Blended Vocabulary for K-12 Classrooms: Harnessing the Power of Digital Tools and Direct Instruction
By Kimberly A. Tyson and Angela B. Peery (Solution Tree Press, 2017)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:
~ The authors present an effective, research-based model of vocabulary acquisition with three key components.
~ This book introduces a balanced approach to vocabulary learning – that integrates technology – so K-12 educators can implement a more thoughtful and systematic approach to vocabulary learning at their schools.

Why I chose this book:
Vocabulary development is important in every grade and every subject. Research even shows that vocabulary levels in younger grades predict reading comprehension levels in later grades.

However, many of our teachers continue using ineffective vocabulary practices or simply do not provide the time for vocabulary learning. This short book helps educators understand that for a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction, we must:
(1) model vocabulary use,
(2) directly teach words and word-learning strategies, and
(3) provide indirect opportunities for word learning.

Throughout all of this, to best engage our students and bring our practices into the 21st century, we should be integrating digital tools as well.

Consider making vocabulary instruction a schoolwide focus for PD!

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn…)
✓ The key characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction: modeling, direct instruction, and indirect approaches
✓ How to identify which words to teach using Isabel Beck’s three-tiered vocabulary framework
✓ How to create a culture of word-learning with a print-rich environment
✓ Some effective vocabulary strategies for primary grades, secondary grades, special education students, and ELs
✓ Some digital tools that support word learning
✓ The Main Idea’s professional learning suggestions to improve vocabulary instruction in your school or district
  (Email Jenn if you would like a PowerPoint version of this.)
Introduction

Regardless of the political climate, vocabulary development will always remain a vitally important skill for our students. They need word knowledge and vocabulary for fluency, comprehension, and overall achievement. Having a broad vocabulary is inextricably tied to student success. Students need new words to improve their factual and conceptual understanding. A better vocabulary helps students to master new content as well as remember previously learned material. The reverse is true as well. Lack of a strong vocabulary foundation results in enormous obstacles such as deficient reading comprehension skills, weak writing skills, and poor spoken skills as well.

Research backs up these claims. Over the course of many years, research has shown that vocabulary development is tied to reading comprehension. Early vocabulary development is particularly crucial and has long-lasting effects. Some research shows that kindergarten vocabulary levels predict reading comprehension in second grade and other research even ties first-grade vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension levels in eleventh grade! There also has been research that shows the disparity of vocabulary development in low-income students compared to their counterparts from middle-class and professional families. One study estimated that three-year-olds from the latter category have been exposed to 30 million more words than those 3-year-olds from low-income homes. A simple fact is that those students with broader vocabularies enjoy reading more, read more independently with more frequency, and end up as better readers than those with smaller vocabularies. Because students with stronger vocabularies end up reading more and more, this leads to more vocabulary growth, and the gap between the two groups grows even wider. Given how foundational vocabulary is, the Common Core State Standards as well as many state and local standards emphasize the importance of word learning in literacy development.

Given what we know about the importance of vocabulary for student achievement, it makes sense for schools to prioritize vocabulary and develop a comprehensive school-wide model. This book provides such a comprehensive model. Before describing the model, the authors share a definition of vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to the words we use to communicate effectively when we listen, read, and write. Furthermore, vocabulary is divided into two categories to discuss words and word usage: receptive and expressive vocabulary. Our receptive vocabulary includes all of the words we understand when we listen and read while our expressive vocabulary refers to the words we generate when speaking or writing. Clearly, our receptive vocabulary is much broader. For example, a two-year-old shows he understands when his parents tell him to put on mittens, gloves, and a scarf because it is cold outside by walking to the closet to pull these items out, but he might not be able to verbalize this himself. The goal in this book is to help teachers learn how to support students to move words from their receptive banks to their expressive banks through a comprehensive approach.

The authors propose a comprehensive blended vocabulary model that consists of several key components: modeling, explicit (or direct) instruction, and opportunities for incidental vocabulary acquisition (indirect instruction). Further, the use of digital tools and games are woven into all three components. Unfortunately, despite the research that shows the need for it, a number of research-based vocabulary instructional practices have not found their way into the classroom.

Below are five steps to help schools implement a more comprehensive and effective approach to vocabulary instruction. These will be described in upcoming chapters:

1. Understand the key characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction.
2. Identify and sort vocabulary into the three-tiered vocabulary framework.
3. Create a print-rich environment to support word learning.
4. Identify and master evidence-based vocabulary strategies.
5. Choose digital tools that support word learning.

There are many ways to use the book to support a school- or districtwide vocabulary framework. Below are some ideas:

- Create a literacy leadership team to support the development of effective vocabulary practices in your school or district.
- Conduct a book study to improve teacher knowledge and understanding of effective vocabulary instruction.
- Discuss how to create a word-learning culture that supports vocabulary development.
- Discuss how current vocabulary practices match up with research-based, effective practices.
- Determine how to implement a blended vocabulary program with direct strategies, indirect strategies, and digital resources.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

- Do you see a large vocabulary gap among your students? What are some practical steps you can take to address this?
- How does understanding how young children develop vocabulary impact instruction at your school?
- Discuss your top takeaways from the introduction related to the importance of vocabulary instruction.
Chapter 1 – A Culture of Word Learning

While many teachers may want to dive right in to learning new vocabulary-building strategies, it will be more effective to take a step back and first establish a culture that supports word learning. If teachers and leaders take the time to establish a strong foundation of vocabulary development, there is a greater likelihood that vocabulary acquisition will occur in every grade and every classroom.

Setting up Literacy Leadership Teams

To begin, creating a thoughtful and diverse school or district literacy leadership team will help to not only support a culture of word learning, but to sustain it in a way that will have deeper and more lingering effects on the lives of students. A literacy leadership team can help ensure that schoolwide (or districtwide) vocabulary development is carefully planned and intentionally implemented. Try to create a diverse literacy leadership team with teacher leaders from different grade levels and content areas, an instructional or literacy coach, special education and EL teachers, a media specialist, a community representative, and an administrator to provide various perspectives on the best ways to reach out to parents, families, and community members alike. However, the primary role of this team should be to communicate with, represent, and support teachers throughout their professional learning. Take the time to develop this team, define roles, and make sure everyone has foundational knowledge of the direct and indirect strategies for teaching vocabulary introduced in this book. It is worth it in the long-run to take the time to properly develop this team.

In this chapter, there are two examples of literacy leadership teams – one schoolwide and the other districtwide. The schoolwide team was founded in a large, urban elementary school with a high-poverty population in Indianapolis. The team included teachers from various grade levels as well as nonteaching staff. After developing a shared understanding of the importance of vocabulary acquisition and a common language to discuss it, they went about creating a culture that would support word learning throughout the day and throughout the school. Word walls and bulletin boards featuring vocabulary words were featured in hallways, the cafeteria, and gym. The team provided support to individual teachers as well as grade-level teams. The team outlined expectations for vocabulary instruction, modeled those strategies, and monitored implementation in classrooms. With all of this support and involvement, the school was able to sustain its focus on vocabulary development for five years and not only saw student achievement improve, but the state’s grade for the school rose from a D to an A.

