

Delaware Early Literacy Playbook



Letter From The Secretary

Delaware Department of Education
Office of the Secretary

Dear Delaware Educators, District and Charter Leaders, and Partners,

As we launch the Delaware Early Literacy Playbook, I want to speak directly to you, the educators who make the magic of reading come alive for children every day. This playbook is more than just a document. It is our call to action and a roadmap for transforming how we teach, lead and learn together in Delaware. Our goal is clear: To give every child across our state the skills and confidence to achieve and thrive, starting with the ability to read well by the end of third grade.

This playbook sets a bold and urgent priority: By the end of third grade, every child in Delaware will be able to read with fluency and comprehension strong enough to succeed in every grade that follows. This work is grounded in equity. Each and every child—regardless of race, zip code, or background—deserves access to high-quality instruction and the opportunity to become a skilled reader, thinker, and writer. That means aligning our policies, resources, and daily classroom practices so that every teacher has the tools and support to succeed.

The playbook is built on a strong foundation: High quality instruction, professional learning, accountability, and innovation. We are committed to ensuring that all PK–3 classrooms use high-quality instructional materials aligned with the SoR. We will invest in ongoing, coherent professional learning for educators, use data to monitor progress closely, and foster learning environments where students are active, engaged, joyful participants in their learning.

We know great instruction depends on strong teacher and leader capacity. That’s why the playbook calls for robust professional learning systems, clearly defined literacy leadership roles, and a student-centered coaching model that helps you meet the unique literacy needs of your students.

Implementation matters. We will measure progress by using leading and lagging indicators to ensure we are not only implementing strategies effectively but also achieving meaningful results that are visible and shared statewide.

We will also think differently about how we organize our schools and teams. Innovative models, such as the Next Education Workforce™ offer new ways to structure teams and roles so that every student gets the targeted literacy supports they need.

I am deeply grateful for your daily commitment to Delaware's children. You are the heart of this work. The playbook gives us direction, and Delaware is committed to providing the tools, resources, and support you need to bring the playbook to life.

As we take these next steps together, I encourage you to lead with courage, with creativity, and with a steadfast belief in what is possible. Together, we will fulfill our promise: That every Delaware child becomes a confident reader, writer, and thinker—ready for the future.

With high expectations and steadfast resolve,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Marten". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Cynthia Marten
Secretary of Education
Delaware Department of Education

Purpose:

This playbook outlines clear actions that leaders can take to strengthen the implementation of early literacy. Each action in the playbook is grounded in research-based best practice and is paired with practical, concrete tools that can be used in districts and charters. This is meant to be used proactively to build shared knowledge and understanding, and actively in the field to monitor and support continuous improvement toward high-quality early literacy implementation.

Intended Audiences and How to Use this Playbook:

If you are a state agency leader, use this playbook to deepen your understanding of the Delaware early literacy vision and approaches to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) implementation, so that you can provide aligned messaging and support in the field to a wide range of stakeholders.

If you are a district leader or school leader, use this playbook to deepen your understanding of the Delaware early literacy vision and approaches to HQIM implementation, so that you can effectively lead planning, investment, and implementation of HQIM to drive early literacy outcomes in your district or school. The resources and tools will also provide practical support as you coach school leaders and teachers to build their own knowledge and skill around early literacy implementation.

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The Foundations of Early Literacy Implementation

What is the science of reading?

“The science of reading (SoR) is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. The SoR informs the development of proficient reading and writing and outlines the foundational reading skills all students should master: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and building knowledge.”

The Reading League. (2022). Science of Reading: Defining Guide.

Being able to articulate the “why” behind early literacy change work is a critical first step in supporting early literacy implementation. Building your understanding of the SoR and how High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and High-Quality Professional Learning (HQPL) support implementation of evidence-based literacy practice will help you craft your “why” statement. Deepening your understanding of these topics will also help you ensure there is alignment between policy and research, which is more likely to lead to district-, charter-, and school-level action.

What (Key Actions)

How (Strategies or Steps to Take)

Build your knowledge of SoR, HQIM and HQPL

- Engage in professional learning to build your understanding of the science and the research behind how K-5 students learn to read and how this translates into instructional best practices
- Understand the connection between SoR, HQIM and HQPL
- Recognize the importance of effective leadership to manage the technical and adaptive challenges of high-quality early literacy implementation.

Build stakeholders’ knowledge of SoR, HQIM and HQPL

- Leverage opportunities to build all stakeholders’ knowledge of SoR, HQIM and HQPL.

Building a Shared Understanding of the SoR

There are two important frameworks that represent the complex combination of skills that result in reading fluency: **The Simple View of Reading** and **Scarborough’s Rope**.

Simple View of Reading (SVR)

In 1986, Gough and Tunmer published a theory called the **Simple View of Reading (SVR)** which **explains how students become skilled readers.**

Students must be able to decode (D) the words on the page and have the necessary language comprehension (LC) skills to comprehend what they decode. The Simple View of Reading reads like a multiplication problem. If one of the factors is zero, then the product is zero. In other words, if decoding or language comprehension skills are missing, then comprehension is negatively impacted.



Gough, Philip E. and William. E. Tunmer. "Decoding, Reading, and Reading Disability." Remedial and Special Education 7, no. 1 (1986): 6-10.

Scarborough's Rope

Scarborough's Rope is another depiction of skilled reading that provides more detailed information about the components just referred to in the Simple View of Reading.

As you see in this model, skilled reading is like a rope composed of multiple strands. Just like a rope, the stronger each of these strands is, the better we are at skilled reading.



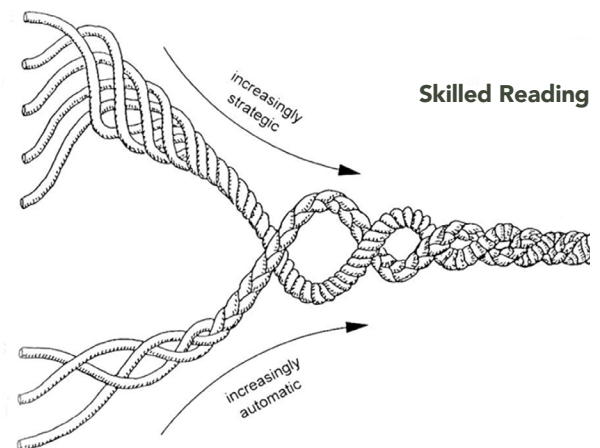
Scarborough's Rope

Language Comprehension

- Background Knowledge (facts, concepts, etc.)
- Vocabulary (breadth, precision, links, etc.)
- Language Structures (syntax, semantics, etc.)
- Verbal Reasoning (inference, metaphor, etc.)
- Literacy Knowledge (print concepts, genres, etc.)

Word Recognition

- Phonological Awareness (syllables, phonemes, etc.)
- Decoding (alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences)
- Sight Recognition (of familiar words)

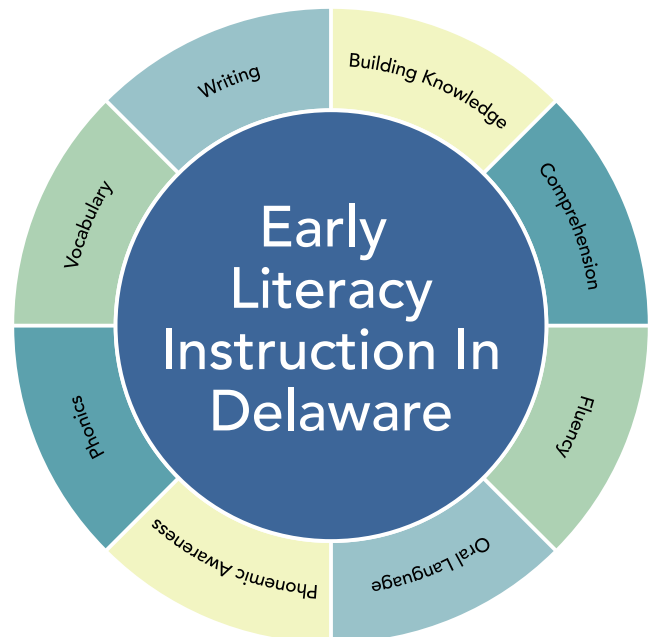


"Connecting Early Language and Literacy to Later Reading (Dis)abilities: Evidence, Theory and Practice," Holly S. Scarborough.
In Susan B. Newman's & David K. Dickinson's (Eds.) Handbook of Early Literacy Research, Guilford Press, 2001.

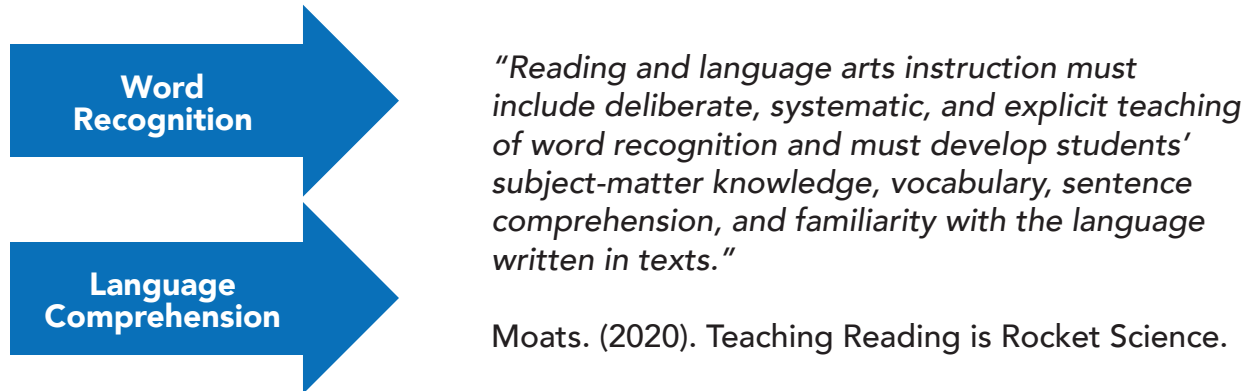
Unfortunately, the SoR is often interpreted too narrowly, with a focus exclusively on foundational skills.

Delaware has created the **Delaware Delivers Model** which reflects these tenets of the Simple View of Reading and the Scarborough Rope.

- **Building Knowledge:** The ability to build and draw upon background knowledge in order for students to make sense of what they are reading and to understand, absorb, and analyze the information.
- **Comprehension:** The ability to understand, remember, and make meaning of what has been read. This is the purpose of reading.
- **Fluency:** The ability to read text accurately, quickly, and expressively, either to oneself or aloud.
- **Oral Language:** The ability to use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings.
- **Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear, identify, manipulate, and substitute the different sounds that make up speech.
- **Phonics:** The key to decoding new words. Breaking words down into sounds and syllables allows young readers to connect words on paper with the words they hear and speak daily.
- **Vocabulary:** The compilation of words that students understand and use in their conversation (oral vocabulary) and recognize in print (reading vocabulary).
- **Writing:** The ability to convey thoughts and ideas in a readable form.



So, what are the implications of SoR for reading for instruction?



Word Recognition

Foundational skills instruction is a term that refers to the instruction necessary for developing word recognition skills. Research-based foundational skills instruction should have the following attributes:

- **Aligned Content:** System teaching of reading foundational skills in a specific sequence that aligns to the standards.
- **Explicit Instruction:** The teacher directly teaches and models the reading skills and sound/spelling patterns.
- **Aligned Practice:** Abundant opportunities for students to practice the sound/spelling patterns that have been taught in and out of context.
- **Assessment:** Assessment of sound/spelling pattern mastery, formally and informally, frequently.

"Structured phonics programs have long been shown to be highly effective in teaching the foundational skills (specifically phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and fluency) necessary for reading comprehension (National Institutes of Health, n.d.). In fact, the research is so strong and so consistent that the IES has decided that there is no further need to review what the evidence shows about the effectiveness of structured phonics programs. It is convinced."

Liben. (2016). Why a Structured Phonics Program is Effective.

Language Comprehension

It is critical that all students have access to HQIM that secure foundational reading skills and provide access to rich grade-appropriate texts that build general knowledge of the world (within and across grades), grow students' vocabulary (both in and out of context), and provide opportunities to develop the literacy skills necessary to support comprehension of complex text. Students should also engage in reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from the text.

“Knowledge seems to facilitate understanding not only because it provides a base of information to support comprehension but also because it influences how readers interact with text. For example, higher-knowledge readers seem to spend more time making sense of ambiguous text—slowing down and persisting through difficulties—which helps them understand and remember what they read.”

Cervetti. (2015). The Sixth Pillar of Reading Instruction.

