



THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Turning **Literacy Research** Into Classroom Practice

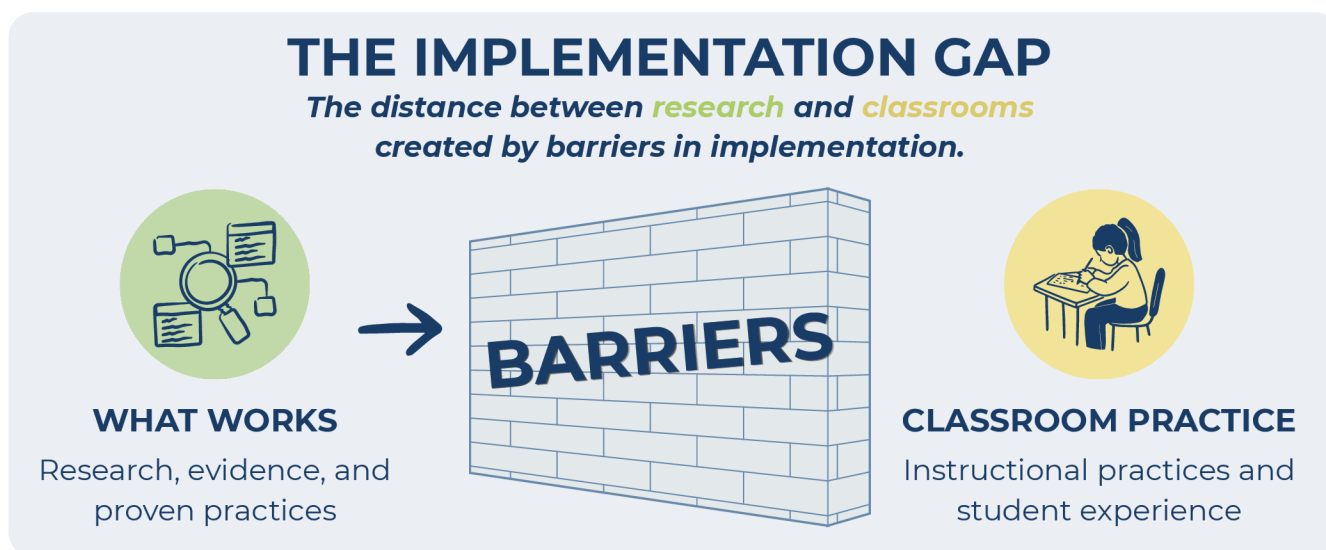
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LAPREA EDUCATION
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools have made tremendous progress in literacy instruction over the past decade (Stanford Report, 2026). States have passed science of reading legislation, districts have adopted evidence-based instructional materials, and educators have invested thousands of hours in professional learning (Schwartz, 2022). These efforts represent meaningful progress that should be recognized and celebrated.

Yet adoption is only the beginning. Research from implementation science consistently demonstrates that knowing what works and implementing what works are fundamentally different challenges. Sustainable improvement depends not only on selecting high-quality programs, but on building the systems that enable teachers to use them consistently and effectively. This challenge is known as the **implementation gap**.



Implementation gaps are not unique to education. Healthcare organizations, businesses, and other industries have long recognized that knowing what works is fundamentally different from implementing what works (Fixsen et al., 2005). In fact, implementation science emerged as an entire field of study because organizations repeatedly discovered that even highly effective innovations often fail without the systems necessary to support sustained adoption.

Education reflects this same challenge. **Teachers remain the single most important school-based factor influencing student learning** (Hattie, 2009), and their success depends upon access to high-quality professional learning, responsive coaching, strong leadership systems, and resources grounded in current research. This paper explores common implementation barriers and highlights the conditions necessary for lasting change. It also emphasizes the role of organizations such as Laprea Education, not just as curriculum providers, but as literacy partners that help schools transform research into sustainable instructional practice.

