Equity in Literacy

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021 in the United States, all children should learn to read, and learn to read well enough that they can fully pursue their dreams in adulthood. Yet in no state, let alone in the country as a whole, have we managed to come close to this level of substantial literacy for 100 percent of our children. This should be cause enough for concern in and of itself. State Superintendent, Michael F. Rice, Ph.D. states,

> Of additional and profound concern is that, on *average*, our children of color and our working class and poor children in Michigan and across the country underperform their peers. This is not a reflection of their capability. As educators and policymakers, both in Michigan and across the country, we have a collective responsibility to do better.

It was a belief in the centrality of literacy to children's futures that led the plaintiffs in the *Gary B* literacy case to file suit. Whether you agree with the plaintiffs and the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals panel that there is a legal right to literacy; believe in the moral right to literacy but don't agree that this right is a constitutional one; or feel that while no legal or moral right to literacy exists but that literacy is a matter of economic necessity for children growing up in the 21st century, the conclusion is the same: we as a country have a responsibility to dramatically improve our teaching and encouragement of literacy—of reading and writing—in our children.

As abolitionist, writer, publisher, and orator Frederick Douglass said, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." As it was in the 19th century when Douglass lived, in similar and additional ways it is true now.

As one aspect of the settlement of the *Gary B* lawsuit,[1] Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer asked the Michigan Department of Education to produce a document "to advise school districts throughout the state as to how they might use evidence-based literacy strategies, initiatives, and programs to improve access to literacy and literacy proficiency, with special attention to reducing class, racial, and ethnic disparities." This is that guidance document.

This document is divided into five broad sections:

- Practices for creating engaging literacy learning environments
- The daily involvement of students in literacy
- The scientific or technical aspects of literacy
- The role of family engagement
- Resources to support equity in literacy

1 Detroit literacy lawsuit settlement: Gary B., et al. v. Whitmer, et al., 2020

OVERVIEW

Most efforts to improve literacy begin (and often end) with the scientific or technical aspects of literacy. The presumption is that we need to improve our technical teaching of literacy and, if we do, children's literacy levels will increase substantially. We can certainly improve our teaching of the technical aspects of literacy (reading and writing) and more broadly of language arts: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This guidance document, in part, will outline ways in which to improve the technical aspects of the teaching and learning of literacy.

While gains can be generated by improving the technical aspects of the teaching and learning of literacy, there are major gains to come through engagement of children in literacy and through increased time in reading and writing. This guidance document begins with strategies for engaging children, particularly children of color, including the development and regular use of diverse classroom and school libraries, books written by authors of color, and books whose characters are of color.

If we are to make gains in literacy, we must reflect on who our children are. Thirty-five percent of Michigan's public school children are students of color.[2] Twenty-eight percent of all *new* children's literature in this country had a character of color. [3] While this is an increase in the number of new books written by authors of color, books for children have been relatively homogenous and relative devoid of characters of color for so long that educators need to be very deliberate in their choices of selecting and using books if we are to provide an appropriate level of diversity in student reading options. All children deserve to see themselves in their reading. Not only is there a validation for children seeing themselves in the books they read, there is a utility: children are more likely to connect to the reading and to want to read more—more of the author's works, about specific characters, about specific historic events, about particular people or peoples, about particular themes in their lives. When students have access to books that are representative of themselves, they are validated by feeling seen and heard and are more likely to be engaged in independent reading.[4]

For us to assign books or other readings that suggest, implicitly or explicitly, that children will read just because we tell them to do so, irrespective of their interest in or attachment to the reading selections, is charitably naïve and less charitably a disconnect from our children. It is true that some children will learn to read well because they understand and accept the expectation of their families and their teachers that they will do so. It is also true that some children will *not* learn to read well, because their families or teachers don't have the same expectations for them, because they need to be convinced of the relevance of reading in their lives, or because we as educators have connected inadequately with them.

2 MiSchoolData

3 View statistics regarding Books by and/or About Black, Indigenous and People of Color (All Years) at https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/

4 For more about representation in text and culturally relevant text, see Freeman & Freeman, 2004; and Stringfellow, L. (2019); Style, E. (1988).

Low expectations for our children, particularly for many of our children of color, tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies. If we expect less of children, we get less. If we expect more, we get more. When educators believe that children come to the classroom with the desire and ability to learn, students are more likely to grow and to develop. Beliefs of educators appear in the classroom through curriculum and instruction decisions and intentionality in the provision of different learning opportunities.

