Nebraska Literacy Plan

A World of Literacy for All Nebraska Students

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Nebraska Literacy Team

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Nebraska Literacy Team Formation, Purpose, and Vision

Purpose Statement:

The Nebraska Literacy Plan is a resource to guide and support quality literacy instruction for all students.

The Nebraska Literacy Team was organized in November of 2010 as a part of Nebraska's Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Formula Grant. Team members were selected from the stakeholder groups in Nebraska with an interest and expertise in literacy, child development, assessment, and school improvement.

The Nebraska Literacy Plan is the fruit of their work. It is designed to create a framework to guide and support the efforts of districts, schools, educators, staff developers, and communities in creating an effective literacy plan to meet the needs of an ever-changing student population.

Nebraska is proud to be a state where curriculum decisions are made by local school boards, and thus are tailored even further to fit the needs of their students. Therefore, the Plan has been designed with that local control model in mind, and seeks not to be a state curriculum, but a collection of resources, ideas, and themes about what should be present in a comprehensive literacy plan. However, the Nebraska Literacy Team recognizes that this plan is also something that should continue to grow and change to reflect the diverse needs of students in an exponentially changing society.

Additionally, the team recognizes that while literacy is an integral part of a student's education, it is only a part of what needs to be developed in a well-rounded student, and that students should be viewed as whole people, for whom literacy is a tool. Therefore, the Nebraska Literacy Team has set forth a vision of the literate graduate.

We want students to be:

- Confident, socially competent, and effective communicators and collaborators with proficient language arts skills;
- Productive workers capable of both collaborative and individual, self-motivated work;
- Critical thinkers capable of making decisions based upon reason and logic;
- Globally competent and concerned citizens--- respectful of other people, cultures, ideas, and the world around them, and involved in civic causes, both near and afar;
- Able to identify and utilize resources to further college and career goals;
- Lifelong learners for whom learning is both a passion and a pursuit;
- Resilient with an ability to grow and adapt despite life's misfortunes and setbacks;
- Proficient and savvy participants in, and consumers of, their media-driven world; and
- Capable of setting, evaluating, and meeting personal and professional goals.

Superintendent Kyle McGowan visits with the family of Crete, Nebraska, National Honor Society Graduate, Maira Mendez in a scene from the film, When We Stop Counting (Crete Public Schools)

R. DEFRAIN/WHEN WE STOP COUNTING

Nebraska Literacy Team Formation, Purpose, and Vision

While learning to read is only one in a long line of important milestones in a child's life, it is arguably one that will have a significant impact on the rest of their lives, including future schooling experiences, course selection, potential post-high school choices, and for some, even the decision whether or not to finish high school. It can also have an indelible effect on their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Sadly, for far too many children, this milestone is delayed, fought for, and for some, never fully realized. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the adults surrounding these children to assure that everything possible is done to help these children arrive at that moment when they step off the branch and fly into the world of literacy.

The Nebraska Literacy Plan is a tool to guide instruction for students in preschool through high school programs. The Plan is meant to assist districts in developing policies, procedures, and practices that have been proven to make a difference for students who are struggling or are educationally disadvantaged. It is also designed to help identify, support, and move forward those children for whom there is an achievement gap—the very striving readers for whom the grant is named—through quality literacy instruction in the classroom, effective interventions, and a family, community, and school partnership that supports each student in their endeavors. The Nebraska Literacy Plan provides support for districts regarding a balanced system of assessments to inform instruction. The Plan is intended to be a yardstick for educators and administrators to measure the effectiveness of their instruction and interventions, and to plan for future instruction.

The Nebraska Literacy Plan is not a state curriculum map, nor does it dictate a specific curriculum. Rather, it has been designed to provide continued support for local control, and to allow district and building leaders to tailor it to suit the needs of their individual districts and schools.

The Nebraska Literacy Plan is divided into the following components:

- Informed and Effective Leadership
- Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)
- Ongoing, Focused Professional Development
- Universal Instructional Design (across all content areas)
- High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments
- Multi-Tiered System of Support
- Family, Community, and School Collaboration

A kindergarten student selects a book from her classroom library

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Within each component there are guidelines that are outlined according to the four-step process of the NDE Continuous Improvement Model: Creating the Profile, Setting the Goals, Planning to Improve, and Implementing the Plan. While this cycle can be used to view the model in its totality, it is also applicable to each component and its processes.

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The Nebraska Literacy Plan also draws heavily on the findings from recent reading research, including the findings of the Carnegie Institute in the Reading Next report. Researchers found fifteen elements present in the successful literacy programs they surveyed. While the focus of Reading Next was adolescent literacy, the elements can be applied to literacy at any level of development. These elements, evident throughout the seven components of the Nebraska Literacy Plan include:

- direct, explicit comprehension instruction
- effective instructional principles embedded in content
- motivation and self-directed learning
- text-based collaborative learning
- strategic tutoring
- diverse texts
- intensive writing
- a technology component (as a tool for and topic of literacy instruction)
- ongoing formative assessment of students
- extended time for literacy
- professional development
- ongoing summative assessment of students and programs
- teacher teams
- leadership
- a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program

   (Biancarosa, Gina; Snow, Catherine E.; for the Carnegie Corporation of New York)

It is the hope of the Nebraska Literacy Team that districts, buildings, literacy teams, and teachers will employ the suggestions made in the Plan and will employ the use of the tools provided to bring about the best possible literacy instruction experience for their learners. The Plan is designed to be flexible and adaptable to fit the initiatives and goals of all Nebraska districts, and supports the philosophy of local educational control, while providing ideas for procedures and practices that have been proven to be effective.

The Nebraska Literacy Model

The Nebraska Literacy Model is comprised of the seven components of an effective literacy program, rooted in a foundation of evidence-based programs and practices. The seven components begin with Informed and Effective Leadership and proceed clockwise around the core. Encircling the core and touching all components are the steps of the Continuous Improvement Process model that shape and define the steps of the literacy improvement process. More information on the Continuous Improvement Process can be found at: http://www.education.ne.gov/CIPTool-kit/.

Informed and Effective Leadership

Family, Community, and School Collaboration

Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)

Implementing the Plan

Creating the Profile

Evidence-Based Practices and Programs

Setting the Goals

Planning to Improve

Multi-Tiered System of Support

Ongoing, Focused Professional Development

High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments

Universal Instructional Design

The Nebraska Literacy Model

Informed and Effective Leadership

Schools with high-performing literacy programs are characterized by the presence of effective school literacy leadership. This leadership begins at the district level, and should include a district-wide literacy team comprised of various stakeholders, including, but not limited to, administrators, teachers, literacy/instructional coaches, parents, community members, and other personnel key to creating an overall plan to guide literacy instruction for the district. Depending upon the size of the district, sub-teams may be established to manage planning and guidance at the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels. Each building may also wish to have a literacy leadership team to guide their building, and to help educators and family members work together to implement the district and building literacy goals. These teams may have the following tasks:

- Developing and communicating a shared vision of literacy
- Analyzing and reflecting on disaggregated data
- Making structural and instructional decisions to support student learning
- Communicating ongoing formative assessment as the key to informed instruction
- Encouraging teachers to continually stay abreast of current reading research
- Providing relevant professional development based on student needs
- Fostering the development of building leaders to support the literacy effort

Creating the Profile

The goal of literacy leadership is to create and maintain an infrastructure that will support best practices in literacy instruction and show ongoing evidence of student learning. To create this infrastructure, district and building leaders develop a profile based on the analysis of formative and summative assessment data and school demographics. Survey all stakeholders, parents, students, staff, and community regarding ideas and suggestions. The resulting data will identify needs, create goals, and develop strategies for meeting needs and achieving literacy goals. Building administrators should also obtain information from classroom observations to assess the effectiveness of current instructional methods, including:

- Effective instructional strategies
- The types and context of instruction occurring (groupings, large-group, individual instruction, conferencing, etc)
- Evidence that the students have been made aware of their learning targets

Literacy teams may also wish to survey the educators involved in instruction regularly (twice per year) utilizing a literacy capacity survey to gauge the changing attitudes and capacities as new initiatives are implemented and staff development is taking place. This will ensure that teachers are feeling comfortable implementing the programs outlined by the district, and will gauge where additional staff development and support might be needed. The Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment designed by the Nebraska Literacy Team can be found in Appendix 4 of this document. It is important, however, that this instrument not be used as a method of evaluating teacher performance, but rather to gauge the effectiveness of the implementation of the Plan, staff development, and ultimately the leadership throughout the building and district. One effective way to assure this type of application is to

> *You cannot help someone get up a hill without getting closer to the top yourself.*
> -General H. Norman Schwarzkopf

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allow teachers to respond anonymously, and with open-ended questions and space for commentary on closed or rated questions, thus removing the fear of evaluative measures being applied to their answers, and enabling them the freedom to respond honestly and thoughtfully (Jackson and Trochim).

