

STOP READING GAPS
BEFORE THEY HAPPEN

An upstream literacy strategy for curriculum leaders

FROM
REACTION
TO
READINESS

Districts have invested heavily in reading intervention. Yet many students still enter kindergarten without the language, vocabulary, background knowledge, and learning routines they need to benefit fully from core instruction.

By the time these differences appear in screening and assessment data, educators are already working to close established gaps. An upstream literacy strategy acts sooner—connecting families, early learning, classroom instruction, and actionable data to build stronger foundations before students require increasingly intensive support.



“The strongest literacy systems do not wait for students to fall behind. They build readiness before intervention becomes necessary.”

THE READING GAP OFTEN BEGINS BEFORE SCHOOL

Reading difficulty rarely begins on the day a student struggles with phonics or scores below benchmark. The foundations for reading begin much earlier through:

- Conversations with adults
- Songs, stories, and rhymes
- Vocabulary and oral-language development
- Exposure to books, print, and new ideas

- Listening comprehension and background knowledge
- Attention, confidence, and learning routines
- Positive experiences with books and learning

When children arrive with uneven experiences, teachers must deliver grade-level instruction while also addressing readiness needs that developed before school. The result is greater pressure on teachers, interventionists, tutoring programs, and MTSS.

ADD TIER 0 TO THE LITERACY STRATEGY

Tier 0 is the family and community readiness layer. It helps children build early language, literacy, confidence, and learning routines before and beyond the classroom. It does not replace core instruction, screening, tutoring, special education, or intervention—it strengthens the conditions around them.

EQUIP FAMILIES Practical ways to support learning at home.	BUILD READINESS Language, vocabulary, knowledge, and routines.	EXTEND LEARNING Meaningful practice beyond the school day.
CONNECT SYSTEMS Continuity across home, preschool, and school.	SEE EARLIER Participation and readiness indicators for leaders.	REDUCE FRAGMENTATION One cohesive strategy across initiatives.

BUILD ONE CONNECTED BIRTH–8 LITERACY PATHWAY

Preventing reading gaps requires more than another isolated resource. Curriculum leaders need a cohesive pathway that connects children’s earliest learning experiences with classroom instruction and real-world application.

BIRTH–AGE 3 Build Language Conversations, songs, stories, rhymes, movement, and play.	AGES 3–5 Strengthen Readiness Oral language, print awareness, phonological awareness, early writing, and self-regulation.	K–GRADE 3 Protect the Foundation Systematic instruction and aligned practice in the essential components of reading and writing.	GRADES 4–8 Apply Literacy Comprehension, writing, critical thinking, financial literacy, and real-world problem-solving.
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“Literacy should be a continuous pathway—from first words to real-world application.”

USE DATA BEFORE STUDENTS FALL BEHIND STRENGTHEN EVERY LEVEL OF MTSS

An upstream strategy gives leaders earlier visibility into:

- Family and student participation
- Books and learning activities completed
- Time spent learning in and beyond school
- Progress across foundational skills
- School, grade-level, and community engagement trends

The most useful data does more than document a gap. It helps prevent one.

- TIER 0** Build family and community readiness.
 - TIER 1** Increase students’ readiness to engage with core instruction.
 - TIER 2** Target specific skill needs instead of broad readiness gaps.
 - TIER 3** Reserve intensive resources for individualized support.
- Prevention does not eliminate intervention. It helps districts use intervention more strategically.**

A CURRICULUM DIRECTOR’S ACTION AGENDA

- What support reaches families before kindergarten?
- Are early childhood, elementary, and middle-grade efforts connected?
- Do home-learning experiences reinforce instructional priorities?
- Does teacher data lead to clear instructional action?
- Does MTSS include a clear prevention layer?
- Where are gaps in access, participation, and continuity?

MOVE FROM REACTION TO READINESS

Start with three questions:

Where do gaps first appear?

What could we do earlier?

How can we connect families, curriculum, intervention, and data?

BUILD READINESS BEFORE REMEDIATION.

Schedule a literacy strategy consultation to explore how Footsteps2Brilliance can help your district move upstream.