

Delaware Literacy Coalition

Strategic Plan for Grades 4-8

In partnership with



December 2022

Who We Are

The Delaware Literacy Coalition is a community of practice devoted to the mission of ensuring that all Delaware students leave high school with levels of proficiency that will benefit them both academically and in the workplace. The majority of this community consists of systems leaders from Delaware public schools but also includes representatives from post-secondary institutions, community organizations, and the Department of Education. The Coalition regularly convenes to learn and collaborate for the purpose of improving and supporting K-12 ELA instructional practices in Delaware schools. (Delaware Literacy Coalition, 2017.)

Our Purpose for This Work

Literacy skills in the 21st century are more essential than ever for success in college, career, and life. Unfortunately, too many of our older students in Delaware do not have the necessary reading and writing skills to set them up for a successful future. Achievement data on both statewide and national assessments have remained stagnant for years. And while there has been considerable and necessary emphasis on applying knowledge from research to the instruction of our early readers, these improvements do not necessarily translate into better achievement among our older readers. The following observation from *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy For College and Career Success* summarizes the challenges faced after Grade 3:

“The truth is that good early literacy instruction does not inoculate students against struggle or failure later on. Beyond grade 3, adolescent learners in our schools must decipher more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level, and learn to form independent conclusions based on evidence. They must also develop special skills and strategies for reading text in each of the different content areas - meaning that a student who ‘naturally’ does well in one area may struggle in another.” (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p. x)

Low literacy achievement at these grade levels (and beyond) are particularly troublesome when considering that so much of the curriculum in all subject area coursework requires the ability to read and understand increasingly complex texts in order to gain knowledge from them. In addition, students who fail one to two year-long courses in 9th grade are significantly more likely to drop out of high school and high school equivalency exams, such as the GED, are written at the ninth-grade level.



There is, however, a growing body of work that illuminates how students in these grades learn to increase their literacy skills, why some struggle, and what effective instruction looks like. The following advice was also included in *Time to Act*, “*To reach the goal of providing quality literacy instruction for all our nation’s adolescents, we must systematically link instruction to the growing knowledge base on literacy and inform it with up-to-date data relating to outcomes and best practices*” (2010, p. x).

The knowledge base referred to in this plan is not comprehensive and will continue to evolve over time. The hope is to establish a new foundation from which to build.

Our Vision for This Work

We envision an excellent education in English/Language Arts and Literacy in which all Delaware students, in grades 4-8, see themselves as effective communicators and critical thinkers who read, write, speak, and listen across disciplines. Students engage with complex texts to build knowledge and express their ideas through discourse and in writing grounded in text evidence. Through high-quality literacy materials and instruction, all students will develop the necessary skills to become fluent, skilled readers so they can problem solve and think critically in service of becoming productive citizens who can analyze perspectives that both conform to, and challenge, their worldview.

Our Strategy

The Delaware Literacy Coalition’s focus on school system actions to support students in grades 4-8 does not dismiss the important work of early literacy and high school educators and their partners or interfere with the initiatives outlined in the Department of Education’s Early Literacy Plan for grades Pre-K-3 (Delaware Department of Education, 2019.) The Delaware Literacy Coalition hopes that by clearly laying out our focus areas, goals, and initiatives, along with the rationale behind them, schools, districts, and partner organizations will be able to find points of alignment with this work, capitalize on our offerings, and partner together with us in service of student achievement.



Working towards our vision of an excellent ELA/Literacy education for every student, we will prioritize supporting educators that serve grades 4-8 in the following goal areas:

- **Promote the use of high-quality core instructional materials and the necessary professional learning to implement them well**
- **Support the conditions and practices necessary for high-quality professional learning that impacts educator practice**
- **Support the teaching of evidence-based intermediate literacy practices that allow all students to access grade-level content**

Within each goal area a common framework will describe:

- ***Why it matters.*** This section reviews the relevant research to demonstrate the importance and impact of work in this area.
- ***What students, educators, and/or leaders need.*** This section describes what we are working towards - the practices that will make our vision a reality. The term educators refers to a broad spectrum of student-facing personnel including but not limited to content teachers of ELA, Social Studies, and science, reading specialists, special education teachers in all settings, and teachers that specifically support multi-language learners. Leaders refers to teacher-facing or systems-level personnel such as building and district leaders, coaches, and district specialists.
- ***Our current state in Delaware.*** This section describes where we currently stand across the state with respect to this area.
- ***Our goals and initiatives.*** For each theme, we lay out our specific goals and how we as a community of practice plan to collaborate with each other and partner with the Department of Education when possible to reach those goals.

High-Quality Instructional Materials

Goal Area: Ensure that students receive optimal and equitable literacy instruction through the use of high quality instructional materials to support student learning outcomes

Why it Matters

Research has shown that when educators do not have access to high-quality instructional materials, they often search for them online, causing inconsistency in the quality of text and tasks they are assigning (Ed Reports, 2021). According to a recent RAND analysis, “96% of teachers use Google to find lessons and materials and nearly 75% of teachers use Pinterest to find lessons and materials” (Ed Reports, 2021, p. 4).



Supplementing materials is a cause for concern as studies have shown that many supplemental materials likely do not adequately support students to meet the demands of the standards. It has been noted that, “Supplementing often involves selecting lessons or activities from unvetted online collections that are not part of a designed scope and sequence” (Ed Reports, 2021, p.4). Overall, when educators do not have access to high-quality instructional materials, along with ongoing training on how to effectively utilize these materials with diverse learners, they often select unvetted resources that are not aligned to the standards.

