PIONEER VALLEY BOOKS

PHONICS LAUNCH
BUILDING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Publisher Response to the IMRA Review Committee Findings

Pioneer Valley Books would like to thank the Texas Education Agency and Safal Partners for their work in providing a thorough and insightful review of *Phonics Launch*. We are excited by our 100% alignment to the phonics TEKS and are grateful for all the positive feedback presented in the final product reports.

Company Overview

Pioneer Valley Books is a small family-owned business that for more than 25 years has been providing high-quality early literacy materials designed by teachers for teachers. The company was founded by a small group of experienced educators and literacy experts who wanted to give early readers access to high-quality, engaging books. Our team is dedicated to producing evidence-based curricula aligned with the latest research, and we are firmly committed to ensuring that our resources boost teacher performance in the classroom and include high-quality books that students are excited about and look forward to reading. Our goal has always been to help all students become joyful readers who just can't wait to read another book.

Program Overview

Phonics Launch is a research-based foundational skills program that combines the power of systematic phonics with dynamic instruction. Each kit can be used across K–3 grade levels and contains lesson plans for systematic, explicit phonics instruction paired with decodable storybooks. Multimodal letter learning and phonics tools foster vibrant student learning experiences. The lessons provide differentiated instruction in phonemic

awareness, alphabetics, phonics, decoding, and encoding—all critical elements in a science-based reading program. *Phonics Launch* is 100% aligned to the phonics TEKS. Scope and sequence charts showing the concepts taught in each lesson and the TEKS and ELPS alignment are available in the *Phonics Launch Handbook*.

Intentional Instructional Design

Phonics Launch's four-day lessons contain instruction in phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, and writing. Each on each day of the lesson, students will learn a phonics skill, practice the skill and isolated words, and immediately apply that learning to connected text and authentic writing. The *Phonics Launch Handbook* includes a scope and sequence, TEKS lesson alignment, assessment information, suggested pacing, and the procedures and rationales for each step and activity. *Phonics Launch* is organized into 5 kits aligned with the phonics continuum. The skills in the kits range from simple to more complex. See below for a description of each kit.

•*Ready, Set, Go*, Sets 1 and 2: letter names and sounds, beginning practice in decoding and encoding CVC words and concepts of print, such as one-to-one matching and return sweep.

• *On Our Way*, Sets 1 and 2: decoding and encoding CVC words, words with initial and final digraphs, and simple words with initial blends.

• *Building Up*, Sets 1 and 2: decoding and encoding words with final blends, long vowels, and vowel teams.

2

• *Moving On*, Sets 1 and 2: decoding and encoding words with more variable and challenging sounds, such as vowel-r combinations, complex blends, and diphthongs, as well as compound and multisyllable words.

• *Lifting Off*, Sets 1 and 2: decoding and encoding multisyllabic words with common prefixes and suffixes, as well as words with challenging sounds such as vowel-r combinations, vowel teams, trigraphs, and diphthongs.

Each kit has a set of lesson cards and books. The lesson cards contain comprehensive, detailed lesson plans that include student learning objectives, questions, student practice, suggested teacher language, and progress monitoring assessments. The downloadable resources include content knowledge and academic vocabulary for effective teaching, materials to support families and caregivers in their students' success, and resources to support administrators and instructional coaches with implementation.

Progress Monitoring

Phonics Launch includes a variety of instructional assessments at the unit and lesson level, including diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments that are aligned to the TEKS. A Phonics Survey is used as a diagnostic tool and as ongoing progress monitoring to place students in the appropriate unit of lessons and track their learning. Weekly progress monitoring and summative assessments measure learning on the skills that were explicitly taught and support differentiation in instruction to meet students' needs. Tables are conveniently included in the *Phonics Launch Handbook* to show TEKS alignment to the lessons and corresponding assessments. The assessments include varying types of tasks and questions. Resources are also provided to guide teachers in interpreting and responding to student performance. These robust assessments and resources give teachers the information they need to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Student Data Trackers are also included to involve students in goal setting and progress monitoring.

Supports for All Learners

The materials in *Phonics Launch* guide teachers in supporting all learners, including providing differentiated instruction, activities, and scaffolded lessons for students who are not proficient on grade-level skills. The lessons support teachers in modeling, explaining, and communicating concepts. Each lesson includes multiple types of practice and a variety of instructional approaches. The *Phonics Launch Handbook* includes recommendations for teachers to differentiate instruction for students who have not yet reached proficiency on grade-level content and skills as well as enrichment and extension activities for students who have demonstrated proficiency.

Phonics Rule Compliance

In *Phonics Launch,* the development of strong phoneme-grapheme correspondence and decoding/encoding skills is front and center in every lesson. This is reflected in the framework of each grade level, where phonological/phonemic awareness and phonics skills are explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced before reading and writing. *Phonics Launch* was designed around systematic and sequenced instruction of foundational skills. Every phonics skill is practiced in isolation and connected to decodable text with purposeful cumulative review built into the activities. The lessons contain Phonics Storybooks that are engaging, decodable texts that include the taught phonics skills. The lessons also contain a variety of engaging phonics activities, including Making Words, Breaking Words, Analogy Charts, and more. Students learn to build, read, and write words.

Foundational Skills

One of the strengths of *Phonics Launch* is the variety of activities and resources found in each lesson. Through these activities, students develop, practice, and reinforce foundational skills, including oral language, letter-sound correspondence, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, sound-spelling patterns, high-frequency words, one-syllable and multisyllabic words, and morphological awareness. These varied activities are highly engaging and purposefully designed to support the learning of all students.

