

## Every Child Reads, Year 1

Completed July 2022

### Background

In 2021, Fulton County Schools (FCS) implemented Every Child Reads (ECR) as a new campaign to "recover" literacy learning in response to educational challenges and disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. ECR focuses on improving literacy instruction in FCS through evidence-based instructional practices and materials and concentrates on the National Reading Panel's "Five Pillars of Reading," which includes phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Superintendent Dr. Mike Looney described this undertaking as a goal to "do something transformative" that builds on the "scientific way to teach students to read." District plans for ECR included hiring new literacy coaches and paraprofessionals at the elementary school level, selecting new textbooks and curricular resources, and training teachers to teach reading and writing in ways aligned with the Science of Reading<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, the district sought to systematically identify the English Language Arts (ELA) and reading resources and instructional practices currently being implemented in core literacy instruction in FCS schools. This strong understanding of the RELA-related resources and instructional practices implemented in core literacy instruction provided FCS staff with information to inform the next steps to best transition District instructional practices to better align with the Science of Reading.

The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) contracted Gibson Consulting to conduct this

evaluation. The findings in this brief were abbreviated from their Evaluation Report.

### Evaluation Questions

1. What published and unpublished Tier I literacy resources are currently in use in RELA classrooms? To what extent do the literacy resources currently in use differ by student grade-level and FCS Zone?
2. How do secondary RELA teachers teach vocabulary? To what extent do instructional practices differ by grade level and FCS Zone?
3. How do secondary RELA teachers teach reading comprehension? To what extent do instructional practices differ by grade level and FCS Zone?
4. How do secondary RELA teachers teach fluency? To what extent do instructional practices differ by grade level and FCS Zone?

### Methodology and Data

The research questions that guided the evaluation activities first assessed which resources and practices Fulton's literacy teachers currently utilize.

In January of 2022, the Gibson research team contacted 1,662 FCS teachers and received 1,012 responses by the date of the survey close. This represented a response rate of 60.9%. Teachers self-reported their use of resources, the areas of literacy instruction, and where these resources were used. See Figure 1: Resources Used by Level, 2021-22 School Year.

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1. Moats, L. (2019, October 16). Of 'Hard Words' and Straw Men: Let's Understand What Reading Science is Really About.

**Figure 1: Resources Used by Level, 2021-22 School Year**

School Level	Number of Literacy Resources
K-5	64 Literacy Resources
6-8	41 Literacy Resources
9-12	23 Literacy Resources
<b>Total</b>	<b>128 Literacy Resources</b>

In March 2022, additional focus groups and surveys gauged instructional practices at the secondary level. The Gibson research team contacted 306 RELA teachers who taught Grades 6-8 via their FCS email account. When the survey closed, there were 131 responses for a response rate of 42.8%. 382 ninth through 12th-grade teachers were invited to complete the survey through their FCS email accounts. At the end of the survey window, 165 teachers participated, with a response rate of 43.2%. Secondary teachers reported using various instructional methods for vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency instruction. See Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Literacy Practices Utilized by 6-12 Teachers, 2021-22 School Year**

Secondary Literacy Area	Number of Literacy Resources
Vocabulary	15 Instructional Practices
Comprehension	24 Comprehension Practices
Fluency	8 Fluency Practices
<b>Total</b>	<b>47 Instructional Practices</b>

## Findings

The landscape analysis included an inventory of teachers' materials and instructional practices to inform and support their literacy instruction. Five strong trends emerged from the analysis.

**RELA teachers have a wide range of literacy pedagogical and instructional resources to draw on for Tier I instruction.**

Pre-survey research and focus groups revealed an impressively wide array of Tier I resources available to FCS RELA teachers. Focus groups helped identify 64 resources in use in K-5 classrooms, 41 resources used by middle school teachers, and 23 resources used by high school teachers.

The resources most used by K-5 RELA teachers demonstrate teacher attachment to specific instructional materials aligned with a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction, such as the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS), leveled readers, Units of Study by Lucy Calkins, and Guided Reading by Fountas and Pinnell.

**Secondary RELA teachers prioritized selecting and using texts from outside District-adopted textbooks or curricular programs.**

In contrast to elementary school RELA teachers, who relied primarily on District-supported resources, secondary RELA teachers reported prioritizing resources found outside of District-supported curriculum sets, programs, or textbooks. This includes short fiction and nonfiction texts, novels, and teacher-created resources.

**RELA teachers reported prioritizing comprehension above other elements of reading development and instruction.**

The National Reading Panel clarified the developmental stages in which core literacy instruction in each pillar is appropriate. In the Landscape Analysis, teachers were asked to identify what element or content area of reading instruction they taught with each resource. At the elementary level, teachers were asked about content area utilization for each pillar of reading instruction. This was refined in the secondary grades as reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. This refinement at the secondary levels reflects the

developmentally appropriate shift from learning to read to reading to learn.