Over the last several years, a growing body of research has connected the skillful implementation of high-quality instructional materials with increased student outcomes. Ultimately, when teachers have access to these materials, it gives them a common foundation to provide equitable instruction for all students. Researchers have found that when curricular resources are not aligned to standards “students of color, those from low-income families, English language learners, and students with mild to moderate disabilities have even less access to these resources than their peers” (TNTP, 2018, p. 4). Moreover, “assigning work to students below their grade level mainly just denies them important opportunities to engage with material they could master if given the chance” (TNTP, 2022, p.4).

Curriculum that is aligned with state standards, along with research-based instructional practices for increasing reading comprehension can maximize learning by holding all students to high expectations. In order to support equity in learning for all students, educators must provide instruction that immerses students in grade-level reading and thinking. The ELA experts at UnboundEd Learning assert that “the most efficient path to effective and equitable instruction requires three things: 1. Adopt an aligned curriculum, 2. Provide instructional support that fosters all students’ persistence with grade-level reading and thinking, and 3. Provide targeted intervention in addition to and in service of grade-level learning”(Wiggins et al, 2020).

What Students Need

All students deserve equitable access to High-Quality Instructional Materials for English Language Arts and Literacy, along with engaging and enriching instructional experiences. According to Achieve the Core’s Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET), Grades 3-12 (2013), high-quality instructional materials include the following:

- **Non-Negotiable 1: High-Quality Text:** Anchor texts are worthy of student’s time and attention: texts are of quality and are rigorous, containing rich academic language, meeting appropriate complexity criteria for each grade.
 - **Alignment Criterion 1: Range and Quality of Texts:** Materials reflect the distribution of text types and genres required by the Standards.



- Non-Negotiable 2: Evidence-Based Discussion and Writing: Materials provide opportunities for rich and rigorous evidence-based discussions and writing about texts to build strong literacy skills.
 - Alignment Criterion 2: Questions, Tasks, and Assignments: Materials support students in building reading comprehension, in finding and producing the textual evidence to support their responses, and in developing grade-level academic language
- Non-Negotiable 3: Building Knowledge: Materials build knowledge systematically through reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language study.
 - Alignment Criterion 3: Building Knowledge with Texts, Vocabulary, and Tasks: Materials build students' knowledge across topics and content areas

What Educators Need

In order for teachers across the state to be successful in the classroom, they require access to High-Quality Instructional Materials. Districts and charters need to explore and assess reading curricula with the goal of determining their ability to support teaching and learning in view of learning loss, remediation, and acceleration and what best fits their student population and teacher needs.

Despite teachers having access to a curriculum, this does not prevent teachers from supplementing various resources. This is a cause for concern as data has shown that many supplemental materials should “not be used” or are “probably not worth using” and likely do not adequately support students to meet the demands of the standards (EdReports, 2021). By providing teachers with high-quality instructional materials, teachers can meet the needs of all of their students.

In addition, Delaware teachers need support and training for using the materials, as well as targeted, job-embedded, professional development in order to effectively deliver instruction. Too often teachers are provided with new tools, or materials, to use in the classroom without the proper knowledge and support to effectively use them.



Targeted and continuous professional development across the school year is key for teachers to be successful. Support should include:

- Participating in training to deepen knowledge of the curriculum components
- Creating a plan for pacing, usage, and planning
- Making a plan for common assessments and grading
- Determining what data will be collected and analyzed and how data will be used

What Leaders Need

It is recommended that schools make data-driven decisions that best fit the needs of their students and programming. In order to effectively build and support a curriculum within the school, administrators need professional development on how the curriculum works in order to create the foundation for strong instruction (Instruction Partners, 2018). This foundation includes, but is not limited to:

- Developing a vision for strong instruction in the content areas
- An implementation plan consisting of implementation goals, roles, and a plan for monitoring progress
- Providing teachers opportunities for ongoing training
- Systems and structures for common collaborative planning and inquiry
- Training for administrators around the positive impact on instructional practices and student achievement when high-quality instructional materials are effectively implemented.
- Ongoing professional development for administration, curriculum specialists, and instructional coaches
- Access to all learning platforms



Current State of HQIM in Delaware

The chart below includes baseline (2019) and current (2022) data related to Delaware School Districts' adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Data was self-reported by each District/Local Education Agency (LEA).

	Elementary Level Using HQIM	Middle School Level Using HQIM
Baseline Data		
October 25, 2019	38%	13%
Current Data		
August 3, 2022	75% (+37%)	75% (+62%)

Based on the data, there was a significant increase in the use of HQIM between 2019 and 2022 at both the elementary and middle school levels. As of September 2022, 13% of districts are currently piloting instructional materials and 13% of districts are not utilizing HQIM at the elementary level.

Additionally, as of September 2022, 13% of districts are currently piloting instructional materials and 13% of districts are not utilizing HQIM at the middle school level. While many districts have adopted materials across the state, we want to ensure that all teachers are trained and supported when implementing their lessons to further ensure equity for all student populations.