Setting the Goals

A key factor to a school's success is the building leadership. The principal, as the school's instructional leader, in concert with input and support from building teachers and staff members, creates the vision and tone for the school, its goals, and mission. According to Reading Next, "Without a principal's clear commitment and enthusiasm, a curricular and instructional reform has no more chance of succeeding than any other school wide reform". (Biancarosa and Snow)

As an instructional leader who believes in the ability of every reader and writer, the principal:

- Understands how students learn to read, write and share knowledge with others
- Participates in professional development offered to the staff
- Is visible in the classrooms, providing feedback to teachers regarding literacy practices
- Supports teachers by providing appropriate resources

The building principal and literacy teams set goals for literacy learning based on student needs. Through the alignment of content standards and a balanced system of assessments, they determine what students learn, and when students reach those goals.

Planning to Improve

Building-level literacy teams develop a plan for literacy improvement by establishing and articulating high expectations for teachers and students, including the use of evidence-based programs, research-based strategies and effective practices across all content areas. They assure the allocation of sufficient resources (personnel, time, materials, and money) and high-quality, job-embedded professional development for highly qualified teacher leaders and instructors who monitor student progress through assessment.

The research is clear that it is the leadership of the classroom teacher that makes the difference in students' reading performance. Clearly, the most powerful feature of schools, in terms of developing children as readers and writers, is the quality of classroom instruction. Effective schools are simply schools in which there are more classrooms where high-quality reading and writing instruction is regularly available. No school with mediocre classroom instruction ever became effective by just adding a high-quality remedial or resource room, program, an after-school or summer school program, or by purchasing a new reading series. (Allington and Cunningham)

A recent and extensive review of the research literature on professional development indicates that to be successful and positively impact student learning, professional development must be:

- Job-imbedded, ongoing, coherent, and intense 30-
- 100 hours of time over 6 months to a year
- Connected to teachers' classroom practice, that is, focused on content and effective teaching
- Aligned with school improvement goals
- Designed to foster staff collaboration
- Inclusive of significant amounts of structured and sustained follow–up and support after the main professional development activities (Routman and Figueroa)

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Implementing the Plan

Literacy teams will then implement the Plan by making appropriate allocations of sufficient resources and sustained professional development to build highly qualified teachers and monitor student progress through frequent assessment. District leadership should have processes in place to help the district literacy team monitor overall progress, determining the effectiveness of the district literacy plan, and to target the areas of low-performance in order to plan for professional development (CIP).

Building-level literacy teams can support literacy educators throughout the school year to help ensure fidelity of implementation. They should also work to ensure that the process of identifying students who are not progressing is firmly in place, provide support and enrichments for students achieving beyond expectations, and assure that educators are working with the building's intervention team to assure that those students are being given additional support and monitoring (see the section on multi-tiered system of suport).

The implementation should include:

- A thorough understanding of the district literacy plan and its components for all instructional staff members, including paraprofessionals
- Targeted training for teachers whose primary designation may not be language arts instruction to ensure implementation of literacy goals across all curricular areas
- A clear scope and sequence for instruction
- Regular administration of formative assessments and benchmarking instruments to check progress
- Clear student benchmarks to determine progress, and to activate additional interventions or enrichments as needed
- Scientifically-research-based interventions for students who are failing or are at risk for failure
- Adequate time and resources for staff planning and data analysis
- Flexibility for adjusting the Plan according to student and staff needs

The following questions could be used to ensure informed and effective leadership is in place:

1. Are the district's goals clearly articulated and understood by all staff members?
2. Have literacy teams achieved a commitment by all groups of stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, families, community members, etc.) to the goals of the literacy plan?
3. Are literacy teams meeting regularly to ensure consistent implementation?
4. Are all pieces of the district literacy plan being implemented?
5. Are those who have a role in literacy instruction implementing their portion of the plan with fidelity?
6. Is literacy data being collected in a timely manner?
7. Is the data being analyzed and discussed regularly to identify struggling students?
8. Are interventions being monitored for fidelity of implementation, and to gauge student improvement?
9. Is professional development being planned and implemented to support the district literacy plan and the building's literacy needs?
10. How are new-to-the-program teachers being supported?

An instructional leader working with staff members

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Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)

Many factors impact literacy (leadership, collaboration, and professional development to name just a few), but without a quality, evidenced-based curriculum aligned to clearly articulated learning goals, literacy instruction can become haphazard and ineffective. Communication and articulation must occur among the professionals who determine, support, and deliver the curriculum regarding expectations and norms. This communication ensures that there is uniformity of coverage, and that the curriculum is appropriately spiraled and delivered, beginning with the preschool experiences through high school graduation. A standards-aligned curriculum is an intentional, thoughtful progression of content based upon, but certainly not limited to, evidence-based standards and indicators. These guideposts indicate what students should know and be able to do upon mastery of the content. Standards and indicators should also reflect rigorous expectations for all students both horizontally and vertically across buildings and throughout districts. It is the responsibility of the district to see that every student is provided a quality education, regardless of school or life circumstances.

While this curricular alignment should guide teachers in content, it should not eliminate or discourage teachers from delivering their content creatively and with the specific needs of their students always driving the instruction. Students in need of additional instruction or remediation should be referred to a building problem-solving team (often known as a Student Assistance Team, Child Study Team, or Response to Intervention Team). Just as teachers must attend to students who need additional instruction or supports, the teachers must also attend to the needs of the learners whose knowledge and skills surpass the targets for their grade level or course. To deny these learners the opportunity to build skills and knowledge beyond their current levels of achievement would be as negligent as failing to provide support to struggling students.

It is also critical that a district distinguish between curriculum and programs of instruction. Curriculum is the content, skills, and essential understandings that students should have mastered by the time they leave a grade level or course of instruction. Curriculum should dictate which programs of instruction are chosen, while programs of instruction should never dictate curricular decisions. While many excellent literacy programs exist, there is no one "right" program that will meet the needs of all learners. Therefore, it is incumbent on districts to assure that the curriculum is firmly set in place, prior to making decisions regarding the selection of programs and materials. Dr. Robert Marzano noted at the CUE (Computer Using Educators) Conference, "There are no silver bullets, only silver BBs." (Wolpert-Gawron)

> *It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations—something that will help them make sense of their own lives and encourage them to reach out toward people whose lives are quite different from their own.*
>
> -Katherine Patterson

Creating the Profile

Districts may begin by examining the curriculum at all grade levels (PreK-12) to see if there is a formal curriculum that provides instructions for each literacy area (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Gaps should be noted and addressed. Curriculum should be reviewed, revisited, and updated on a regular schedule to assure a progression of skill development.

