# SUPPORTING THE SCIENCE OF READING

## INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN CLARITY

A UTAH LEADING THROUGH EFFECTIVE, ACTIONABLE, AND DYNAMIC EDUCATION

## INNOVATIVE PRACTICE REPORT

ULEAD EDUCATION

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# 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, and Academic Success through Social Emotional Supports Grounded in Academic Classroom Practice, with an emphasis on middle grade mathematics and multilingual learner achievement.

This report addresses effective teaching and planning strategies in early literacy.

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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August 2024

**The link between academic engaged time and learning is one of the most enduring and consistent findings in educational research.**

(Gettinger & Walter, 2012, p. 654)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven focus groups were conducted with 20 teachers and five learning coaches across the identified Title 1 and non-Title 1 school grade level teams to illuminate reading practices that have contributed to student success.

The practice sites for this study included six schools and seven grade level teams who taught at Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools in Washington County School District.

Kindergarten
- LaVerkin Elementary
- South Mesa Elementary

1st Grade
- Water Canyon Elementary
- Arrowhead Elementary

2nd Grade
- Heritage Elementary
- Crimson View Elementary

3rd Grade
- South Mesa Elementary

Through legislation, Utah has established a goal of 70% of students in third grade reading on grade level by July 2027 and initiated important changes to how schools curate curriculum and deliver reading instruction. Teachers throughout the state continue to engage with learning about the Science of Reading (SOR), but implementation efforts and results vary.

Outlier schools in one large school district implementing Science of Reading were interviewed about their practices with Science of Reading and Response to Intervention (RTI). While initially intended to illuminate successful Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and RTI practices, this study instead found four themes that highly align to Instructional Design Clarity among effective teachers.

## Theme 1: Student Learning Oriented
## Theme 2: Goal Oriented
## Theme 3: Continuous Collaboration
## Theme 4: Robust School District Supports

Schools can best facilitate similar outcomes by:

## 1. Supporting Effective Goal Setting Structures
## 2. Reducing Friction to Data Access
## 3. Facilitating Focus
## 4. Providing Ongoing Professional Learning

This report describes how teachers implement these four themes in their daily work, the related research that supports each practice, and how these structures contribute to highly effective teaching practices.

# PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

The Science of Reading (SOR) and Instructional Design Clarity (IDC) should be seen as complementary approaches for promoting reading proficiency among students; SOR indicates what to teach and how to effectively teach reading, while IDC provides a framework for deploying SOR in real school settings with students of diverse proficiencies and backgrounds. Indeed, one is actually essential to the other for realizing the vision of universal literacy among Utah's students.

Washington County School District (WCSD) was the site for this project. WCSD has a history of Instructional Design Clarity. Indeed, a board policy emphasizing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was passed in 2011 to promote collaborative teaming, vertical and horizontal alignment, and IDC within the school district (WCSD, 2011). More than a decade later, consultation with school and district leaders revealed that this is an essential model within the district.

Beginning in 2021, USBE has invested in professional learning for K-3 general education teachers, special education teachers, coaches, principals, and local education agency leaders in the Science of Reading in order to improve literacy instruction and student outcomes across the state (USBE, 2023b). As educators began completing their professional learning, USBE began observing classrooms across the State, looking at how that learning was being implemented.
In May of 2023, USBE created a rubric to determine the level of implementation. Those educators scoring 90% or higher were recognized with a Science of Reading Award. The recipients of this award are considered key to helping Utah reach its goal of at least 70% of third grade students reading on grade level.

Washington County School District employees were recognized with Science of Reading Awards. Amy Mitchell, the Title I Director for WCSD, and Kathy Hall, the WCSD Elementary Literacy Coordinator, were nominated by district personnel. One elementary school and eight WCSD employees recieved the award which has only been awarded to a total of 25 recipients thus far (Palmer, 2024).

Because of their efforts in IDC and the SOR, Washington County School District was selected as the site for this project.

**Washington County School District**

The Washington County School District serves students across Washington County encompassing St. George, Hurricane, Springdale, and part of Zion National Park (Utah State Board of Education [USBE], 2023a; WCSD, 2022). The district has nine high schools, six middle schools, six intermediate schools, 28 elementary schools, a post-high school, an adult high school, and an online school (WCSD, 2022). Student enrollment in Washington County has risen significantly in the last decade, from under 27,000 in 2014-2015 to over 36,000 in 2024, making it one of the fastest growing districts in the country. The district employs over 1,800 teachers, and 69% of teachers have seven or more years of experience (USBE, 2023a; WCSD, 2022).

Washington County School District Demographics, October 2023

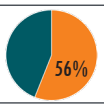
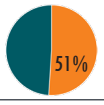
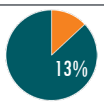
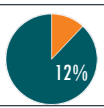
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White

**Outlier Identification**

The Acadience Reading assessment was used to identify outliers. Acadience is a state-wide screening assessment administered three times yearly that measures student foundational reading proficiency. Each grade level assessment consists of multiple subtests that are then calculated into a composite score.

This project used beginning- and middle-of-year composite score data from the 2023-2024 school year. The researcher calculated an effect size (Hedges & Olkin, 1985) for each grade level, as well as for each grade level by school. Effect sizes were then filtered by Title I status and ranked from highest to lowest. Each Title I and non-Title I school grade level with the highest effect size, eight schools total, was invited to a 2.5 hour focus group to discuss their RTI practices. Each grade level teacher and learning coach was invited to the session.

