

Advancing All Students: Comprehensive Student Support Plan 2021-2022

Vestal Central School District

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**Vestal Central School District
2021-2022**

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District Mission and Goals

The Vestal Central School District strives to provide every student with a high-quality education that will empower them to meet their life goals. The district's educational vision is reflected in the following statements and goals.

District Mission Statement



The Vestal Central School District believes each student is unique and can learn. The District's mission is to provide instruction, programs, strategies and challenges in a caring, positive learning environment. Each student will become a critical thinker, a lifelong learner, and a responsible, contributing citizen in a changing global society. The Board of Education, staff, parents, students and community share a commitment to this mission.

District Goals

Challenge all Vestal students to meet ever-increasing standards of excellence in preparation for participation in the global society.

Support students' efforts to learn and grow by assuring all a positive educational environment.

Foster community pride in the Vestal schools by communicating openly and effectively about our students and the school program.

Invest fiscal resources responsibly and effectively to accomplish the District's mission.

Core Beliefs of Responsive Classroom®

In order to be successful in and out of school, students need to learn a set of social and emotional competencies—cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—and a set of academic competencies—academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors.



International Baccalaureate: Mission Statement



The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments, and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

Part I: Advancing All Students



The Vestal Central School District recognizes that all learning begins with rich and engaging instruction. To this end, the district will pursue a rigorous program of professional learning and curriculum development to advance the capacity of our faculty and principals to create learning environments that meet students at their places of strength. Lively, engaging curriculum presented to students in ways that captures their creativity, imagination, and interest, is the first step towards ensuring that all students have opportunities to succeed. Teachers and principals must be given the resources and time to create schools and classrooms that foster social and academic development in tandem. Parents must be assured that their students will

experience an education that affirms their self-concept and leads them to be responsible, compassionate members of a complex global society.

Our district recognizes that most students will need additional support to attain the knowledge, conceptual understandings, skills, and credentials to accomplish their goals—both now and in their futures. To this end, the Vestal schools will:

- Develop interventions and enrichments that respond to students’ specific academic and social/emotional needs.
- Administer universal screening assessments and use the data to (1) help us evaluate our core curriculum and instruction, and (2) help us identify students who may need additional intervention and/or enrichment.
- Integrate technology and alternative models of teaching and learning in order to remove barriers that prevent students from succeeding.
- Work to deepen students’ social/emotional learning and civic engagement by creating opportunities for students to construct meaning, express their views, and lead their peers and the community at large.

Most importantly, we must ensure that all learning nurtures and protects the special bonds that develop among teachers, students, principals, and families who work together for the common good of our district. Students who have a sense of connection to each other, their teachers, their schools and their communities will be more academically successful. Our district will work to create an environment where those bonds and relationships flourish.

The primary purpose of this Comprehensive Student Support Plan is articulate a holistic vision for high-quality K-12 education in the Vestal Schools. While it provides information about Vestal’s assessments, interventions, and student support systems, we hope it goes well beyond that to re-conceptualize student support in holistic terms. Rather than narrowly focusing only on students’ deficits, we believe it is important to also build upon their strengths, recognizing that none of us wish to be defined by what we do not know or cannot do. Instead, we emphasize that virtually all students will need some sort of additional support (including enrichment) at some point in their K-12 career.

Part II: A Holistic Vision of Support

At Vestal we believe that a high-quality education must not only support students' academic growth, but also their social, emotional, creative and physical development. Too often the language of intervention unwittingly characterizes students in deficit-laden terms. Rather than narrowly defining support as isolated skill development, we believe (1) educational interventions must be closely connected to the core curriculum; (2) that learning and assessment should be as authentic and relevant as possible; and, (3) that student support should be broadly conceived.

While we have high expectations for all students, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that they learn at their maximum potential, we feel strongly that *no student should be stigmatized in order to have their educational needs met*. All students will likely need specialized support or enrichment at some point in their academic careers.

A good education should *empower* students. Not only should it help them overcome learning challenges, but it should also help them develop their talents and hone their interests. Not only should schooling introduce students to the world as it currently is, but it should also equip the next generation to reimagine what the world could be—and to make it so.

As we outline our holistic approach to student support, we begin with a foundation of inclusion and cultural responsiveness.

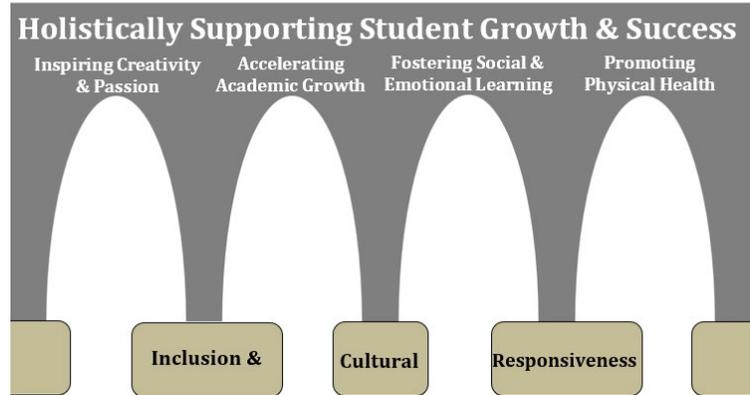
A. Inclusion & Cultural Responsiveness



Our holistic approach assumes that student growth and success begin with an inclusive and culturally responsive environment that celebrates diversity by honoring the many assets our students and families bring to our school community. Our goal is for every student to feel they are a valued member of that community, and that they are capable of positively contributing to the educational experiences of others.

Our district strives to educate students in the least restrictive environment possible. Most students with disabilities and nearly all Multilingual Learners (MLLs) are educated in integrated settings with non-disabled and native English-speaking peers. Special education and English as a New Language teachers regularly support students by consulting with and co-teaching alongside core classroom teachers.

Vestal is committed to culturally responsive teaching. We strive to enact a curriculum that reflects the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of our students and families. Our teachers receive ongoing training to help them provide an equitable education to all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, or any other aspect of their identity. Annual building-level programs such as African Road Elementary's "Taste of



ARE” event give students and families the opportunity to share their home cultures. Likewise, Vestal High School’s Seal of Biliteracy program celebrates students who attain a high degree of fluency and literacy in a language other than English.

B. Inspiring Creativity & Passion

Remediation cannot come at the expense of meaningful learning. Some neuroscientists say it is biologically impossible to learn without caring. If students are to be motivated to learn deeply, then schooling should inspire interest. We attempt to do that through (1) implementing high-quality first instruction; (2) differentiating that instruction by interest and readiness, and (3) offering students extensive curricular and co-curricular opportunities in the arts.

High-Quality First Instruction

We believe student growth and success begins with a rich and engaging curriculum that taps student curiosity and interest by asking students to transfer and apply their learning beyond the classroom. We help students hone their skills and develop deep conceptual understandings by exploring their worlds as junior artists, musicians, citizens, linguists, readers, writers, scientists, mathematicians, engineers, etc.



Vestal teachers work hard to help students learn through a variety of teaching strategies including both well executed direct instruction and ambitious “minds on” experiences such as project-based and inquiry-based learning. Whatever the method, our teachers know that students need ample opportunities for practice, thoughtful feedback, and reflection. Student growth and success begins here—with high-quality first instruction.



This sometimes takes the form of externally developed curriculum programs such as the Eureka Math Modules and English Language Arts Curricula from the Columbia Teachers College. Those programs help ensure consistency across classrooms and grade levels, while leaving some room for teacher adaptation. In other cases, curriculum is home grown. When the district sponsors its own curriculum development, we use the “Teaching for Understanding” (TfU) model developed by Harvard University’s Project Zero. TfU helps teachers structure learning around “generative topics.” These are unit themes that are central to one or more academic disciplines, and framed in ways that are likely to interest students.

Differentiation by Interest & Readiness

Vestal offers numerous opportunities for intervention and enrichment, both within the K-12 core curriculum and through advanced and elective coursework at the secondary level. In some cases, teachers differentiate lessons by student interest, allowing students to choose everything from project topics to texts. For example, our K-5

reading and writing curricula are built around a workshop model affiliated with Columbia Teachers College. Reading and writing workshop lessons include a mini lesson in which the teacher introduces and models a particular teaching point. Students apply their learning as they read and write independently. During this independent work time, teachers actively confer with students individually and in small groups, providing in individualized feedback and coaching. In reading workshop, students have substantial freedom to choose texts that interest them, as long as they support the main teaching point and are at an appropriate reading level for the students. In writing workshop, students have opportunities to creatively develop their own voice as they learn write many genres of both fiction and non-fiction.



At the secondary level, students make course selections based on their interests and level of academic readiness. Vestal Middle and High Schools offer numerous enriched and accelerated courses. Beginning in seventh grade, Vestal offers enriched classes in social studies and English Language Arts. Students in these classes explore the same topics as their peers in the regular classes, but they do so in greater depth. Our district offers acceleration in math and science. In accelerated courses, students learn more topics than their non-accelerated peers. This allows them to effectively skip a grade, granting them access to more advanced courses in grades 11 and 12. Vestal high school also offers electives on anything from “The Murder Mystery Novel” to “Anatomy and Physiology.” Finally, students can earn college credit through SUNY Broome’s “Fast Forward,” the Rochester Institute of Technology’s “Project Lead the Way,” “Advanced Placement,” and the “International Baccalaureate” programs.

Vibrant Art & Music Programs

Vestal offers K-12 students with a wide array of both curricular and co-curricular programming in the arts, theater, and music. These include annual theater productions at Tioga Hills Elementary, Vestal Middle School, and Vestal High School.

All Vestal students take art from kindergarten through eighth grade. Vestal High School then offers numerous art electives including studio art, digital photography, ceramics, and 3-D Design and much more.



A strong K-6 general music program helps propel students to more advanced performance groups at the secondary level. Beginning in late elementary school, students may take band, chorus, and orchestra. By high school, many join groups like jazz band, marching band, and jazz choir. Vestal students are also regulars at New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) competitions and in Broome County Band, Chorus, and Orchestra performances.

C. Accelerating Academic Growth

At Vestal, we work hard to maximize the potential of each and every student. Sometimes that means a student needs specialized supports or instruction to accelerate their academic growth. Our district’s approach to acceleration rests on the following four concepts:

- **Axes of Supports:** Supports vary based on frequency, duration, and the level of individualization.

- **Student Support Teams:** Interdisciplinary teams make holistic judgements about student support and programmatic improvement.
- **Data-Informed Practice:** Practitioners make student support decisions informed by data, research, and experience-based wisdom.
- **A Variety of Student Support Services:** Students receive supports through Academic Intervention Services, Response to Intervention, English as a New Language, Special Education, and other services.

Axes of Supports

We find it helpful to classify the intensity of interventions along the axes of frequency, duration, and level of individualization.

Frequency

One way to gauge the intensity of a support is to consider how often students receive the support. For example, a multilingual learner receiving English as a New Language services every day would have more intense support than a student who attended a math workshop on one out of every six days of the academic cycle.

Duration

Supports may also vary in duration. For example, a student whose support sessions lasts 20 minutes per day receives a less intensive support than a student whose intervention lasts for 40 minutes per day. The duration of an intervention also varies by the number of weeks it runs. For example, a forty-week intervention is more intensive than a ten-week intervention.

Level of Individualization

The final way that interventions can vary in terms of intensity is by the level of individualization. For example, one-on-one instruction that is specially designed to meet an individual student’s learning needs would be more intensive than instruction provided to a small group. Likewise, even a student who is being supported in the regular classroom might use modified materials, which would be yet another form of individualization.

Phasing Out Tiered Language

Whereas Vestal uses the concept of “axes” to explain how supports might vary in terms of frequency, duration and individualization, outside of the district it is more common to refer to three or more “tiers” of intervention. As we ascend through the tiers, typically the students served are considered more “at risk.” Consequently, interventions typically associated with each successive tier become more intensive.

As a district, we are transitioning away from conceptualizing support in this way. However, because “tiered” language remains common, we offer a brief summary of the concept, and an explanation for our departure from it.

Figure 1

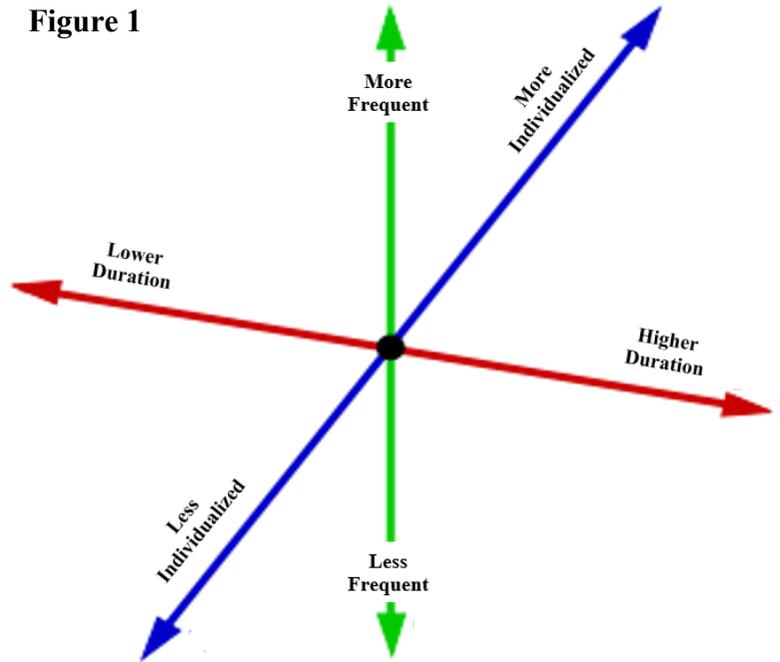
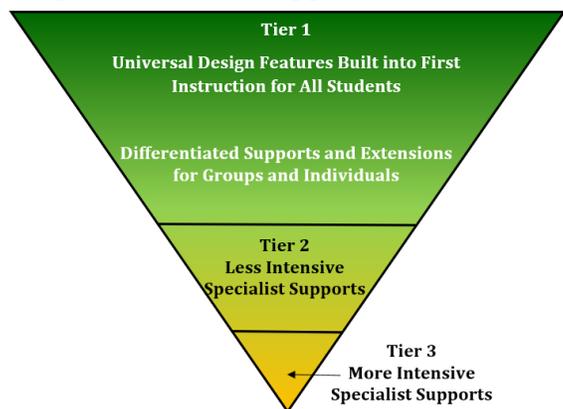


Figure 2: Tiered Supports



Tier 1 usually includes “first instruction.” This refers to the regular curriculum to which all students are exposed. Some districts also refer to “Tier 1 supports.” Typically, this involves designing curriculum using the principles of “Universal Design for Learning” (UDL). These principles involve building accessibility features into the instruction experienced by *all* students. For example, a teacher may provide both visual and oral directions that are chunked into discreet steps. This practice makes learning more accessible for English Language Learners and/or students with disabilities, but it also may benefit other students. Additionally, Tier 1 supports also may include differentiated instruction. A teacher may provide accommodations for particular individuals or groups in order to make first instruction more accessible. For example, a writing teacher may provide a graphic organizer as a scaffold for one student. However, other students may be expected to write more independently.

At Vestal, we use both UDL and differentiation as part of our first instruction, even though we do not necessarily refer to it as “Tier 1” instruction.

While Tier 2 and 3 interventions are typically more intensive, there is little agreement in the research literature—or across school districts—as to precisely where the lines should be drawn between these tiers. Some districts may consider an intervention to be “Tier 2” if it is delivered by an instructional support specialist such as a reading or math interventionist. However, it is also common to utilize these specialists to support first instruction, particularly where they may be coaching classroom teachers through the implementation of new curricula.

Alternatively, some districts may consider an intervention to be “Tier 2” if it is “push-in” or “integrated” support provided within the regular classroom. The same districts might consider “Tier 3” interventions to be those provided in a “pull out” or “stand-alone” context. However, there is no reason why “pull out” support must necessarily be more intense than “push in” support. On the contrary, integrated supports may be quite intensive. Likewise, a student may receive “pull out” support (stand-alone English as a New Language services, for example), not because they are at more “risk,” but because they simply need instruction that is different from that of their classmates.