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Curriculum should also be examined for alignment with the Nebraska State Standards or the standards set forth by their local board of education. Preschool curriculum may be aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines to ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten. Districts need to evelop a Pre K-12 scope and sequence to provide continuity and assurance of alignment. This will provide a clear guide of when key concepts and skills are introduced, and when mastery of those skills is expected.

The next step for districts is to examine how the curriculum is being taught. Multiple literacy standards (as outlined by the Nebraska State Standards) should be woven into the curriculum as a method of delivery and to help create multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning. 21st century skills should also be implemented and considered during instruction. Districts may wish to delineate who is responsible for designated pieces of the curriculum, especially at the middle and high school levels, to assure that students have the opportunity to learn all essential skills. Course descriptions and requirements play a critical role in assuring that students are college and career ready by the end of high school, and should be considered as a part of this process.

Setting the Goals

PreK-12 curriculum alignment should begin with a determination of the literacy goals and mission of the district. Current board policies should be examined to be sure they are consistent with current data, hold all students to a rigorous standard, and are supported by the most recent educational research on best practices and materials. It is critical that all instructional personnel who are involved in the delivery of curriculum are represented and involved in the goal-setting phase. This group will create goals that are developmentally appropriate, rigorous, and best meet the needs of all students.
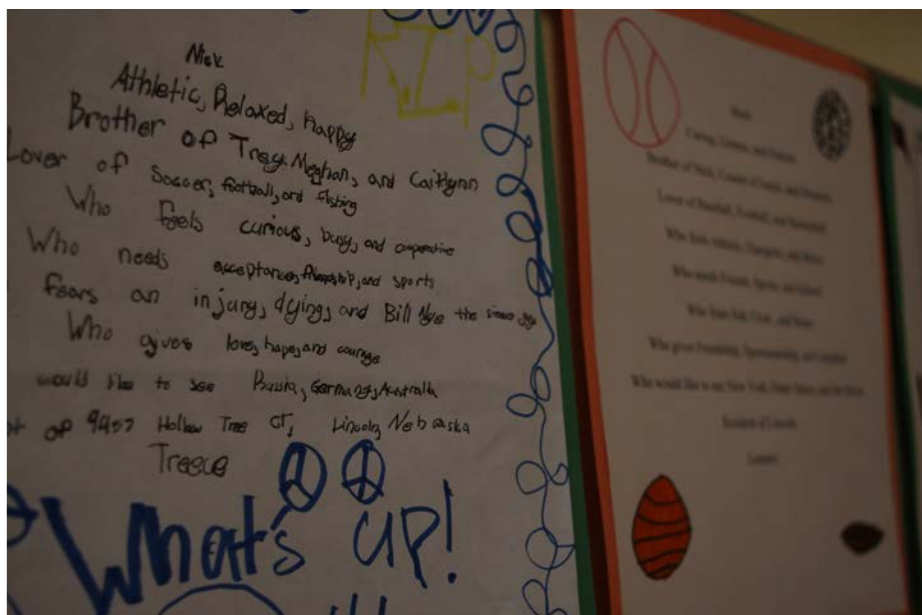
Samples of bio-poems written by students are displayed in the hallways of their elementary school

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The outcome of these goals will be measured throughout the year by a high-quality balanced system of assessments. Data should be utilized to inform instruction and to provide evidence that the curriculum is meeting the needs of the various learners. Goals and outcome measures to determine their effectiveness should be determined. Instruction should not focus solely on the assessments or their content, but a strong alignment must exist.

A survey of stakeholders to obtain information regarding their current practices and policies is advisable. This provides an opportunity for input prior to the goal-setting phase. (Sample surveys can be found in Appendix 3 of this document.)

Planning to Improve

The curriculum should be based on developmentally appropriate and evidence-based practices. A thorough examination of the existing curriculum is essential prior to curriculum planning. Any gaps in the curriculum should be identified and addressed in a way that complements and strengthens the current curriculum. During this phase, literacy teams should also be examining

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the scope of their programming to assure that the essential components of foundational literacy instruction are thoroughly covered. According to the United States Department of Education, effective literacy instruction is defined as:

Developmentally appropriate, explicit, evidence-based, and systematic instruction that provides students with-

(i) *Early development and grade-level mastery of (A) oral language skills, both listening and speaking, (B) phonological awareness, using a wide vocabulary, (C) conventional forms of grammar, and (D) academic language;*

(ii) *The ability to read regularly spelled words and high-frequency irregularly spelled words with automaticity and to decode regularly spelled unfamiliar words accurately, using phonemic awareness, print awareness, alphabet knowledge, and knowledge of English spelling patterns;*

(iii) *The ability to read texts accurately, fluently, and with comprehension, relying on knowledge of the vocabulary in those texts and of the background information that the students possess;*

(iv) *The ability to read with a purpose and the capacity to differentiate purposes and to select and apply comprehension strategies appropriate to achieving the purpose;*

(v) *An understanding of, and ability to adapt to, the varying demands of different genres, formats, and types of texts across the core content areas in order to comprehend texts of appropriate levels of complexity and content, including texts necessary for mastery of grade-level standards;*

(vi) *The ability to effectively access, critically evaluate, and appropriately synthesize information from a variety of sources and formats;*

(vii) *The development and maintenance of a motivation to read and write, as reflected in habits of reading and writing regularly and of discussing one's reading and writing with others; and*

(viii) *The ability to write clearly, accurately, and quickly so as to communicate ideas and deepen comprehension in ways that fit purpose, audience, occasion, discipline, and format; adhere to conventions of spelling and punctuation; and benefit from revision so as to improve clarity, coherence, logical development, and the precise use of language.*

With respect to programs serving children birth through age five, the term "effective literacy instruction," means supporting young children's early language and literacy development through developmentally appropriate, explicit, intentional, and systematic instruction, in language- and literacy-rich environments, that provides children with foundational skills and dispositions for literacy, such as-

(i) *Rich vocabulary development;*

(ii) *Expressive language skills;*

(iii) *Receptive language skills;*

(iv) *Comprehension;*

(v) *Phonological awareness;*

(vi) *Print awareness;*

(vii) *Alphabet knowledge;*

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    (viii) Book knowledge;

    (ix) Emergent writing skills;

    (x)   Positive dispositions toward language and literacy-related activities; and

    (xi) Other skills that correlate with later literacy achievement.

        (United States Department of Education)

Once the content alignment has occurred, the district team will likely need to create a new scope and sequence for their curriculum in order to ensure uniform implementation district-wide. The new scope and sequence should ensure an appropriate breadth and depth of curriculum. Special consideration should be given to critical literacy transitional periods including:

- Preschool to kindergarten;
- Kindergarten to first grade;
- *Learning to read* to reading to *learn*;
- Elementary to middle grades; and
- Middle grades to high school.

There should also be regular discussions occurring surrounding sound instructional practices that follow Universal Instructional Design, and that are evidence-based, to ensure that the delivery of the content is effective.

Implementing the Plan

Once the district and literacy team have undertaken the district alignment process building leaders should support the teachers, while monitoring for the fidelity of implementation and the inclusion of learning targets. Ineffective practices and materials should no longer be utilized. It is important for teachers and administrators to distinguish amongst and monitor the relationship between what Fenwick English calls the "overt or written curriculum" (what is defined on paper as the curriculum to be taught), the "taught curriculum" (what is actually implemented/taught—sometimes what has been taught prior, or what the teacher feels most comfortable teaching), "tested curriculum" (the limited content that is assessed by norm- and criterion-referenced tests), and the "hidden curriculum" (which includes attitudes about what can be learned and who can learn it), as the implications of these four identified areas are an important part of implementing the curriculum and objectives. (The Benefits of Curriculum Alignment) Therefore, effective monitoring of the process and its implementation will help to ensure fidelity to the curriculum and objectives.

