



# EARLY LITERACY COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT



Office of the State  
Superintendent of Education



GOVERNMENT OF THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

## INTRODUCTION

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s (OSSE’s) early literacy communication toolkit is a resource for local education agencies (LEAs) to support family engagement in early literacy. Research shows that family involvement in language and literacy activities at home positively influences children’s reading acquisition, vocabulary, conceptual development, and overall literacy achievement. ([Early-Literacy-Research-Brief-July-2021.pdf](#)) In accordance with the [Implementation of the Early Literacy Education Task Force Recommendations Amendment Act of 2024](#), this toolkit is OSSE’s commitment to ensuring LEAs have the resources to support families in early literacy.

The toolkit includes a list of ideas on how schools can utilize the tool throughout the school year, questions for LEA leaders to consider when identifying best strategies for implementation, and resources that can be used to share information with families. The toolkit is designed to be adaptable to the specific needs of an LEA, and to work within the context of an LEA’s overall family engagement strategy.

### The toolkit is divided into three sections:

1. Guidance for Using the Tool
2. Science of Reading and Structured Literacy Instruction
3. Literacy resources for parents

The following table provides an overview of each section, when and how an LEA may use the information and turnkey resources.

TITLE	CONTENT	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	TURNKEY RESOURCES
<b>SECTION 1:</b> Guidance for Using the Tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Step by step guidance for using the tool</li><li>• Questions and considerations for each section of the tool</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviewed by LEA leaders at the start of the school</li><li>• Used during leadership meetings or staff meetings to strategically plan how to use the content of the tool</li></ul>	N/A
<b>SECTION 2:</b> Science of Reading and Structured Literacy Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is Early Literacy</li><li>• Reading instruction over the years</li><li>• Science of reading research and models</li><li>• Structured literacy instruction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Back to school night presentation</li><li>• Literacy night presentation</li><li>• Newsletter to families</li><li>• Post content on school’s website</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Turnkey slide deck for LEAs aligned to family engagement</li></ul>
<b>SECTION 3:</b> Literacy Resources for Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities to support at home</li><li>• Questions to ask the teacher</li><li>• Literacy assessments</li><li>• Resources for diverse learners</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent teacher conferences</li><li>• Home visits</li><li>• Individual parent meetings</li><li>• Family literacy night</li><li>• Newsletters or handouts for families</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reproducible resources for LEAs</li><li>• Additional external resources for LEAs</li></ul>

## ▶ SECTION 1: GUIDANCE FOR LEA LEADERS IN USING THE TOOL

To use the communication toolkit most effectively with families, OSSE suggests LEA leaders utilize three identified steps, outlined below.

1. Read the “LEA questions and considerations” for each section of the toolkit. These questions and considerations are provided as a framework for each section to support an LEA leader in identifying:
  - a. How to implement the section’s content with families;
  - b. How the content provided in this section may align with resources an LEA already has in place; and
  - c. Areas where content from the toolkit should be differentiated to LEA specific content.
2. Read and review the content and resources provided in the toolkit, keeping the questions and considerations in mind.
3. Identify how and when to share this information with families.

TITLE	LEA QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS:
<b>SECTION 1:</b> Guidance for Using the Tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I use this toolkit most effectively with my schools?</li> <li>• What are other ideas for how schools may share and elevate this information?</li> </ul>
<b>SECTION 2:</b> Science of Reading and Structured Literacy Instruction	<p>Early Literacy Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are your schools aligned on this definition of early literacy?</li> <li>• Do families already have a clear definition of early literacy?</li> <li>• What is the importance of sharing this definition with families?</li> </ul> <p>Reading Instruction Over the Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information is important for families to know about how reading was previously taught?</li> <li>• How can you utilize existing resources such as <a href="#">Sold a Story Podcast</a> to help parents understand the importance of research-based reading instruction?</li> </ul> <p>Science of Reading Research and Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What research and theoretical models are important to share with families?</li> <li>• What research and theoretical model are you using in your LEA or school?</li> <li>• What information is most salient to families to support literacy instruction?</li> </ul> <p>Structured Literacy Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does sharing information on research aligned literacy instruction support families in understanding their child’s reading skills?</li> <li>• How can I provide this information to families in a way that is easy to understand?</li> <li>• How could I break up this information and provide a series of workshops or one page resource guides?</li> <li>• How can we support families with visits and knowing what is happening during the day?</li> </ul>