At each school level, teachers reported using resources to provide reading comprehension instruction more frequently than other elements of literacy development and instruction. Although reading comprehension is an essential element, it remains difficult for many students to read with comprehension without high-quality phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency instruction.

**Middle school RELA teachers reported greater use of nonfiction text than high school ELA teachers, while all secondary teachers favored greater use of fiction.**

There is a growing body of scientific evidence<sup>2</sup> indicating that successful readers interact with a variety of text structures, most broadly categorized as informational texts and fiction texts. Students need equal amounts of exposure to nonfiction texts as they do fiction texts to ensure that students can adequately comprehend, interact with, and learn from nonfiction texts to grow their ability to make greater sense out of fiction texts.

Participating secondary RELA teachers reported using a variety of nonfiction texts in alignment with evidence-based reading instruction. Almost all (99%) of middle school teachers reported using short nonfiction texts, the predominantly used resource type for teachers of Grades 6-8. High school teachers ranked short nonfiction texts as their third most used resource overall at 96% and the first choice of informational text on their list.

**Vocabulary instruction is happening at least weekly, with varied models of instruction.**

Our evaluation team used the Landscape Analysis, and Instructional Practices of Secondary Teachers surveys better to understand the vocabulary instructional practices of RELA teachers. All RELA teachers were asked about which reading content area they taught with each resource (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension).

Grades K-5 RELA teachers used the same resources for their vocabulary instruction as they did for the rest of their literacy instruction. However, they reported using the iReady Teacher Toolbox resource suite most frequently for this pillar of reading instruction.

The Instructional Practices of Secondary Teachers survey asked secondary RELA teachers more targeted questions about how often vocabulary instruction occurred in teachers' core literacy instruction. Seventy-four percent of secondary teacher participants indicated that vocabulary instruction occurred in their classrooms at least weekly. Middle school RELA teachers taught vocabulary more frequently in their classrooms than their high school colleagues. Thirty-five percent of Grade 6-8 teachers reported providing vocabulary instruction daily or very often in their teaching, almost double the number of Grade 9- 12 teachers reporting the same frequency (16%).

**Considerations**

The overall recommendation from the landscape analysis is to provide clarity to Fulton teachers about the Every Child Reads initiative. Bridges between previous reading instruction models and the new instructional model should articulate instructional priorities and how they differ from early elementary,

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<sup>2</sup> Wexler, J., Swanson, E., & Vaughn, S., Shelton, A., & Kurz, L. (in press). Building a sustainable school-wide adolescent literacy model in middle schools: Guidance for

administrators. *Middle School Journal*, 53(3), 15-25.  
DOI: 10.1080/00940771.2019.1603802.

upper elementary, middle, and high school. These can also focus on identifying the materials best suited for district instructional priorities.

In elementary, the district can continue strengthening resources' vertical and horizontal alignment with attention to phonics and decoding instruction. They can consistently support implementation vertically across grade levels as students matriculate through the grades.

In defining explicit reading instruction at the secondary level, it is essential to establish and promote concrete actions for vocabulary and comprehension instruction. Looking at middle school data, teachers report using effective strategies for vocabulary instruction. These can be amplified by authentically embedding vocabulary into reading instruction and connecting to the texts students read. Additional professional development can offer teachers more explicit and meaningful vocabulary instruction strategies. Survey and focus group data revealed many different vocabulary word lists in our middle and high schools. Clarifying evidence-based practices for generating vocabulary lists can be part of the overall vocabulary professional development.

Current research-based practices around reading comprehension instruction to improve explicit instruction further should be leveraged, particularly to amplify instruction of informational texts.

For secondary students, fluency should be addressed for students experiencing reading challenges, such as those with IEPs or 504s, engaging in RTI instruction, or those identified as remedial. This student group could also include students who are emerging multilinguals.

The final recommendation is to clarify expectations around reading priorities, including genre, mode, and source so that students explore reading strategies and skills in multiple kinds of texts.

## References

For this report, the Science of Reading is defined as a body of research from multiple disciplines, including developmental psychology, educational psychology, and cognitive science, that shed light on how children learn to read. The science of reading is not an ideology, philosophy, program of instruction, curricula, or a specific component of instruction. Rather it is a scientific approach to gathering evidence that provides actionable information about how reading progresses from the earliest stages in spoken language to the ability to decode unfamiliar words and make meaning from written text successfully.

1. Moats, L. (2019, October 16). Of 'Hard Words' and Straw Men: Let's Understand What Reading Science is Really About. <https://www.voyagersopris.com/blog/edview360/2019/10/16/lets-understand-what-reading-science-is-really-about>
2. Wexler, J., Swanson, E., & Vaughn, S., Shelton, A., & Kurz, L. (in press). Building a sustainable school-wide adolescent literacy model in middle schools: Guidance for administrators. *Middle School Journal*, 53(3), 15-25. DOI: 10.1080/00940771.2019.1603802.