What to Look For in Key Phonics Instructional Routines

CHECKLIST

ROUTINE or ASPECT OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION	TEACHER ALERTS (Things to Consider)	PRINCIPAL LOOK-FORS
Blending (Modeling how to sound out words)	☐ Spend more time decoding words in connected text rather than in isolation. ☐ Make sure words in blending lines are high utility, i.e., words students are likely to encounter in reading or use in writing. ☐ Don't overdo the modeling. Model 1–2 words, then have students do the work. Provide quick corrective feedback, as needed.	☐ Quick-paced activities are being used. ☐ The teacher models only 1–2 words, then has students chorally do the rest the first time. ☐ Blending lines are quickly revisited, calling on individual students, pairs, tables/rows, etc. ☐ Blending lines are revisited multiple times throughout the week (e.g., used as quick review or lesson warm-up, small-group work). ☐ Copies of blending lines can be used for independent and at-home work.
Dictation (Guided spelling)	☐ Model by thinking aloud each week how you write words using the new phonics skill. ☐ Make sure spelling is linked to phonics and students' needs based on analysis of their writing. ☐ Provide increased opportunities for students to write words with the new phonics skills (e.g., writing follow-up to decodable text readings). ☐ Don't start dictation too late—start at the beginning of K. ☐ Spelling words and sentences should be cumulative. Fold in review skills over an extended period of time. Monitor students' writing for information on which skills need the most work.	☐ Does dictation begin in Kindergarten? ☐ Does the teacher extend Elkonin box (sound box) activities by having students replace counters with letters? ☐ Does the teacher analyze student writing for evidence of use of taught phonics skills and adjust dictation exercises as needed?

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Reading Connected (Decodable) Text	☐ Make sure accountable text is a part of the *daily* phonics instruction and independent or partner follow-up work. ☐ Make sure you are using strong, accountable texts, i.e., comprehensible, engaging, and filled with enough words students can decode based on the phonics skills they have been taught. ☐ Strengthen connection between phonics lessons and small-group lesson reading, especially if using guided reading leveled texts (which may contain few words with the target phonics skill). ☐ Build comprehension (through rich questioning) AND vocabulary (through pre-teaching of words about the selection to use in discussions). ☐ Use decodable texts as springboards for writing.	☐ Are decodable/accountable texts a daily part of phonics lessons? ☐ Does the reading of these texts focus on decoding strategies, checking comprehension, and building vocabulary?
High-Frequency Words	☐ Go beyond introductions with only context sentences. ☐ Reteach and review those words that are more challenging. Many require repetition at intervals throughout the year. One week is NOT enough. ☐ Teach "irregular" words as word families, where possible.	☐ Are teachers using a research-based routine like Read/Spell/Write/Extend to accelerate mastery? ☐ Are more challenging words cycled through the year and assessed more frequently?
Word Awareness Activities (Words sorts, word building)	☐ Remember that word sorts are far more than moving cards into piles—it's all about the talk about how words work. ☐ Use high-utility words in the sorts and word-building activities to increase student capacity when reading and writing. ☐ Create review transition activities when distributing and collecting materials for word building and word sorts.	☐ Do the word sorts include follow-up discussions about what students learned about how words work (not an independent activity)? ☐ Is word building done every week? Is it used in small groups for students needing more support?

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Readiness Skills (Phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition)	☐ Don't overdo rhyme; instead, focus on the power skills (oral blending and segmentation). ☐ Be precise in your language of instruction. ☐ Add instructional supports (e.g., sound boxes, picture cards, ABC cards). ☐ Include letters in more sophisticated tasks like manipulation. ☐ Sequence activities from easier to more complex and as needed in reading and writing. ☐ Assess alphabet knowledge—accuracy and automaticity.	☐ Is there more focus on the "power skills" in K–1? ☐ Are the skills taught in a progression and are multiple levels in an activity provided if teaching a whole group? ☐ Are supports like sound boxes and counters, tapping, and others provided? ☐ Does the instructional language result in confusion (e.g., rhyme)? ☐ Does the alphabet sequence enable students to make words early on?
Professional Development	☐ Become a teacher researcher. ☐ Engage in group planning and analysis of student work. ☐ Videotape, videotape, videotape.	☐ How can you build capacity to bring back some teacher control to reading instruction? ☐ How can you restructure professional development to differentiate for teacher needs?