TITLE	LEA QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS:
<b>SECTION 3:</b> Literacy Resources for Parents	<p>Out of School Activities to Support Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which links are most important to share with families?</li> <li>• How can I present or share these links in a way that is most helpful to the families at my school?</li> <li>• Can I model some of these activities during a family literacy night or parent teacher conferences?</li> </ul> <p>Assessment Types</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many universal screener platforms provide family reports and guides for communicating results with families. OSSE strongly encourages LEAs to utilize those reports and guides when speaking to families about literacy data.</li> <li>• It might be helpful to include details about the specific assessments your schools use and how frequently they're administered, to provide a clearer picture.</li> </ul> <p>Questions to Ask your Child's Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will providing your families with these questions support your ability to effectively communicate about their child's early literacy skills?</li> <li>• How can the staff of your schools best prepare to answer these questions?</li> <li>• Consider creating an FAQ document for questions that are often asked, or an LEA identifies as most important for their schools' population.</li> </ul> <p>Resources for Diverse Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I leverage these additional guidelines for my school's populations?</li> <li>• What additional information can be added?</li> <li>• What, if any, existing information or resources may not be as relevant?</li> </ul>

**There are many ways LEAs can utilize this toolkit with families.**

SUGGESTIONS ON WHEN TO USE THE TOOLKIT	SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Teacher Conferences</li> <li>• Back to School Night</li> <li>• Principal and Family Events</li> <li>• Family Home Visits</li> <li>• Family Literacy Nights</li> <li>• Individual Parent Meetings</li> <li>• Parent Workshops on Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print reproducible materials from the toolkit to share with families</li> <li>• Post content on social media or school website</li> <li>• Create slide decks with the material to present at a parent meeting</li> <li>• Provide a series of family workshops where school staff provide family training on components of the toolkit</li> <li>• Create monthly newsletters for families that highlight home activities, using the resources in this toolkit</li> <li>• Provide families with the "questions to ask your teacher" section of the toolkit ahead of parent teacher conferences</li> </ul>

## ▶ SECTION 2: SCIENCE OF READING AND STRUCTURED LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Section 2 of this toolkit provides LEAs with a [turnkey slide deck](#) to share information with parents about the science of reading and structured literacy instruction. LEAs can tailor the slides for individual school audiences.



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Part 2: Science of Reading and Structured Literacy

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### ▶ SECTION 3: LITERACY RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Section 3 of this toolkit provides LEAs with materials to support their child at home, including support in understanding assessment results and supporting diverse learners.

#### Activities to Support at Home

This section provides links that LEAs can provide to families for activities to be done at home. These websites are research aligned and available at no cost to an LEA or any member of the public. LEAs can also use these links to plan activities to model with parents and the broader school community.

SKILL	WAYS TO SUPPORT AT HOME
Oral Language	<a href="#">Helping Your Kid With . . . Early Language and Literacy - The Meadows Center</a> <a href="#">Oral Language - Parent Information Center of NH</a>
Phonemic Awareness	<a href="#">Phonological &amp; Phonemic Awareness   National Center on Improving Literacy</a> <a href="#">The Reading Ready Caregiver Guide and Activities</a>
Phonics	<a href="#">Alphabetic Principle &amp; Phonics   National Center on Improving Literacy</a> <a href="#">The Reading Ready Caregiver Guide and Activities</a>
Fluency	<a href="#">Fluency with Text   National Center on Improving Literacy</a> <a href="#">Fluency - Parent Information Center of NH</a>
Vocabulary	<a href="#">Helping Your Kid With . . . Building Vocabulary and Comprehension With Read-Alouds - The Meadows Center</a> <a href="#">Vocabulary - Parent Information Center of NH</a>
Comprehension	<a href="#">Helping Your Kid With . . . Building Vocabulary and Comprehension With Read-Alouds - The Meadows Center</a> <a href="#">Comprehension - Parent Information Center of NH</a>

For additional resources on family support, please see the Additional Links for Family Resources section of this guidebook.



## Common Reading Assessments

This section provides a brief overview of the most common types of assessments used in an elementary school. LEAs can print this information and provide it to families or use the information below as talking points during conferences.