The following questions could be used to ensure a standards-aligned curriculum PreK-12 is in place:

   1. Are the district goals for student achievement rigorous and mindful of student potential?

   2. Is the district/building curriculum based upon standards and best practices, instead of a series, program of instruction, or course descriptions?

   3. Has the scope and sequence been structured to assure appropriate pace and delivery of literacy instruction?

   4. Are curriculum and instructional practices formally aligned and discussed?

   5. Are lesson plans designed with the standards and the district curriculum in mind?

   6. Are students aware of their learning targets and participating in assessing their own progress?

   7. What data demonstrates that existing programs/practices/resources are effective?

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Ongoing, Focused Professional Development

Teacher quality is a key factor influencing student academic achievement. In order to have quality literacy instruction, the professionals delivering that literacy instruction must be provided with quality, job-embedded professional development on a consistent basis. Professional development is necessary to help all teachers, administrators, support staff and substitutes become highly qualified. Highly qualified teachers stay informed of the latest research and developments to increase their effectiveness, and build on the pre-service educational foundation. In-service opportunities should be offered at the school, district, regional and state levels. Information and resources provided through professional development help schools and districts incorporate high quality teaching practices and boost student academic achievement.

Creating the Profile

In order to plan for quality staff development, the literacy team must first ascertain the level of expertise of current staff and student literacy needs. The Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment included in Appendix 4 of this document allows the literacy team to determine current level of practice. This assessment also should drive future staff development opportunities by serving as a needs assessment.

Setting the Goals

Once the district's profile has been determined, the literacy team may decide upon district or building-level appropriate goals. Some considerations when planning for effective literacy staff development are:

- A focus on Universal Instructional Design, including response to the needs of diverse learners
- Maintenance of high expectations for all
- Development of individual teacher strengths and capacity for training and mentoring others
- Flexibility in dealing with change initiatives and processes
- Current research implementation into the day-to-day teaching practices
- Involvement of personnel in decision-making with regards to choices and selections for staff development opportunities
- Protection of weekly/monthly time for teachers to collaboratively plan and engage in professional development sessions as well as time for individual work and reflection
- The incorporation of data-informed decisions in creating and evaluating professional development
- The creation of a positive school culture that meets the needs of all learners and intentionally invites family and community partnerships

The single greatest effect on student achievement is not race, it is not poverty—it is the effectiveness of the teacher—what that teacher knows and can do.
—Harry K. Wong

Planning to Improve

Planning to improve instructional practices will be a continuous process as change takes time. Included in this plan will be ongoing job-embedded professional development delivered onsite and supported by instructional coaches or teacher-mentors. Additional resources could also be used, which include; distance learning, video segments, webinars, internet sites, and resources from leading practitioners. Collaborative planning time for teachers is necessary as well as time for reflection and continuous feedback as they continue to embed current research into their

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daily practices. The professional development plan should utilize resources to insure fidelity of implementation and collection of data in a timely manner to inform future direction.

Implementing the Plan

Information collected from formal and/or informal daily teaching will help inform the direction and progress of the plan. All stakeholders recognize progress and see the results of their actions, which will allow them to monitor and adjust the plan based on individual needs. This will increase awareness and understanding of effective practices and provide encouragement and support for staff and impact student achievement.

Effecting change is a complex process. It often takes more time than anticipated. It requires that those being asked to implement the change have a clear understanding of the process and vision of the plan and are allowed to provide input as stakeholders.

The following questions could be used to ensure ongoing, focused professional development is in place:

1. *How critical is staff collegiality in professional development?*
2. *What procedures are in place to ensure time for ongoing, job-embedded staff development?*
3. *What influence can an individual teacher have on student achievement?*
4. *Are current staff-development opportunities in line with district and building literacy goals?*
5. *Are staff members encouraged to collaborate and engage in collegial conversations surounding staff development?*
6. *Are all content area teachers included in staff development opportunities?*

A principal leads her staff through a discussion regarding rigor, relevance, and relationships in education

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Universal Instructional Design

Just as important as the *who* and *what* of literacy instruction is the *how*. The strongest curriculum can be implemented by quality teachers and be supported by caring, concerned, and involved leaders; however, to be effective, current evidence-based strategies must be employed to ensure that all students have equal access to the curriculum and enhanced opportunities to learn. Universal Instructional Design is the creation of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design. (The Center for Universal Design) Universal Instructional Design takes into consideration students with varying abilities, ethnicities, cultures, and languages. However, its principles are applicable for all learners. (Northeastern University)

Universal Instructional Design includes:

- Examination of district practices, beliefs, and skills with regard to how students learn best
- Implementation of effective literacy learning processes for all students by delineating essential course components
- Incorporation of multiple research-based literacy practices and tools across all curricular areas
- Creation of a respectful, accessible, and accommodating learning environment
- Support of learning through many means, including the use of technology

Universal Instructional Design supports the findings by the *Reading Next Report* with regards to the the fifteen elements of effective adolescent literacy programs as mentioned in the introduction of this document.

Creating the Profile

To assess current practices, beliefs and skills, literacy teams may wish to review the results of the Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment to answer the following questions:

- What are the belief statements of the district regarding literacy instruction and learning?
- What are our current district demographics, and how do those data impact our literacy instruction?
- What instructional factors – positive and negative – may contribute to literacy performance at all levels?
- What literacy professional development is currently in place at the district, program, and school levels?
- What literacy curriculum is currently in place that echoes across the content areas?
- Does the literacy instruction in the district align with the Nebraska State Standards?
- How can we better create and maintain intentionally inviting literacy environments that incorporate Universal Instructional Design?

> *"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."*
>
> -Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

From this information, literacy teams can formulate a better picture of the needs of the district or school by evaluating current practices and looking at areas for improvement. This evaluation should include a review of facilities as well as programs to ensure accessibility for all learners.

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Setting the Goals

Once the practices, beliefs, and skills have been identified, the literacy teams can begin setting goals. They may wish to utilize the Goal Setting Template found in Appendix 5 of this document. Utilizing this document, they can:

- Prioritize critical literacy needs ~~and determine how to~~ best meet ~~the needs~~ of all learners
- Examine the challenges that exist that have prevented students from learning successfully
- Set goals for the literacy priority areas that are supported by evidence-based practices
- Explore strategies and options for achieving the goals
- Identify persons responsible for carrying out certain portions of the plan
- Determine any needs that must be met to implement the plan
- Set dates to evaluate plan effectiveness and level of implementation

Literacy teams in concert with staff members should identify which practices they wish to work on, and coordinate those practices and skills with their professional development plan. They may also wish to provide staff members with the opportunity to observe other effective staff within their building or district.

Planning to Improve

With clear goals for improvement in place, literacy teams should begin to work with educators to examine the ways Universal Instructional Design can be applied to the classroom: multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression for all students. (The Ivy Access Initiative) These three areas target the way instruction is delivered and measured.
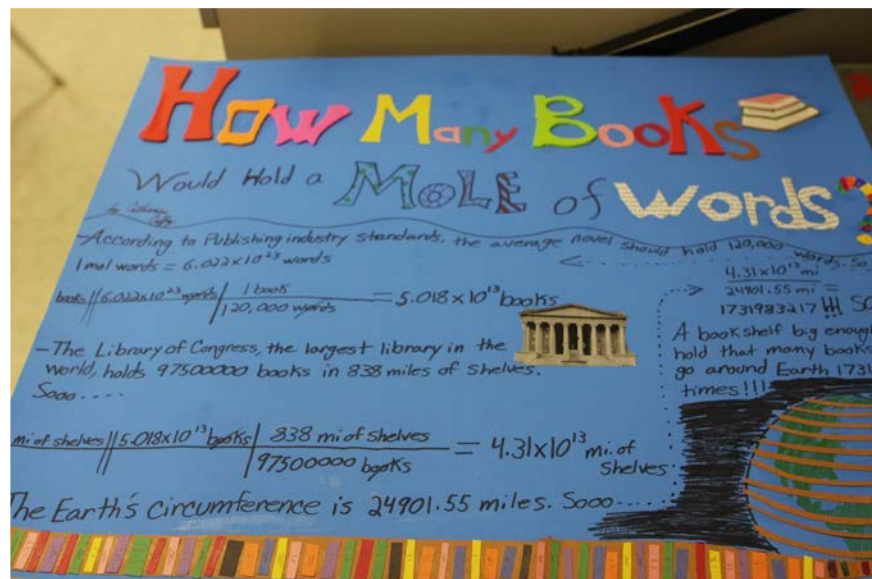
Example of writing-across-the-curriculum: a poster from a high school chemistry student, displaying both text and graphical representations of information

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Multiple means of representation - addresses how teachers present information to students. Switching between formats such as overhead transparencies, white/blackboard, lecture or note outlines, study guides, presentation software, models, etc. can help students receive information in multiple modalities while reinforcing the information in different ways. Practices such as providing graphic organizers (in some cases, partially completed), summarizing main points on an outline, or providing a partially-completed outline can help students structure the recording of information in more appropriate ways so that it is learned correctly and completely.