Finally, some districts consider special education services to be Tier 3 interventions while others see special education as residing entirely outside of the tiered framework. The situation is made even more complex by the fact that special education services, themselves, can vary tremendously in terms of intensity.

Vestal has chosen to shift from tiered language to a system of axes for two reasons. Firstly, as the discussion above shows, we find that the concept of tiers offers relatively little clarity. Attempting to define rigid boundaries between each tier often leads to arbitrary and counterintuitive conceptualizations of student needs and supports. It also ignores the considerable variation within each tier. We find it more helpful to consider student needs along the three distinct continuums of frequency, duration, and level of individualization.

Secondly and most importantly, we believe tiered language often casts students in deficit-laden terms. We have noticed a tendency to refer to pupils as “tier 2” or “tier 3” students. A tier of intervention should never be equated with a student’s identity as a learner. Few among us would wish to be defined in terms of what we cannot do well... *yet*. “Risk” is not absolute or fixed. A student may excel in one area, progress typically in another, and temporarily struggle in a third. It is normal and appropriate that most students will need some extra support at some point in their academic career. Our goal is to help students grow to their maximum potential. While we hold high expectations for *all* students, we also have to see them as individuals with different talents, interests, challenges, goals, and motivations. They will not all learn at the same pace and schooling may not lead them to identical destinations.

Student Support Teams

Another way that our district seeks to accelerate students' growth is through the use of student support teams (SSTs). Each building in the Vestal Central School District has its own SST. This is an inter-disciplinary team of educators who meet regularly and work together to promote the growth, success, and overall well-being of the students in the school. This team generally consists of (but is not limited to)

- ✓ A principal and/or assistant principal
- ✓ A psychologist
- ✓ A school counselor
- ✓ A special education teacher
- ✓ One or more classroom teachers
- ✓ Other specialists and related service providers as needed (e.g., social worker, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech teacher, English as a New Language teacher, nurse, reading support teacher, math support teacher, school duty officer, etc.).



The SST helps staff think about ways to accelerate the growth and success of individual students. The district has a uniform referral process in place for students who may need additional support. The SST also works proactively to identify students in need of assistance by analyzing building-level data.

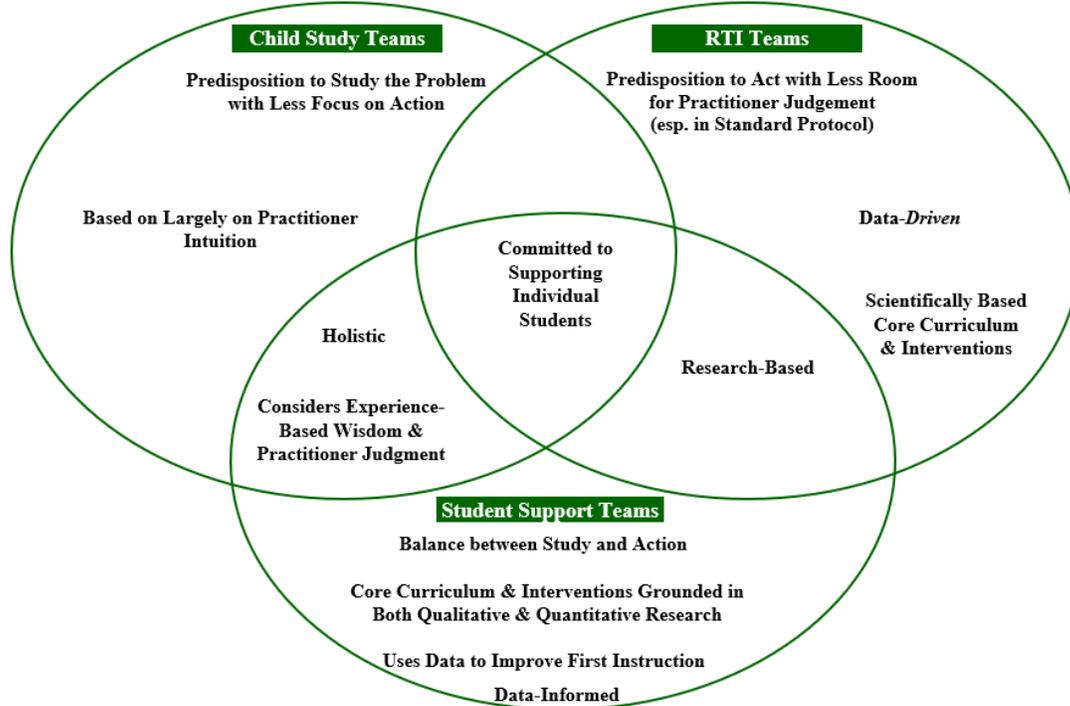
While the concept of an interdisciplinary support team is not new to education, our conceptualization of SSTs is a departure from two earlier conceptualizations of such teams: child study teams and Response to Intervention (RTI) teams. During the 1990s it was commonplace for districts to have “child study teams.” As the name suggests, these teams tended to take a holistic view of the students by studying them. However, these teams fell victim to two shortcomings. Firstly, the focus on study was not always accompanied by a concurrent focus on action. There was a tendency to admire learning problems without actually addressing them. Secondly, the teams’ responses were often based on intuition and experience-based wisdom. While these are both essential, and we believe teams should take them seriously, they rarely led to new insights on their own.

Two decades later, most districts began transitioning to RTI teams. As we explore more in a later section, RTI is a helpful framework that introduced the idea that students’ learning challenges (particularly in the area of early literacy) could be addressed through research-based interventions administered with fidelity and accompanied by regular progress monitoring assessment.¹ RTI begins with a call for “scientifically based” core curriculum. First instruction, is supposed to be limited to curriculum programs that have been deemed effective by quantitative research studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs. These studies constitute a narrow subset of educational research. Under RTI, decisions are supposed to be driven by data. Most RTI teams use either a “standard protocol” or a “problem-solving” approach. The former applies a pre-established set of research-based interventions to any students who exhibit a particular learning challenge. Under the standard protocol, the role of the RTI team is to correctly diagnose a learning problem, assign the corresponding intervention, monitor the student’s progress, and change the intervention if insufficient progress is made. There is relatively little room for practitioner judgement. While there is some research to support the effectiveness of the standard protocol, it sometimes leads to the misapplication of interventions. On the other hand, the “problem solving” approach grants teams wider latitude to exercise professional judgement. Their decisions are still driven by data and scientific research, and they still apply research-based interventions, but they are able take a slightly more holistic approach.

¹ Hughes, C. A., & Dexter, D. D. (2011). Response to intervention: A research-based summary. *Theory into practice, 50*(1), 4-11.

Figure 3

Comparing Student Support Teams to Other Types of Teams



We have formulated the concept of “student support teams” to blend the advantages of both the child study and RTI approaches while expanding the team’s focus to include analysis of schoolwide data. We believe student support teams should take a holistic problem-solving approach. We agree with the child study team’s emphasis on practitioner judgement. Experience-based wisdom can be an asset for problem solving. There is no reason to automatically discount practitioner experience, particularly when members are intimately familiar with the context that matters most—their own school.² It may not always make sense to apply scientifically validated research to settings and circumstances that are unlike those measured in each study. At the same time, practitioner intuition can also be an unreliable guide.

The RTI model’s emphasis on data analysis and educational research is helpful here. Student support teams take into consideration a broad array of data and research—both quantitative and qualitative—when making recommendations about curriculum and interventions. By analyzing long-term trends in a student’s data, we often see patterns that are not initially evident to practitioners. Likewise, educational research has the potential to broaden our experience by allowing us to learn what those in other contexts have found to be successful.

Finally, because both the child study team and RTI approaches are primarily focused on individually referred students, they often miss broader patterns that may impact the learning of *groups* of students. Some scholars have argued that the RTI model’s emphasis on scientifically based first instruction implies that a deficit must lie with any student who fails to learn as expected.³ Student support teams go beyond individually referred students. Not only do they use building-wide data to proactively identify non-referred students, but they also look for ways to improve first instruction by identifying broader trends in student achievement. When an individual student fails to progress as expected, it is appropriate to provide individualized supports. However, when broader data trends show programmatic weaknesses, it is appropriate to support groups of students by adjusting first instruction.

² Biesta, G. (2007). Why “what works” won’t work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, 57(1), 1-22.

³ Artiles, A. J., Bal, A., & King Thorius, K. A. (2010). Back to the future: A critique of response to intervention's social justice views. *Theory into Practice*, 49(4), 250-257; Artiles, A. J., & Kozleski, E. B. (2010). What counts as response and intervention in RTI? A sociocultural analysis. *Psicothema*, 22(4), 949-954; Artiles, A. J. (2015). Beyond responsiveness to identity badges: Future research on culture in disability and implications for response to intervention. *Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-22; Ferri, B. A. (2012). Undermining inclusion? A critical reading of response to intervention (RTI). *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(8), 863-880. doi:10.1080/13603116.2010.538862

Student support teams help improve learning by analyzing data at two levels: that of the individual student and that of our instructional programming as a whole.

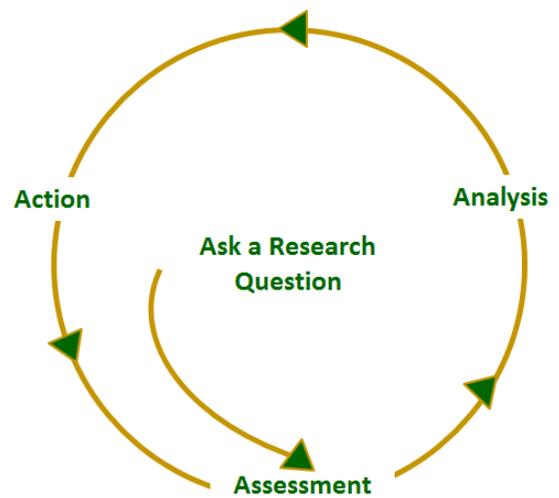
Figure 4 Cycle of Data-Informed Practitioner Inquiry

Data Informed Practitioner Inquiry

One of the ways that Vestal helps accelerate student growth is through the balanced use of data. Our District prides itself on making decisions based on a global assessment of the “whole child.” That means that data is used to *inform* our decisions, but no single data element *drives* those decisions in isolation.⁴

We believe that a good education requires educators to collaboratively seek solutions and to exercise professional judgement as they determine how to holistically promote student growth and success. The district defines “data-informed practice” as **an ongoing inquiry process in which qualitative and quantitative data are interpreted in a holistic context and used to aid in decisions making.**

These decisions may encompass any aspect of educational practice including but not limited to instruction, enrichment, intervention, resource allocation, policy development, and disability identification.



Data-informed practice at Vestal incorporates the following characteristics: (1) Ongoing cycles of inquiry, (2) Crystallization of multiple data sources, (3) Reflective collaboration, and (4) reflective collaboration.

Ongoing Cycles of Inquiry

Data-informed practice is cyclical and ongoing. Our inquiry-based approach begins with a research question that helps provide focus and ensures that data work will ultimately promote high-quality student learning. Data is then gathered and analyzed. Finally, practitioners use this new information to take action. The cycle continues indefinitely as the one inquiry often generates additional research questions.

Crystallization of Multiple Data Sources



Our most trusted conclusions are those that are “crystallized” through multiple data sources. Practitioners analyze data that is both quantitative (e.g., demographic information or test scores) and qualitative (e.g., teacher observations, open-ended survey responses, or samples of student work). These sources are complementary because every data source provides a different lens through which to view student learning.

Contextualization

Because it deals with human beings, education is a complex endeavor. Context, therefore, is incredibly important. In order to make valid data-informed inferences, practitioners must have a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which data is collected. Staff are encouraged to synthesize their expertise, intuition, and knowledge of the “whole child” as they analyze data. In order to implement “wise” educational practices, Vestal understands that instructional programming should be based on knowledge of empirical research AND a sophisticated understanding of what works best for students in Vestal’s particular educational context. Data analysis is a key to understanding the instructional programs and practices that will work best for our students.

Reflective Collaboration

⁴ Knapp, M. S., Swinnerton, J. A., Copland, M. A., & Monpas-Huber, J. (2006). Data-informed leadership in education. *Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy*.

To fully realize the potential of data-informed practice, staff must have regular opportunities to collaboratively analyze data. Because it enables practitioners to perceive patterns that may not have been readily observable, data analysis encourages staff to critically reflect on their own practice. Blythe argues that qualitative data analysis is most powerful when groups sincerely reflect on the implications of their inquiries and are willing to alter their practices accordingly.⁵ As illustrated in Figure 5, this data-informed collaborative meaning-making process is an essential part of the culture of continuous improvement that characterizes “learning organizations” (i.e., those that continuously transforms itself to meet the needs of changing times).⁶

Figure 5
Upward Spiral of Collaborative Data Analysis



A Variety of Student Support Services

Vestal attempts to accelerate students’ growth through a variety of student support services. Including:

- (A) Academic Intervention Services (AIS)**
- (B) Response to Intervention (RTI)**
- (C) English as a New Language (ENL) Services**
- (D) Special Education Services.**

The same student may receive services from more than one category. Each of these services will be described in detail in Part III of this plan. We will also clarify the relationships between these services later in the document.

A Holistic Approach to Accelerated Growth

At Vestal, we understand that most students will need some extra support at some point in their academic careers. Our approach is unique, but it reflects our reading of a wide cross section of educational research—both quantitative and qualitative—and our collective experience-based wisdom. We feel it is important to ensure that students receive appropriate research-based interventions. However, we are extremely careful to make sure the language and systems we create will promote holistic growth without further marginalizing students who may already be vulnerable. While we follow all relevant laws, regulations, and guidelines, we also believe our language matters. That is why some of the terms and concepts we use (e.g., axes of intervention, student support teams, and data-informed practice) differ from common usage. We believe the way we frame student support ensures that student have access to the best possible education while maintaining their dignity as learners.

D. Fostering Social and Emotional Learning

Academic growth and achievement do not happen in a vacuum. Social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health education are vital elements of our district’s holistic approach to student support. We are reminded of Abraham Maslow’s classic “theory of human motivation” in which he asserted that people need to have their basic and psychological needs met if they are to reach their fullest potential.⁷ As shown in Figure 6, these include

⁵ Blythe, T., Allen, D., & Powell, B.S. (2013). *Looking together at student work, 3rd Ed.* New York: Teachers College Press.

⁶ Senge, P.M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York: Currency Doubleday.

⁷ McLeod, S. (2018, May 21). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. *Simple Psychology.* <https://canadacollege.edu/dreamers/docs/Maslows-Hierarchy-of-Needs.pdf>

the needs for safety, love, and belonging. At Vestal, we strive to create a caring environment in which students' social and emotional needs are met by peers, faculty, and staff. We do this through a rich variety of SEL and character education programs.

These programs include the following:

- Responsive Classroom
- Other SEL and Character Education Programs
- Mental Health Initiatives
- Counseling and Social Work Services

Responsive Classroom

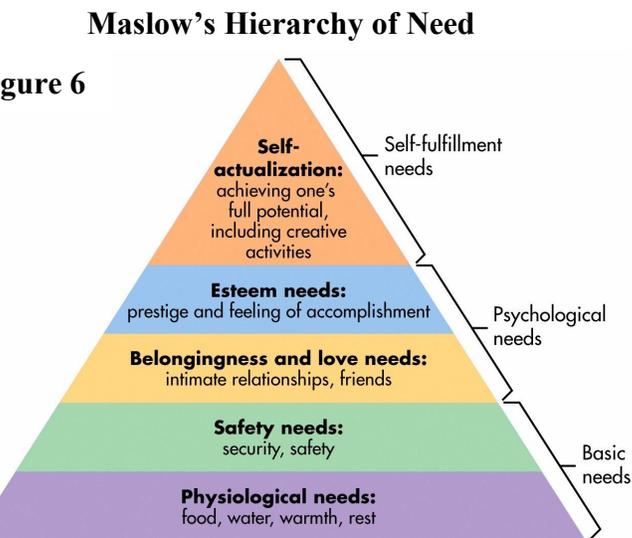
At the elementary level, Vestal has integrated the “Responsive Classroom” (RC) model into the curriculum.⁸ RC blends engaging academics with instruction in social and emotional competencies such as cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. It is guided by the following principles:

- Teaching social and emotional skills is as important as teaching academic content.
- How we teach is as important as what we teach.
- Great cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- Partnering with families—knowing them and valuing their contributions—is as important as knowing the children we teach.