The Connection Between the SoR, HQIM, and HQPL

It is important to also pause here to note that the SoR is not just about implementing a program. It requires building mindsets and knowledge about the pedagogy and practices proven by research to effectively teach children how to read and then helping teachers to bridge that knowledge into practice. We do that through providing teachers with high-quality professional learning grounded in the materials they will be using with their students.

Why are HQIM + HQPL so important for bridging the SoR to practice?

Building an understanding of the SoR is an important first step, and supporting teachers to put that knowledge into practice through the use of high-quality instructional materials is key for successful outcomes.

Building knowledge of the SoR is critical for strong, research based instruction that supports skilled reading.



HQIM are vital to ensuring equitable, on-grade-level, aligned instruction for all students.



Intentional leadership is required to support teachers to bridge SoR learning to practice.

High-Quality Instructional Materials

In Chapter 2 of this playbook, we will dive deeper into the research behind the importance of HQIM. In particular, The Opportunity Myth, a study of 5 diverse school districts and charters across the country that followed nearly 4,000 students to learn more about student experiences and the resources that are crucial to their success.

TNTP. (2018). The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It.

High-Quality Professional Learning

“Curriculum matters, but how teachers use curriculum matters even more. As schools, districts, and charters continue to make shifts in the instructional materials they use, and amid ongoing challenges, teachers deserve the highest-quality professional learning to support curriculum implementation.”

Short and Hirsch. 2020. Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning.

The Role of High-Leverage Leadership

Throughout the remainder of this playbook we will ground each topic in the high leverage leadership actions that support effective change management. We will look at the technical and adaptive considerations of implementing an early literacy program and provide some guidance and resources to support that work.

High Leverage Leadership Actions that Support Effective Change Management

- Change management is a **systematic approach** to dealing with the transition or transformation of an organization’s goals, processes, or resources.
- The purpose of change management is to implement strategies for **helping people understand, buy into, and adapt** to the change.
- Effective change management leads to positive outcomes aligned to organizational goals which is key to successful Early Literacy implementation.
- Change Management is both **technical and adaptive**.

Technical

Defined systems, structures, policies, and expectations. Technical changes pave the way for implementation by removing barriers; these must be planned for and executed PRIOR to HQIM implementation.

Adaptive

Preparing people to accept, adjust to, and embrace a change. Adaptive challenges require ongoing work to address the “root cause,” leading to gradual shifts in mindsets, beliefs, values, priorities, and/or habits.

Critical Moves: Early Literacy Practices in Delaware Schools

These are the core practices that research and practice suggest will best support sustained, systemic growth of proficient readers in Delaware.

Goal

Goal: Sustained, systemic growth of proficient readers in Delaware, owned by teachers

Strategies

Ensure Access to Meaningful, Grade-Level Instruction

Critical Moves: Early Literacy Practices in Delaware Schools

- Skillfully implement high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) aligned with SoR
- Provide grade-level assignments/rigor (student practice and meaningful engagement)
- Anchor early literacy practices with Delaware Early Literacy Playbook (Digital, Print), Instructional Practice Guide (Digital), and Foundational Skills Instruction Observation Tool (Digital)
- Conduct universal screeners 3 times per year in order to identify student supports and early interventions
- Regularly assess students for learning (formative, standards aligned)
- Conduct student-centered coaching cycles focused on improving student learning by centering coaching cycles on student work and data
- Implement regular Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or collaborative time to support lesson planning and student progress monitoring, embedded into weekly PLC structures (45+ min/wk, teachers and coaches analyze student work together and adjust instruction)
- Scaffold literacy instruction to support multilingual learners (i.e. model academic language, teach explicit vocabulary, use visual and multimodal supports, collaborative learning, etc.)
- Scaffold literacy instruction to support students with disabilities (ie., explicit, systematic instruction, multi-sensory approaches, concepts)
- Utilize quality dual language immersion options where possible that support early language acquisition

Goal: % of 3rd graders proficient on SBAC literacy assessment increases from 39% (2025)

Sustained, Job-Embedded Professional Learning

- Leaders trained in ELLA (SoR) and district and charter curriculum
- Leaders coached by districts and charters and/or state coaches focused on instructional leadership
- Teachers/paras trained in LETRS/ AIM (SoR) and district and charter curriculum
- Teachers engage in learning and planning to internalize units and lessons
- Regular leader and AP instructional walkthroughs and job-embedded coaching for teachers
- Strategic scheduling in place for literacy (PLCs, planning time and collaboration, lesson and unit internalization)

Strategic Staffing & Enabling Conditions

- Implement Strategic Staffing Model 2.0 to maximize teacher expertise (immersive training for candidates)
- Regularly review data at leadership meetings from evidence-based reading instruction
- Align resources to support struggling readers
- Explore Next Education Workforce model and consider joining pilot

Family Engagement & Student Supports

- Partner with families to reinforce literacy strategies at home
- Disseminate progress data and success stories broadly

Developing a Vision of Early Literacy Implementation

Delaware's Literacy Vision: Our instructional vision is that every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

Vision setting is used as an evaluation activity that helps groups create a shared vision of what they have to invest in their efforts and what they will accomplish. In order to understand where we want students to be, we must have a clear vision of the instruction that will get them there. A vision gives direction to our work, allowing our goals and purpose become a reality.

What (Key Actions)

How (Strategies or Steps to Take)

Prerequisites: *Develop an understanding of what early literacy is and what quality implementation looks like in action.*

Establish the group of people who will carry the work forward

- Determine informed, engaged, and involved stakeholders to drive the work
- Engage with school leaders, teachers and community members to join a 'steering committee'
- Invite high influence/experienced members of the district and charter to be involved in this work

Norm on Delaware's vision of literacy and determine criteria of success for early literacy in your district and charter

- Come to shared understanding of the Delaware vision;
- What should successful early literacy implementation look like in our district and charter?

What (Key Actions)

How (Strategies or Steps to Take)

Prerequisites: *Develop an understanding of what early literacy is and what quality implementation looks like in action.*

Craft a clear vision for effective early literacy instruction which will set the bar for what is expected across all classrooms and will serve as the district's/charter's 'north star,' aligning stakeholders on a common goal.

- Come to a shared understanding of what Delaware's early literacy vision could look like in our schools/districts and charters
- Norming on the vision as a team and your current state aligned to that vision
 - A strong vision should:
 - align to science-based reading principles
 - be a concise, compelling description of what students are doing and achieving
 - align stakeholders on a common goal of literacy classroom expectations
 - build rationale for why HQIM are necessary in early literacy implementation (Ch1A)
 - A strong vision should clearly articulate what you want to be true for all students in your district and charter:
 - What should effective instruction look like?
- Build consensus from the steering committee on the final vision

Feedback on vision

- Consider your context and craft a feedback process

Change management

- Naming adaptive or technical challenges you anticipate encountering as you work to align your early literacy practices to the SoR and your vision
- Clearly communicate the what, why, and how of the change (early literacy strategies and HQIM) including positive impact on students and the changing role of the teacher.
- Ensure that a consistent message is shared throughout the district/charter.
- Communicate and message positive, frequent, and employed through a proactive approach.

Change management

- Delaware Delivers Strong Early Readers Guide
- Sample district/charter vision

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

What will it take for you to finalize this vision?

Who will you involve in the process?

How will you communicate the vision?

What do we risk if we do not spend time ensuring systems, structures, expectations, and policies are aligned and supportive of early literacy implementation?

Assess the Landscape and Set Goals

Delaware's Literacy Vision: Our instructional vision is that every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

Understanding your school or district and charter "current state" in relation to the early literacy vision will help you set and make progress towards meaningful, ambitious, and realistic goals. It is important for leadership teams to invest time and energy in gathering and analyzing information about what's currently going well and in need of improvement as it relates to early literacy in order to effectively prioritize improvement efforts by setting goals.

What (Key Actions)	How (Strategies or Steps to Take)
Prerequisites: Set a clear, compelling early literacy vision	
Gather information and data about your "current state" of early literacy implementation.	• With your team, review the Early Literacy Leadership Levers and evaluate to what extent each is already effectively in place in your school/district/charter. • If you need more information or data about any categories, make a plan to gather that data. Potential strategies include: • Visit schools to conduct learning walks focused on gathering information about identified areas. • Talk to principals, coaches, teachers, students, and/or families to learn more about how early literacy implementation is going from their perspectives. • Administer a "stakeholder survey" (e.g. using a Google form) to collect information about levels of investment, instructional practices, materials usage, etc. • Host a virtual or in-person "lunch and learn" that gives stakeholders an open forum to share concerns, hopes, values, and questions as it relates to early literacy.

What (Key Actions)

How (Strategies or Steps to Take)

Reflect upon, discuss, and analyze findings to identify strengths and priority areas for improvement.

- After you have gathered the information needed to accurately understand your “current state,” reflect on your findings through team discussion.
- Identify where you saw strengths, and celebrate those.
- Identify where you see areas for improvement, and prioritize those based on your context and potential for impact.
- Refer to the Early Literacy Leadership Levers to support your reflection and prioritization.

Set specific, measurable, and relevant early literacy goals.

- With your team, draft 1-3 focused, high leverage implementation goals that will move you closer to your vision for early literacy.
- Review your goals and ensure they meet the criteria: specific, measurable, relevant.
- With your team, draft 1-3 focused, high leverage implementation goals that will move you closer to your vision for early literacy.
- Review your goals and ensure they meet the criteria: specific, measurable, relevant.

Determine how you will monitor progress towards these goals, and at what cadence you will revisit and adjust them in response to progress.



Sample Goals:

Sample Goal 1: By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, at least 80% of teachers will be implementing our selected high quality instructional materials with fidelity, as measured by school/classroom walkthrough data.

Sample Goal 2: By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, at least 75% of stakeholders (leaders, teachers, families) will report being invested in the HQIM, as measured by questions on a stakeholder survey (administered quarterly).

Sample Goal 3: By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, students will have the opportunity to engage with rigorous grade-level literacy tasks from the HQIM 90% of the time, as measured by school/classroom walkthrough data.

Sample Goal 4: By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, multilingual learners will receive daily whole-group knowledge-building instruction 90% of the time.

Sample Goal 5: By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, K-5 students will receive explicit instruction and targeted practice opportunities with foundational skills on a daily basis, 90% of the time.

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

What do we already know about early literacy implementation, and what evidence do we have to support that? What do we still need to find out or get a fuller picture of, and how will we do that?

What are the unique strengths and needs of our school and student communities? How can we ensure that our priority areas and goals encompass and are supportive of diverse populations?

Of the improvement areas identified, which are most urgent? Which are important, but can be deprioritized until more foundational components are firmly in place? Why?

*(After setting goals) Are the goals we have drafted specific, measurable, and targeted?
Will they be compelling and motivating to our stakeholders?
Will they lead to a positive impact on early literacy implementation?*

Communicate the Vision and Build Investment

Delaware’s Literacy Vision: Our instructional vision is that every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

After a clear and compelling vision for early literacy is defined, it is critical to make a plan for sharing the vision with all stakeholders who are invested in students’ literacy success. If stakeholders can clearly articulate and internalize the vision, they are more likely to align their learning, instruction, and other key actions with this vision.

What (Key Actions)	How (Strategies or Steps to Take)
<i>Prerequisites: Set a clear, compelling early literacy vision (Chapter 1B), and set goals after assessing your current state.</i>	
Communicate the vision and goals to all stakeholders involved.	• Make a plan to communicate this to all stakeholders, at all levels, including teachers, school-based instructional leaders (e.g. coaches), school administrators, school system instructional leaders (e.g. content specialists), and families and caregivers. • Promote excitement and engagement around the literacy vision and goals by grounding all stakeholders in their shared purpose: ensuring the success of all students. • Leverage existing channels of communication, and consider new communication strategies (e.g. a short video unpacking and building excitement about the literacy vision that includes voices from multiple stakeholders.)

What (Key Actions)

How (Strategies or Steps to Take)

Establish and communicate clear roles and responsibilities. Every stakeholder must have clarity about the specific role they play in working towards the vision and goals.

- List the various roles that exist in your school system (e.g. district literacy specialists, school principals, school-based instructional coaches, teachers, etc.).
 - For each group, discuss and codify in a document/chart that can be shared widely: "What role does this group specifically play in achieving our literacy vision? What are the specific things they are responsible for aligned to our vision and goals?"
- Post the codified roles and responsibilities in a central, accessible place (e.g. the district website or in school buildings on an announcement board), and leverage school leaders to reiterate roles and responsibilities of coaches and teachers in an ongoing way during their day-to-day work (e.g. staff meetings, 1:1 check ins, etc.).

