GEORGIA LEARNING
RESOURCES SYSTEM

Beyond the Screener: Using Diagnostic Data to Get to the Root of Reading Difficulties and Drive Targeted Instruction and IEP Goals

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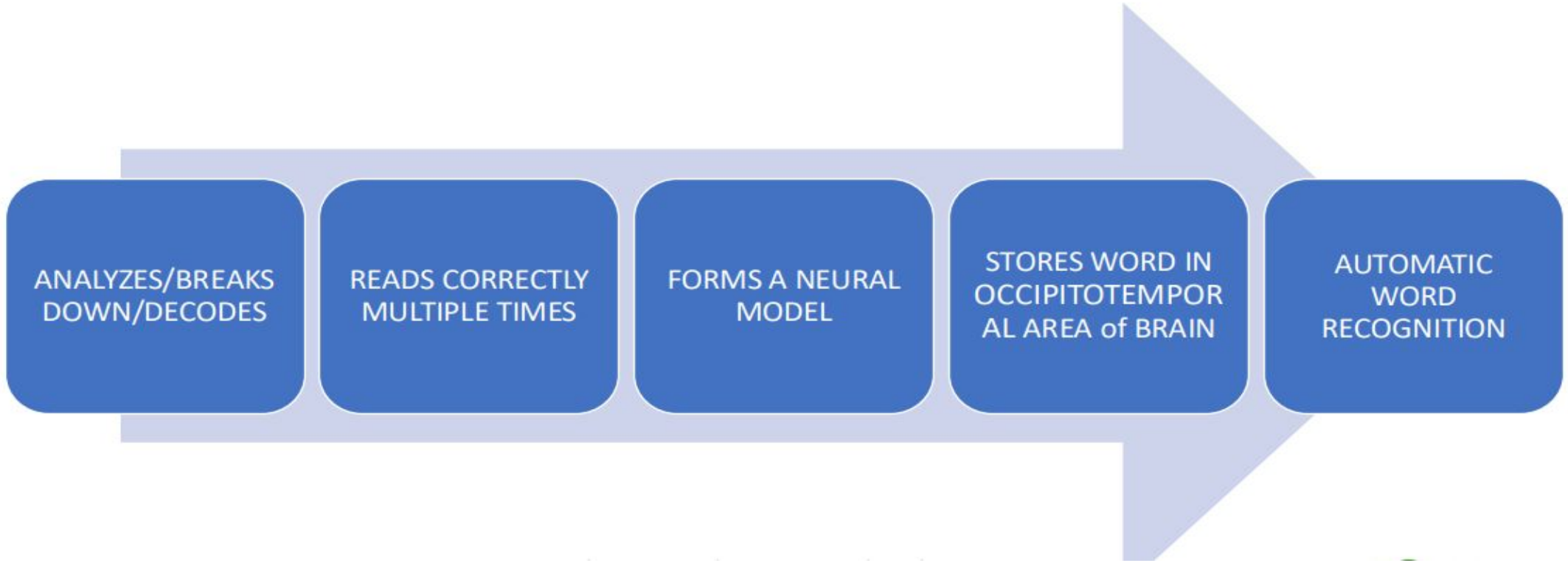
Welcome: Planting the Seed

- Today we're digging beneath the surface of reading performance.
- Let's explore how diagnostic tools help us uncover the root causes of reading difficulties.
- Our goal: Grow stronger IEPs that truly reflect the science of reading by targeting the foundation of reading

Why Foundational Skills Matter

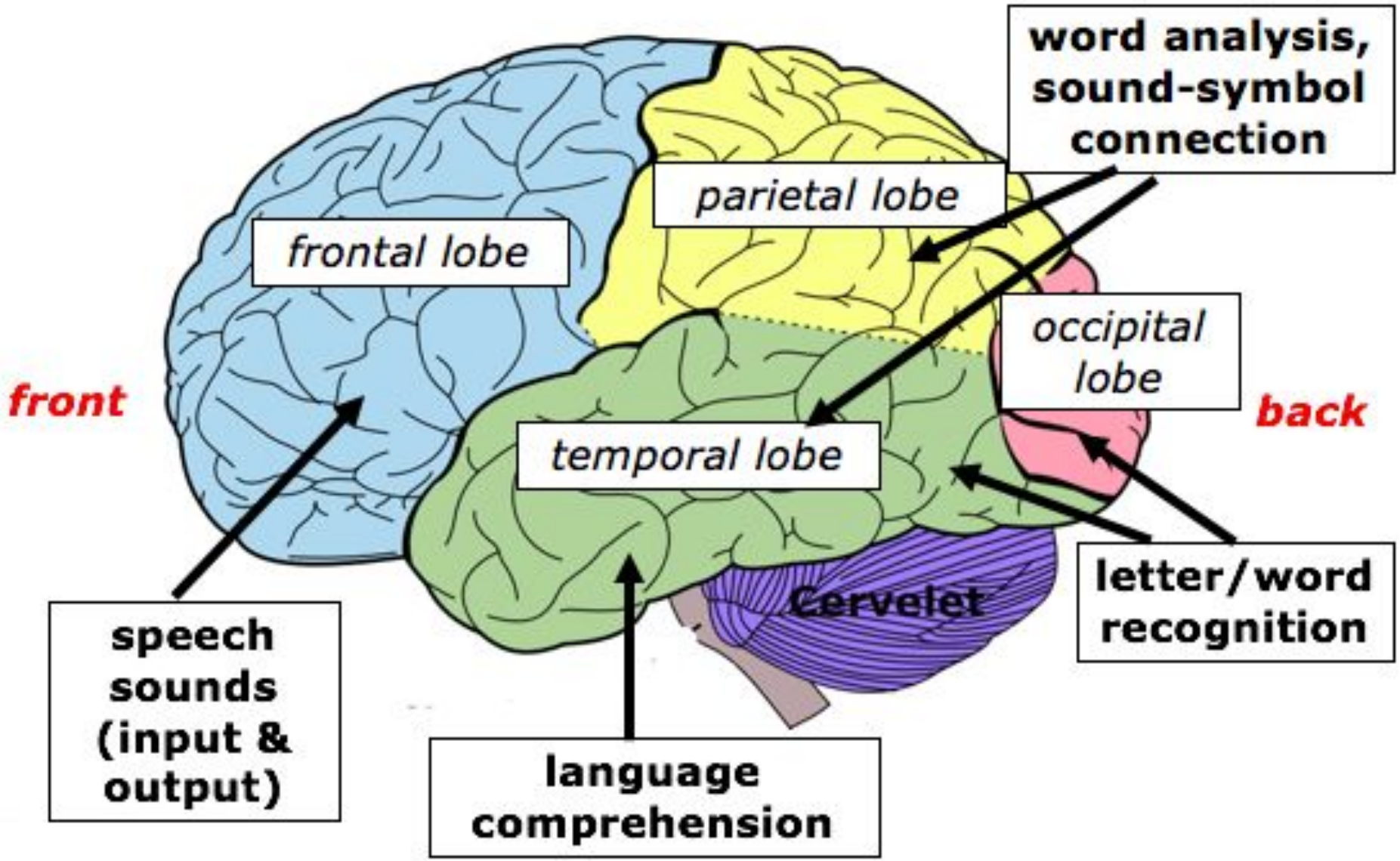
- If all students could master foundational skills…..
  - Disproportionate representation of SWD will decrease.
  - Number of SPED referrals will decrease.
  - Less students will be removed from the general education setting.
  - More students will acquire grade level advanced word recognition skills, language, reading fluency and reading comprehension.
  - MTSS intervention groups will decrease.
  - More students will improve results with state assessments.
  - More students will graduate and engage in post-secondary options