The Curriculum Myth

When literacy outcomes stagnate, schools often search for a new solution. The response may be to adopt a new curriculum, purchase additional resources, or launch another literacy initiative. While these efforts are well intentioned, curriculum changes alone rarely produce lasting instructional improvement. The missing piece is often not another program, but rather a system that enables teachers to consistently translate research into classroom practice.

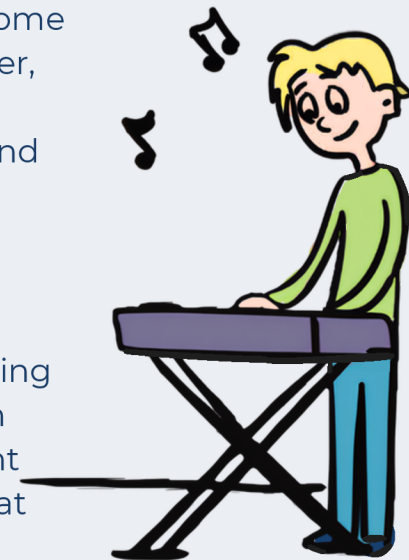
The reality is that *teachers* are the implementers of any program that is purchased.

This distinction matters because literacy improvement is ultimately a human endeavor, not a purchasing decision.

CONSIDER THIS...

You can purchase a high-quality piano, but still not become a great pianist. The quality of the instrument does matter, but excellent performance ultimately requires expert instruction, deliberate practice, meaningful feedback, and time.

Evidence-based curriculum works the same way. **High-quality instructional materials are essential, but they cannot improve student outcomes on their own.** Lasting improvement occurs when teachers are supported with professional learning, opportunities to practice, coherent instructional systems, and implementation supports that help transform great materials into great instruction.



As schools continue to align with the science of reading, the question should shift from:

"What **program** should we buy?"

to

"What **systems** will help teachers implement evidence-based practices successfully over time?"

When schools begin asking the second question, the focus moves beyond adopting new resources toward building the conditions that allow great teaching to succeed.

Why Implementation Is So Difficult

Implementation gaps are often misunderstood as teacher resistance or a lack of effort, but research suggests otherwise (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Educational change is inherently complex because teachers must simultaneously manage curriculum, assessment, intervention, student behavior, scheduling constraints, and competing initiatives while adapting instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (Conner, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Coburn, 2001).

Implementation challenges are therefore systems challenges, not teacher problems.

Several factors commonly contribute to the implementation gap, such as:

1

One-Time Professional Development

Single-day workshops often generate enthusiasm without producing lasting instructional change (Desimone, 2009). Teachers need opportunities to revisit concepts, observe examples, practice implementation, and receive ongoing feedback (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Professional learning should be viewed as a **process** rather than an event.

2

Limited Opportunities for Practice

Learning the science of reading is different from applying it. Teachers need opportunities to try instructional routines, analyze student responses, and refine their practice with support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). Implementation should be **incremental** rather than immediate.

3

Fragmented Priorities

Many schools unintentionally ask teachers to implement numerous initiatives at the same time, often without clear alignment or prioritization. As a result, efforts related to reading, writing, intervention systems, behavior supports, and assessment practices can end up competing for teachers' time and attention rather than reinforcing one another. Research suggests that sustainable implementation is achieved through building **coherence** across practices and systems rather than simply adding additional initiatives (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

4

Difficult-to-Implement Resources

Teachers make hundreds of instructional decisions each day. When instructional materials are difficult to navigate, disconnected from professional learning, or misaligned with existing curriculum, implementation becomes more complex and less consistent. Each additional decision increases cognitive demand and creates opportunities for inconsistency. Research suggests that resources should **reduce cognitive burden** by making evidence-based practices easier, not harder, to implement (Remillard, 2005; Penuel et al., 2007).

