
Section II: Abilities And Knowledge Needed By K-3 Teachers Of Literacy

Section I of this report emphasized the importance of high-quality K-3 reading instruction in preventing or ameliorating potential reading difficulties and in attaining the ultimate goals of reading instruction: good reading comprehension, motivation to read and lifelong habits of learning through literacy. Knowledgeable and skilled teachers are indispensable to high-quality reading instruction, and specifying the competencies required of K-3 teachers was the charge of Connecticut's Early Reading Success Panel. However, members of the panel thought that in order to specify the competencies required of **teachers**, it was necessary first to consider the competencies required of **children** in kindergarten through third grade.

Children's Reading Competencies

This section begins by describing **reading-related competencies** for kindergarten and first, second and third grades. These are competencies children are expected to achieve by the **end** of each grade. They are organized according to the five areas discussed in the first section of this report: word-identification skills, fluent and accurate word identification in context, comprehension, spelling and writing. As noted in Section I, each

area involves numerous component skills; for example, word identification includes phonological and phonemic awareness, basic print concepts, letter-sound and spelling-sound knowledge, understanding of the alphabetic principle, word decoding, structural analysis, and sight-word knowledge.

The kindergarten competencies represent a logical progression of the language and literacy competencies specified in *The Connecticut Framework: Preschool Curricular Goals and Benchmarks* (1999b). For example, one preschool benchmark is for children to recognize *some* printed letters, whereas by the end of kindergarten, the goal is recognition of *all* printed letters. Another preschool benchmark is for children to be able to use letter-like approximations to write words and ideas, but not necessarily with a sense of left-to-right progression or letter order in words; by the end of kindergarten, children should be able to write all letters, write with left-to-right progression and use knowledge of letter-sound relationships to spell the first and last letters of many words correctly. Understanding of grade-appropriate vocabulary is an important competency in both kindergarten and preschool, but what is “grade-appropriate” would be more sophisticated for kindergartners than for preschoolers.

The competencies are not a checklist for evaluating individual children or a statement about how to teach but, rather, a guide in determining which skills and abilities should be addressed at each grade level, and a guide for use in preparing primary-level teachers.

At all four grade levels, the tables specify important competencies in a comprehensive curriculum of reading instruction. (Of course, in any grade, some children will be capable of far exceeding the specified competencies and their instructional programs should not be limited to these competencies.) These tables are meant to guide school districts in determining which skills and abilities are important to address at each grade level, as well as to guide schools of education in preparing primary-level teachers. The competencies are deliberately worded so as to be reasonably explicit, yet allow individual school districts flexibility in developing or choosing specific instructional activities and programs. **The competencies are not a checklist for evaluating individual children or a statement about how to teach.** For example, competencies at any grade level can be addressed in the context of an experiential, child-centered educational program in which children learn through exploration and guided discovery as well as through explicit instruction from the teacher.

The charge of the Early Reading Success Panel involved reading and, therefore, the focus of the panel in specifying children’s (and teachers’) competencies was on reading. Because reading connects so strongly to other language areas—oral language, spelling and writing—it was impossible to frame reading competencies without considering these areas. However, the competencies listed here are not intended to comprise a complete language arts curriculum; they are a subset of that curriculum. For example, a full language arts curriculum would need to include areas such as speaking (expressive language).

The lists of competencies were influenced by a wide variety of sources, including presentations to the panel by many nationally recognized experts; previous state documents (e.g., Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998, 1999b); reports from other states involved in similar efforts, including Indiana, Texas and Alabama, research on typical reading development (e.g., Chall, 1983); an examination of graded text from several basal reading programs; and especially, the report of the National Research Council, *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* (1999). The tables on pages 48-58 present what panel members believe to be appropriate competencies for Connecticut readers in kindergarten through third grade.