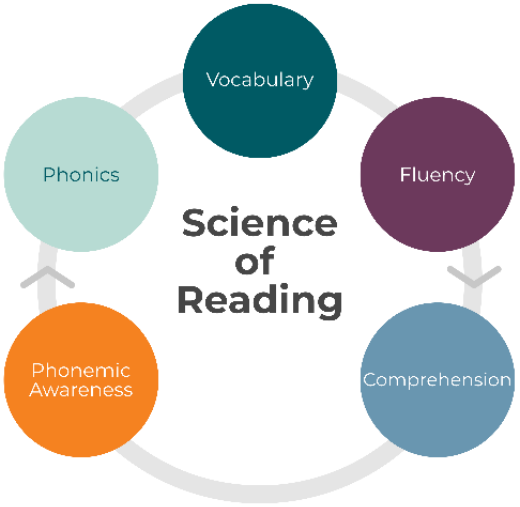
Seven focus groups were conducted with 20 teachers and five learning coaches. Participation from the non-Title I second grade school consisted of one teacher, and the Title I third grade school was unable to participate. More information on the calculation of effect sizes can be found in Appendix A.

| Outlier Grade Level(s) | School | Grade Level Enrollment | School Enrollment | Title 1 Status | % Low Income | % Racial Minority | % Limited English | % Students with Disabilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | La Verkin Elementary | 54 | 348 | ✓ |  56% | 14% | 5% | 16% |
| K | South Mesa Elementary | 82 | 593 | |  12% | 10% | 1% | 13% |
| 1 | Water Canyon Elementary | 35 | 197 | ✓ |  51% | 6% | 2% | 18% |
| 1 | Arrowhead Elementary | 81 | 519 | |  34% | 23% | 4% | 17% |
| 2 | Heritage Elementary | 77 | 461 | ✓ |  56% | 34% | 9% | 17% |
| 2 | Crimson View Elementary | 97 | 534 | |  13% | 11% | 3% | 14% |
| 3 | South Mesa Elementary | 107 | 593 | |  12% | 10% | 1% | 13% |

# THE BACKGROUND

**The Science of Reading**

The Science of Reading (SOR) is an interdisciplinary body of research that provides evidence on the methods and techniques students use to learn to read most effectively (NCIL, 2022). SOR-aligned approaches include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension using practices that have been demonstrated as successful in the empirical literature. In recent years, many states have passed SOR legislation with the intention of increasing reading proficiency for their students. Utah's SOR legislation is Senate Bill 127, passed in the 2022 legislative session. This bill established a goal of 70% of Utah students in third grade reading on grade level by July 2027 and initiated important changes to how schools curate curriculum and deliver reading instruction.




**Effective Utah Teaching Standards**

The Utah Effective Teaching Standards highlight practices associated with effective teaching and are intended to "describe the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are the hallmark of effective instruction" (USBE, 2023c, p. 11). The elements of each standard offer flexibility, as opposed to a checklist of behaviors, while providing a unifying structure to address essential aspects of effective teaching. When used as a lens to highlight strengths and supports for educator growth, the standards "provide opportunities for… improved instruction and positive learning outcomes" (USBE, 2023c, p. 11). By using the standards to frame the effective practices at schools, this study can serve as a means to influence the practical implementation of these standards. These standards address five core areas of effective teaching including:

- Learners and Learning
- Instructional Design Clarity
- Instructional Practice
- Classroom Climate
- Professional Responsibility

# PRACTICE IN ACTION

The schools identified as outliers in the dataset exhibited each of the five Utah Teaching Effective Standards. However, Standard 2: Instructional Design Clarity is directly evident in the work of these educators. These teams displayed clarity in how they "organize and sequence instruction and effectively plan for learning and student engagement" (USBE, 2023c, p. 14), evidencing an established collaborative process for addressing student learning.

## Theme 1: Student Learning Oriented

## Theme 2: Goal Oriented

## Theme 3: Continuous Collaboration

## Theme 4: Robust School District Supports

**Theme 1: Student and Learning Oriented**

The teachers interviewed exhibited a clear orientation toward individual students and their learning outcomes. These teachers shared the mindset that learning outcomes are highly contingent on the quality of instruction. As such, these teachers reported focused, intentional use of instructional minutes. Examples of intentional use of instructional minutes include a focus on evidence-based and Science of Reading practices, incorporation of reading and writing support across the curriculum, strategic use of personnel and grouping practices, and minimization of time in transition.

Teachers frequently connected this intentional use of instructional time with holding students to high expectations. Interviewees frequently cited the belief that all students can learn–and deserve–to read. In turn, these teachers held students to high expectations in order to advance their reading proficiency.

Holding students to high expectations is a commonly referenced approach to high levels of learning. However, it became apparent through the interviews that students were not the only ones held to high expectations. These teachers also held themselves–and each other–to high expectations. It appears that high self-expectation provided the catalyst for intense focus on maximizing the use of instructional minutes.

*Research Connection*

According to Gettinger and Walter (2012), "the link between academic engaged time and learning is one of the most enduring and consistent findings in educational research" (p. 654). Generally, more instructional time correlates with greater student learning. Unfortunately, in many classrooms instructional time is under optimized (Aronson et al., 1999). Therefore, one low-cost, high-impact approach to enhancing student learning outcomes is by making better use of existing instructional minutes. Gettinger and Walter (2012) recommend the following strategies for increasing academic engaged time:

- Minimize classroom disruptions and off-task behavior
- Reduce transition time
- Establish consistent and efficient classroom routines
- Focus on explicit learning objectives
- Facilitate active student responses
- Provide feedback to students
- Deliver instruction at a quick, smooth, efficient pace
- Support students self-management skills
- Have students set their own goals for learning

The academic literature reports the importance of teacher expectations on student learning (Brophy, 2007). Rubie-Davies (2007) reported that students of teachers with high-expectations experienced large gains over the course of a school year ($d = 1.05$), while students taught by low-expectation teachers exhibited negligible gains ($d = 0.05$). This study also reported changes in student self-beliefs based on teacher expectations. Students with high-expectation teachers experi-

## Standard 2: Instructional Design Clarity

Effective teachers preview classroom content, demonstrate clarity in how they organize and sequence instruction and effectively plan for learning and student engagement by:

**Element 1: Content**
Demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of Utah Core Standards, communicating relevance of content, communicating clear pathways to student mastery and designing learning experiences aligned to clear learning intentions and success criteria.