Multiple means of engagement - provide a variety of contexts in which students can learn the content both from the teacher as well as in cooperation with peers. Examples of this may include instruction that takes place in flexible large and small groups, extended time for learning and transfer, scaffolding for students learning metacognitive strategies (e.g. monitoring for comprehension, problem-solving, connecting seemingly unrelated ideas) including oral and visual prompts, appropriate use of technology, varied homework assignments, and active use of teaching strategies based upon brain research. Frequent opportunity for application to real-world problems has also been shown to heighten

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student engagement. Additionally, it is critically important for students to be aware of their learning targets to provide the impetus for engagement and a clear picture of academic success. Feedback should be ongoing, and presented in a supportive format. The Nebraska Language Arts Standards have been converted to a student-friendly format (available on the Nebraska Department of Education [website]), and are another way to communicate learning targets to students, and to help them to become more engaged in their learning.

Multiple means of expression - allow students to demonstrate their understanding of content and to assure that they are meeting the objectives set forth for them by their teacher. These curriculum-based formative assessments should be varied in format, presentation, response types, and should take into account both the breadth and depth of content. *Assessment as a part of learning* gives students and teachers a chance to check for understanding and to build self-efficacy in students who may otherwise struggle when being assessed, or who may not be learning the content as expected. Offering students choices of assignments and assessments whenever possible also offers flexibility for learners, and gives students an opportunity to take control of their learning. This also can reduce test anxiety in students when it comes time for the *assessment of learning*.

Assessment expert Rick Stiggins noted, *'…confidence is the key to student success in all learning situations."* Stiggins places the onus on schools to help students regain and/or maintain that confidence. "The problem is that, as we enter the twenty-first century, schools will be held accountable for increasing the proportion of their students who meet state standards. That means schools that used to accept students giving up must now keep them from losing confidence. They must find those students who already have developed a sense of futility in their schooling and reverse their academic self-concepts." (Stiggins)

Implementing the Plan

Once teachers have been armed with a standards-aligned curriculum, and a toolkit of evidence-based strategies, they are ready to implement the principles of Universal Instructional Design in their classrooms. Practices should include asic literacy instruction that enhances the primary skills underpinning literacy including:

- Emerging and early reading skills and strategies, including knowledge of print and phonological awareness
    - Fluent and accurate word identification in context
    - Reading comprehension skills
    - Vocabulary development
    - Receptive and expressive communication skills (including writing, speaking, and listening)
- The presence of differentiated literacy instruction and materials to meet individual students' needs
    - The incorporation of technology instruction across content areas
    - Content-specific literacy instruction to support all curricular areas
    - Student-centered, and student-involved assessment
    - Appropriate use of technology to aid and enhance student learning

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The following questions could be used to ensure the implementation of Universal Instructional Design across all content areas:

1. *Do all students have equal opportunity to learn given current curriculum requirements?*

2. *Which instructional strategies are most effective for each student?*

3. *How can teachers manage classrooms that promote positive student/teacher relationships?*

4. *How does an understanding of motivation and engagement theories help students and teachers overcome learning obstacles?*

5. *What specific learning strategies can enhance learned intelligence and background knowledge?*

6. *What practices should be applied to our classrooms to ensure accessibility of content for all students?*

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High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments

Highly functional schools utilize a comprehensive assessment system to measure student performance and evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction. The results are then applied to the school improvement process to help schools improve the quality of the services they deliver.

A high-quality, balanced system of assessments includes an analysis of data (national, state, local formative and summative data) and yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to school district leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders. This information is used to design and adjust instructional strategies and practices and determine interventions to improve and enhance student performance.

Creating the Profile

In order to gauge the success of any program, it must be assessed utilizing instruments designed to yield reliable, consistent, and meaningful information. This is especially true of literacy programs where timely, comprehensive and meaningful assessments must be balanced with plentiful instruction and intervention opportunities. Therefore, districts must be vigilant in creating a balanced assessment system utilizing high-quality measures that have:

- Clear, focused, and appropriate learning targets
- Clearly defined purposes
- Sound technical quality

Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.

-Benjamin Franklin

The various types of assessment within a balanced assessment system may include:

- Screening assessments to measure a student's current achievement proficiency based on grade-level performance standards
- Diagnostic assessments to define a student's strengths and weaknesses with critical skills.
- Formative assessments to monitor performance to ensure that students continue to make adequate progress with critical skills, provide feedback to students and to inform instruction.
- Summative (target) assessments to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and indicate level of achievement when compared to grade-level standards, and
- Norm-referenced assessments to provide student and district results in comparison to nationally-normed groups

Literacy teams may wish to use a chart like the one pictured below to create a better picture of the assessments being given in-district, and to see where improvements should be made.

Level	Screening	Diagnostic Assessements	Formative Assessments	Target Assessments	Norm-Referenced
PreK					
K-2					
3-5					
Middle					
High					

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Setting the Goals

Highly functioning schools implement a collaborative process for analysis of building/grade level/student assessment results through the formation of data teams. Data teams are comprised of key communicators from all areas of the district and/or school. This team will:

- Establish goals/purposes for assessment
- Establish processes to utilize assessment data to identify information about student progress and literacy program effectiveness (including the effectiveness of staff development)
- Communicate assessment results
- Develop recommendations for instructional improvement

These data teams will work to not only assure that district assessment systems are balanced and sound, but that the results are being communicated in a timely manner, and are useful to literacy teams to help inform instruction and enhance student achievement.

Planning to Improve

Highly functional schools develop a comprehensive assessment plan that is used by all stakeholders to inform instruction thus maximizing student achievement. This plan includes:

- Assessment goals for the district, school, classroom, and/or student
- A clearly defined assessment calendar that identifies specific assessments/grade levels, time line for administration, and responsibilities for gathering resources and data collection
- Establishment of collaborative teams to monitor and inform curriculum and instruction to sustain a continuous process of improvement
- A determination of who is responsible for implementation of various parts of the plan

