

Bloomfield School District
Helpful Hints for Parents
By Dr. Kimberly Mizell, Superintendent

Over the years there has been a lot of discussion on the need for more phonics in the classrooms and a less holistic approach to teaching reading. The Bloomfield School District has incorporated a three pronged approach to reading instruction in the lower grade levels. The majority of the teachers (Kindergarten through Fourth grades) have had professional development in using the Orton Gillingham systematic approach to reading (comprehensive reading instruction program). As well as the 95% Group diagnostic screening process with reading intervention that identifies gaps in learning for each individual child. In addition, the 2016-2017 English Language Arts reading adoption material from the curriculum company called Journeys is the third prong to Bloomfield reading instruction approach. This three pronged approach is being utilized in every classroom and will facilitate your child's reading skills over time.

This first article will provide an explanation of skills needed to become a good reader. After each reading skill is defined and introduced, you will understand why just one concept is not the answer i.e., phonics cannot address all the skill required to become a proficient reader. The following skills will be defined and addressed over the next few articles; phonics and phonemic awareness, comprehension, and fluency. The first skills described will be phonics and phonemic awareness.

Phonics and phonemic awareness skills: These skills refer to the ability to know what sounds (phonemes) each letter or combination of letters in the English alphabet makes. Phonics introduces letter recognition and different rules of language. Phonemic awareness helps to teach your child the various sounds that can be made from vowels, vowel combinations, consonants, and consonant combinations (blends). The development of these skills teaches your child how knowing small sound patterns or syllables can help one read longer words. It also involves learning how to read words with prefixes (pre, un, re) or suffixes (less, able, ful), endings and roots to increase one's vocabulary. The following ten categories define the phonics and phonemic awareness skills required in the process of becoming a proficient reader.

1. **The Alphabet:** Learning how to recognize and identify the alphabet and name upper-case and lower-case letters.
2. **Consonant sounds:** Learning the sounds that each consonant makes.
3. **Short Vowels:** Learning the short vowel pronunciation of the five vowels a,e,i,o,u, and when y acts as a vowel.
4. **Consonant Blends:** Two or three consonants that are combined and read as a group:
Example: st, dr, fl, str
5. **Long Vowels:** Learning the long vowel sounds (when the vowel is pronounced as its letter name) and the three different ways vowels are spelled when pronounced as a long vowel
6. **All Other Irregular Vowel Patterns:** English has over 100 ways to combine and pronounce the five vowels. Example: oo can be pronounced 3 different ways: boot, book, and flood.
7. **Irregular Consonant Patterns:** Some consonants such as C and G have different ways to be pronounced. Some consonants are silent, and some are combined in ways that make new sounds.
8. **Syllabication:** There are simple rules that help students divide compound, two, three, four, and multi-syllable words into their small parts known as syllables to help students read them correctly.

9. **Prefixes, Suffixes, Endings and Roots:** Learning these word parts empower students to correctly read and understand the meaning of the thousands of words that contain these parts.
10. **Reading Advanced Multi-syllable Words:** Mastery of Phonic Skills 1-9 lead students to tackling advanced words needed to improve comprehension of text at higher levels or text in the various content area subjects.

I hope this gives you insight into the reading instruction that is occurring in the classrooms.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kimberly Mizell, Ph.D.