National Center on
INTENSIVE INTERVENTION
at American Institutes for Research ■

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U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Intervention Taxonomy Brief: Sound Partners

The goal of this brief is to provide educators with information they can use to evaluate the appropriateness of **Sound Partners** for a specific student or group of students who require supplemental and intensive intervention. The brief also may be used to guide decisions about the selection or purchase of a new intervention. We envision that the brief may allow users to examine the extent to which the program aligns to the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity, a framework used by educators to categorize interventions along key dimensions. The information included in this brief is organized along the seven dimensions of the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity and can assist educators in answering the following questions:

- Does evidence suggest that this intervention is expected to lead to improved outcomes in the identified area of need (**strength**)?

- Will the group size, duration, structure, and frequency provide sufficient opportunities for students to respond and receive corrective feedback (**dosage**)?

- Does the intervention match the student's identified needs (**alignment**)?

- Does the intervention assist the student in generalizing target skills to general education or other tasks (**attention to transfer**)?

- Does the intervention include elements of explicit instruction (**comprehensiveness**)?

- Does the student have opportunities to develop the behavior skills necessary to be successful (**behavioral support**)?

- Can the intervention be individualized with a data-based process to meet student needs (**individualization**)?

To learn more about the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity and find resources to support implementation, visit https://intensiveintervention.org/taxonomy-intervention-intensity.

Program Summary

Sound Partners is a phonics-based tutoring program that provides individual explicit instruction in early reading skills to students who need it most. The program was specifically developed to reduce the number of students identified with reading disabilities by supplementing reading instruction for: kindergarteners in need of a supplemental Tier 2 intervention, first graders at highest risk of reading failure, second and third graders below grade level in reading, and students just learning the English language. Sound Partners is designed to enable paraeducators or tutors to provide effective instruction in the early reading skills most predictive of reading achievement.

Exhibit 1. Program Information

Features of program implementation	Program recommendations
Grade level(s)	Kindergarten and first grade
Group size	1:1 (research also supports its use with dyads)
Intervention length	20 weeks (the average intensity provided in the research studies) or as indicated by program mastery tests or school progress assessments
Frequency	Daily
Session duration	20–30 minutes
Cost	Visit Voyager Sopris Learning: http://store.voyagersopris.com/sound-partners/
Training	The research recommends that tutors be instructional assistants and/or paraprofessionals. A tutor handbook describes teaching activities. A series of videos on Vimeo models a trainer implementing each component. For additional training opportunities and support for Sound Partners implementation, including face-to-face and virtual implementation, please contact the University of North Carolina–Charlotte Reading and Special Education Faculty: ▪ Dr. Kristen Beach (kbeach4@uncc.edu) ▪ Dr. Erin Washburn (ewashbu1@uncc.edu) ▪ Dr. Samantha Gesel (sgesel1@uncc.edu)

Evidence of Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity Dimensions

The following section presents definitions for the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity dimensions and a summary of intervention-specific evidence for each dimension. The evidence comes from the intervention's vendor or developer. It is accurate as reported to the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII); it was not independently verified by NCII. Additional program evidence can be found on the NCII Tools Chart and might appear on the What Works Clearinghouse. For specific questions about the content, contact the program developer at patriciav@ori.org.

Taxonomy Dimension: Strength
Strength tells us how well the program works for students with intensive intervention needs, expressed in terms of effect sizes. Effect sizes greater than 0.25 indicate an intervention has value in improving outcomes. Effect sizes of 0.35 to 0.40 are moderate, and effect sizes of 0.50 or larger are strong (preferred).

Exhibit 2 provides the effect sizes for students in need of intensive intervention organized by domain and subdomain. These effect size data are calculated on low-achieving participants, those falling at or below the 20th percentile on pretest measures of achievement. If available, additional effect sizes for disaggregated data can be found on the NCII Tools Chart.

Exhibit 2. Sound Partners Effect Sizes for Students ≤20th Percentile by Domain and Subdomain

Domain	Subdomain	Outcome measures	Effect size[a]
Early Literacy	Phonological Awareness	Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing: Phonological Awareness	0.2
Early Literacy	Phonological Awareness	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS): Phoneme Segmentation	Unavailable
Early Literacy	Letter Knowledge	DIBELS: Letter Naming Fluency	Unavailable
Early Literacy	Phonics	DIBELS: Nonsense Word Fluency	Unavailable
Early Literacy	Phonics	Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Sight Word and Phonemic Decoding Efficiency	Unavailable
Early Literacy	Phonics	Woodcock Reading Mastery Test—Revised Normative Update (WRMT-R /NU): Word Reading Accuracy	Unavailable
Reading	Reading Comprehension	WRMT-R/NU: Passage Comprehension subtest	0.32
Reading	Reading Fluency	Grade level passage reading rate	Unavailable

[a] To ensure comparability of effect size across studies, NCII uses a standard formula to calculate effect size across all studies and outcome measures—Hedges g, corrected for small-sample bias.

Taxonomy Dimension: Dosage
Dosage is the number of opportunities a student has to respond or practice and receive corrective feedback. Dosage may be impacted by the size of the instructional group, the number of minutes each session lasts, the number of student-teacher interactions built into lessons, and the number of sessions provided per week.

Assuming a group size of one student, each student in the group has an estimated 73 opportunities to respond and receive corrective feedback.

Taxonomy Dimension: Alignment
Alignment (Exhibit 3) focuses on how well the program (a) addresses the target student's full set of academic skill deficits, (b) does not address skills the target student has already mastered (extraneous skills for that student), and (c) incorporates a meaningful focus on grade appropriate curricular standards.