Our Goals

District and Charter systems across the state are strongly encouraged to adopt HQIM to ensure that all students get access to grade-level, knowledge-building core curriculum. Additional curricular goals should include instructional components to support students with disabilities and multilingual learners as well as culturally responsive pedagogy. These curriculum materials provide a vehicle to support educators in their implementation of reading practices based on the Science of Reading. This will create diverse content knowledge amongst our learners across the state and engage every student in an authentic learning experience.

As a *Literacy Coalition*, we will:

Promote and advocate for the adoption/selection of high-quality instructional materials in elementary and middle schools by

- **Sharing resources used for selecting teams and processes to select new materials aligned with state guidance and local priorities and offer support/technical assistance to LEAs embarking on the adoption/selection process**
- **Documenting LEA's established visions of excellent ELA instruction and current choice of curricular materials**

Collaborate and sharing best practices for implementing new curricular resources by

- **Defining broad goals for successful implementation**
- **Sharing resources such as assessment plans, grading guidance, pacing guides, and professional learning plans designed to support successful implementation**

Explore collaborative opportunities focused on annual goals for continuous improvement in the context of an HQIM implementation



High-Quality Professional Learning

Goal Area: Support the conditions and practices necessary for professional learning that impacts educator practice.

Why it Matters

The DDOE’s mission is to, “empower every learner with the highest quality education” (Delaware Department of Education, 2022). Ensuring that students have consistent equitable access to strong instruction means that educators need to continue to build knowledge and learn skills to enhance their practice. Continuous effective professional learning grounded in evidence-based practices and the specific, relevant needs of educators is a strongly supported means of achieving this level of instruction (Hammond et al., 2017).

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Effective professional learning for both novice and veteran educators, has the potential to expand teachers’ knowledge and skills. It has the potential to shift teachers’ instructional practices resulting in positive impacts on student achievement despite unsupported skepticism that continues to linger in many educational systems. (Hill et al., 2022). This potential is best reached when a variety of professional learning structures such as coaching, unit and lesson studies, professional learning community cycles, and workshops are used to provide teachers, coaches, and school leaders with active, ongoing, collaborative, and responsive professional learning that meets both their needs and their students’ needs.

It is critical that districts engage various stakeholders to support the shift of the professional learning narrative through the implementation of well-organized, sustained, and relevant opportunities steeped in the evidence-based criteria and conditions necessary for effectiveness. Supporting research allows for informed decisions regarding productive professional learning. A combination of the following specific conditions and criteria for professional learning has led to strengthened instructional practices and enhanced student achievement in many districts across the country.

- The unwavering support of leaders and school and district systems
- Strategic planning for the stakeholders (i.e. teachers, coaches, administrators, various community members) and systems within which they work
- Data analysis to provide a clear understanding of teacher needs
- A firm grounding in evidence-based practices



- “Active learning” (Hill et. al, 2022, p. 7) that takes into account teachers’ experiences and includes cycles of inquiry (learning, feedback, and reflection).
- Opportunities for capacity-building within districts and schools to adapt practice and sustain learning over time

Using the research that continues to evolve and develop to guide the plans and decisions made by districts regarding meaningful professional learning is a path forward to best service our teachers and students (Hill et al., 2022; Hammond et al., 2017).

What Educators Need

Professional learning is most effective when it directly connects research-based best practices with the high-quality instructional materials that are being used in the classroom. Current change theory research states that educators demand professional learning that provides immediate actionable steps that produce measurable improvement in student outcomes in order for them to embrace and incorporate the new strategies into their practice. In addition, The most effective professional learning efforts are a sustained and interconnected series of opportunities that provide ongoing support and feedback loops to ensure that the teachers are both participants and contributors to the professional learning.

Teacher leaders and administrators must partner and pay as much attention to the enabling conditions and structures of professional learning as to the design and practices in order for the professional learning to be effective as to avoid potential barriers such as the following:

- lack of shared vision about what is quality English/Language Arts and literacy instruction in that grade band
- inadequate resources, including standards that are aligned to curriculum and grade-level texts
- lack of time for planning and implementing new instructional approaches, such as text-centered, knowledge-building instruction
- conflicting requirements in lesson planning and/or assessment demands. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)

Professional learning achieves some of its highest aims when every teacher maintains high expectations for students and commits to learning new ways to scaffold instruction and employ culturally responsive teaching strategies.



When teachers are effectively engaged in professional learning they are able to develop a habit of reflection, base their opinions on student results, seek feedback and support from other literacy educators, and accept the discomfort that comes from interrogating their beliefs and assumptions about teaching, learning, curriculum, and students.

All educators who support ELA instruction need explicit training to understand the design of the ELA curriculum, its alignment with the standards, and how to implement the instructional practices within the curriculum. In grades 6-8, teachers of history/social studies and science/technical subjects also need explicit training to unpack the literacy demands of their curriculum and how it addresses their specific ELA/Literacy standards. In addition, teachers need training to best utilize the instructional materials at the lesson and unit level to provide quality instruction for students. This knowledge also allows them to make informed instructional decisions that strengthen student engagement and success and customize the materials, when appropriate (Instruction Partners, 2018). Professional learning practices that support this work include but are not limited to

- Learning opportunities that ask them to wear a “student hat.”
- Contributing to and using change management tools, including vision setting, a concerns-based adoption model, and innovation configuration maps, to guide improvement efforts, and
- Explaining curricular coherence that transcends grade levels or courses to aid with informed daily decision-making (Short and Hirsch, 2020)

Beyond training, teachers need time to reflect, share, and prepare to teach—ideally with colleagues in the same grade band, using the same text and/or materials. Effective collaborative planning ensures that teachers have the time they need to clarify lesson outcomes, anticipate and adjust their instruction to meet unfinished learning needs, and improve their practice in a specific focus area. As teachers begin to plan with curriculum, it is important to consider that the work shifts from curating materials for units/lessons to intellectual preparation. Protocols for routines such as unit internalization, lesson preparation, and student work analysis help teachers in this transition. (Instruction Partners, 2018.)