The majority of Vestal’s elementary teachers have received extensive and ongoing professional development in RC practices such as strategic and intentional use of teacher language, interactive modeling, and the use of logical consequences. RC helps foster positive, caring relationships through morning meetings, the collaborative creation of classroom rules, energizers, and closing circles.

Other SEL & Character Education Programs

Each of Vestal’s schools implements additional SEL and character education programs. At the elementary level, examples of such programs include lessons from “Kelso’s Choice”⁹ conflict resolution model, the “Second Step” program¹⁰, and a homegrown approach to “play-based learning” in which school counselors and speech therapists help primary students improve their social skills through imaginative play with peers. At the secondary level, Vestal Middle School has used the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program,¹¹ and Vestal High School has been exploring Restorative Practice.¹²



Mental Health Initiatives

Vestal has partnered with groups such as the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) to provide professional learning experiences to our faculty and staff around mental health. These have included trainings on “Mental Health First Aid” and suicide prevention. The District has also sponsored in-school and

⁸ “Principles and practices.” Responsive Classroom. <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/>

⁹ “What is Kelso’s choice?” Summit Street School. <https://www.ewsd.org/Page/5755>

¹⁰ “Second Step.” <https://www.secondstep.org/social-emotional-learning>

¹¹ “Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.” <https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/>

¹² “Circle Forward.” Institute for Restorative Initiatives. <http://www.instituteforrestorativeinitiatives.org/circleforwardbook1.html>

community viewings of mental health-related films such as *Angst* and *Like*, followed by panel discussions and a mental health fair in which community agencies set up tables promoting their services. The District has also conducted several trainings on the “Conflict Cycle” and trauma-informed practice. These initiatives have positively impacted Vestal’s students by providing them with both direct educational experiences, and by shaping the environments in which they grow by indirectly assisting parents, staff, and community members.

Counseling & Social Work Services

Educational and mental health research consistently highlights the importance of caring relationships to healthy academic and social development. At Vestal, we aim to promote resilience in our students. Students sometimes experience toxic stress and trauma as a result of factors outside of the District’s control. If left unaddressed, such “Adverse Childhood Experiences” can bring a lifetime of negative consequences.¹³ However, Masten (2001) reminds us that resilience does not come from the absence of adversity, but from the presence of protective and mitigating factors that help students learn to cope with difficult situations.¹⁴ Vestal’s school counselors, psychologists, and social worker provide students with both direct and indirect services. Direct services include meeting with individuals or small groups, or teaching lessons to a full class. For example, some of our elementary counselors facilitate a “banana splits” group to help students cope with their parental divorce. Indirect services include consulting or collaborating with classroom teachers, or coordinating wrap-around services with community agencies.

E. Promoting Physical Health



Vestal’s holistic approach to student support emphasizes the connection between mind and body. As indicated by Maslow’s hierarchy, students’ physiological needs, including both nutrition and physical exercise must be met before they can live up to their full academic and social potential.

Nutrition & Wellness

Vestal’s Food Services department ensures that all students have access to adequate nutrition every day. Qualifying students receive free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school. Additionally, school-based initiatives such as Vestal Middle School’s “Vacation Power Pack” program work to ensure that no student goes hungry, even when school is not in session. The district follows USDA guidelines for healthy meals and Smart Snacks. All school lunches include whole grains, protein, vegetables, fruit, and milk. Additionally, our district collaborates the Food and Health Network’s Farm to School program to provide nutrition



¹³ Adverse Childhood Experiences. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

¹⁴ Masten, A.S. (2001) Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), pp.227-238.

education activities and assistance. Nutrition and wellness are also incorporated into both our district’s curricular and co-curricular programming. At Vestal Middle School, for example, students in the Family and Consumer Science program learn how to prepare nutritious meals. Likewise, Vestal High School’s Garden Club collaborates with the Broome-Tioga BOCES “Rock On Café” to grow vegetables for school lunches.¹⁵

Physical Education & Sports



In Vestal’s K-12 Physical Education programs, students learn how to live healthy, active lives through engaging lessons on everything from cooperative team sports to “pickle ball” to archery. All students participate in physical education classes several days each week. Additionally, the district offers a wide variety of elementary intramural sports, as well as modified, Junior Varsity and Varsity athletics in such as sports as football, tennis, golf, cross country, volleyball, field hockey, cheerleading, soccer, swimming, bowling, basketball, indoor track, wrestling, baseball, softball, lacrosse, and track and field. Finally, the district’s annual “Running of the Bears”

event is a good example of how the district integrates physical wellness with civic education. Each year the proceeds from the 5K run/walk benefit a local non-profit organization.

Part III. Student Support Systems

In this section, we will provide details about the following student support services at Vestal.

- **Academic Intervention Services**
- **Response to Intervention**
- **Special Education**
- **English as a New Language**

A. Academic Intervention Services (AIS)

Academic Intervention Services are mandated under part 100.2(ee) of the Commissioner’s Regulations. They are “designed to help students achieve the learning standards in English Language Arts and mathematics in grades K-12, and social studies and science in grades 4-12.”

These services include the following components:

- Additional instruction that supplements the general curriculum (regular classroom instruction) and/or
- Student support services needed to address barriers to improved academic performance.¹⁶

Initial Diagnostic Screening

Upon entering the Vestal Schools, students will undergo an initial diagnostic screening in order to identify students who may need additional supports. This screening process will differ depending on the students’ grade level.

¹⁵ “Students Grow Vegetables to Be Used for School Lunches,” Spectrum News, December 6, 2019. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/binghamton/human-interest/2019/12/06/students-grow-vegetables-to-be-used-for-school-lunches->; “Garden Club Grows Lettuce for School Lunches,” Vestal Central School District. <https://www.vestal.k12.ny.us/protected/ArticleView.aspx?iid=5P33BI&dasi=230>

¹⁶ New York State Education Dept. (2000. January 7). Academic intervention services: Questions and answers. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/docs/AISQAweb.pdf>

Kindergarten

Students who enter kindergarten at the start of the school year will undergo a battery of screenings that include the following elements:

- A District-Developed Parent Questionnaire
- The Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-4)

Kindergarten Transfer Students and Grade 1 Students

- ***Early Literacy:*** Students transferring into the Vestal schools after the first semester of kindergarten will be administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS) assessment that is appropriate for their grade level. DIBELS is given as a universal screening and benchmark assessment once each trimester to all kindergarteners and first graders (with the exception of the Fall trimester in kindergarten). If one of these regular screenings will be given close to the time when a transfer student enters the Vestal schools, then they will simply take the screening with the rest of their classmates. Otherwise, the building reading teacher will conduct the screening and share the results with the classroom teacher and, if there is a concern, the building's student support team.
- ***Math:*** The classroom teachers administer the Assessment of Mathematical Understanding (AMU) as a universal screening assessment to kindergarteners at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year. A modified version of the AMU is administered in grade 1 to students of concern. If students transfer into to kindergarten or grade 1 at a time when it would be appropriate to administer the AMU, then that will serve as the diagnostic screening assessment. Otherwise, classroom teachers will use a mid- or end-of-module assessment (or other relevant classroom assessment) as the diagnostic screening for transfer students.



Transfer Students in Grade 3-8

- ***Literacy & Math:*** STAR Reading and Math are given as a universal screening and benchmarking assessments in the Fall, Winter, and Spring for students in grades 2 through 5. They are also given, at the classroom teacher's discretion, to *most* students in grades 6 through 8. STAR Reading and Math serve as the diagnostic screening assessment for all transfer students in grades 2 through 8. STAR screenings are coordinated by the student's English Language Arts and Math teachers. In the middle school, the Library Media Specialist can assist with the administration of STAR Reading and Math if the student enters school outside of the regular screening windows. The results should be reviewed by the reading and math support teachers, who will refer any concerns to the building-level student support teacher.
- ***Records Review:*** In addition to STAR Reading and Math, the records from each transfer students' prior school will be reviewed. At the elementary level the records will be reviewed by the classroom teacher. At the middle school level, they will be reviewed by the school counselor.

Transfer Students in Grades 9-12

- In grades 9-12, the diagnostic screening consist a review of transfer records by the school counselor. The counselor will share any concerns with the building principal and the relevant content teachers.

Identification of Students for AIS

Students are identified for AIS through a two-step process that includes both State test scores and a set of "multiple measures" determined by the school district. This process must be "uniformly applied at each grade level." The diagram below shows how the process works at Vestal.

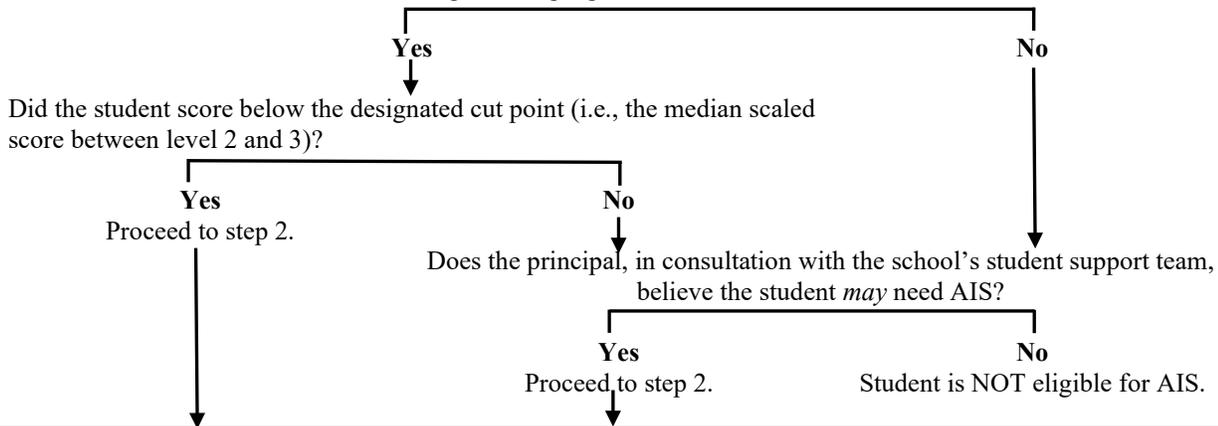
Grades K-3: Districts must provide students in the primary grades with academic intervention services if the students (1) “lack reading readiness based on an appraisal of the student including his/her knowledge of sounds and letters;” OR (2) “are determined... to be at risk of not achieving the State designated level in English language arts and/or mathematics.” However, CR 100.2(ee)(7) allows districts to provide Response to Intervention (RTI) in lieu of AIS. Consequently, *students in grades K-3 will be supported according to the provisions outlined in the district’s RTI plan. Please see the next section for details about Vestal’s RTI model.*

Grades 4-9: In grades 4-8, the two-step process shown below is used to identify students for AIS.

AIS Identification Process for Grades 4-8

Step #1: New York State Assessment Results

Did the student take the relevant NYS English Language Arts, math or science test?



Step #2: Holistic decision based on “multiple measures

The building principal, in consultation with the school’s student support team, will make the final determination as to whether a student is eligible for AIS by holistically considering the following factors.

- Subject-Specific Screening and/or Benchmark Assessments (in Math & ELA)
 - ELA
 - Running Records (Is the student significantly below grade level?)
 - AND/OR
 - STAR Reading (Did the student score below the 35th percentile?)
 - Math
 - STAR Math (Did the student score below the 35th percentile?)
- Classroom teacher recommendation based on observed classwork and classroom assessments
- Consideration of other circumstances such as the following:
 - The student was sick for the exam
 - The student transferred from outside of New York late in the school year
 - The student is an English Language Learner whose level of oral English proficiency precludes them from participating in a reading, writing, or math intervention. This may be particularly true for students at the “entering” or “emerging” linguistic levels. Principals should also consider whether the student’s main support needs are already being addressed through English as a New Language.
 - Note: English language learners and students with disabilities may still be eligible for AIS. Their eligibility cannot and should not be determined based on their membership in one of these sub-groups.

Grades 10-12: In grades 10-12, students will be eligible for AIS in English Language Arts, math, science, and/or social studies if they meet the criteria relevant to that subject area:

- English Language Arts and Social Studies: The student has been recommended for AIS by the student’s counselor in consultation with the student’s current and former content area teachers (English and/or social studies) and, if applicable, any additional support teachers (e.g., reading, English as a New Language, or special education). Recommendations will be made based teacher observations of the student’s classwork and classroom assessments including final exam scores when available.

- **Math & Science:** The student failed the relevant beginning level math or science Regents exam (i.e., Algebra 1, Earth Science, and/or Living Environment), AND/OR has been recommended for AIS by the student’s counselor in consultation with the student’s current and former math and/or science teachers.

A student’s eligibility for AIS should be re-assessed at least annually so that students may enter or exit AIS services as needed. *At all grade levels, final determinations of about AIS eligibility will be made by the building principal.*

The student support team must come up with a plan to provide a student with AIS by no later than the end of the first semester. Parents should be notified of this plan at the outset of AIS.

Description of AIS Services at Vestal

Vestal offers many forms of AIS. Decisions about the type, frequency, and duration of AIS will be determined by the building principal in consultation with the building’s student support team. All Academic Intervention Services are provided by qualified staff.¹⁷ This could include reading or math support teachers, special education teachers, or other teachers with content-specific expertise. The intensity of student’s AIS should be based on their level of need as determined by multiple measures and sources of evidence. Students with higher need should receive more intense services. The intensity of a student’s AIS may vary by frequency, duration, and/or the level of individualization.

At Vestal, some common examples of AIS include:

- **Stand-Alone Support through a “Workshop” Model:** Students may be scheduled for a specialized “workshop” in which a content specialist works with them to learn the content and/or skills they need in order to achieve the grade-level proficiency standard. For example, students may attend a reading workshop in which a literacy specialist works with students in a small group or one-on-one to boost reading their decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills. The district offers workshops in reading, writing, and math at both the elementary and secondary levels. At the secondary level, the district also offers workshops in science and social studies.
- **Integrated Support:** This involves a content specialist and/or a special education teacher providing students with additional support within the regular classroom. This support could take different forms depending on the students’ needs. For example, it might involve co-teaching a lesson with the regular classroom teacher. It might also involve pulling students aside and working with the students to improve knowledge and/or skills relevant to the regular lesson. Integrated support might also involve providing additional scaffolding and support to make the regular lesson more accessible to AIS recipients.
- **Student Support Services:** In some cases, building support teams may determine that the primary reason why a student is not meeting grade-level proficiency standards is primarily related to non-academic issues such as social and emotional challenges, poor attendance, etc. In those cases, students may receive student support services in lieu of (or in addition to) academic intervention services. Examples of student support services include individual or group counseling services, attendance interventions, etc.



¹⁷ Staff are considered qualified if their assignment aligns to their area of certification and the district has considered other relevant factors including experience, unique training, etc.

- **Extended Curriculum:** In some cases, AIS takes the form of “extended curriculum.” This means that students are given additional time and help so that they can master the relevant skills and content. At the high school level, extended curriculum is often provided by “stretch courses.” A stretch course extends learning over a longer period of time than would typically be offered. For example, the Elements of



Algebra A and B courses stretch preparation for the Common Core Algebra Regents over two years instead of one. These courses are designed to help students fill in any gaps in their mathematical knowledge and skills, in order to make Algebra 1 content accessible to them. Elements of Geometry and Trigonometry, which provides an additional year of instruction before students move on to CC Geometry or CC Algebra 2, is another example of stretch course. In other cases, the curriculum is extended as students receive an additional lab period for one or more days of the six-day cycle. At the high school level, this model is used

in some sections of courses like Common Core Algebra, and Earth Science Extended.

- **Within Class Staffing that Reduces Student-Teacher Ratio:** This includes any staffing configuration that reduces the typical student-teacher ratio AND, in so doing, provides students with additional help. Courses in the AIM program, for example, meet this requirement by capping enrollment at no more than 12 students per class.
- **Summer or Extended School Day:** Intervention and/or enrichment programs that occur outside of the regular school day including after school, on weekends, or over the summer.
- **Progress Monitoring Only:** Sometimes the principal in consultation with the building’s student support team may determine that a student is likely to meet state proficiency levels, but they want to continue to closely monitor the student’s progress. In such cases, staff will monitor student progress on at least a quarterly basis. If it is determined that that the student is not likely to meet state proficiency levels, then the staff member responsible for the progress monitoring will bring the student’s case to the attention of the building’s student support team.