Implementing the Plan

Highly functional schools implement an assessment plan that provides a continuous cycle for maximizing student achievement.
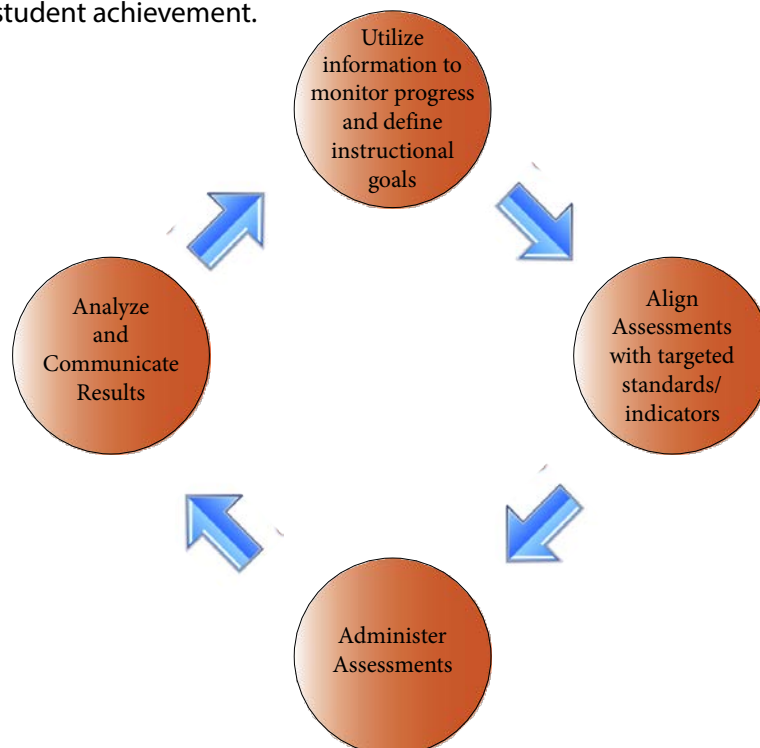
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The following questions could be used to ensure a High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments is in place:

1. Is there an established process to effectively analyze data?

2. Do data-driven decisions help guide literacy instruction decisions?

3. Has the district established a balanced system of assessments that measure the learning of all students?

4. Has the district established a calendar outlining the frequency with which instruments should be administered?

5. Has the district or buildings defined clear student benchmarks?

6. Do teachers provide students with timely, descriptive feedback on their learning?

7. Is data from the assessment system communicated to all stakeholders in a timely manner?

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Multi-Tiered System of Support

A multi-tiered system is designed to provide effective instruction for all students using a comprehensive and preventive problem-solving approach. It employs a tiered method of instructional delivery, in which the core curriculum includes instruction in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency with text, vocabulary, and comprehension, which addresses and meets the needs of most students. This practice integrates assessment and intervention within a school-wide, multi-level prevention and intervention system to maximize student achievement in the area of literacy. This system of support includes the delivery of high quality instruction to students and the use of reliable and valid data to make decisions regarding effective instruction. (Nebraska Department of Education)

A complete multi-tiered system of support includes: an evidence-based core curriculum that addresses and meets the needs of at least 80% of students, support for students needing additional instruction and individualized services for students who continue to demonstrate more intensive needs.

Creating the Profile

A multi-tiered system of supports measures the performance of all students. Simultaneously, the students should be screened regularly, using screening instruments that have been proven to be effective in predicting reading success, and in diagnosing students to determine areas of deficiency. These steps, however, must be used in tandem with professional analysis and discussion of the outcomes of the assessments to ascertain which students are in need of additional support. This can be done at the building or grade level, and allows teachers to collaborate and engage in discussions including the following considerations:

- Are at least 80% of the students performing at grade level in the current core curriculum?
- What does the data tell us about our strengths and challenges as it relates to student achievement in literacy?
- Which students are underachieving and what are the needs of those students?
- Are there specific deficiency patterns that can be traced to a lack of instruction or method of instruction that is ineffective, or is there a need for specific intervention?

Through this ongoing collection and analysis of achievement data for all students, individual children can be targeted for participation in the next tier of the support system, and decisions can be made about moving students between tiers to levels of more or less-intensive strategies and interventions.

Setting Goals

When setting goals for the multi-tiered system of support and the students served by that system, teachers and literacy teams should determine and prioritize the areas of need, including prioritizing support for chronically underachieving students, and students at-risk for academic failure. The population of students in the United States and Nebraska is becoming more and more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and socio-economic status resulting in a wide variance of background knowledge and skills these students bring to school. Specific goals that are outlined as district and building priorities must first be considered in order to establish foundational literacy skills that might be missing from a student's repertoire. Beyond that, the data from the screening

> *Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is that small voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'*
> -Mary Anne Radmacher

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instruments and other assessments should be carefully analyzed to set priorities for interventions, and to determine the most effective delivery of those interventions. Core instruction and interventions delivered with fidelity have been shown to have the greatest impact.

Planning to Improve

Research of effective practices and programs is important to ensure the systems in place work together and provide students the support they need along a continuum of services, including a high-quality, balanced system of assessments. Within a multi-tiered system, reliable, valid, and objective data are used for the purposes of determining student skill levels, matching instruction and intervention to students' skill needs, and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and interventions. An example of one type of multi-tiered system of support is available on the NDE website at http://www.education.ne.gov/RTI/rtiframework.html.

When used effectively, a multi-tiered system of support can inform the special education identification process. Federal special education law requires that any interventions utilized in a multi-tiered system of support that serves as part of an identification process for special education, must utilize scientifically-research-based interventions. (United States Department of Education) However, verifying students as eligible for special education is only a small part of a multi-tiered system and should not be undertaken unless successful implementation of a continuum of instructional supports for all students is achieved.

Literacy teams then need to give consideration to the following as they prepare, plan, and implement a multi-tiered system of support:

- Which strategies, techniques and interventions have been shown to meet the needs of learners who struggle with_____(e.g. comprehension, fluency, etc.)
- Are there other learning supports that impact outcomes for underachieving students?
- What other considerations are there for the targeted students? (attendance, health issues, behavior concerns, English-language deficiencies)
- How can the interventions be implemented with fidelity and with the least intrusion on the student's daily routine?
- How long will the interventions be delivered?
- How often will progress be measured?
- How often will the support team meet to discuss student progress?
- Are special allotments of staff or materials needed to implement these supports or interventions?
- What staff development is needed to support this process?
- How are families being included in the process?

Implementing the Plan

The first step in implementation is to assure buy-in and support from all staff. This includes staff development driven by the needs of the staff in order for them to develop an understanding of the overall literacy goals for the district and building, as well as an understanding of the multi-tiered support process and their role therein. It is recommended that districts or buildings establish a team that operates in cooperation with or as a subcommittee of the district literacy team to establish the system, its norms, protocols, and the processes that will guide buildings with the implementation process. This should be done with an understanding that the

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multi-tiered system of support is a part of the general education classroom, and is not a special education initiative or process to be left to special education staff to coordinate. However, a partnership must exist between the general education classroom and the providers of special education services to ensure students receive the best possible education, no matter where and how they are served.

Once the system is in place and operational, building literacy teams need to monitor the process to ensure that all staff are:

- Implementing the curriculum and interventions with fidelity
- Administering and analyzing assessments (screening, formative, summative, progress monitoring) in a timely manner, as outlined by district or building protocol
- Closely following progress monitoring guidelines, procedures, and district decision rules

Further, they need to examine the data to determine the effectiveness of the interventions selected, and determine next steps. When achievement data becomes available, they need to further extrapolate trends and determine if the core curriculum is meeting the needs of the majority of the student population, and if the system of support has been effective in helping students grow and make progress.