Employing a coaching model will provide teachers with clarity on where to focus their improvement efforts. A coaching model refers to the ongoing support and feedback teachers should receive to improve their literacy instructional practices and strengthen their use of the ELA curriculum. Coaching provides opportunities to informally observe teachers, identify trends in instruction and use of materials, provide individualized support to implement the training they have received, and/or execute the plan created during their planning processes. (Instruction Partners, 2018.)



What Leaders Need

The knowledge and skill demands on ELA teacher leaders and literacy coaches are substantial in terms of ELA content, literacy content pedagogy, and effective facilitation of adult learning. The most effective ELA teacher leadership roles are focused on subject-specific literacy pedagogy and can provide coaching of teams and individuals. Effective literacy coaching includes professional learning grounded in cycles of inquiry, the use of models and/or modeling, and time for teacher collaboration and reflection. In addition, teacher leaders help administrators articulate and amplify a shared vision for excellent ELA/literacy teaching and learning by collaborating in the observation and feedback processes specific to the ELA classroom. (Learning Forward, 2019.)

First and foremost, ELA teacher leaders need the support of the ELA teachers' immediate supervisors and the building leadership. In most professional learning situations, the support of the school building administration has been identified as a critical factor. (Learning Forward, 2019.) Commitment is demonstrated in part by engaging in ELA professional learning sessions designed for leaders and teachers and sharing reflections. It is also demonstrated by conducting content-specific observation and feedback cycles with the ELA teacher leader/literacy coach. While the roles and responsibilities differ, both are instructional leaders and working together provides the necessary clarity leading to clearer instructional expectations and better literacy outcomes for students. In addition, literacy coaches need an aligned ELA curriculum and assessment system, a limited number of teacher priorities, and adequate time for team-based professional learning and collaborative instructional planning. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)

ELA teacher leaders/literacy coaches also need time and investment in their own professional learning to ensure they are well prepared to fulfill their large responsibilities as a content expert and an instructional leader. This includes learning experiences that resemble those they will use with teachers and practice with protocols/tools for collaborative planning, observation and feedback, and coaching conversations. (Short and Hirsch, 2020)

In collaboration with ELA educators, literacy administrators are responsible for developing and promoting a shared vision for teaching and learning that addresses ELA pedagogy and the role of curriculum-based professional learning in supporting that vision. And while effective professional learning plans may begin with a multi-year vision, they also have clear year-long goals centered around a series of trainings, meetings, coaching events, and feedback loops. (Short and Hirsch, 2020)



Precision for the formats (professional learning days, PLCs, Feedback/Leadership meetings) and structures of this time allow teacher leaders to effectively plan for educator learning and to utilize formative data to make course corrections and provide targeted support in real-time.

ELA administrators must also strategically combine the selection and purchase of high-quality instructional materials with multi-year support for their implementation. Much of this support include adopting policies and practices that promote and eliminate barriers to instructional coherence. Systems-level administrators must also attend to building the capacity of formal and informal leaders at all levels to support curriculum-based professional learning. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) This includes practice with protocols/tools for observation and feedback and collaborative conversations between the teacher leader and the building leaders Both building and system administrators need highly skilled teacher leaders with expertise in content, the curriculum, and facilitating collaborative learning. This skill set is necessary to guide educators through the process of examining beliefs and assumptions throughout curriculum-based professional learning. Administrators also need teacher leaders who can develop and use change tools to support successful curriculum implementation and improved literacy instruction. (Short and Hirsch, 2020.) Collaboration with these teacher leaders is necessary for administrators to expand their understanding of how updated literacy research is expressed in ELA classroom practice within the context of their curriculum.

Current State of Professional Learning in Delaware

Since curriculum decisions are made by the LEA, by necessity each local education agency develops their own plans to support curriculum specific professional learning for their ELA educators. Professional development days for larger-scale training opportunities are determined by each LEA's calendar. While there is no prescribed uniformity among the LEAs, many, if not most, elementary ELA collaborative opportunities are held weekly by grade level.

In contrast, weekly or bi-weekly ELA collaborative opportunities in middle school are often organized by departments representing the range of grades 6-8. Larger systems may have the opportunity to meet by department and grade level specificity. In all contexts, LEAs report that there is a very limited number of ELA teacher leader/literacy coach positions available to meet the needs of all educators -teachers, and administrators. Administrators are forced to make strategic decisions regarding which of the teacher leader's responsibilities are most paramount and for which educators - teachers and/or administrators.



Gaps are filled by classroom teachers, department heads, building administration, and other support personnel with varying degrees of clarity. Novice teachers, both to the profession and to the LEA, are of particular concern. It is a challenge to advance the instructional practice of all literacy educators while simultaneously catching the new teachers up to speed while also being mindful of the other additional demands placed on them, such as mentoring and completing required coursework.

