

A Model for Celebrating and Cementing Reading Fluency Schoolwide

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It was mid-March, in Central Harlem, in the doldrums of the New York City school calendar. You wouldn't know that in our 2nd grade classrooms. The 2nd graders were preparing for their Public Reading, one of our favorite rituals. They had already experienced one, so they were giddy with excitement and nerves, remembering how much praise and attention they'd gotten back in November. Everyone had their chosen poem, paragraph, or set of riddles printed out fresh, in large font, so they could be read with ease. They knew their parents and older siblings would be coming as soon as they could get there, and they knew there'd be homemade cookies and punch after everyone had read.

The 2nd graders had departed from their usual weekly routine with our homemade "Fluency Packet" to pick their own favorite poem of the moment, some riddles they liked, or a paragraph from a book they had recently read. Each child had worked to learn the correct pronunciation and cadence for her selection and then had rehearsed her piece daily during the 15-minute fluency time for the past week and a half. Everybody was confident about their performance. Each child was reading her selection clearly and accurately, with the expressiveness the selection warranted, and loudly enough for a full room to hear. The 2nd graders had achieved the high level of fluency and self-confidence required for public speaking and performance.

These Public Readings were the performance outlet of our 2nd grade fluency program, the focused effort to ensure all our 2nd graders were fluent with grade-level texts before they headed off to third grade. We had found it was straightforward and doable to achieve universal reading fluency in second grade given that nearly all our first graders came in with solid

decoding and automatic word recall with the patterns they'd been taught. Reading fluency was enshrined at the Family Academy as a nonnegotiable accomplishment by the end of second grade, just like automaticity in decoding was for first grade and phonemic awareness proficiency was for kindergarten.

How did we do it?

We centered our full-group practice on our “fluency packets” because the passages were fun and the routine was easy, two valuable qualities with a vital reading skill we were determined to make sure every child got during the course of the year! The passages in the packet ranged from silly poems by people like Jack Prelutsky or Shel Silverstein to inspirational writing (excerpts from famous speeches, Civil Rights testimonials) to fables to song lyrics. Each summer, we would assemble the passages in a slim three-ring binder labeled, “The Fluency Packet,” complete with a table of contents and pages for parents’ initials and optional comments. Each incoming 2nd grader got one. There was a weekly routine with the selection of the week with 15–20 minutes each day dedicated to fluency.

Here’s how it generally worked:

Day 1 – the teacher modeled the selection and the children read chorally several times. There were some comprehension questions the class would answer in discussion to remind everyone that the point of reading is not just to sound good, but to understand what you’re reading. The children would take their packets home and practice 3-4 times in the presence of an older family member who would initial the work was done and write a comment if they wished

Day 2 – the children would again hear a fluent reading of the passage before practicing with echo and buddy reading. The home practice was the same.

Days 3-5 – about 1/3 of the class reads the passage aloud each day, one after the other, with the listening students following along in their own packets. The teacher has the strongest readers go early in the week so the students who are still attaining fluency get more chances to practice and hear fluent models. The nightly home practice remains the same.

We stuck to a weekly system and had to adjust for short weeks of course, which we would sometimes do by using a shorter text that week. Six- or seven-day cycles are fine, too, whatever works for your setting. In general, we spent 15–20 minutes each day on fluency with our class sizes of 26-28 students.

The daily fluency work was one of the students' favorite parts of the day, rivaled only by recess and teacher read-aloud in popularity. It was active for everyone, everyone had a role, and everyone knew what was required. The teachers would riff on the routine to make it more fun, especially during the later parts of each week when the repetition started to feel like too much. We dubbed these “enhancers,” and the sky was the limit. We invited children to play with prosody by inventing or adopting different personas when it was their turn to read aloud. Read it like you're an old man! Rap the passage! Read it in an exaggerated accent. Read it as a witch might read it. Read it like you're a royal queen talking to your subjects or you're talking to a baby. Get with a friend and read it as a duet this week! Everyone loves these enhancers, no matter what setting we've worked in.

Think about the implications of this routine. By the end of each week, between the home practice and the multiple daily oral readings (while everyone else followed along in their own packet), that passage would have been heard, read, and followed something like 60 times in a class of 26 students. Plus, it meant that every child in our second grade performed for her peers at least once a week. Our students became poised public speakers from then on! The hams got to be hams, the quieter children got to build their confidence and be aware that they could do

this. The less fluent children got to hear the passage modeled a lot before it was their turn to read, with the result that every student enjoyed a successful experience she associated with reading and felt herself a fluent, expressive reader each and every week. One other thing: Through our fluency program, our students understood that practicing makes you better, so they started to internalize the valuable lesson that practice pays off in improved skills and ability.

Do you see why reading fluency wasn't an issue at our school?

Our data bore this out too. We paid attention to the [Hasbrouck and Tindal norms](#) and worked more with students who were reading below the 25th percentile on the Words Correct Per Minute recommendations at periodic screening points. Those students tended to be those we already knew didn't have solid foundational skills learning cemented, so they had access to a reading specialist several times weekly. At this time, New York City evaluated 2nd graders 1:1 on an early version of the PALS assessor, and our students nearly all achieved highly on the reading fluency component annually. Our rich, lively program got great results!

As you already know, we set aside this routine for a couple weeks three times a year to let the children prepare for a bigger public reading: this one with a party vibe and for an audience of their families and school adults. That event, described at the top of this post, was carefully prepared for, so every child experienced what it felt like to be successful at something valuable—reading—in front of people important in her life.

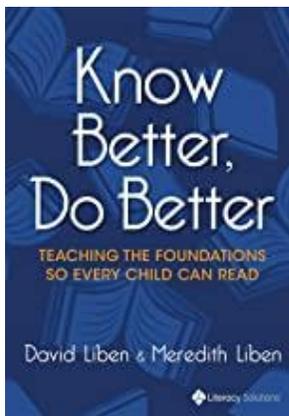
The really good news about reading fluency is that children can get better at reading something smoothly even within a single time period, say 20 minutes during one class. Their improvement will be palpable. They'll hear and feel that they've gone from halting word-by-word decoding to smooth, fluid reading. So will their teacher. This cycle of practice and

success makes fluency work really rewarding. Doing this daily in second grade can be the key to locking in all the foundational skills learning that have come before. It can set every child on track to be a successful reader for life.

Post-script, to parents with young readers at home now – ALL the time 😊:

You can do this with your child this summer or anytime. Find fun, silly, short things to read that you and your child are BOTH interested in. Make sure you model fluent reading first, and point at the words as you read along with your child following along in the text. Do it a couple times until your child wants to try it. Lean into the fun practices here: play with your voices, take turns reading lines or characters... keep it light and fun. Your child wants to sound good for you! If you can't help, but have access to a computer, go to Microsoft Word's View option and turn on the Immersive Reader and play with its capacity with your child. You might want to watch this 17 minute [YouTube video](#) first so you see how powerful a tool this is!

(Main post was adapted from [Know Better Do Better, Teaching the Foundations So Every Child Can Read](#) by David and Meredith Liben)



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For a full suite of free, ready-to-use fluency resources, including fluency packets for every grade from 2nd on, and guidance for using, see [Achieve the Core Fluency](#).