**Element 2: Learning Progression**
Demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of where students have been, where they are now, and where they are going using strategically sequenced learning experiences aligned within and accross grade levels.

**Element3: Instructional Planning**
Planning high quality, personalized instructional activities that are informed by student progress data, provide multiple opportunities for students to reflect upon and assess their own growth, and allow multiple opportunities and means for demonstration of competency.

**Element 4: Engagement**
Designing lessons and activities that actively engage students in their learning and use a variety of effective tools and strategies.

(USBE, 2023c)

enced small gains in their self-belief of capability in reading and math, whereas students with low-expectation teachers experienced significant decline in their academic self-beliefs. Teacher expectations often translate into classroom practices. In a synthesis of High-Expectation Theory and Self-Determination Theory, Hornstra et al. (2023) report that high-expectation teachers engage in the following practices:

- Ask high-level questions of all students, not just high achievers
- Engage in flexible and often mixed groupings of students
- Form strong, positive, warm relationships with students
- Structured opportunity for student choice within the classroom
- Classroom management is positive and preventative
- Students are expected to support each other
- Frequent goal setting and monitoring progress toward goals
- Structure contingent on student needs

*Instructional Design Clarity*
By "designing lessons and activities that actively engage students in learning" (USBE, 2023c, p. 14), teachers showcased Element 4: Engagement from the Utah Effective Teaching Standards. Additionally, elements of Standard 4: Classroom Climate are evident as teachers set high expectations with an organized structure.

**Theme 2: Goal Oriented**
*Goal Setting*
The interviewed teachers reported a high degree of goal setting. Academic goals were set at the grade level, classroom level, and individual student level across all teams. The partner school district utilized the PEERS framework for goal setting (Knight, 2017; 2019). Teacher teams using the PEERS framework set goals that are:

- Powerful
- Easy
- Emotionally Compelling
- Reachable
- Student Focused

In WCSD, teacher teams are required to set grade-level PEERS goals with their principal. However, many teams reported setting multiple team and classroom goals in addition to the goals required by the district. Perhaps connected to their belief in student learning, teachers perceived goal setting as an essential component to student success. As such, these teacher teams set goals, monitored progress toward the goals, and adjusted goals as needed.

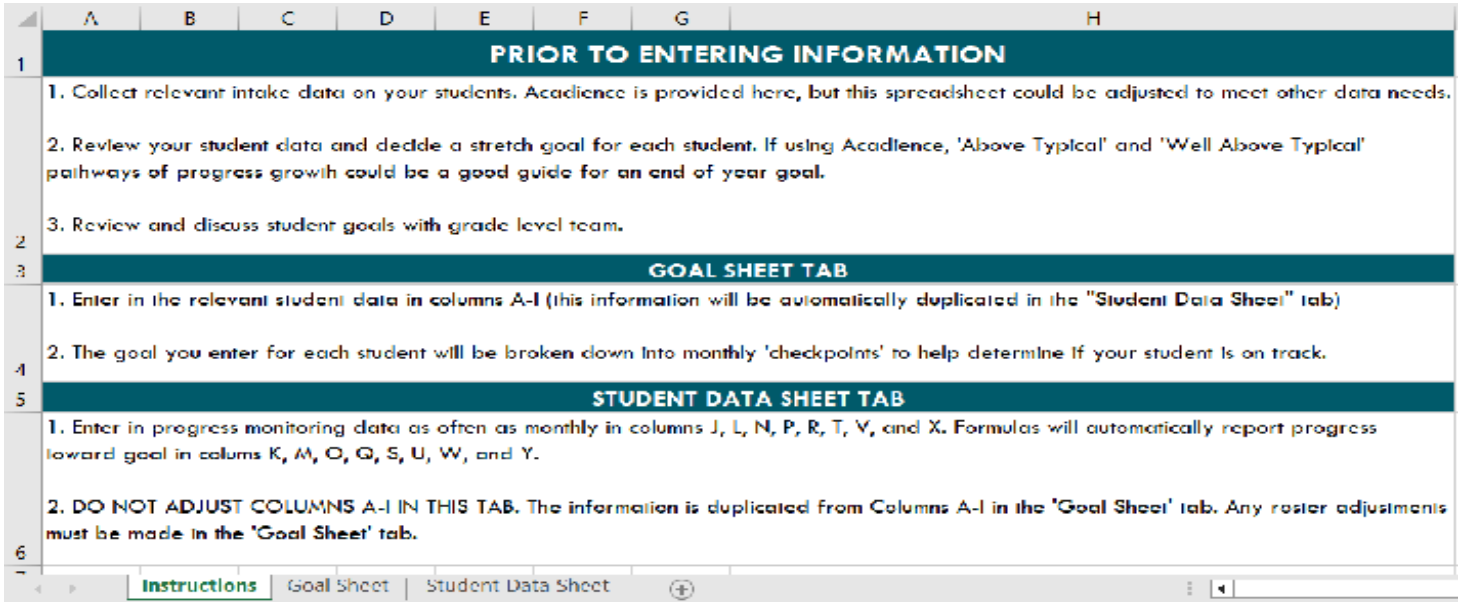
One kindergarten team offered the following goal as an example: "All kindergarteners will identify the name and sound of every letter by Halloween." The grade level team then collaborates to make a plan about how to meet the goal. If the goal is met the team sets a new PEERS goal either during PLC time or a formal data meeting. Teachers reported striving toward–and meeting–established goals help to provide focus to their instruction and their collaboration time.