Please see Appendix 2 for a more complete description of AIS at the secondary level by subject area.

Parental Notification & Involvement

The Vestal schools are committed to engaging parents, caregivers, and community members as partners in supporting students. The district will communicate about AIS in the following ways:

- **The Comprehensive Education Plan:** This plan will be reviewed by the District’s Student Support Committee and, if necessary, revised at least biannually. The revised plans will be approved by the Vestal Board of Education and made available to parents and community members through the district website.
- **Parental Notification Letters:** Parents will be notified in writing when a student is provided with academic intervention services. That notification will provide a summary of the type of academic intervention services to be provided, a description of the process used to identify the student for the services, and an explanation of how the student is expected to benefit from the services. If a student’s academic intervention services are ended during the school year, the district will also provide parents with a written notification summarizing why the principal and building support team believe the student is likely to meet the state proficiency benchmark.
- **Annual AIS Parent Orientation:** Every fall each of the Vestal schools holds an AIS Parent Orientation night. The parents and caregivers of students who receive academic intervention services are invited to hear an overview of the district’s AIS processes. The session is followed by a question-and-answer session with the building principal or their designee and some members of the student support team.

- **Quarterly Progress Reports:** Teachers will complete AIS progress reports on a quarterly basis. In grades K-8, AIS teachers provide written narrative reports. In grades 9-12, AIS students will receive progress reports in the form of specially designated comments on the interim report cards.

Exiting AIS

Decisions about AIS often last for an entire school year. The process above will be re-applied annually. Consequently, some students may exit AIS if, through the process outlined above, they are found to be no longer eligible.

In some cases, by design, a student’s intervention may last for less than a year. For example, a student whose AIS comes from taking a semester-long elective.

In some cases, students may exit AIS during the school year. Such decisions will be made by the building principal by reapplying the process outlined above in light of the students’ recent academic growth. A student may exit AIS during the year if the principal determines that the student “is shown to be likely to meet or exceed the State-designated performance level on the next State assessment” by meeting the levels specified above in the “multiple measures” portion of the district AIS identification process.

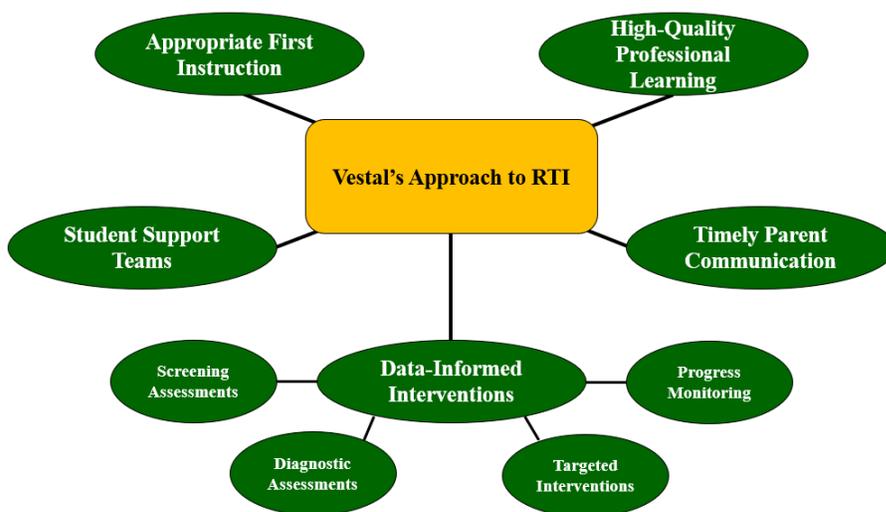


B. Response to Intervention

Part 100.2(ii) of the Commissioner’s Regulations requires districts to implement a Response to Intervention (RTI) model for literacy in at least the primary grades. The regulations define RTI as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions about an individual student.”¹⁸ RTI minimally includes the following elements:

- Appropriate first instruction
- Screenings to identify students who may need additional help
- Targeted intervention/instruction designed to meet the students’ learning needs
- Progress monitoring assessments to assess the effectiveness of interventions
- Written notification of parents when a student qualifies for an intervention¹⁹

Figure 7



¹⁸ NYSED. (2010, Oct.). Response to Intervention: Guidance for New York State school districts. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/RTI/guidance-oct10.pdf>

¹⁹ Commissioner’s Regulations 100.2(ii) Response to Intervention Programs. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1002.html#ii>

RTI is a framework designed to provide early identification and intervention for students in kindergarten through grade three who may need additional academic support in the areas of reading and math. The goal of RTI is to prevent and/or remediate difficulties in reading and math at an early age before State assessments are given, and often before a formal referral to the Committee for Special Education.

Appropriate First Instruction

Vestal’s K-5 English Language Arts Curriculum

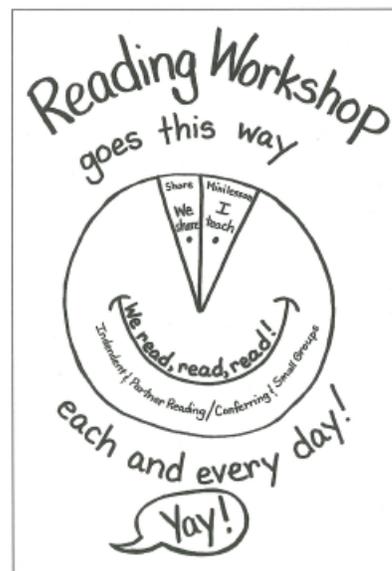
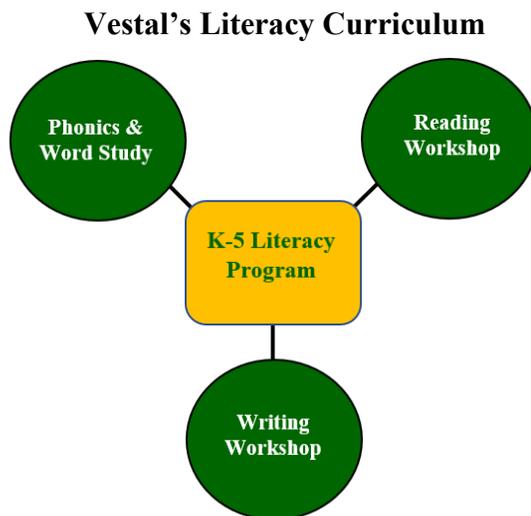
At the elementary level, Vestal’s ELA curriculum adopts a balanced approach to literacy. Our curriculum includes the following components: (1) Phonics & Word Study, (2) Reading workshop, and (3) Writing workshop.²⁰ More specifically, we use the Columbia Teachers College (CTC) units of study for reading and writing. In kindergarten through grade 2, we use the CTC phonics curriculum.²¹ In grades 3 through 5, we use the “Words Their Way” approach to word study.²² The reading, writing and word study curricular components are aligned with each other so that the skills and knowledge in all part are mutually reinforcing.

The CTC phonics curriculum is based on research-based practices developed by scholars such as Isabel Beck, Donna Scanlon, Pat and Jim Cunningham, Rollanda O’Connor, Marilyn Adams, Tim Rasinski, Donald Bear, Wiley Blevins, and Marie Clay. In the CTC phonics units, “high-leverage” phonics concepts are taught explicitly, but in fun and engaging ways that are developmentally appropriate for students in the primary grades.²³

The CTC reading and writing workshop lessons include the following components:

- **A Mini Lesson:** The teacher conducts a brief mini-lesson in which they model a particular reading or writing skill. Minilessons are interactive, with students working with a partner to discuss the teaching point.
- **Independent Work Time:** Students are sent off to read or write independently. They are expected to integrate their learning from the minilesson into their independent work.
- **Conferring:** Teachers systematically move between students, examining their work, questioning them, and coaching them individually. Teachers also use this time to pull together small groups of students to work on a particular skill.
- **A Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:** About half-way through the independent work time, the teacher briefly interrupts the class to make an observation reinforcing a key teaching point from the minilesson.
- **An End-of-Workshop Share:** After working independently, the lesson concludes with students sharing pieces of their writing or observations from their reading.

Figure 8



²⁰ Calkins, L., & Ehrenworth, M. (2016). Growing extraordinary writers: Leadership decisions to raise the level of writing across a school and a district. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 7-18.

²¹ “A Workshop Curriculum for Grades K-8.” Calkins and TCRWP Colleagues. <https://www.unitsofstudy.com/introduction>

²² The Words Their Way Series. <https://www.pearson.com/us/higher-education/series/Words-Their-Way-Series/2281883.html>

²³ Units of Study in Phonics: Grades K-2. Lucy Calkins & TCRWP Colleagues. <https://www.unitsofstudy.com/phonics/>

The workshop model simultaneously introduces students to a variety of different genres of reading and writing, but it also grants them significant “voice and choice,” as they learn to work independently on books and written pieces that *they* find interesting. The workshop model is inclusive, providing students with strong first instruction while allowing them to work at their own pace, and to read at a level that is appropriate for each individual.

Notably, students spend the vast majority of their time reading and writing. This is in line with literacy research that has consistently affirmed the importance of time on task for the development of fluent reading.²⁴ For more information about research base that undergirds Vestal’s ELA curriculum, please see Appendix 1.

Vestal’s K-6 Mathematics Curriculum

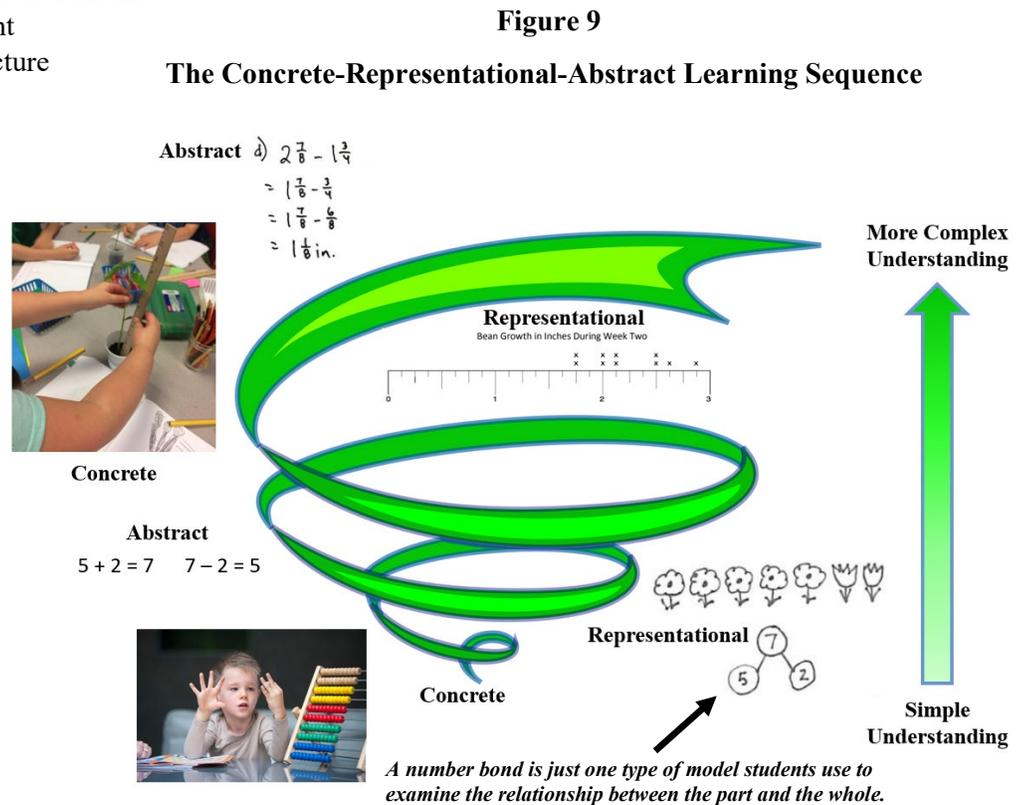
The Eureka Math Modules provide the foundation for Vestal’s math curriculum in kindergarten through grade 6. This curriculum was originally designed to implement the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.²⁵ Vestal is currently working with Broome-Tioga BOCES to adapt it to [New York’s Next Generation Mathematics Learning Standards](#).²⁶

The Eureka Math Modules interweaves the following three components into a “clearly sequenced and comprehensive educational program:”²⁷

- Challenging Mathematical Content
- Meaningful Assessment
- Engaging Lesson Structure

The Eureka curriculum, written as a story of units, sequences mathematical content so that it is focused and aligned across and within grade levels. It is structured as a spiral curriculum to deepen students’ understandings over time.

As illustrated in Figure 9, students develop more complex understandings by moving through a concrete-representational-abstract learning sequence within lessons, across units, and across years. The concepts, models, and intentional language build as students progress. The curriculum is constructed so that, when students learn new concepts and skills, they are simultaneously reminded of what they learned previously. Ultimately, as students learn the curriculum, this helps them experience mathematics as a coherent system of knowledge that makes sense.



²⁴ Allington, R. L. (2013). [What really matters when working with struggling readers](#). *The reading teacher*, 66(7), 520-530.

²⁵ National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Math_Standards1.pdf

²⁶ New York State Education Department. (2019). New York State Next Generation Mathematics Learning Standards. Retrieved from <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/nys-next-generation-mathematics-p-12-standards.pdf>

²⁷ EngageNY. (2013, July 4). [“How to implement a story of units.”](#) p.3.

Consider the following example of a kindergartener moving through the concrete, representational, and abstract learning sequence. This is illustrated in Figure 10. They might count on their fingers or move beads on a rekenrek (a type of abacus). This helps them understand the concept of numbers. A next step might involve representing the objects they are counting with pictures. A kindergartener learning addition, for example, might add flowers by drawing five daisies and five tulips.

Figure 10 The Transition from Concrete to Representational

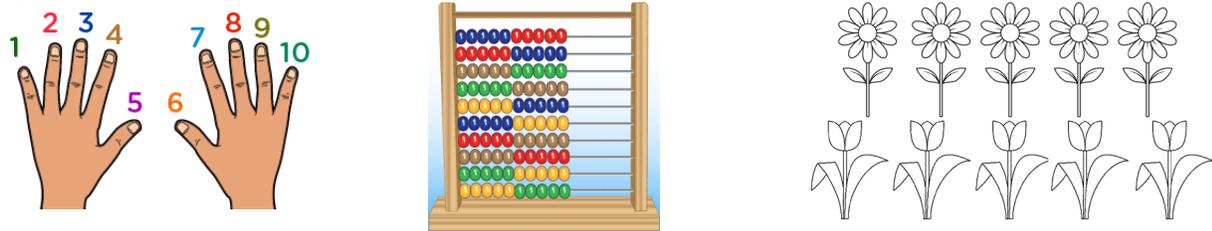
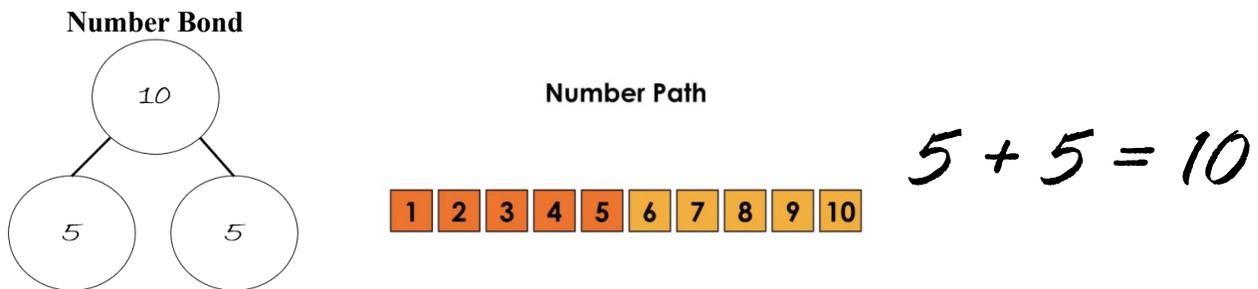


Figure 11 illustrates how the student might learn to represent the addition problem through a variety of models such as number bonds, or number lines called number paths. These different models help students learn the concept of addition by allowing them to visualize it different ways. Finally, students will learn to express the same problem abstractly, using numbers and symbols.

