

Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest Strategies to Improve Reading Partnership

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest is partnering with school districts in Michigan to **increase kindergarten and grade 1 reading skills**.



To meet this goal, the **Strategies to Improve Reading (STIR) partnership** will develop, test, and refine an approach—consisting of a set of resources, tools, trainings, professional learning communities, and coaching sessions—to support educators and school leaders in integrating **evidence-based strategies** for K–1 literacy. This approach will build educator capacity to (a) implement features of effective instructional practices for **phonological awareness** and **phonics**, (b) use and support decision-driven data collection and analysis, and (c) adapt leadership practices to support literacy.



The goal of **phonological awareness** instruction is to help students identify and manipulate units—such as words, syllables, onsets, and rimes—in the oral language. Ultimately, strong phonological awareness skills support students in developing skills in phonics.¹



The goal of **phonics** instruction is to help students understand the relationships between written letters and their sounds to sound out words. Ultimately, phonics instruction helps students decode words accurately and read text fluently.²

Why is this topic important?

Literacy skills in the early grades are important predictors of students' future academic outcomes. Students who do not read by the end of grade 3 are more likely to struggle in later grades and not graduate high school.³

According to a systematic review by the What Works Clearinghouse of 56 studies, students experience more growth in their literacy skills when they receive systematic, explicit, and data-driven instruction in phonics and phonological awareness.⁴

To support student success in reading, instruction in **phonological awareness** and **phonics** should be

- systematic
- explicit
- data driven
- culturally and linguistically responsive

Planned partnership activities

Over 5 years, REL Midwest will collaborate with **school districts in Michigan** to develop, test, and refine the STIR approach. Partner districts will work closely with REL Midwest to support the refinement of the STIR components. REL Midwest also will develop products to share research findings, evidence-based practices, and learnings from the partnership.

Visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) to learn more as the work unfolds.

Contact us to learn more!



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REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven midwestern states to support the use of research and data to improve student outcomes, with a focus on students who are farthest from opportunity.

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- ¹ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: Reports of the subgroups* (NIH Publication No. 00-4754). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ² Foorman, B. R., Chen, D., Carlson, C., Moats, L., Francis, D. J., & Fletcher, J. M. (2003). The necessity of the alphabetic principle to phonemic awareness instruction. *Reading and Writing, 16*(4), 289–324.
- ³ Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. <https://eric.ed.gov/?ID=ED518818>; Pace, A., Alper, R., Burchinal, M. R., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2019). Measuring success: Within and cross-domain predictors of academic and social trajectories in elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 46*, 112–125; Stanley, C. T., Petscher, Y., & Catts, H. (2018). A longitudinal investigation of direct and indirect links between reading skills in kindergarten and reading comprehension in tenth grade. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 31*(1), 133–153. <https://eric.ed.gov/?ID=EJ1165396>.
- ⁴ Foorman et al., 2003.