Kindergarten Reading Competencies

Word Identification

Demonstrates phonological awareness:

- Rhymes spoken words
- Identifies spoken words with similar initial sounds
- Identifies spoken words with similar ending sounds
- Blends up to three or four orally presented phonemes into a correct word

Demonstrates basic print concepts:

- Recognizes that print conveys meaning
- Recognizes that printed words are composed of letters
- Recognizes that printed words are separated by spaces and that print is read left to right and top to bottom
- Begins to use one-to-one match of written and spoken words during emergent reading and writing activities

• *competencies for the end of each grade*

• *for use as a guide in planning instruction, not a checklist for evaluating individual children*

• *many different instructional activities can be used in reaching each competency*

Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters

Demonstrates letter-sound correspondences for all single consonants

Has a basic understanding of the alphabetic principle (i.e., the idea that the letters in printed words represent sounds in spoken words)

Recognizes sight words taught as part of the kindergarten curriculum

Fluent And Accurate Word Identification in Context

Recognizes sight words taught as part of the kindergarten curriculum in context

“Reads” familiar books emergently, not necessarily in the conventional sense (e.g., recognizes that the print, not the pictures, tells the story; begins to track print from left to right and top to bottom on a page)

Comprehension

Answers literal and inferential questions about grade-appropriate books read aloud by the teacher

Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary

Identifies common words in basic categories (e.g., can give examples of favorite foods or favorite colors)

Applies comprehension strategies, such as summarization and prediction, to grade-appropriate stories read aloud by the teacher

Uses prior knowledge to aid comprehension of fiction and nonfiction texts

Notices when simple sentences fail to make sense

Follows simple verbal directions

Retells familiar, grade-appropriate stories that have been heard several times

Uses oral language to relate own experiences and construct own stories

Spelling

Writes own name (first and last) correctly

Writes uppercase and lowercase letters when the letter name or sound is dictated

Represents initial and final phonemes of many words correctly when attempting to spell phonetically regular words

Writing

“Writes” emergently, not necessarily in the conventional sense, to express own meaning (e.g., uses letters in writing, represents some sounds correctly, uses left-to-right progression in writing)

First Grade Reading Competencies

Word Identification

Demonstrates phonemic awareness:

- Blends orally presented phonemes into a correct (one-syllable) word
- Segments one-syllable spoken words into phonemes

Knows sounds for long and short vowels and for common letter patterns, such as sh, th, ch; oo, ee, igh; ing, ed

Decodes by analogy words with common letter patterns (e.g., -ake, -ick)

Accurately decodes orthographically regular one-syllable words (e.g., sit, take, need) and nonsense words (e.g., vit, dake, jeed) presented out of context, by using knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle

Accurately decodes words with common inflectional endings (e.g., -s, -es, -ed, -ing)

Recognizes sight words taught as part of the first grade curriculum

Fluent And Accurate Word Identification In Context

Applies known decoding skills while reading in context

Monitors comprehension while reading in context and self-corrects contextually inappropriate errors

Attends to punctuation during oral reading (e.g., pauses at commas and periods)

Reads aloud with accuracy any text appropriately designed for first grade

Meets end-of-first grade standard for accuracy on the state-approved informal reading assessment

• *competencies for the end of each grade*

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• *many different instructional activities can be used in reaching each competency*

Comprehension

Answers literal and inferential questions about grade-appropriate books read aloud by the teacher and about own reading in context (at instructional level)

Reads and understands simple written instructions

Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary

Classifies categories of words (e.g., can tell which of the following are fruits and which are vegetables: oranges, carrots, bananas, peas)

Applies comprehension strategies, such as summarization and prediction, to grade-appropriate stories read aloud by the teacher and to own reading in context (at instructional level)

Notices when simple texts fail to make sense

Distinguishes between fiction and nonfiction (informational) texts

Describes new information gained from texts in own words

Uses prior knowledge to aid comprehension of fiction and nonfiction texts

Reads aloud with comprehension any text appropriately designed for first grade

Meets end-of-first-grade standard for comprehension on the state-approved informal reading assessment

Spelling

Spells correctly three- and four-letter short vowel words (e.g., ship, man, sled)