The first section of this document addresses the importance of creating engaging literacy learning environments for students. Children must be convinced that reading is important for them. Reading nurtures the imagination, opens doors to new learning, and leads to positive life outcomes for individuals and communities. Reading and writing are important literacy skills. As educators, we need to role model the importance of literacy for our students and provide opportunities for students to develop the necessary literacy skills to be successful. When students grow up with books and magazines and other reading material in their homes and with people reading to them, with them, and around them, students accept without dispute the importance of reading (and, often by extension, of writing as well). When students grow up with little to no connection to reading material, the simple functioning of the day-to-day experiences make students less likely to be convinced that their reading and writing are useful for them. Children in the latter category may master the basics, but they are more likely to need to be convinced, implicitly or explicitly, of the relevance of literacy to their lives if they are to engage sufficiently to get the substantial vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading practice required for learning success.

The second section of this document discusses the importance of the major aspects of literacy – that is, *daily* reading and writing; the minimum amount of reading and writing necessary at different ages; fluency as a lift-off to comprehension; comprehension as a foundation for more comprehension; vocabulary development; background knowledge development; and breadth and depth of reading development.

The third section focuses on the technical aspects of literacy mentioned previously.

The fourth section addresses the role of family engagement to support literacy.

The fifth section focuses on the resources to support equity in literacy.

This document includes resources to provide guidance to school districts about using evidence-based literacy strategies, initiatives, and programs to improve access to literacy and literacy proficiency. These resources will require periodic updating. Additionally, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Library of Michigan will be expanding from time to time the section for resources on diversifying classroom libraries to support student engagement.

SECTION 1: PRACTICES FOR CREATING ENGAGING LITERACY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Students' literacy engagement is enhanced when teachers and schools attend to research-informed practices that support instruction and encourage students to find purpose in reading and writing. Students are more engaged in reading when they are given a choice of what to read. Engagement includes self-regulation and comprehension when reading, as well as participation in discussions with peers and adults about what they read. When students connect to the characters or the topics in the books that they read, the connection influences how students examine their own lives. To offer choices for reading, teachers must deepen their understanding of students as individuals and as readers.

Understanding that readers' engagement is dependent on many factors and strategies that support finding purpose is significant. These strategies include the use of:

1. Diverse Texts: exposing students to meaningful texts that represent a diverse set of backgrounds and circumstances, allowing students to see themselves and others in the literature and learning materials.
2. Culturally Responsive Teaching: creating learning environments where student diversity is valued.
3. Literacy for Purpose: creating learning opportunities so students understand why literacy matters and why reading can be life-changing.

When educators take an interest in students' lives, learn more about students as individuals, and support their individual learning needs through instruction, children are more likely to engage in learning. Students are motivated to read more when they have skills to fluently decode words, recognize words, and comprehend what they read. Children who have struggled with reading often need skill support and practice to help with reading and comprehension of grade-level text. While the skill practice and interventions are necessary for success, this should not limit the student's access to quality, grade-level literacy learning. For this reason, foundational skills, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary are all imperative; these will be discussed in other sections of this document.

Diverse Texts[5]

Literacy instruction that engages all students uses texts, lessons, and assignments that encourage reflection and dialogue about differences, perspectives, and identities. To diversify the narratives of literature, educators and children should be engaged in books and other learning materials written by authors of color. Such authors include, but are not limited to: Langston Hughes, Jacqueline Woodson, Claude Brown, Gwendolyn Brooks, Countee Cullen, James Baldwin, Jason Reynolds, Ralph Ellison, Christopher Paul Curtis, Maya Angelou, Zora Neale Hurston, and Amiri Baraka. Appendix A of this document includes a list of suggested authors by grade level. These include authors of color and authors from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. While this list is in no way comprehensive, it provides an introduction to challenge educators both to read texts from these authors and to make them available in meaningful ways to students. MDE and the Library of Michigan will make this list available on the Equity in Literacy website and it will be expanded over time with input from educators and students.

Literacy instruction that engages all students includes an intentional approach to choosing learning materials and topics. Intentional approaches can include using diverse texts in ways that disrupt negative stereotypes, build awareness of the position and voice of the author, and address the issues of marginalized populations. Curricular materials should be inclusive and avoid stereotypic depictions of race, national origin, gender, or disability; additionally, the materials should reflect the cultural practices and contributions of diverse communities in traditional and evolving ways. Students should see themselves and others reflected in the ideas and representation of the featured authors, characters, and perspectives.

What to Look For

Each practice in this document will include a description and a "What to Look For" section to showcase how the practice might look in a literacy classroom or school setting. Additional resources are available in Appendix B: Resources to Support Equity in Literacy.