To support districts with their professional learning plans, The DDOE published its definition of High-Quality Professional Learning in 2021. In addition, the DDOE curated a Professional Learning Partners Guide to assist district and school leaders in identifying partners to provide high-quality professional learning. Of these listed vendors, only one based in Delaware provides curriculum-specific HQPL. This vendor only supports curriculum-specific HQPL for grades K-5. A consequence of the lack of local professional learning partners is that it is significantly more costly to provide curriculum specific professional learning for secondary ELA teachers due to vendor costs and the departmentalization of the schools. Put simply, it costs more to provide for fewer. The state redesigned the competitive Reimagining Professional Learning Grant program to support professional learning plans focused on the skillful implementation of high-quality instructional materials. Between 2021-2023, Over 1.3 million dollars in grant monies were awarded to support seven LEAs with their professional learning plans to improve educator practice in secondary ELA. Over 1 million dollars in grant monies were awarded to support six LEAs with their professional learning plans to improve educator practice in elementary ELA.

In regards to literacy teacher leadership, The State of Delaware provides one ten-month reading specialist to each district (not charters) to provide “assistance to districts in designing, demonstrating, and implementing best practices in literacy instruction. This position is responsible for curriculum work and providing professional development in literacy for district educators.” (Fiscal Year Appropriations Act 2023, 2022) These personnel are to meet monthly as part of the Literacy Cadre. The Literacy Coalition receives yearly funds to support the teacher leaders of the Cadre in designing, demonstrating, and implementing best practices in literacy instruction throughout their districts.

In May 2019, the Literacy Coalition voted to use their monies to support the literacy coaches of the Cadre in a year-long trajectory of learning that included equitable teaching practices to attend to the mastery of foundational standards, features of text complexity, close reading, writing instruction, and opportunities for increased student engagement. This trajectory included habits and tools to facilitate inquiry cycles back in their schools/districts. This trajectory, also known as ELA Content Leader, was open to Cadre members and other teacher leaders that an LEA chose to include. Approximately thirty teacher leaders have completed the ELA content leader professional learning series, with two-thirds of the participants working in secondary settings.



Our Goals

As a *Literacy Coalition*, we will:

- Promote and advocate for curriculum-based professional learning within our LEAs to prepare teachers to use their curriculum successfully so all students have the opportunity to achieve the grade-level literacy outcomes.
- Promote the hiring and development of professional learning partners and coaches with established expertise in literacy, the chosen ELA curriculum, and facilitating collaborative learning.
- Review decision-making criteria that guide the selection of models of professional learning used with teacher leaders/coaches and administrators.
- Conduct needs assessments to identify areas of professional learning most needed and desired by educators at regular intervals.
- Collaborate to establish and/or inform guidance for evaluation and feedback cycles to assess the progress and impact of investments in curriculum-based professional learning.
- Establish informal networks with LEAs using the same instructional materials for collaboration.

We will also advocate for/ prioritize the following activities to take place to support the work of the *Cadre* in a curriculum-flexible context:

- Deepen expertise in relevant content, pedagogical content knowledge, and teaching pedagogy through learning experiences that resemble those they will use with teachers (inquiry cycles, feedback protocols, and coaching conversations) and administrators (observation and instructional rounds, principal/building leadership meetings, and quarterly data reviews).
- Equip teachers to scaffold lessons to connect less-prepared students with rigorous content and learning experiences.
- Demonstrate how to shape lessons that address students' culture, context, race, and ethnicity.
- Establish informal networks with LEAs using the same instructional materials to collaborate.



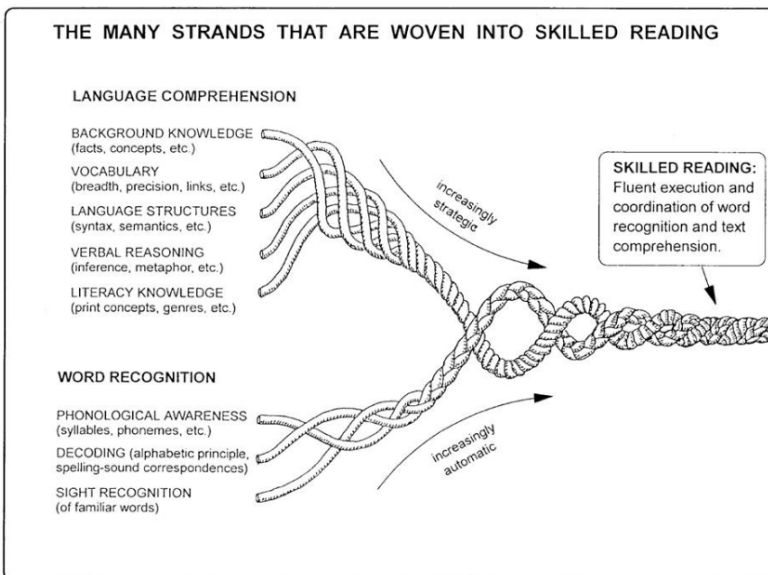
Evidence-Based Intermediate Literacy Practices

Goal Area: Support the teaching of evidence-based intermediate literacy practices that allow all students to access grade-level content.

