

YOUTH SUCCESS MOVEMENT · WORKING PROTOCOL

The Ten

Grade four and above — students who have had sufficient instruction and are failing anyway

The document you hold while sitting with student four of ten. Sessions in order, what to say, what to run, what each finding routes to.

September 2026 · Version 2.0

What changed in version 2.0

Several checks in version 1.0 attached an interpretation to a single observation. Those interpretations have been withdrawn — the observations remain, and what they are read as has changed. Each one is marked in place.

The engine model has also gained three parts since: handling a word that is not in the library, working with the picture once it is built, and what a timed test asks for on top of reading. Session three now covers all three.

No threshold, cut point or percentile appears anywhere in this document. Where version 1.0 gave one, it was not sourced and it has been removed.

The premise, and why it matters

These ten students had the same instruction as classmates who passed. That is not a detail — it is the control, and it is what makes the whole exercise worth doing.

How can the ten who failed be explained by inadequate instruction, when the same instruction was adequate for the ten who passed? Same teacher, same room, same lessons, and some children read while others do not. Something else is at play in those ten.

And yet what the system offers them is more of the same, plus accommodations. Neither addresses a cause, because no cause was ever identified.

Two holes in the premise, and you should raise both yourself

A student who was not there did not receive the same instruction. Attendance is not a condition to screen for here — it is a check that runs before anything else. Ask for the record including partial days, because full-day absences are what get reported and ten late mornings can cost as much reading instruction as two absent days. If attendance is low, that student has a different problem and should not be in the ten.

The same lesson is not received the same way, and classrooms are not randomly composed. Someone will raise this, usually as “so it is poverty.” The answer: poverty is not a mechanism, it is a label for a bundle of them — untreated conditions, thin early language, weaker skills built by fewer demanding experiences, disrupted sleep, and a child who has already drawn a conclusion about themselves. “It is poverty” explains nothing and generates no action. Naming which one is operating in a particular child generates several.

What you are proving

Not this. That the students improve. They probably will, but a semester is short and a student three years behind may gain two years and still not cross a line calibrated to grade level.

This. That every one of the ten had a cause nobody had identified. True within two weeks, checkable, and impossible to argue with. Any crossings are upside.

Write your prediction down first

Before you meet anyone, record what you expect to find and how many of each. A prediction made in advance is worth far more than an explanation offered afterwards — and if you are wrong, that is the most useful thing you will learn all year.

Before you begin

Confirm the control

- **Attendance.** High enough that missed instruction is not the explanation, including partial days. Ask the school what they consider low for their building rather than applying a number of your own.
- **Peer comparison.** Evidence that students in the same classrooms passed. Ask for it; do not assume it.

What to request, once consent exists

From the file: state test history, several years if available · current reading level · screener history with subtest breakdowns rather than composites · attendance including partial days · any evaluation reports, including cognitive testing that may be years old · vision and hearing screening records · what has been tried, for how long, with what result

From the parent: everything in Check These First. Sleep and snoring, what the child says about themselves, what happened and when. The school will not have any of this.

From the student: kept for session one. Do not ask through anyone else.

A cognitive evaluation may not exist even where there is a plan

Under response-to-intervention identification, cognitive and processing abilities are generally not assessed beyond ruling out intellectual disability.

So a student can hold an IEP with no working memory, processing speed or attention data anywhere in the file. That is itself a finding, and it is not a criticism — the team followed the method their state approved. Ask whether one was ever done before asking what it said.

The invitation

Invite the student, not only the parent. If the parent applies and the child is informed, you have recreated the referral — and the referral is the thing they have been resisting for years.

Make the application take about twenty minutes. It is the first thing they have chosen in this whole story, and a small act of authorship matters more here than it would anywhere else.

Do not screen on wanting it. A student who says they do not care is almost never telling you about motivation — they are protecting themselves from wanting something they have repeatedly failed at. Screen on showing up instead.

Track who was invited and did not apply. Same school, same struggles, no intervention. It is a comparison group you did not have to construct, and its existence makes the eventual result far harder to dismiss.

Session one · The conversation

About thirty minutes. The student alone, if they are old enough. No testing of any kind.

