



New Fairfield Public Schools Elementary Reading Resources Report and Findings

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Course: ELA - English/ Language Arts (Literacy)

Grade(s): K-5

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Introduction

In the context of “Right to Read” legislation in Sections 394-404 of Public Act No. 21-2, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) requires all public school districts to implement a CSDE-approved reading program. This mandate, coupled with student performance data and teacher feedback, provided New Fairfield Public Schools with the opportunity to undertake a self-study and self-assessment of its literacy resources.

Like many districts across Connecticut and the nation, attention had already been given over the past several years to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in New Fairfield through both professional learning and the implementation of programs such as Heggerty (phonemic awareness, K-1) and Foundations (phonics, K-2) to provide explicit, systematic instruction for students in these two strands of literacy. In addition, DIBELS as an assessment tool has provided the district with a vehicle for monitoring and responding to students’ performance in these early literacy skill areas. However, additional core strands of reading - specifically, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension - have continued to be areas of need for students in terms of performance and for staff in terms of resources for coherent, well-articulated instruction in the classroom. This was confirmed by the CSDE in their response to our 2023 district waiver application and their review of our literacy program.

With that in mind, a team of New Fairfield elementary administrators and staff began researching the CSDE-approved resources. Given the solid foundation of early literacy instruction provided by Heggerty and Foundations, accompanied by Geodes decodable texts, we selected two resources from the CSDE list that have been approved as compendium resources; that is, they are intended to be used in conjunction with Heggerty and Foundations to address instruction of the remaining literacy strands of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These two selected resources were (1) *Wit and Wisdom* (Great Minds), and (2) *Bookworms* (Open Up Resources). In early January, 2024, a plan to pilot these two resources was presented by Mrs. Allyson Story, Principal of Consolidated/Meeting House Hill School, to the New Fairfield Board of Education. In addition, the district continued this year to study, implement, and gather feedback regarding the current resources from Teachers’ College (TC Units of Study) in use in our classrooms; this resource is not currently included on the CSDE list of approved resources. The report that follows provides an overview of the study and pilot of these resources and our plan to move forward with *Bookworms* as a core resource in the context of literacy curriculum and instruction in New Fairfield Public Schools.

About Literacy Instruction in New Fairfield

The New Fairfield Public Schools strives for vertical alignment across curricula and programs to ensure a coherent experience for students as they journey across their PreK-12 years in the district. To that end, this pilot of elementary literacy resources is situated in the broader context of our district English-Language Arts (ELA) philosophy, aligned to the New Fairfield Public Schools Vision of the Learner:

We believe that through the study of English language arts, students become talented communicators and enlightened, global citizens who are able to thrive in society. A high-quality education in English language arts includes explicit, differentiated instruction in all aspects of literacy, beginning with foundational skills so that students are prepared to think critically, make meaning and communicate.

English language arts classrooms must be safe, literature-rich learning environments that provide students access to a wide array of fiction and nonfiction texts where students have choice in what they read and write, fostering ownership of their learning. Instruction must be differentiated to address students' individual needs through whole-class lessons, small-group work and individualized conferences where students practice their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills and receive actionable feedback.

To meet the needs of every student, teachers must work collaboratively to ignite all students' imagination, confidence and creativity and lead students to their highest potential.

It is important to note that this pilot entails resources to be used in support of the delivery of our district K-5 literacy curriculum. Curriculum is broader than a given resource; curriculum is the design and organization of Standards and performance expectations to define what students should understand, know, and be able to do, aligned to the New Fairfield Public Schools Vision of a Learner. Programs and resources are selected to support the implementation of curriculum by providing materials and tools for learning experiences in the classroom. Instructional practices and routines are also critical in ensuring that curriculum resources are implemented in such a way as to be responsive to student learning needs and deepen understanding. With this in mind, the pilot and study of literacy resources provides an opportunity to also articulate principles of literacy instruction that drive our teaching and learning in the classroom (as well as professional learning) beyond any single program or resource. We seek to ensure that literacy instruction in each classroom provides:

- **Explicit, systematic instruction** across all strands of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension);
- **Opportunities for deliberate practice** with real texts through partner and independent reading and fluency routines;
- The development of oral language and written language through discussion and **critical thinking** about text;
- Opportunities for **small group, differentiated instruction** that is responsive to the needs of each reader.

As resources are implemented, we keep in mind that no single program or resource itself serves as our curriculum. Rather, instructional routines and resources provide the tools for delivering curriculum and we engage in a continuous improvement cycle of monitoring implementation and student performance to adjust and enhance our use of resources for optimal student learning.

Guiding Questions

The pilot and study of literacy resources was grounded in the following two overarching evaluative criteria questions given our district needs and current status of resources:

Does the resource support explicit, systematic, sequential and cumulative instruction of fluency, vocabulary and comprehension?

How does the resource work together with our existing programs to support a comprehensive literacy curriculum?