WE ARE NOT BORN WIRED TO READ. AN EFFECTIVE READER…



The Reading Brain

(the left hemisphere)



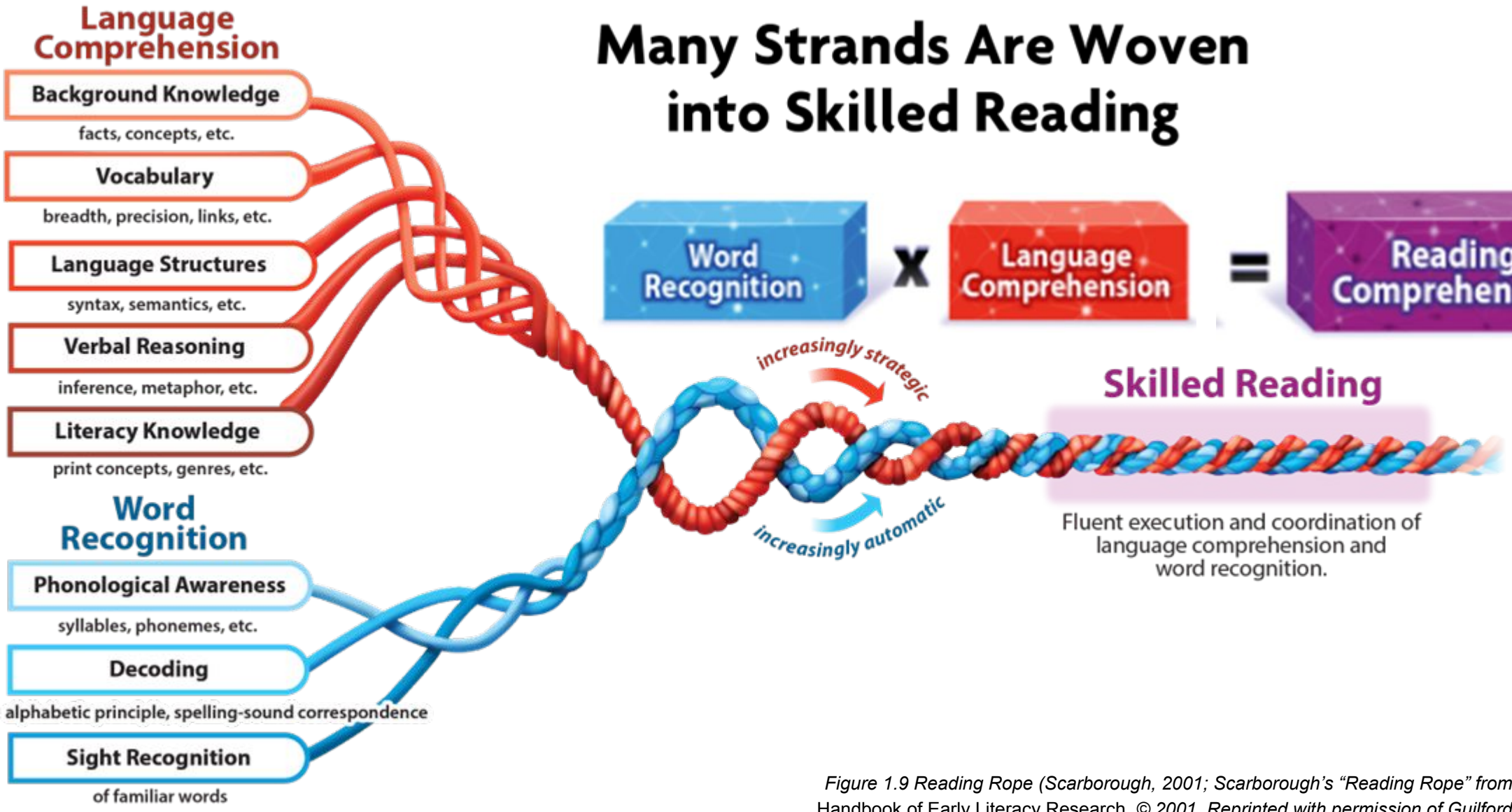


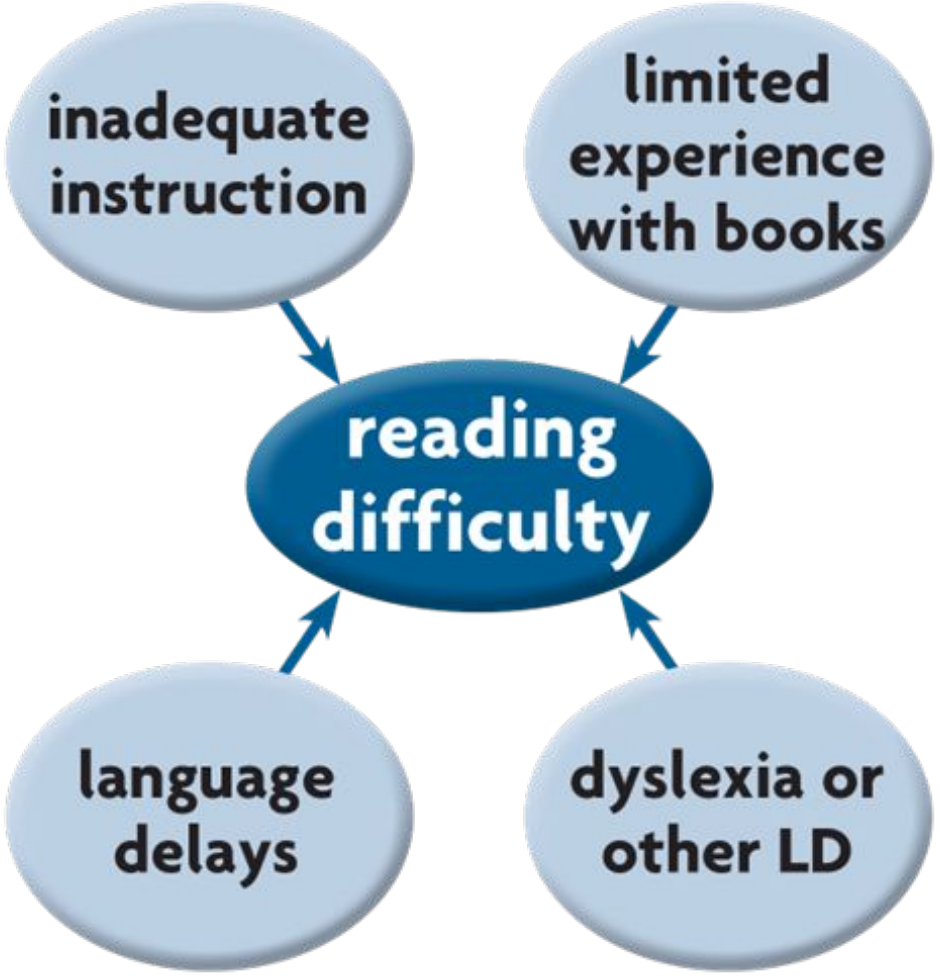
Figure 1.9 Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001; Scarborough's "Reading Rope" from Handbook of Early Literacy Research, *© 2001. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press.)*

The Root System of Reading: Scarborough's Rope

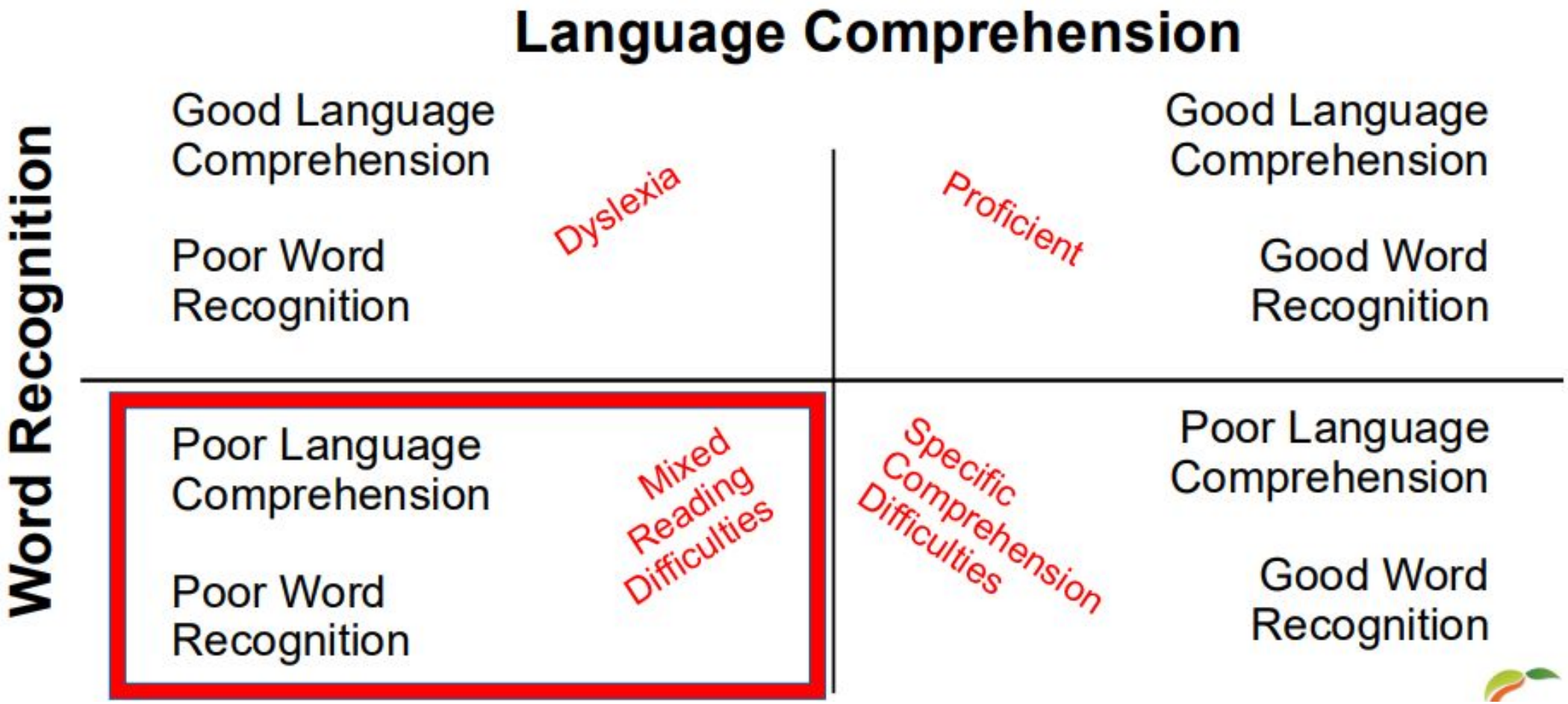
- Think of Word Recognition as the root system of reading fluency
- It's foundational to skilled reading
- Key components include:
- - Phonological Awareness (sound structure; manipulating AND articulating sounds in spoken words)
- - Decoding (applying sound-symbol knowledge {phonics} to read unfamiliar words)
- - Sight Recognition (automatically recognizing known words)
- Weakness in one area can disrupt reading fluency and breaks the "rope"
- Diagnostic tools help pinpoint which area needs support

Weak Roots=Stunted Growth!

