


Is My Child Getting the Phonemic Awareness Instruction They Deserve?

What to Ask	Encouraging Signs	Signs There Might Be a Problem
What materials do you use to teach phonemic awareness?	<p>"We use [program name]."</p> <p><i>Not all programs are created equal. But this is at least a sign that the school has a cohesive instructional plan.</i></p>	<p>"We don't have a program for teaching phonemic awareness. It's taught in the context of authentic reading and writing."</p> <p>"We just sing songs and rhyme."</p>
Where can I find the scope and sequence (what is covered and in what order) for phonemic awareness instruction?	<p>"Let me show you."</p> <p><i>The instructional plan should include blending (putting sounds together to make words), segmenting (breaking a word into its sounds), deleting (saying just part of a word) and substituting (replacing part of a word).</i></p>	<p>"We don't have a scope and sequence, per se. We embed phonemic awareness instruction into Shared Reading, Writer's Workshop, Guided Reading, etc."</p> <p>"Phonemic awareness is only taught in kindergarten."</p>
How is my child's phonemic awareness developing?	<p>"Your child is working on [blending/deleting/substituting] sounds and that is/isn't expected at this age."</p> <p><i>Phonemic awareness can be taught whole-class, but students who are not keeping up should get an extra dose.</i></p>	<p>"We look at the students' reading more holistically. Your child is at guided reading level [x]."</p>
<p>How are you monitoring to ensure my child masters the phonemic awareness skills you have taught?</p> <p>May I see my child's progress monitoring data so I know which phonemic awareness skills they have mastered and which ones they still need to work on?</p>	<p>"I give short phonemic awareness tests to see which students need an extra dose of instruction."</p> <p>"If you have the ability to help at home, you could practice [this] with your child to reinforce what I do in class."</p>	<p>"Phonemic awareness isn't something we really test."</p> <p>"Let me show you a book that's at your child's just-right level."</p>
I'd like to see how my child is responding to phonemic awareness instruction. When could I come and observe?	<p>"Here are some times that work."</p> <p><i>Note that phonemic awareness instruction should be daily.</i></p>	<p>"There isn't really a set time for phonemic awareness instruction."</p> <p>"We find having parents in the classroom during instruction is distracting to the students."</p>


What to Look for in Instruction

- Short instructional drills (5-15 minutes) with *lots* of opportunities for student practice.
- Students are not shown letters or words during instruction. Phonemic awareness is about the sounds in words.
- Teacher is prepared with a list of words, which the students repeat and play with. For example:
 Teacher: "Say *cat*."
 Students: "Cat"
 Teacher: "Change the /a/ to /u/. What's the word?"
 Students: "Cut!"


Is My Child Getting the Phonics Instruction They Deserve?

What to Ask	Encouraging Signs	Signs There Might Be a Problem
What materials do you use to teach phonics?	<p>"We use [program name]."</p> <p><i>Not all programs are created equal. But this is at least a sign that the school has a cohesive instructional plan.</i></p>	<p>"We don't have a program for phonics."</p> <p>"I teach phonics as the need arises when I listen to students read."</p> <p>"I use [program], but the teachers in the grades above/below may use something different."</p>
Where can I find the phonics scope and sequence (what is covered and in what order)?	<p>"Let me show you."</p> <p><i>Look for a scope and sequence that spans multiple grades.</i></p>	<p>"We don't have a scope and sequence, per se. We embed phonics into Shared Reading, Writer's Workshop, Guided Reading, etc."</p>
<p>[Where in the phonics progression is my child's instruction?]</p> <p>How much progress has my child made in mastering phonics?</p> <p>Is that at, below, or above grade level expectations?</p>	<p>"Your child is currently on [x] lesson of this scope and sequence."</p> <p><i>Phonics should be taught in differentiated groups. Students who are below grade level need an extra dose of instruction.</i></p>	<p>"We look at the students' reading more holistically. Your child is at guided reading level [x]."</p>
<p>How are you monitoring to ensure my child masters the phonics you've taught?</p> <p>May I see my child's progress monitoring data so I know what they have mastered and what they still need to work on?</p>	<p>"I frequently give short phonics tests to see what I need to reteach."</p> <p>"If you have the ability to help at home, you could practice [this] with your child to reinforce what I do in class."</p>	<p>"Phonics isn't something we really test."</p> <p>"We don't test students on reading lists of words; let me show you a book that's at your child's just-right level."</p>
I'd like to see how my child is responding to phonics instruction. When could I come and observe?	<p>"Here are some times that work."</p> <p><i>Note that phonics instruction should be daily.</i></p>	<p>"We find having parents in the classroom during instruction is distracting to the students."</p> <p>"You can come during Guided Reading at [time]."</p>
		
What to Look for in Instruction		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are directed to a specific sound in spoken language "/k/ as in <i>kick</i> and <i>can</i>." The teacher tells students the letter(s) that can represent that sound. "The letters K and C can be used for the /k/ sound. The letters CK are used only after a short vowel." Students practice making the sound when they see the letter(s) and review previously taught letter-sounds. Students use the phonics they have been taught to read and write words in a list. Students then read texts that include the phonics they have been taught. 		


Is My Child Getting the Fluency Instruction They Deserve?