Figure 11 The Transition from Representational to Abstract

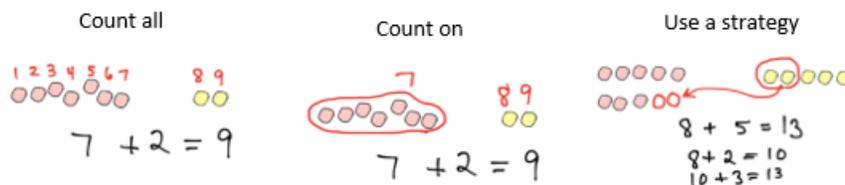


This use of “multiple means of representation” is an accessibility feature that is built into the Eureka Math curriculum to help students, including those with disabilities or more limited English language proficiency, understand complex mathematical concepts.

The Eureka Math curriculum is “vertically aligned” so that students build on their prior knowledge as they progress through a given year and across grade levels. Teachers use common language, models, and instructional techniques to assure that students deepen their understandings over time.

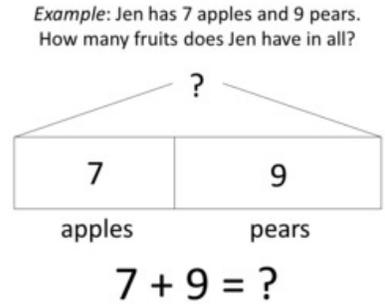
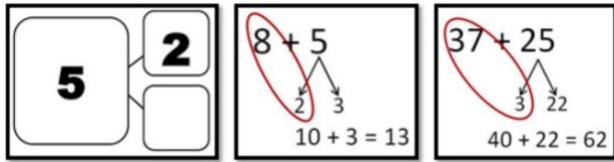
To help illustrate how Eureka’s vertically aligned spiral curriculum works, consider how the concept of addition unfolds by the time a student reaches fifth grade. While instruction will still toggle between the concrete, representational and abstract, students’ understandings become much more sophisticated. Consider, as an example show in Figure 12, where the progression of addition moves through three phases of counting.

Figure 12



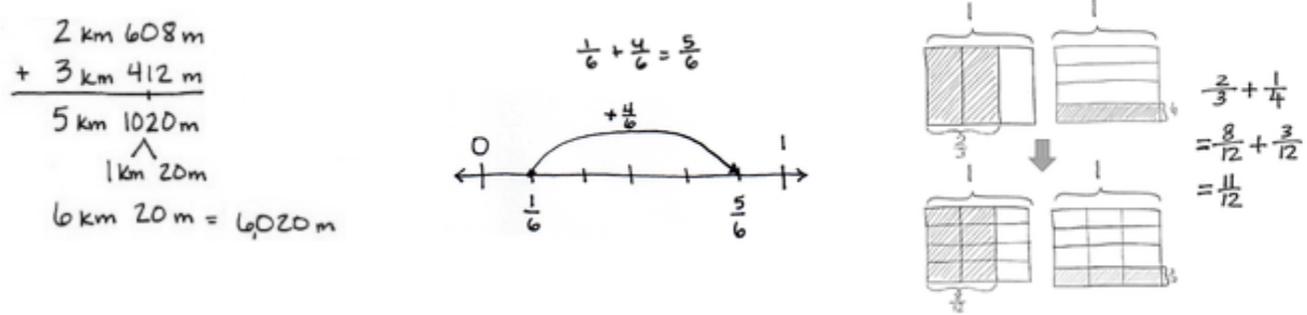
These concepts build across grade levels as students also explore expressing numbers as a part-whole relationship. Models, such as number bonds and tape diagrams aid students in flexibly using numbers as they learn many strategies to add.

Figure 13 Examples of part-whole, strategy development, and using numbers flexibly

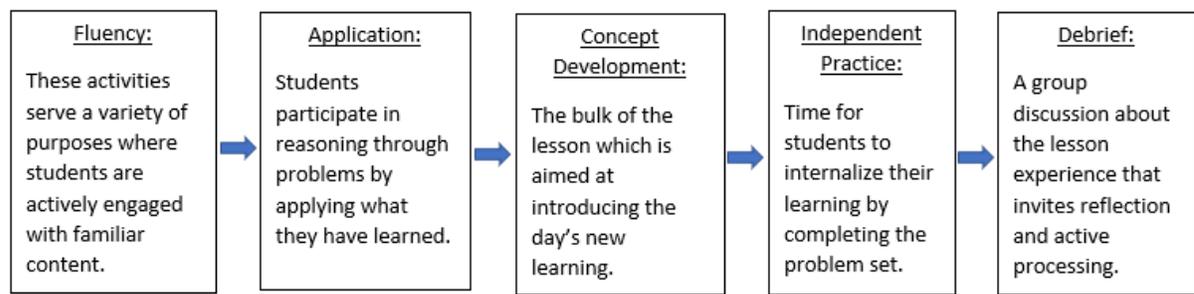


This brings us to the use of a standard algorithm (i.e., a set of steps) for addition along with the ability to add fractions with/without common denominators.

Figure 14 The Standard Algorithm and Other Representations



Typical Daily Math Lesson Structure: Eureka Math
Figure 15



Each Eureka Math lesson follows a similar sequence. This structure balances fluency work with concept development. After fluency work such as a “sprint,” students are given an application problem. This requires them to apply their prior knowledge to a new situation. This is followed by a mini lesson in which the teacher directly introduces a new concept and walks students through problems intended to build their understanding. Concept development is followed by independent practice and a full-group debriefing activity. The lesson often ends with an “exit ticket,” which is usually a problem that requires students to further demonstrate and develop the conceptual understanding introduced in the mini lesson. Teachers will often reinforce the lesson by giving the student additional practice problems for homework.

Data-Informed Interventions

A key component of an RTI framework is the use of data to inform educational decision-making at the individual student, classroom, and school levels. The RTI framework involves using assessment data for screening, diagnosis, and progress monitoring.

- *Screening Assessments*: The purpose of a screening assessment is to identify students who may be in need of additional support or enrichment. Screenings are universal in that they are given to all students. The district has identified four performance levels for each screening. If a student scores at a level 1 or 2, then they may need additional support. A screening assessment is much like a blood test at the doctor's office. It does not necessarily tell us everything we need to know in order to teach a student, but it tells us that we should look into the student's growth and success more closely.

The following universal screening assessments are used in kindergarten through grade two:

Kindergarten and Grade 1

- Reading: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)
- Math: The Assessment of Mathematical Understanding (AMU)

Grade 2

- STAR Reading
- STAR Math

- *Diagnostic Assessments*: Students who score at levels 1 or 2 on a screening assessment, or who are referred to the student support team with a concern, may need to take an additional diagnostic assessment administered by a reading or math specialist. This assessment will give the specialist additional information about how to best support the student's growth and success.
- *Targeted Intervention*: Based on the results of the diagnostic assessment, the qualitative observations of the student's teachers, and their collective professional judgement, a reading or math specialist will select an appropriate research-based targeted instruction intervention in order to see if they can help the student accelerate his or her growth. These interventions would be considered to be at the Tier 2 or 3 level depending on the level of intensity.
- *Progress Monitoring*: In order to assess the degree to which the student is responding to the intervention, and to decide if the intervention should be adjusted or changed, the reading or math specialist will regularly administer a short "progress monitoring" assessment. He or she will track the data from these assessments in an appropriate data collection platform such as RTI Edge or eDoctrina. They will bring progress monitoring back to the building's student support team

Student Support Teams

The student support team will work with the interventionist and classroom teacher to discuss and problem-solve around the student's learning challenge. After analyzing the student's progress monitoring and diagnostic data, and considering the qualitative observations of his or her teachers, the team may recommend that the student's intervention be ended, that it be changes (including escalation to Tier 3), or that the student be referred to the Committee for Special Education to see if he or she may have a disability.

Timely Parent Communication

Students' needs are best met when the adults in their lives collaborate in their best interest. It is therefore important that the district keep parents and guardians updated as to their students' needs and progress. The district sends an RTI letter home when a student is identified for any intervention that goes beyond differentiated instruction by the regular classroom teacher. This letter identifies the type of intervention the student will receive, as well as its minimum frequency, setting, duration, and providers. Once the intervention is in process, parents can expect quarterly progress reports, which provide a narrative account of how the student is responding to the intervention. Finally, if an intervention ceases before the end of the school year, parents will receive an RTI exit letter stating why the intervention has been discontinued.

High-Quality Professional Learning

In order to meet the needs of all students, the district realizes that faculty and staff need to have ongoing professional learning experiences. The district provides teachers with workshops and/or instructional coaching to help them address State curriculum standards, plan and execute lessons using authentic and student-centered strategies calculated to promote deep conceptual understanding, and assess student learning. Professional learning experiences address both the content to be taught and ambitious methods that can be used to teach it well. This professional learning addresses both “first instruction” and intervention. More details can be found in the district’s annually revised professional learning plan.²⁸ Finally, the district-wide student support committee meets several times each year to discuss the implementation of the Comprehensive Student Support Plan, re-evaluate, and suggest future revisions.

C. Special Education Services

Special Education is governed by Parts 200 and 201 of the Commissioner’s Regulations and by federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Part 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In New York State, special education is governed by Parts 200 and 201 of the Commissioner’s Regulations. Special education services are “specially designed individualized or group instruction or special services or programs to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.”²⁹ Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible student, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student’s disability; and to ensure access of the student to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards that apply to all students.

Procedures for Referral, Evaluation, and Identification of Needs for Special Education

Students are classified with disabilities based on a multi-step process described below.

Referral:

A student suspected of having a disability shall be referred in writing to the chairperson of the district’s committee on special education or to the building administrator of the school which the student attends or is eligible to attend for an individual evaluation and determination of eligibility for special education programs and services. The school district must initiate a referral and promptly request parental consent to evaluate the student to determine if the student needs special education services and programs if a student has not made adequate progress after an appropriate period of time when provided instruction as described in section 100.2(ii) of this Title. Referrals can be made by any of the following individuals:

- A student’s parent or a person in parental relation
- The school psychologist
- The commissioner or designee of a public agency with responsibility for the education of the student
- A designee of an education program affiliated with a childcare institution with CSE responsibility pursuant to section 4002(3) of the Education Law

Individual Evaluation

The individual evaluation must be at no cost to the parent, and the initial evaluation must include at least:

- A physical examination
- A psychological examination (if appropriate)
- A social history
- Observation of the student in their current educational setting
- Other appropriate assessments or evaluations that are related to the area(s) of suspected disability

²⁸ Vestal Central School District Professional Learning Plan for Continued Teacher and Leader Education. (2021, Nov. 16). Retrieved from <https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/Prof-Dev-Plan2021-22.pdf>

²⁹ New York State Education Department. (2002, May). Special education in New York State for children ages 3-21: A parent’s guide. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/parentsguide.pdf>

The results of these evaluations are shared with the parent and the CSE/CPSE.

The CSE/CPSE includes the following individuals:

- The student's parent(s)
- A regular education teacher
- A special education teacher
- A school psychologist
- A representative of the school district who is qualified to provide or supervise special education and who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and the availability of resources in the district
- An interpreter (if necessary)
- A school physician (if requested)
- An additional parent of another student with a disability in the district (if requested)
- Other persons having knowledge or special expertise regarding the student included related services personnel (if appropriate)
- The student (if appropriate)

Determination of Eligibility

After the evaluation is complete, the CSE/CPSE will meet. The parent is invited to attend the meeting and review the results of the individual evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services.

A student shall not be determined eligible for special education if the determinant factor is:

- lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, development, reading fluency (including oral reading skills) and reading comprehension strategies
- lack of appropriate instruction in math
- limited English proficiency.

Creation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

If a student is deemed eligible for special education services, then the CSE/CPSE must develop an individualized education plan or IEP. The district shall ensure that the recommendations on a student's IEP are implemented.

The Continuum of Special Education Services

In Vestal, the continuum of special education services are outlined in the district special education plan and are continually evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of our students.

Progress Reporting for Students with Disabilities

Parents of students with disabilities receive written narrative reports describing progress toward the student's IEP goals.³⁰ At the elementary level, special education progress reports are provided each trimester. At the secondary level, special education progress reports are done quarterly.

³⁰ New York State Education Department. (2010, June 30). Reporting progress to parents. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/iepguidance/progress.htm>

D. English as a New Language (ENL) Services

In this section, we highlight important information about ENL services. More information can be found in the “Frequently Asked Questions” document in Appendix 3, or by visiting our district’s website, hovering over the “District Info” menu at the top, and clicking [“English Language Learners.”](#)

The Purpose of ENL

The Vestal Central School District’s ENL program supports English learners as they acquire social and academic language proficiency. The aim of ENL is to help English Language Learners (ELLs) acquire English proficiency while supporting their learning across other content areas. ENL services are mandated by part 154 of the Commissioner’s Regulations.³¹ Students with significant exposure to languages other than English are screened for English proficiency when they enroll in a New York State school. Qualifying students are assigned a linguistic level of Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, or Expanding. The type and intensity of the services they receive depend on level. Students may receive “integrated” ENL in the regular classroom, “stand alone” ENL in a “pull out” setting, or some combination of both. ELLs may also qualify for AIS, RTI, and/or special education. At the same time, language proficiency should be carefully considered when making decisions about whether it is appropriate to provide any of these other services.



ELL Identification

The ELL identification process begins at registration when parents complete the “Home Language Questionnaire.” (HLQ) On this form, they list all languages to which their children have been exposed and provide information about the student’s proficiency in each linguistic modality. When any language other than English is listed on any part of the HLQ, the document is sent to an ENL teacher for evaluation. The ENL teacher reviews any transfer records. When a student transfers from another school in New York State, then the student maintains the same ELL status they had in their prior district. Otherwise, the ENL teacher conducts an informal interview with the student and (usually) the parent. If, based on the results of the interview, the student’s primary language is clearly English, then the student may be considered a non-ELL. If there is any indication that the student may be an ELL, then they are administered the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL). Except for some kindergarteners, this examination assesses the student’s proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Based on this test, the student will be assigned one of the following proficiency levels: entering, emerging, transitioning, expanding, or commanding. Commanding students are not eligible for ENL services. For all others, the type and extent of ENL services is based on their linguistic level. A detailed flow chart outlining the full ELL identification process can be found in Appendix 4.

³¹ Regulations Concerning English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners <http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/regulations-concerning-english-language-learnersmultilingual-learners>

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity as an Asset

The district celebrates the tremendous linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity of its students and their families. At Vestal, we believe exposure to such diversity enriches the experiences of all students. Vestal’s ENL program promotes linguistic and academic excellence by creating a culturally responsive instructional environment that builds upon students’ prior knowledge, skills, talents, interests, and experiences.

The ability to speak, understand, read and write more than one language as a strength that expands students’ horizons. Vestal is proud of the fact that our students speak over 30 languages other than English. The district encourages the families of English learners to maintain their home

languages. Doing so provides many cultural, academic and cognitive benefits. For example, research has shown that developing competence in another language can help students learn English more easily.³² The district celebrates bilingualism and is currently seeking new ways to encourage and support students in attaining biliteracy. However, because the district does not have large numbers of students at a given grade level who speak the same language, Vestal does not currently offer any bilingual education programs.

Vestal has a thriving Seal of Biliteracy program. The Seal of Biliteracy is a special distinction that students may earn at graduation. In order to qualify, students must demonstrate proficiency in all four linguistic modalities in both English and at least one other language. To date, forty-two Vestal students have been awarded the Seal. Of those students, seven have been awarded the Seal in three languages, and two earned it four languages. As of 2020, the latter distinction is one that had been earned by only five students across all of New York State.

The success of Vestal students in the Seal of Biliteracy program is a testament to both the high-quality world language instruction provided by the district’s teachers, and to the dedication of multilingual families who have worked to pass their linguistic and cultural heritage on to their children.