What to Look For in Classrooms Where Students Have Access to Diverse Texts that Are Meaningful and Grade-Level Appropriate:

1. Learning materials positively depict people of color and other historically marginalized individuals and avoid stereotypic depictions of race, national origin, gender, and disability.
2. Teachers intentionally select books that allow for activities where students can reflect on and discuss ways in which their own identity and experiences influence how they read the text.
3. Resources are available to increase the number of diverse texts available for instruction and for students to read independently.

5 For more information on using diverse texts, see Bishop, R. (1990); Coomer, M. N., Skelton, S. M., Kyser, T. S., Warren, C., & Thorius, K. A. K. (2017); Style, E. (1988); Vasquez, V. (2017, March).

Culturally Responsive Teaching[6]

Another important element in engaging all students in literacy learning is to value student diversity through culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is a research-based approach in which the teacher makes meaningful connections of learning in the classroom to the individual cultures, languages, and life experiences of the students. This approach helps students engage with learning and see the relevance of reading and writing to their own lives. Culturally responsive teaching requires support and time for educators to explore how their perspectives and life experiences shape decisions that influence student learning. This approach to teaching allows educators and students to question inequality and injustice in the school, district, state, country, and world.

Culturally responsive teaching stems from a belief that all students can learn, a willingness to explore instructional practices that work for diverse classrooms of students, and an understanding of the racial, ethnic, and class barriers that contribute to inadequate access to literacy learning. Teachers who embrace this approach value the diversity of peoples' social identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, and home language. When teachers pair instruction and engagement by leveraging what they know about a child, they are intentionally providing access to literacy learning.

Professional learning to improve cultural responsiveness is critical in making high-quality literacy instruction accessible for all students. Districts are encouraged to provide all staff with current professional learning and to maintain a professional learning calendar that places equity in the forefront. Time and support are necessary for educators to address implicit bias that may influence their teaching practice. MDE has curated a collection of current opportunities for professional learning. This list is available on the Equity in Literacy website.

What to Look For in Classrooms Where Student Diversity is Valued through Culturally Responsive Teaching:

1. Facilitated conversations and perception surveys are used so students can share experiences connected to their identities, to help create a welcoming environment in the classroom.
2. Teachers purposefully connect learning opportunities with students' personal interests and social concerns to deepen engagement.
3. Professional learning, coaching, and self-study materials are offered by the district to directly address implicit bias. Educators can talk about the strategies that they use to address personal bias to minimize its influence on their work in classrooms and schools.

6 For more information on valuing student diversity and equitable approaches to teaching, see Callins, T. (2006); Hammond, Z. (2015); Ladson-Billings, G. (1995); Muhammad, G. (2020); Paris, D. & Alim, H. S. (2014); Paris, D. (2017); Stringfellow, L. (2019).
For more information on ethnicity and student engagement, see Bingham & Okagaki, (2012).
For more information on student engagement perceptions, see Ivey & Johnston, (2013).

Literacy for Purpose[7]

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

– Frederick Douglass

Engaging students in literacy learning means being clear about why reading matters and how it can be life changing. For historically marginalized students, the ability to read has an even greater effect on life outcomes. Reading is an empowerment tool that can affect income, opportunities, and life happiness. Students who can read at grade level by the end of third grade are less likely to drop out of school, be incarcerated, or live in poverty. Creating purpose for students to read and to engage in literacy lessons is critical for students' lifelong outcomes.

Creating purpose for literacy includes engaging students in learning about the world – both history and current events – and showing where real-life experiences of reading, writing, listening and speaking empowered people in the past and in current life. Teachers can create purpose by helping students understand how literacy skills can support more authentic learning during, and beyond, the school day. For students who have been marginalized and, according to data, are more likely to be struggling readers, the real-life purposes of literacy learning can be lost. When students get frustrated and struggle to read, the focus of learning might have to include intervention and skill-building; instruction might be limited to remediation. Struggling students especially need to be included in grade-level literacy learning and be provided with extra time for intervention. The instructional purposes for grade-level learning and intervention should be clear to the teacher, the student, and the student's family.

What to Look For in Classrooms Where a Purpose for Literacy Learning is Created:

1. Teachers and students can talk about how the learning connects to their lives in ways that demonstrate knowledge and understanding. The learning is infused with stories, activities, and tasks that represent the students' interests, personal experiences, and current events that are directly affecting their lives.
2. Teachers facilitate projects where students are using reading, writing, and communicating to solve real issues, such as creating a better classroom culture, improving the playground, or working with the community to solve a neighborhood issue.
3. Students can give examples of how literacy learning has had, and will continue to have, a positive influence on their lives.

7 For more information on Literacy for Purpose, see Hansel & Pondiscio (2016, May); Paris, D. (2017); The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010); Thompson, G.L. and Shamberger, C. T. (2015).