Progress toward the PEERS goals was supported by two key factors:

backward design and adaptation. In backward design, teachers subtracted student beginning-of-year (BOY) data from the end-of-year (EOY) goal, providing the amount of growth the goal required. Teachers then determined the amount of growth needed per month by dividing the total growth number by the number of months between the BOY data and EOY goal. Last, teachers made a yearly scope–typically in Google Sheets–that provided monthly benchmarks for determining progress. This process was repeated for grade level goals, classroom goals, and individual student goals.

**Sample Goal Data Sheet**

A template of the Sample Goal Data Sheet, truncated in the pictures below, is available for download and personal use at: https://bit.ly/SampleGoalUT



**PRIOR TO ENTERING INFORMATION**

1. Collect relevant intake data on your students. Acadience is provided here, but this spreadsheet could be adjusted to meet other data needs.

2. Review your student data and decide a stretch goal for each student. If using Acadience, 'Above Typical' and 'Well Above Typical' pathways of progress growth could be a good guide for an end of year goal.

3. Review and discuss student goals with grade level team.

**GOAL SHEET TAB**

1. Enter in the relevant student data in columns A-I (this information will be automatically duplicated in the "Student Data Sheet" tab)

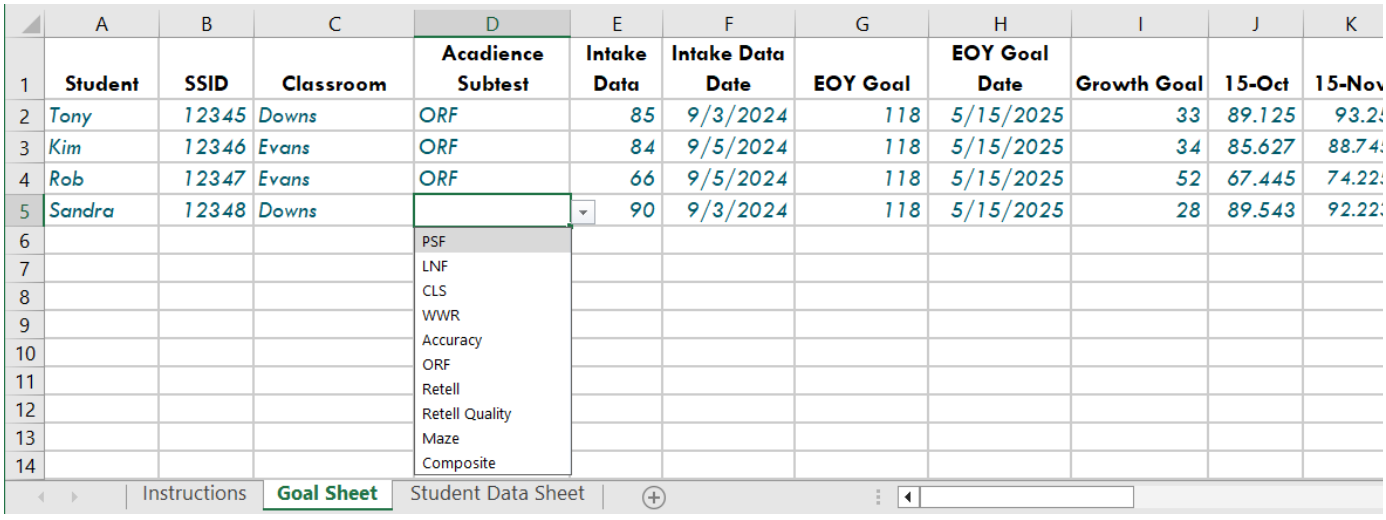
2. The goal you enter for each student will be broken down into monthly 'checkpoints' to help determine if your student is on track.

**STUDENT DATA SHEET TAB**

1. Enter in progress monitoring data as often as monthly in columns J, L, N, P, R, T, V, and X. Formulas will automatically report progress toward goal in colums K, M, O, Q, S, U, W, and Y.

2. DO NOT ADJUST COLUMNS A-I IN THIS TAB. The information is duplicated from Columns A-I in the 'Goal Sheet' tab. Any roster adjustments must be made in the 'Goal Sheet' tab.

Instructions | Goal Sheet | Student Data Sheet



| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Student | SSID | Classroom | Acadience Subtest | Intake Data | Intake Data Date | EOY Goal | EOY Goal Date | Growth Goal | 15-Oct | 15-Nov |
| 2 | Tony | 12345 | Downs | ORF | 85 | 9/3/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 33 | 89.125 | 93.25 |
| 3 | Kim | 12346 | Evans | ORF | 84 | 9/5/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 34 | 85.627 | 88.745 |
| 4 | Rob | 12347 | Evans | ORF | 66 | 9/5/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 52 | 67.445 | 74.225 |
| 5 | Sandra | 12348 | Downs | | 90 | 9/3/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 28 | 89.543 | 92.225 |
| 6 | | | | PSF | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | LNF | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | CLS | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | WWR | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | Accuracy | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | ORF | | | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | Retell | | | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | Retell Quality | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | Maze | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Composite | | | | | | | |

Instructions | Goal Sheet | Student Data Sheet

| D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acadience Subtest | Intake Data | Intake Data Date | EOY Goal | EOY Goal Date | Growth Goal | Oct PM | Oct +/- | Nov PM | Nov +/- |
| ORF | 85 | 9/3/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 33 | 88 | -1.125 | 95 | 1.75 |
| ORF | 84 | 9/5/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 34 | 86 | 0.373 | 88 | -0.745 |
| ORF | 66 | 9/5/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 52 | 67 | -0.445 | 74 | -0.225 |
| | 90 | 9/3/2024 | 118 | 5/15/2025 | 28 | 89 | -0.543 | 92 | -0.223 |

Perhaps because Acadience is used as a universal screener in Utah, teachers typically reported selecting Acadience subtests or composite scores as a target for goal selection. Although the goal setting process itself was required by the district, school teams possessed full autonomy to select goals meaningful to their context. Teachers reported reviewing the data, identifying the areas of strength, and development for their group, and determining a goal that would productively enhance their students' reading skill. Teachers reported goals were determined based on a) which areas of reading they felt the student needed the most and b) where the student could be by the end of the year.