The Structure & Location of ENL Services at Vestal

English learners are assigned to regular classrooms with peers whose first language is English. Vestal’s program includes both “integrated” and “stand-alone” English as a New Language services. In the integrated setting, ENL teachers collaborate with a teacher in another subject area to provide language support in the regular classroom. In most cases English learners also leave the regular classroom for part of the day in order

Figure 16

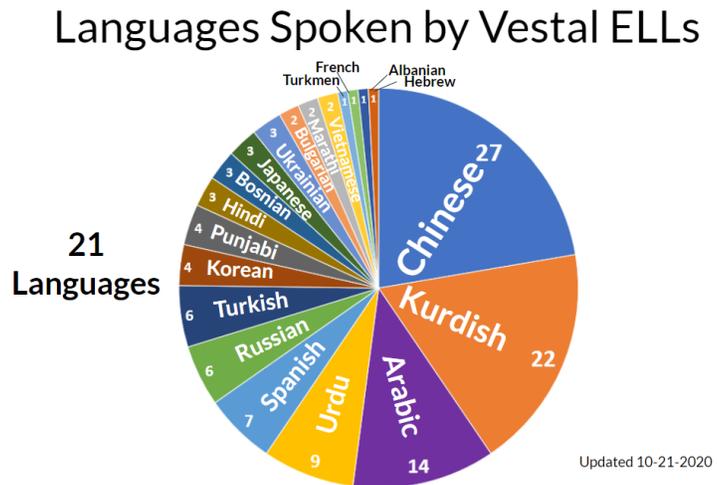
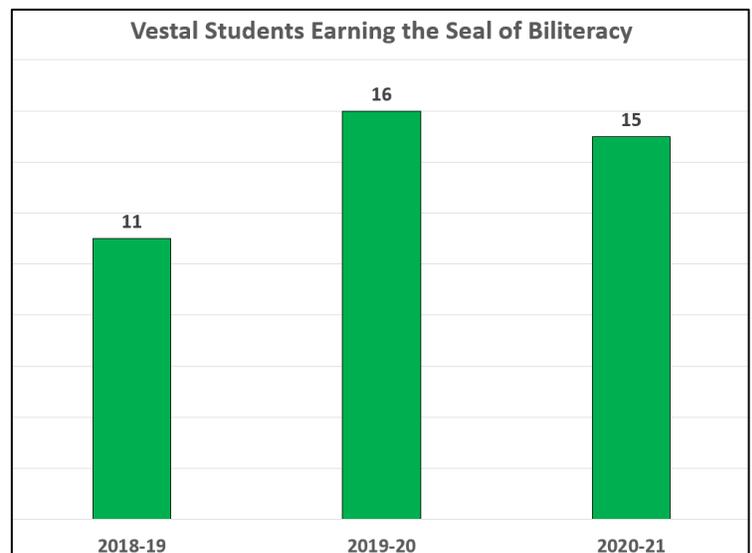


Figure 17



³² Ferlazzo, L. (2017, January 28). Response: ELL students’ home language is an asset, not a ‘barrier.’ *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-response-ell-students-home-language-is-an-asset-not-a-barrier/2017/01>

to receive “stand-alone” instruction by a certified ENL teacher. The duration of stand-alone instruction is based on their language level. This instruction generally occurs in small groups with other English learners who have similar needs. The precise focus of stand-alone instruction depends on the unique linguistic and academic needs and interests of English learners.

Vestal Central School District currently offers English as a New Language programs at the following schools:

- African Road Elementary
- Vestal Hills Elementary
- Vestal Middle School
- Vestal High School

Students requiring English as a New Language services who live in attendance zones for Clayton Avenue Elementary, Glenwood Elementary or Tioga Hills Elementary Schools will attend one of the other schools in which ENL programs are offered.

RTI & AIS Considerations for English Language Learners (ELLs)

It typically takes ELLs five to seven years to fully acquire English.³³ Therefore, the lack of English language proficiency can be a significant, even if temporary, barrier to learning in literacy and other areas.

Scholars have identified the following recommendations for promoting literacy among ELLs:³⁴

1. Screen for reading problems and monitor progress
2. Provide intensive small group reading interventions
3. Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction
4. Develop academic English
5. Schedule regular peer-assisted learning opportunities.

Vestal addresses each of these recommendations through the English Language Arts curriculum, English as a New Language (ENL) services, and the district’s RTI and AIS models.

First Instruction

Like all other students, ELLs are entitled learning that is meaningful and intellectually challenging. The fact that a student may be learning English does not mean that he or she cannot reason at a sophisticated level if given the proper scaffolding and support. It is essential that teachers hold high academic expectations for ELLs while also providing the support necessary for them to meet those expectations.

Classroom teachers provide ELLs with a variety of supports with the regular classroom. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles are embedded in the curricula experienced by all students. For example, the Eureka Math series makes extensive use of modeling, providing students with multiple means of representation. In other cases, teachers differentiate instruction in order to accommodate ELLs. The English Language Arts curriculum includes reading and writing workshops and word study (CTC Phonics at the primary level and “Words their Way” at the intermediate level. All three of these elements allow teachers to tailor instruction to a student’s level of readiness.

Interventions for ELLs

Like all Vestal elementary students, ELLs undergo several universal screening assessments in ELA and Math each year. Depending on their grade levels, students take the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

³³ Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters, *Working papers on bilingualism*, 19 121-129.

³⁴ Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades. IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2007-4011. *What Works Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497258.pdf>

(DIBELS), STAR Reading, STAR Math, the Fountas & Pinnell Reading Level assessments. These assessments along with other curriculum-based measures and teacher observations can be used to identify ELLs who are in need of additional interventions.

Judging whether or not an ELL is learning at an adequate pace can be a challenge. Firstly, standardized tests commonly use native English speakers as their norm groups. This can make it difficult to distinguish between a language acquisition issue and a more specific difficulty in a content area. Secondly researchers have many variables that commonly influence a student's rate of language acquisition.³⁵ Some factors that can influence language acquisition include:

1. The Quality of ENL and ELA Instruction: Teacher efficacy, curriculum, access to appropriate interventions, etc.
2. English Knowledge: Prior exposure to English including familiarity with Roman alphabet and numbers, speaking, reading, and writing, the “distance” between English and the home language, etc.
3. Proficiency in the Home Language: Oral proficiency, literacy, proficiency in writing
4. Educational Background: The quality and quantity of schooling in their home language
5. Sociocultural, Emotional, and Economic Factors: Poverty, Mobility, Exposure to Trauma, Violence or Abuse, Refugee Status, Parents Educational Background
6. Other Factors: Learning disability, language ego, learning style, student personality, degree of English immersion outside school, etc.

As a very rough rule of thumb, we like to see most ELLs advance about one linguistic level each year. For a more specific literacy indicators, teachers can use the New Language Arts Progressions³⁶ to estimate what a student at a particular linguistic level should be ready to learn. However, this information may not be adequate in cases in which a student is not able to progress through linguistic levels.

Like all students, ELLs should receive interventions if there is reason to believe they are not progressing at an adequate pace in a content area. At the same time, the district recognizes that interventions can be counter-productive if they are not well-aligned with content-area instruction or if they cause the student to miss other valuable learning experiences. Any decision to provide ELLs with interventions that go beyond what they receive in their regular classroom or through ENL services must take a holistic view of the student's needs. Wherever possible, student support teams should consult with both the student's classroom teacher and their ENL teacher in order to design an intervention that best meets their needs.

ELLs with Disabilities

ELL Identification for Students with Disabilities.

When a possible ELL enters the district with a pre-existing Individualized Education Plan (IEP), staff should carefully consider both the student's linguistic profile and the nature of their disability before proceeding with the ELL identification process. Before administering the NYSITELL to a student with a disability, the district convenes a Language Proficiency Team (LPT) minimally consisting of an ENL teacher, a Director of Instruction, and the Director of Special Education or her designee. The student's parent or guardian is also invited to attend. Where appropriate, classroom or special education teachers, and an interpreter are also invited to join the LPT. After considering the student's profile, the LPT recommends one of the following:

- Administer the NYSITELL without special testing accommodations
- Administer the NYSITELL with certain testing accommodations
- Do not administer the NYSITELL

³⁵ Paradis, J. (2011). Individual differences in child English second language acquisition: Comparing child-internal and child-external factors. *Linguistic approaches to bilingualism*, 1(3), 213-237. Retrieved from <https://www.ualberta.ca/linguistics/media-library/chesl/documents/paradisindividualdifferences2011.pdf>

³⁶ New York State Education Department. (2014). New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative>

This third option should only be recommended if it seems likely that testing the student would result in their *misidentification* as an ELL as a result of a disability rather than a bona fide language acquisition need.

Diagnosing ELLs with Disabilities

ELLs who have disabilities or other serious learning difficulties should receive more intensive interventions including, where appropriate, special education services. Determining whether a student should receive such services can be challenging given the difficulty of finding appropriately normed assessments. To ensure that ELLs receive disability classifications when, and only when, appropriate, the student support team and/or the Committee for Special Education should use appropriately normed alternative language assessments wherever possible. Likewise, bilingual psychologists and/or interpreters should be used when necessary. Appendix 5 provides checklists of questions to consider when deciding whether a student should be classified as an ELL with a disability.

Exiting ENL Services

Students may exit ENL services in either of the following ways:

1. Testing at the “Commanding” level on the NYSESLAT (New York State English as a Second Language Test).
2. Testing at the “Expanding” level on the NYSESLAT AND either scoring at a level 3 or 4 on the New York State English Language Arts test or scoring at least 65 on the English Regents exam.

Once a student formally exits ENL services, they are considered a “Former ELL.” As such they are entitled to testing accommodations, and transitional services for two years after exiting. Transitional services can take the form of 90 minutes per week of integrated ENL or another form as outlined by the District’s Comprehensive ELL Educational Plan.

Interpretation and Translation Services

The district is committed to helping all parents interact with the school district in the language with which they are most comfortable. This may include the provision of oral interpretation for parent-teacher conferences or other important meetings. It also includes the translation of important correspondence such as progress reports, disciplinary referrals, special education paperwork, etc. When a parent registers their child for school, they can indicate the language in which they would like to receive oral and written communications. Parents may change their preference at any time by notifying the district through a teacher or administrator. Requests for interpretation are coordinated by the Director of Instruction.

Part IV. Conclusion

The Vestal Central School District is dedicated to meeting the needs of all students in a holistic way that merges intervention with enrichment to promote, not only growth and achievement among our students, but also their social and emotional wellbeing and overall resilience. We take, as a given, that most students will need something special, whether it be intervention or enrichment, at some point on their journey through the Vestal schools.

The primary purpose of this Comprehensive Student Support Plan is articulate the district's vision for student support. The plan is intended for multiple audiences. It is meant to inform parents and community members about our existing programs and processes. At the same time, it is also meant to be both descriptive and prescriptive for district faculty and staff. This plan articulates both structures as they are, and process as the district intends for them to be. At the same time, an over-arching purpose of the plan is to articulate, for both internal and external stakeholders, an aspirational vision of what student support could and should be. At Vestal we believe that it is important to create systems to meet the needs of all students. However, we also think those systems need to be flexible. We encourage our staff to engage in a process of mutual adaptation as they use their professional judgment to implement the district's systems and structures in ways that seem most likely to help the district realize its overall holistic vision of support. We know this plan will continue to evolve as faculty and staff face new realities on the ground and craft new solutions to meet students' needs.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Research Base for Vestal’s Literacy Curriculum

The Simple View of Reading & Scarborough’s Rope

Reading is a highly complex skill. Although humans are hardwired to learn to speak, reading and writing are skills that must be learned.³⁷ In 1986, Gough and Tunmer advanced a “simple view” of reading, arguing that reading comprehension was a function of both decoding and language comprehension.³⁸ Decoding is the act of using letter-sound relationships to pronounce written words. Language comprehension is the ability to make meaning from oral or written language.

In 2001, Scarborough built upon the simple view using the metaphor of a rope to explain how students learn to read.³⁹ Figure 1 illustrates this model. He suggested that sub-components of language comprehension—background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures (i.e., grammar), verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge—could be understood as strands that wind ever more tightly around each other as students learn. Likewise, he argued, that a “word recognition” consisting of phonological awareness (i.e., the ability to recognize and work with the sounds in spoke language), decoding, and sight word recognition could be said to make up a second strand. With practice, he claimed students learn to read more and more fluently and with better overall comprehension.

Vestal implements the Phonics, Reading, and Writing Units of Study, developed by Lucy Calkins and the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, as our primary elementary literacy curriculum. These literacy units align with Scarborough’s model in that they recognize the importance of both foundational skills (phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition) and meaning making (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge).

Figure 18

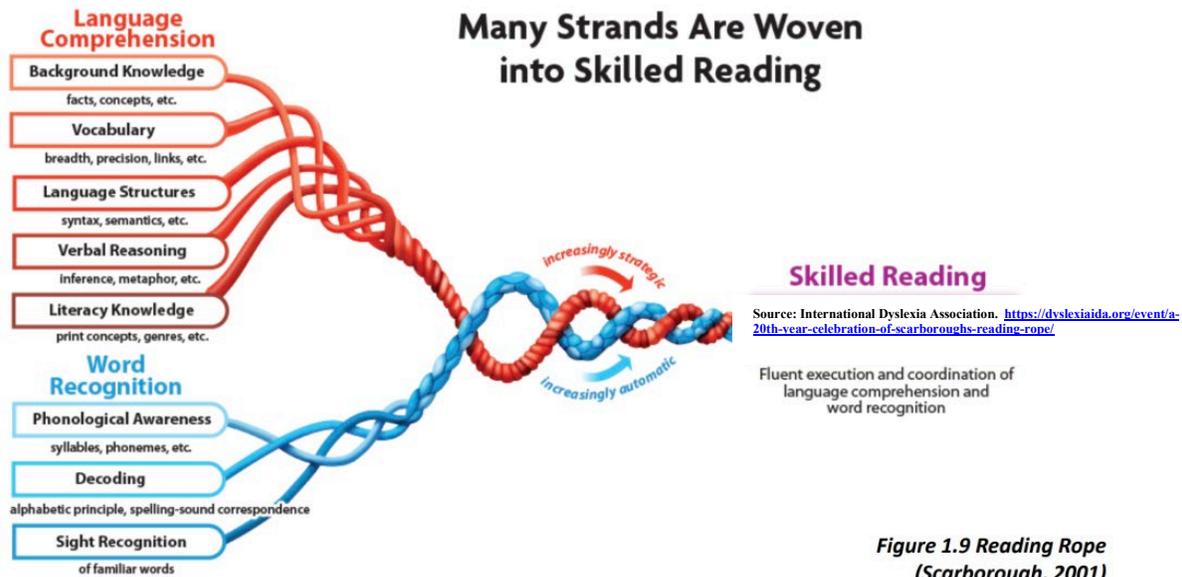


Figure 1.9 Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001)

³⁷ Liberman, I. Y., Shankweiler, D., & Liberman, A. M. (1989). [The alphabetic principle and learning to read](#). In I. Y. Liberman, D. Shankweiler, & A.M. Liberman, *Phonology and reading disability: Solving the reading puzzle* (Vol. 6). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

³⁸ Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). [Decoding, reading, and reading disability](#). *Remedial and special education*, 7(1), 6-10.

³⁹ Scarborough, H. S., Neuman, S., & Dickinson, D. (2009). [Connecting early language and literacy to later reading \(dis\) abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice](#). *Approaching difficulties in literacy development: Assessment, pedagogy and programmes*, 10, 23-38.

Foundational Skills

Stanovich described a phenomenon by which a student who acquired foundational skills in word recognition tended to enjoy reading more.⁴⁰ This enjoyment led to additional reading, which in turn, improved the student's fluency and automaticity. This phenomenon, known as "the Matthew Effect," also helps explain why students who fail to develop foundational skills tend to improve more slowly. Their lack of foundational skills makes them dislike reading, which, in turn, leads to them doing it less. Without as much practice, they quickly fall behind.

Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling stresses that a structured literacy approach calls for direct instruction of students by teachers in a logical order in which prerequisite skills are taught first. Proponents of structured literacy have noted that some students do not learn to read well without explicit instruction.⁴¹ Likewise, some studies have found direct instruction to be associated with gains in reading achievement.⁴²

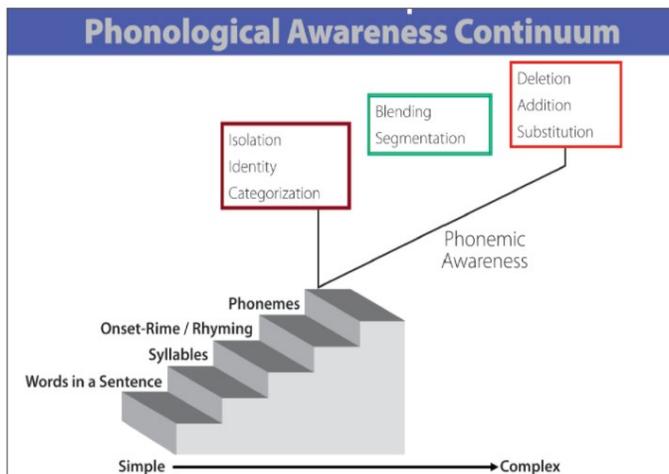
The Phonics Units of Study curriculum includes many components of structured literacy, including:

1. Explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction,
2. Cumulative practice and ongoing review,
3. A high level of student-teacher interaction,
4. The use of carefully chosen examples and nonexamples,
5. Prompt, corrective feedback.

The Columbia Teacher's College Phonics Units of Study are based on rigorous academic research.⁴³ However, as new research findings change the field of literacy, the CTC curriculum is changing with it. Currently, CTC, in collaboration with the Child-Mind Institute, is in the process of updating their phonics curriculums to include more current practices in the field of reading learning, including the addition of more synthetic approaches and the use of decodable texts, among others.

Consistent with structured literacy research, Vestal's approach to foundational skill instruction is explicit, systematic, and follows the standard research-based developmental progression shown in Figures 19 and 20.

Figure 19: Phonological Awareness Continuum



Source: 95% Group LLC. Tips for explicitly teaching phonological awareness activities and lessons. Retrieved from <https://www.95percentgroup.com/blog/details/tips-for-explicitly-teaching-phonological-awareness-activities-and-lessons>

⁴⁰ Stanovich, K. E. (2009). [Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy](#). *Journal of education*, 189(1-2), 23-55.

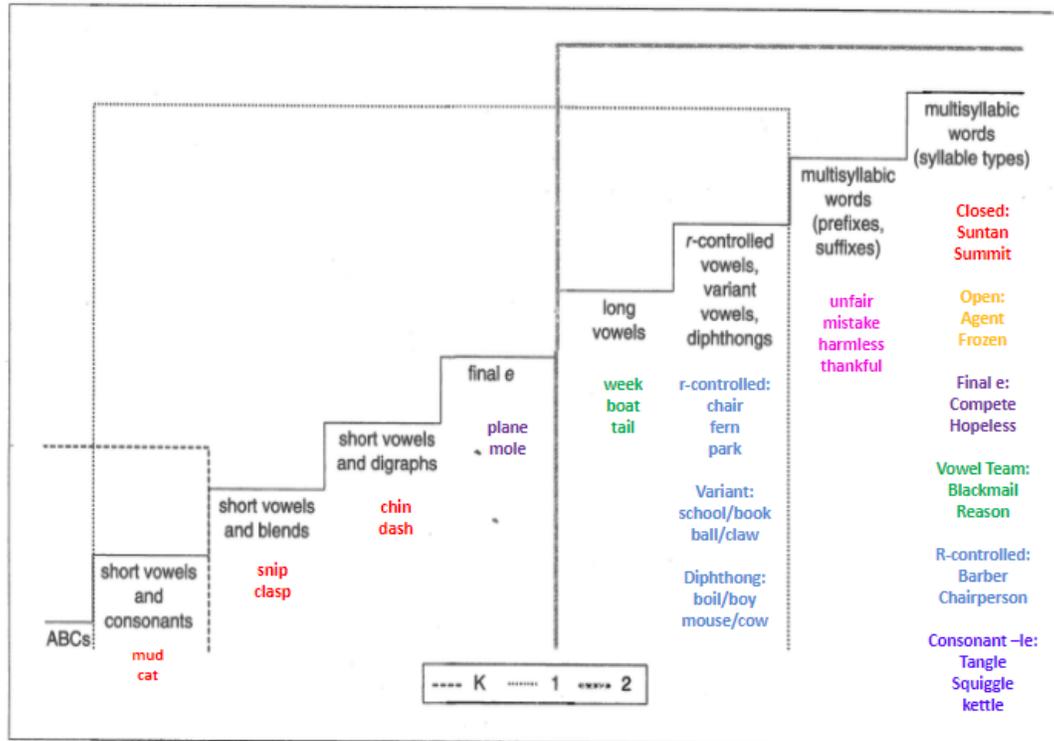
⁴¹ McCardle, P., Scarborough, H. S., & Catts, H. W. (2001). [Predicting, explaining, and preventing children's reading difficulties](#). *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 16(4), 230-239.

⁴² Robinson, L., Lambert, M. C., Towner, J., & Caros, J. (2016). [A comparison of direct instruction and balanced literacy: An evaluative comparison for a pacific northwest rural school district](#). *Reading Improvement*, 53(4), 147-164.

⁴³ Calkins, L., & Ehrenworth, M. (2016). Growing extraordinary writers: Leadership decisions to raise the level of writing across a school and a district. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 7-18; Columbia Teachers College Reading & Writing Project. (2020). In defense of balanced literacy: Understanding and responding to Student Achievement Partners' critique of units of study. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14w8B3OzjmwA6uox4VGVtZmV5D5KZL0J-/view>; Higgins, B., Miller, M., & Wegmann, S. (2006). Teaching to the test... not! Balancing best practice and testing requirements in writing. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(4), 310-319; Hudson, A. K., & Williams, J. A. (2015). Reading every single day: A journey to authentic reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 530-538; Jasmine, J., & Weiner, W. (2007). The effects of writing workshop on abilities of first grade students to become confident and independent writers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(2), 131-139; Miller, M., & Higgins, B. (2008). Beyond test preparation: Nurturing successful learners through reading and writing workshops. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 44(3), 124-127; Thomas, A. F. (2012). The Effects of Implementing a Reading Workshop in Middle School Language Arts Classrooms. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 9; Towle, W. (2000). The art of the reading workshop. *Educational Leadership*, 58(1), 38-41; Troia, G. A., Lin, S. J. C., Cohen, S., & Monroe, B. W. (2011). A year in the writing workshop: Linking writing instruction practices and teachers' epistemologies and beliefs about writing instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 112(1), 155-182.

Figure 20: Phonics Progression

Phonics Progression



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Reading Comprehension and Meaning Making

While acknowledging the importance of foundational skills, research also emphasizes that, in order to learn how to read well, students must read often. Scholars such as Richard Allington have decried the fact that interventionists often end up spending more time with decontextualized skill development and less time actually reading.⁴⁴ If anything, he argues, struggling readers should spend *more* time reading appropriately leveled texts.

The CTC curricula in phonics, reading, and writing all incorporate direct instruction. However, the reading and writing lessons also rely heavily on a workshop model. This ensures that students spend the majority of their time actually reading and writing in authentic, meaningful ways. Literacy research has repeatedly demonstrated the important role that such practice plays in developing fluency.⁴⁵

In addition, the CTC Units of Study in Phonics, Reading and Writing have been designed with high levels of engagement in mind. There is strong evidence that confirms student motivation and engagement are key factors in successful literacy skill acquisition.⁴⁶ Reading, writing, and phonics instruction that incorporate instructional methods including peer discussion and student choice are critical components of students' reading and writing success. Calkins herself stresses the importance of creating literacy and writing programs that are deeply engaging to young learners, saying,

⁴⁴ Allington, R. L. (2013). [What really matters when working with struggling readers](#). *The reading teacher*, 66(7), 520-530.

⁴⁵ Allington, R. L. (2013). [What really matters when working with struggling readers](#). *The reading teacher*, 66(7), 520-530.

⁴⁶ Gambrell, L. and Marinak, B. (2009). [Reading motivation: what the research says](#). *Reading Rockets* (online website)

My colleagues and I developed our own program because we decided teachers and children deserve an approach . . . that supports high levels of student (and teacher) engagement. It is important to note that there is science behind engagement. It is not only common sense but also scientific research that show that engaged learners use whatever skills and strategies they have with greater persistence and effort, and therefore learn more.⁴⁷

Overall, Vestal is very happy with the CTC Phonics, Reading, and Writing curricula. We have noticed positive qualitative differences in our teachers' English Language Arts instruction. Using the CTC curricula, students have become more excited about reading and writing. We also strongly agree with Allington's claim that, in order to learn well, students have to spend a lot of time actually reading and writing. The workshop model ensures that happens. However, we also feel that the units of study include appropriate direct instruction, particularly in Phonics. In short, we feel the CTC curriculum provides an appropriate balance between systematic explicit instruction and time for students to put all they are learning into authentic practice as real readers and writers.

Calkins expressed this point, saying,

One of the beautiful things about teaching literacy is that no one needs to make a choice between responsive, student-centered teaching and results-oriented, data-based teaching. When young people share their reading with you and with each other, it's easy to track their progress in higher-level comprehension skills. Schools can be characterized by that cycle of continuous improvement that is the real source of good teaching."⁴⁸

Not only do we think the CTC curriculum does an excellent job ensuring that students are excited about learning, and helping them see themselves as readers and writers, but also think it leads to superior teaching and learning. One of the strengths of the CTC curriculum has been in the professional learning that teachers have experienced as they have learned the curriculum. Simply put, this learning has made our teachers stronger, helping them develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet each child at their current level and maximize their growth.

Despite our continued support for the curriculum, we understand that our reading programs need to continue evolving as researchers learn more about helping struggling readers. As previously stated, CTC has announced that they are currently in the process of making substantial revisions to their reading workshop model based on their dialogue with the Child Mind Institute and others. We will review and consider piloting these revised units as soon as they become available.

Meeting the Needs of All Learners

While we believe that the CTC units provide high-quality research-based first instruction, we also acknowledge that some students require more structured teaching. Since 2019, Vestal teachers have participated in the "Accelerating Literacy" program at Broome-Tioga BOCES. This is a professional learning initiative carried out in collaboration with professors from Binghamton University's department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Leadership. The goal of Accelerating Literacy is to help reading and special education teachers develop the expertise to diagnose reading challenges and effectively intervene to remediate them. Not only does this program involve extensive professional learning, but it also involves follow-up coaching from a BOCES literacy specialist. The Accelerating Literacy program takes a "structured literacy plus" approach, helping teachers learn how to teach through structured literacy while also using broader socio-cultural research to ensure rich instruction. Thus far, we have focused our training on reading specialists and special education teachers at

⁴⁷ Calkins, L. (2020, January 13). "No one gets to own the term 'Science of Reading.'" Columbia Teachers College. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16Ewx2fZB4JEfP6aCAbTeN1L4F-34PnBX/view>

⁴⁸ Calkins, L. (2015). A guide to the reading workshop: Primary grades. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, p.8.

the elementary and middle school level. For the 2021-22 school year, we will be expanding our participation to include first- and second-grade classroom teachers and English as a New Language teachers.

Appendix 2: Academic Intervention Services at the Secondary Level

General

Academic Support

Sometimes the primary reason why a student struggles to meet State standards is that they need generalized assistance with study skills, organization, and or homework completion. Vestal Middle School offers stand-alone workshops that provide support with homework completion and organization. Vestal High School offers a “Set for Success” class for such students.

Summer Program

In some years, VMS and VHS provide summer programming to enhance students’ skills. This programming, if sufficiently intensive, can qualify as AIS for a given subject area. This programming should provide intervention and/or enrichment that goes beyond taking a summer school course to gain credit in a course that the student failed during the regular school year. Likewise, summer programming must go beyond summer services required as part of a student’s IEP or as compensatory services for a student with a disability.

Within Class Staffing that Reduces to Student-Teacher Ratio

Some courses provide additional staffing that reduces the student-teacher ratio, thereby creating the opportunity for more individualized and highly supported instruction within the regular classroom. Examples of this include any class in which the presence of a second teacher results in additional academic support for the student.

Progress Monitoring Only

In some cases, it is determined that a student may have fallen below the cut point for proficiency on a given exam merely because they had a bad day (e.g., they were ill during a test, had a personal crisis, etc.). When other indicators such as course grades and teacher observations suggest that the low test score was an outlier, the school may simply monitor the student’s academic progress. As long as that monitoring suggests that the student is on track to demonstrate proficiency in a given academic area, they may receive progress monitoring only.

English Language Arts

Reading Workshop

Reading workshops are stand-alone sections that are generally taught by a literacy specialist. The goal is to provide interventions that will boost students’ proficiency in reading. Interventions may address decoding, fluency, reading comprehension or some combination of reading skills.

Writing Workshop

Writing workshops are stand-alone sections that are generally taught by English Language Arts teachers. The goal is to help students learn to improve their writing across a variety of genres. Teachers may teach writing through assignments that students have in their regular ELA class, or they may use unique assignments that are specially created for the workshop course.

Speech Improvement

Speech improvement services are provided by a certified speech teacher. While they are usually taught in stand-alone setting, they may also be provided in an integrated setting.

Mathematics

Math Workshops

Math workshops are stand-alone workshops that are generally specific to a particular course (e.g., Math 6, 7, 8, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, etc.), and are taught by either a qualified elementary teacher (Math 6 for example) or a by a math teacher.

Extended Curriculum

In some courses, the curriculum is extended or stretched over a greater length of time. The purpose of such a “stretch course” is to provide all students with additional time for academic support. Examples of this include the following:

- Elements of Algebra A and B, which stretches the Algebra course over two years
- Algebra 1 at VHS, which builds in an extra lab day during which teachers provide intervention and/or enrichment
- Elements of Geometry/Trigonometry, which provides students with an additional year to master geometry.
- Elements of Algebra 2

Science

Science Workshop

Workshops are stand-alone sections that are generally course-specific (i.e., Earth Science workshop, Living Environment, Chemistry, etc.). They are taught by either a science specialist or a qualified elementary teacher (e.g., science 6).

Extended Curriculum

Beginning in 2021-22, Vestal High School added an additional lab period to each Regents science course (i.e., Earth Science, Living Environment, Chemistry and Physics). This additional lab period is used for intervention and/or enrichment.

Social Studies

Social Studies Workshop

This is a stand-alone workshop that focuses on helping students develop the background knowledge and social studies practices necessary to demonstrate success on the social studies Regents exams. Social studies workshop generally combines student who are preparing for Global History & Geography with those preparing for United State History and Government. Teachers differentiate their instruction to assist students with the content and skills needed for their particular exam.

Student Support Services

In some cases, it may be determined that a student is in danger of not meeting State standards, not because of a subject-specific learning challenge, but because of poor attendance, mental health needs, or other social/emotional issues. In such cases, a school counselor, psychologist, or social worker will provide an appropriate student support service. This could include (but is not limited to) one-on-one counseling, group counseling, attendance monitoring, and/or referrals to outside wrap around services.

Appendix 3: Frequently Asked Questions about ENL Services at Vestal

Q1 Are English as a New Language services offered in every school in the district?

A1 *No. Currently English as a New Language Services are offered only in the following schools: African Road Elementary, Vestal Hills Elementary, Vestal Middle School, and Vestal Senior High School. Students living in the attendance zones for Clayton Avenue, Glenwood or Tioga Hills elementary schools who need ENL services will be assigned to one of the two elementary buildings in which those services are offered.*

Q2 Does Vestal offer a bilingual education program?

A2 *No, Vestal does not currently offer bilingual education. State regulations require that school districts create bilingual education programs when they have twenty or more students who speak the same home language at a given grade level. Currently Vestal does not have twenty or more students at any one grade level who speak the same language.*

Q3 Does the school district provide an orientation for the families of English Language Learners who are new to the school district?

A3 *Yes. Parents and guardians are invited to attend an orientation program. This one-hour session is offered in the evening in October. In September, parents/guardians will receive an invitation providing details about the time and place of the meeting. The district's English as a New Language (ENL) teachers will present information about our program and answer any questions that you may have. A copy of this presentation is available on the district's web site.*

Q4 How are students identified as English Language Learners?

A4 *The ENL identification process is prescribed by Part 154 of the New York State Commissioner of Education's regulations. After registering their child for school all parents/guardians complete a Home Language Questionnaire. If a language other than English is reported on that document, then our staff conduct an individual interview with the student and (when possible) his or her parent or guardian. Students are then given the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL). If the student tests below the designated cut point, then the student is identified as an English Language Learner.*

Q5 Can I refuse English as a New Language services after my child is identified as an English Language Learner?