A Note on Student Intersectionality[8]

To engage students in literacy, it is important to engage all facets of their identities and to help them see themselves in the literature and curriculum in multiple ways. In other words, it is important to understand students' intersectionality when focusing on student engagement in literacy.

Coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a term that describes how a person's multiple identities (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status) overlap and shape how everyday life is experienced. These identities affect the ways that individuals interact with and influence (or do not influence) the systems and institutions within which they operate (for example, schools, healthcare, and criminal justice). In the world of education, intersectionality highlights the idea that students can experience marginalization and discrimination in multiple ways based on their different identities. For example, African American girls are six times more likely to be suspended than white girls.[9] This is likely due to factors related to the combination of both gender (sexism) and race (racism), not one of these factors alone. While both African American and white girls may be marginalized based on gender, African American girls can be further marginalized by the intersection of their gender and their race.

Teaching with an awareness of intersectionality puts students' identities into context. With this awareness, educators recognize that students are not representatives of a single social identity, and that students' histories have been influenced by all the communities to which they belong. Honoring those histories acknowledges the complicated reality of students' lives; it helps ensure that students can show up authentically and meaningfully engage in their educational experience.

What to Look For When Student Intersectionality is Addressed:

1. Educators build meaningful relationships and collaborate with their students to allow for personal conversations to occur, so students have opportunities to authentically share and explore their identities.[10]
2. Educators engage in professional learning and self-study to understand their own identities, biases, and assumptions, to ensure they do not unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and systems of oppression.[11]
3. Districts offer professional learning; school personnel are encouraged to receive training in social justice education to better understand the ways internal, interpersonal, institutional and systemic racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression have historically influenced public education, and continue to do so.
4. Curriculum—including materials such as books, videos, and articles—are reflective of the school community and historical texts accurately reflect historical events. In districts that are predominantly white, the curriculum includes positive, non-stereotypical depictions of people of color, as well as discussions of racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

8 For more information about intersectionality, see Brochin, C. (2018); Crenshaw, K. (1989)

9 http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf

10 For more strategies for building meaningful relationships, see the Resources for Building Teacher-Student Relationships online at Education Northwest.

11 There are tools and professional learning opportunities available to help educators become aware of their own identities and biases. Some are included in the resource section at the end of the document.

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults." – Fredrick Douglass

Now more than ever, educators and teachers will have to devote their energy to uplift, inspire, and enlighten the next generation of world changers. In a world filled with chaos, educators have the daunting task of ensuring that each of our students receives a quality education filled with care, inspiration, high expectations, knowledge, and love.

However, this is a time of reflection, evaluation, and rediscovery of self for educators across our state. We can no longer ask our students to excel while contributing to the barriers for each student to have quality education and have the ability to live productive and fulfilling lives now and in the future.

In this new world, educators can begin to make shifts in finding intersectional understanding, support, and care toward all our students, creating educational spaces that defy and demolish oppression toward our students' success.

To bring the best out of our students, educators need to embrace the biases we have carried in our souls, attitudes, and actions toward our students. Once educators begin to examine and reflect on how they have contributed toward an unjust society, they can begin to work toward providing all students with the feeling of safety, liberty, genuine equality, and happiness. In reflection, educators must especially think of the limitations on our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), LGBTQ, and other young individuals who wish to be allies and accomplices toward a better world. After realizing and accepting that we contributed to placing limitations on these individuals, we must right the wrongs and provide the necessary items to grow and flourish in education.

Abolitionist educator Dr. Bettina Love states, "Education is an industry that is driven and financially backed by the realities that dark children and their families just survive." These words by Dr. Love are entirely accurate and the reason why educators must not wait to make changes in our educational system for our students. We can no longer sit back and allow a world filled with prejudice, racism, sexism, and xenophobic ideas to control our students' paths. It is time for educators to improve themselves so that we can indeed contribute to the growth for all in this state, country, or the world.

Activist Audre Lorde once said, "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs on the reasons they are dying."

It is time for us in education to think about the reasons that our kids are figuratively dying. How can we, as educators, take steps to ensure that we are examining, discussing, and providing growth to ourselves and our students on significant issues in their lives? Students are looking for us to provide a world filled with joy, protection, care, and without fear for them to be their authentic selves.

The time is now, educators. Waiting for change does a disservice to our young people, our country, and ourselves.