On the district level, one midsize suburban district created a literacy leadership team which in turn helped to establish literacy leadership teams at every school in the district. The district team met monthly for professional development and this learning was then turned back to the schools. The district team not only dissected the what, why, and how to develop rich cultures to support word learning, but they themselves learned a wide variety of direct and indirect instructional strategies. Based on data, the district team created a districtwide goal. Schools were allowed to create their own vocabulary goals as long as they kept the district goal in mind. It was powerful to have both district and schoolwide teams reinforcing the work and keeping up the momentum for large-scale momentum for improving vocabulary instruction.

In order to facilitate communication, professional learning, and planning both within and across the types of teams listed above, there are a number of collaborative digital tools available. There is a list of digital tools to support collaboration at go.SolutionTree.com/literacy, many of which will be familiar to educators: shared notebooks (such as Evernote and OneNote), Twitter, Backchannels, Pinterest, Wikis, and of course Google Docs are some of the useful tools for literacy teams.

Addressing Resistance

As with any new initiative, it is common to experience some pushback or resistance. Even schools that have had flagging student achievement for a while and are serious about addressing vocabulary development will have some teachers who still see it as just another initiative that will come and go and will simply try to ride it out. The problem is that they are viewing this change as a procedural or structural change like changing the bell times or bus schedule. Instead, we need to approach this as a cultural change. That is, we need to aim for more transformational changes such as the way staff is thinking and getting things done. This is why the literacy leadership team is so important: to help create a culture that supports word development in all classrooms, and all subjects, in all grades. In the early stages, it is vital that the literacy leadership team work proactively to address this resistance by putting structures in place to allow them to discuss and plan with teachers to support them in their vocabulary instruction. This is why it is crucial that literacy leadership team members have the expertise needed to support teachers in learning vocabulary strategies. Another factor in addressing resistance is to provide the type of tight and loose leadership discussed by DuFour and colleagues. The team must develop the tight parameter that every teacher must provide direct vocabulary instruction every day, yet allow teachers to determine which strategies work best for their students (loose parameter). These parameters, along with the literacy team’s support, will help to prevent some of the resistance to a vocabulary initiative.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

- Think about who you should include on a schoolwide literacy leadership team.
- As a team, discuss an initiative currently underway in your school and district. How does vocabulary align with this initiative?
- Do you think your school culture values and supports word learning? How could you promote it?
- How could you convince coworkers who teach nonacademic subjects or other staff to become more active in vocabulary instruction?
Chapter 2 – A New Model for Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Clearly, it is important for educators to learn *strategies* for vocabulary instruction, but having a *model* allows them to think conceptually and ensure they have a comprehensive approach to word learning. Below is an overview of three of the most widely used models for vocabulary instruction as well as the model the authors propose – the Blended Vocabulary Model – that synthesizes the best of the other three.

**Existing Vocabulary Models**

Three of the most widely used models for vocabulary instruction are: Marzano’s Six-Step Model, Michael Graves’s Model, and Isabel Beck’s Model. An overview of these three along with the authors’ own proposed model is below (from p.22):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marzano’s Model</th>
<th>Beck’s Model</th>
<th>Graves’s Model</th>
<th>Blended Vocabulary Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the word</td>
<td>1. Contextualize words</td>
<td>1. Provide rich and varied language experiences</td>
<td>1. Model robust vocabulary and interest in words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students provide a linguistic explanation in their own words with an example or description</td>
<td>2. Provide friendly explanations</td>
<td>2. Teach individual words</td>
<td>2. Teach targeted words and word-learning strategies so students can tackle words on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Over time, deepen understanding by recording words in a notebook</td>
<td>4. Provide opportunities for students to actively process word meanings</td>
<td>4. Foster word consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Periodically discuss terms with students</td>
<td>5. Provide many encounters with words over time</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Over time, students engage in games and activities for reinforcement</td>
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Each of the models has benefits for vocabulary instruction. In Marzano’s model, not only do students have several opportunities to be exposed to words in steps 1 to 3, but these steps emphasize a student-friendly approach and help students take ownership over their learning with exercises such as creating nonlinguistic representations of words. However, some teachers report that they don’t get to steps 4 to 6 as frequently which means they end up spending far too much time directly teaching a few words and a more indirect approach is lost. Further, they lack the guidance they need in choosing vocabulary words to teach. Graves’s Model, in contrast, does provide more opportunities for indirect learning of words. His approach is more comprehensive and includes indirect vocabulary approaches such as learning words through read-alouds, listening, speaking, and more. However, teachers often neglect the fourth part – creating a word-rich environment – and this misses the chance for all adults in the building to model word use and enthusiasm. Beck’s vocabulary work informs the conceptual approach for how vocabulary is approached in the CCSS. She proposes five steps as part of what she calls *robust vocabulary instruction*, much of which overlaps with the two other models.

**The Blended Vocabulary Model**

To create the Blended Vocabulary Model, the authors took the best of the three models above. What they came up with is a comprehensive approach to vocabulary learning that allows for a wide variety of instructional strategies and which can be applied school- or districtwide. Their model contains only three parts. They chose a concise model with only three parts because teachers already have enough to juggle so trying to remember more than three is unlikely. Furthermore, like a stool with three legs, in this balanced approach, it is unlikely that an entire component will fall by the wayside or dominate the other two. Below is an overview of this model:

1. **Modeling**: *All* adults who interact with students model robust vocabulary and interest in words.
2. **Explicit instruction**: Teach students targeted words and proven word-learning strategies so they can tackle words on their own. Digital tools are included as part of instruction, review, and practice.
3. **Incidental learning**: Facilitate incidental vocabulary learning through a print-rich environment and various literacy experiences such as read-alouds, independent reading, dramatic performances, family literacy nights, poetry slams, and more.

1. **Modeling** – Teachers are in a perfect position to model vocabulary use. When they speak, rather than using common vocabulary words students have already mastered, they can intentionally insert synonyms (Rather than ‘bring’ or ‘send’ a teacher might say, “Would you please *convey* this message…”?) Excellent teachers of vocabulary already do this seamlessly. In addition, modeling involves attending to new and interesting vocabulary as it arises in a class reading, a video, or even a school announcement. Also, teachers can be excellent models of being enthusiastic about words. When it’s appropriate, they can express a true delight in new words that arise in the classroom and then share a synonym or an explanation.