What to Ask	Encouraging Signs	Signs There Might Be a Problem
What materials do students use to develop fluency?	"Students read and reread the decodable texts introduced in phonics instruction. If they no longer need decodable texts, I ensure they pick texts they can read with high levels of accuracy."	"We do fluency work during Shared Reading." "Students read predictable or leveled books during independent reading."
Is my child's oral reading fluency above, at, or below grade-level expectations? If my child is struggling, are they struggling with reading words accurately, reading at an appropriate rate, or reading with expression?	"Your child's reading rate is currently [x] and we are working on reading with expression." "Your child is decoding words in grade [x] level text accurately." <i>Students reading below 60 correct words per minute should do their reading aloud.</i>	"Your child reads at guided reading level [x]." "We don't want children to focus on the words too much because that gets in the way of their reading fluency."
How are you monitoring to ensure my child's fluency is continuously improving? May I see my child's progress monitoring data so I know what they are doing well with and what they need to work on?	"Students do timed oral reading of these short passages regularly so I can assess their fluency." "If you are able to help at home, you could listen to your child read from these texts and monitor for accuracy."	"We don't believe in assessing reading rate because then children become 'word callers.'" "Your child should read books at Guided Reading level [x]."
I'd like to see how my child is reading during fluency practice. When could I come and observe?	"Here are some times that work." <i>Note that fluency practice should be daily.</i>	"We find having parents in the classroom during instruction is distracting to the students." "Students read independently for 30-45 minutes while I teach Guided Reading groups."
		
What to Look for in Instruction		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work with texts they can read accurately, attending to every letter in every word. • Beginning readers whisper-read from the same text several times. • Students are explicitly taught how to attend to punctuation and phrasing. • The teacher regularly listens to each student read aloud to check for accuracy and comprehension. 		

Is My Child Getting the Vocabulary Instruction They Deserve?

What to Ask	Encouraging Signs	Signs There Might Be a Problem
What materials do you use to teach vocabulary?	<p>"We use [program name]."</p> <p>"On this wall, you can see the sentence frames and picture cards for the words we're working on."</p> <p><i>Meaningful vocabulary instruction focuses on student practice with the words, not weekly word lists that students are expected to memorize</i></p>	<p>"We teach vocabulary in the context of Shared Reading."</p> <p>"Our vocabulary work is embedded into Guided Reading."</p>
Where can I find a list of the words that will be taught this year?	<p>"Let me show you."</p> <p><i>Students should be explicitly taught roughly ten words a week.</i></p>	<p>"We go over vocabulary as the need arises in our mini-lessons and Guided Reading."</p>
Is my child learning and using the vocabulary words being taught?	<p>"I have some writing samples (or anecdotes) to show you examples of when your child has used the words we've been practicing."</p>	<p>"I don't really teach specific words, but when I confer with your child I notice they are/aren't reading their books with comprehension."</p>
I'd like to see how my child is responding to vocabulary instruction. When could I come and observe?	<p>"Here are some times that work."</p> <p><i>Note that vocabulary instruction and practice should occur daily.</i></p>	<p>"We find having parents in the classroom during instruction is distracting to the students."</p> <p>"You are welcome to come and observe Guided Reading."</p>
		
What to Look for in Instruction		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have repeated opportunities to meaningfully use and to demonstrate their understanding of words that are taught, in discussion and in writing. • Students are taught word-learning strategies.(e.g., noticing prefixes and suffixes) • Morphology (some word parts have meanings that stay consistent from word to word) is explicitly taught. 		

Is My Child Getting the Comprehension Instruction They Deserve?

What to Ask	Encouraging Signs	Signs There Might Be a Problem
What materials do you use to teach reading comprehension?	<p>"We use [program names] to build background knowledge and vocabulary."</p> <p><i>It's important that students are read to and (when they can) that they read complex text social studies, science, art, music, etc.</i></p>	"I teach comprehension strategies (predicting, inferring, etc.) in the mini-lesson of our Reading Workshop."
What texts do you use to teach reading comprehension?	<p>"When I read aloud [these] texts that are above grade level, I facilitate discussions."</p> <p>"Students read these texts that are at grade level, with support when necessary."</p>	<p>"Students read 'just right' books at their Guided Reading levels."</p> <p>"I read excerpts of stories aloud to students so they can practice a comprehension strategy and then they apply the strategy to their own leveled books."</p>
<p>How are you monitoring to ensure my child is building comprehension?</p> <p>May I see my child's progress monitoring data so I know what they are doing well with and what they need to work on?</p>	<p>"Here are your child's written and/or picture responses to the texts we've been discussing in class."</p> <p>"If you're able to help at home, our current unit is about [topic] and you could build background knowledge and vocabulary by doing activities such as..."</p>	<p>"I confer with each child as they read independently from leveled books."</p> <p>"I take notes on how well students are attending to meaning during my Guided Reading lessons."</p>
I'd like to see how my child is responding to comprehension instruction. When could I come and observe?	<p>"Here are some times that work."</p> <p><i>Note that you're hoping to see academic class discussions, grounded in grade-level text, in any content area.</i></p>	<p>"We find having parents in the classroom during instruction is distracting to the students."</p> <p>"You are welcome to come during Readers Workshop and Guided Reading."</p>
		
What to Look for in Instruction		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All students have access to texts that are at or above grade level because of appropriate supports (e.g., text read aloud to them, discussions about meaningful chunks of texts, explicit vocabulary instruction) To read or listen with comprehension, students need background knowledge, vocabulary, and an understanding of language features (e.g., idioms, figurative language) and knowledge of text (e.g., genre, text features) 		