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Secondary English Teacher of the Year, MCTE, 2018
Teacher of Excellence Award, NCTE, 2018
Social Justice Activist of the Year-Finalist, NEA, 2017
English teacher, Carmen Ainsworth High School

SECTION 2: THE DAILY INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN LITERACY

At all ages, children should be provided with ample daily opportunities to engage in, and make choices about, literacy. Daily reading and writing have lasting positive effects on literacy achievement. Intentional instruction that addresses literacy should occur throughout the school day, and not exclusively in an English language arts setting. Incorporating appropriate literacy skills into subjects such as mathematics, social studies, and science reinforces and builds literacy skills and provides purpose for engaging students in reading, writing, and learning. Differentiated instruction is necessary to support students with the teaching and practice needed for improving literacy skills. For students who are facing barriers to learning, extended practice and time for instruction, informal or otherwise, are needed outside of school. Opportunities for instruction and extended practice should occur before and after school, as well as during school breaks such as summer vacation. For all children, support for literacy should be a part of daily life before they begin kindergarten.

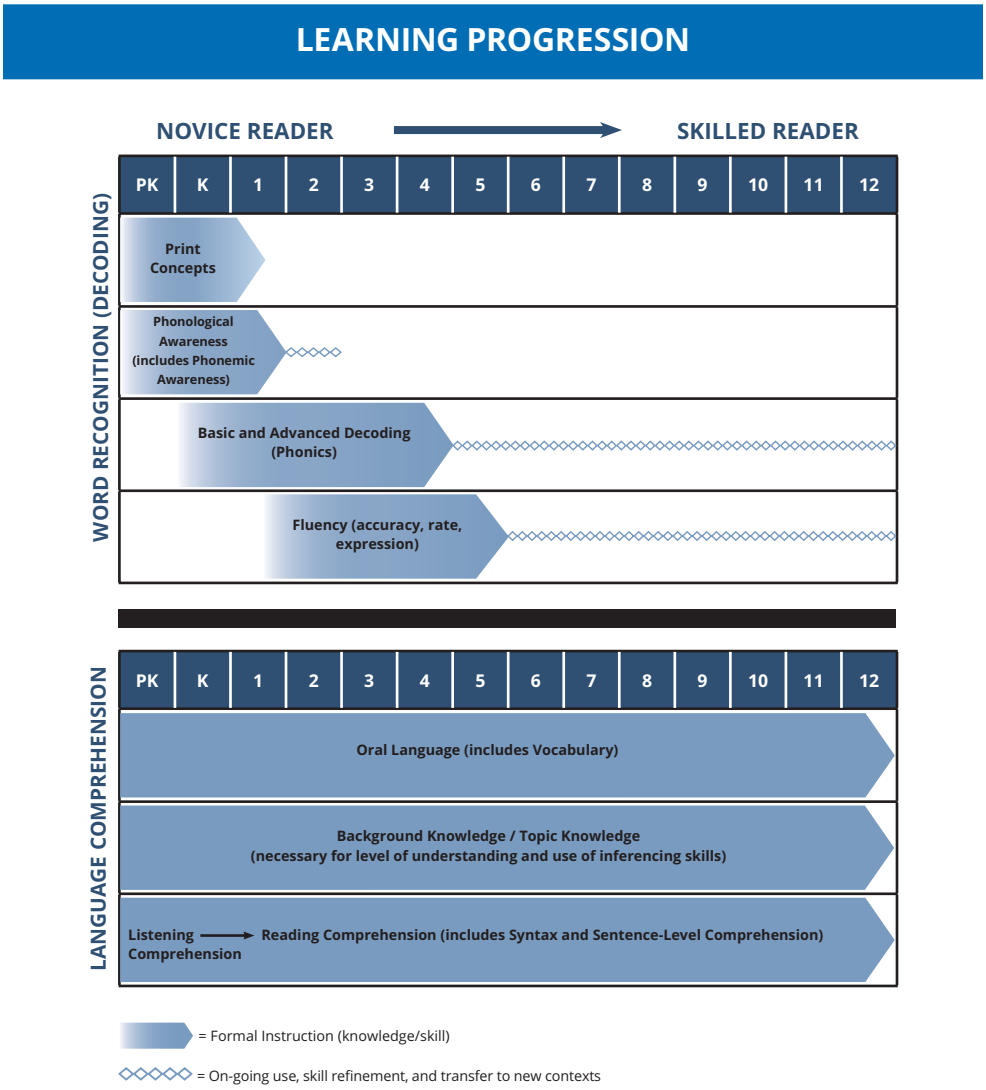
While in the classroom, children should experience direct instruction in reading and writing every day. This instruction must happen during the daily literacy block and during content area learning. There are varying schools of thought regarding the minimum time that should be spent on reading and writing in school at different grade levels. However, what is most important is that children have significant time each day with literacy learning that includes direct instruction, time to read and write, and specific literacy skill support as needed. Students should also be provided time during the school day for opportunities that offer choice in what they read and write. Literacy teaching and learning must be intentional and connected to a purposeful scope and sequence of a learning progression to ensure continuity and alignment from grade to grade.