Purpose

To open the mindset gate — and the way you open it is by promising a cause, not by offering encouragement. Almost every adult in this student's life has told them to try harder. They have tried harder and failed, which to them proves the problem is them. A true explanation is the only thing that dislodges that, and it is why the finding is itself the intervention rather than something that comes after motivation is fixed.

What you say

"I am not going to tell you to try harder. You have tried harder. That is not the problem."

"What I am going to do is find out why this has been hard. There is a why. Nobody has looked for it, and I am going to."

"You do not have to believe this will work. Come three times and let me find out what is going on. After that, you decide."

What you ask

- **When did it get hard?** Always, or did something change? A student fine until fourth grade has a different problem from one who never got started.
- **What happens when you read?** Let them describe it. "The words move." "I forget the beginning." "I get tired." These point somewhere, and nobody has asked.
- **What do you think the problem is?** They usually have a theory. It is often wrong and it is always informative — especially if the theory is about themselves.
- **What have people tried, and what happened?** The history of failed interventions. Each one taught them something about themselves.

- **What do you actually want?** Ask it plainly. Many have never been asked and the answer is rarely about reading.

What you are listening for

- **How they describe themselves.** Write the exact words down, whatever they are. This is the single most important thing you collect all day.
- **Whether there was a moment it changed.** Fourth grade is the common one, because that is when text turns knowledge-dependent.
- **Whether they have a theory.** A student with a theory is still engaged with the problem. A student with none has usually stopped expecting it to change.
- **What they avoid saying.** Silence around a topic tells you something.

What not to do

Do not reassure, do not promise a result, and do not tell them they are clever. Every one of those has been said to them and none of it survived contact with the next failure.

The only thing that lands is the promise to find out why — because it is the one thing nobody has offered.

Session two · Conditions, and the contrast

About forty-five minutes. Parent present, or by phone the same week. This is the highest-yield session in the sequence.

Purpose

Two jobs. Find or rule out the things that block instruction from landing at all — quick, simple, and routinely never checked. Then run the one contrast that routes the rest of the investigation. Nothing measured after this point can be trusted if a condition here is uncorrected.

What you ask

- **The nine conditions.** Check These First, in order. Five minutes with the parent.
- **Sleep and breathing.** Hours, consistency, and whether they snore or sleep with their mouth open. At this age this is the highest-yield item on the list.
- **Vision — the optics only.** When was the last full eye exam, and is it corrected. That is an eye doctor's field and we leave it there. Most students have had some vision testing.
- **Visual processing — a separate thing, and ours.** Whether the eyes hold their place, whether letters stay put, whether the page is comfortable. Five minutes, noted rather than interpreted, and it also surfaces letter mixing such as d and b.
- **Food.** Whether there is breakfast, and whether there is enough at home.
- **Has anything changed?** A student who was fine and is not may have a condition that arrived, rather than a skill that was never built.

On hearing

Ask, and move on. The critical window is roughly ages three to five, it is normally caught early, and a case reaching us uncaught would be rare. Note it in passing; do not build a line of inquiry around it.

What you run

- **Check These First** — all nine, with the parent. Five minutes.

- **The listening-versus-reading contrast** — two matched passages at their level. You read one aloud, they read the other, three questions each.
- **Note rate as well as accuracy** on the passage they read. Accurate but slow is a finding in its own right and it is the one most often missed.
- **The closing question** — “when you read, what are you trying to do?” Ask it casually at the end.

What you are listening for

- **Understands listening, struggles reading.** The trouble is at the word level. Their understanding was never actually tested by anything the school ran.
- **Struggles with both.** It sits above the word level — language, vocabulary, knowledge.
- **Accurate but slow, tired after a page.** The words are there but cost too much, leaving nothing for meaning.
- **An answer about saying words correctly.** They have learned that reading means accurate pronunciation, because that is what was praised, corrected and scored for six years.

One passage is not a result

This contrast raises the question and does not settle it. It points you at a branch. If the two passages differ in topic, familiarity or length as well as in who read them, you have changed more than one thing at once.

A condition cleared is the most common good outcome in this entire process, and the one most often missed. If you find one, correct it and re-measure before going further. The student you meet after a proper eye exam may not be the student you started with.