After sharing the vision and goals and establishing clear roles and responsibilities, it is important to strategically build and maintain investment in an ongoing way.

Build investment around the early literacy vision, goals, and HQIM.

- Leverage existing channels of communication (e.g. monthly district newsletter, weekly school email blasts, bulletin boards, staff meetings, coach/teacher relationships, etc.) to spotlight and build initial investment.
- Discuss with school leaders (and equip school-based leaders to succinctly and accurately explain/discuss to coaches/teachers) how the selected HQIM aligns with the SoR and research-based approaches to teaching literacy.
- Create a culture of support and learning orientation by messaging that we're all in this together. Reassure stakeholders that support, collaboration, and ongoing growth are coming.

Make maintaining and strengthening investment an ongoing priority.

- Provide ongoing opportunities for professional learning and targeted support, while building relationships.
- Regularly identify and celebrate progress and successes (including individual positive feedback and publicly sharing or shouting out successes at the individual, classroom, or school-wide level).
- Collect quotes, or audio or video testimonials from stakeholders who are invested and seeing progress. Share these with the larger school or district and charter community.
- Provide opportunities for coaches and teachers to visit classrooms where implementation is going well and where instruction is aligned to the SoR.

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

What will our community be most excited about as it relates to our vision and goals? How can we put this aspect front and center in our messaging?

What are the most important roles and responsibilities to establish? How will we message these? Who should we consult when setting these expectations?

What existing communication channels, systems, or relationships can we leverage to share the vision/goals, and to build and maintain investment? Do we need to put any new systems in place?

Where are there already “bright spots” or success stories we can highlight? How will we codify and share those?

Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title	Overview	How to Access
Hard Words: Why aren't our kids being taught to read?	An article discussing how scientific research has revealed the ways children learn to read and the most effective methods for teaching them. However, many educators are unaware of this science, and in some cases, actively resist it.	https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read
The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Professional-Based Learning	A paper from Carnegie offering essential guidance on transforming teaching and student learning through high-quality professional development to support the implementation of new instructional materials and curricula.	https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/47/94/47947a81-4fdf-421b-a5e8-fbb211898ee0/elements_report_november_2020.pdf
Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong	In this podcast, host Emily Hanford investigates the influential authors who promote this idea and the company that sells their work. It's an exposé of how educators came to believe in something that isn't true and are now reckoning with the consequences — children harmed, money wasted, an education system upended.	https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/
Science of Reading: The Podcast	Science of Reading: The Podcast delivers the latest insights from researchers and practitioners in early reading. Each episode takes a conversational approach and explores a timely topic related to the SoR.	https://amplify.com/science-of-reading-the-podcast/
What the Research Says: Effective Reading Instruction for All Students	This free, self-paced course will be helpful to teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders in education who want to build their knowledge of how children learn to read with the goal of improving student outcomes. While some of the foundational skills topics will feel more relevant to elementary audiences, we have designed all sessions to also be applicable to educators working with older students.	https://schoolkitgroup.com/effective-reading-instruction-for-all-students/
Delaware Delivers Strong Early Readers	Delaware Delivers Strong Early Readers provides school system leaders with an overview of how Delaware will develop strong readers who can succeed in college, career, and life. Specifically, it outlines the state's investments in early literacy, including recent legislation, and how education leaders can create effective systems to bolster early literacy instruction in their schools.	https://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/de_delivers_strong_early_readers_guide.pdf
District and Charter Leaders: Early Literacy Leadership Levers	This guidance document includes many of the high leverage leadership actions necessary for bridging early literacy research to practice in order to ensure all students develop into proficient readers.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-zXb-K0FbelGN1lCeN6Q552yQbHsnJL5s/view?usp=sharing
State Education Agency Leaders: Early Literacy Leadership Levers	This document identifies key levers for SEAs and why they are important.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fO7uQlFD57GClj2ZzLuD_7ptxyA7l_i/view?usp=sharing

Chapter 2: Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)

Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)

“Even raising the floor by a reasonable amount can make a meaningful difference. The ‘achievement gap,’ then, isn’t inevitable. It’s baked into the system, resulting from the decisions adults make, consciously and unconsciously, about which students get what resources. It’s a gap of our own design.”

TNTP. (2018). *The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It.*

Delaware’s vision is that every learner leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. To help students achieve this ambitious goal, teachers deserve great instructional materials that include built-in supports and resources that get students excited to learn. Teachers and administrators also need and deserve robust professional learning that helps them use those materials to the maximum benefit of their students. This chapter focuses on what High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) are and how adopting them supports closing the achievement gap.

What Are High Quality Instructional Materials?

HQIM provide a road map for teachers on how to plan, teach, and assess student learning throughout the year. Delaware defines HQIM as those materials that:

1. Include a full year’s worth of teacher materials (e.g., syllabi, lesson plans) and student materials (e.g., books, assignments, tests) that support student mastery of grade-level material;
2. Are fully aligned to Delaware’s standards for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each school year; and
3. Are on Delaware’s recommended list of High Quality Instructional Materials. These materials support the full scope of the SoR aligned to **Delaware Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 4 of the 151st General Assembly** and the state’s HQIM Initiative.

District and charter leaders provide teachers with standards-aligned instructional materials and professional learning.



Teachers provide students with high-quality, standards-aligned instruction everyday.



Every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life.

Why do High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) matter?

High-quality instructional materials provide research aligned, on-grade-level Tier 1 instruction for all students. Leveling texts/tasks/meeting students where they are, though well intentioned, can result in inequitable access. By using HQIM, teachers can focus on internalization that supports high quality instruction versus spending time searching for and creating materials. The provided resources give teachers a starting place from which to scaffold instruction to meet their students' diverse needs. Students can succeed with HQIM with appropriate scaffolds. In order for the implementation of HQIM to be successful and sustainable, districts and charters should prioritize providing a long-term focus for professional learning and ensuring that there is adequate collaboration for teachers and leaders.

"In classrooms where we observed more grade-level assignments, we also found that students met the bar on those assignments more often than not, even though the bar was higher. That was true of students in nearly all groups—regardless of race or language background. It was also true in nearly all types of classrooms, including those that are often identified as "high-need." In all of these classrooms, students were more likely than not to have success on assignments that were grade-appropriate— when they were given the opportunity to try."

TNTP. (2018). The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It.

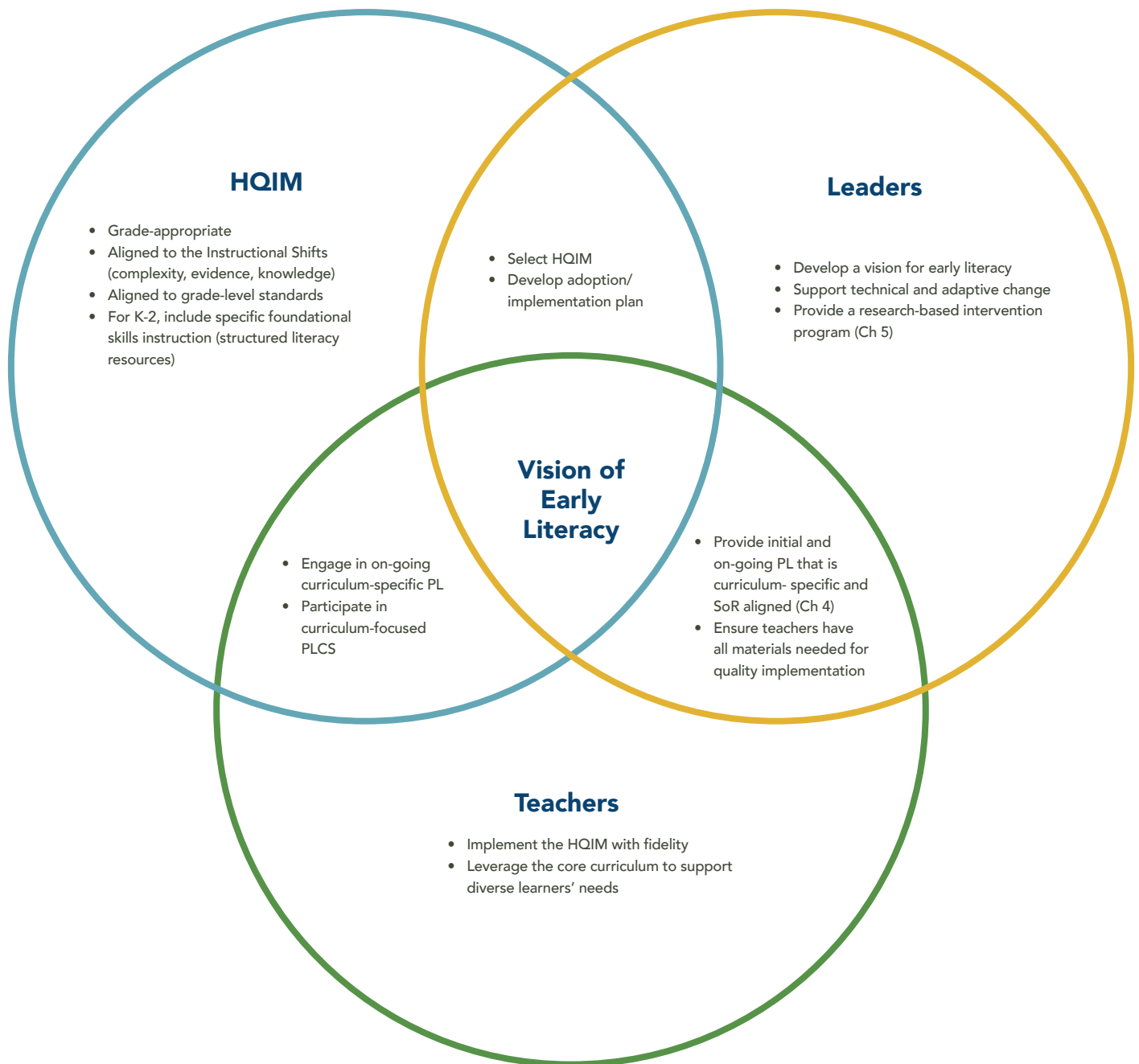
In summary, research has clearly shown that building knowledge of the SoR is critical for strong, research-based instruction that supports skilled reading; HQIM are vital to ensuring equitable, on-grade-level, aligned instruction for all students; and intentional leadership is required to help teachers bridge SoR learning to practice.



What is the role of HQIM in your vision of early literacy instruction?

HQIM is only as strong as the teachers and leaders who support its implementation.

Adoption of HQIM is critical, but the Venn diagram shows that leaders and teachers play essential roles in bringing the HQIM and the vision of early literacy instruction to life in a district and charter.



Common Missteps

Suggestions for how to avoid them

Combining curricula to “piece-meal” a solution

- Analyze the priority needs of your students in order to identify the best HQIM to support their needs. Combining components from different curricula can be confusing to teachers and often impacts the quality of instruction.

Not engaging various stakeholders throughout the adoption process

- Form a diverse adoption committee that includes various stakeholder groups (e.g. district literacy leaders, school leaders, teachers, families) and meets regularly throughout the process. Develop a communication plan to keep stakeholders not on the committee informed and involved, including opportunities for feedback.

Providing teachers with initial implementation professional learning only

- Both teachers AND leaders need on-going professional learning, not just the initial launch of a newly adopted HQIM. This provides the foundational understanding of the research, design and structure of an HQIM, as well as addressing common challenges that occur during a multi-year implementation process. Leaders and teachers need their own PL that focuses on the implementation in their role. However, leaders are always encouraged to attend teacher PL so they are better able to support their teachers.

Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title

Overview

How to Access

Overview of High-Quality Instructional Materials

This resource was developed by the DDOE specifically for the benefit of the districts and charters in Delaware. It contains a collection of resources on what high-quality instructional materials are.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qNXAEgzCESPRyRLQnwaFxdLqTkH8snjZ/view>

List of Approved Core Curriculum

Delaware’s recommended list of High Quality Instructional Materials support the full scope of the SoR aligned to Delaware Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 4 of the 151st General Assembly and the state’s HQIM Initiative.

<https://education.delaware.gov/educators/academic-support/standards-and-instruction/digital-de/instructional-resources/early-literacy/publisher-profiles/>

The Opportunity Myth

In a compelling report, TNTP explores the question “how can so many students be graduating from high school unprepared to meet their goals for college and careers?”.

<https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

Are the teachers implementing the HQIM core curriculum with fidelity? (more to come in Chapter 3.)

Do the teachers have the necessary materials to implement the core curriculum?

Have teachers received the needed professional learning to build their understanding of science of reading (SoR) and how their HQIM supports SoR aligned practices?