In this sample, many of the teachers actively engaged students in the goal achievement process. In many classrooms, students maintained personal growth binders where they would track their progress toward their individual goals. When a student met a goal, they would confer with the teacher to establish a new goal. As reported by their teachers, these students knew their progress toward key reading benchmarks and were motivated to meet these benchmarks. Similarly, many of the teachers reported tracking classroom-level goals with their students.

*Adaptation*

The monthly milestones provided by the backward design process were complemented by strategic adaptation of Tier I curriculum materials. Frequently reported curricular adaptations included: expanding or contracting aspects of the curriculum to fit student need and promote goal achievement, omitting aspects of the curriculum lacking rigor or a Science of Reading evidence base, supplementing the curriculum with district-created resources, and the use of team-created or teacher-created materials. The materials were often created/vetted though the lens of grade/classroom goals and/or previous evidence-based professional learning.

Google Slides for instruction was a consistently mentioned co-created material. One team specifically reported they ensure their slides include high interest and challenging reading materials that build on various phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies and target the components of reading. Teachers also reported creating materials that mimicked previous materials to support spiral review in their classroom. Teachers reported these helped to stay coordinated and goal-focused while maintaining an emphasis on learning.

Teachers typically mentioned that team/teacher created materials were usually designed to connect with or enhance their current core reading program. WCSD will adopt a new core reading program from the USBE SOR curriculum list in the 2024-2025 school year. Several teachers expressed anticipation that their new curricular materials will be higher quality and that they will thus need to supplement less.

Despite the reported supplementation to Tier I instruction, none of the interviewed teams mentioned the use of Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT). This omission of Teachers Pay Teachers for curricular adaptation

## Goal Characteristics Promoting Positive Outcomes

The design and implementation of goal-setting strategies, coupled with other instructional practices, have a direct impact on the benefits of student goal-setting. A comprehensive review of goal-setting litertature found the most effective goals should be:

- **Optimally Challenging**
- **Proximal in Time Frame**
- **Specific**
- **Focused on Deep Understanding and Mastery**
- **Set by Students**
- **Accompanied by Planning, Self-Evaluation, Regular Feedback, and Reflection**

(Midwest Comprehensive Center, 2018)

is notable. Although an extremely popular platform for materials, research has indicated that TPT materials tend to be low rigor and of dubious evidence-base (Aguilar et al., 2022).

Teachers reported feeling comfortable and confident in their strategic adaptation of Tier I curriculum. Adaptation was typically done in collaboration with their grade level team and coach (see section on Collaboration) and was subordinate to their goal-driven expectations for student learning. More succinctly, curriculum–and curricular adaptation–was a means for student learning, not an end in and of itself.

Teachers used benchmark and progress monitoring data as the major driver of adapting Tier I curriculum. All students were monitored monthly in Acadience, with students achieving 'below' and 'well-below' status monitored more frequently. Students in need of additional support were also administered phonics or phonemic awareness diagnostics to assist in designing responsive instruction. Teachers actively reviewed these data–and other systematically collected data–to determine curricular and instructional adaptations.

*Research Connection*

Evidence in educational psychology indicates that goal setting promotes energy, persistence, self-regulation, and motivation (Woolfolk, 2019). Goals that include specific performance standards–as in the PEERS framework– are more likely to be achieved than goals with generic or vague objectives (Zimmerman et al., 2015).

Goal setting is also viewed as an agentic process. That is, goal-oriented behavior allows for choice, prioritization, flexibility, decision-making, and adaptation in pursuit of the goal, as evidenced by the teachers in the sample (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

> "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them" (Bandura, 1994).

Hattie (2008) describes expert teachers as "adaptive learning experts" (p. 246) who respond to student needs by flexibly implementing an array of effective instructional strategies. Effective adaptation requires a robust understanding of students, pedagogy, and desired learning outcomes (Vaughn, 2021). Reynolds and Daniel (2017) describe adaptation as a 'contingency based scaffold' wherein teachers adapt in the moment based on student response to provide optimal levels of instructional support. Critically, a recent review of 64 studies identified student learning, student motivation, and student behavior as antecedents to effective instructional adaptation (Parsons et al., 2018). These data indicate that aligning instruction content and rigor with student need is a critical component of effective reading instruction.

*Instructional Design Clarity*

Teachers evidenced three key elements of Instructional Design Clarity: Element 1: Content, Element 2: Learning Progression, and Element 3: Instructional Planning. Teachers showed a clear understanding of the standards and discrete skills needed to ensure mastery of the standards and the ability to modify or create materials to best fit students' needs. They were able to sequence learning to reach important milestones en route to mastery learning.

Through using data to plan personalized instructional activities and providing multiple points and ways to demonstrate competency, teachers engaged in significant instructional planning. Additionally, Standard 3: Instructional Practice says, "effective teachers engage in high quality instructional practices that are data informed, exhibit a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, and meet the learning needs of students" (USBE, 2023c, p. 15) in a variety of ways.

