

Literacy Essentials: The Journey From Spelling To Reading®

Why No Spelling Homework? (with Orton-based programs)

The goal of homework is to provide **effective practice** for children as they move toward mastery of various literacy skills. The heart of this goal revolves around the question of “What is **effective practice**?” The person involved with practice must know the program well enough to provide oversight and correction in order to be effective. Practice makes permanent, not perfect. So, the need for the practices to be accurate cannot be overstated. The teacher and other trained individuals are best able to provide effective practice

Phonograms:

Effective practice of the spelling patterns or phonograms requires knowledge of the handwriting program and the sounds represented by the phonograms. Phonograms are taught and practiced in a multisensory manner that includes handwriting. The handwriting program is not a copy method. Students are given specific verbal explanations for where to place and move their pencil in order to form each letter. Therefore, parents would need to understand the language of instruction for handwriting (especially in K-1 and in schools new to Literacy Essentials). As well, a parent would need to know all 72 phonograms and an accurate/correct pronunciation for each sound. Additionally, knowledge of the rules that correspond to several of the phonograms would be necessary.

Spelling:

Spelling words are not practiced by calling out letters, nor are they practiced by rote copying of words multiple times. Again, the program utilizes a multisensory approach. With that in mind, parents would first need knowledge of how to use the spoken/auditory recording of the word for spelling (which would include correct syllabication for multi-syllable words and correct “say to spell” pronunciations, e.g., *said*). Next, the parent would need to help the student determine which phonogram is used to spell the sounds they hear (e.g., see vs sea, which spelling pattern for the sound /E/). The parent would need to understand the rules of orthography and the marking system. Without this knowledge the parent is unable to offer the support necessary for “effective practice.”

Given the complexities of teaching orthography, the school needs to assure parents that the classroom teacher will own the responsibility for teaching and practicing to mastery handwriting, phonograms, and spelling. The three to five struggling students and/or students coming in new to the school in each classroom will need a plan that could include help from instructional assistants or Student Services in order to receive the number of practices necessary to acquire mastery.

Ideas for Effective Literacy Practice at Home

- Once handwriting has been “mastered” in the classroom, sentence writing with spelling words and reading the spelling words for automaticity are skills that could be practiced effectively at home.
- With K-1, the parents should read aloud to their children and once the children are reading in the classroom, the student can read to the parent at home.

Ineffective Homework Ideas

- Telling students/parents to watch the YouTube videos to learn the phonograms. Use of the video does not guarantee correct pronunciation of the sounds. The purpose of the video was to give teachers support for their mastery of the phonograms prior to and following training. Someone who knows the phonograms needs to insure the adult is correctly pronouncing the sounds in the order of frequency of occurrence in words as presented on the cards.
- Rote copying of letters for handwriting practice, phonograms or spelling words multiple times.
- Sending home weekly phonogram or spelling monitoring practices. These assessments are for the teacher's use. The assessments should help the teachers isolate the phonograms or words the class needs to continue to practice. Sending monitoring practices home while the students are still in the "practice" phase can cause parents to feel responsible to do something about the "missed" phonograms/words.

Help Parents Navigate the New Paradigm

1. If the school has the resources, you may choose to provide training to interested parents throughout the school year on handwriting, phonograms, and orthography.
2. Honest conversations are needed with parents who have struggling students. Parents need to understand how to think about orthography in early elementary. Spelling is more difficult than reading. Often children who are performing at 60% in spelling are reading on grade level. The goal is spelling to read. Some struggling students may lag behind in spelling all the way through lower elementary. This is often due to a phonological weakness for those students.