Session three · Follow the fault

About forty-five minutes. Which branch you run depends entirely on session two. Do not run both.

Purpose

Locate the fault, working upward, and stop at the first thing that fails. Everything above a broken step is unmeasurable until it clears — so a fault found at the word level ends the session, and the stages above it wait.

Branch A — the word level

Run this if they understood what you read aloud and struggled with what they read themselves.

- **Accuracy against rate.** Two different findings. Inaccurate points at decoding. Accurate but slow points at a thin word library — and more phonics makes it worse, because the mechanism already works.
- **Naming speed.** How quickly stored items come back. Quick, needs no reading, and it measures whether recognition is fast enough to leave capacity for meaning. Run it as a measure in its own right.
- **What happens at an unknown word.** Every text has some. Watch which of three things happens: they stop and stay stopped, they work at it and lose the sentence, or they take what the sentence gives and carry on. Only the third one works on a timed test. If sounding it out produces a word they clearly know when spoken, the library is thinner than the vocabulary — that is storage, not language.
- **Reading program placement.** Run the placement test. If they test out, they do not do the program — that is an answer rather than a judgment call.

Withdrawn from version 1.0 — the colors-against-letters contrast

Version 1.0 asked you to compare naming speed for colors against letters and read a gap between them as pointing at orthographic retrieval rather than general speed.

Naming speed itself is well established and stays. The contrast between the two, read as a finding about one student, was not — and it is not a validated procedure. Run naming speed. Do not read the gap.

Branch B — above the word level

Run this if they struggled with both passages, or if the word level is clean.

- **Vocabulary depth.** Definition quality on five common words. Listen to the form of the answer rather than whether it was right. Plus the school’s vocabulary sub-score if it exists.
- **Sentence repetition.** Eight items of rising complexity. Look for a pattern across all eight rather than a verdict from one. One shape is worth knowing about: if the meaning survives but the grammar is consistently flattened — the sentence coming back simpler than it went out, again and again — that is worth asking a speech-language pathologist about.
- **Retell.** “Tell me what happened.” A list of facts rather than a story is worth following up on connecting.
- **Working with the picture.** New in version 2.0, and it is what most test questions actually require. After the retell, ask something that cannot be answered by pointing at a sentence — which of those two was worse and why, what happens next, why did she do that. A student who is fine on recall and lost here has built the picture and has never been asked to work inside it.
- **Monitoring.** Plant sentences that cannot be true — several, across more than one sitting. Everybody reads past things occasionally; what matters is whether anything ever stops them, in anything they read.

Withdrawn from version 1.0 — three single-observation readings

The planted contradiction: “reading straight past it means monitoring is absent.” One item, one sitting, one inference. Use several and look for a pattern instead.

Sentence repetition: “truncation means memory ran out.” The grammatical-flattening half stands. Reading the location of the error as the cause does not.

Retell: “fine on short and lost on long points at model building.” The effect is real at group level; the individual inference is not. Notice whether length changes anything, and treat it as a place to look.

What you are listening for

- **Stop at the first fault.** Do not run the rest of the battery to be thorough. You are not building a profile, you are finding the binding constraint.
- **Expect faults above it to disappear untreated.** Those parts were working and had simply never been engaged.
- **Two findings are normal.** Most of these students will have a condition and a fault, or a fault at two levels.
- **“Could not be checked” is a real answer.** Record it as that rather than as a verdict. A form that forces a conclusion will manufacture one.

Session four · Cognitive skills, only if indicated

About an hour, and only when conditions are clear or being actively addressed.
Frequently not needed at all.

Purpose

To find out whether the constraint is the machinery rather than the reading. This is the branch for the student who is not responding to instruction that is demonstrably adequate — and for the student who is passing while paying far too much for it.

When to run it, and when not to

- **Run it when:** conditions are cleared, instruction is known to be adequate, and the student is either not responding or succeeding at visible cost — three hours of homework for one hour of work, exhausted by Thursday.
- **Do not run it when:** conditions are still open. A tired, hungry or frightened student produces a score that understates them, and unlike a bad day, that score will follow them.
- **Test twice, on different days.** Large swings between administrations indicate a state condition rather than capacity, and a single administration cannot tell the two apart.