**Theme 3: Collaboration**

*Formal Collaboration*

The interviewed cohort also reported high levels of both formal and informal collaboration. Formal collaboration efforts included weekly PLC meetings, frequent (often monthly) data meetings with learning coaches and/or building administrators, and yearly planning sessions at the beginning of the school year.

Teachers emphasized these formal collaborative meetings are high-leverage decision making sessions. In these sessions, teams reported reviewing data, setting goals, reviewing progress toward goals, analyzing Tier II data, regrouping for homogeneity, discussing individual student progress, reviewing/adjusting upcoming scope and sequence, and discussing Tier

l curriculum adaptations to meet student needs.

These meetings typically followed a pre-determined agenda, however schools differed in whether the agenda was created by admin, grade-level teams, or both. Appendix B presents a meeting protocol designed by a Kindergarten team. Appendix C presents a sample of school-wide collective norms.

Interviewees noted a strong interplay between the less-frequent data meetings with building administrators and coaches and the more-frequent PLC meetings. The data review and decision making that occurred within the weekly PLC meetings helped set the stage for the data meeting with the learning coach and administrator.

Teachers reported that the PLC meetings allowed teachers to be very familiar with student data and respond with instructional/curricular adjustments. This effective use of PLC time allowed the larger data meetings to focus on bigger picture items, such as group progress toward goals.

*Informal Collaboration*

The formal collaboration reported by the teams was also supplemented with continual informal collaboration. Teachers emphasized the importance of these interactions for promoting student achievement. Locations for informal collaboration included in each other's classrooms before/after school, during lunch break, on the playground, and even passing each other in the hall.

These informal actions appeared to be more micro in nature, coordinating daily instructional materials, discussing how students responded to a particular lesson, and following up on how individual students performed after Tier II regrouping. They also described these informal collaborations as occurring rather seamlessly during slivers of available time throughout the day. Informal collaboration also appeared to be an important means through which teachers leaned on each other for support.

Taken together, the formal and informal collaborations of these teachers are an important part of their success. Teachers cited different purposes for different collaborations. Any individual type of collaboration is likely insufficient, but combined they form a gestalt where the logistics of promoting student success are established.

*Research Connection*

> Collaboration is defined as "professional interactions among teachers to attend to instructional issues both in formal and informal settings" (Chen et al., 2020).

Collaborative school cultures are connected to many positive outcomes, including increased student outcomes, increased morale, decreased absenteeism, greater job satisfaction, lower turnover of novice teachers, a greater sense of belonging for teachers, increased teacher self-efficacy, and increased professional learning (Blomeke et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2007; Johnson, 2003; Meirink et al., 2007, Strahan 2003). Teacher collaboration also appears to be enhanced when teachers' own goals are supported by school and district leadership (Hargreaves, 2019).

*Instructional Design Clarity*

Engaging in formal and informal collaborations to discuss content and learning progressions is a necessary structure to support Element 3: Instructional Planning. Planning for teachers happened in structured, supported, and organized settings as well as through continuous conversation and reflection. Planning also led to incorporation of other Effective Teaching Standards such as selecting instructional strategies, analyzing assessment practices, and engaging in continuous professional learning.

**Theme 4: School and District Supports**

*School Supports*

The interviewed teachers also reported robust support from the school and district to facilitate student academic growth. Teachers reported high levels of trust and respect with their building administrators. Building administrators were consistently reported as having high expectations, but also allowing autonomy in teacher decision-making to reach grade level goals.

Administrators were also actively involved with adjusting schedules to meet classroom and individual student needs. Teachers recognized the complexity of a K-5 building schedule and reported deep appreciation for administrators willing to adjust schedules–sometimes multiple times throughout a year–to best support students. Building administrators were also recognized as being willing to provide necessary supplies or resources as requested by the grade level teams.

Learning coaches were also reported as a major school-level support. Learning coaches were described as responsive, actively involved with analyzing and responding to student data, surveying teams on grade level and teacher needs, designing and conducting personalized professional learning for grade level teams, and helping collect/tabulate data. Coaches were frequently complemented by their teams and reported as being a major contributor to student growth.

Last, other academic and nonacademic staff were reported as being key to student growth. All the grade level teams interviewed reported paraprofessional assistance for instruction. Non-Title I schools reported only having one or two paraprofessionals' assistance while some of the Title I schools reported nearly a dozen paraprofessionals providing support during Tier II instruction. Paraprofessionals were most often reported as delivering intervention instruction with approved curriculum as part of Tier II instruction, however paraprofessionals were also reported as being involved with progress monitoring. These paraprofessionals were not assigned to a single classroom or grade level for the entire day, rather the paraprofessionals usually supported instruction in multiple grade levels and supported other school needs such as lunch or bus duty.

Teachers reported that paraprofessionals were helpful in meeting student needs because they allowed for greater differentiation of instruction. However, a trade-off was noted in several of the interviews; although paraprofessional assistance was welcomed, it also introduced more responsibility on teachers to coordinate with paraprofessionals and design instruction for them to implement. Teachers did not experience additional time set aside to coordinate with paraprofessionals. The teams found ways to collaborate before/after school, and during preparations periods.

*District Supports*

Teachers also highlighted many school district supports that enabled their success. One key resource reported was the district Title I grade level specialist. In WCSD, each grade has a specialist specifically assigned to provide support, materials, and professional learning for the Title I teachers of that grade level. Grade level teams acknowledged the level of support these specialists provide. Additionally, teachers reported that these specialists were visible within their schools, attended data meetings as schedules permitted, and were a key district-level contact.

Other resources such as instructional scope-sequence for each grade, data collection spreadsheet templates, diagnostic assessments, and district-level progress toward goals were also reported by the teachers. WCSD maintains a website for each grade level where teachers can access these materials. Similarly, the district grade level specialists provide frequent email updates that include potential resources, progress toward district goals, upcoming professional learning opportunities, and other relevant materials.