Why it Matters

Both state and national achievement data reveal that virtually every teacher works with students who struggle to read on grade level. However, by the time students are in upper-elementary grades, reading material in all subject areas conveys information and ideas that students are expected to learn and understand. When students are unable to understand these texts, they miss crucial opportunities to learn grade-level content. Applying the knowledge from the science of reading equips teachers of older students with the necessary tools to provide access to grade-level content, thus closing the opportunity gap.

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According to the Simple View of Reading, reading comprehension can be divided into two parts: Word Recognition and Language Comprehension. The Word Recognition strand includes the decoding skills students need to associate letters and sounds to identify and make meaning of words. The Language Comprehension strand includes the language skills needed to comprehend what those words and groups of words mean within the context of the text.

Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) is a visual frequently referenced by practitioners to demonstrate the interaction between these two parts. According to the Science of Reading, weakness(es) in one strand of the rope yields flawed readers.



Science of Reading theory directly mirrors the expectations of The Common Core State Standards. The Common standards expect that students should be able to use this combined knowledge of sounds, spellings, and words—phonics, syllabication, and morphology (word roots and affixes)— to read familiar words, including those with multiple syllables after fourth grade (ELA.RF.4.3; ELA.RF.5.3). The increasingly strategic use of the language comprehension skills are reflected in the reading standards for all grades. (ELA-Literacy.RA.R.1-10 and the Knowledge of Language and Vocabulary Acquisition and Use clusters of the Language standards for grades K-12).

Scarborough’s Rope is limited in that it does not fully represent the important constructs that bridge word recognition and language comprehension. These constructs include but are not limited to vocabulary, reading fluency, and morphological awareness (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Attending to students’ vocabulary development and knowledge of meaningful units in language is reflected in the Common Core State Standards in Reading and Language for all grades. Fluency, however, is not. While the Science of Reading theory holds that a strong foundation in Word Recognition skills leads to greater automaticity with these skills (i.e., the development of fluent reading), the Common Core State Standards imply that students should be able to read grade-level prose—informational and narrative—and poetry with appropriate speed, accuracy, and expression comprehending the purpose and meaning (prosody) of each by fifth grade (ELA.RF.3.4; ELA. RF.4.4; ELA.RF.5.4).

But, reading fluency can change with text content, genre or complexity. And although fluent reading doesn’t guarantee comprehension, disfluent reading hinders comprehension, especially with complex texts. Disfluent readers, instead of being able to make meaning as they read, spend a disproportionate amount of cognitive capacity sounding out words or wrestling with sentence structure, leaving little time and energy to comprehend what they’re reading. What’s more, new studies point to the potential of prosody serving as a proxy for reading comprehension (Groen et al., 2018). As a consequence, listening to a student read can be one of the most powerful evaluation tools for determining a student’s intervention needs at a broad level: whether they be additional supports for language comprehension skills, practice with the bridging constructs, and/or supports for the skills in the word recognition strands of the Reading Rope.

Activities and teaching practices that target fluency can be integrated into the context of the work within complex, grade-level texts in all grades, but these activities and teaching practices will not be found in standards-aligned materials in grades 6-8 nor will fluency be measured in standards-aligned assessment products for grades 6-8.



What Students Need

Proficient readers in the upper grades apply a series of complex skills to a grade-level text. Students who are not yet proficient with reading grade-level text can have difficulty with one or more of these complex and interrelated skills. Due to the interactions between the two parts of Scarborough’s Reading Rope, intervention and support for struggling readers shouldn’t come at the expense of listening to, reading, and discussing grade-level texts, or at the expense of knowledge- and vocabulary-building content. All students need access to grade-level standards-aligned, text-centered literacy instruction applied to a knowledge-building core curriculum. This type of instruction includes routine use of comprehension building practices such as,

- Building both students’ world and word knowledge
- Opportunities to ask and answer text-based questions
- Routines for summarizing and techniques for monitoring their comprehension

In light of new learnings about the role of fluency in the upper grades, all students should also have the opportunity to hear the reading of grade-level or stretch text with prosody. And because comprehension in one grade-level text doesn’t guarantee comprehension in all other grade-level texts, all students also need regular opportunities to read a wide range of texts. (Vaughn, et al., 2022.)

The lack of transfer of skills between texts has implications for intervention support as well. In addition to core instruction, some students may need more intense building of background knowledge and vocabulary work, purposeful fluency-building activities, work with decoding multisyllabic words and practice reading them with automaticity. For most of these interventions to be effective, they need to be applied to the texts/content they are studying in the core curriculum (Liben & Pimentel, n.d.).

In addition to these supplemental supports, there may be some students that require more intense interventions such as direct instruction of vowel and consonant letter sounds and combinations at their prescribed level in concert with spelling instruction to reinforce these skills. (Vaughn, et al., 2022.) These students require a highly trained, specialized professional to provide these types of supports (Kamil et al., 2008).