Have teachers received the needed PL to understand the structure, design and implementation moves in order to implement the curriculum with fidelity?

Have you identified what specific areas of the core curriculum need to be supplemented?

Do you currently have intervention programs that support needs in Tiers 2 and 3? (more to come in Chapter 5.)

Chapter 3: Establishing the Enabling Conditions for Strong Implementation

Establishing the Enabling Conditions for Strong Implementation

“What really makes education effective is well-leveraged leadership that ensures great teaching to guarantee great learning.”

Bambrick-Santoyo. (2018). *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*.

This chapter focuses on creating the initial enabling conditions for strong early literacy instruction. Choosing which HQIM to adopt is just the beginning of the process. In order to support the implementation of early literacy HQIM, leaders need to also consider the following:

- **Materials:** Ensuring teachers have the materials needed to implement the HQIM and setting expectations for how the materials are used.
- **Time:** Maximizing and directing all available time to continuously improve the effectiveness of instruction.
- **Tools:** Adopting and training teachers and leaders on the protocols and tools that support effective implementation.
- **Team:** Identifying the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders that will enable the conditions for successful HQIM implementation and developing a professional learning plan to provide ongoing professional learning that supports them in their roles.

As we unpack each of these levers in this chapter, please note that we have also indicated when more information about the topic will be provided in future chapters (i.e., “see chapter 4”).



Enabling Conditions for Strong Early Literacy Implementation

Based on: Rivet Education Instructional Materials Implementation Tools

Materials

Once HQIM have been selected, there are usually important decisions to be made around materials, their use, and how they will be distributed.

- Ensure teachers and specialists have required instructional materials, removed previous ones, and have the appropriate credentials to access digital materials.
- Set expectations that teachers use the instructional materials as designed (including components, pacing, routines, etc) and do not modify materials to lead to ineffective or below-grade-level instruction.
- Maintain funding for professional learning providers and replenish instructional materials. Communicate funding expectations to school leaders and ensure sufficient budget allocation.

Time

"... teachers are too often faced with an impossible task of teaching more lessons than can realistically fit into their school calendar. This leaves them without enough time to cover the grade-level materials."

Instruction Partners. (2023). It's Time to Give Teachers Realistic Pacing Guidance.

- Establish grade-specific pacing calendars aligned to curriculum and district/charter calendar; communicate pacing expectations.
- Ensure dedicated time in the schedule for students to receive additional tier one supports as needed and targeted, small group differentiated instruction in response to assessment data. (See chapter 4.)
- Establish and protect weekly common planning time (at least 45 minutes per week) for teachers to collaboratively internalize units and lessons. (See chapter 4.)
- Establish an assessment plan and communicate expectations for use of curriculum based assessments. (See chapter 6.)

Tools

Just as important as the HQIM are the supporting resources you will leverage to ensure strong and consistent implementation.

- Establish protocols for unit and lesson preparation (See chapter 4.)
- Identify a common tool for monitoring implementation through walkthroughs and observations
- Communicate expectations for conducting walkthrough observations to provide feedback and coaching focused on implementation support, not evaluation. (See chapter 5.)
- Establish data collection tools and routines for analyzing student work and curriculum-based assessments (See chapter 6.)

Team

Each level of leadership along the vertical hierarchy (SEA, district/charter leaders, school-based leaders, coaches, teachers) plays a unique and essential role in implementing HQIM and delivering consistent literacy instruction based on evidence-based practices. Clearly defining and communicating these roles and responsibilities to stakeholders is a crucial step in the planning process. Additionally, providing professional learning opportunities to support the successful implementation of these practices is key.

“Curriculum matters, but how teachers use curriculum matters even more. As schools, districts, and charters continue to make shifts in the instructional materials they use, and amid ongoing challenges, teachers deserve the highest quality professional learning to support curriculum implementation.”

The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Professional-Based Learning

- Define roles and expectations for the school-based implementation team, including observation, coaching, feedback, and data analysis.
- Create a cohesive district-wide professional learning plan for teachers and leaders to build an understanding of the instructional materials and their connection to a vision for excellent, equitable instruction. Communicate participation expectations.
- Establish expectations for unit and lesson preparation and professional learning structures to support lesson preparation (e.g., PLCs, coaching, and PL days). (See chapter 4 for additional information on planning for instruction.)
- Audit and adjust existing policies and procedures (i.e. grading expectations) to align with and support implementation
- Set the expectation for the use of data from curriculum-based assessments to identify how students have responded to instruction and where additional support is needed (See chapter 6.)
- Set the expectation for the use of embedded supports for diverse learners to provide grade-level instruction to all students. (See chapter 4.)
- Continue ongoing investment efforts, including identifying schools and teachers who strongly implement the instructional materials, showcasing their success stories and offering observation opportunities to other educators.

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

Do teachers have the materials needed to implement the HQIM and are they clear about implementation expectations?

Do schedules and pacing guides support effective implementation and the ability to address all students' needs?

Have expectations for use of protocols and tools that support implementation been clearly communicated and supported by professional learning?

Do stakeholders at all levels have clear roles in how they support implementation?

Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title	Overview	How to Access
Rivet Education: Instructional Materials Implementation Tool	The Implementation Tool outlines who does what, and when. Implementation science suggests that people move through a series of non-linear but relatively predictable stages when implementing a new program, including new instructional materials.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xILLNuJ_XsvYrCiwqHmhd-U457BaV-XV/view?usp=sharing
The K-2 Elements of Aligned ELA Instruction	From UnboundEd, this document highlights essential (and often intertwined) elements of aligned K-2 instruction to help you to identify gaps, strengthen instruction, and improve alignment as you consider structure and time for your classroom(s) and curricula.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hQKCwMtQEYRe-d6y6_9W4Gsph-kNxodY/view?usp=sharing
Sample Roles and Responsibilities	Sample roles and responsibilities chart for systems adopting and implementing HQIM.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JHoTVs1LjMJd8rKO8GmocWBWNmdWsUen/view?usp=sharing

Chapter 4:

Structures that Support High-Quality Implementation

Structures that Support High-Quality Implementation

Making the Shift from Planning to Preparing

"A primary role of school systems is to create the conditions in schools through which teachers can become experts at teaching the curriculum they are using and adapting instruction to the needs of their particular students."

Aspen Institute. (2017). Practice What You Teach.

Successful implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) requires a comprehensive strategy that aligns support across teacher and leader capacity, professional learning, and opportunities for lesson internalization, planning, and practice. While HQIM are detailed and well-structured, teachers must still prepare in a way that meets the diverse needs of all students. Educators need to understand how units and lessons fit into the broader scope of the year, ensuring they see the "big picture." Although they won't need to create lessons from scratch, they must prepare for each lesson and optimize it for student success.

This chapter provides guidance on what internalization looks like at the unit and lesson levels. The goal is to equip educators with the knowledge they need to implement the curriculum with integrity, staying true to its intended purpose.

Teaching effectively requires flexibility, as classroom dynamics can be unpredictable. While following the lessons exactly as written—adhering to prescribed timing, language, and instructions—is possible, it's not always the norm. Educators must understand the curriculum's underlying logic and remain committed to engaging and challenging all students. The internalization protocols outlined in this playbook are designed to help educators gain the necessary background knowledge to teach the curriculum, ensuring all students have access to strong instruction. To help educators navigate the layers of the curriculum, this chapter promotes both a broad and detailed approach to internalization for both portions of the K-2 lesson - language comprehension and word recognition.

Building a Shared Understanding of the Importance of Internalization

HQIM is a necessary condition for strong instruction, but on its own will not lead to the shifts necessary to reach Delaware's vision for literacy. SEA/LEA must prioritize actions that will allow educators to deeply prepare, practice, and collaborate with their peers.

**Promote Investment
and Buy-in**

**Create and Sustain Enabling
Systems and Structures**

**Build Teachers' Knowledge
and Skills**

These three actions will support both the technical and adaptive changes required to implement HQIM well.



Technical

Defined systems, structures, policies, and expectations.

Technical changes pave the way for implementation by removing barriers; these must be planned for and executed prior to HQIM implementation.



Adaptive

Preparing people to accept, adjust to, and embrace a change.

Adaptive challenges require ongoing work to address the "root cause," leading to gradual shifts in mindsets, beliefs, values, priorities, and/or habits.

Promoting Investment and Buy-in

- Share knowledge early and often with teachers. Validate concerns and share the rationale for switching from planning their own lessons to preparing for instruction with HQIM.
- Ensure the master schedule aligns with the recommended time suggested by the HQIM.
- Build community and opportunities for collaboration. Deepen relationships with and amongst teachers to support one another by engaging with this process.
- Encourage growth mindset. Make it okay to try and fail, and model making mistakes and learning from them.
- Be responsive to teacher feedback and provide support.
- Provide clear and streamlined communication. Set and share a clear vision for curriculum implementation expectations.
- Celebrate progress and successes frequently and consistently.

Creating and Sustaining Enabling Systems and Structures

- Ensure time in the master schedule for consistent, weekly grade level planning for all teachers (Students with disabilities, multilingual learners, etc.)
- Ensure teachers have significant planning time
- Plan for consistent PD time aligned to this approach
- Determine clear roles, responsibilities, owners of work to support internalization (coaches, APs)
- Ensure access to curricular materials and other necessary resources

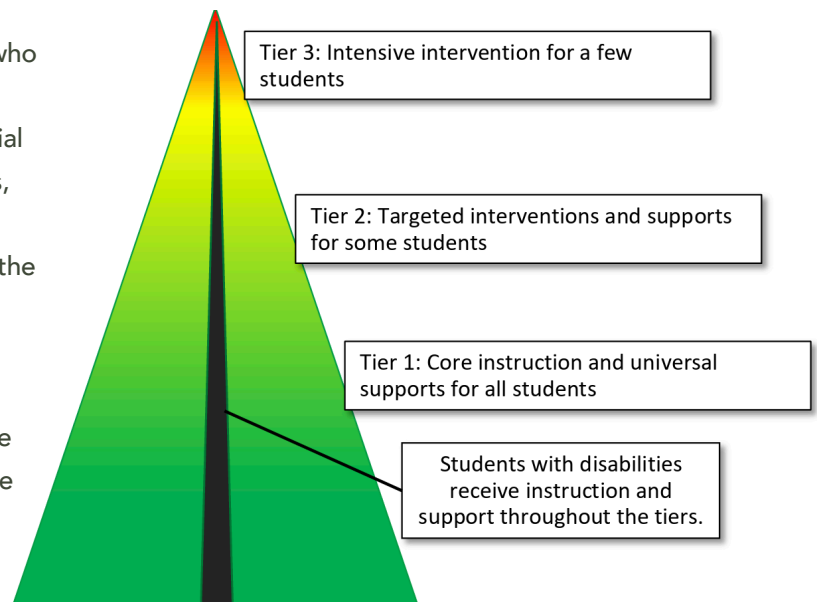
Building Teacher Knowledge and Skills

- Support teachers in deep internalization through unit and lesson study during collaborative planning time
- Provide feedback on unit and lesson internalization
- Measure and monitor quality of implementation through observation
- Support teachers through coaching and feedback
- Support teachers to use data to inform instruction

Promoting Cohesion of Services through Consistent Collaboration

To promote cohesion among services, and fully align to Tiers of Support in [DE-MTSS](#), it is important to be mindful of how all teachers who support students are collaborating.

- All teachers and instructional staff who support students, including but not limited to classroom teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, instructional paraprofessionals, and MLL teachers, should be trained in the core curriculum.
- Whenever possible, draw from the same materials and curriculum in both Tier 1 and intervention. Set the expectation that these resources are the first stop to provide additional support to students.



- Prioritize collaboration between Tier 1 and intervention teachers during the planning process.
- Allocate time and create systems that allow teachers to share lessons plans and student performance data across Tier 1 and intervention.
- Determine how teachers will check in informally between meetings.

Leadership Levers for Early Literacy Success

The Leadership Levers for Early Literacy Success guidance document, shared earlier in this playbook, outlines key leadership actions essential for translating early literacy research into practice and ensuring all students become proficient readers. Each key action is broken down into specific levers that leaders can pull to support implementation. This tool is designed for schools, districts, and charters to assess their current implementation status, prioritize areas for improvement, and set instructional goals.

When planning for high-quality implementation, the guidance is clear: As a leader, you must prioritize unit and lesson preparation.

