Red Flags, Roadblocks, Resources

This document aims to explore roadblocks, red flags, and helpful resources for schools transitioning from a balanced literacy approach to a Science of Reading approach. It provides insights into common challenges that schools may encounter and offers links to additional resources to support their journey.

Common Roadblocks:

1. **Resistance to Change:** One of the primary roadblocks is resistance from teachers, administrators, and even parents who are accustomed to the balanced literacy approach. Overcoming this resistance requires persuasive communication and highlighting the benefits of the Science of Reading. Emily Hanford's podcast series, "Sold a Story," is a helpful resource that explores the attributes of skilled readers and emphasizes the need for evidence-based instructional practices.
2. **Lack of Knowledge and Training**: Teachers may lack sufficient knowledge and training in the Science of Reading approach. Acquiring new skills and understanding the research behind the approach is essential for effective implementation. Really Great Reading offers an extensive library of free Science of Reading Trainings and free scientifically aligned tools. These can enhance educators' knowledge, build excitement and eliminate misconceptions.
3. **Misconceptions and Beliefs:** Deeply ingrained misconceptions and beliefs about reading instruction may hinder the adoption of evidence-based strategies. Educators may need to unlearn outdated practices and embrace evidence-based methods. Louisa Moats and Carol Tolman's article, "Speaking is Natural; Reading and Writing are Not," provides further insights into dispelling the myth that learning to read is as easy as learning to speak.

4. **Limited Resources and Materials:** Schools may face challenges in acquiring research-based instructional materials, decodable books aligned with a specific scope and sequence, and assessments aligned with the Science of Reading. Limited budgets can impede the procurement of necessary resources, which are crucial for effective implementation.
5. **Time Constraints:** Transitioning to a new approach requires time for professional development, planning, and collaboration among teachers. Time constraints can hinder educators' engagement in the necessary training and implementation activities. Overcoming this roadblock requires careful scheduling and prioritization of dedicated time for professional development.
6. **Alignment with Existing Structures:** Implementing the Science of Reading approach may necessitate adjustments to existing curriculum frameworks, assessment systems, and instructional supports. Aligning the new approach with existing structures and systems can be a complex process that requires thorough planning and coordination.
7. **Parental Expectations and Understanding:** Parents may have different expectations or limited understanding of the Science of Reading approach. Educators must effectively communicate the benefits and evidence behind the approach to build support and understanding among parents.
8. **No clear Foundational Literacy Skill Data on their entire K-2 student population:** Lack of comprehensive data on foundational literacy skills across all K-2 students indicates a potential gap in assessment practices aligned with the Science of Reading. Obtaining accurate data is crucial for identifying students who may require targeted intervention or additional support.

Overcoming these roadblocks requires strong leadership, ongoing professional development, a supportive school culture, and a commitment to evidence-based practices. Collaboration among educators, administrators, and other stakeholders is essential to address challenges and ensure successful implementation of the Science of Reading approach.

Red Flags:

Administrators should be aware of the following red flags or warning signs while observing educators during the transition from a balanced literacy approach to a Science of Reading approach:

1. **Students not knowing how to segment words into phonemes:** This indicates a lack of phonemic awareness, a foundational skill for reading. If students struggle with segmenting words, it might point to a gap in instructional dedication (most students pick up these skills with a moderate amount of instruction, modeling and practice. Teachers may need to address this through a deeper dedication to direct instruction and practice.
2. **Teachers using word walls and flash cards to teach students how to read words:** Relying solely on word walls and flash cards to teach reading can indicate an outdated methodology that does not prioritize systematic phonics instruction. Teachers need to understand the importance of explicit phonics instruction for developing strong decoding skills.
3. **Teachers using the three-cueing approach:** The three-cueing approach, relying on context, syntax, and visual cues to read words, is not aligned with the Science of Reading. If teachers employ this method, it suggests a reliance on guessing strategies rather than explicitly teaching decoding skills. Even when advanced scientifically aligned instruction is present, the three cueing method can undermine the good work being done in parts of the instructional day.
4. **Teachers using leveled literacy books:** Leveled literacy books may not provide sufficient opportunities for explicit phonics instruction. Lack of decodable texts can limit students' practice in applying phonics skills to decode unfamiliar words. Many of these books use outdated methodologies and encourage use of guessing and three-cueing.

5. **Teachers teaching high-frequency words before students understand letter-sound relationships and the alphabetic principle:** In an optimal structured literacy approach, students develop phoneme segmentation and letter knowledge before high-frequency word instruction. Prioritizing high-frequency words without a foundation in phonics can impede students' decoding abilities.
6. **Teachers not having clear Foundation Skill Data on their entire K-2 student population:** Lack of data on foundational literacy skills across all K-2 students (screening data) indicates a potential gap in assessment practices aligned with the Science of Reading. This makes it challenging to identify students who may require targeted intervention, additional assessment or additional support.
7. **Teachers not having diagnostics that allow them to target individual skills that are weak or missing in students:** Diagnostic assessments are essential for identifying specific skill gaps in students' reading abilities. Without such assessments, teachers may struggle to provide targeted instruction and interventions based on individual needs.
8. **Less than 80% of students reaching proficient levels on early literacy screening assessments:** Low proficiency levels on early literacy screening assessments can indicate ineffective or insufficient instruction in foundational reading skills. It highlights the need for closer examination of instructional practices and potential misalignment with the Science of Reading.
9. **Teachers leveraging Teachers Pay Teachers to create materials:** While Teachers Pay Teachers can be a valuable resource, relying solely on purchased materials may indicate a lack of knowledge or training in evidence-based instructional practices. Teachers should understand the principles of structured literacy and be able to create or adapt materials accordingly.
10. **Lack of a clear scope and sequence for Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Letter Knowledge, and other structured literacy elements:** A well-defined scope and sequence ensure logical and developmentally appropriate sequencing of instructional components. The absence of a clear scope and sequence can lead to instructional gaps or inconsistencies in teaching foundational reading skills.

11. **Lack of decodable books that relate to the scope and sequence being used:** Decodable books, containing phonetically regular words, are crucial for practicing phonics skills. The absence of decodable books aligned with the chosen scope and sequence may hinder students' ability to apply their phonics knowledge.
12. **Lack of consistency in phonemic awareness and phonics instructional language across the K-3 ecosystem:** Consistency in instructional language and terminology is crucial for a coherent approach to teaching phonemic awareness and phonics. Inconsistency across grade levels or classrooms can lead to confusion for students.

Helpful Resources:

- Emily Hanford's podcast series "Sold a Story" provides insights into the attributes of skilled readers and the instructional routines necessary for building expert readers.
- Really Great Reading offers a family of Science of Reading workshops that can enhance educators' knowledge and help dispel misconceptions.
- Louisa Moats and Carol Tolman's article "Speaking is Natural; Reading and Writing are Not" provides further understanding of the differences between learning to speak and learning to read.
- Early literacy screening assessments can help identify students' proficiency levels and potential gaps in foundational reading skills.
- Structured literacy resources, including scope and sequence documents and decodable books, support effective implementation of the Science of Reading approach.

Conclusion:

Transitioning from a balanced literacy approach to a Science of Reading approach can face various roadblocks and red flags. Overcoming these challenges requires leadership, ongoing professional development, a supportive school culture, and a commitment to evidence-based practices. By addressing resistance, enhancing knowledge and training