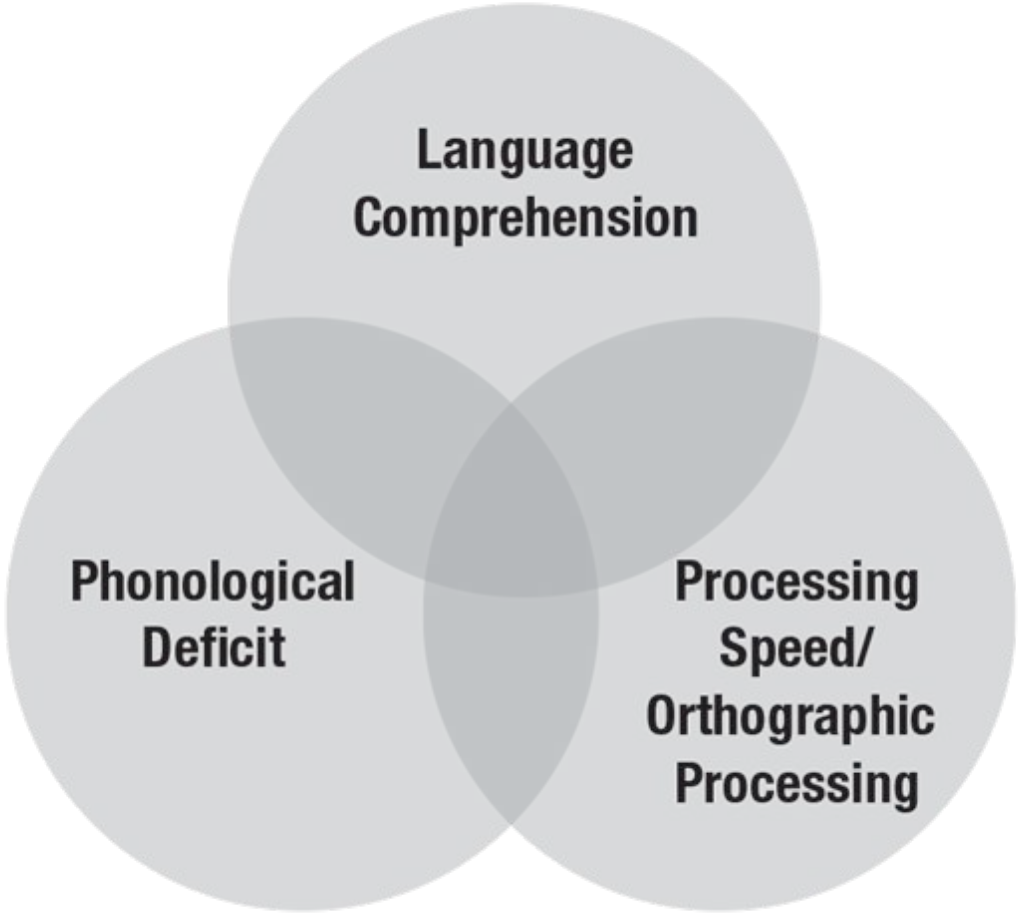
What causes reading difficulties?



Monitor Word Recognition & Language Comprehension



Identifying the Root System: Which strand is struggling?