Creating and Sustaining Enabling Systems and Structures

- Teachers and leaders engage in professional development on how to effectively internalize their HQIM's units and lessons.
- Teachers and leaders communicate expectations for completion of intellectual preparation of each unit and lesson from the curriculum using the district/charter curriculum protocols & format (e.g. internalization and annotation guide).
- Teachers and leaders establish and protect weekly common planning time (at least 45 minutes per week) for teachers to collaboratively internalize units and lessons.
- Teachers and leaders engage in structured data conversations with student data.
- Teachers and leaders establish a shared vision of excellence for PLCs and make a plan to support lesson internalization.
- Teachers and leaders apply strategies to refine delivery of early literacy instruction to align to research based approaches and better support students' foundational skills development and deep and meaningful engagement with texts.

Supporting Skillful Preparation to Deliver High-Quality Instruction

"While quality curriculum is important, it is not enough. While stronger curricula make a real difference, that difference is magnified by matching it with professional development. Indeed, what research we have suggests that over half of the possible impact of shifting to a stronger curriculum is lost if strong professional development is not part of the transition."

Steiner, D., et al. (November 2018). What We Teach Matters: How Quality Curriculum Improves Student Outcomes.

Unit and Lesson Internalization

Internalizing HQIM ensures that all students have access to rigorous and engaging grade-level content. It also enhances the quality of differentiation and on-the-spot support students receive. Educators need to approach internalization in two ways: wide-angle unit internalization and close-up lesson internalization.

Unit internalization gives teachers a clear understanding of the key concepts in each unit before teaching, including what students will learn, how they will be assessed, and the overall arc of the learning process. By starting with unit internalization, teachers can see how each lesson fits into the broader learning goals before diving into individual lessons.

Lesson internalization, on the other hand, focuses on how knowledge and skills are developed within each lesson. This allows teachers to prepare both scaffolding and opportunities for acceleration, ensuring that instruction meets the needs of all students.

Internalization Best Practices

- Start with the end in mind
- Understand the backwards design of the unit or lesson
- Do the critical work of students (this includes writing the essay, or completing the task)
- Plan intentional, curriculum- embedded scaffolds that maintain the rigor and integrity of grade-level content

Unit Internalization

Focuses on the “big picture” by considering the goals of the unit and what students will learn and be assessed on.

Lesson Internalization

Focuses on one lesson (or a section of lessons) to see how the knowledge and skills are built, find opportunities for engagement, and determine potential misconceptions.

ELA Unit Internalization

Unit internalization helps teachers gain a clear understanding of each unit before teaching it, including the learning objectives, assessment methods, and the overall progression of the unit. By beginning with unit internalization, teachers can see how each lesson fits into the broader learning goals and builds towards mastery of grade-level standards before diving into the details of individual lessons.

Unit Internalization Protocol

Steps	Key Actions for this Step
Step 1: Understand the big picture	1. Write and discuss 3-5 takeaways students should have by the end of the unit. What is the “story” of the unit? 2. What content knowledge and literacy skills will students be developing in this unit? 3. Why is this unit important? How does it connect to the prior unit (if applicable)?
Step 2: Know what success looks like	1. Review the end-of-unit assessment. 2. Identify the content knowledge that students will need to be successful in the assessment. 3. Identify the literacy skills that students will need to be successful in the assessment.
Step 3: Examine the arc of learning	1. Review how the lessons build on one another and see how each skill area is developed across lessons. 2. Analyze how the lessons connect to the unit assessment. 3. Begin to identify the support students who do not have the prior knowledge for the unit might need.
Step 4: Organize your resources	1. Review instructional materials and additional resources recommended throughout the unit. 2. Based on what you know about the unit, develop a strategy for how the special education and multilingual learner teachers could support your students. How will those actions contribute to improved student outcomes?



ELA Lesson Internalization

At the lesson level, internalization helps teachers gain a deep understanding of what students are expected to learn throughout the unit and what is taught in each individual lesson. Engaging in internalization ensures that all students have access to rigorous, engaging, grade-level content in text-focused lessons, while also considering each student's unique learning needs in foundational skills lessons. Unlike traditional planning, internalization empowers teachers to engage and differentiate instruction effectively by using their expertise and creativity.

Text-Centered Lesson Internalization Protocol

Steps

Key Actions for this Step

**Step 1:
Understand the Lesson
Big Picture**

Read the lesson in order to:

1. Consider its purpose in the unit.

**Step 2:
Understand the
"Vision of Success"**

Revisit the lesson in order to:

1. Review the key learning objectives.
2. Identify and review the formative assessment, Exit Ticket and checks for understanding (CFU).
3. Identify how students will show what they have learned and if they've met the objectives.

**Step 3:
Understand how the lesson
unfolds and builds toward
that vision**

Read the text and skim the lesson activities.

1. Identify the big idea of the text.
2. Identify where students might have misconceptions or face challenges understanding the text.
3. Identify opportunities for students to demonstrate their progress toward the learning during this lesson.

**Step 4:
Plan to support all students**

Consider each lesson activity in order to:

1. Understand the purpose of questions and tasks and how they support understanding.
2. Answer discussion questions or CFUs and annotate the key parts of the text that support your answer(s).
3. Build in additional scaffolds as needed.
4. Plan opportunities for deeper engagement.

Foundational Skills Lesson Internalization Protocol

Steps	Key Actions for this Step
Step 1: Identify Content Alignment	1. Identify the standards that are the focus of the lesson and where they are addressed in the lesson. 2. Identify which skills are being introduced and which skills are being built on.
Step 2: Explicit Instruction + Aligned Content	1. Identify (highlight) the teacher moves in the lesson. 2. Identify (highlight in a different color or underline) the student moves in the lesson. 3. Annotate for opportunities to build student engagement without altering the intent of the lesson.
Step 3: Data + Checks for Understanding	1. Identify where there are opportunities to collect data to check for understanding and progress toward mastery of objectives.

PLC Best Practices

Each stakeholder group along the vertical spine (state agency leaders, district/charter leaders, school-based leaders, coaches, teachers) has a unique and critical role to play in HQIM implementation and literacy instruction grounded in evidence-based practices. Clearly defining and communicating those roles and responsibilities to stakeholders is an important planning step, providing professional learning to support implementation

“PLC meetings are the primary catalyst for frequent cycles of improvement centered on a core practice or area of focus. Teachers come together to analyze student data and work samples, decide how to address individual student needs, and apply strategies in class the next day. Then, teachers bring new student data and work samples to the next PLC meeting, and the cycle begins again. It’s one continuous, schoolwide loop.”

TNTP. (2024.) Opportunity Makers.

PLCs are a crucial structure for supporting effective early literacy implementation and ensuring consistency and coherence. Through the structured discussions in PLCs, instructional leaders reinforce shared school expectations and identify variations in teacher and student performance. If PLCs are not in place, it is essential to determine when and how this work will take place and how you can support it.

School leaders (principals, assistant principals, or others with curriculum expertise, such as department heads or instructional coaches) should provide strong support during the early stages of implementation. Develop a timeline for a gradual release of leadership during common planning time, giving teachers more responsibility over time. Prioritize the steps during common planning that benefit most from teacher collaboration, and assign other tasks as pre-work. Make sure to clearly communicate expectations for attendance and pre-work at least a week in advance to maximize the effectiveness of the planning time.

PLC Best Practices

Ultimately, you want to foster the conditions that allow for the following characteristics:

- **Safe:** Teachers feel they can try new things, make mistakes, be vulnerable and grow.
- **Relevant:** Learning is centered around students. Teachers are deeply engaged with the materials and content they teach.
- **Collaborative:** Teachers engage in meaningful conversations, reflections, learning and planning together.
- **Positive:** Teachers connect, have fun and build fulfilling personal and professional relationships.



Guiding Questions to Support this Work

Are structures in place to allow teachers to maximize their HQIM and achieve the vision?

If not, how can you prioritize time and resources to allow teachers to be set up for success?

What structures exist for classroom teachers to collaborate with support specialists?

Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title	Overview	How to Access
Delaware Multi-Tiered System of Support Implementation Guide	This guide will assist district, charter, and school teams as they plan for and implement the DE-MTSS framework. The guide aligns with the DE-MTSS regulations and presents key information and actions to support implementation of DE-MTSS in districts, charters, and schools.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/19oU4QOL3Jt4hINGThWhfd0ur3sQh3VJC/view?usp=sharing
Unit Internalization Protocol	Focuses on the “big picture” by considering the goals of the unit and what students will learn and be assessed on.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l9Qj26i6khjzeOugdnoUW-nNxzqUoa3/view?usp=sharing
Text-centered Lesson Internalization Protocol	Focus on one lesson (or a section of lessons) to see how the knowledge and skills are built, opportunities for engagement, and potential misconceptions.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o-S-NKLm26JcJ8i8_RbSwXseFPwm_p2/view?usp=sharing
Foundational Skills Lesson Internalization Protocol	Focus on one lesson (or a section of lessons) to see how the knowledge and skills are built, opportunities for engagement, and potential misconceptions.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E3lcrSK1YoFFahZVDnmEnQumBZOGwM-PK/view?usp=sharing

Chapter 5: Observing for High-Quality Instruction and Student Engagement

Observing for High-Quality Instruction and Student Engagement

Adopting Observation Tools

In every early literacy classroom across Delaware, we aim to develop skilled readers through instruction that emphasizes both language comprehension and word recognition. But as state agency or district/charter leaders, how can you assess what's happening inside classrooms, and how do you ensure that feedback aligns with your shared vision?

Delaware's Literacy Vision: Our instructional vision is that every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

As discussed in Chapter 1, vision setting helps groups create a shared understanding of both the investments they need to make and the outcomes they aim to achieve. To determine where we want students to be, we must first have a clear vision of the instruction needed to reach that goal. A well-defined vision provides direction for our work, turning our goals and purpose into tangible results.

In this chapter, we will explore how adopting informal observation tools, along with setting up systems and structures for feedback and coaching, can support your vision for effective literacy instruction and ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality instruction.

Content-specific feedback, whether formal or informal, is critical professional development. In this chapter, we are focusing on adopting observation tools that were designed for informal coaching conversations and development, rather than formal evaluation.

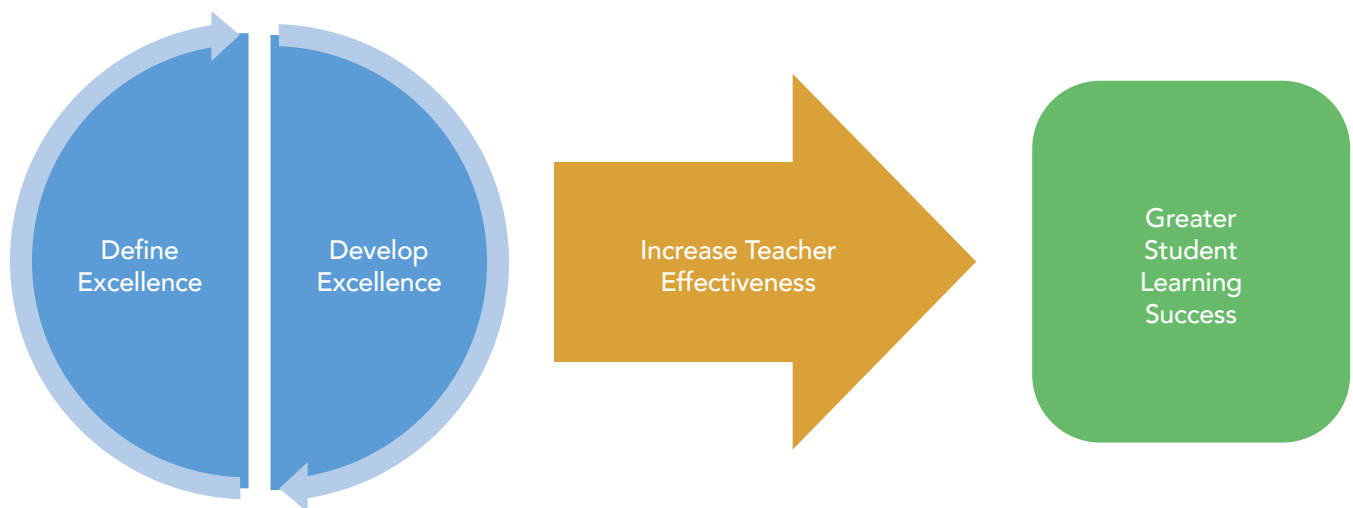
Alignment Between the IPG and the DTGSS

A well-designed developmental observation tool supports planning, reflection, collaboration, and coaching. While there are different tools for different purposes, our recommended informal observation tool for reading and listening comprehension, the Instructional Practice Guide, is strongly aligned with the Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System ([DTGSS](#)).