The following questions could be used to ensure effective implementation of a multi-tiered system of support is in place:

1. *Do all staff understand, and are they invested in, district and building literacy goals?*
2. *Do staff understand the multi-tiered system of support, it's purpose, goals, and their role therein?*
3. *Is the core curriculum evidence-based?*
4. *Are at least 80% of the student population at grade/performance level in literacy?*
5. *Are all students being screened regularly?*
6. *Have clear student benchmarks been defined to help when considering support services?*
7. *Are scientifically-research-based strategies utilized for students who are not performing at grade-level?*
8. *Does the support team meet regularly to evaluate student data and move students between tiers when needed?*
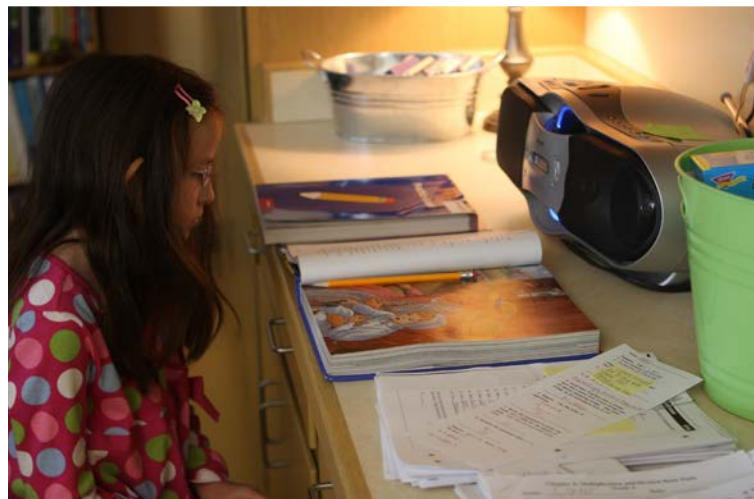
An elementary student reflects on a reading passage while utilizing materials to scaffold her comprehension processing

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Family, Community, and School Collaboration

A child's first teachers—family, friends, and community are the same influences who will continue to be an important part of their educational experience throughout their lives. However, this network of support is different for all students, and the values of their family, community, and culture may have a tremendous impact on school readiness, attitude toward education, and their goals for that education. Regardless, it is the job of the people surrounding that child, including the school team to reach out to create partnerships that will allow the child to grow and learn with as many advantages as possible.

Additionally, the family and community impact upon literacy begins with early reading experiences; how often a child is spoken to, read to, and expected to participate in conversations. The types of interactions and conversations matter as well. These earliest experiences have been shown to have a significant impact upon school success, and the variances between the experiences of children entering school are astounding. Two students sitting side-by-side in a kindergarten classroom on the first day of school may already have an enormous achievement gap between them. According to the study done by Betty Hart and Todd Risley of the University of Kansas, some children enter kindergarten having heard 32,000,000 fewer words than their classmates, simply because of the difference in their early home experiences. Therefore, the stronger the partnership between schools, families, and communities, the more likely children will be to come to school ready to learn. (Hart and Risley)

Creating the Profile

Nebraska Department of Education's (NDE) role is to provide resources and support to aid in the development of a cohesive family and community literacy partnership. The district's role is to actively promote and provide regular, systematic literacy opportunities for collaboration amongst all stakeholders to help students learn and improve skills in reading, writing, and communication. It is the schools' role to provide families and community members with information to empower them as equal partners to support all children's literacy growth. The community and family roles are to support students in their educational experience, to pursue opportunities to further their own learning, and to seek and support opportunities to be actively engaged in the development of literacy initiatives at the school, district, and state levels.

Further, the maintenance of a strong partnership between families, communities, and schools helps to mitigate issues with attendance, health concerns, and allows all parties involved to create strong lines of communication that will benefit the student.

According to the National PTA website, students with involved families tend to have (in comparison with peers):

- Higher grades
- Higher test scores
- Increased motivation
- Lower suspension rates, and
- Higher college matriculation rates
- Lower percentages of drug and alcohol use

  Fewer incidents of violent behavior (National PTA)

> *Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.*
>
> **-Kofi Annan**

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These benefits reflect primarily on the student, but ostensibly could have a ripple effect into their family and community with a myriad of positive effects.

Setting the Goals

There are many goals for developing school, family, and community partnerships to support literacy initiatives.

These goals include but are not limited to:

- Improving school literacy programs
- Providing stakeholders' literacy services and support
- Increasing literacy and leadership skills
- Connecting families with others in the school and in the community, and
- Providing teachers with support

When stakeholders view one another as partners in literacy education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work to create successful partnership programs.

Planning to Improve

What do successful partnership programs look like? Successful partnership programs are designed and implemented to provide effective literacy practices which meet the individual needs of all students.

The Nebraska Literacy Plan provides families and community members with tools and resources to support continued literacy outside of school. Examples may include a professional development focus on:

- Effective literacy tutoring skills
- Effective reading and listening strategies, and
- Effective communication and collaboration among school personnel

Parent and community involvement is an integral component of an effective literacy plan. At a most basic level it should include keeping parents informed regarding academic progress, behavior, etc., giving parents information that will help them discuss school happenings with their children, and to open dialogue between the school and families regarding progress and concerns. (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Whetsel) This can be done through phone calls, letters, newsletters, home visits, and a variety of electronic communications including email and web-based information.

Dr. Everette Reynolds reading to preschoolers at Mount View Elementary in Omaha as a part of the Real Men Read Program (Black Men United)

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However, opportunities abound for more meaningful involvement and collaboration around the school and the literacy process. Parents and community members should have an active role in planning for literacy, and should be

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respected for their area of expertise—the children and community the plan will be serving. They should be surveyed to ascertain interest and expertise in other areas as well, to find meaningful opportunities for involvement.

Implementing the Plan

Literacy teams should take the data from stakeholder surveys to create opportunities for family and community collaboration. They may even wish to establish guidelines for regular home to school communication as well as monitoring to ensure that collaboration is occurring. The NDE Continuous Improvement Toolkit suggests a documentation log as one means of monitoring and tracking communication.

Beyond communication, the intentional invitation of collaboration must occur regularly, and with meaningful opportunities extended. Consideration should be given to family assets (specifically time, talents, and interests) to examine which collaboration opportunities might be the most appropriate.

Once the program has been implemented, the literacy team should examine participation and ensure that the collaboration is achieving the desired effects.

The following questions could be used to ensure family, community, and school collaboration is in place:

1. Have families and community members been involved in the development, communication, and support of the literacy development plan?

2. What types of parental and community involvement make a real difference?

3. How are schools and communities working together to facilitate connections between school and home?

4. Do all families feel equally welcomed, invited and important in our school?

5. In what ways and with what frequency do we put a good message out into the community (particularly in the media) with regard to what is happening in our school?

6. Are families and community members accepting and following up on our invitations to become involved?

7. Are we incorporating ideas received from families and community members to enhance collaboration?

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A middle school student and his parents discussing the digital component of a homework assignment

Appendix

High school students participating in a small-group discussion

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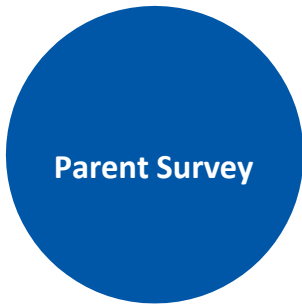
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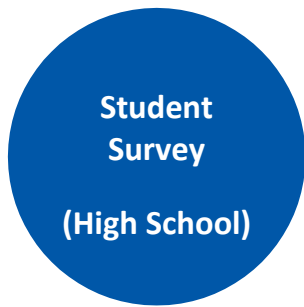
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Parent Survey

Parent Demographic Information	
Gender	_____Male _____Female
Race/Ethnicity	__White (non-Hispanic) Hispanic Asian __African Native American Other Races

Current Level of Practice Scale 1= Does Not Occur at My Child's School 2= Is Beginning to Occur at My Child's School, or Occurs Rarely 3= Is Occurring More Frequently at My Child's School 4= Occurs Frequently at My Child's School, but Not At All Times 5= Frequent or Common Practice at My Child's School	Current Level of Practice in My Child's School	Comments
1. Informed and Effective Leadership		
a. Our school communicates frequently and effectively with parents about the literacy program.		
b. Parent input on literacy instruction is welcomed and encouraged.		
2. Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)		
a. Our school has high academic standards and expectations for all students.		
b. My child is aware of his/her learning targets and has opportunity to participate in assessing his/her own progress.		
3. Universal Instructional Design		
a. My child enjoys going to school.		
b. This school meets the academic needs of my child.		
4. High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments		
a. Assessment information provided is clear and easy to understand.		
b. Teachers provide students with timely, descriptive feedback on their learning.		
c. Teachers provide parents with timely, descriptive feedback on their child's learning.		
d. I am notified when assessments are given.		
5. Family, Community, and School Collaboration		
a. My family feels welcomed, invited, and important.		
b. Meaningful parent involvement opportunities have been extended and accepted.		
c. I see evidence that the community and school work together.		
d. As a parent, I see literacy instruction as a shared responsibility.		