Collectively, the teachers reported that district personnel have made a concerted effort to minimize any friction between collecting, tabulating, and reviewing data. This smooth data collection process provided a streamlined experience and was viewed positively. One software platform they have invested in is ESGI (https://esgi-software.com). This software allows for common formative assessments to be shared by teams and across the district to assist in monitoring

## USBE Coaching Competencies

Learning coaches in Washington County are expected to "develpp and demonstrate the USBE Coaching Competencies artculated by the state office via the USBE Coaching Endoresement" (WCSD, 2020). The five competency areas include:

Area 1: Foundations of Instructional Coaching

Area 2: Adult Learning Theory

Area 3: Instructional Design and Assessment

Area 4: Strategies for Effective Instructional Delivery

Area 5: Effective Leadership and Collaboration

student progress toward goals. The collected data is also accessible to district literacy stakeholders to help support literacy efforts at the district level. Moreover, teachers noted a supportive culture within the district, characterized by trust between district leaders and classroom teachers, as well as accessible channels for communication with district personnel.

*Research Connection*
Instructional Design Clarity
Element 3: Instructional Planning was highly supported by administrators and district supports that allowed for easy collection of data and support in providing personalized instructional activities that allow for differentiation to fit student needs. Learning coaches assisted with Standard 3: Instructional Practice as they helped analyze formative and summative data. Teachers were supported by administrators and other staff as part of continuous professional learning and through effective communication, which aligns to Standard 5: Professional Responsibility. Whereas non-teachers may not be responsible for delivering instruction, they were critical to the success of instructional planning and practice for teachers in this study.

# TEMPLATE FOR REPLICATION

The processes described previously are multifaceted, complex, and nuanced. The exact make-up of the success of these grade level teams is, in some respects, likely specific to their individual contexts. However, many of the principles demonstrated by these teachers are readily replicable with the potential to yield immediate success. This section will provide suggestions for replication for both grade level teams and schools/districts.

**Grade Level Teams**

Student and classroom-level goal setting appeared to be a major driver of success for these grade level teams. Therefore, goal setting is recommended as a key component for replication. Steps for grade-level goal setting include the following:

### Phase One: Prepare and Set Goals

- Review beginning-of-year (BOY) reading intake data. Evaluate group strengths and weaknesses.
- Identify a focus area for growth. Focus area should be important for short- and long-term reading proficiency.
- Set a grade-level goal for growth using an established framework such as PEERS or SMART goals.
- Determine how progress toward a goal will be monitored, including how often. Calendar dates to meet for follow-up.

### Phase Two: Plan and Implement

- Select specific, evidence-based practices to target the goal. Use resources such as the USBE Early Literacy Repository to help. Determine frequency and duration of practices designed to help reach the goal. Plan how to integrate explicit instruction with the evidence-base practice and embed with other high-leverage reading practices.
- Review the contents of Tier I curriculum and determine how the curriculum can support progress toward the goal. Determine necessary curricular adjustments to enhance outcomes. Supplement with approved, high-quality resources as necessary (avoiding Teachers Pay Teachers).
- Begin implementing the high leverage practices during instructional time. Informally monitor initial student response to the practices and make adjustments as necessary.

### Phase Three: Review, Iterate, and Adapt

- Collect follow-up data at the pre-determined interviews.
- Meet as a team to evaluate progress toward goal.
- Evaluate how current instructional practices – including those specifically selected – enhance or inhibit progress toward the goal.
- Determine if and how instruction should adjust to meet instructional goal.
- Continue progress toward goal.

The goals set by these grade level teams appeared to give context to other key decisions made in the classroom. Tier I instruction, curricular adaptation, paraprofessional allocation, Tier II instruction, formal collaboration, and other reported aspects of success were framed within making progress toward and accomplishing set goals. Further, teachers reported great satisfaction when goals were reached. Clearly, these teachers reported many other aspects of their success beyond goal setting but making progress toward goals appeared to be the connector between the other practices.

**Schools and Districts**

The outlier teachers interviewed for this project did not achieve success in a vacuum. Indeed, support provided by the school and district set the stage for these teachers to teach effectively. The following recommendations are provided for schools and districts wishing to enhance their efficacy in Science of Reading (SOR) and Instructional Design Clarity (IDC).

## Reduce Friction to Data Access

Making data-informed decisions is a central aspect of IDC, and the teams interviewed in this sample very obviously demonstrated this trait. What was also evident was that WCSD has invested time and resources to provide readily accessible student data. There is likely a relationship here – teachers may not have discussed data-informed decisions so readily if there was considerable friction to access that data. Student data collection in the 21st century involves multiple assessments at regular intervals across different platforms with varying levels of accessible interfaces.

Reducing the number of platforms and increasing the ease to access necessary platforms could help provide teachers with streamlined access to data. This can mean eliminating platforms that do not provide informative data, whether because of duplication of data or low quality. It can also mean threading multiple data sources into a single spreadsheet or implementing software that compiles and aggregates data among platforms. Regardless, teachers in this sample reported easy and quick access to data, which provided opportunity for teams to make informed decisions. Schools and districts may wish to consider the number of platforms teachers access to make data-informed decisions and the amount of friction inherent in accessing these platforms.

## Facilitate Focus

These teachers were undoubtedly very busy and acknowledged the challenge of addressing the needs of all learners in all subjects. Notwithstanding, their interviews demonstrated a sense of clarity around promoting reading proficiency. Several teachers used the term ‘big rocks’ to denote aspects of SOR and IDC that must be prioritized above other aspects of schooling. Although not exhaustive, the ‘big rocks’ described by teachers were regular Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings focused on student learning, data-informed decisions across instructional tiers, alignment of instruction with student need, and assurance that instruction was evidence-based. The fact these priorities were described across

cases suggests that these were communicated at the district level.