Both informal observation and formal evaluation are important to ensuring alignment to your vision for instruction. Informal observation is typically ongoing and frequent and is not tied to performance, though it does promote change and growth. Ideally informal observations are tied to professional development and coaching conversations. Formal evaluations follow a specific schedule or cadence and are tied to performance - and sometimes promotion, tenure, and pay.

Important things to note about the IPG and the DTGSS:

- While the DTGSS is designed for both formal and informal observations, this chapter focuses on using the IPG observation tools which provide more detailed indicators aligned to high quality early literacy instruction.
- Both sets of tools are based on best practices in teaching and learning and follow a growth-oriented approach to continuous improvement. This process is aimed at supporting teacher development, leading to improved student achievement.
- The information gathered from informal observations using the tools discussed in this chapter will help you support teacher growth, ultimately contributing to stronger outcomes when teachers undergo more formal evaluations.
- Both tools are grounded in the same theory of action displayed below.



Alignment between the IPG and the DTGSS

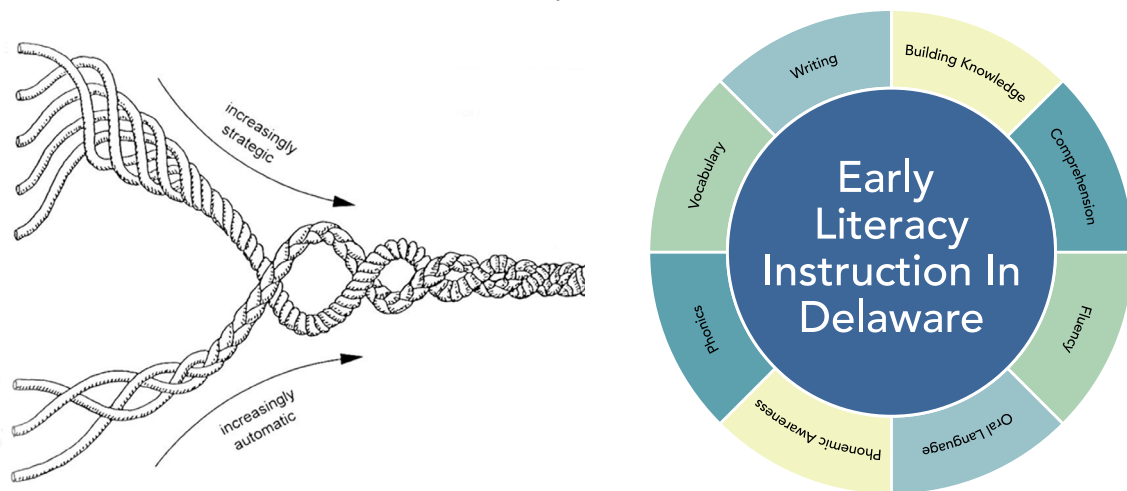
Benefits of Informal Observations

The benefits of informal observation are numerous and include:

- Builds a common understanding of effective learning and teaching,
- Ensures successful implementation of change initiatives,
- Fosters transparency before evaluative feedback (no “gotchas”),
- Improves student outcomes.

Observing for Language Comprehension and Word Recognition

The Delaware Delivers Model (outlined in Chapter 1) builds on the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Rope, highlighting the critical role of both language comprehension and word recognition in classroom instruction for developing skilled readers.



Given that each component of instruction is essential, how can we determine what to observe and when in a K-2 classroom? We recommend using two versions of the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) based on the focus of the lesson being observed: the IPG for Grades K-2: Reading/Listening Comprehension or the IPG Foundational Skills Observation Tool.

Alignment Between the IPG and the DTGSS

During text-focused lessons with an emphasis reading and listening comprehension the focus is on engaging all learners in key three shifts:

1. Regular practice with complex texts and its academic language
2. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening grounded in evidence from text
3. Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction texts

These shifts are reflected in three Core Actions and their indicators:

1. Core Action 1: Focus each lesson on a high-quality text (or multiple texts).
2. Core Action 2: Employ questions and tasks, both oral and written, that are text-specific and accurately address the analytical thinking required by the grade-level standards.
3. Core Action 3: Provide all students with opportunities to engage in the work of the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE GUIDE

ELA / LIT K-2
SUBJECT GRADES
READING / LISTENING COMPREHENSION
GUIDE TYPE

Date _____

Teacher Name _____

School _____

Grade / Class Period / Section _____

Topic / Lesson / Unit _____

Learning Goal _____

Standard Addressed in this Lesson _____

Observer Name _____

About The Instructional Practice Guide

Content-specific feedback is critical to teacher professional development. The Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) is a K-12 classroom observation rubric that prioritizes what is observable in and expected of classroom instruction when instructional content is aligned to college- and career-ready (CCR) standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), in ELA/literacy (<https://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>). It purposefully focuses on the limited number of classroom practices tied most closely to content of the lesson.¹

Designed as a developmental rather than an evaluation tool, the IPG supports planning, reflection, and collaboration, in addition to coaching. The IPG encompasses the Three Shifts by detailing how they appear in instruction:²

- Complexity: Practice regularly with complex text and its academic language.
- Evidence: Ground reading, writing, and speaking in evidence from text, both literary and informational.
- Knowledge: Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.

This rubric is divided into the Core Actions teachers should be taking. Each Core Action consists of indicators which further describe teacher and student behaviors that exemplify CCR-aligned instruction.

Using The Instructional Practice Guide

The K-2 ELA/literacy IPG is intended for use with reading and listening comprehension lessons; refer to the Foundational Skills collection (<https://www.corestandards.org/foundational-skills/>) for support with foundational skills instruction and observation. For each observation, you should make note of what you see and hear. It may be helpful to supplement what you've recorded with further evidence from artifacts such as lesson plans, tasks, or student work. Although many indicators will be observable during the course of a lesson, there may be times when a lesson is appropriately focused on a smaller set of objectives or you observe only a portion of a lesson. In those cases you should expect to not observe some of the indicators and to leave some of the tool blank. Whenever possible, share evidence you collected during the observation in a follow-up discussion.

After discussing the observed lesson, use the Beyond the Lesson Discussion Guide to put the content of the lesson in the context of the broader instructional plan. The questions in the Beyond the Lesson Discussion Guide help delineate what practices are in place, what has already occurred, and what opportunities might exist to incorporate the shifts into the classroom during another lesson, further in the unit, or over the course of the year.

To further support content-specific planning, practice, and observation, explore the collection of free IPG companion tools, resources, and professional development modules at <https://www.corestandards.org/instructional-practice-guide/>.

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Foundational Skills

This observation tool is designed to build understanding and experience with best practices to support explicit teaching of foundational skills. This tool is intended to be used for norming, learning, and improving the quality and impact of the support and feedback we’re providing to teachers around foundational skills instruction. It is not intended to be used for evaluative purposes and does not replace other district and charter observation tools used for that purpose. A foundational skills lesson may include any of the following: whole class instruction, student independent practice, collaborative tasks, small group instruction, centers, and assessment opportunities.

This observation tool is structured to be used with any of these classroom structures with four focus areas and supporting indicators:

1. Core Action 1: Use of Systematic and Aligned Materials. Instruction should connect past foundational skills components to the current lesson, and connections between new and previously taught skills should be made clear in the lesson.

2. Core Action 2: Use of Explicit Modeling and Instruction. The indicators in this section represent the teacher-driven moves in the lesson, such as what the teacher says, models, and assigns.

3. Core Action 3: Abundant and Aligned Student Practice. The indicators in this section represent what students say and do throughout the lesson. This format may change throughout the lesson, and can include whole group, small group, independent, and teacher-supported tasks/practice.

4. Core Action 4: Assessment & Differentiation. The indicators in this section represent strategic collecting of data as well as adjustments to instruction based on observed student needs.

Foundational Skills Instruction Observation Tool¹

Directions: Enter a rating (E, SE, NE, or N/A) for each indicator for each classroom you visit. Enter additional notes at the bottom of each indicator

Ratings:
 - E = Evident (indicator holds true for all or nearly all students, when applicable)
 - SE = Somewhat Evident (indicator holds true only partially)
 - NE = Not Evident (indicator as described does not hold true in the classroom)
 - N/A = Not Applicable (e.g. not able to be observed during the portion of the lesson you saw)

Grade/Class Observed:

Lesson Observed:

Language of Instruction:

Core Action 1: Use of Systematic and Aligned Materials

1A: The foundational skills observed in the lesson are part of **systematic instruction** that reflects the implementation of **high-quality instructional resources (HQIR)** and **grade-level standards**

Look fors:

 - One or more of the following focus areas should be present. Check any that are observed:

☐ Phonological Awareness

☐ Print Concepts

☐ Phonics and Word Recognition

☐ Fluency
 - Instruction should connect past foundational skills components to the current lesson, and connections between new and previously taught skills should be made clear in the lesson.

Rating:

Notes:

A Note on Norming

Norming is a collaborative process where educators come together to agree on how to assess performance based on shared criteria. In the context of the IPG, norming involves rating each indicator of the core actions, justifying the rating with low-inference notes, and then aligning as a team to ensure a common understanding of instructional strengths and areas for growth.

The purpose of norming is to:

- Support the instructional vision by ensuring alignment toward the instructional goal.
- Promote consistently rigorous instruction and outcomes.
- Ensure feedback is aligned, regardless of the observer.
- Identify specific areas of support for teachers to drive improved student outcomes.

It is important to note that norming is not about determining right or wrong ratings or evaluating individual teacher performance.

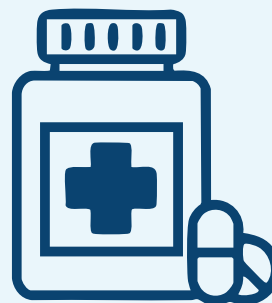
Developing Systems and Structures that Support the Observation Process

Equally important to aligning observation tools with your vision for strong instruction is developing the systems and structures that support the observation process. While this chapter focuses on enhancing our work with observing instruction, it's crucial to remember that improvement won't come solely from observation and feedback. Intentional collaboration to support internalization is key. Teachers must engage in intellectual preparation to be ready to deliver high-quality instruction. Similarly, observers need to prepare thoroughly so that the observation, feedback, and coaching can target specific areas for instructional improvement.

**Intellectual Preparation
= Preventative Care**



**Observation, Coaching, & Feedback
= Diagnosis & Treatment**



The Observation Process + Cycle

Adhering to a consistent observation process and cycle will enhance the quality and consistency of the observations and feedback provided to teachers.

- **Step 1: Prepare for the observation**
 - Just as we ask teachers to intellectually prepare for instruction by internalizing their lessons, we as observers must also prepare for the lessons we'll be observing. As you review the lesson annotations, take note of any questions that arise or specific actions you plan to watch for in the teacher's instruction.
 - Additionally, review the IPG and its indicators to identify any particular areas you will be focusing on during the lesson.

- **Step 2: Observe with the IPG & take low inference notes**
 - When taking objective, low inference notes we want to:
 - Describe specific actions.
 - Break down action into bite-sized moments.
 - Quote teacher and students when possible.
 - Use time stamps when possible.
 - Use quantities/numbers when possible options for taking notes:
 - Write notes on the IPG.
 - Take notes on the lesson plan directly; if you have the lesson printed, take notes in it; if you've accessed an electronic version, add comments to it.
 - Use the "observational notes" tool in your note catcher.
 - Begin to notice trends across core actions and tag observations to indicators when possible.
- **Step 3: Prioritize the focus area**
 - Based on your notes and ratings, identify the highest-leverage area for improvement within the lesson observed.
 - Please note: The IPG for reading and listening comprehension is intentionally organized in numerical order. If the lesson you observed does not align with Core Action 1, you should not focus on Core Action 2 or 3.
 - Consider the following about the teacher:
 - What is the teacher's experience and knowledge of ELA?
 - What feedback is most important for the teacher's current development in this curriculum, and what can be addressed later?
 - How much support does the teacher need to adjust or change their practice?
 - How does the teacher best receive feedback?
- **Step 4: Support implementation through feedback, coaching, and PLCs**
 - Teachers want timely, trustworthy feedback about student learning, especially after making adjustments to their instruction so they can assess whether those changes are effective. In the next two sections, we will explore effective feedback and the coaching cycle.

Six Steps to Effective Feedback

"...people are much more likely to embrace conclusions they've reached than directives they've received."

Bambrick-Santoya. 2012. *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*.

The primary purpose of informal observation and feedback cycles is to find the most effective way to support teachers to improve student outcomes. In his book *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*, Paul Bambrick-Santoya identifies 6 steps to effective feedback.

The Observation Process + Cycle

Adhering to a consistent observation process and cycle will enhance the quality and consistency of the observations and feedback provided to teachers.

