

Balanced Literacy vs Science of Reading

HPISD’s approach to literacy has changed in recent years as the district formally adopted a Balanced Literacy Framework and related materials such as Lucy Calkins Units of Study. Impacted students include:

- All Students in 8th grade and younger
- Some Freshman and/or Sophomores, depending on 7th and 8th grade ELA class

Balanced Literacy (HPISD approach)	Science of Reading
<p><u>Research</u> indicates less than half of students will read proficiently with this approach.</p> <p>Emphasis on student-centered, independent learning. Instruction from the teacher intentionally limited (workshop model) and students often teaching each other.</p> <p>Indirect or implicit instruction in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonics • Spelling • Grammar • Vocabulary <p>i.e. Students are not explicitly and systematically taught strategies to independently read and write. Dependent on fellow students to provide spelling and grammar feedback.</p> <p>Beginning readers: Use of leveled readers that encourage cueing / guessing strategies (such as looking at pictures or using a repetitive pattern instead of encouraging kids to sound out words).</p> <p>Grades 5-8: Reading whole class novels rarely happens. Emphasis is on student choice of books. Students work together in “book clubs” to identify literary elements, characterization, author’s craft, social commentary, etc. (Often, teachers have not read all the choice books that are the basis of classroom instruction).</p> <p>Book selections for classroom instruction based on student interest across a variety of reading levels instead of prioritizing appropriate grade level rigorous content.</p> <p>Teacher corrections on writing are discouraged. Corrections are also more challenging if students are writing about books teachers have not read.</p> <p>HPISD balanced literacy materials: Lucy Calkins Units of Study, Fountas & Pinnell, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), Patterns of Power, Words Their Way</p>	<p><u>Research</u> indicates 95% of students will read proficiently with this approach.</p> <p>Emphasis on direct, explicit, systematic instruction from the teacher as the foundation for student’s independent and collaborative work.</p> <p>Explicit, systematic teaching of foundational skills with detailed scope & sequence and defined assessment method to ensure students have learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonics • Spelling • Grammar • Vocabulary <p>Beginning readers: Use of decodable readers that students can read by applying phonics skills.</p> <p>Grades 5-8: Reading whole class novels is beneficial. It allows teachers to build background knowledge, teach academic vocabulary, model literary analysis, lead class discussions, etc. (Choice reading used for nightly reading, etc.).</p> <p>Book selections for classroom instruction based on grade-level rigor to help prepare students well for more challenging texts in high school and beyond. Skill and content knowledge build logically each year.</p> <p>On-going teacher corrections on writing are beneficial (grammar, spelling, syntax, etc). Whole class novels allow for higher writing expectations since the teacher has read and taught the novel.</p>

There is national consensus on the necessity to anchor literacy instruction in the vast, interdisciplinary body of research known as the Science of Reading. This research has been conducted over the last five decades, and it is derived from thousands of studies from developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience. This body of work gives us a clear picture of how students learn to read and write.

Currently, **28 states have Science of Reading initiatives to move districts away from materials like HPISD's Balanced Literacy resources Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell.**

Here is how a few states are moving away from Balanced Literacy materials:

- **Massachusetts** - The state is offering grants for the purchase of high-quality core curricular materials for literacy in any grade. The grant application indicates Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell do not meet expectations. Schools using these materials will receive priority in order to support replacing low quality materials.
- **California** - The Palo Alto school district (home of Stanford University) has long used Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell, but is adopting a new curriculum promoted by the national conversation about the Science of Reading ([podcast](#) and [district process](#)).
- **California** - A recent federal class action lawsuit prohibits the future use of Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention in the state.
- **Colorado** - The state requires districts to select from a short list of approved materials that align with the Science of Reading. The mandate requires schools to replace low quality elementary reading programs including Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell.
- **Virginia** - In February 2022, a bill unanimously passed the state House that would require districts to align with the Science of Reading in educator training, intervention, and curriculum. It is expected to pass in the Virginia state Senate and be signed into law this spring.

Texas is giving clear direction for schools to move away from Balanced Literacy and to the Science of Reading via House Bill 3, the [Texas Reading Academies](#) (teacher training), and direction from educators and researchers at leading universities (UT, A&M, SMU, and more).

Colleges are also changing: as of January 2021, prospective Pre-K through 6th grade teachers in Texas must demonstrate proficiency on the Science of Teaching Reading Certification Examination. Locally, SMU's graduate literacy program is aligned with the Science of Reading, and, therefore, the university will not allow its graduate students to complete practicums in HPISD's Balanced Literacy classrooms.

Poor reviews for Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell:

- **Ed Reports**, an independent curriculum reviewer, is commonly referenced by many district and policy leaders. It is like Consumer Reports for curriculum. They gave their lowest possible ratings to [Lucy Calkins Units of Study](#) and [Fountas & Pinnell](#). Their voice is well-respected and influential nationally.
- The non-profit **Student Achievement Partners** issued a [lengthy research report on Lucy Calkins Units of Study](#) that concluded the program ""would be unlikely to lead to literacy success for all of America's public schoolchildren."

Author admits materials don't align with reading research: In 2020, [Lucy Calkins revealed her curriculum needs "rebalancing"](#) after her team's review of current research (and the extensive national blowback). The publisher is expected to publish updated materials Summer 2022, which HPISD would need to purchase if they don't want to continue to use K-8 core materials that now even the author herself has misgivings about.

Anyone with questions, concerns, or requests regarding literacy in HPISD is encouraged to contact:

- HPISD Principals, Instructional Coaches, and English Language Arts Teachers
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