifically tailored for **adolescent readers** who have struggled with traditional approaches.

2. **Adaptive Blended Learning programs** for elementary students that provide explicit, systematic instruction across all critical areas of reading development.

3. **Targeted interventions** for nonproficient readers in middle and high school, designed to accelerate the development of fundamental literacy skills.



Effective literacy programs should not only provide targeted instruction for students but also offer valuable data and insight to guide and inform teachers' instruction.

Schools that have implemented specialized professional learning for educators and high-quality instructional materials often report several positive outcomes:

- Improved reading scores across the student population
- Increased teacher confidence in meeting diverse learning needs
- More efficient use of instructional time
- Enhanced identification and support of students with learning differences

When selecting and implementing these tools, ensure they are user-friendly for both teachers and students. Key considerations include:

1. Ease of integration with your existing curriculum and technology infrastructure
2. Robust reporting features that offer actionable insight
3. Alignment with SoR principles and Structured Literacy approaches
4. Flexibility to accommodate the needs of diverse learners

To maximize the effectiveness of any new tools or programs, provide comprehensive training and ongoing support. This might include:

1. Initial, in-depth training sessions
2. Consistent check-ins and refresher courses
3. Access to on-demand resources and support
4. Opportunities for teachers to share best practices and address challenges

By carefully selecting and implementing specialized tools, paired with thorough training, you can significantly enhance educators' capacity to deliver practical, inclusive literacy instruction for all students.



Professional Learning and Coaching

Providing tailored growth opportunities for educators is essential for implementing effective literacy instruction. Strategies for this include:



1. Differentiated professional development: Offer a range of learning opportunities that meet teachers at their current level of understanding and skill.



2. Job-embedded learning: Incorporate learning opportunities into teachers' daily routines through instructional coaching and collaborative planning sessions.



3. Peer observation and feedback: Foster a culture of peer observation, allowing teachers to learn from one another's practices.



4. Data-driven professional learning: Utilize student performance data to pinpoint areas for teacher growth and customize professional learning accordingly.

Implementing effective **coaching models** can significantly enhance teacher development.

Consider these approaches:

1. The **GROW** model (Goal, Reality, Options, Will/Way Forward): This model guides teachers in setting goals, assessing their current situation, exploring options, and committing to action.
2. **Cognitive Coaching**: This approach focuses on developing teachers' cognitive processes for planning, problem-solving, and decision-making.
3. **Content-Focused Coaching**: This model emphasizes improving instructional practices in specific content areas, such as literacy.

Addressing the challenge of **limited time** for teacher development:

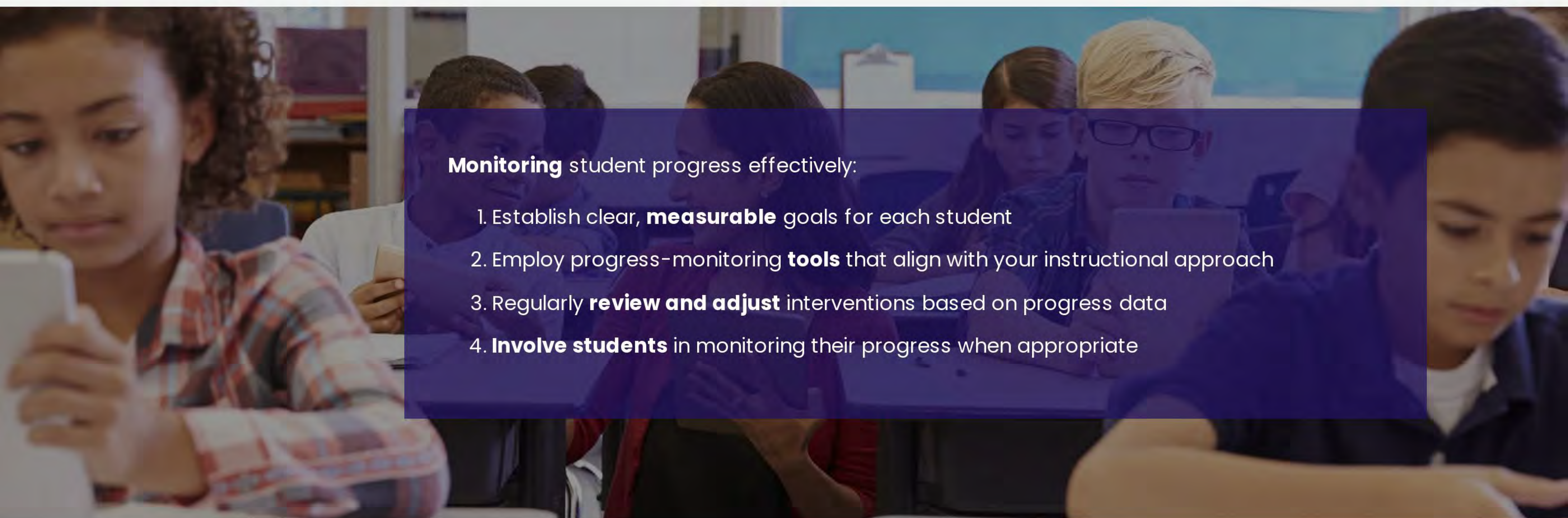
1. Leverage technology for **asynchronous learning** opportunities
2. Implement **micro-learning sessions**—short, focused learning experiences
3. Create a culture where professional learning is valued and **prioritized**
4. Utilize **existing meeting times**, such as grade-level meetings, for targeted professional development