2. **Explicit Instruction** – Explicitly teaching students vocabulary words is a key part of all the models introduced above. This involves teaching students strategies to learn unfamiliar words as well as providing effective direct instruction of carefully chosen words. Because Isabel Beck’s work is cited in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards, many teachers are already familiar with her three-tiered framework of classifying words as a method of choosing words to teach. This topic will be explored in more...
3. Incidental Learning – Because it is impossible for students to learn all of the vocabulary they need from direct instruction, teachers need to do everything they can to support incidental learning of new words through exposure. This means ensuring that classrooms are print-rich environments and teachers include opportunities for independent reading, deep discussions of words, games that involve new vocabulary, and more. Incidental word learning occurs more frequently when classrooms are filled with a rich variety of books and ebooks, newspapers, word walls, labels, anchor charts, and posters. Some schools get creative and host poetry slams, family literacy nights, or even vocabulary parades (with students dressed as words)! This third element—incidental learning—aligns with all three models of vocabulary instruction which emphasize exposure to unfamiliar words in various and repeated ways.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

• Look at the chart summarizing the four vocabulary models. Were you familiar with any of them? Discuss similarities and differences. Which aligns best with your schoolwide goals? Discuss how the literacy leadership team can support teachers as they implement one of these models.
• Do you see any advantages or disadvantages of adopting a specific model for vocabulary instruction? Why or why not?
• What resonates with you regarding the three-part blended vocabulary model? How does it align with your current approach?

Chapter 3 – Methods for Classifying and Selecting Vocabulary Words

Given that a lack of vocabulary is a significant problem for many of our students, and there are so many words teachers can choose from to teach, how should they begin to select appropriate vocabulary for students? This chapter focuses on different ways to categorize and select vocabulary for instruction.

Understanding Tiered Vocabulary

In their influential book, Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction, Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan developed a structure for organizing words into three levels to help teachers in selecting vocabulary for instruction. This three-tiered framework has become widespread because it was included in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards and is fairly easy to understand and use. Below is an overview of the three tiers.

Tier One: These are the most basic words that people use every day and which are probably already a part of our students’ vocabulary. Through conversations with family, peers, and teachers, students hear these words regularly in conversation. Tier one words are often referred to as walking around or everyday vocabulary. Examples include words like big, small, up, down, house, family, table, eat, and sleep. Most native speakers acquire these words incidentally and do not need teachers to teach them explicitly. However, this may not be the case for English learners who may need direct instruction of tier one words. Chapter 7 provides more information about vocabulary instruction for non-native English speakers.

Tier Two: These are general academic words that can be found in various content areas. Words such as justify, explain, predict, summarize, infer, generalize, conclusion, revolution, and reflection are a few examples. These words are not specific to a particular subject area. For example, justify and predict can be used in science, social studies, and English classes. Because these words appear in a variety of settings and may be used differently depending on the discipline, it is particularly important to teach them to students. A reflection of light in science differs from a character who is reflecting in a novel or a reflection over a line in mathematics. In contrast to tier one vocabulary which students learn orally, tier two words are usually learned through reading and explicit instruction. It is useful for teachers to use a targeted list of tier two vocabulary words to help them focus their vocabulary instruction.

Tier Three words are more low-frequency and specialized academic words that belong to a particular discipline. Beck and colleagues call these domain-specific words. For example, terms like isotope, carcinogen, photosynthesis, stanza, onomatopoeia, quadratic formula, sarcophagus, hegemony, a cappella, and chiaroscuro are associated with a specific discipline. They are rarely generalizable to other subject areas and we can assume our students are unfamiliar with them. Many teachers gravitate toward teaching tier three words because this supports student understanding of their subject area. Beck and colleagues suggest that teachers should teach these words – for example, frontloading them before a lesson – however, teachers should not focus exclusively on these words. Instead, teachers should prioritize the instruction of tier two words and supplement this by teaching some tier three words, roots, and affixes as part of a comprehensive approach to word learning.
Selecting Vocabulary

Although the Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of vocabulary, they do not outline how to select words. Intentionally selecting appropriate words is a crucial aspect of developing a schoolwide effort to improve literacy. Below are some suggestions for types and sources of words to help develop districtwide or schoolwide lists that address content and standards.

General Knowledge Words – These are tier one words that students would commonly use in the classroom and school. Teachers can brainstorm a list of those words students need to function in their content area, grade level, and school or they can consult existing general knowledge word lists such as Edward Fry’s instant words or Dolch’s list of sight words.

Academic Vocabulary – To choose the academic words to focus on in an upcoming unit, teachers should brainstorm key vocabulary and then divide those words into three groups: already-known words (tier one), must-know words (tier two), and should-know words (tier three). The focus of instruction should be the tier two and tier three words on this list. Keep in mind that teachers often overestimate the number of must-know words; instead this should be a list of essential vocabulary to learn. To help insure consistency of key vocabulary lists, teachers should meet in vertical teams (across grades) to compare lists. This will help third-grade teachers see the list of second grade must-know words, so by third grade these can be considered already-known words.

Words in State Standards – Your state’s standards are a good place to look for tier two vocabulary words. Marilee Sprenger has compiled a list of the 55 most frequently used words in the Common Core State Standards. This resource or your own state’s standards are both excellent resources for identifying useful tier two words to teach.

Districtwide K-12 Core Vocabulary Lists – Many districts create their own vocabulary lists, usually made up of tier two words. If your district has developed such a list, this is another excellent place to look to select critical vocabulary to teach.

Words from Literature and Read-Alouds – Read-alouds have many benefits for literacy development, not the least of which is that they help build student vocabulary. Read-alouds often introduce words in context that students may not come across in their own independent reading. Teachers should select words students need to understand in novels, poems, literature, picture books, or other texts they plan to use in class.

Creating core vocabulary lists to teach is the first step in a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction. Since these lists should be common across the school or even the district, consider using Google Docs so teachers can share and have access to these lists.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

• Describe how you currently select vocabulary words. Does it align with what is presented in this chapter?
• Imagine there is an upcoming 6th-grade unit on volcanoes. How would you sort the following words into the three tiers: tectonic plates, solid, magma, erupt, expand, geologist, pressure, lava, fall, prediction, smoke, and avalanche. Discuss.
• Given how important it is to choose vocabulary intentionally, how can you support teachers in purposefully selecting vocabulary?
• Do you have vertical alignment of vocabulary lists? How could you support vertical alignment?

Chapter 4 – A Balanced Approach to Word Learning and Assessment

This chapter provides an overview of how literacy leadership teams and teachers can intentionally plan for a balanced approach to word learning. It includes all of the components that go into this framework including both direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction. Next, the chapter describes ways to assess how well students have learned new vocabulary words.

A Balanced Approach to Word Learning

To ensure that you have a vocabulary program that is strong and sustainable, make sure it is balanced. It is necessary to incorporate three important components to support all students, K-12, in their vocabulary development: (1) provide direct, research-based vocabulary instruction, (2) create a literacy environment that supports incidental word learning, and (3) model excellent vocabulary use. Further, infuse all three components with digital tools for both practice and review.