Literacy Learning Progressions[12]

Literacy instruction should follow a research-informed progression. It is crucial that the complexity of teaching literacy skills progresses with grade level. The following figure is an example of what a grade-level progression for reading skills might look like from kindergarten through third grade. While reading development is a complex process, the progression below is developed from the Simple View of Reading, which broadly defines this process by dividing reading into the two primary categories of word recognition and language comprehension. In the progression, a shaded bar is shown within a grade-level band, with each bar representing an evidence-based estimate of when readers typically master these skills. Some of the component skills are extended by a thin line that represents ongoing use and refinement of skills.

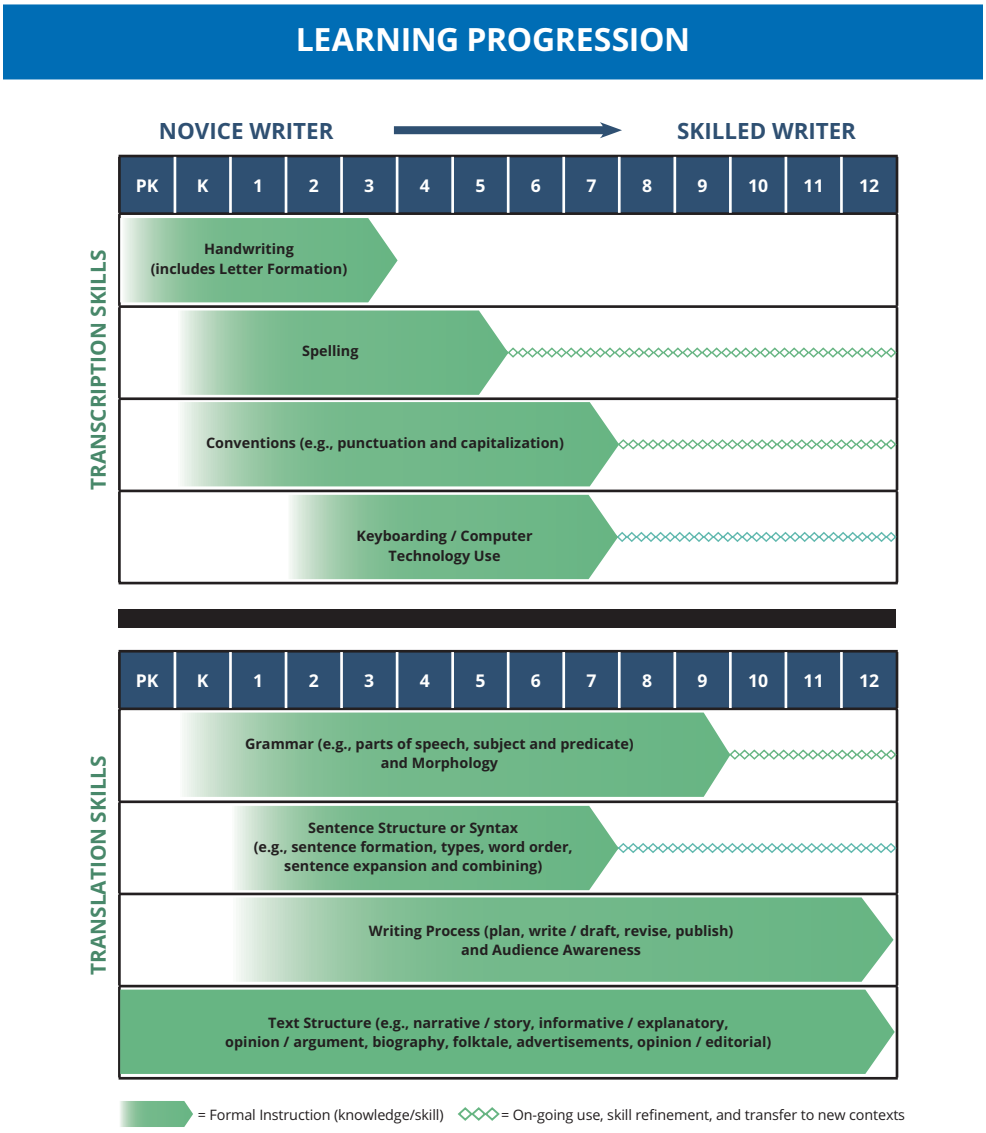
12 For more information on the literacy learning progressions, see Foorman et al., (2016); Graham et al., (2012); Hoover & Gough (1990); Berninger & Chonquoy (2012); and St. Martin, Vaugh, Troia, Fine, Coyne, (2020).