In addition, teachers were asked to reflect specifically on the questions below throughout the implementation of the resources in order to focus their analysis of the resources and their effectiveness in the classroom.

- How does the resource allow for high-quality, **daily differentiation of foundational, comprehension and vocabulary** skills to meet the diverse needs of **all students working at, above or below grade level**?
- How does the resource provide for structured discussions that address grade level **Speaking and Listening Standards**?
- How does the resource provide for explicit instruction and practice to address grade level **Language Standards**?
- How does the resource include a range of **authentic writing and explicit instruction** of grade level **Writing Standards**?
- How does the resource provide for **explicit instruction in grade level Comprehension and Word Recognition (vocabulary) Standards / skills**?
- How does the resource represent diverse cultures, identities, backgrounds and perspectives that are representative of the New Fairfield community as well as a broader understanding of communities and citizens beyond New Fairfield?

Along with the principles of literacy instruction noted previously, these questions, used to frame check-in and debrief meetings with staff, were critical in ensuring that we considered both the **student experience** (outcomes, engagement) and the **teacher experience** (usability, professional learning).

Implementation / Timeline

Our pilot and study of literacy resources was undertaken systematically and over time to ensure opportunities to examine student learning in the classroom and stakeholder feedback from teachers, coaches, and administrators. This included an initial virtual training for staff and overview of the materials provided by the publisher of each resource prior to the implementation of resources in the classroom. Throughout the implementation of the resources, teachers piloting *Wit and Wisdom* or

Bookworms met weekly with our elementary literacy coaches to plan collaboratively, raise questions, and debrief instruction. Both the coaches and administration maintained contact via Zoom meetings and email communication with the publishers to ask clarifying questions and be responsive to teachers. Below is a summary of the timeline of implementation for the pilot.

September, 2023	Initial review of CSDE literacy resources
November / December, 2023	Selection of pilot materials / Design of pilot
January 30-31, 2024	Initial meeting with pilot teachers
February 20, 2024	Overview of pilot resources (webinar)
Mid-February - Mid-March, 2024	Initial resource classroom implementation (with weekly planning / coach meetings)
March 24, 2024	Implementation check-in (student work share, teacher reflections / feedback grounded in guiding questions)
Mid-March - Mid-April, 2024	Continued resource classroom implementation (focus on small group instruction)
April 23, 2024	Final pilot resource review (student work review, Reading Resource Review Template)

- **Implementation Check-In**

As noted in this timeline, after several weeks of implementation, teachers piloting new program resources came together for an implementation “check-in” on March 24, 2024, at a professional learning session dedicated to examining student work from the pilot classrooms and reflecting on the instruction to date based on the pilot’s guiding questions. This provided an opportunity to monitor and adjust based on student work evidence and teacher feedback.

Teacher reflection and feedback focused on the content of the instructional resources and literacy practices for student learning and engagement as well as the usability and sustainability of implementation from the perspective of the teacher experience. Teachers noted that both resources provide structures and routines that support literacy instruction in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Also, student oral language development is fostered in both resources, with students citing text evidence when responding to comprehension questions to a greater extent than previously. It was noted across both resources that previewing texts and book selection is important to support classroom discussions and to take into account community context. In addition, strengths and practices specific to a given resource in the pilot were noted, including points listed below:

Wit and Wisdom	Bookworms
Fluency routines that scaffold fluency elements through re-reading of passages.	Fluency routines practiced through choral and partner reading and re-reading.
Strong vocabulary routines (Deep Dives)	Vocabulary routines engage students (Super Sentences)
Workbooks include fill-in items for students; questions of rigor raised.	Student levels of thinking and discourse raised through discussions and written responses to texts.
Range of media for response and application of comprehension / critical thinking.	Primarily whole texts used for response and application of comprehension / critical thinking.
Pacing challenges; not yet able to embed small group instruction.	Flexibility with pacing within lesson structure; small group instruction informed by DIBELS data and diagnostic assessment tool from the pilot resource.

- **Continued Resource Implementation**

Implementation in the first weeks of the pilot focused on the core whole-group instructional segments of each resource. However, small group instruction remains a critical component of our literacy model in order to differentiate instruction for students and respond to student learning needs. With this in mind, teachers piloting both resources turned attention during the second half of the implementation period (approximately 3-4 weeks) to integrating small group instruction into their literacy block with the pilot resource to assess feasibility of this instructional practice. Teachers utilizing the current Teachers College Units of Study also continued to integrate small group instruction to address student needs.

- **Final Resource Review**

On April 23, 2024, all K-5 classroom teachers met for a final review of each resource. Teachers reflected on the strengths and challenges of each resource, and they shared reflections specific to the integration of small group instruction into the literacy instructional block. Also, teachers of each pilot resource as well as those continuing to use previous district literacy resources (TC Units of Study) completed the [Reading Resource Review Template](#) to provide comprehensive feedback regarding each resource. The template focused on content related to the guiding questions of the pilot. This final review template focused on the following criteria:

- **Content Standards** - The extent to which the resource aligns with Literacy Content Standards (Reading, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening)
- **Program Components** - The extent to which the resource provides explicit instruction and materials in support of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as well as critical thinking, discourse, and a balance of literary and informational texts.