From the participants, it did not seem that these priorities were communicated solely with all-hands-on-deck standalone district meetings or via email. Rather, it appeared that these priorities were communicated on a consistent basis through school learning coaches and building administrators. Certainly, district level communication occurs to help reinforce these practices, but it appeared that traction was gained at the building level. Therefore, it is recommended that schools and districts evaluate their highest priorities to facilitate student reading success. Schools and districts must then determine mechanisms and processes to communicate these priorities to classroom teachers in consistent, sustainable, and professional ways.

Similarly, it is also recommended that schools and districts evaluate practices, initiatives, curriculum, processes, or other aspects of schooling to evaluate what must be de-implemented. These must also be effectively communicated to teachers. A combination of communicating highest priorities while communicating what must be phased out may provide teachers with greater opportunity to focus on high-leverage practices.

## Provide Ongoing Professional Learning

The outlier teachers in this sample demonstrated exemplary SOR knowledge. Many referenced Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS; Moats & Tolman, 2019) as being a key driver for shifting their reading instruction in recent years. However, the consensus also reported that their schools and district were very responsive to teacher needs and requests for providing ongoing professional learning. Support for professional learning occurred at the school level, facilitated by the school learning coach, and at the district level, facilitated by the grade level specialists and elementary literacy coordinator.

While it appeared that some professional learning occurred on district-wide professional development days, the majority of professional learning seems to occur on early-out Fridays and during PLC time. Finding ways to promote professional learning that promotes school/district initiatives while balancing the professional learning teachers request is likely challenging. However, it may be essential to allow teachers to continually develop their craft and increase their capacity for effective instruction.

# CONCLUSION

Considerable time and resources are being devoted across the state to implement SOR and IDC practices. As such, many sites could have been selected for identifying outlier practice. However, practitioners across the state may find it useful to learn about the outlier practices of one large district known for its SOR and IDC systems. The outlier teachers in this sample were clearly oriented toward students and their learning, engaged in high-level goal-achieving activities, participated in ongoing formal and informal collaboration, and received robust school/district support. They demonstrated many of Utah's Effective Teaching Standards, especially those pertinent to instructional design clarity. These characteristics enabled them to deploy SOR-aligned instructions using IDC practices. It is recommended that Utah educators review the themes in this report and evaluate the potential for application in their contexts.

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# APPENDIX A

**Measurement of Growth**

The researcher calculated effect sizes (Hedges & Olkin, 1985) to measure the growth of each school by grade level between the Fall 2023 and Winter 2024 administrations of Acadience. Effect size is a commonly used metric in educational research to quantify numerical differences among groups. An effect size is calculated using the number of students, group mean, and group standard deviation for Time A and Time B. The resultant outcome is in standard deviation units. Thus, an effect size of 1.0 represents a group shift of one standard deviation.

The formula used to calculate the effect sizes in this project is displayed as Formula 1 where M1 is the middle of year Acadience composite average for each grade level team at each school K-3, and M2 is the beginning of year Acadience composite average for each grade level team at each school K-3. The pooled sd represents a weighted average of the standard deviation from both timepoints.

$$g = \frac{M1 - M2}{pooled\ sd}$$

# APPENDIX B

**Sample Team-Designed Data Meeting Protocol**

**Kindergarten Collaboration - [Date]**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Literacy<br>I can hear sounds in words and say the parts. | 2. Literacy<br>I can name all the letters in the alphabet. | 3. Literacy<br>I can say the sounds of all the letters in the alphabet. | 4. Literacy<br>I can read 75 high frequency words by sight. | 5. Literacy<br>I can write a story. |
| 6. Literacy<br>I can read words and understand what I read. | 1. Math<br>I can count to 100 by ones and tens. | 2. Math<br>I can read, write, and compare numbers 0-20. | 3. Math<br>I can add within 10 using drawings or objects. | 4. Math<br>I can subtract within 10 using drawings or objects. |

| What do we want them to do? | Standard: |
|---|---|
| How will we know if they learn it? | |
| What will we do if they aren't learning? | |
| What will we do when they learn it? | |

| What do we want them to do? | Standard: |
|---|---|
| How will we know if they learn it? | |
| What will we do if they aren't learning? | |
| What will we do when they learn it? | |

| Norms | Housekeeping |
|---|---|
| Begin and end on time [monitor name]<br><br>Stay on task [monitor name]<br><br>Have a plan [montior name]<br><br>Record and reflect [monitor name] | |

# APPENDIX C

**Sample Collective Team Norms**

## South Mesa Collective Commitments

Through meaninful and heartfelt relationships with students and our community, we will inspire tomorrow's readers and leaders.
At South Mesa, we commit to HIGH LEVELS OF LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

### LEARNING

We commit to being lifelong learners and instilling lifelong learning in our students.

Teaching Standards 1, 2, & 3

### CLIMATE

We commit to creating a physcially and emotionally safe, secure place for learning and growth for students and educators.

Teaching Standards 3, 8, 9, & 10

### LEADERSHIP

We commit to being leaders that listen, collaborate, encourage, and support.

Teaching Standards 8, 9, & 10

### INSTRUCTION

We commit to intentional, engageing, and standards-based instruction.

Teaching Standards 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7

### ASSESSMENT

We commit to ongoing, valuable, assesments that drive instruction.

Teaching Standards 5

### INTERVENTION

We commit to providing strong Tier I instruction and responding to learning needs. We commit to include the student and parent in progress and achieving goals.

Teaching Standards 1, 2, & 5

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