Phonological Deficit

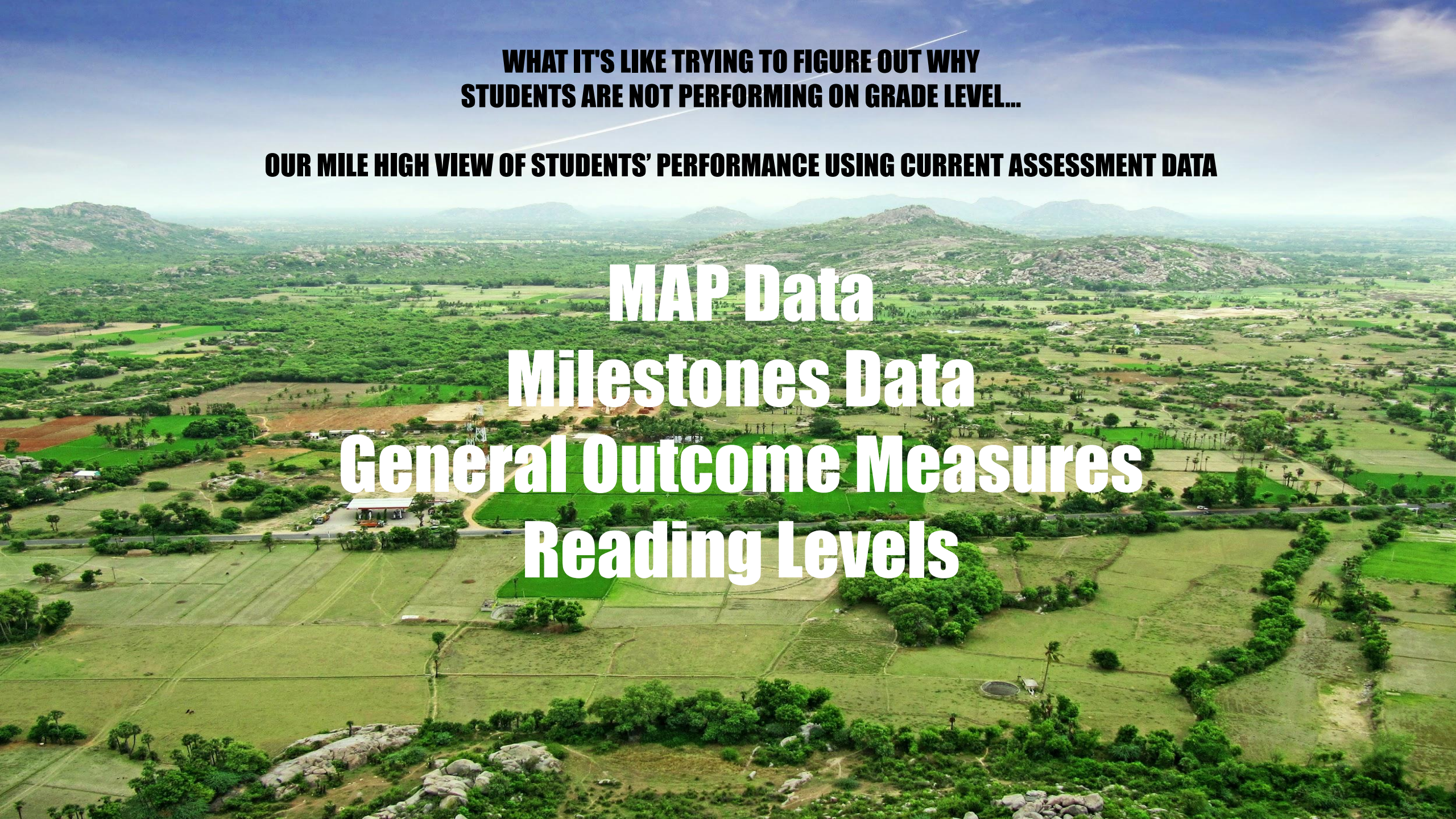
- Most common
- Refers to difficulty identifying, distinguishing, remembering, and manipulating the sounds in spoken language. This impacts how well students can connect those sounds to the letters and patterns they see in print—what we call phonics
- Hallmark of what we typically think of as dyslexia
- Students struggle to segment or blend sounds in words, may confuse similar sounding phonemes, may guess at words rather than decode them; spelling inconsistent and phonetically inaccurate
- Core weakness in phonological processing: not with vision or memory, but with how the brain processes spoken sounds
- They don’t just “catch on” to reading through exposure

Processing Speed/Orthographic Processing Deficits

- Processing speed refers to how quickly and efficiently the brain can take in visual information—like letters and words—and respond to it
- Students with slow processing speed are often accurate, but very slow
- It's as if every word they read is brand new, even if they've seen it many times before.
- Orthographic processing is the ability to recognize written letter patterns and spelling conventions quickly and automatically; a strong reader develops what we call an orthographic lexicon—a mental bank of familiar words and patterns.
- Students read slowly and without expression
- They decode words accurately but lack fluency
- Their spelling is erratic, even for high-frequency words
- They struggle with timed tasks and tire quickly when reading
- These students often fly under the radar because they appear to read 'correctly'—but they never develop the effortless, fluent reading that supports comprehension.

Language Comprehension Difficulties

- Often overlooked
- Students may be able to decode words just fine; they don't understand what those words mean
- Their difficulty isn't just with reading comprehension–is also shows up in listening comprehension
- They can read aloud fluently, but have trouble summarizing or answering questions
- Struggle to make inferences, understand figurative language, have a limited vocabulary or difficulty understanding syntax (the system of rules that dictate how to put words in order to create meaningful and understandable expressions)
- They are often labeled as "good readers" because their decoding is intact, but their comprehension doesn't match their oral reading fluency


WHAT IT'S LIKE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY
STUDENTS ARE NOT PERFORMING ON GRADE LEVEL...
OUR MILE HIGH VIEW OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE USING CURRENT ASSESSMENT DATA
MAP Data
Milestones Data
General Outcome Measures
Reading Levels

Screeners Only Show the Surface

- While approved screeners are valuable for identifying who is at risk, they often fall short in telling us what to teach
- They are *SYMPTOMS* not a *DIAGNOSIS*
- They're too vague–you can't teach a student to "get better at phonics" or "improve comprehension" without knowing:
  a. Which specific skill is breaking down?
  b. What instruction will directly address the gap?
  c. Whether the issue is accuracy, rate, or automaticity?
  d. Whether the problem lies in phonological awareness or orthographic mapping?
  e. Is it unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, or a self-correcting issue?

K–3 Approved Dyslexia Screeners: Examples of Reporting

Screener	Example Reporting	Why It's Vague
iReady Universal Screener	"Phonics Domain – Below Level" "Scale Score: 421" "Vocabulary – At Risk"	Provides domain-level scores but lacks granular skill breakdown. Cannot determine if student struggles with blends, digraphs, long vowels, etc. PSI/PASI subtests may help but are often not enabled.
MAP Reading Fluency	"Fluency: At Risk" "WCPM: 43" "Listening Comprehension – Low"	Reports composite fluency or comprehension levels. Does not provide decoding accuracy, error types, or oral reading behaviors. Not designed to isolate phonological or decoding deficits.
Star Early Literacy	"Subdomain: Alphabet Knowledge – Developing" "Phonemic Awareness – On Watch"	Broad developmental labels without subskill analysis. Doesn't pinpoint blending, segmenting, or phoneme isolation issues. More useful for early pre-reading stages.
Star CBM Reading	"ORF: 41 WCPM" "Accuracy: 86%" "Error Rate: 14%"	Provides fluency and accuracy but no decoding strategy analysis or phonics pattern error details. Doesn't differentiate substitution, omission, or self-correction patterns.
FastBridge aReading	"Overall Risk Level: High" "Decoding – At Risk" "Comprehension – Low"	Adaptive test gives high-level domain flags. Does not show specific words or items missed. Lacks instructional planning detail without pairing with CBMs (e.g., earlyReading).
Amira ISIP	"Struggling with PA" "Vocabulary = 30th percentile" "Decoding: Needs Support"	AI-generated reports based on speech recognition. Data is not always transparent; no access to specific item errors or phoneme-level performance. Hard to use for IEP planning.
mCLASS with DIBELS 8th	"NWF: 15 CLS" "PSF: 9" "ORF: 55 WCPM with 85% Accuracy"	Most detailed of the screeners. Still requires interpretation to determine sound/word-level patterns. May need supplemental tools (e.g., Core Phonics Survey) to plan instruction or write targeted IEP goals.