Spells correctly words taught as part of first grade spelling curriculum

Recognizes that there is a conventional way to spell words and tries to spell correctly when he or she can

Generates new words based on common letter patterns (e.g., -at, -it)

Shows increasing knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing words that are generally recognizable, even if they are not spelled conventionally

Writing

Uses the following basic mechanics of writing correctly:

- Ending punctuation (period, question mark, exclamation point)
- Capital letters in first word of a sentence, names and the word "I"
- Applies knowledge of spelling in everyday writing activities

Composes readable first drafts with a clear beginning, middle and end

Writes for different purposes and to a specific audience or person (e.g., brief thank-you notes or invitations)

Uses descriptive words when writing

Produces a variety of compositions (e.g., stories, journal entries, descriptions)

Second Grade Reading Competencies

Word Identification

Knows sounds for common vowel-r patterns (e.g., ar, er, ir, or, ur) and for some letter patterns found in long words (such as very common prefixes and suffixes that recur in second grade text, e.g., -ful, -ness, and dis-, in)

Uses strategies for syllabifying long words as an aid to decoding (e.g., looking for compounds, dividing between two consonants, looking for known prefixes and suffixes)

Accurately decodes orthographically regular multisyllable words (e.g., buttermilk, happiness) and two-syllable nonsense words (e.g., lempit) presented out of context, by using knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle

Accurately reads many irregularly spelled words (e.g., ocean, angel)

Recognizes sight words taught as part of the second grade curriculum

Fluent And Accurate Word Identification In Context

Applies known decoding skills while reading in context

Monitors comprehension while reading in context and self-corrects contextually inappropriate errors

Reads with increasing fluency and expression

Reads voluntarily for interest and own purposes

Reads aloud with accuracy any text appropriately designed for second grade

Meets end-of-second-grade standard for accuracy on the state-approved informal reading assessment

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- *competencies for the end of each grade*
 - *for use as a guide in planning instruction, not a checklist for evaluating individual children*
 - *many different instructional activities can be used in reaching each competency*

Comprehension

Answers literal and inferential questions about grade-appropriate books read aloud by the teacher and about own reading in context (at instructional level)

Generates questions before, during and after reading

Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary

Explains common antonyms (e.g., big, little; day, night) and synonyms (e.g., little, small)

Explains multiple meanings of common words (e.g., fly, duck)

Applies comprehension strategies, such as summarization and prediction, to grade-appropriate stories read aloud by the teacher and to own reading in context (at instructional level)

Demonstrates understanding of story elements in narratives (e.g., setting, characters)

Discusses similarities in characters and events across narratives

Reads nonfiction materials for answers to specific questions or for specific purposes

Connects and compares information across nonfiction selections

Uses titles, tables of contents and chapter headings to locate information in nonfiction texts

Makes and can explain connections between a text and outside experiences and knowledge

Reads aloud with comprehension any text appropriately designed for second grade

Meets end-of-second-grade standard for comprehension on the state-approved informal reading assessment

Spelling

Spells correctly words taught as part of second grade spelling curriculum

Spells words involving previously studied generalizations (e.g., dropping silent e before adding -ing) and word patterns correctly

Spells many common irregular words correctly (e.g., were, of, come)

Represents all sounds in a word when spelling independently

Writing

Uses the following basic mechanics of writing correctly:

- Apostrophe in a contraction; commas in a series (e.g., Mary, Jim and Joe), in the date, between the name of a town and state, and in salutation and closing of a letter
- Capital letters in names of days, months and holidays, and salutation and closing of a letter
- Applies knowledge of spelling in everyday writing activities

Writes in complete sentences

Begins to use formal language patterns in place of informal or conversational language patterns in own writing (e.g., proper verb forms)

Makes reasonable judgments about what to include in written products

Begins to use a writing process in producing written work

Uses some elaboration and specific details in written work

Demonstrates some organization and/or sequencing in written work

Produces a variety of compositions (e.g., stories, short reports, letters)