The **False Divide**

Action Guide for Educators

The majority of older students in the United States aren't reading at grade-level.
What can educators do to change that?

Reading Reimagined undertook five years of research and development to better understand what's holding readers back, especially in the later grades—and how to help. Our research found that a gap in advanced decoding skills underpins the literacy crisis for older readers.

Conservative estimates indicate that many older readers struggle to decode grade-level texts:

1 in 3
Fourth graders struggle

1 in 4
Sixth graders struggle

1 in 6
Eighth graders struggle

These students may be able to decode simple words using the basic phonics skills they learned in early elementary grades, but they have not yet developed advanced skills to decode the more complex, multisyllabic words that appear in later grades. Without sufficient decoding skills to drive automatic word recognition, reading development stalls—and students cannot comprehend what they read.

Why are so many older students missing these skills? Because the U.S. education system views literacy learning as a two-phase process: "Learn to read, then read to learn." Beyond third grade, most academic standards, assessment tools, and curricula deprioritize foundational skill-building in favor of comprehension only.

Given the current landscape, what can educators do to give their upper elementary and middle school students the foundational literacy skills they need—while also teaching everything else?

Read the Full Report Here

Reading Reimagined partnered with the RAND corporation to survey teachers in grades 3-8, and found that two-thirds of teachers reported that they need resources to identify struggling readers and support their development. Nearly half said most of what they know about foundational literacy instruction comes from classroom practice, not training. In short, if you are an educator who feels limited in your capacity to provide your students with advanced foundational reading instruction—but who recognizes the need for it—you are not alone.

Supporting older readers will require systemic changes to literacy instruction, from policy to practice. All of this takes time, will, and investment. But this does not mean teachers are without agency in the meantime.

Here are free, research-backed resources teachers can put to use in their classrooms with minimal additional time or training:

Instructional Component	Resource	QR	Overview	Best used for...	Level of teacher lift for implementation
Multisyllabic decoding Morphology Vocabulary	**Big Words** (Building Words + Making Meanings)		Suite of instructional resources and strategies designed to help students read, write, and comprehend complex, multisyllabic words	Whole-class instruction for upper elementary students (3-5)	Medium
Multisyllabic decoding Morphology Vocabulary Fluency	**Read Stop Write**		Novel approach to interventions that integrates foundational skill-building with comprehension using informational texts	Reading intervention for upper elementary and middle school students (4-9)	Medium
Fluency	**NWEA Fluency Protocol** **NWEA Fluency Protocol Research Report** **Student Achievement Partners Fluency Protocols**		Sequence of five sessions of about 20 minutes each, in which a single text is read aloud to a class, then in pairs, as a group, and independently Each Fluency Packet provides 40+ passages – enough to use approximately 1 passage per week – to build student fluency throughout the academic year.	Whole-class instruction for any grade, when paired with a high-interest, grade-appropriate text	Low

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADOPTING NEW RESOURCES

When evaluating additional resources to support older students'' foundational literacy learning, educators should ask:

- **Is this resource developmentally appropriate and designed specifically for older students?**
- **Is it evidence-based?**
- **Does it use grade-appropriate, high-interest texts and content for skill-building?**
- **Does it include a simple way to gather data on students' learning?**

For more information, read the full report here:

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