A5 *No. New York State regulations require that all students identified as English Language Learners receive ENL services.*

Q6 Can I appeal my child's identification (or lack of identification) as an English Language Learner?

A6 *Yes. If you believe your child has been misidentified (either as an ELL or a non-ELL), then you can request a review of that identification. The review process only applies to students who have been recently screened. Requests must be made within forty-five school days of receiving notification of your child's language status. To initiate a review, simply make a written request to your child's building principal. Your child's ENL teacher can assist you with this process.*

Q7 How do students exit English as a New Language Services?

A7 *As per state regulations, students may exit ENL services in one of the following ways:*

- *OPTION 1) Scoring at the Commanding level on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), which is given every spring.*

OR

- *OPTION 2) Scoring at the Expanding level on the NYSESLAT, **and** scoring at level 3 or 4 on the grades 3-8 New York State English Language Arts test **or** scoring at least 65 on the Regents exam in English.*

Q8 Will my child be educated in the same classroom as native English speaking students?

A8 Yes. All English Language Learners are placed in regular classrooms with students whose first language is English, and receive instruction based on the regular curriculum. Most students are also given “stand-alone” ENL instruction outside of the regular classroom for parts of the school day.

Q9 Can the school district provide me with translated correspondence and/or an interpreter for parent-teacher conferences?

A9 Yes. During the ENL identification process we ask parents/guardians which language they would like us to use for correspondence and oral communication. We can provide you with an interpreter for parent-teacher conferences or other important school meetings. Please make this request through your child’s ENL teacher.

Q10 Can my child participate in all extracurricular events offered to non-English Language Learners?

A10 Yes. The Vestal schools offer a wide array of extracurricular activities including clubs, sports, and musical groups. English Language Learners have open access to the same activities as other Vestal students.

Q11 Should I continue to communicate with my child in our home language?

A11 Yes! Not only does maintaining your home language keep your child connected to your family’s culture, but research has also demonstrated many academic and cognitive benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism. Students who come to us with strong linguistic skills in their home language often find it easier to learn English. For example, if they already know how to read and write in their home language, this will usually help them learn those skills more quickly in English.

Q12 Where can I find information about adult English as a Second Language classes, citizenship classes, and other services?

A12 Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are offered through Broome-Tioga BOCES. For more information please visit their web page at <http://www.btboces.org/ESOL.aspx>. The American Civic Association also offers adult ESL classes, citizenship classes, and other services. For more information please visit their web page at <http://www.americancivic.com/>.

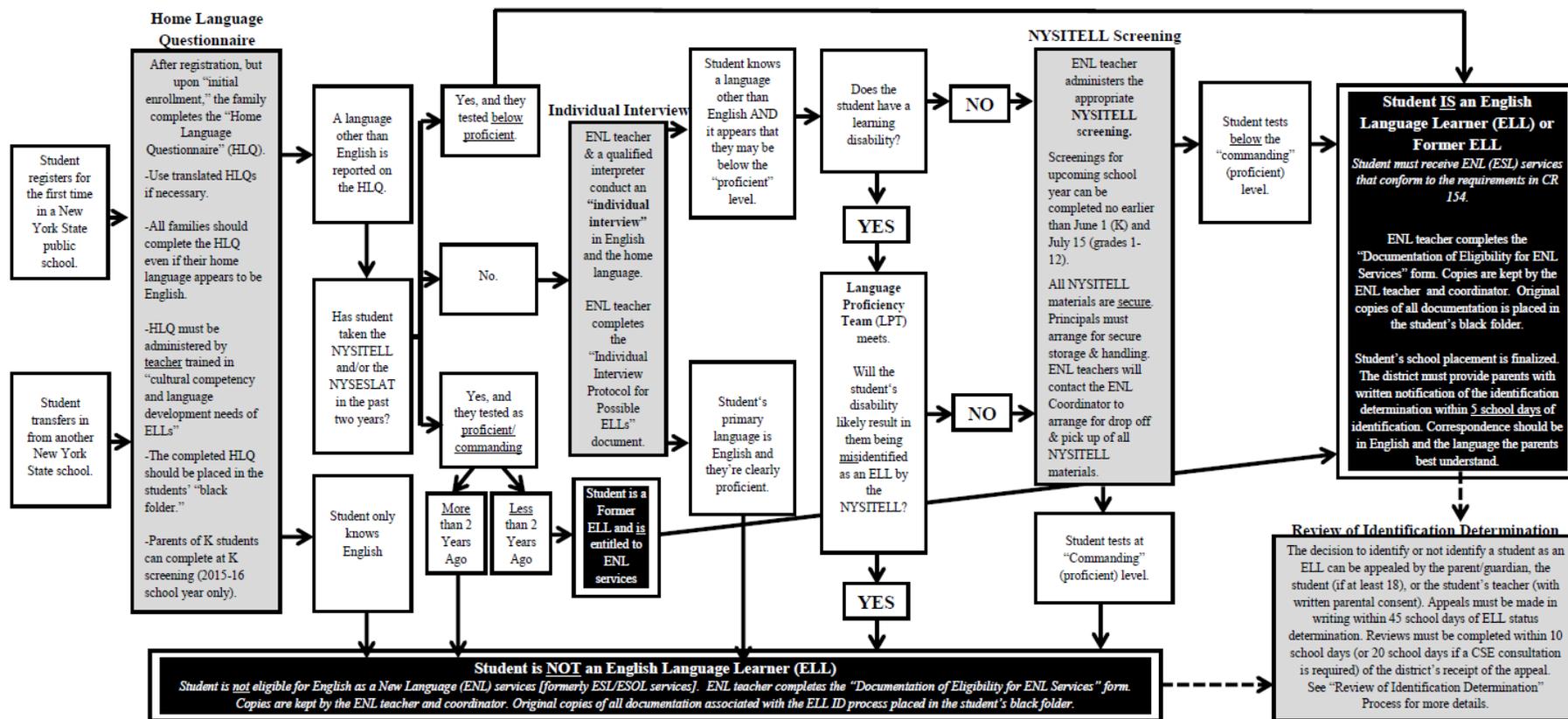
Q13 Will I receive feedback about how my child is progressing in his or her English as a New Language instruction?

A13 Yes. Students receive regular written ENL progress reports. These reports are sent home each trimester at the elementary level, and quarterly at the secondary level. Additionally, ENL teachers attend parent conferences for ELLs twice each year. Also please feel free to contact your child’s ENL teacher at any point in the school year if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Appendix 4: ELL Identification Process

Vestal Central School District's Process for Identifying English Language Learners

PIC 3/13/15



Appendix 5: Distinguishing between Disability and Language Acquisition

Prereferral data collection tool for ELLs with a possible learning disability ⁴⁹

Created by Audrey Cohan, Ed.D. and Andrea Honigsfeld, Ed.D.

In addition to providing written responses to each of the questions below, carefully document relevant information about the child. If feasible, create and maintain a baseline portfolio of typically developing ELLs who come from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds for the purpose of comparison.

Language Background Information

1. What language does the child speak at home?
2. Is the child literate in the home language?
3. Are the parents/caregivers/extended family members bilingual?
4. Are the parents/caregivers/extended family member literate in the native language and/or in English?
5. What predictable patterns of language acquisition difficulties are observed based on the child's native language?
6. What type of language services is the child receiving (ESL or Bilingual)?
7. Is the child currently receiving any additional support services? (Speech, occupational therapy, counseling?)
8. What other languages has the child been exposed to at home?
9. Does the child have receptive language ability in any other language (i.e. does he/she understand another language which he/she does not speak?)

Personal/Cultural/Educational Background Information

1. How long has the child been in the United States?
2. What is known about the child's former educational experience? (Ascertain the amount of school time and subjects taught. Obtain information about the school calendar: hours per day; days per week; months per year.)
3. Has the child experienced any significant interruption in formal schooling and if so, why?
4. What trauma or significant personal experiences has the child had, if any?
5. If born in the US, what cultural/religious/linguistic community is the child a member of?
6. If foreign born, what level of acculturation is observable in the child/in the family?
7. Have the parents reported any difficulties during pregnancy or birth, for instance, was the child born prematurely?

Language Acquisition Patterns

1. Is the child's language performance comparable to typically developing children from similar cultural and linguistic experiences?
2. Are the child's language performance and patterns of language use unique to him/her?
3. Has the child acquired Basic Interpersonal Language Skills?
4. What sub-areas of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency does the child demonstrate difficulties with?

Learning Patterns

⁴⁹ Honigsfeld, A., & Cohan, A. (2010). [Piloting a pre-referral data collection tool: A documentary account](#). *Insights on Learning Disabilities*, 7(1), 15-28.

Teacher 2

Teacher 3

Key questions to consider

1. Have the child's learning problems persisted over time?
2. Have the problems resisted normal classroom instruction?
3. Have the problems also resisted systematic, targeted intervention?

Instructional Intervention

1. Have you differentiated instruction? How?
2. Has the child worked with partners or in cooperative groups successfully? How?
3. Has the child benefited from working with technology? How?
4. Have you worked with the child one-on-one on an isolated skill for an extended period of time? What skill(s) were targeted?
5. What are the documented results of these interventions?

Checklist for CSE Teams⁵⁰

A Checklist for CSE Teams: Considering Limited English Proficiency before Classification of an English Language Learner

In developing an IEP for an English language learner (ELL); the CSE Team must consider the student's level of English language proficiency. It's important to know that research-based shows that second language conversational skills are acquired in one to two years, but academic language proficiency is acquired over a longer period of time, five to seven years, sometimes longer. Therefore, the IEP Team must consider the student's level of English language proficiency to support and strengthen implementation of the IEP goals.

The CSE Team may find it helpful to ask the following framing questions:

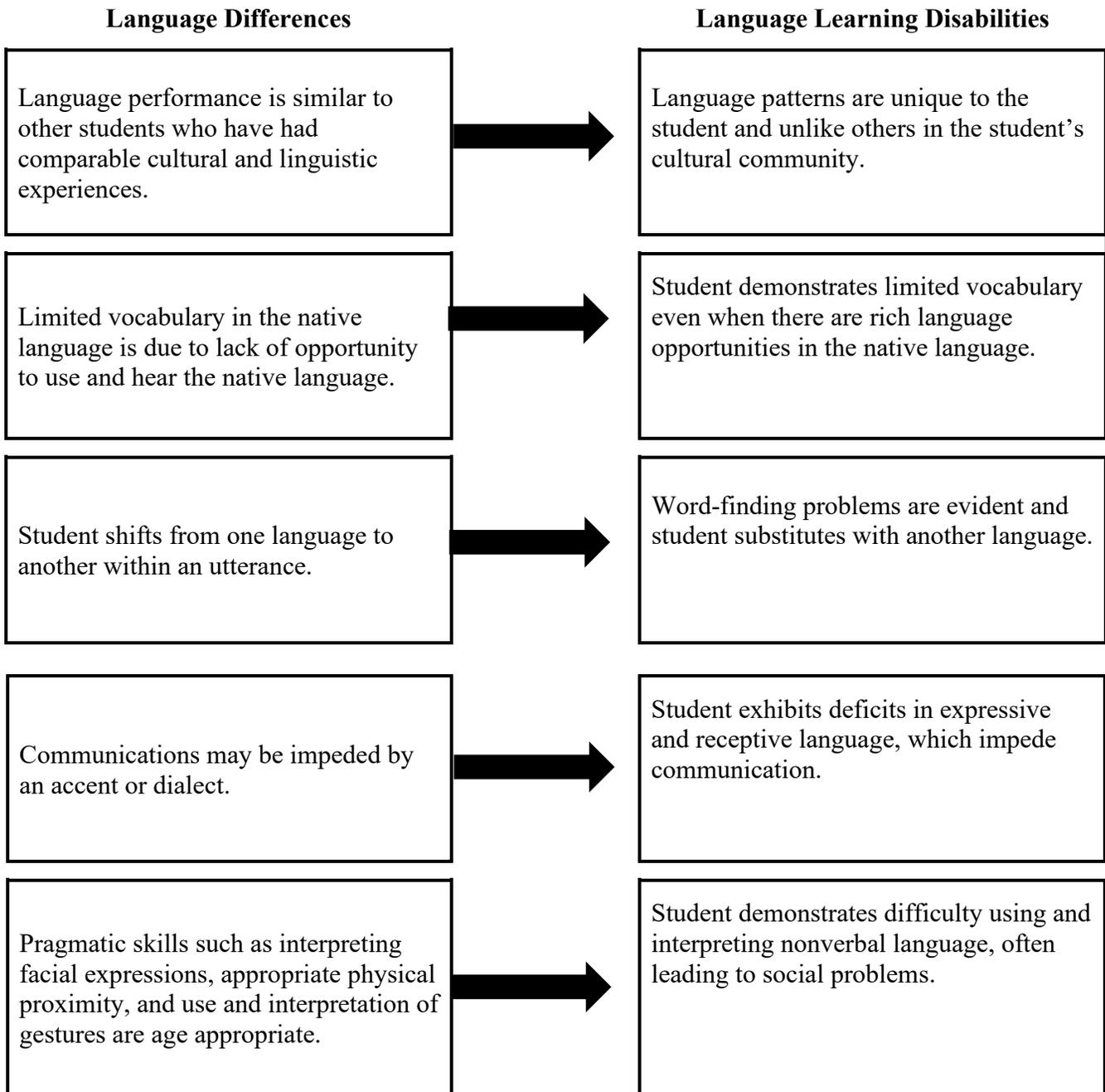
- Has the dominant language in the home been considered?
- Has the child's primary language of communication been considered?
- Were the cultural values and beliefs of the parents considered in planning for the child's education before referral?
- Was sufficient time to adjust to new environment, language, classroom, community, and family situation provided before the referral?
- If the school district offers bilingual programs, has opportunity to learn in the 1st language been provided?
- Is there evidence of whether or not the student had prior success when schooled in home language?
- Are prior school experiences, attendance and/or interrupted formal schooling documented?
- Did interventions provided prior to referral included native language instruction and ESL methodology?
- Did the instructional plan incorporate a variety of research based instructional strategies for English language learners? (Including RtI specific for ELLs)
- Is there a member of the CSE Team who has expertise regarding the student and understands how language develops as well as strategies that can be used when educating a student with English as a second language?
- Does the CSE Team have access to assessment data to determine if it is accurate and culturally and linguistically unbiased?
- Does the assessment information use a variety of methods and environments? (Such as the use of multiple mediums to present information, culturally relevant information, a low stress environment for language performance...)
- The assessments must demonstrate that the disability is evident in the dominant language OR rule out limited English proficiency as the cause of the learning difficulties.
- Descriptive data, not test scores, should decide if the student qualifies for special education.
- Standardized test results must be cross-validated with performance-based measures.
- If both performances are low and parents are also concerned about their child's communication skills, then the student most likely has a disability.
- Do the PLP "present levels of performance" statements in the IEP address both how the student uses his or her native language and how the student uses English?
- Do progress monitoring activities measure progress toward the mastery of English?
- Do the goals delineate in which language they will be addressed and who will be responsible for measuring the outcomes?
- Was there collaboration between general, special education, English as a second language and bilingual education teachers, if appropriate, during the referral process?
- Has the district communicated with the parents prior to the referral and clearly explained the referral process, Evaluations..., in the language they understand?
- Have parents been actively involved in the referral process?

⁵⁰ A Checklist for CSE Teams: Considering Limited English Proficiency before Classification of an English Language Learner. Retrieved from http://eslnms.weebly.com/uploads/5/5/3/0/5530796/ell_checklist_for_iep_teams_rev-7-16.pdf

- Is there an interpreter who is knowledgeable about special education terms, present at the CSE meeting for the parents and the student?
- Are the CSE Team members trained in how to use an interpreter effectively?
- Was the evaluation process that was used, clearly defined in the native language and in English during the reviews and reevaluation?

Language Difference versus Disability

Causes of Confusion in Assessing Students with Language Differences and/or Language Learning Disabilities⁵¹



⁵¹ Adapted from Echevarria, J., Vogt, M. & Short, D.J. (2013). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP Model, 4th Ed.* New York: Pearson, p.252