Withdrawn from version 1.0 — the percentile threshold

Version 1.0 said: below the fifteenth percentile on a core processing skill, treat it as a gate.

That number was never sourced and it has been removed. It is not a position anyone here holds.

What stands: a percentile is a ranking, and ranking is what it is for — a student low on the scale is clearly different from one high on it, and saying so is necessary. What cannot be said is that a particular score predicts a particular reading outcome. Describe standing and direction. Do not attach a number to a prediction.

There is a point at which a skill is low enough that instruction cannot land. Where that point sits varies by student and by circumstance. Write it as a region, not a cut point.

What you are listening for

- **Response to training tells you something.** A skill that was never built moves. A skill blocked by something unresolved does not.
- **Never leave training software with a student alone.** The same program handed to a struggling student with nobody present appears to do harm rather than nothing — every failure becomes evidence for what they already believe about themselves. The training is demanding by design, and the demanding part is where somebody has to be sitting there.

Session five · The finding

Student and parent together. About thirty minutes. This is the most important session in the sequence and it is not a report-back.

Everything up to here was gathering. This session is where the work actually happens — because naming a true cause is itself the intervention, and for most of these students it is the first time anyone has offered one.

In the case that shaped this whole approach, the finding was a very weak working memory. Naming it did not fix anything. What it did was explain six years of failure **without the student having to be the reason for it** — and that is what made the work possible. The hope came from the finding, not from encouragement.

How to say it

“I found something. This is why it has been hard.”

“It is not that you did not try, and it is not that there is anything wrong with how you think. It is [the specific thing], and it has been getting in the way the whole time. Nobody looked for it, so nobody found it.”

“Here is what we do about it. It will take [honest timeframe]. It will be work, and it will be hard in places — and the hard part is the part that is working.”

Four rules

- **Name one thing, not a list.** Even if you found three, lead with the most upstream one. A list reads as a catalogue of everything wrong with them.
- **Use words they can hold and repeat.** They will explain this to a friend, a sibling, a teacher. If they cannot say it, it did not land.
- **Be honest about the timeframe.** Weeks for a condition, months for automaticity, years for an engine. Overpromising here costs you everything later.
- **Give them something to do that week.** The relief needs somewhere to go, and the first action should be small enough to complete.

And what the parent hears

Something they have usually been carrying alone: that their child's difficulty has a cause, that the cause was findable, and that nobody found it.

Expect anger, or tears, or both. Neither is directed at you. Let it happen and do not rush past it.

The family has been failed. They have not been failing.

Finding to response

One or two actions, never a list. Most upstream fault first, then re-measure.

What you found	Response	How long
Uncorrected vision	Referral. Correct it, then re-measure everything. This is not an instructional problem and no program addresses it.	Weeks
Visual processing — tracking, comfort, letters moving	Try a colored overlay and watch. Note what you see; do not interpret it, and do not propose training eye movements.	Immediate to try
Sleep or breathing	Routine change. Doctor if there is snoring or mouth breathing.	Two weeks to see a difference
Has stopped expecting it to change	The finding conversation itself, plus visible progress at something genuinely hard, plus one adult who stays.	Starts immediately
Inaccurate decoding	Structured decoding work through the reading program.	6 to 12 months
Accurate but slow	Volume of easy text, well below their level, a great deal of it. Not more phonics. And reduce any pressure on speed.	Months
Stops dead at unknown words	Tell them explicitly that carrying on is allowed — most have been taught by correction that it is not. Then practice it out loud together.	Weeks
Thin vocabulary or knowledge	Read aloud above their level daily, deliberate knowledge building, and	Years