What Educators Need

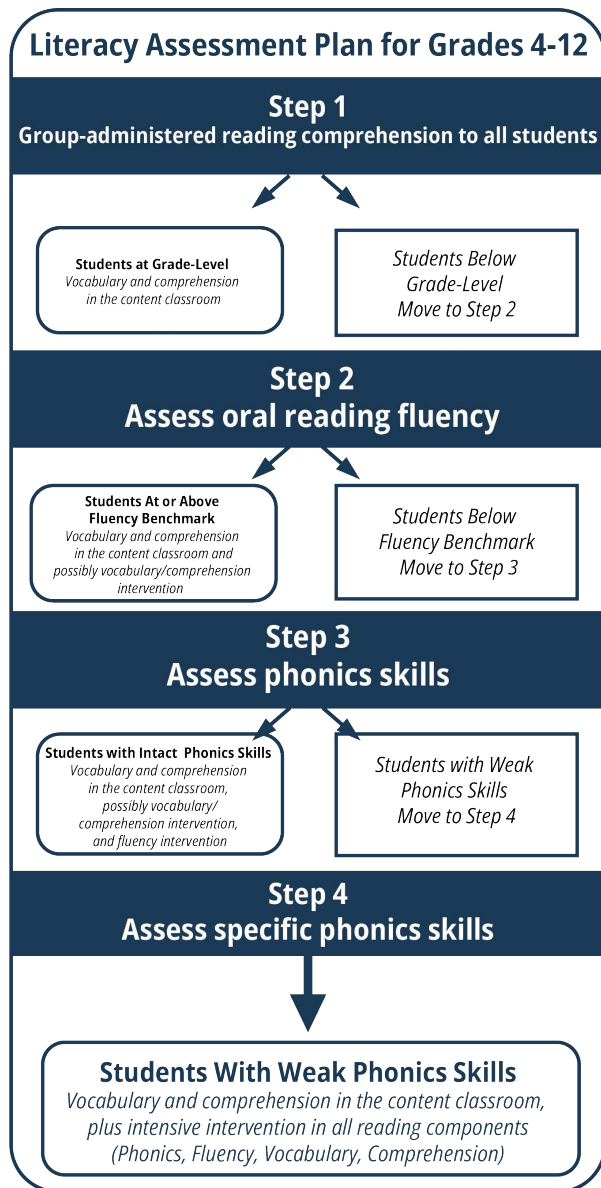
The instructional recommendations in the IES Instructional Practice Guide for Reading Interventions in grades 4-8 (Vaughn et. al, 2022) were designed to be used by all educators providing reading intervention or those who oversee multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) in reading. These educators include special educators, general education teachers, intervention teachers, reading specialists, reading coaches, and trained volunteers. Teaching word-analysis strategies to older students requires special knowledge and skills that are far removed from the training and interests of content-area teachers, and these students require more explicit, individualized, and intensive instruction, as well as extended practice, to master new reading strategies or improve word level skills. The IES Improving Adolescent Literacy Practice Guide (Kamil et al., 2008) supported this conclusion that it is not reasonable to expect content-area teachers to teach basic reading skills to students who are reading significantly below grade level. For this reason, we make a distinction between two broad categories of teachers of literacy: content teachers and reading intervention teachers. All teachers will need clarity in their roles and responsibilities regarding literacy instruction.

Content teachers of ELA, Social Studies, and Science that provide strong reading instruction have listening, reading, and discussing content-rich, complex texts at the center of their instruction. In addition, they provide opportunities for students to engage in the volume of reading beyond instruction. They attend to building students' vocabulary and background knowledge as well as their understanding of how pace and expression are cued by the syntax, vocabulary, and text structure of the complex text they are studying. They can use formative assessments from their curriculum to provide differentiated instruction in these skills for their current unit of study.

In order to do this well, content teachers need a standards-aligned curriculum that includes formative/diagnostic measures to determine which students may need additional comprehension, vocabulary, and/or fluency supports for the topic/text under study. They need opportunities to collaborate with other content leaders in their grade level and the reading intervention teachers to address both how the curricular texts raise specific literacy challenges as well as the variance in students' literacy strengths and needs. This includes multilingual learners who are learning academic English at the same time they are trying to meet content standards. These collaborations require a large degree of curricular uniformity at the grade-level for the work to be meaningful and effective. In addition, content teachers in grades 6-8 will also need to teach the specific reading skills/standards that are essential to their content area (ELA, SS/Hist, Science/Technical Subjects), if not included in their curriculum. They will also need additional fluency and multisyllabic word reading routines/activities to use with their curriculum and materials since these skills are not addressed in their standards.



Reading Intervention teachers are responsible for evaluating assessment data, determining individual student service plans, identifying and choosing appropriate supplemental reading programs and intervention models, and monitoring student progress in addition to providing the reading instruction for struggling readers that address phonics, word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. In a middle school setting, they must often juggle these tasks within the context of scheduling constraints and with limited support staff.



The success of this work hinges on a streamlined assessment system that provides them with the information necessary to determine what each student requires in terms of reading instruction aligned to the components of reading. To this end, intervention teachers need a screening instrument and/or process to use with all students to determine who is reading at or above grade level and who is not. Students who perform at or above grade level on this measure do not require additional assessment unless there is something that would indicate a student may have weak reading skills despite performing well on the standardized measure. For those students who are not reading on grade level or for whom there are other concerns, interventionists need access to a series of diagnostic assessments to determine which reading components are contributing to difficulty with comprehension of grade-level material. This series should begin with an assessment that measures oral reading fluency rates. If students are hitting grade-level benchmarks for fluency, further diagnostic assessment to determine if there are phonics weaknesses is not necessary.