1. **Praise: Narrate the positive.**
 - “We set a goal last week of _____ and I noticed how you [met goal] by [state concrete positive actions the teacher took].”
 - “What made that successful? What was the impact of [that positive action]?”
2. **Probe: Start with a targeted question and add scaffolding as needed.**
 - Avoid general questions (i.e., “How did your lesson go today?”) Instead, focus on one aspect of the lesson where you want to focus on providing more support.
 - Ask questions with a purpose (i.e., “How could planning for use of a discussion protocol support students in this lesson?”)
3. **Action Step: Use probing to lead to a bite-sized action step.**
 - Guide teacher to remember a specific moment in their lesson (i.e., “What happened when students were asked to independently complete the worksheet?”)
 - Provide a specific piece of evidence from your observations (i.e., “What happened when you asked Sam about...?”)
 - Present the data (i.e., “I noticed that only about 10% of your class were engaged when you asked them to respond to the comprehension questions.”)
 - Leader directly states the problem (should only be used after other strategies to have teacher recognize the problem have failed)
4. **Practice: Role play or create plans for how to implement action steps in current or future lessons.**
 - Once you and the teacher have set a goal for improvement, there are many different coaching strategies you can use for supporting the teacher with improving their instruction.
 - Please see the supporting resources section at the end of this chapter for a document on Coaching Support Strategies.
5. **Plan Ahead: Create plans for how you will implement this action.**
 - Support teachers to build action steps into upcoming lessons (i.e., “Where would be a good place to implement this in an upcoming lesson?”)
6. **Follow-up: Set timeline for follow-up.**
 - Set Timelines: When will coaching supports take place, when will observations take place? (i.e., When will you plan for this action step? When can I observe you implementing this into an upcoming lesson?)

For more formal feedback cycles, leaders and coaches are encouraged to leverage the [Delaware Collaborative Feedback Framework](#).

Connecting the Dots

The data we collect during the observation process serves multiple purposes, but at its core, it offers a window into what students are experiencing on a daily basis. As discussed in this chapter, it's essential to follow up observations with timely and effective feedback conversations. However, there are other important ways to leverage the data we gather.

The trends we identify across classrooms and grade levels should guide the professional learning and support we offer to teachers, inform our financial and time investments, and highlight bright spots or areas for growth that require attention or escalation. By assessing instruction at the classroom and grade-band levels, we can ensure consistency with school, district, and charter expectations for instructional practices and curriculum implementation. A strong observation process is a critical component of creating a culture of continuous improvement through progress monitoring. In the final chapter of this playbook, we will explore what progress monitoring at the school and system levels looks like.



Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title	Overview	How to Access
Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System	The Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System includes a framework that prioritizes what matters most in ensuring great outcomes for students. In addition, a growth-oriented process to utilize the framework results in continuous development for teachers.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eBkxtYrdJr5yurIUm9GZ0iPXJFJt28/view?usp=sharing
IPG for Reading/Listening Comprehension	The Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) is a K–12 classroom observation rubric that prioritizes what is observable in and expected of classroom instruction when instructional content is aligned to college- and career-ready (CCR) standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), in ELA/literacy (corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy).	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pv4yu_7PEKpwQfex8tPj1vzCovlQLb6s/view?usp=sharing
Foundational Skills Informal Observation Tool	This tool is designed to build understanding and experience with best practices to support explicit teaching of foundational skills. This tool is intended to be used for norming, learning, and improving the quality and impact of the support and feedback we’re providing to teachers around foundational skills instruction. It is not intended to be used for evaluative purposes and does not replace other district observation tools used for that purpose.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f7tfzLrcCxxkLpbwzr9E38F8MJVOTa6/view?usp=sharing
Collaborative Feedback Conversation Framework	Feedback conversation framework with specific examples.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UlsRs9hq5-TbXbBOKh6EgnxtXlgOosq/view?usp=sharing

Chapter 6: Monitoring Progress and Grounding in Our “Why”

Monitoring Progress and Grounding in Our “Why”

Connecting Back to Our Vision

Delaware’s Literacy Vision: Our instructional vision is that every student across Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

When monitoring the progress and implementation of HQIM, it’s essential to gather data that offers a comprehensive view of the student experience and compare it to our vision for effective early literacy instruction. This data helps us track curriculum implementation, guide professional learning and support, and identify successes or areas for growth that may need attention. Evaluating implementation ensures alignment with district and charter expectations regarding instructional practices and curriculum delivery.

Implementation data should be compelling. It should inform decisions and tell a story that motivates teachers, leaders, and community members toward continuous improvement. While our long-term goal is improved student outcomes, there are shorter term metrics we can evaluate to keep a pulse check on implementation.

In this chapter, we will explore the systems and structures that support the strategic collection, analysis, and response to student data, as well as those that foster teacher development aligned with strong HQIM implementation.

Building a Shared Understanding of Research-Based Assessment Practices

Curriculum-Based Assessments

Curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) are integrated into the curriculum to assess student learning. They help teachers gauge how students are developing the knowledge and skills outlined in a lesson or unit. These assessments, both formative and summative, provide teachers with valuable insights that inform future planning and support for students in upcoming lessons and units.

Formative assessments provide insight into what students are currently learning and what they still need to learn. Examples include exit tickets, activity pages, writing prompts, and observational notes.

Summative assessments measure what students have learned by the end of a unit, semester, or school year. Examples include unit tests, mid-year assessments, and end-of-year exams.

Monitoring student responses to instruction is crucial to ensure they are learning the material being taught. Every exercise or worksheet offers an opportunity to gather data on student progress, highlighting what they have mastered and where further teaching is needed. Consistently tracking this data helps teachers identify gaps in learning or misconceptions, offer timely feedback and support, and adjust instruction as needed—whether by providing extra help, removing examples, or adding new ones.

In addition to CBAs, we know that districts and charters conduct **interim assessments** (e.g., Smarter Balanced) to assess potential reading difficulties in areas like comprehension and vocabulary by comparing student performance to nationally normed proficiency benchmarks. These assessments provide a snapshot of students' progress toward mastering end-of-year standards and can help predict how likely a student is to be proficient on the state summative assessment. However, they should be accompanied by curriculum-aligned assessments to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of student learning.

Supporting Assessment Best Practices

Effectively using assessments and the data they provide requires careful planning and intention. The table below highlights five best practices and explains how they help create a strong culture of using assessment data to guide instructional decisions.

Best Practice

What it Looks Like

Vision

District and charter leaders promote a shared vision that emphasizes the importance of high-quality, curriculum-embedded assessments. These assessments are used to guide instructional decisions, plan targeted scaffolds or supports for students, and tailor future lessons. Curriculum-embedded assessments are a clear priority in the educational process.

Protected Time + Frequency

The scope and sequence of instructional materials are followed closely, with frequent opportunities for embedded formative assessments. Teachers participate in internalization meetings to collaborate and review unit/module assessments before teaching them. Students are given ample time to complete curriculum-embedded assessments (both formative and summative), while teachers have dedicated time to analyze student work and data collaboratively.

Assessment Integrity

Curriculum-embedded assessments are used with minimal modifications. Any changes to assessment items or materials do not disrupt the overall coherence of the program. Clear expectations and criteria guide teachers in making customization decisions, ensuring the integrity of the embedded assessments is maintained.

Integration of Other Assessments

Other assessments, such as interim or benchmark assessments, are used strategically as complementary data points alongside curriculum-embedded assessments. These assessments do not replace curriculum-embedded assessments. Schools avoid adjusting the scope and sequence of materials or adding extra lessons to align with benchmark or interim assessments.

Analysis and Use of Assessment Data

End-of-Year Summative assessments: Used for accountability, school evaluation, or measuring learning outcomes across different student groups.

Universal Screeners or Benchmark/Interim assessments: Indicate whether students are on track to meet end-of-year standards. These assessments are aligned with standards, holistic, and cover material across units, making them easy to aggregate and analyze.

Universal Screeners: A brief, standardized assessment typically at the beginning of the school year or at regular intervals. Its primary purpose is to quickly identify students who may be at risk for academic, behavioral, or developmental challenges.

Curriculum-Embedded assessments: Directly align with the curriculum, ensuring that what teachers assess matches what they have taught. These assessments provide valuable insights, allowing teachers to adjust instruction and address student needs.

Monitoring Student Progress

When leveraging HQIM, it is important to develop systems and structures that support strategic collection, analysis and response to student data mentioned in the section above.

What are data conversations?

“Collaboration amongst teachers paves the way for the spread of effective teaching practices, improved outcomes for the students they teach, and the retention of the most accomplished teachers in high-needs schools.”

Berry, Daughtry, Wieder. (2009). Collaboration: Closing the Effective Teaching Gap.

Data conversations help support teachers by holding them accountable for collecting and analyzing student data in a reliable and valid manner. By facilitating these conversations regularly, leaders or coaches ensure that assessment results are interpreted accurately and that data analysis leads to the development of effective instructional responses.

Data conversations support teachers and hold them accountable for **collecting and analyzing student data regularly and accurately and to identify disparities in outcomes.**

Data conversations foster teacher reflection on the efficacy of their instruction and **lead to appropriate instructional responses** to the data.

Data conversations support leaders to **set professional learning goals** that drive instructional improvements and student outcomes.

Other benefits of leading data conversations include:

- Encouraging teacher self-reflection on their past instruction, its impact on students, and how they can improve or adjust their approach moving forward.
- Fostering collaboration and a shared commitment to intentionally supporting students.
- Helping shift teachers away from a “compliance” mindset about assessments, encouraging them to see assessments as valuable tools for informing instruction.
- Promoting a growth mindset and motivation for continuous improvement, as regular data conversations provide opportunities to observe and celebrate student growth and success.

Planning for Data Conversations

Like other components of effective HQIM implementation, leading successful data conversations requires careful planning and preparation. When done well, these conversations help hold teachers accountable for consistently and accurately collecting and analyzing student data, while also identifying disparities in outcomes. They encourage teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction and make adjustments based on the data. Additionally, data conversations support leaders in setting professional learning goals that promote instructional improvements and enhance student outcomes.

Data conversations do not need to be standalone meetings; instead, they should make use of existing collaboration time with leaders, coaches, and teachers, such as during collaborative planning sessions or PLCs.

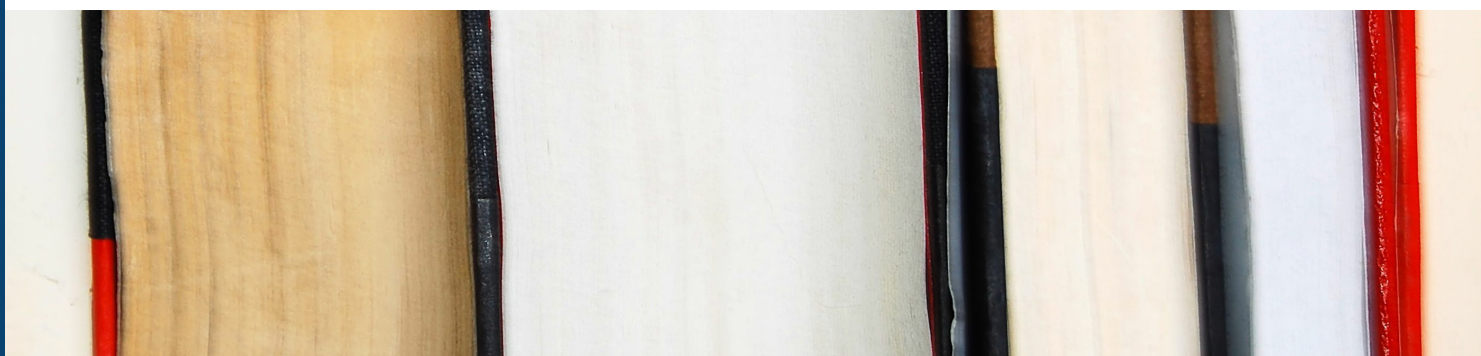
"Data-driven instruction properly implemented does not require teacher buy-in - it creates it."

Bambrick-Santoyo. (2010). *Driven By Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction*.

Steps for Effective Data Conversations

1. Intentionally **select an assessment or data source** that is worthy of deeper analysis.
2. Determine a **specific purpose or desired outcome** that is aligned with the type of assessment you selected.
3. Use any student data you already have to **pre-plan using the template**: prioritize key questions, anticipate teacher responses, and brainstorm potential instructional responses to the data.
4. Acknowledge and plan for other **technical and adaptive considerations** to increase the likelihood of a meaningful, productive data conversation.

