WHAT DO YOU DO
WHEN YOU'VE TRIED EVERYTHING?

A GUIDE TO HELPING YOUR MOST VULNERABLE READERS

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Reasons Your Students May Still Be Struggling—and 5 Ways Technology Can Help

Research tells us that trauma-impacted children, such as those living with food insecurity or in poverty, are often not ready to learn to read because of how their brains have developed. For these children, regular reading instruction, no matter how much of it, may not be effective. Because of the trauma they've experienced, these children show differences in the frontal lobe, in the occipital lobe, and in working memory, making it very difficult for them to learn in traditional ways. There are fundamental gaps that slow or stop some students' language, cognitive, and processing abilities. Here's why these students may still be struggling to learn to read and how technology can give them the deliberate, personalized, intensive reading instruction they need:

1 Evidenced-based reading approaches aren't being used (or aren't being used properly).

Evidence-based reading instruction means that the research-based instructional practice has a record of success. There is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence suggesting that when such practices are used with a particular group of children, the children can be expected to make adequate gains in reading achievement. In this case, a school must look at which approach works best for children.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP: One important point to make here is that if you don't implement a program consistently, track progress, and use it as intended, you can't expect it to work. Technology offers a way for intervention programs to be more easily implemented and more likely to be used consistently. Students can rely on technology to offer the correct lesson at the right time regardless of what else happens during the day. This consistency makes a big impact on reading growth for these fragile students.

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There is not enough phonemic and phonics development and teaching.

Did you know that many students from low-income homes actually show impaired auditory processing? This means they are not discriminating sounds like they should. Struggling readers may not have been surrounded by text like their peers, or they may not have had a language-rich environment in their formative first five years. A systematic approach to teaching phonemic awareness and phonics works best for these kids. This means teachers take a planned, thorough approach to making sure children can first recognize differences in sounds and then progress all the way through the phonemic-awareness levels, up to the most complex combinations of sounds and letters.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP:
Phonemic and phonics lesson progression is a complicated operation. Many teachers are not trained in a specific program but, rather, are expected to patch together given tools to help a typical-achieving student make progress. Technology can be the game-changer for those kids who need the concrete tools to

"Take a planned, thorough approach to making sure children can first recognize differences in sounds."

help them analyze and decode instead of guess. Adaptive technology like Fast ForWord, developed by neuroscientists, uses a three-part model that quickly addresses weaknesses in foundational phonemic awareness, language, and processing skills. These abilities are often overlooked in other reading programs but are the skills which vulnerable students need most.

3

Schools tend to be resistant to change.

For the most part, students who need intervention are given more of the same lessons already being provided in the classroom. Applying more of the same methods and practices is not an effective use of intervention. Making a choice to try something new can feel like a risk, but doing the same thing and expecting a different result is not logical.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP: Instead of sending teachers to expensive professional development, school districts can offer teachers a program that provides the data and reports that help them incorporate new strategies to help their most struggling students.

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Children who haven't been immersed in language or text and who have trouble with memory recall need a different way to learn to read.

4 Reading is viewed, in large part, as memorization.

For kids who've been surrounded by print all of their lives, many words can be memorized and recalled quickly. Children who haven't been immersed in language or text and who have trouble with memory recall need a different way to learn to read. Sight-word memorization before sound-symbol relationships reinforces the message that words should be learned as visual wholes. Much of reading is accomplished by looking at parts and putting them together. There are lots of different ways to help vulnerable readers train their brains to operate differently.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP: Instead of helping kids memorize words, use technology to give them auditory and visual clues that help them access different parts of their brains in order to be successful at reading.

5 The feedback given during instruction reinforces guessing as a tool for problem solving.

Knowing what kind of feedback to give a struggling reader can make the difference in their understanding and confidence level. It's important that kids learn how to use effective strategies for reading—if they learn that guessing is the best option, they will not make progress. These students who struggle to read need to understand how to analyze the combination of letters in front of them in order to figure out the word.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP: Many teachers already have many more students than they can help, and vulnerable readers need even more attention and care. Since feedback is critical to progress, technology can be relied on to give appropriate feedback to each student right when they need it most. Few people who've watched kids make it to the next level in a video game would disagree with the joy and stamina this produces in children.

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Accountability Checklist

What You Need to Be Doing to Support Your Most Struggling Students

Hospitals use checklists all the time to ensure their medical teams don't miss any important details. Schools can use checklists for the same reason. When a school needs to help a struggling reader, following a checklist can help make sure no detail is forgotten. Here's a checklist to keep everyone accountable for supporting your most struggling students:

○ Screen all students for reading problems.

○ Monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk.

○ Select a screening process.

○ Use benchmarks to identify children who are at risk.

○ Provide training for teachers on how to collect and interpret data.

○ Identify which research-based program to use for reading intervention.

○ Provide intensive, personalized and systematic intervention more regularly.

○ Ensure a high level of teacher-student interaction with opportunities for practice and feedback.

○ Consider holding a parent meeting to explain the program and its home component.

○ Monitor progress once a month.

○ Use progress monitoring data to identify students in need of more frequent or different instruction.

○ Ensure that students master each reading skill or strategy before moving on.

○ Celebrate every success along the way.

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How to Talk With
Parents
Whose Kids Are Struggling

People are always telling parents how reading is the single best thing they can do for their children, but what happens when parents don't understand the value of literacy or how it works? It's hard not to feel bad about yourself when teachers tell you your child isn't doing well, especially when you don't know what that means. Teacher-parent interactions require that the teacher be sensitive, understanding, and responsive to the needs not only of the children but of the parents as well. Here are some tips for how to talk with parents whose kids aren't reading:

Schedule talking time when parents can make it. Ask them what works for their schedule.

Let parents know that they can bring their children to the meeting.

Give parents a list of reasons why reading is essential for a person's well being and success in life.

Have a very clear **literacy activity set up** for the children to do for parents.

Arrange to **meet families at a local library** to help them get a card and check out books.

Share with parents that storytelling without a book in hand is the original form of reading.

Give parents a list of **wordless picture books** they can enjoy with their children.

Explain that they can find out what their child likes to do and engage them in that activity.

Help them find books that make their child's interests easier to understand.

Install a reading app or digital program on their device for their child to use.

Tell parents that **all reading counts**.

Show parents **how to use audiobooks** and sing-along videos.

Invite parents to be a part of the plan for reading intervention.

Teach parents to incorporate play with letters in unexpected ways (e.g., alphabet pasta, crackers with letters on them, etc.).

Give parents a list of ways they can get the support they need.

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Vulnerable Readers Guide

Free Resources

Fast ForWord Program Free Demo
https://pages.scilearn.com/Website-demo-req-2019LP.html

Webinars
https://www.scilearn.com/webinars/

Videos
https://www.youtube.com/user/FastForWordProgram

Poverty Resources
https://www.scilearn.com/title-i/

No More Band-Aids on Reading Struggles
https://www.scilearn.com/struggling-readers

Special Education Resources
https://www.scilearn.com/special-education/

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