Exhibit 3. Alignment With Content Areas Addressed

Instructional grade level(s)	Content area addressed	Skill strands
Kindergarten	Reading	- Letter-Sound Correspondences - Phoneme Segmentation - Phoneme Blending - Spelling - Sight Word Recognition - Sentence Reading - Decodable Storybook Practice
First Grade	Reading	- Letter-Sound Correspondences - Phoneme Segmentation - Phoneme Blending - Spelling - Sight Word Recognition - Sentence Reading - Decodable Storybook Practice

Taxonomy Dimension: Teaching to Promote Transfer
Attention to transfer is the extent to which an intervention is designed to help students (a) transfer the skills they learn to other formats and contexts and (b) realize connections between mastered and related skills.

For decoding (instructional target), three activities designed to explicitly teach for transfer are (a) blending two- and three-letter words in isolation, (b) decoding words in short phrases and sentences, and (c) decoding words in decodable storybooks.

Activity 1. Decoding is introduced by teaching blending an initial phoneme and vowel (V)-consonant (C) combination (e.g., /m/ /at/) with teacher modeling and Elkonin box support, followed by transfer to decoding similar word items.

Activity 2. Decoding progresses with practice reading lists of VC and CVC words composed of taught letters. The student points and blends the sounds and reads the words.

Activity 3. Decoding is then applied in passage reading practice with short decodable sentences to begin reading words in context. Passages gradually increase in length. Students apply decoding skills in decodable storybooks.

Taxonomy Dimension: Comprehensiveness
Comprehensiveness is the number of explicit instruction principles the intervention incorporates (e.g., providing explanations in simple, direct language; modeling efficient solution strategies instead of expecting students to discover strategies on their own; providing practice so that students use the strategies to generate many correct responses; and incorporating systematic cumulative review). Additional information can be found within the NCII Explicit Instruction *course content materials.*

Dimension: Provide Directions in Clear, Direct Language
Activity 1. Activities are introduced with tutor scripts refined through many research studies. The scripts were refined with feedback from teacher tutors to sound natural for tutors to read and say. The scripts also were tested to provide clear directions for the student about the task, taking into account the needs of students with limited oral language skills.

Activity 2. For new and more challenging activities (e.g., introducing the plural /s/ ending), the tutor instructions include reminders for correction prompts (e.g., "Is there an /s/ at the end? Try it again.")

Dimension: Ensure That Students Have Adequate Background Knowledge and Skills
Activity 1. All new phonics content is first explicitly introduced by the tutor, and students practice and review subskills to accuracy. Passages and storybooks for practice reading in context are carefully matched to the phonics content to ensure student success and motivation.

Activity 2. Tutor training includes using mastery tests to monitor student skill acquisition. For example, student performance on a mastery test may indicate a student needs review and added practice on, for example, the letter sound /w/ or words that end with /g/, before moving on to new content. Low levels of mastery may indicate repeating parts of lessons, and isolated weaknesses may indicate adding incidental review as the tutor moves forward in the lessons.

Dimension: Provide Adequate Practice Opportunities
Activity 1. The number of items for practice and the rate of introducing new content increases gradually across the program. Tutors are trained to pay attention to the accuracy rates for each student (based on program mastery tests and classroom progress monitoring) and to continue to build accuracy with added practice.

Activity 2. Letter-sound correspondences present a learning challenge for many students. The lessons offer several forms of practice to establish this prerequisite knowledge: The "Say the Sounds" activity requires the student to point to and say the sound for letters in an array that includes new sounds as well as cumulative review of earlier taught sounds. In the "Alphabet Practice" activity, the student points to and says the name of each letter on an alphabet card to build naming fluency.

Dimension: Incorporate Systematic Cumulative Review
Activity 1. In the Say the Sounds activity, a new letter is introduced, and then the student practices pointing and saying the sounds for an array of letters that includes previously introduced letters. This activity allows the teacher tutor to notice when earlier sounds require continued practice. The activity also provides the student with the more challenging practice discriminating the new and earlier taught letters in an array.

Activity 2. The lessons introduce sight words that appear in the decodable storybooks and reading passages. The tutor creates a flash card for each new sight word and provides individual practice and review of the sight words that are learned at different rates for each student.

Taxonomy Dimension: Behavioral Support
Behavioral support addresses the extent to which the program incorporates (a) self-regulation and executive function components and (b) behavioral principles to minimize undesired

behavior. *Additional information can be found within the* [NCII behavioral support course content](#).

Dimension: Lesson Activities Feature a Predictable Pattern of Roles and Responses to Establish Student Expectations and Maintain Student Engagement
Activity 1. Lessons clearly introduce learning expectations, and students quickly learn the response requirements for each activity. A predictable pattern of tutor and student roles and responses establishes student expectations and maintains student engagement.

Activity 2. In each lesson, students have multiple opportunities to respond and practice phonics subskills. Lesson design affords students opportunities to respond correctly and maintain motivation for learning while using brisk pacing to minimize off-task student behavior.

Activity 3. Cumulative review built into the lesson design allows for brisk pacing to maintain student attention and to return to difficult material in a later lesson rather than practice to frustration.

Additional Information About Sound Partners

Sound Partners Kindergarten was designed and tested to supplement reading instruction for students who are struggling to learn letter-sound correspondences, phonemic awareness, and blending. The Kindergarten level provides more phonemic awareness practice and a slower rate of introducing new skills.

Sound Partners is not a comprehensive reading intervention. Both levels provide explicit phonics instruction and target decoding by introducing the prerequisite alphabet and phonological skills, with sequenced and scaffolded practice in decoding and encoding. Program outcomes are strongest for decoding and word reading across many research studies conducted with kindergarten and first-grade students in the lowest 30th percentile and identified by teachers as in need of more intensive intervention. Program effects also have been reported for fluency and comprehension.