Data-Driven Decision-Making

Using **assessment data** to inform instruction and interventions is crucial for effective literacy instruction. Consider these strategies:

1. Implement routine (or consistent) **benchmark** assessments to monitor student progress
2. Utilize formative assessments to **guide daily instruction**
3. Analyze data within teacher teams to identify trends and **plan targeted interventions**
4. Offer professional development for interpreting and using data effectively



Monitoring student progress effectively:

1. Establish clear, **measurable** goals for each student
2. Employ progress-monitoring **tools** that align with your instructional approach
3. Regularly **review and adjust** interventions based on progress data
4. **Involve students** in monitoring their progress when appropriate

Addressing **accountability concerns** related to reading test performance:

1. Align literacy instruction with **state standards** and assessment expectations
2. Provide **targeted support** for students needing additional support
3. Maintain **consistent communication** with all community members and decision-makers about your literacy initiatives and their impact
4. Use **multiple measures** of student progress beyond standardized test scores



Actionable Insight for Immediate Implementation

Quick tips and best practices for administrators:

- Conduct a literacy audit to identify your school's strengths and areas for improvement
- Establish a **literacy leadership team** to guide your school's initiatives
- Implement targeted instruction tailored to students' specific skill levels
- Create a literacy-rich environment throughout the school

Develop literacy action plans with measurable goals:

- Set **SMART** goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound)
- Involve teachers in the goal-setting process
- Align goals with district and state literacy standards
- Regularly review and adjust goals based on progress data

Establish routines for ongoing teacher support and coaching:

- Schedule consistent **coaching sessions** with each teacher
- Implement a system for **peer observation** and feedback
- Create opportunities for **collaborative planning** focused on literacy instruction
- Provide resources and time for teachers to reflect on their practice

Integrate **SEL** practices to support students with dyslexia:

- Implement strategies to build students' **self-efficacy and agency**
- Provide opportunities for students to develop **strong relationships** with teachers and peers
- Teach and model **growth mindset** principles
- Celebrate students' **efforts and progress**, not just their achievements

Checklist for assessing current literacy programs and identifying areas for improvement:

- ☒ Is our core reading program aligned with the science of reading?
- ☒ Do we have a systematic approach to identifying and supporting struggling readers?
- ☒ Are we providing sufficient professional development in literacy instruction?

- ☒ Do we offer a variety of literacy interventions to meet diverse student needs?
- ☒ Are we effectively using data to inform our literacy instruction and interventions?
- ☒ Do we have a schoolwide culture that values and promotes literacy?





Advocacy and Implementation

As a school administrator, you play a pivotal role in advocating for literacy instruction based on the science of reading. Here are some strategies for gaining buy-in from all community members :

- Deepen your understanding of the **science of reading** and its benefits
- Share **success stories** and data from schools that have implemented SoR-based instruction
- Involve teachers in the decision-making process
- Communicate regularly with parents and the community about your literacy initiatives

Be prepared to address concerns and **misconceptions** about SoR-based instruction

Steps for implementing inclusive literacy practices schoolwide:

- Conduct a **needs assessment** to identify areas for improvement
- Develop a **comprehensive literacy plan** with input from key constituents
- Provide robust professional development about SoR and Structured Literacy
- Implement new practices gradually, starting with **pilot programs** if necessary
- Monitor implementation and provide **ongoing support**
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your initiatives and make adjustments as needed

Equipping educators with inclusive literacy is a crucial step toward ensuring all students, regardless of their learning differences, have the opportunity to become proficient readers. As a school administrator, your leadership in this area can profoundly impact student outcomes and overall school success.

By implementing the strategies outlined in this handbook, you can create a school environment where:

- All teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide effective literacy instruction
- Students with dyslexia and other learning differences receive the targeted support they need
- Data-driven decision-making guides instruction and interventions
- A culture of continuous learning and improvement flourishes

Remember, this transformation will not happen overnight. It requires ongoing commitment, effort, and adaptability. However, the long-term benefits—improved student achievement, increased teacher efficacy, and a more inclusive learning environment—make the journey worthwhile.

With your leadership and the right tools and strategies, your school can become a model of inclusive literacy education.

While this handbook provides a comprehensive overview, literacy education is an ever-evolving field. Stay curious, continue learning, and seek the latest research and best practices in inclusive literacy instruction.



Additional Resources

For more reading and professional development opportunities, consider:

[**Lexia Top 7 Adolescent Literacy Resources**](#)

[**Lexia® Solutions**](#)

[**International Dyslexia Association® \(IDA\)**](#)

[**National Center on Improving Literacy**](#)

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