WE NEED TO GET DOWN IN THE WEEDS
TO LOOK AT STUDENT MASTERY OF
SPECIFIC, DISCRETE SKILLS

The Science of Reading Emphasizes Specificity: What's Beneath the Surface

- Reading = multiple subskills (Scarborough's Rope).
- For instructional planning and IEP goal writing, we must follow up with diagnostic tools that uncover the student's lowest skill deficit in phonological awareness, phonics, or decoding
- We've got to go underground–to the roots of reading!

That means asking:

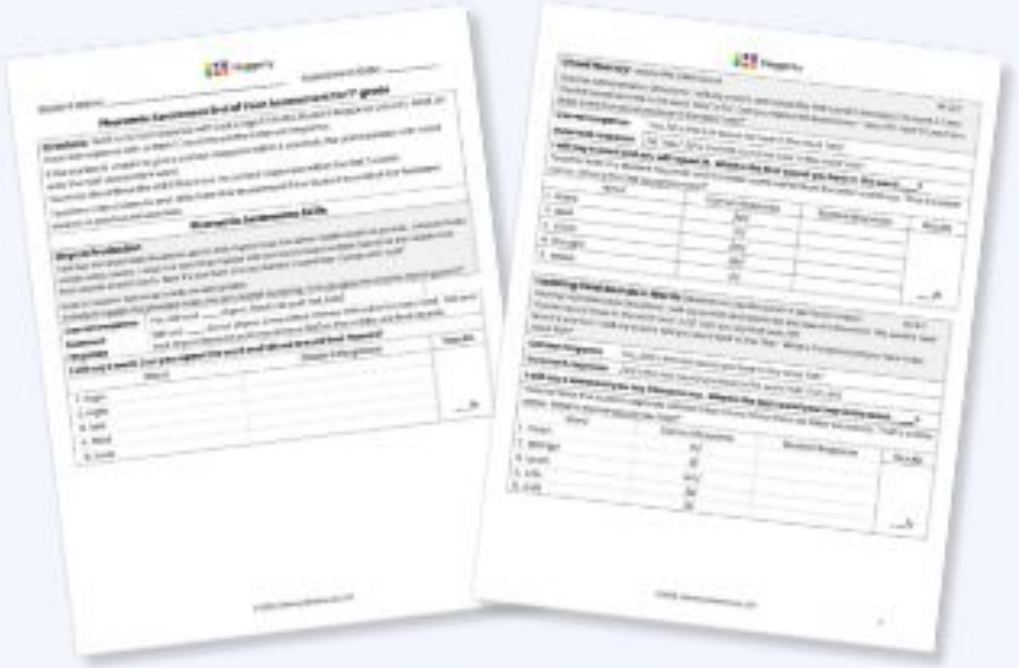
Can they blend sounds?

Can they segment words?

Do they struggle with CVCE patterns or r-controlled vowels?

Do they know how to map sound-to-print?

Diagnostic Assessments



CORE Phonics Survey—Record Form

Name_____ Grade_____ Date_____

SKILLS SUMMARY

Alphabet Skills and Letter Sounds

____/26	A.	Letter names—uppercase
____/26	B.	Letter names—lowercase
____/21	C.	Consonant sounds
____/5	D.	Long vowel sounds
____/5		Short vowel sounds

Reading and Decoding Skills

____/15	E.	Short vowels in CVC words
____/15	F.	Consonant blends with short vowels
____/15	G.	Short vowels, digraphs, and -tch trigraph
____/15	H.	*R*-controlled vowels
____/15	I.	Long vowel spellings
____/15	J.	Variant vowels
____/15	K.	Low frequency vowel and consonant spellings
____/24	L.	Multisyllabic words