Learning Progression for Developing Skilled Readers



As with the Simple View of Reading development, the writing progression (developed from the Simple View of Writing) is also divided into categories of development, which include transcription and translation skills. The following figure shows a learning progression for development of these writing skills. It includes a sequence of teaching the skills necessary to be an accomplished writer. Each of the component skills listed within blue bars can and should be further defined and presented in a more in-depth instructional scope and sequence. The thin line represents the need for ongoing use, skill refinement, and transfer to new contexts.

Learning Progression for Developing Skilled Writers



What to Look For When Students are Provided Instruction that is Aligned to Reading and Writing Learning Progressions:

1. Ample time is provided in the daily schedule for direct instruction and student exploration in literacy.
2. Direct instruction in reading and writing occurs daily in literacy-specific learning time. Direct instruction in reading and writing also occurs in content area learning. Additionally, students are provided daily time to exercise their choice in reading and writing.
3. A clear purpose for reading and writing instruction can be explained by both the teacher and the students.
4. Teachers have daily lesson plans showing standards-based instruction that connect to the appropriate learning progressions. Time is available for students to receive additional skill support as needed.

Differentiated Literacy Instruction[13]

The reading and writing progressions shown above represent the trajectory for typical skill development. When educators understand the typical learning progressions and associated research-based teaching practices, students are more likely to receive the high quality literacy instruction and interventions that they need to be successful readers and writers. For students who struggle in one or more skill areas, differentiated instruction and intervention in addition to grade-level instruction will be needed. For this reason, grade-level classroom instruction must be a priority, with the teacher providing scaffolds and additional time for skill development as needed before, during, and after school. When a student struggles with literacy, is unable to complete assignments, or shows frustration in learning, a multi-disciplinary team should convene to problem-solve a situation. At a minimum, the team should include the classroom teacher, an educator with literacy expertise, a special education teacher (if possible), and a family member of the student.

Some students will need to receive evidence-based intervention. Multiple considerations should be addressed to ensure students are receiving the appropriate additional instruction that will improve literacy skills. One consideration is that the chosen intervention matches the need of the student as determined by screening and progress-monitoring assessment tools. A second consideration is to provide an appropriate amount of time for instruction and practice. Additionally, educators can ensure that the student receives opportunities to transfer a skill that was taught during intervention to classroom activities. Finally, the student may need additional explicit instruction such as simpler directions, additional modeling, more in-depth development of background knowledge, more immediate feedback, gradual fading of instructional supports, and sufficient independent practice. Teachers may also need to consider behavioral supports that can contribute to student success; these might include an environment that allows for increased focus, instructional methods to keep students on-task, and provision of strategies to help the student self-monitor engagement and progress.

The literacy supports offered must accelerate learning as opposed to continuing a cycle of remediation. Classroom teachers in all content areas can provide scaffolds to ensure students are engaging in grade-level literacy activities. Some scaffolds include reading with partners, reading aloud, shared writing, providing purposeful reasons for re-reading passages and revising drafts, and instruction on how to break complex sentences into more manageable pieces for better comprehension. While these research-based instructional practices are appropriate for all students, they are also key practices for reducing inequities by race, class, and ethnicity. Too often, differentiated instruction occurs outside the classroom and differs from instruction that occurs in the classroom with the whole class. When this takes place, there is a disconnect between what the individual student learns and what the rest of the class learns, putting the struggling learner at a greater disadvantage and exacerbating inequities. Often, a more effective model is to have the interventionist work in the classroom with students who are struggling with their literacy progression.

13 For more information on Differentiated Literacy Instruction, see Gersten et al., (2008); MDE MTSS Team. (2018); and Michigan Department of Education. (2020).

What to Look For When Students Receive Differentiated Learning:

1. Differentiated instruction is provided for students struggling with literacy learning inside the classroom from the teacher, interventionist, or other support staff. The differentiated instruction matches the student's learning need and accelerates progress in reducing learning gaps. The instruction is engaging and relevant to the student.

2. Teachers use varying grouping strategies among the students, with flexible groups for instruction that target students' learning needs.

3. Students work together in pairs and small groups to draw on their own knowledge and their peers' knowledge to co-construct meaning.

Time for Literacy Outside of School[14]

Time for literacy outside of school is also important. Spaces where reading time can be maximized include the years before a child enters school, hours spent outside of the school day, and school holiday and summer breaks. Additional time for both supported and independent reading increases the eagerness to read more, expands vocabulary, and builds knowledge.