What it is NOT

To begin to understand this balanced approach, it helps to look at what it is not. Many well-meaning educators employ vocabulary strategies that focus on words that are disconnected from any context and unwittingly end up killing enthusiasm for word-learning. There are many research-based practices that will build a strong vocabulary foundation, but first teachers must consider which practices they need to end. To begin, effective vocabulary instruction does not mean assigning a long list of vocabulary words students need to copy, look up in the dictionary, and then reproduce on a Friday quiz. Dictionary definitions are often confusing for students, who end up memorizing those definitions and promptly forgetting them after the quiz. Furthermore, teachers often rely on vocabulary lists from textbook publishers and workbooks which are unrelated to what students are studying. This allows teachers to relinquish responsibility for taking the time to choose appropriate words and teach them in a contextualized and systematic way. Word search puzzles are also an ineffective way to get students to review vocabulary words. A number of practices educators currently use lose effectiveness because of a lack of appropriate intentionality. For example, a beautiful word wall with colorful, laminated words does
not support maximum word learning if the teacher leaves it on the wall all year like wallpaper without replacing words with new words that are integral to classroom instruction. The same can be true of students marking new words with sticky notes or using worksheets. If these activities are completed without the intention of developing deeper thinking around new vocabulary words, then they end up as rote exercises unconnected to real learning.

**What it IS – Elements of Effective Vocabulary Instruction**

In order to have a more balanced and cohesive approach to vocabulary instruction, research shows that schools need a combination of both direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include the explicit instruction of specific words and the teaching of strategies for students to become more independent word learners such as through context and morphology. Indirect strategies include authentic opportunities for word exposure through providing a literacy-rich environment, reading aloud, supporting wide reading, as well as conducting oral activities. The **key components of effective vocabulary instruction** below include both direct and indirect strategies.

**Create a Literacy-Rich Environment** – Basically, a literacy-rich environment is a space brimming with reading materials, environmental print, signs, charts, word games, dictionaries, and digital media as well. This type of environment provides the foundation to support speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is endorsed by the International Reading Association and the Association for the Education of Young Children, and it supports the Common Core and other state standards. Below are some examples of what one might find in a literacy-rich environment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom libraries</th>
<th>Content posters</th>
<th>Anchor charts</th>
<th>Word walls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labels</td>
<td>Literacy work stations</td>
<td>Writing centers</td>
<td>Computers, tablets, and handheld devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays of student work</td>
<td>Displays of information</td>
<td>Bulletin boards</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The hope is that all of these displays flood students with words every day. It is more common to see elementary classrooms with leveled libraries, pocket charts with words, word walls, charts with directions, collaborative digital word walls and more. However, it is rarer to see this type of literacy-rich environment in the classrooms of secondary teachers. This is a missed opportunity to support our older students with the content-specific vocabulary they need to continue to learn beyond the elementary years. Research shows that students of all ages benefit from such an environment.

**Provide Multiple Exposures to New Vocabulary** – If we want students to be able to move words from their receptive to their expressive vocabulary, teaching words cannot be a one-time occurrence. We need to provide students with multiple exposures to new words. This means varying the ways students interact with words through diverse activities in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

**Target Specific Words** – Chapter 3 addressed ways teachers can choose the words students need most so they can directly engage students in activities to learn those words. Researchers estimate that teachers can directly teach about 400 words a year. There are many ways to explicitly teach targeted words. One important way to do this is through frontloading. The idea is to bring students’ attention to new words they will hear in an upcoming reading, lecture, or video by pronouncing those words, providing simple definitions, and displaying the words. Upcoming chapters will include strategies to directly teach a targeted group of vocabulary words.

**Teach Independent Word-Learning Strategies** – Another component of a balanced approach includes teaching students strategies so they can independently learn words. Vocabulary researchers say that this is most commonly done through: (1) the use of context, (2) the use of word parts, and (3) the use of reference materials.

**Actively Engage Students** – For students to move vocabulary from their receptive to expressive language, they need to be stimulated to do so. Two basic ways to engage students in vocabulary review and practice is through conventional board games like Boggle and Scrabble and also through digital tools. Students can review vocabulary with digital games such as Flashcard Stash (www.flashcardstash.com), find synonyms and antonyms with Vocabulary Games (www.vocabulary.co.il), or play fun vocabulary games with Freerice (www.freerice.com).

**Support Incidental Word Learning** – Research shows that students learn an average of three to four thousand words a year. Teachers can’t possibly teach all of these words, so where is this vocabulary learning coming from? From incidental word learning. To boost this type of vocabulary acquisition, teachers should ensure that students are engaging in independent reading across all classes. This means teachers should be responsible for two key items – the time and the texts to support independent reading. When teachers schedule time for independent reading and develop classroom libraries so students can choose their own materials, they provide a tremendous boost to incidental word learning. Another way to support incidental word learning is through read-alouds. Read-alouds allow teachers to introduce texts and vocabulary that are challenging and include higher-level words students would not otherwise hear in conversations with friends, such as *blithely, umbrage, or derogatory*. However, it isn’t simply enough to read books aloud. Teachers need to bring attention to these words and provide student-friendly definitions of them.
Model Rich Language Use – As was mentioned earlier, all of the adults in the building can model and reinforce the use of varied and higher-level vocabulary. Instead of always asking for a pencil, teachers can ask students to take out their writing implements. The school can display word walls in the gym, hallways, the library and even the cafeteria (with words like al dente or arugula).

Vocabulary Assessment
In addition to putting all of the above strategies into place to teach new words, it is vital that teachers also assess student word learning. How do you know how well your students understand new vocabulary words? It’s not as simple as either they know it or they don’t. In fact, word learning falls more along a continuum of understanding. One of the most respected descriptions of this continuum was developed by Edgar Dale in which he outlines four stages of word development:

1. The student has no knowledge of the word because he or she has never heard of or seen the word.
2. The student may have heard the word, but doesn’t really know what it means.
3. The student is able to make general associations with the word and recognize it in context.
4. The student has a deep understanding of the word and can use it in speaking and writing.

For example, imagine the word polygon. Some students have simply never heard of the word (stage 1). Others have heard the teacher use it, but do not know the meaning (stage 2). Still others remember hearing the word in math class and know it is a shape (stage 3). Finally, students who deeply understand the word know that it is a flat shape with at least three closed lines and can use the word appropriately (stage 4).

Once teachers understand that vocabulary mastery comes in stages, they can decide when and how they want to assess student word learning. If teachers want to know a student’s general knowledge of vocabulary accumulated over time, they might use a standardized assessment test (such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test for younger students or the Nelson-Denny Reading Test for older students) as a baseline. These tests have limited uses, so most teachers use a variety of assessments in their classes to paint a fuller picture of their students’ vocabulary learning. Teachers often use a variety of formative assessments to check for accuracy in both oral and written vocabulary use. For example, they may use exit tickets in which students write definitions of words or they simply listen in to student conversations with a rubric in hand to determine correct vocabulary use.