- **Instruction** - The extent to which the resource and embedded routines promotes student engagement, small group instruction, differentiation, and entry points for all students (including ML students).
- **Implementation** - The extent to which the resources are feasible for implementation in terms of preparation, pacing, and available materials.

Administrators and the elementary literacy coaches met as well to look at each resource across the full year and K-5, beyond the single pilot unit, specifically to assess full alignment with Standards and the volume and range of texts for students.

Findings

Based on the review of literacy resources with teacher feedback and student work samples, each resource presented with strengths as well as challenges. This reaffirms our commitment to the design of a comprehensive curriculum that is broader than any single resource; that is, no program or resource will serve as our full curriculum. That being said, all of the resources that were studied through the lens of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension can integrate with our current use of Heggerty (phonemic awareness) and Foundations (phonics / decoding). Also, with any of these resources, we will look to integrate the use of Geodes and other decodables as texts that support the application of decoding skills and growth in fluency.

Below is a summary of our analysis of resources and New Fairfield teacher feedback based on our pilot review criteria:

	TC Units of Study (Current)	Wit & Wisdom	Bookworms
Content Standards			
Program Components			
Instruction			
Implementation			

Key: Fully met criteria Partially met criteria Did not meet criteria

Critical points of feedback for each of the resources are noted below:

TC Units of Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authentic texts with student choice for independent reading. ● Opportunities for independent writing and a variety of student-generated writing. ● Greater clarity and explicit instruction needed in the areas of Vocabulary, grammar, and language skills.
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Wit & Wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong fluency and vocabulary routines. ● All readers engage in deep discussions and higher-order thinking about grade-level texts. ● Concerns expressed regarding time for writing and expectations; lack of student-generated ideas and lack of choice. ● Strong launch but over time student engagement faded given length of module / single-topic study. ● Concerns regarding pacing of lessons and materials preparation.
Bookworms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong vocabulary and grammar / language routines. ● High student engagement and excitement for reading and writing. ● All readers engage in deep discussions and higher-order thinking about grade-level texts. ● Clear, explicit language to instruct regarding effective text responses. ● Supports listening skills. ● Pacing and depth of time with a given topic / text appropriate. ● Deep discussions in classrooms require extended time and can impact pacing. ● Small group instructional block continues to be refined. ● Full implementation can ensure that routines are established for the academic instructional blocks.

Based on these findings and feedback, we plan to move forward with Bookworms as a Standards-based resource component of our elementary literacy curriculum. Bookworms provides explicit instruction and routines that address the components of vocabulary, grammar, language, and comprehension in a manner that has ignited student engagement this spring while being sustainable for teachers over time. Bookworms would be coupled with decodable texts, fluency routines, and small group, targeted strategy instruction that allow students to grow their decoding and fluency skills within an overarching curriculum. We continue to value opportunities for independent reading and student-generated writing and will work to ensure these elements are integrated into literacy instruction in the classroom with our core resources.

Professional Learning Plan

The introduction of any new resource in support of curriculum delivery is dependent on the professional learning of staff to ensure fidelity of implementation and informed professional judgment in the use of the resource. What is perhaps most exciting in the selection of a literacy resource is the opportunity to deepen staff understanding of reading instruction and related practices. Moreover, the excitement generated by the study and pilot of new resources has positioned our elementary classroom teachers to be eager to grow in new knowledge and new practices with the materials.

It is essential that professional learning be embedded and ongoing. Therefore, we seek to provide initial training to all staff to ensure consistency in implementation, as well as coaching and additional professional learning sessions throughout the year to allow teachers to raise questions, reflect on their

instruction and student learning, refine practice, and deepen understanding of the range of tools available in the resource. The following is a draft of professional learning experiences that we plan to leverage in support of this first year of implementation of the Bookworms resources:

- **Initial Overview Training (2-hour, on-site): May 24, 2024**
- **First-Year Implementation Training (full day, on-site): August, 2024**
- **Leadership Coaching (monthly): September, 2024 - June, 2025**
- **On-Site School-Based Follow-up (2 days): TBD**

In addition, our K-5 literacy coaches will meet with grade-level representatives and administrators this summer to prepare curriculum materials and professional learning experiences to further support staff in this launch and implementation. Throughout the year, grade-level planning sessions will be facilitated by our literacy coaches, and other curriculum-based coaching experiences, such as demonstration lessons, co-teaching, student work sessions, learning walks, and lesson study, will be provided by the literacy coaches. This will ensure ongoing professional learning that builds the capacity of our staff throughout the implementation of Bookworms in support of student learning and growth. We are eager to begin and look forward to this opportunity for our students and staff!