(Birsh, 2011)



Age-appropriate formal and informal phonics screeners and diagnostic spelling assessments can be used to determine whether or not students have weaknesses in word attack skills. If so, the reading interventionist will need further diagnostics to determine exactly where the breakdown in the phonics scope and sequence is. The reading interventionist will also need to know how to minimize the English language demands of assessments to allow MLLs to demonstrate content knowledge and how to employ and interpret multiple measures of assessment to get a fuller picture of the student's knowledge and ability. The image provided (Birsh, 2011) shows one variation of the aligned assessment system.

To assist in these efforts, the reading intervention teachers will need adequate time and resources to administer the assessments and a clear procedure to review the data to guide instructional decisions. They also need flexible scheduling to allow for grouping based on instructional needs. They will also need a collection of research-based intervention resources accompanied by the professional learning required to use them skillfully and make informed judgments on their use with specific students. School-wide support and communication to help carry over what they are teaching into regular content classes will be imperative and as a consequence, they will need access to the core content curriculum with the reassurance that this curriculum is what is being taught in the regular classroom settings.

What Leaders Need

Administrators play a critical part in ensuring that all literacy teachers receive the support they need to improve literacy instruction for their students. This support includes providing assessment and instructional resources for the reading intervention teachers and time for flexible grouping options to provide the interventions. This support should also include scheduling time and opportunities for reading interventionists and content teachers to collaborate and compare teaching strategies, review students' reading progress in school, and choose appropriate interventions and classroom resources. Every school context is different and administrators that strategically maximize the skills of the educators in their building will have an advantage in providing tailored differentiated professional learning for their staff, including more precise goals for collaborative planning and coaching.

Administrators should fully understand the principles of evidence-based reading instruction, and be given training on job-related issues such as evaluation of both core curriculum and intervention programs and effective literacy instruction across the tiers. As instructional leaders, they should look for and recognize effective instructional techniques for working with readers that are not yet proficient when they observe in classrooms. (Birsh, 2011.)



Administrators need both a deeply knowledgeable staff and collaborative partner(s) to serve as a resource for supporting the layered professional learning needs of both content teachers and reading interventionists as well as evaluating assessment systems and advising on research-based intervention programs. Ideally, every school/district would have a Literacy Coach/Reading Specialist to serve in this capacity. Administrators may need to assemble a team to assist them in this work. Administrators also need opportunities to collaborate with other administrators in similar role positions to learn from each other and problem-solve.

Current State of Evidence-Based Intermediate Literacy Practices in Delaware

In the spring of 2020, the DDOE published a list of high-quality professional learning partners who can provide Pk-4 teachers, reading specialists, reading interventionists, and school and district leaders with professional learning on the science of early reading. With funding provided in support of the Delaware PreK-3 Literacy Plan, the DDOE has sponsored multiple cohorts of workshops provided by AIM Pathways and Lexia Learning. In addition, the DDOE partnered with The University of Delaware's Professional Development Center for Educators (UD PDCE) to offer courses on the Science of Reading (K-3), the Cognitive Model of Reading Assessment (K-3), Understanding Text Complexity, Reading and Writing Connections, and the Science of Writing. Educators were given opportunities to earn micro-credentials in Early Literacy. Educators serving grades K-5 were the primary focus when promoting these opportunities.

Using funds from a State Professional Development Grant, the DDOE partnered with the American Institutes of Research (AIR) to produce five Delaware Early Literacy Initiative Modules available in Schoology for schools and districts.

The DDOE sponsored its inaugural cohort of the Acceleration Academy in the summer of 2022 for content teachers and reading interventionists that serve grades 6-12. This learning focused on providing evidence-based targeted reading supports for background knowledge, and vocabulary, writing, and fluency in the context of grade-level core English/Language Arts curriculum. For content teachers outside of English Language Arts, the past two Delaware Writing Projects supported historical reading and writing practices in the eighth-grade social studies classroom and the Lead for Disciplinary Literacy project is currently being conducted with the middle school social studies and science teachers of Red Clay School District.



Our Goals

As a *Literacy Coalition* we will:

- Commit to providing all students, including students with exceptionalities and multilingual learners, with grade-level text-centered, knowledge-building Tier 1 instruction with appropriate scaffolds and support for comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.
- Promote the use of aligned, high-quality curriculum to bring coherence and consistency to the LEA's academic planning.
- Collaborate to establish recommendations for a balanced assessment system for grades 4-5 and 6-8, including curriculum-based assessments, screeners, and diagnostics to support educators in diagnosing unfinished learning and providing the necessary scaffolds to ensure all students have access to grade-level ELA instruction.
- Promote the shared responsibility of literacy instruction and intervention across all content areas (science, social studies, CTE, etc.)
- Support the development of district and building leaders in creating systems that enable literacy instruction and interventions, such as scheduling, staffing, resources, etc.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for everyone responsible for ELA/Literacy programs, professional learning, and instruction, including administrators, content specialists, coaches, ELA teachers, literacy teachers of other content areas, teachers and leaders focused in students with exceptionalities, and teachers and leaders focused in multilingual learners. Note that the distribution of responsibilities will likely vary between elementary and secondary buildings.
- Establish a culture and structures that support productive communication and collaboration both within the school systems and between the elementary and middle school systems and school leadership teams and staff.
- Provide opportunities for professional learning for all stakeholders (administrators, content teachers, literacy leaders, etc.) on how to best use assessment data to identify students in need of specific intervention and provide targeted support in all content areas



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Delaware Literacy Coalition Strategic Plan for Grades 4-8

In partnership with