Digital tools not only help with assessment, but they also increase engagement. To provide information about student knowledge of vocabulary terms, teachers can use online tools such as Kahoot! (getkahoot.com), Socrative (socrative.com), or Plickers (plickers.com). For more formal assessments, some teachers use cloze assessments. These assessments test students’ receptive word knowledge by leaving a blank in a text and having students choose the appropriate vocabulary word from a group of words. To test expressive word use, teachers often use student writing. Keep in mind that this is the last stage of vocabulary acquisition, but teachers sometimes use this too early and end up getting student writing that looks like this:

• He frolicked.
• My mother frolicked.
• My dog frolicked.
• They frolicked in the park.

For this reason, it is important that teachers understand the stages of vocabulary development and the purpose for giving a particular vocabulary assessment. Do they want to assess receptive or expressive word use? Do they want to assess general vocabulary knowledge or a targeted list? Do they want a more informal formative assessment or more of a summative one?

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams
• Think about the components of a balanced approach to word learning. How would you describe the balance in your classroom?
• Which direct and indirect strategies do you currently use? What else from the chapter would you like to incorporate?
• Discuss what effective vocabulary instruction is and isn’t. Have you observed any nonproductive practices in your school?
• Which indirect or direct strategies are most prevalent at your school? How could you support teachers to widen their approach?

Chapter 5 – Vocabulary Strategies for Elementary Students

It is a primary goal of elementary teachers to help their students bridge the enormous gap they have between their oral and written skills when they enter school. This is a huge task! A big part of helping their students become fluid readers and writers is for teachers to ensure students have a strong vocabulary foundation. This chapter focuses on strategies to help primary students develop their vocabularies. Word learning for elementary students does not differ that much from that for secondary students – it should be engaging, involve student-friendly definitions, provide context for new words, and allow time for rich discussions about words – but with primary-grade students, writing plays less of a role than with older students. Below are some strategies to build vocabulary in the elementary grades in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Motor Imaging – To capitalize on young students’ love of moving, motor imaging is a popular way to use a nonlinguistic strategy to reinforce word learning through movement. After introducing a word and discussing its meaning, the teacher asks students to share how they might use their bodies to remember the word. For example, for the word abode, students might use their arms to form a simple outline of a house. The class chooses one of the students’ physical movements to represent the word and then the whole class pantomimes this movement every time they hear abode in the teacher’s read-aloud.
Chapter 6 – Vocabulary Strategies for Secondary Students

The demands for middle and high school students to know increasingly more complex vocabulary words continues to grow. Typically, students enter kindergarten with a vocabulary of five thousand to ten thousand words and graduate with about fifty thousand words. However, with more rigorous standards, students should go well beyond fifty thousand words. This demand for increased vocabulary growth is occurring at a time when many students are less and less interested in school. Furthermore, there are often large achievement gaps when it comes to word learning. The highest performing seniors know about four times as much as their lowest performing counterparts, and these lower-performing seniors know about as many words as the highest performing third graders. While many secondary teachers are concerned about these gaps, they often do not know what to do to teach vocabulary effectively. Many simply resort to teaching words the way they were taught. In this chapter, the authors organize a number of effective strategies for vocabulary instruction into three categories. The strategies are organized into: (1) strategies using nonlinguistic representations, (2) strategies using collaboration, and (3) strategies for independent processing. Below are a few strategies from each category. While not exhaustive, the list of strategies provides a starting point.

(1) Strategies Using Nonlinguistic Representations – Using graphic organizers or visual images is a helpful way for secondary students to develop their understanding of new vocabulary words.

Concept Circle – Popularized by Janet Allen, the concept circle is a graphic organizer to help students analyze connections between words. For example, for the word mammmal, students would enter a word in each section as it relates to the concept. (See the concept circle to the right.)

Sometimes teachers introduce vocabulary words without a clear connection to an overarching concept or topic. In contrast, concept circles help students make those connections. Concept circles work well with older students as well and can be used to spark a discussion between students or even quiz them to check for understanding.

Word Walls – Word walls aren’t new, but there are new and different ways to think about word walls. They can be used in any grade, K-12, and can function as more than just a place to display high-frequency words in alphabetical order. They can be portable, digital, in the hallways, or on surfaces that aren’t even walls. Rather than creating a set of unchanging, laminated words at the beginning of the year, consider a more fluid process in which teachers create them with students as different needs arise. Teachers might have one wall for math terms, another for all of the words in an upcoming read-aloud, and still a third for science words in the shape of a flower if that’s what the science unit will focus on. Given that space is limited, teachers should expand their ideas of where to create word walls – they can use cupboards, portable word walls on standing charts, hang words from the ceiling, or use pocket charts with pockets for interchangeable words. Teachers can also consider adding images, visuals, and pictographs to a word wall.

Or they can go even further and deepen student engagement by co-creating digital word walls. With Padlet (padlet.com), teachers can include text, images, links, and videos. For example, in teaching about volcanoes, the Padlet online bulletin board can include links to vocabulary terms such as lava, eruption, mantle, and tectonic plates along with links to images and videos to provide nonlinguistic representations of each word. ThingLink (thinglink.com) is another tool that is interactive and has links to nonlinguistic representations of words. Another way to engage students with word walls is to play games with them. For example, teachers can use Word Jars – every time a student uses one of the words on the wall, the teacher puts a ball in the jar until some prize is earned. Or with Connect a Word students have to use two of the words on the word wall and make a connection. For example, “Windchill is when the air temperature feels cooler on the skin that the actual temperature.”

Anchored Word Learning – This is essentially a read-aloud word wall. Isabel Beck argues that if teachers read aloud once a day, students learn an additional 540 words a year. If they increase that to twice a day, that number jumps to 1,000 new words in a school year. Without much preparation, teachers can select words that will expand students’ vocabulary and appear in other contexts. When the teacher arrives at those words during the read-aloud, she helps students understand the word with a student-friendly definition and examples, and then adds this to a read-aloud word wall.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

• Select one linguistic and one nonlinguistic strategy from this chapter to try in the classroom. What worked?
• Check out the ideas for word walls in this chapter and think about how you might want to create a new word wall.
• What guidelines have been given to teachers for word walls? After reading this chapter, should any guidelines be added to this?
• How could your school incorporate word walls into unexpected places such as the gym, cafeteria, and hallways?
• Do teachers already use digital tools in word learning? Choose a few digital tools to model in the next staff meeting.
Revised Frayer Model – One way to support word learning is to provide students with a graphic organizer – such as the Frayer Model – in which students do more than define a word; they may also give examples and nonexamples, perhaps a synonym, characteristics of the word, or identify other defining features. Below is a sample graphic organizer that also has a space for students to include a nonlinguistic image as well. To use it correctly, teachers should not hand out a stack of these graphic organizers and apply it to all vocabulary words. Also, it is unlikely that students will be able to generate examples or visuals before a discussion of the definition. Nor should teachers have students spend an entire period on one nonconceptual word; it is best used with words that have some definitional heft. For example, in English a word like theme would work much better than a word like soliloquy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Non-Examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Scales** – Word scales are a visual way to organize a set of words that are related by degree. Imagine a diagonal line that shows a series of words from the word warm at the bottom all the way up to the word hot. Or for social studies, imagine a class learning about communities studying a series of words that shows the continuum from the word hamlet at the bottom (through village, town, city, state, and nation) all the way up to the word continent at the top. This is a way for teachers to teach sets of words in context.