ASSESSMENT TYPE	PURPOSE
Universal Screeners	Universal reading screeners are brief (10-15 minute) tests given three times a year to measure the skills students need to learn to read. For more information on universal screeners, please visit OSSE's <a href="#">Dyslexia Family Guide</a> .  DC requires all schools to screen students in grades K-2 under <a href="#">D.C. Law 23-191. Addressing Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties Amendment Act of 2020.</a>   <a href="#">D.C. Law Library</a> .
Diagnostic assessments	Identify a student's specific strengths and weaknesses in reading such as phonics or vocabulary. Diagnostic results are used to guide instruction and identify students for intervention. A diagnostic assessment may be given as often as needed by a teacher or interventionist.
Summative Assessments	Check the overall performance of students at the end of a unit or school year. A student may receive a summative assessment known as a unit test or a summative assessment such as DC CAPE. These assessments can also be used to measure the effectiveness of a school's reading program.
Progress Monitoring	Measure students' progress in instruction and intervention. Progress monitoring tools may be given weekly, biweekly or monthly and teachers use results to adjust instruction.

## Understanding Assessment Results

This section provides a sample data analysis template to use when sharing data results with families. Additionally, OSSE highly encourages LEAs to utilize their assessment's family facing resources when sharing student data with families.

### Early Literacy Data Analysis Template for Families

Name of assessment:

Date of assessment:

Child's assessment score:

How does this score compare to grade level proficiency at this time of year? Is the student below, on or above grade level in reading?

What instruction is happening at school to support this student?

What can be done at home to support this student?

## Questions to support family and teacher dialogue

This section provides a list of questions that parents can ask teachers about their child's reading development.

### Questions about Reading Difficulties

- What's the difference between the help my student is receiving and what is available through special education with an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan?
- How is the information from the Universal Screener being used to make decisions about my student's language and literacy needs?
- Who can provide information about additional testing for dyslexia and other special education services?
- Is my child receiving extra support or intervention with reading inside or outside of the class?

### Questions about Assessments and Progress

- Can you help me understand my student's universal screener results?
- Can you explain what my child's most recent assessment results mean in terms of their strengths and areas of growth in reading?
- Can you show me how you assess my child for reading proficiency or growth? Can I see my child's progress monitoring data in (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension)?
- How much progress or growth has my child made this year toward reading on grade level?
- What additional assessments does my child receive and what are the results?
- How will you let me know if my child is making progress?

### General Questions about Literacy

- What curriculum are you using?
- What are my child's academic strengths and areas of improvement?
- What are my child's reading and writing goals?
- Is my child reading on grade level? What are the characteristics for a child reading on grade level at this point of the school year?
- What specific areas of reading instruction is my student struggling with?
  - Sounding out the words?
  - Knowing what the words in the text mean?
  - Comprehending and understanding what the text is about?

- What can I do at home with my child over the summer to continue their reading growth?
- How do I get a library card for my child?
- What types of books do you notice my child likes to read? Can you make any suggestions of authors or titles of books for them to read over at home?
- What types of online programs or games could my child do at home that would help their reading.

### Questions about Reading Instruction in the Classroom

- Can you describe what reading instruction looks like in your classroom? What is my child learning about during reading instruction?
- What curriculum do you use to teach (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension)?
  - Are they teacher made?
  - Are they publisher created?
- Where can I see the scope and sequence for (phonemic awareness, phonics)? How do I know what my student is currently learning or has been previously taught?
- Does my child read fluently and with expression? Can you model what that should sound like?
- Where can I find a list of vocabulary words being taught in the classroom?
- How do you ensure that students are using and practicing new vocabulary words?
- What texts are you using to teach reading comprehension throughout the school year?



## Supports for Diverse Learners

This section provides links for resources to support families of diverse learners.

- Tip sheets for families (select are available in multiple languages):
  - [Talk, Read, and Sing Together Every Day! | The Administration for Children and Families](#)
  - [ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/west/Resource/100653](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/west/Resource/100653)
  - [Literacy Tips for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities | Reading Rockets](#)
  - [Helping Young Children with Learning Disabilities at Home – Learning Disabilities Association of America](#)
  - [Engaging Families of Children with Disabilities | HeadStart.gov](#)
  - [Early Stages Resource Library | earlystages](#)
- [Everyday Early Intervention: Encouraging Speech Development | Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse](#)
- [How Parents and Families Support Oral Language and Vocabulary](#)
- [Early Identification of Speech, Language, and Hearing Disorders | Reading Rockets](#)
- Videos for families (Spanish and English):
  - [Reading and Writing SOS: Bilingual Families | Reading Rockets](#)
  - [PODER - An Abriendo Puertas, UnboundEd & CORE Partnership](#)
- Informational websites for multilingual families:
  - [Raising Bilingual Kids | Colorín Colorado](#)

## Additional Links for Family Resources

This section provides additional resources for LEAs to use with families along with a brief description of what the resource covers.