Skills to review: _____

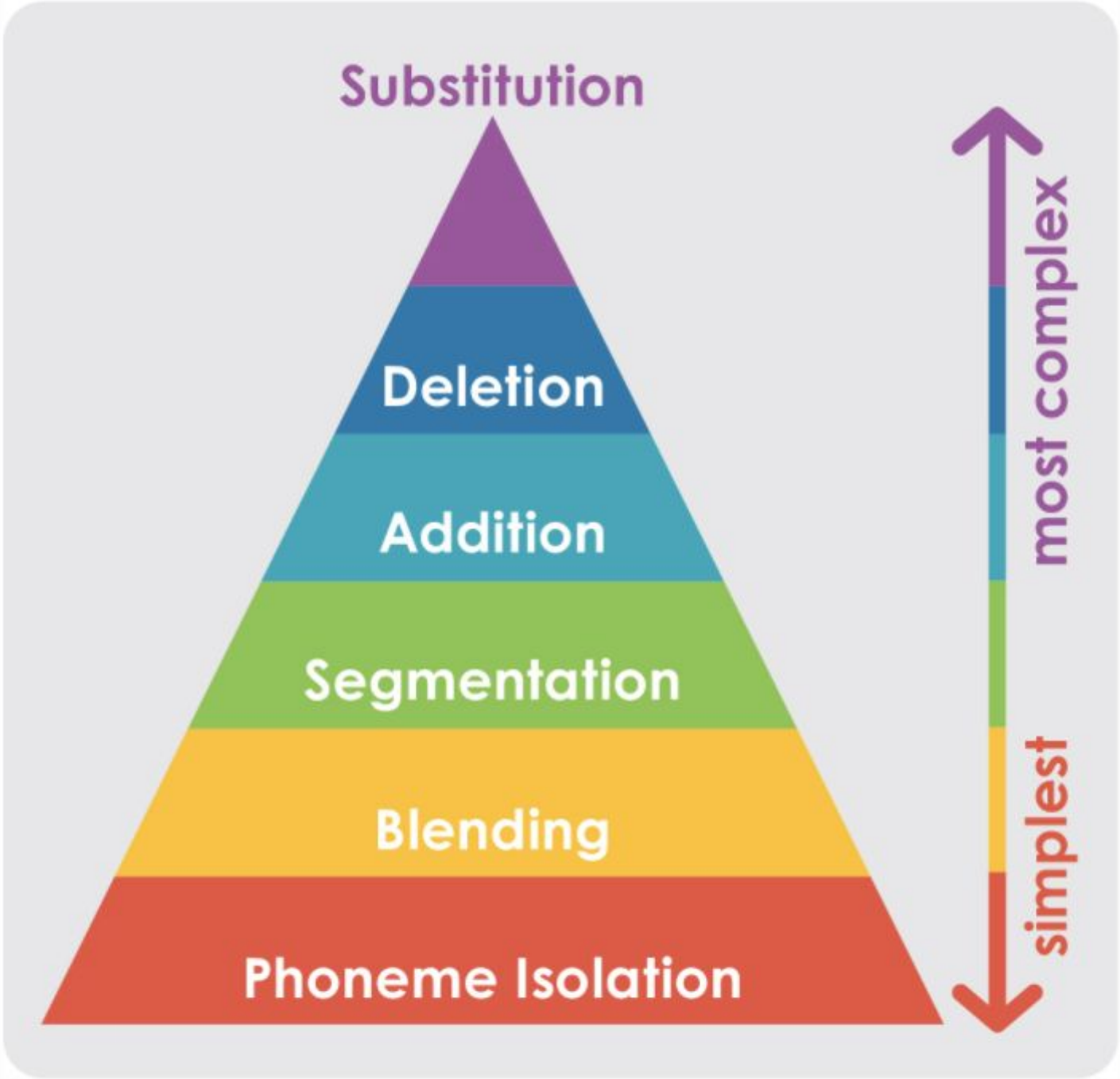
_____

Skills to teach: _____

_____

"The most powerful predictors of later reading and writing skills . . turned out to be those requiring phonological awareness, specifically the analytic ability to manipulate phonemes in words."

(Liberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989)



Phonemic Awareness Scope & Sequence By Grade

K	Grade 1	Grade 2
Onset fluency	Onset fluency	Onset fluency
Blending phonemes into words	Blending phonemes into words	Blending phonemes
Final phoneme isolation	Isolating final sound in words	Isolating final sounds
Segmenting words into phonemes	Segmenting words into phonemes	Segmenting words into phonemes
Isolating medial sounds in words	Isolating medial sounds in words	Isolating medial sounds
Adding phonemes	Adding phonemes	Adding phonemes
Deleting phonemes	Deleting phonemes	Deleting phonemes
Substituting phonemes	Substituting phonemes	Substituting phonemes



Phonics Scope & Sequence

Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade
Letter names – upper	Short vowels in CVC words	Multisyllabic words
Letter names – lower	Consonant blends with short vowels	Syllable blending
Consonant sounds	Short vowels, digraphs, and –tch trigraphs	Prefixes and suffixes
Long vowel sounds	R-controlled vowels	
Short vowel sounds	Long vowel spellings	
Blending CVC words (short vowels)	Variant vowels	
	Low-frequency vowels with consonant spellings	
	Inflected endings (-ing, -ed, -es)	

Digitize: Dr. Roberts' Magical Spreadsheet!

School Reading Profile.xlsx

- Turn your paper results into digital form
- Spreadsheet will auto-organize the data to reveal school, class and individual patterns
- Directions for entering data included in the spreadsheet.
- You can't make change on information you don't have.

HEGGERTY Grade 1	ONSET FLUENCY	BLENDING PHONEMES INTO SPOKEN WORDS	PHONEME ISOLATION	SEGMENTING WORDS INTO PHONEMES	ISOLATING MEDIAL SOUNDS IN WORDS	ADDING INITIAL PHONEMES	DELETING INITIAL PHONEMES	SUBSTITUTING INITIAL PHONEMES
WINDOW	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
NUMBER ASSESSED	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61
NUMBER BELOW BENCHMARK	5	9	23	20	25	36	19	30
PERCENT BELOW BENCHMARK	8%	15%	38%	33%	41%	59%	31%	49%

HEGGERTY Grade 2	INITIAL PHONEME ISOLATION	BLENDING PHONEMES	FINAL PHONEME ISOLATION	SEGMENTING WORDS INTO PHONEMES	MEDIAL PHONEME ISOLATION	ADDING INITIAL PHONEMES	DELETING INITIAL PHONEMES	SUBSTITUTING INITIAL PHONEMES
WINDOW	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
NUMBER ASSESSED	53	53	53	53	53	53	52	52
NUMBER BELOW BENCHMARK	4	7	9	26	15	25	11	27
PERCENT BELOW BENCHMARK	8%	13%	17%	49%	28%	47%	21%	52%

SCHOOL YEAR

PART	A	B	C	D	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
CORE PHONICS	Letter Names Uppercase	Letter Names Lowercase	Consonant Sounds	Long Vowel Sounds	Short Vowel Sounds	Short Vowels CVC	Con Blends + Short Vowels	Short Vowels, Digraph, + Trigraph	R-controlled Vowels	Long Vowel Spellings	Variant Vowels	Low Frequency Vowel + Consonant Spellings	Multi-Syllabic Words
WINDOW	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
NUMBER ASSESSED	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114
NUMBER BELOW BENCHMARK	12	31	53	31	27	59	86	82	82	86	97	107	105
PERCENT BELOW BENCHMARK	10.5%	27.2%	46.5%	27.2%	23.7%	51.8%	75.4%	71.9%	71.9%	75.4%	85.1%	93.9%	92.1%

Mobilize: Small Group Rosters

Reading Small Group Rosters .xlsx

- Group students by skill need rather than by grade level or overall score
- How can we address gaps while students are learning grade level standards (adding, not replacing)
- Targeted interventions
- Groups are flexible and temporary; goal is to move them to automaticity in each pattern as quickly as possible
- How many repetitions are they going to need to get to the automatic phase?
- Progress Monitor! More repetitions and practice if necessary.