Building Systems for Lasting Literacy Success

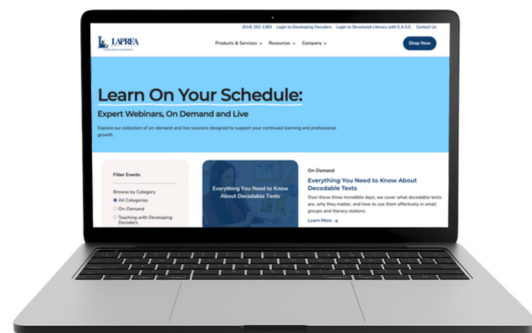
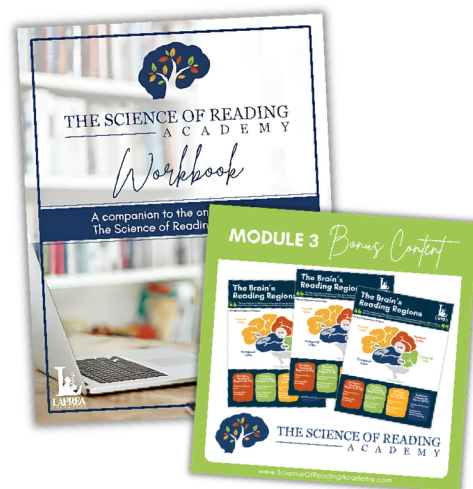
Given the complexity of these challenges, closing the implementation gap requires more than selecting high-quality instructional materials. Sustainable literacy improvement depends on building systems that continually support teachers as they translate research into classroom practice. While no single support is sufficient on its own, research consistently identifies several interconnected conditions that have the potential to promote lasting instructional change.

1

High-Quality Professional Learning

Professional learning is most effective when it is ongoing, accessible, job-embedded, and immediately relevant to classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Rather than relying solely on isolated workshops, schools should create opportunities for teachers to revisit key concepts, observe examples of effective instruction, and deepen their understanding over time.

On-demand professional learning offers one way to extend learning beyond scheduled professional development days. Because teachers encounter new questions throughout the school year, flexible learning opportunities allow them to revisit instructional routines precisely when they become relevant to their practice. One example of this approach is the Laprea PD Library, which was intentionally designed to provide timely professional learning that educators can access, revisit, and immediately apply within their classrooms.



2

Ongoing Instructional Coaching

Professional learning builds knowledge, but coaching helps transform knowledge into practice. Research consistently demonstrates that instructional coaching is among the most effective methods for supporting sustained changes in teacher practice because it provides opportunities for observation, feedback, reflection, and collaborative problem solving (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007; Aguilar, 2013).

Effective coaching is not evaluative. Instead, it creates a safe environment where teachers refine instructional decisions, celebrate growth, and continually improve their practice. Coaching should be viewed as an essential extension of professional learning rather than a separate initiative.

3

Coherent Instructional Systems

Successful implementation depends upon coherence across a school's instructional resources. Too often, districts unintentionally create additional complexity by combining programs that were never designed to work together. As teachers translate between multiple scopes and sequences, instructional decision-making becomes more difficult and implementation becomes less consistent.



Instead, supplemental resources should strengthen and extend core instruction rather than compete with it (Coburn, 2001; Fullan, 2007). For example, districts implementing UFLI Foundations may benefit from using Developing Decoders because the books were intentionally designed to align with UFLI's instructional sequence. Rather than requiring teachers to reconcile competing scopes and sequences, this alignment preserves instructional coherence and reduces unnecessary planning demands.

4

Implementation-Friendly Resources

Teachers make hundreds of instructional decisions every day. The resources they use should simplify those decisions rather than create additional complexity.

Research-aligned instructional materials provide greater value when they are practical, easy to implement, and grounded in the current evidence base (Penuel et al., 2007; Remillard, 2005). Whether selecting decodable texts, planning intervention lessons, or accessing professional learning, educators benefit from resources that are intentionally designed to reduce cognitive burden while maintaining instructional quality. This philosophy guides Laprea Education's approach to resource development.



