

INTRODUCTION

The *GirlSMART Literacy Program Guide* is the product of extensive dialogue about and analysis of the existing afterschool GirlSMART (formerly GIRLStart) programs at sites in San Leandro and Oakland. With the goal of redesigning their existing literacy program, Girls Incorporated of Alameda County staff hired a literacy consultant to work with them during the summer of 2010. GirlSMART staff made a commitment to improve their literacy program in order to ensure that all GirlSMART girls attain the highest level of literacy possible.

The literacy consultant conducted site and classroom visits, spoke with staff, and reviewed the components of the program, the curriculum, and the schedules. (See Appendix A for a list of meeting topics and agendas.) After input from staff, recommendations were made for the GirlSMART program redesign. These recommendations were tailored specifically to the unique needs of the programs in San Leandro and Oakland. These needs include: serving students from high poverty families many of whom are not native English speakers, serving students in the afterschool setting, limited funding, and supporting group leaders who are not certified teachers and who are employed for a limited time (approximately 2 years). The recommendations were also made with the understanding that the literacy consultant would provide professional development and ongoing support to assist GirlSMART in implementing changes to their existing program. GirlSMART is a grant that extends beyond the original sites, and all GirlSMART programs follow the same program structure and implement the same program components.

Since 2010, and based on student needs, the GirlSMART literacy has undergone two updates to the program. The newest “revamp” occurred the summer of 2022. The 2022 revamp has modifications to the original six program components that are listed below under “Program Overview.” The two major shifts are that guided reading has been identified as **the** core program component followed by read alouds. Additionally, Reader’s Theater is now recommended, and not required and falls under the umbrella of “other eyes on the page activities” which are now considered supplemental to guide reading, which is the core “eyes of the page activity. Lastly, *Words Their Way*, which is a development phonics and spelling, and was required, is now considered optional. *Words Their Way* has been replaced with the required program component of **Phonics (and spelling) Instruction**.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to assist GirlSMART programs in improving their current literacy program. Each program has a unique set of resources and needs which may

differ from the San Leandro and Oakland GirlSMART programs. It is therefore essential that program managers and site coordinators take into consideration the resources and needs of their sites as they read this guide.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The redesigned GirlSMART Literacy Program includes the following components:

- 1. Read alouds:** Read alouds have always been a central component of the GirlSMART Literacy Program, but to improve the quality of the read alouds, the number of read alouds per week was decreased to allow more time for comprehension strategies. Instead of hearing read alouds every day with a new book, kindergarten and first grade girls will hear read alouds 3 times per week while second and third graders will hear read alouds 2 times per week. Group leaders have more time to discuss, reread and do extension activities with books. This should improve girls' understanding of the book which is the ultimate goal of reading. In addition to using comprehension strategies, *Qualities of Strong, Smart and Bold* are an integral part of the read alouds. The use of this additional perspective reinforces the socio-emotional goals of GirlSMART and deepens girls' comprehension and critical thinking skills. Guidelines and strategies for teaching vocabulary are also an important part of read alouds. Special attention should be given to effectively teaching vocabulary, which is addressed in this program guide. Although the amount of read alouds has decreased, they remain an essential component of the GirlSMART Literacy Program. Research has repeatedly shown that read alouds improve students' ability to comprehend stories, as well as their written, oral and auditory skills. Jim Trelease (2006), an expert in read alouds states, "We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire. But in reading aloud, we also: condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure; create background knowledge; build vocabulary; [and] provide a reading role model" (p. 4).
- 2. Qualities of Strong, Smart and Bold:** Sandra Kaplan, an expert in gifted education, created *Habits of a Scholar* to encourage gifted students to develop scholarly attributes. (See Appendix B, entitled *Think Like a Scholar*, for Kaplan's scholarly habits.) Inspired by the explicit guidance and positive framework that these habits provide students in the classroom, site coordinators from Oakland and San Leandro schools developed *Qualities of Strong, Smart and Bold*. The creation of these qualities included extensive brainstorming, feedback and several revisions. Every effort was made to articulate the most important qualities of GirlSMART girls in a manner that was accessible to girls without watering

down the complexity of these qualities. These qualities are explicitly taught to girls and are integrated into all aspects of GirlSMART. In addition to being explicitly taught, these qualities will be discussed during read alouds, used to reinforce “strong, smart and bold” behaviors in the classroom and for individual goal setting.

3. **Reader’s Theater:** Although it was decided to maintain the chapter on Reader’s Theater in the program guide, in 2022 a major shift in the GirlSMART program occurred, and ***Reader’s Theater is no longer required***, although highly recommended. Organizations may decide to focus mostly on Guided Reading which is the most essential component of the GirlSMART program. Reader’s Theater promotes fluency, which is an essential but often overlooked component of literacy. Fluent readers can recognize words automatically, group words into meaningful phrases (segmenting), and analyze rapidly phonic, morphemic and contextual aspects of unknown words. Hearing fluent readers, repeated readings, and Reader’s Theater are activities that contribute to and improve reading fluency. Reader’s Theater involves assigning students a role at an appropriate reading level and allowing them to read their role with a group of students who read the other roles in the script. Expression and drama are encouraged; however, students are not expected to act out or perform a play.
4. **Guided Reading:** Guided Reading is the newest component of the GirlSMART program. Its implementation began in 2013 in response to the identified need of our girls, whose independent reading skills and reading levels are below grade level norms. Guided reading involves a teacher working with a small group of students who demonstrate similar reading behaviors and can read similar levels of texts. The teacher selects a text that is easy enough for students to read with your skillful support. Students are asked to read the text and use comprehension and word attack skills explicitly taught by the teacher as they read. ***In 2022, due to DIBELS data and student needs, it was decided that Guiding Reading would take center stage as the most important component of the GirlSMART program.***
5. **Words Their Way:** *Words Their Way* is a differentiated spelling program that begins with an assessment. Based on the assessment, students are given spelling patterns and sorting activities that are developmentally appropriate. It ensures that each student is getting what she needs to improve her orthographic knowledge and vocabulary. ***Words Their Way used to be a required program component, but it is no longer required.*** Instead, GirlSMART organizations are ***required to implement phonics instruction*** a minimum of four days a week, but they may choose to use a program (or combination of programs) other than *Words Their Way*.

6. **Assessment:** Assessment is necessary to measure student growth and program effectiveness. Assessment for the GirlSMART Literacy Program will serve three purposes:

Diagnostic to ensure that girls are given literacy materials that are appropriate for their current developmental literacy level during word work (*Words Their Way*) time and Readers' Theater. Group leaders should use this information to guide them in creating questions during read alouds that are at an appropriate level of difficulty for the group as well as for individual students.

Formative assessments should inform instruction. Any informal check for understanding, whether it be a question asked during a read aloud, or an observation made by a teacher during guided reading, phonics or writing are all examples of formative assessment. Site coordinators and teachers can use the results of the first and second trimester DIBELS assessments to identify girls who need additional help and to identify strengths and weakness of girls' literacy to inform instruction in the classroom. It is important to remember that one of the most powerful forms of formative assessment is the day-to-day observations that teachers make while their students are engaged in all literacy activities of the GirlSMART program.

Summative since a major goal of GirlSMART after school program is to improve girls' literacy, girls' growth in literacy must be measured. In addition to providing guidance in working with students, the results of the summative assessments allow GirlSMART staff to identify strengths and weaknesses in the program and modify the program as necessary.

GirlSMART programs will use DIBELS 8 to track growth, monitor student progress, and inform instruction. The end of the year or third trimester DIBELS results can be used as a summative assessment as well.