Look-for Tool: K-2 Foundational Reading Skills

Supports walkthroughs and feedback on subject-specific instructional strategies

Purpose:

This tool is intended to help leaders **provide feedback on practices associated with strengthening a teacher's content knowledge as they shift to align with more rigorous standards and curriculum**. It is based on the three descriptors in the Teacher Content Knowledge indicator within the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and includes aligned, concrete "look-fors" for K-2 foundational reading skills.

The second descriptor in the Teacher Content Knowledge indicator defines look-fors in more detail in three subcategories – *focus, questioning,* and *student work* – that point to the primary shifts that occur as teachers align to the depth required by college and career readiness standards.

- *Focus* defines the overarching practices a leader should see for this subject.
- *Questioning* details what a leader should hear in classroom discussion to better ensure that specific-subject depth is achieved.
- *Student work* describes the tasks that should be utilized as teachers shift to more rigorous expectations.

The look-fors provide suggestions of potential evidence; however, the lists in this tool are not exhaustive, and coaches should use their own context and understanding to consider other ways a teacher may demonstrate his or her content knowledge in practice. The tool also provides examples of student evidence, which are also not exhaustive.

Additionally, there is a glossary at the end of the tool to help define specific terminology. Observers are encouraged to review this glossary to better understand key terms, which are highlighted throughout the document.

How to use this tool:

This tool can be used by school leaders and coaches during walkthroughs or observations to identify evidence of practices associated with strengthening teacher's content knowledge as they shift to align with more rigorous standards and curriculum. It is intended to provide feedback to teachers as they work to deepen student learning. The tool provides a developmental continuum for the observer to provide an assessment of the teacher's content knowledge as demonstrated in practice. Coaches and teachers are also encouraged to discuss the evidence from walkthroughs, observations, and analysis of student work in pre- and post-conference sessions and in professional learning communities as appropriate.

Key Content from Descriptor	Look-fors: Examples of Teacher and Student Evidence	Observation
1. Displays extensive content knowledge and understanding of state standards and instructional materials, including curriculum	Teacher uses instructional materials to structure a systematic, evidence-based progression of foundational skills development in alignment with state standards and local curriculum. *Students might: use sound walls or posted student work to activate and use knowledge of previously learned skills*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Teacher communicates learning targets explicitly and ensures that students understand them throughout the lesson, proactively addressing possible sources of confusion such as similar but distinct skills. *Students might: ask questions to clarify learning targets, articulate learning targets to each other in pairs*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Teacher explains and models target skills in technically accurate and student-friendly ways: for example, articulating phonemes precisely, flagging exceptions to spelling patterns. *Students might: repeat sounds and words in chorus or individually, mimicking the teacher's modeling*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Comments:	
2. Implements a variety of subject-specific instructional strategies	**Focus (overarching practices)**	
	Teacher uses gradual release model targeting grade-appropriate foundational reading skills: • Print concepts, including letter recognition (K-1) • Phonological, including phonemic awareness (K-2) • Phonics and word recognition (K-2) • Fluency (from late K) *Students might: learn using written text or with entirely oral/aural activities, depending on the target skill(s)*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Teacher uses formal and informal assessment data to plan and adjust instruction so that all students have enough, but not too much, time and support to master target skills. *Students might: take turns responding to teacher prompts or reading aloud while the teacher takes notes*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Questioning (what is heard)	
	Teacher prompts students to focus on sounds and to decode systematically ("sound it out") when possible instead of guessing at words using pictures or memorizing them as wholes. *Students might: persist through difficulty by isolating, segmenting, and blending sounds when stuck on a word*	Yes Some Not Yet

Key Content from Descriptor	Look-fors: Examples of Teacher and Student Evidence	Observation
	Teacher focuses feedback on target and previously learned skills: for example, prompting students to correct invented spelling patterns only for words they have already learned how to spell. *Students might: spell words incorrectly but in ways that "make sense" given their emerging phonics knowledge*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Student work (rigorous tasks)	
	All students practice target skills out of context in varied and multisensory ways: for example, with chants, manipulatives, movement, games, and puzzles. *Students might: engage in whole-class, teacher-led games and chants before moving into group or individual work*	Yes Some Not Yet
	All students practice target and previously learned skills in context through repeated and increasingly fluent readings of decodable text (from late K). *Students might: read aloud individually or chorally in small groups determined by recent assessment results*	Yes Some Not Yet
3. Highlights key concepts and ideas and uses them as the basis to connect other powerful ideas	Teacher provides opportunities for students to build mutually reinforcing foundational skills together: for example, decoding and encoding with the same sound-symbol correspondence. *Students might: practice identifying the two sounds in a particular blend, then practice spelling words with that blend*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Teacher provides opportunities for students to build vocabulary along with foundational skills: for example, by discussing the meanings of words they are learning to spell. *Students might: come up with meaningful or silly sentences using words from their decodable texts*	Yes Some Not Yet
	Teacher provides opportunities for students to build reading comprehension along with foundational skills: for example, by retelling or discussing the meanings of their decodable texts. *Students might: ask and answer questions about the characters or events in a decodable text*	Yes Some Not Yet

Glossary

- **Decodable text:** uses primarily sound-symbol correspondences that students have already learned
- **Decode:** use knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence to translate written text into speech sounds
- **Encode:** use knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence to translate speech sounds into written text
- **Fluency:** reading with accuracy and appropriate speed and expression to support *reading comprehension*
- **Foundational skills:** *print concepts*, *phonological* (including *phonemic*) *awareness*, *phonics*, and *fluency*
- **Invented spelling:** incorrect spellings students devise using their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences
- **Print concepts:** conventions such as, in English, reading from left to right and separating words with spaces
- **Phoneme:** the smallest individual speech sounds: e.g., the sound represented by just the "d" in "dog"
- **Phonemic awareness:** identifying and manipulating *phonemes;* a component of *phonological awareness*
- **Phonics:** translating between speech sounds and written symbols, including *decoding* and *encoding*
- **Phonological awareness:** identifying and manipulating speech sounds, including words and syllables
- **Reading comprehension:** understanding of meanings (not just pronunciations) of connected text
- **Vocabulary:** understanding of meanings (not just pronunciations) of words and phrases