Program Clarifications

We would like to clarify several points regarding our instruction.

> **Support for Emergent Bilingual Students**
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> The framework of instruction in *Phonics Launch* is uniquely designed to give all students individualized phonics instruction regardless of their level of English proficiency. *Phonics Launch* was also designed with the understanding that not all emergent bilingual students have the same needs or require the same level of support. Because of this, our materials make recommendations and provide resources for supports that allow teachers to make decisions on the best ways to differentiate learning for all students. *Phonics Launch* also includes a variety of assessment opportunities that gives teachers the information they need to evaluate student learning and adjust the level and type of supports each student receives.
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> Steps 1 (Learning Letters/Phonemic Awareness) of Days 1 and 3 give students time to learn, listen to, and verbally practice the sounds of the English language. Step 1

(Sight Word Review) on Days 2 and 4 allows students to practice reading and writing high-frequency words. Step 2 (Phonics) on Days 1–4 gives students time to connect the sounds to the symbols of the English alphabet. *Phonics Launch* uses visual supports, including word study cards with sound boxes and letter cards, that benefit all students, especially emergent bilingual students. Step 3 of Days 1–4 is a shared read or interactive writing. Before each new book is read, the lessons contain a book introduction to support teachers in introducing new, unfamiliar concepts to students.

Chapter 9 of the *Phonics Launch Handbook* provides teachers with a variety of explicit strategies to use to support emergent bilingual students. This chapter is organized by foundational skill so that teachers can easily reference and implement the strategies that will benefit their students. With this resource, *Phonics Launch* can be personalized to meet the needs of all teachers and students.

Explicit Instruction and Corrective Feedback

Phonics Launch was designed to support teachers in providing effective instruction for their students. At Pioneer Valley Books, we understand that not all students have the same needs, and for this reason, the lessons are not scripted to the extent that teachers are unable to make adjustments to ensure the success of their students. The lesson cards include the essential information and teacher language teachers need to implement the curriculum effectively. The *Phonics Launch Handbook* provides more detailed information about the procedure for each activity and how to differentiate and/or provide enrichment based on the needs of their students.

Responsive feedback has an effect size of 0.75 on student achievement. "When students are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks, they are more likely to respond to feedback because they need that information to continue growing and learning," (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, 23). This can be especially critical for students who struggle. Being responsive to the needs of individual students and their errors in real time plays an important role in their learning and quickly resolves misunderstanding. Effective corrective feedback involves careful observation of students' responses and errors and should be based on their specific needs and literacy goals. All students do not need the same type of corrective feedback. Moreover, the type of corrective feedback one student needs may change over time as that student's literacy knowledge advances.

Even in *Phonics Launch*'s small-group setting, teachers need to manage a range of levels of ability. To that end, we provide teachers with the resources they need to provide corrective feedback that is individualized to each student's needs and goals. The *Phonics Launch Handbook* contains corrective feedback charts (also available for download as an online resource) to help teachers provide appropriate responsive feedback during phonological/phonemic awareness activities, phonics activities, reading connected text, and during writing. Feedback is flexible in that it can be used for individual as well as small-group support. By providing a framework rather than scripted instruction, teachers are encouraged to use the corrective feedback provided as a springboard to make in-the-moment instructional decisions that help move every student's learning forward.

Oral Language Development

Phonics Launch includes daily opportunities for oral language development. Step 3 (Applying Phonics: Reading) of Days 1 and 3 includes a Book Discussion in which students will use content vocabulary and academic language to discuss the books they read. Step 3 also outlines specific teaching points that explicitly teach students strategies in phrasing and expression.

High-Frequency Words

The collection of decodable books used in *Phonics Launch* features a set of carefully sequenced high-frequency words and provides students with multiple opportunities to read and reread new sight words in context. Then, to support the acquisition of new words, the lessons include a phoneme-grapheme mapping routine. Once students are introduced to the new high-frequency word and map it, they have many opportunities to practice the new word in isolation and in the context of reading and writing. Using this multilayered approach ensures students will quickly develop a large bank of sight words.

The scope and sequence of the high-frequency words chosen for *Phonics Launch* is informed by the Dolch word list. When possible, we have aligned sight words with the phonics focus, but we have prioritized introducing words most likely to show up in grade-level text. Students then build automaticity reading and writing those words in isolation and in context. Building a strong bank of sight words helps improve student confidence and efficacy when reading and writing.

Program Improvements

At Pioneer Valley Books, we believe strongly in creating curricula that support teachers. Therefore, in response to this review, we have made several additions/improvements to our program for the State of Texas and its teachers.

- We have added an appendix to the *Phonics Launch Handbook* that provides an overview of how the ELPS align with all lesson components. Since the lesson components do not change across the program, this gives teachers a solid understanding of how the ELPS are supported in each lesson.
- We have added summative assessments to assess student learning at the end of each unit.

Again, Pioneer Valley Books wishes to thank the Texas Education Agency and Safal Partners for including *Phonics Launch* in their 2024 IMRA review. We believe in the strength of *Phonics Launch*, not only to give students a strong background in foundational literacy skills, but to instill in them a lifelong love of books and reading.

If you would like to learn more about *Phonics Launch*, please visit us at https://pioneervalleybooks.com/pages/phonics-launch.