What you found	Response	How long
	audio so the engine keeps being fed while the word level is repaired.	
Sentence-level breakdown	Reduce the load — shorter segments, pre-taught vocabulary, rereading permitted. If the grammar was consistently flattened, refer to a speech-language pathologist.	Months
Cannot connect or build a picture	Inference practice through real discussion. Ladder-level questions daily, out loud. Summarizing as you go.	Months to years
Cannot work with the picture once built	Change the questions rather than the reading. After anything they read or watch, ask one question that cannot be answered by pointing at a sentence.	Months
No monitoring	Teach stop-and-check explicitly. And change what gets asked about — what happened, what did you think, rather than whether it was right.	Months
Weak processing skill	Targeted training at the edge of ability, with an adult present. Never software alone.	About 6 months, up to 12
Everything checks out and they still fail the test	Look at the test rather than the reading — did they finish, did they fade, did they misread the questions, were they frightened. A student with a working engine needs something different and a reading intervention will find nothing.	Immediate

Two things that run alongside everything

Keep knowledge growing while the word level is repaired. Audiobooks, read-alouds, documentaries, conversation. From fourth grade onward nearly all vocabulary and knowledge is supposed to arrive through reading — so a student who cannot read is not standing still, they are falling further behind daily. This is the single most neglected action at this age.

Keep one adult in the room. Everything in our own experience, and everything we have seen fail elsewhere, points to the same thing: the work needs somebody present who notices, and who names the struggle as the point.

What to record, per student

One page each. It becomes the record, and across ten students it becomes the evidence.

Stage	What goes down
Before	Attendance including partial days · state test history · screener subtest breakdown · current reading level · what has been tried and what happened
Session 1	Exact words used about themselves · when it got hard · their theory · what they said they want
Session 2	All nine conditions, with dates · the contrast result · rate as well as accuracy · the answer to the closing question
Session 3	Which branch · the first fault found · the error shapes, not just the scores · anything that could not be checked, recorded as that
Session 4	Both administrations, with dates · the gap between them
The finding	The one cause named · the words used · what they said back
Actions	What was started, when, by whom · what was corrected and on what date
Re-measure	The same instrument that found the fault. Then again at three months regardless.

Across the ten

- **The headline number.** How many had a cause that had never been identified. This is the finding, it is true within two weeks, and it cannot be argued with.
- **The distribution.** How many conditions, how many word-level, how many above the word level, how many machinery, how many test-condition only. Compare it against the prediction you wrote down first.

- **The overlap.** How many had two or three findings rather than one. This is the thing a single-label system structurally cannot represent.
- **The comparison.** The invited students who did not apply. Same school, same struggles, no intervention.
- **Why anyone stopped.** If a student drops out, record why from a fixed list — never started, stopped early, stopped when it got hard, life happened, drifted, wrong fit. Nobody publishes this and it is worth having.

What to expect

The order things move in

- **First, within weeks — willingness.** The finding conversation changes what the student believes about themselves, and that shows up before anything measurable does. Watch for it and name it when it happens.
- **Then, within a term — anything condition-related.** Sleep, vision, visual comfort. These are the fast ones and they are why the sequence puts them first.
- **Then, months — automaticity,** if the word library was the fault. Processing skills, if trained properly.
- **Then, years — the engine.** Vocabulary, knowledge, the habit of connecting. There is no shortcut and pretending otherwise costs credibility.

What you will probably see in the room

- **Students talking about it to each other.** In our own experience, students in another year group asked why they were not included. Word traveled by student rather than by adult, and the demand it created was worth more than any recruitment.
- **Belief spreading between students who can see each other.** This is not a side effect. In the two school results this approach came from, it was the largest single thing that happened — a few students began succeeding, the others saw it, and then all of them did well. Where you can run these ten as a group rather than as ten separate cases, do.
- **Confidence arriving before scores.** Tell families this in advance so they know what to look for, and so a real change is not dismissed because a number has not moved yet.
- **At least one student for whom nothing is found.** Say so honestly, escalate, and keep looking. “We have not found it yet” is a legitimate and respectable outcome; pretending is not.

And the sentence to keep hold of

The system tells a failing student to try harder. We tell them we are going to find out why it has been hard.

Those sound similar to an administrator and they are opposites to the student. One locates the deficit in their effort. The other says the deficit is unexplained — and that we intend to explain it.

Nothing in this protocol is a diagnosis, a test, or a measurement of a student. The sessions direct attention; the professionals named in them make findings. Where a step points at a real instrument, it says what it is and who administers it.