

Resource roundup: Evidence-based strategies to cultivate early literacy skills as schools reopen



Photo by Allison Shelley for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action.

By Sara Mitrano
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Despite the severe disruptions to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, early childhood educators remain fervently dedicated to cultivating students' literacy skills. As a growing number of students return to in-person learning, educators and families can draw on these early literacy resources and events from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) network and the What Works Clearinghouse.

The [REL Midwest Early Childhood Education Research Alliance](#) has conducted research and produced a number of resources to support early childhood literacy instruction and development.

- In April 2021, the alliance hosted a webinar on [evidence-based literacy interventions to support young learners during and after the COVID-19 pandemic](#). The event featured researchers who specialize in early childhood literacy as well as practitioners from Springfield Public Schools in Illinois, who shared strategies their district is using to support early literacy instruction in the current school year and in the fall. To access the webinar recording and presentation materials, visit the [event page](#).
- A recently published report and related infographic examine [gaps and trends in reading achievement](#) across kindergarten and grade 1 for two Illinois school districts.
- Another infographic outlines [best practices for teaching beginning readers](#), as recommended by What Works Clearinghouse practice guides.
- Also drawing on What Works Clearinghouse practice guides, two videos describe how to implement research-based literacy practices through play-based learning. The first video describes [classroom strategies for integrating play into literacy instruction](#), and the second provides an [extended interview with literacy expert Tim Shanahan](#).
- A documentary illustrates [how community organizations can incorporate literacy development into their work with children](#) and effectively partner with districts to promote early literacy.
- A blog post written by a prekindergarten teacher presents practical tips for [supporting early childhood literacy skills in the time of COVID-19](#).

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REL Southeast has developed a portfolio of resources to assist both families in supporting young children's reading at home and educators in selecting, implementing, and evaluating effective early literacy practices and interventions.

- The [Supporting Your Child's Reading at Home series](#) provides activities and videos to assist families and caregivers in supporting young children's reading skills. Resources are available for [kindergarten](#), [grade 1](#), [grade 2](#), and [grade 3](#), and a [blog post](#) and [webinar recording](#) provide an overview of the series.
- A companion series of [teachers' guides](#) supports family involvement in foundational reading skills for [kindergarten](#), [grade 1](#), and [grade 2](#), with a grade 3 guide coming soon. The guides draw on the recommendations in a [related What Works Clearinghouse practice guide](#).
- Another companion resource to the above What Works Clearinghouse practice guide is a tool designed to [assist college instructors in building pre-service teachers' knowledge of evidence-based early literacy strategies](#) for grades K–3.
- A report examines the [relative effectiveness of two approaches to early literacy intervention](#) in grades K–2: an embedded approach and a standalone approach.
- A rubric for district and school practitioners draws on six What Works Clearinghouse practice guides to [help educators evaluate K–5 reading and language arts instructional materials](#).
- Two self-study guides help district and school administrators, teacher leaders, and coaches [improve the effectiveness of literacy coaching in prekindergarten through grade 12](#) and [plan and implement K–2 literacy interventions](#).
- A guide for state and local education agencies and early childhood centers assists leaders in [developing early literacy professional learning communities](#) [1,634 KB 

REL West's *Joyful Reading* webinar series and related video provide research-based guidance to strengthen and enhance interactive readalouds in the classroom or at home.

- In March 2021, REL West hosted a webinar in its four-part [Joyful Reading webinar series](#), designed to help prekindergarten–grade 1 educators learn a routine for storybook reading, explore ideas for creating school-to-home connections, and extend storybook reading to creative expression activities. This webinar featured research-based guidance to help teachers learn about moving from a joyful reading routine to creative expression activities.
- In the video [Interactive Readalouds: Learning from Books Together](#), a skilled facilitator models the readaloud process and shares tips for asking effective questions for both on-the-surface and deeper-dive discussions of books. The video draws on recommendations from the What Works Clearinghouse, and a companion [readaloud lesson planning template](#) [239 KB 

The What Works Clearinghouse has several educator practice guides related to early childhood literacy development and instruction.

- Browse this practice guide to learn [four recommendations for teaching foundational reading skills to K–3 students](#). Several companion products, including a [professional learning communities facilitator's guide](#) from REL Southeast, are available.
- A second practice guide provides [five steps that teachers, reading coaches, and principals can take to improve K–3 students' reading comprehension](#). Companion products include a [professional learning communities facilitator's guide](#) from REL Southeast.
- For practices to help [English learner students access academic content](#) in elementary and middle school, explore the recommendations in this What Works Clearinghouse practice guide and the companion [professional learning communities facilitator's guide](#) from REL Southwest.

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