Student Demographic Information	
Gender	_____Male _____Female
Race/Ethnicity	__White (non-Hispanic) Hispanic Asian __African Native American Other Races

Current Level of Practice Scale 1= Does Not Occur at My Child's School 2= Is Beginning to Occur at My Child's School, or Occurs Rarely 3= Is Occurring More Frequently at My Child's School 4= Occurs Frequently at My Child's School, but Not At All Times 5= Frequent or Common Practice at My Child's School	Current Level of Practice in My Child's School	Comments
1. Informed and Effective Leadership		
a. I feel that I am a good reader and writer.		
b. There is an expectation for reading and writing in all my classes.		
c. There is an adequate amount of print and digital material available in my school.		
d. My principal frequently observes my reading and writing classes.		
2. Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)		
a. I am expected to read challenging material in a variety of genre.		
b. I am aware of my learning goals and assess my own progress.		
c. My school offers a variety of literacy courses that are rigorous.		
3. Ongoing, Focused Professional Development		
a. My Teachers use different activities to teach literacy skills.		
b. My teachers are continually learning and using new ways to teach reading and writing.		
4. Universal Instructional Design		
a. I am engaged and motivated to learn literacy skills in all my classes.		
b. All teachers stress the importance of reading and writing		
c. I feel all students in my school have an equal opportunity to learn.		
d. Teachers use a variety of learning strategies for students with low and high abilities.		
5. High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments		
a. My teachers talk to me about my results from class work and different tests.		
b. I feel I am becoming a better reader and writer.		
c. I am aware of the reading and writing standards and		

	expectations for my grade level		
	d. The results of tests I take help me understand what I need to know.		
	e. My teachers us my test scores to determine what to teach next.		
	f. My teachers use my test scores to help me determine my learning goals.		
6.	**Multi-Tiered System of Support**		
	a. My teachers help me with reading and writing when I need assistance.		
	b. I have time during the day to receive reading and writing help from teachers.		
7.	**Family, Community, and School Collaboration**		
	a. My teachers and parents talk together to me about what is happening in reading and writing.		
	b. My teachers care about whether I do well in reading and writing.		
	c. My teacher provides me with positive feedback about my reading and writing.		
	d. My teachers tell my parents when I do well or not with my reading and writing.		
	e. My school provides opportunities for my family to learn about literacy.		

Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment

Current Level of Practice Scale 1= Does Not Occur at Our School 2= Is Beginning to Occur at Our School, or Occurs Rarely 3= Is Occurring More Frequently at Our School 4= Occurs Frequently, but Not At All Times 5= Frequent or Common Practice at Our School	Current Level of Practice in Our Build-ing	Comments
1. Informed and Effective Leadership		
a. Building Literacy Teams take an active role in the design of literacy instruction in our building and have shared their plan, vision, and goals with all staff		
b. Literacy Teams have achieved a commitment by all groups of stakeholders (administrators, teachers, families, community members, etc.) to the goals of the literacy plan		
c. Collegial input on literacy instruction is welcomed and encouraged		
d. Adequate material resources are available for literacy instruction		
e. Adequate personnel are available for literacy instruction		
f. Adequate time is available for literacy instruction		
g. All staff members are regularly evaluated and their participation in literacy development is assessed		
h. Literacy teams are flexible in finding solutions to meet the needs of staff and students		
i. New-to-the-program teachers are supported in the literacy process		
2. Standards-Aligned Curriculum (PreK-12)		
a. Our curriculum is rigorous and holds all students to the same standard		
b. The district/building curriculum is based on standards and best practices, not a series, program of instruction, or course descriptions		
c. The district/building has provided a scope and sequence for literacy instruction		
d. Curriculum and instructional practices are formally aligned and discussed		

Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment

e. Lesson plans are designed with the standards and the district curriculum in mind		
f. Students are aware of their learning targets and participate in assessing their own progress		
g. District data demonstrates that existing programs/ practices/resources are effective		
3. Ongoing, Focused Professional Development		
a. Literacy is a primary focus of professional development in our district		
b. Literacy is a primary focus of professional development in our building		
c. Staff collegiality (sharing of ideas/resources, mentoring, assistance) is evident		
d. Professional development opportunities are consistent with the district/building literacy plan		
e. Professional development is followed up with adequate support		
f. All pertinent staff participate in literacy-focused staff development		
g. Staff members are encouraged to collaborate on planning for staff development opportunities		
h. Content-area-specific teachers (non-literacy) are provided with staff development in appropriate literacy practices for their content area		
4. Universal Instructional Design		
a. Literacy instruction occurs across all subject areas		
b. All teachers see literacy instruction as their responsibility		
c. All students have equal opportunity to learn given curriculum requirements		
d. Evidence-based best practices are utilized in all classrooms		

Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment

e. Motivation and engagement theories are applied in all classrooms in order to help overcome learning obstacles		
f. Specific learning strategies are employed for students with special-needs, including students who are ELL, Gifted, or students with disabilities.		
g. Teachers manage classrooms that promote positive student/teacher relationships		
h. Content-area reading strategies are taught and utilized		
5. High-Quality, Balanced System of Assessments		
a. The district has an established process for effectively analyzing data.		
b. Data-driven decisions help guide literacy instruction decisions		
c. The district has a balanced system of assessments that measure the learning of all students		
d. The district has established a calendar outlining the frequency with which instruments should be administered		
e. Clear student benchmarks have been defined		
f. Teachers provide students with timely, descriptive feedback on their learning		
g. Data from the assessment system is communicated to stake holders in a timely manner		
6. Multi-Tiered System of Support		
a. Our school staff communicates the belief that all children can learn		
b. All staff understand and are invested in the district and building literacy goals		
c. All staff understand the multi-tiered system of support, it's purpose, goals, and their role therein		
d. The core curriculum is evidence-based and shown to be a quality literacy program that meets the needs of at least 80% of the student population		

Literacy Capacity Self-Assessment

e. All students are being screened regularly		
f. Clear student benchmarks trigger consideration for support services		
g. Scientifically-research-based strategies are utilized for students who are not performing at grade-level		
h. The support team meets regularly to evaluate student data and move students between tiers when needed		
7. Family, Community, and School Collaboration		
a. Families and community members have been involved in the development, communication, and support of the literacy development plan		
b. All families feel equally welcomed, invited, and important		
c. All staff work to establish connections with the families of their students		
d. Regular, positive communications are occurring between the school and the families of their students		
e. Regular information is being released to the community regarding literacy activities and opportunities for community involvement in the school		
f. Meaningful parent involvement opportunities have been extended and accepted		
g. The school works to help students with negative home influences find success at school		

Literacy Goal Template

District /School Name: Team Name:

Team Leader(s):

Date:

Literacy Team Members		
Name	District/Building Role(s)	Years in Education

Creating the Profile		
Literacy Area of Concern (e.g. vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, subject area reading problems)	Causes/Contributing Factors: (please describe in-depth; please identify the corresponding component from the literacy plan- e.g. Informed and Effective Leadership)	Data Source(s)

Setting the Goals	Planning to Improve			
Goal	Strategies to Meet the Goal	Person(s) Responsible	Needs (to fulfill goal)	Target Date

Implementing the Plan

Implementation and Impact Check: Indicate: N= Not Evident E= Emerging O= Operational HF= Highly Functional		Date
Change in Area of Concern	What Worked/Didn't Work	Evidence