

YOUTH SUCCESS  
MOVEMENT

# The Skill Gap Model

*Identifying the gaps that hold students back —  
and the training that closes them*

Identify the Gaps · Close the Gaps · Empower Effective Learning



# Skill Gap Theory

**01**

## Strong Foundation

Students who enter school with a strong foundational skill set learn to read with almost any valid reading program.

**02**

## The Weak Link

Students with any weakness in foundational skills struggle with current curricula — and most never catch up without intervention.

**03**

## The Skill Gap

Learning to read proficiently requires a specific set of skills. A gap in those skills creates a gap in outcomes.

**Proficient reading requires a specific set of skills — gaps in those skills must be identified and closed.**

# Four Types of Skills That Empower Reading

*All skill development is also impacted by homelife.*



## Mindset & Social Emotional Skills

Self-esteem, persistence, delayed gratification, and resilience that underpin all learning



## Basic Reading Skills

Phonological awareness, letters/sounds, phonics rules, and foundational vocabulary



## Advanced Reading Skills

Complex codes, syntax, semantics, comprehension, and broader vocabulary acquisition



## Cognitive Processing Skills

Visual/auditory processing, working memory, attention, processing speed, and recall



*Homelife acts as a multiplier on all four skill areas — stress, nutrition, sleep, and family support shape learning capacity.*

# The Skills for Reading Success

## 3rd-grade reading proficiency milestone

### Social Emotional

- Mindset
- Persistence
- Delayed gratification
- Self-esteem

### Basic Reading

- Letters & sounds
- Print awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics & rules
- Basic vocabulary

### Advanced Reading

- Letter creation & writing
- Sequencing
- Sound combinations
- Syntax & semantics
- Non-content words
- Spelling
- Comprehension
- Broader vocabulary

### Cognitive Processing

- Sensory input accuracy
- Visual processing
- Visual memory
- Rapid automatic naming
- Auditory processing
- Auditory memory
- Working memory
- Processing speed
- Attention

**Any one skill gap can block reading success — and most are never identified with current assessments.**

# Mindset Skills



## The Failure Loop

Students who have been failing often believe their struggle is their own fault — labeled as 'behind' or 'slow,' carrying test anxiety.



## Growth Mindset First

Building growth mindset and social-emotional skills first is essential to create the persistence needed to close skill gaps.



## Social Emotional Skills

Persistence, patience, self-management, relationships, self-awareness, and decision-making all play key roles in academic success.



*What a student believes about their abilities impacts both self-esteem and academic outcomes.*

*If a student believes they will fail, they likely will.*

**Growth**

Mindset unlocks persistence

**Self**

Esteem drives engagement

# Basic Reading Skills

## Print Awareness

Understanding that print carries meaning, directionality, and structure.

## Phonics & Phonemic Awareness

Breaking words into sounds; understanding letter-sound correspondences.

## Letters & Sounds

Recognizing individual letters and associating them with their corresponding sounds.

## Basic Vocabulary

Often intentionally limited to fit simple decoding rules — stories may feel unnatural to early readers.

## The Curriculum Gap

- Current curricula spend too much time on basic decoding skills.
- Fluency and comprehension skills are not built adequately.
- Stories are often limited to fit decoding rules — they don't reflect real oral language.
- Students who lack foundational skills fall behind and rarely catch up without targeted intervention.

# Advanced Reading Skills

## Letter Creation & Writing

Reinforces the connection between reading and producing written language.

## Complex Sound Codes

Multiple letters that represent one sound; multiple spellings for one sound.

## Non-Content Words

High-frequency words that don't follow phonetic rules — require memorization.

## Comprehension

The ultimate goal of reading — understanding and interpreting meaning.

## Sequencing

Understanding narrative and logical order — essential for comprehension.

## Syntax & Semantics

How sentences are structured and how meaning is conveyed beyond individual words.

## Spelling

Builds the deep orthographic knowledge that supports fluent reading.

## Broader Vocabulary

Expanded earlier in training — enabling richer stories and deeper understanding.

# Cognitive Processing Skills

*The brain takes in sensory inputs, makes sense of the world, and guides how a student interacts with their learning environment.*



## Visual Processing

& Memory

Accurate visual input and memory are foundational for recognising letters and words.



## Auditory Processing

& Memory

Processing and retaining spoken sounds enables phonetic decoding and listening comprehension.



## Working Memory

LT / ST recall

Holding and manipulating information while reading is essential for building meaning.



## Processing Speed

Automaticity

Faster processing frees cognitive resources for comprehension rather than decoding.



## Attention

Focus & sustain

Sustained attention is required to follow text and absorb new information.



## Rapid Automatic Naming

Key fluency predictor

Speed of symbol recognition — the strongest single predictor of reading fluency.

**Weak cognitive processing makes absorbing any lesson extremely difficult — regardless of teacher quality or curriculum.**

# Homelife

*“A child's brain arrives at school carrying everything that happened before the bell rang.”*



## Housing Security

Instability and frequent moves disrupt learning continuity and create chronic stress.



## Relationship Security

Stable, caring relationships build the emotional safety needed for cognitive engagement.



## Nutrition & Sleep

Brain development and daily learning capacity are directly tied to food and rest quality.



## Educational Support

At-home reinforcement and parental engagement significantly amplify school learning.



## Financial Security

Economic stress creates household tension that impacts the learning environment.



## Adverse Childhood Experiences

Physical/emotional stress, trauma, death, divorce — ACEs directly impact brain development.

# The Solution

01

## Be Aware

Recognize the broader set of skills that impact reading success — beyond what current curricula assess.

02

## Evaluate the Full Set

Assess every relevant skill area to identify exactly where each student's gaps lie.

03

## Provide Targeted Training

Use evidence-based methods to close each specific skill gap — not generic remediation.

*"The current paradigm is not closing the Skill Gap — and that is why so many students continue to fall behind."*