Rather than creating isolated products, Laprea seeks to build connected supports such as instructional materials, professional learning, and implementation guidance that help teachers confidently translate literacy research into effective classroom practice.

Moving From Research to Results

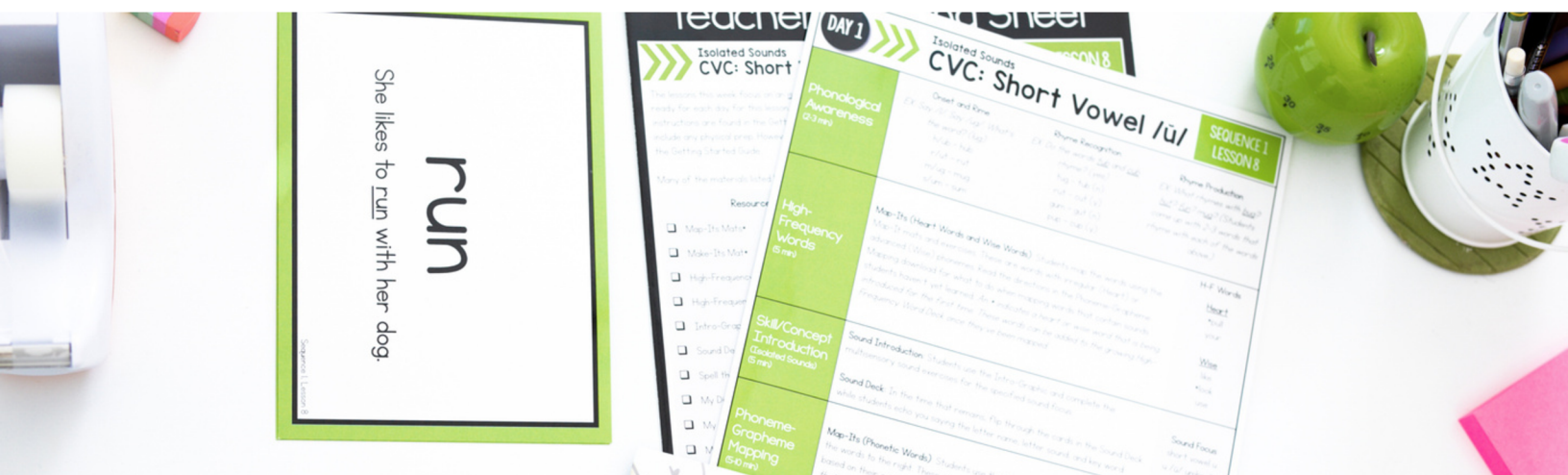
The science of reading has transformed literacy education by providing educators with a clearer understanding of how children learn to read. As a result, schools have access to stronger research, higher-quality instructional materials, and more professional learning opportunities than ever before. Yet it is clear that research alone does not improve student outcomes.

Student achievement can only change when evidence-based practices become evidence-based routines within classrooms. That transformation depends not on a singular curriculum, workshop, or initiative, but on the systems that support teachers as they refine their practice over time.

Implementation should therefore be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a destination. Schools that experience lasting improvement recognize that professional learning is never truly complete. Teachers continue asking questions, refining instruction, analyzing student data, and adapting their practice throughout their careers. Sustainable implementation honors this reality by providing educators with continuous opportunities to learn, practice, receive feedback, and access high-quality resources when they need them most.

Organizations that serve as implementation partners play an important role in bridging the gap between research and classroom practice. High-quality implementation partners do more than provide instructional materials. They also align professional learning, practical classroom resources, and implementation supports so evidence-based practices become easier to use consistently.

At Laprea Education, this philosophy guides every resource we create. Our instructional materials are intentionally designed to reduce unnecessary planning decisions, reinforce evidence-based instructional routines, and support teachers throughout the implementation process. By reducing complexity and increasing coherence, implementation partners can help schools sustain instructional improvement long after initial adoption.



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