(2) **Strategies Using Collaboration** – Students are particularly interested in their peers in middle and high school, so incorporating collaboration into vocabulary learning will help to engage them.

**Save the Last Word for Me** – This strategy was originally introduced by Kylene Beers. It is a simple technique that helps students develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary words while working in a group. It can also be used to review words. A small group gets a set of cards with a vocabulary word on each one. The first student chooses a card and provides a definition of the word. Then each person in the group adds to that definition. After everyone has spoken, the original student synthesizes what the group has said about the term. This can happen orally or in writing with a paper that is passed around the group.

**Jigsaw Vocabulary** – Most teachers are already familiar with the jigsaw strategy. For vocabulary, groups of students can learn different vocabulary words (become “experts” in those words) and then divide up and teach those words to other groups. In one adaptation, students can create a 20-second pantomime or somehow act out the words to make them memorable for others.

(3) **Strategies for Independent Processing** – Secondary students need to learn to take more initiative to learn new words on their own.

**Vocabulary Log** – This is also sometimes known as a vocabulary journal, a vocabulary notebook, or a word log. In fact, students can keep a digital notebook using LiveBinders or OneNote which allows students to not only collect and store new words, but also share them. The idea is for this log to be a place where students record words, of their own choosing, from texts, nonprint media, or conversations. This is a great place for students to record new words from their independent reading. Because students choose the words they believe are important to learn, the learning is more self-directed. However, teachers often provide direction by requiring that students find a certain number of new words a week or record them in a format like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Context and Source</th>
<th>Definition in your own words</th>
<th>Application (Write a sentence)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Proverbial</td>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Found in newspaper, “But on the other side of that proverbial coin...”</td>
<td>Well-known or typical</td>
<td>I felt like the proverbial third wheel when I went to the park with my best friend and her date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vocabulary Talks or Videos** – Students can choose and present words they feel are important for their peers to know. Like a book talk, a vocabulary talk is a way for students to present one to three words to peers. While some students share words from their independent reading, others use words that allow them to showcase their interest or expertise. Teachers often structure one book talk a day or a week. Students can also share words and demonstrate their understanding through quick 15- to 45-second videos.

**Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams**

- Have teachers select one strategy from each of the three sections and with their teaching team and plan how to implement them.
- What digital tools do your teachers already use for vocabulary instruction and how can you have them preview new ones so they can integrate them into their repertoire of vocabulary-teaching tools?
Chapter 7 – Vocabulary Strategies for Special Populations

Classrooms throughout the United States contain increasing numbers of special education students and English learners. Many of the strategies introduced in the book thus far serve to support all learners, but this chapter includes additional strategies that will have the greatest impact on these populations of students. Recommendations for both groups of students tend to overlap. Neither benefits from the rote memorization of twenty vocabulary words out of context each week. Instead, it helps to provide a rich environment of age-appropriate literature; share student-friendly definitions of new words; help students delve more deeply into word meaning; ensure students can pronounce, spell, compare and contrast words; and show students how to use words in multiple contexts with repeated exposure to words. In particular, there are three types of strategies that are especially useful in building vocabulary comprehension in special education students and English learners: (1) dramatic strategies, (2) visual strategies, and (3) kinesthetic strategies.

(1) Dramatic Strategies – An important shift teachers can make in their vocabulary instruction is to make it more dramatic. Whether this means adding anecdotes, poetry, or stories to their instruction or including more moving, speaking, and performing, these approaches can help make vocabulary learning more engaging and effective.

Dancing Definitions - Teachers can dramatically act out words and have students repeat those words in a similar dramatic fashion. In discussing new vocabulary, the teacher utilizes different gestures and intonations in order to emblazon the definitions in students’ memories. Educator Augusta Mann invented this approach and demonstrates it in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U10wZ1ANWk.

Thirty-Second Vocabulary – This is a technique to help reinforce vocabulary definitions. Students come up with a pantomime or performance of a target word and are given thirty seconds to dramatize it. This is an example of students dramatizing the word haughty in thirty seconds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I93wexL3jNg

(2) Visual Strategies – In teaching vocabulary to ELs, students with learning disabilities, or really any students, it is beneficial to use visuals whenever possible. Informally, teachers can quickly sketch a diagram on the board or find an image online to illustrate a definition.

Word Walls – As was mentioned earlier, it helps to make word walls more visual by including anything from clip art and realistic images to student-created art in order to demonstrate the meaning of words. Co-creating a digital word wall using Padlet is not only an effective way to deepen vocabulary comprehension, but it is also a more engaging approach.

Illustrated Note Taking - In this technique, students learn to take notes by including a simple visual to illustrate a word’s meaning. Students can draw these by hand or if they are taking notes with LiveBinders or OneNote they can use images from the web.

Thinking Maps – Graphic organizers are great visual tools to help students deepen their understanding of vocabulary words. You can find a number of different graphic organizers, or thinking maps, online, such as: the Brace Map (for analysis), the Bubble Map (for description), the Circle Map (for conceptual understanding), the Tree Map (for classification), and much more.

(3) Kinesthetic Strategies – Using concrete objects or body movements helps students more deeply internalize word meanings because they take something more abstract and make it tangible. Think about all of the people who gesture with their hands while they speak!

Using Objects – Math teachers already know how helpful manipulatives are in strengthening student conceptual understanding. Teachers in other subject areas can also use tangible objects to illustrate concepts. For example, a teacher might use different sized balls to show the relative sizes of the planets. Or an English teacher might use paper cutouts to represent characters.

Creating Tableaus – This technique comes from the French for “living picture.” In this strategy, students create a freeze frame to capture a scene without moving or speaking. For example, an English teacher might have students create a tableau to show how the Capulets and Montagues feel about each other in the beginning of Romeo and Juliet.

Using Movement – Adding movements and hand gestures helps students develop their vocabulary. This can be a simple strategy in which students represent a word with their bodies. For example, a student might use extended arms to demonstrate right, acute, and obtuse angles. Or a teacher might use students themselves to represent points on a number line made out of tape on the floor. Students can even come up with their own facial expressions for words such as tyranny, anarchy, or oppression.

Discussion Questions for Teachers or Literacy Leadership Teams

• Currently, how do teachers differentiate vocabulary instruction for ELs and students with learning disabilities? Do any teachers use dramatic, visual, or kinesthetic strategies?
• How can teachers best expand their repertoire of vocabulary strategies to incorporate some of the strategies presented here?
THE MAIN IDEA’s PD Ideas for Improving Schoolwide Vocabulary Instruction

***Email Jenn for a PowerPoint version of this.

I. Rationale

A. Exactly how important is vocabulary development?

**Before:** Silently, think to yourself how important vocabulary-building activities are in your classroom compared to other literacy activities. Rate it from 1-10.