Why Screeners Aren’t Enough for IEPs

You wouldn’t write a treatment plan for a sick plant based only on a quick look at the leaves.

You can’t write a strong IEP goal like

✅ “Student will decode words with initial blends”

…if all you know is ❌ “Student is below grade level in phonics.”

The roots haven’t been examined.

These statements do not **identify which component** of reading is weak—or what needs to be taught. Using the **Simple View of Reading** and **Scarborough’s Reading Rope**, we know reading is not one skill—it’s a **network of strands**.

This is why diagnostic assessments like the Core Phonics Survey, Heggerty PA Diagnostic, or informal decoding inventories are essential. They help uncover:

- The lowest skill deficit
- The most instructionally relevant goal
- A path to real progress

From Roots to Growth: Aligning PLAAFPs and Goals to What Students Need

1. Use Diagnostic Assessments
    a. Core Phonics Survey for decoding
    b. Heggerty Phonemic Awareness
2. Write a skill-specific PLAAFP
    a. based on specific assessment data
    b. identify the lowest foundational skill deficit
    c. describe how this affects access to the general curriculum

Diagnostic Data: Student misses 80% of words with vowel teams on the Core Phonics Survey.
PLAAFP: Student is unable to decode words with vowel team patterns (e.g. ea, ai) which impedes fluency and comprehension of grade level text.

3. Develop a measurable, aligned goal

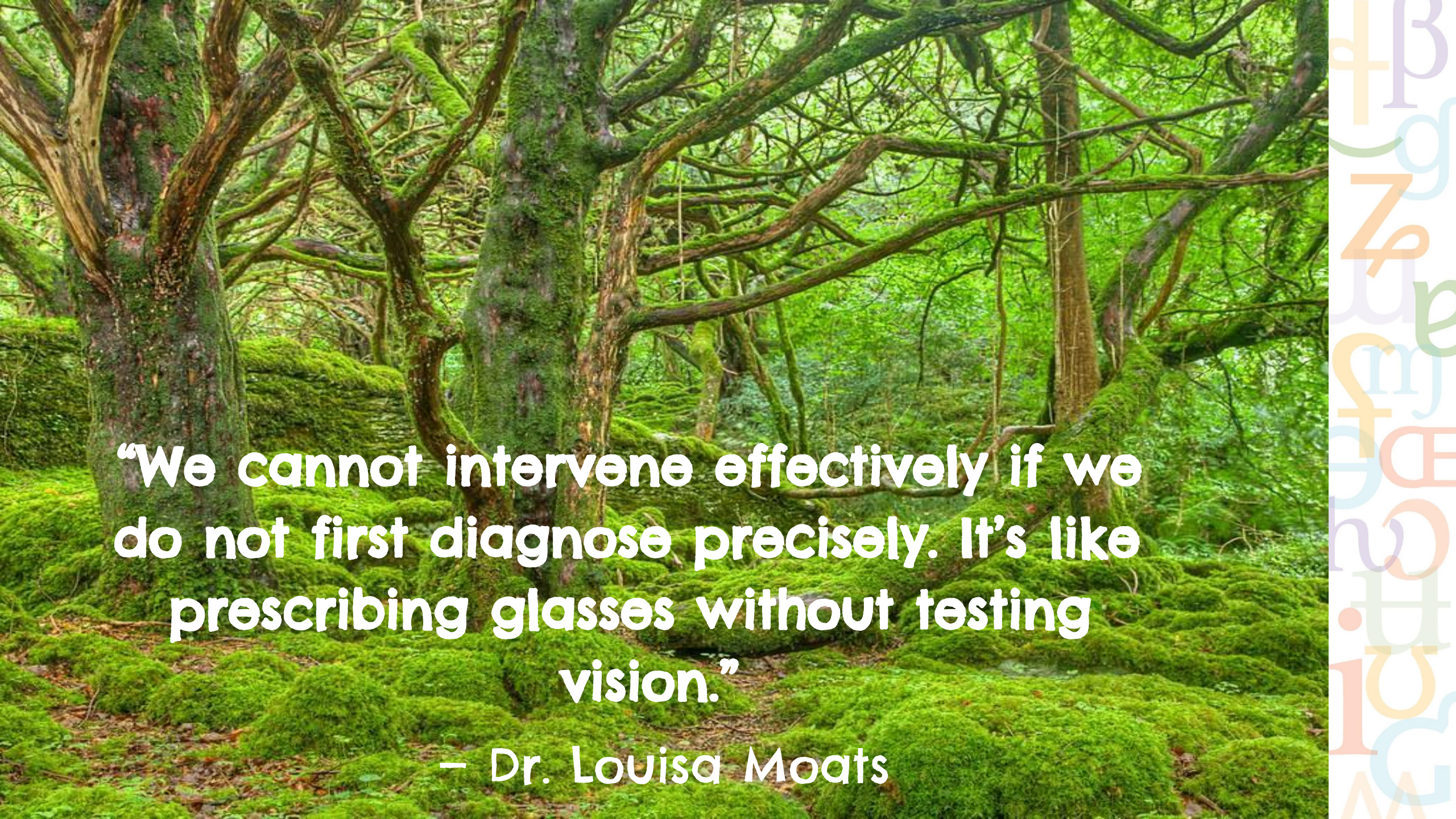
    a. target the skill from the PLAAFP
    b. be measurable and instructionally actionable
    c. include conditions, criteria, and timeframe

Goal: Given a list of 20 vowel team words, student will decode with 80% accuracy over 3 consecutive sessions.

Grow with Intention: Your Call to Action

- Strong growth starts underground! Expect more than just a screener: Invest in diagnostics (time, not money–these are free!)
- Support teachers in going deeper: Build their capacity in the science of reading to understand foundational skills and how they connect to IEPs
- Strengthen every root: encourage IEPs that name the exact deficit and map goals directly to it
- Lead with science: anchor your decisions in what we know from Scarborough's Rope, The Simple View of Reading and cognitive science

Let's commit to growing strong readers—intentionally, skillfully, and one root at a time.


"We cannot intervene effectively if we do not first diagnose precisely. It's like prescribing glasses without testing vision."
– Dr. Louisa Moats