Step 1 and **Step 2** focus on the data we're using and the purpose of the conversation. For example, you wouldn't analyze universal screener data in a data meeting with the goal of informing the next unit of instruction. While universal screeners are useful for early identification of reading needs, they don't provide the insights needed to guide day-to-day instruction with HQIM. Using them for that purpose would be mismatched with the data we need. The table below provides examples of data types for data conversations, along with aligned purposes or outcomes.



Assessment or Data Source Sample Purpose or Desired Outcome

Daily Exit Ticket from HQIM

"Our goal is to reflect on what students learned today, and to identify what they did not yet learn so we can reinforce that during tomorrow's lesson."

End of Unit Assessment from HQIM

"We will name successes from this unit and reflect on what instructional moves led to that success so we can replicate that. We'll also identify ongoing student needs, so that we can look for opportunities to spiral in additional supports for them as we prepare to teach our next unit."

Reading Diagnostic Assessment

"We will analyze this data to pinpoint which specific reading skills and spelling-sound patterns these 3 students have not yet developed and make educated assumptions about why, based on the specific errors they made, so that we can create an intentional plan for instruction."

For **Step 3**, we focus on preplanning using the planning template. While you may not always have access to real data in advance, especially when planning for a group conversation with multiple teachers, it's helpful to anticipate possible trends and familiarize yourself with upcoming content in the HQIM. This way, you can still guide teachers to take action based on their real-time findings during the conversation. When planning, prioritize key questions, anticipate teacher responses, and brainstorm potential instructional responses to the data.

Lastly, as emphasized throughout the playbook, for **Step 4**, it's important to address both the technical and adaptive challenges that come with change.



Technical

Defined systems, structures, policies, and expectations.

Technical changes pave the way for implementation by removing barriers; these must be planned for and executed prior to HQIM implementation.



Adaptive

Preparing people to accept, adjust to, and embrace a change.

Adaptive challenges require ongoing work to address the "root cause," leading to gradual shifts in mindsets, beliefs, values, priorities, and/or habits.

Guiding Questions to Support this Work

What structures exist for collaborative reflection and discussion around student data?

How do we provide professional learning opportunities and support for educators to use data to inform their instructional practices effectively?

How is data collected, organized, and analyzed to inform decision-making?

Supporting Teacher Growth

Throughout this playbook, we have emphasized the importance of building teacher knowledge and skills in implementing HQIM, ensuring that every lesson is grounded in the SoR and aligned with Delaware's vision for early literacy. In Chapter 5, we discussed how trends identified across classrooms and grade levels should guide the professional learning and support we provide to teachers. In this final section of the playbook, we will explore how we can use the systems, structures, and data at our disposal to support teacher growth, ultimately, improving student outcomes.

Aligning on High-Quality Professional Learning

"While quality curriculum is important, it is not enough. While stronger curricula make a real difference, that difference is magnified by matching it with professional development. Indeed, what research we have suggests that over half of the possible impact of shifting to a stronger curriculum is lost if strong professional development is not part of the transition."

Steiner, D., et al. (November 2018). What we teach matters. How quality curriculum improves student outcomes.

When we refer to High-Quality Professional Learning (HQPL), we mean professional learning that enhances educators' understanding of both what to teach (the content) and how to teach it (content pedagogy). This happens when professional learning is directly connected to the instructional materials teachers are using in their classrooms and incorporates best practices for adult learning.

More specifically, HQPL is defined by the following criteria set by the Delaware Department of Education.

- **Specific:** It deepens educators' understanding of what to teach and how to teach it.
- **Relevant:** It's connected to the instructional materials teachers are expected to use rather than isolated teaching strategies that are unrelated to what students are learning.
- **Equitable:** It helps teachers make smart, deliberate adaptations to their instructional materials so that all students have the appropriate support they need and also takes into consideration the educator's own learning needs and provides them with appropriate support.
- **Ongoing:** It's provided regularly and often throughout the year to ensure educators receive the support they deserve.
- **Engaging:** It creates an engaging space in which educators can ask questions, collaboratively develop ideas, practice new skills, receive feedback from others, and reflect on their own learning.

Action Steps for Creating a Professional Learning Plan

We believe that improving the quality of instruction leads to better outcomes for students. However, with limited time and resources, how do we decide where to focus our efforts to improve student outcomes? Both student data and teacher data should guide our professional learning plans. Following the six action steps outlined below will ensure that we consistently keep students at the center of our professional learning plans.

6 Steps to Creating a Professional Learning Plan

Action Steps

What does it look like in practice?

Establish Student-Focused Professional Learning Goals

- Use data to identify priority needs for students as well as disparities in student outcomes, particularly along lines of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, linguistics, gender, ability, and other characteristics.
- Use this information to inform the development of professional learning goals.
- Clearly define and communicate the equitable student outcomes that are desired from professional learning.

Identify Instructional Improvements Necessary to Reach Goals

- Identify instructional areas in need of support by utilizing an informal observation tool and collecting student work samples for analysis.
- Help teachers analyze student data and connect data trends to instruction (and instructional preparation).
- Target teacher support by utilizing information gathered from informal observations and student data.
- Monitor instructional improvements by tracking information gained through observations.

Establish Roles and Responsibilities

- Utilize distributed leadership to build capacity by determining which learning experiences are best facilitated by district, charter, or school staff versus outside professional learning providers.
- Establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the professional learning system and communicate them to all stakeholders.
- Provide support to those responsible for delivering professional learning to ensure they can carry out their roles effectively.

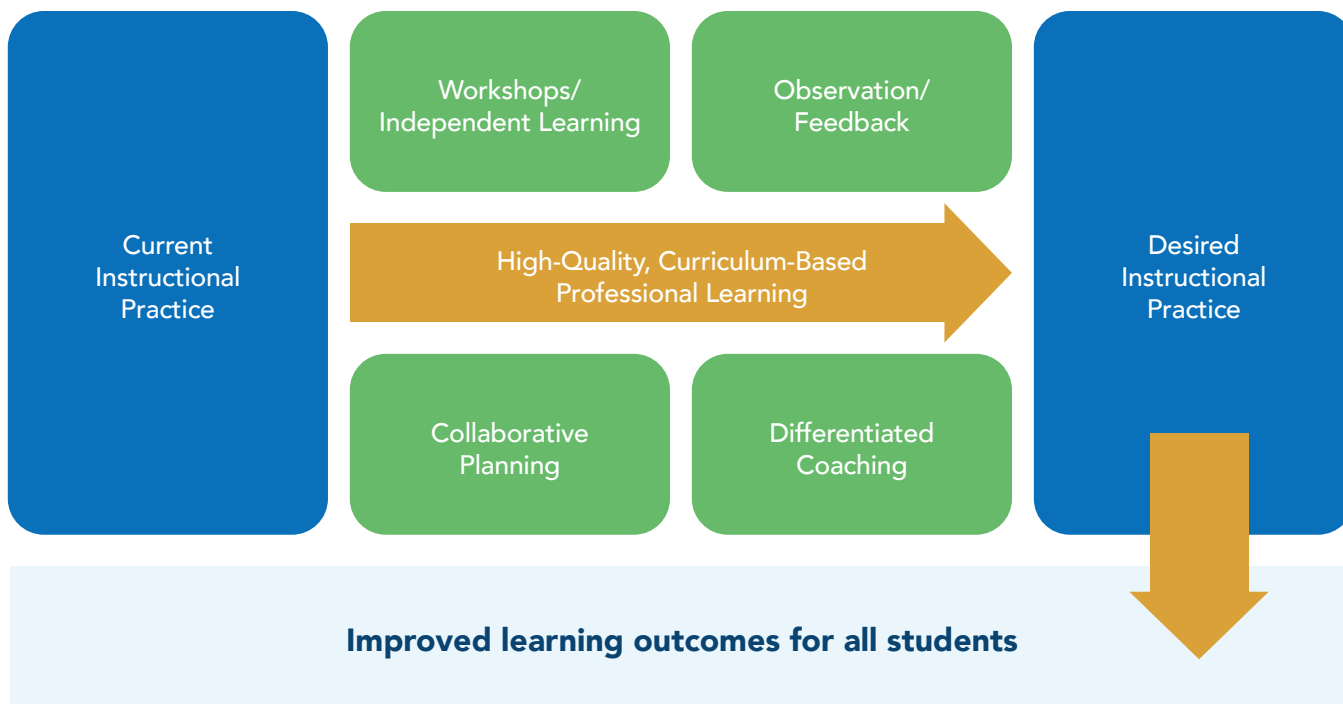
Prioritize Professional Learning Time

- Create a culture that values professional learning time as sacred and essential for growth.
- PLCs and professional learning opportunities should involve all staff, including classroom teachers, special education teachers, and MLL specialists whenever possible. This ensures that everyone has the chance to collaboratively plan and learn together, fostering consistency in implementation.
- Minimize interruptions, such as rescheduling or pulling educators away for other tasks during professional learning sessions.
- District and building leaders should advocate for sufficient professional learning time, including PLCs, in collaboration with union leaders and as outlined in contracts.
- Additionally, leaders should be actively present and participate in professional learning alongside educators.

Monitor Effectiveness of Professional Learning

- Analyze, reflect on, and respond to the data collected during the professional learning experience.
- Monitor both student and teacher data to assess progress toward professional learning goals.
- Develop a plan to highlight successful strategies and instruction that lead to strong outcomes.
- Use this data to set new goals for future professional learning.

Curriculum-Based Professional Learning Structures



The Coaching Process + Cycle

"Coaching is a form of professional development that brings out the best in people, uncovers strengths and skills, builds effective teams, cultivates compassion, and builds emotionally resilient educators. Coaching at its essence is the way that human beings, and individuals, have always learned best."

Aguilar. (2013). *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation*.

Curriculum-specific coaching and feedback are incredibly powerful tools for improving teacher practice and student outcomes. While there are various approaches to coaching cycles, they generally include goal setting, support and development, observation, and feedback. Here, we break these elements down into five stages.

- Stage 1: Teacher and the instructional coach set goals using the informal observation tool (i.e., the IPG)
- Stage 2: Support the teacher through professional learning opportunities (i.e., supporting internalization, rehearsal, etc.)
- Stage 3: Gather data during a lesson observation, and use the data to prepare for a coaching conversation.
- Stage 4: Partner with the teacher in a coaching and feedback conversation.
- Stage 5: Reflect on the process, and plan for next steps and goals.

6 Steps to Creating a Professional Learning Plan

Benefits of the Coaching Cycle

For **teachers**, the coaching cycle offers a structured approach to professional development, allowing them to focus on specific goals and strategies. It also creates a safe space for reflection and feedback, helping to foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Coaching cycles support co-planning (including internalization and lesson rehearsal) and use data to inform planning for student supports.

For **instructional coaches**, the cycle provides a clear framework, ensuring their efforts are focused and effective. It also encourages collaboration with teachers, strengthening the partnership and promoting mutual respect.

For additional examples of what the coaching cycle looks like in practice, please review the Coaching Case Study found in the Supporting Resources section of this chapter.

Student-Centered Coaching Overview

What is Student-Centered Coaching?

Student-Centered Coaching is an instructional coaching model that shifts the focus from fixing teachers to improving student learning. Rather than starting with teacher goals or curriculum plans, coaching conversations and cycles begin with student outcomes—what students know, understand, and are able to do.

In this model, coaches and teachers partner as equals to co-plan, co-teach, and assess student progress. The goal is to use evidence of learning (like formative assessments, writing samples, or reading data) to drive instructional decisions that are targeted, intentional, and responsive to student needs.

1. Focus on Student Learning

Instruction is guided by data and centered on how students are progressing toward specific literacy standards or learning targets.

2. Collaborative Culture

Encourages true partnership between coaches and teachers—building trust, mutual respect, and shared ownership of outcomes.

3. Improved Instructional Practices

Teachers refine their literacy instruction through ongoing, embedded support rather than one-off workshops.

4. Data-Informed Decision Making

Frequent use of formative assessments ensures that strategies are adjusted in real-time based on how students respond.

5. Equity and Differentiation

Coaching cycles allow for differentiated support based on the needs of diverse learners, including MLLs and struggling readers/writers.

Supporting Resources

All supporting resources for the Delaware Department of Education Early Literacy Playbook can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/DDOESupportingResources>

Title

Overview

How to Access

Data Conversation Planning Tool

A tool that can be used to plan and facilitate data conversations with teachers.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZNnakTyR_Qnt0FGWtiYf1HB-nYxdJ7DO/view?usp=sharing

Coaching Cycle Case Study

A case study that highlights the leader moves that support a strong coaching cycle.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O2hmSp1FoD100Xde4S9-euLDcZ01OkKL/view?usp=sharing>