(1 = I would do most literacy activities before vocabulary development, 10 = I would choose vocabulary development as my highest priority)

(Teachers can give a rating in their heads, hold up their fingers, or enter their ratings using a program like Polleverywhere.com.)

**After:** Share some statistics with teachers (below), and then ask them to rate the importance of vocabulary instruction again. Has their rating changed? Discuss.

- Studies have found that by age four, children in middle and upper class families hear 15 million more words than children in working-class families, and 30 million more words than children in families on welfare. (According to a report by Too Small to Fail)
- Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) reported finding that “vocabulary as assessed in grade 1 predicts more than 30 percent of grade 11 reading comprehension.”
- For those students who are English Language Learners, the achievement gap is a vocabulary gap (Carlo, et al., 2004).
- Vocabulary in kindergarten and first grade is a significant predictor of reading comprehension in the middle and secondary grades (Cunningham, 2005; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Chall & Dale, 1995; Denton et al. 2011).

B. In sociology, the Matthew Effect suggests that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Discuss: How might a “Matthew Effect of vocabulary” play out in schools given the information in the box above?

II. Defining Vocabulary and Selecting Words to Teach

A. **Discuss:** Why does a two-year-old walk to the closet and pull out winter accessories when his parents tell him to put on mittens, gloves, and a scarf when he might not be able to verbalize this himself? Discuss receptive vs. expressive vocabulary.

B. **Definition of vocabulary.** Look at the following definition of vocabulary based on the one written by Kimberly Tyson and Angela Peery and discuss in pairs how similar it is to your own definition. Is anything missing? Is there anything you hadn’t considered?

**Vocabulary** refers to the words we use to communicate effectively when we listen, read, speak and write. Furthermore, vocabulary is divided into two categories to discuss words and word usage: receptive and expressive vocabulary. Our receptive vocabulary includes all of the words we understand when we listen and read while our expressive vocabulary refers to the words we generate when speaking or writing.

Discuss: Does our school have a common definition of vocabulary? Are we focusing on developing vocabulary in all four of these areas (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) equally? Which of these four areas do you most emphasize in your class?

C. **Selecting vocabulary to teach**

One important task for teachers is to choose the vocabulary they will directly teach students. Researchers estimate that teachers can directly teach about 400 words a year. Many teachers will have already heard about Isabel Beck’s work, but below is a brief overview of her system to categorize vocabulary into Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 words. Keep in mind that she’s not suggesting we ignore Tier 3 or Tier 1 words, but that as teachers we should emphasize Tier 2 words as much as possible.

Have teachers read the passage below (chosen from Newsela.com, a website that provides student-friendly current news articles you can search by grade to find nonfiction texts for your students). Ask them to name a few words that would fit into Tier 1, 2, and 3.

The Universe was formed by an event known as the Big Bang, a large explosion of matter. After the Big Bang, the universe was composed of radiation and free-floating subatomic particles. What happened next is unclear. Did small particles slowly join to form stars, star clusters and galaxies over time? Or did the universe first organize as immense clumps of matter that later broke apart into galaxies? So far, no one has been able to prove one or the other.

**Tier 1** – Everyday words students (other than ELs) should mostly be familiar with such as: *big, down, house, family.*

**Tier 2** – General academic words (that can be found in several content areas, not just one subject area such as: *justify, explain, predict, summarize, infer, generalize, conclusion, revolution, and reflection.*

**Tier 3** – More low-frequency, specialized academic words that belong to a particular discipline such as: *photosynthesis, onomatopoeia, quadratic formula, and sarcophagus.*

***Special resource – For additional help with vocabulary selection teachers can use a helpful tool called the ‘Academic Word Finder’ which can be found under ‘Classroom Resources’ on the Achieve the Core website. You copy and paste the text you want to use with students and it not only finds the Tier 2 words for you, but for each word it also provides the grade level, the part of speech, simple definitions, and sample sentences/phrases. Give your teachers time during the meeting to explore it: achievethecore.org***
III. A Balanced Model for Teaching Vocabulary

Most models of vocabulary instruction involve a mix of the three components below (share this with teachers):

1. **Modeling:** All adults who interact with students model robust vocabulary and interest in words.
2. **Explicit instruction:** Teach targeted words and proven word-learning strategies so students can tackle words on their own.
3. **Incidental learning:** Facilitate incidental vocabulary learning through a print-rich environment and various literacy experiences such as read-alouds, independent reading, dramatic performances, family literacy nights, poetry slams, and more.

Have teachers work alone or in pairs to paint a fuller picture of these three components by filling out the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of Vocabulary Instruction</th>
<th>What is this component?</th>
<th>What do we do that already fits into this component or how might this look in action?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct/Explicit Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect/Incidental Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Vocabulary practices to lay to rest

A. Discuss why this funny piece resonates for so many educators:

**Recipe: Vocabulary Casserole**

**Ingredients:**
- 20 words no one has ever heard before
- 1 matching test to be administered on Friday
- 1 dictionary with very confusing definitions
- 1 teacher who wants students to be quiet on Mondays copying words

Put 20 words on the board. Have students copy them and then look them up in dictionary. Make students write down all the definitions. For a little spice, require that students write words in sentences. Leave alone all week. Top with a boring test on Friday.

Perishable. This casserole will be forgotten by Saturday afternoon.

Serves: No one. Adapted from *When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do* by Kylene Beers (p. 177)

B. Many schools still rely on vocabulary practices that should be retired. For example:

1) Giving students long lists of vocabulary words to copy, look up in a dictionary, and then reproduce on a Friday quiz;
2) Relying on vocabulary lists from textbook publishers and workbooks which are unrelated to what students are studying;
3) Word search puzzles; and
4) Creating a word wall once during the year and not changing it all year.