RESOURCE	SOURCE	DESCRIPTION OF RESOURCE
<a href="#">IES Practice Guides to Support Families</a>	PDF guide	Reading guides for supporting families at each grade level.
<a href="#">How Children Learn to Read</a>	Article	Explanation on how children learn to read.
<a href="#">Reading Rockets: Target the Problem</a>	PDF guide	Guide for students, parents and families that outlines characteristics of a struggling reader in each pillar of reading instruction and activities families can do to support.
<a href="#">Reading Rockets: Empowering Parents</a>	PDF guide	Guide for parents on the topic of early literacy.
<a href="#">Five Recommendations to Help Your Child Become a Future Reader</a>	PDF guide	The Reading League's five recommendations for your child to become a future reader.
<a href="#">Parent Engagement   Reading Rockets</a>	Website	General information about family engagement in schools.
<a href="#">National Center on Improving Literacy</a>	PDF guide	Ten ways to support your child's literacy at home.
<a href="#">National Center on Improving Literacy</a>	Website	Parents and Family Resource System: Includes implementation toolkits for families and quick activities for building reading at home.
<a href="#">The Meadows Center</a>	Website	The Meadows Center's website, which provides additional links for family literacy support at home.
<a href="#">The Reading League Families and Caregivers</a>	Website	The Reading League's website on family and caregiver resources, links and information related to early literacy.
<a href="#">Home Literacy Environment Checklist   Reading Rockets</a>	PDF checklist	Home literacy environment checklist.
<a href="#">Literacy Skill Checklist   National Center on Improving Literacy</a>	Website	Interactive website where caregivers can answer questions about their student's skills and receive tailored resources based on student's current ability. Educators can use this to prepare for parent teacher conferences or meetings with families.
<a href="#">The ABCs of Teaching Reading at Home</a>	Website	How reading develops across the grade levels and how parents can support with each skill at home.
<a href="#">Get A Card   District of Columbia Public Library</a> <a href="#">Books from Birth   District of Columbia Public Library</a> <a href="#">Attend an Event   District of Columbia Public Library</a>	Website	DC Public Library (DCPL) Websites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to get a library card</li> <li>• Free books from birth information</li> <li>• Literacy Events at DCPL</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Ten Myths About Learning to Read   Reading Rockets</a>	Website	A shared an explanation of 10 common myths about reading. Families can use this information to help advocate for what is happening in their child's classroom during reading instruction.
<a href="#">The Development of Phonological Skills   Reading Rockets</a>	Website	Information for families on the progression of phonemic awareness skills.
<a href="#">  studentadvocate.dc.gov</a>	Website	The Office of the Student Advocate website which contains resources for families in DC.
<a href="#">Sold a Story Podcast</a>	Podcast	A podcast, reported by Emily Hanford, highlights problems with how children have been taught to read.

This toolkit was developed by the OSSE Division of Teaching and Learning literacy team with contributions from several family advisory council and local LEA leaders.

For further questions or support, please reach out to Vaani Gupta, Literacy Manager at [Vaani.Gupta@dc.gov](mailto:Vaani.Gupta@dc.gov).

## References

[Dyslexia Guidebook 2022-23](#): The Office of the Student Advocate

[Early-Literacy-Research-Brief-July-2021.pdf](#): Partnering with Families for Early Language and Literacy Research-based Strategies for Early Childhood Educators Developed by the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center Barbara J. Boone, Patrick D. Cunningham, Hadley F. Bachman, and Meredith E. Wellman

[Glossary](#): Reading Rockets

[How a Flawed Idea Is Teaching Millions of Kids to Be Poor Readers : At a Loss for Words](#): APM Reports

[Is My Child’s School Getting Reading Right? What to Ask. What to Look For](#): The Right to Read Project

[Learning About Your Child’s Reading Development](#): National Center on Improving Literacy

[Literacy DC](#): OSSE

[Science of Reading: Defining Guide](#): The Reading League

[The 5 Pillars of Reading](#): Dr. Shaheen Munir-McHill, March To Literacy

[The Power of Early Literacy: Building Strong Foundations for Lifelong Learning](#): Voyager SoprisLearning

[The Science of Reading Basics, Part 1: The Reading Brain](#): Zaner-Bloser

[The Science of Reading Basics, Part 2: The Simple View of Reading](#): Zaner-Bloser

[The Science of Reading Basics, Part 3: Scarborough’s Reading Rope](#): Zaner-Bloser

[What Is Structured Literacy?](#): International Dyslexia Association

[What We Know About Reading and the Brain](#): Reading Rockets

[Whole Language vs. Phonics: The History of the Reading Wars](#): Lexia®



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