

EFFECTIVE THIRD GRADE WORD READING PRACTICES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Surveys and interviews were conducted with teachers across ten identified Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools to illuminate third-grade classroom literacy practices and specifically highlight high-leverage practices common among outlier teachers.

Third grade teachers were identified as outliers using Acadience Oral Reading Fluency scores and comparing beginning-of-year to middle-of-year achievement to develop an effect size. Outlier teachers had classroom effect sizes at least two standard deviations from the average effect size.

In this study, some non-outliers were included for comparison. For this reason, only schools with at least one outlier teacher are identified, but names are omitted.

Bloomington Hills Elementary School

Coral Canyon Elementary School

Crimson View Elementary School

Heritage Elementary School

Legacy Elementary

Little Valley Elementary School

Majestic Fields Elementary

Sandstone Elementary School

South Mesa Elementary

Sunset Elementary School

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is crucial for future academic success. Utah has set a goal of having 70% of third graders reading at grade level by July 2027 and has implemented changes to improve reading instruction. A large school district surveyed and interviewed its third-grade teachers to understand their reading practices. This research revealed key differences in teaching strategies between “outlier” teachers (those whose students showed high reading achievement) and other teachers.

Outlier teachers use **specific decoding and fluency practices** and **explicitly prioritize instructional tasks** including:

- **Phoneme-grapheme mapping**
- **Blending and word building**
- **Multisyllabic word reading routines**
- **Morphology instruction**
- **Reading decodable text**
- **Repeated reading**
- **Choral reading**
- **Dyad reading**
- **Practicing fluency phrases**
- **High-frequency word instruction and practice**
- **Using grade-level text**

In contrast, other teachers frequently used less effective practices, such as differentiating instruction based on text level, conducting one-minute fluency timings (not for assessment), and relying on isolated worksheet practice during center time. By identifying and replacing these low-leverage practices with more effective strategies, schools can potentially replicate the success of outlier teachers and boost student reading achievement.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education was created to find, research, and highlight proven practices in Utah schools for replication statewide. ULEAD partners with practitioners, researchers, and education organizations to develop and curate resources, foster collaboration, and drive systemic change for improved student outcomes. The ULEAD Clearinghouse is a growing repository of innovative, effective, and efficient practice resources and tools to support educators.

The ULEAD Steering Committee, composed of current Utah educators and stakeholders, meets quarterly to inform the focus priorities that ULEAD will research. ULEAD uses data to find positive outliers in each focus area and create reports, such as this one, illuminating the practices and policies that lead to positive outcomes. At the time of this report, these priorities include: Student Attendance, Educator Retention and Job Satisfaction, Academic Achievement through Strategic Engagement through Technology, Middle Grade Mathematics,

Early Literacy, and Multilingual Learner Achievement.

This report addresses effective teaching strategies to support Science of Reading implementation in early grades with a specific focus on high leverage classroom practices. ULEAD collaborates with Institutes of Higher Education and education practitioners to develop Innovative Practice Reports. This report was developed in partnership with Utah State University.

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