**Discuss:** Do we employ any vocabulary practices at our school that we need to lay to rest?

V. A Sampling of Effective Vocabulary Strategies

There are many effective vocabulary strategies teachers can use. You can ask teachers to jigsaw—everyone learn one new strategy that fits a balanced approach and then introduce it in an upcoming staff meeting. Or, you can introduce a few strategies yourself:

**A. Direct Instruction of Targeted Vocabulary Words** (see above for help with *choosing* these words)

Let teachers know that researchers estimate that teachers can *directly teach* about 400 words a year. This suggests we need to limit the number of words we directly teach. Instead of following the Vocabulary Casserole above, provide brief explanations and examples of words. Then ask students to write definitions in their own words or draw images. Below are suggestions to get students to dive deeper into, play with, and own words: *graphic organizers, collaborative word walls, Save the Last Word for Me, and 30-Second Vocabulary.*

1. **Graphic Organizers** – After introducing a term, teachers can give students graphic organizers like the ones below, to fill out. Have teachers practice by giving them the term ‘direct vocabulary instruction’ to place in the middle and ask teachers to fill out one or both of these graphic organizers. Alternatively, have teachers Google ‘Thinking Maps,’ choose one for use in their classes, and discuss in pairs which words they could use with the graphic organizer in the coming week.
2. Collaborative Word Walls – Rather than creating word walls on their own at the beginning of the year, suggest that teachers use different word walls for different units and involve the students. Have teachers bring laptops to a meeting and give them time to:

a) Find images of word walls online or on Pinterest to get inspired! (Here are some science word wall examples: https://www.pinterest.com/gettingnerdy/science-vocabulary-and-word-walls/?lp=true)

b) Explore ways to create digital word walls through Padlet (padlet.com) which allows teachers and students to link vocabulary to images, links, and videos. Here’s a sample video about how this works (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtVb52Cou8). Make sure teachers bring headphones to the meeting! Or they can explore ThingLink (thinglink.com) -- here’s an example of how it could be used with Solar System vocabulary: https://www.thinglink.com/scene/705504269851164674

3. Save the Last Word for Me – After students have begun to learn a word, this strategy is a helpful way for students to dive deeper into its meaning (particularly for older students). Have teachers try this in groups. Use a term or a concept that has deeper layers, like ‘Balanced Approach to Vocabulary Instruction’ (I know this isn’t one word!) Everyone goes around and says one thing about what this concept means. Then the last person brings it all together and provides a comprehensive definition of the concept. After, have teachers share a word in their discipline/grade with deep enough layers that they could use it with this strategy (such as ‘democracy’).

4. Thirty-Second Vocabulary – This is a technique to help reinforce vocabulary definitions. Students come up with a pantomime or performance of a target word and are given thirty seconds to dramatize it. This is an example of students dramatizing the word haughty in thirty seconds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i93wexL3jNg. Perhaps just show this video – give teachers a break!

5. Using Context Clues – Explicit instruction means not only teaching specific words, but also teaching word-learning strategies, like using context clues. Teachers often simply tell students to “use context clues” without teaching them how. Give teachers this description of Four Types of Context Clues and then give them a text (on the grade level they teach) and ask them to find the meaning of a few underlined words and identify the type of context clue a student would use to figure out the words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Types of Context Clues with Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition—the word is defined directly and clearly in the sentence in which it appears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The manager wanted a weekly inspection, a careful examination of all the equipment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Antonym (or contrast)—often signaled by the words whereas, unlike, or as opposed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Unlike Jamaal’s room, which was immaculate, Jeffrey’s room was very messy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Synonym (or restatement)—other words are used in the sentence with similar meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The slender woman was so thin her clothes were too big on her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inference—word meanings are not directly described, but need to be inferred from the context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Walt’s pugnacious behavior made his opponent back down.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Reading Passage – Which type of context clues would a student use to define the underlined words?

In September 1957, nine black students enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was an important moment in the civil rights movement. The students were testing a ruling by the Supreme Court, the highest court in the nation. The ruling said that all public schools had to be integrated. This meant that schools that did not allow black students had to open their doors to them. Many people resisted the ruling. On the first day of classes at Central High, Governor Orval Faubus called in the state National Guard. He told the troops to stop the black students from entering the school. (Text from Newsela.com)

B. Incidental Word Learning

1. Discuss: Although teachers can directly teach about 400 words a year, research shows students learn an average of 3,000-5,000 words a year. How do you think students are learning all of these extra words? Make sure teachers discuss incidental word learning – through independent reading, read-alouds, conversations, a print-rich environment, and more.

2. Read-alouds/Independent Reading in Subject Areas Other Than English

Often it is only in English or ELA classes that students do independent reading and teachers conduct read-alouds. Give teachers of younger students time to think about a read-aloud they could do in math, science, or social studies. Remind them that they can choose higher-level books since they will be providing support. Also, Isabel Beck argues that if teachers read aloud once a day, students learn an additional 540 words a year. If they increase that to twice a day, that number jumps to 1,000 new words in a school year.

For teachers of older students, share the following idea and ask them how they might incorporate independent reading into math, science, or history (students could even keep vocabulary logs for new words):

In one school, eighth-grade students are given a list of sources for science articles on their grade level. Each week, students choose any article they want and write a review of it. If they choose an article that connects to the topic they are discussing in science class, they get extra credit! Incorporating choice and independent reading in the field of science supports incidental word learning.

3. Games – To support incidental word learning, teachers can give students time to play games like Boggle or Scrabble. Or they can have students play online vocabulary games with Vocabulary Games (www.vocabulary.co.il), Free Rice (www.freerice.com), or Flashcard Stash (www.flashcardstash.com). Bring in Boggle, Scrabble, or laptops and give teachers time to play and explore!
VI. Developing a Schoolwide Vocabulary Initiative

Tyson and Peery recommend putting together a literacy leadership team to support a culture of word learning at your school (see Chapter 1 of *Blended Vocabulary for K-12 Classrooms*). Below are some activities a literacy leadership team can support to help your school begin to have a more comprehensive schoolwide approach to vocabulary instruction. Once you put this team together, have them choose from the initiatives below (or others) and create an action plan to put their ideas into effect:

A) Establish a schoolwide culture of word learning: How can we regularly post words in the cafeteria, bathrooms, gym, and hallways? How can we train everyone – including office staff and administrators – to constantly model excitement for word learning and use alternative vocabulary words (‘writing implement’ rather than ‘pencil’ for example)?

B) Ensure vertical alignment: How can we help ensure that vocabulary instruction is more vertically aligned? For example, could we conduct a staff meeting in vertical teams in which teachers share their lists of ‘already-known,’ ‘must-know,’ and ‘should-know’ words for an upcoming unit to make sure these flow from previous grades? When the third-grade teachers see the list of second grade must-know words they will learn that by third grade these can be considered already-known words. Consider using a chart like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Already-known words</th>
<th>Must-know words</th>
<th>Should-know words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C) Design a schoolwide unit template with a section for vocabulary learning: How can we design a school-wide template that would work for all grades and subjects that includes a section for word learning?

D) Design a school-wide vocabulary assessment template: How can we develop a rubric for vocabulary assessment based on what we know about Edgar Dale’s continuum of word learning with the following four stages of word development?

1. The student has no knowledge of the word because he or she has never heard of or seen the word.
2. The student may have heard the word, but doesn’t really know what it means.
3. The student is able to make general associations with the word and recognize it in context.
4. The student has a deep understanding of the word and can use it in speaking and writing.

E) Introduce and support a balanced school-wide vocabulary approach: How can we introduce an approach to word learning that includes modeling, direct instruction, and indirect word learning and continue to support it throughout the year?

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**Action Plan for Schoolwide Vocabulary Initiative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal (which of the above ideas will you accomplish?):</th>
<th>Steps to Meet Our Goal</th>
<th>Done by whom?</th>
<th>Completed by when?</th>
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