The years before children enter school

Engagement with books and opportunities to write and draw from an early age promote excitement about reading and writing. Families and educators play a role in motivating children to read. Having a variety of books in the home, singing and talking to infants, reading books and nursery rhymes, and playing rhyming games with toddlers as part of daily living is important for vocabulary development. Creating an environment that promotes literacy includes allowing young children to use crayons, pencils, chalk, and paints to express their thoughts and ideas. Reading to children, talking about stories, and acting as reading role models are all ways to support more reading for very young children. The positive interactions that young children have when they read with adults increase their motivation to read more. Ensuring that families have access to high quality books during the years before preschool and beyond is necessary to ensure that children benefit from reading experiences. Local library programming or Great Start Collaborative programs such as Talking is Teaching can be leveraged to expand the vocabulary of young children.

Hours outside of the school day

Reading and writing before and after school are important for literacy development. Encouraging students to spend more time reading and writing outside of the school day can start by creating a culture of reading in the school building. To do this, schools make books available for borrowing, encourage book reviews and student writing to be shared during school announcements, and organize book clubs and writing groups as after-school activities. Schools can collaborate with communities by announcing library events and working with local businesses (such as barbershops, hair salons, and laundromats) to provide books for children to read while they wait. Guiding students to read independently or with a buddy while riding a bus to and from school is another way for a school to encourage more time for reading. It is important for educators to provide families with strategies to use when reading with their children. Some strategies include reading aloud together, providingwriting materials to use at home, and giving guidance on how to talk with children about what they read. Effective family engagement strategies for literacy and resources are included on the MDE literacy website.

14 For more information on the importance of independent reading, see Anderson et.al. (2019); Augustine et al., (2016); Kim & White, (2011); Kim & Quinn, (2013); Senechal & Young, (2008).

Literacy during summer and holiday breaks

Loss of reading skills during breaks from school can widen the learning gap for students. Independent reading and extra support for literacy skills can be provided during summer and holiday break time. Both informal and formal reading can be supported by the school. Informal learning opportunities include encouragement for students to read every day. For young children, reading with an adult each day should be strongly encouraged. For all students, daily reading outside of school is critical, with older students reading independently. To strengthen reading skills, children in grades 2 and below should read with an adult for at least 20 minutes daily outside of school time. Children in grades 3 and above should read at least 30 minutes daily outside of school time, either with or without an adult. This additional reading builds fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge, all of which are necessary for the development of literacy skills. Local libraries can provide book suggestions and engaging summer reading programs that encourage a lot of independent reading. The encouragement for daily reading can come from teachers who provide personalized lists of books that students may like to read that are connected to their interests. Guidance to families and students can also include sharing of reading experiences, practicing skill development that was learned during class, and discussion prompts for older children who can read independently. Families can be encouraged to support their child's reading without concern for the length of text or genre. Novels, short stories, comic books, cooking recipes, and poetry are all forms of reading.

Formal reading programs involve face-to-face learning, virtually or in person. Summer reading programs can be offered by the school or from school partners like community centers and libraries. These programs work best when they recruit students who are not demonstrating grade-level literacy skills, the students attend regularly, and explicit instruction can be individualized. The learning objectives in the program should connect with learning from the regular classroom the goal of accelerating student learning. For these programs to be successful, the students must attend regularly and complete the full summer learning course. For older students, summer learning can provide them with the time they need to complete course credits. More details on formal reading programs for students who need skill practice are provided in Section 3.

What to Look for When Students are Involved in Time for Literacy Outside of School:

1. Schools find ways to provide free books to families with young children prior to the children starting school. This may include collaborating with community businesses and with school and local libraries.
2. Schools and families partner to encourage reading and writing before and after school. Schools provide books, resources, guidance, and coaching on how families can work with children to encourage reading and writing. Indeed, some districts have set up parent education and family literacy programs, in some cases similar to those initiated by the Harlem Children's Zone.
3. Schools collaborate with families to ensures students are engaged in reading and writing during holiday breaks and summer months. Schools provide access to books for informal learning and more formal summer school programs to support and accelerate literacy learning.
4. Schools partner with faith-based institutions, boys and girls clubs, and other youth-serving organizations on out-of-school-time literacy programming and supports.

SECTION 3: THE SCIENTIFIC OR TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Michigan's Essential Practices for Literacy[15]

Michigan is committed to the *Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy (Literacy Essentials)* documents developed by the Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF), a subcommittee of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA), and the General Education Leadership Network (GELN)[1]. A suite of *Literacy Essentials* has been developed by grade-band sets for ages birth through grade 12. These instructional practices define non-negotiable literacy engagement and instruction that children and students should experience every day from birth through grade 12. This minimum threshold for literacy instruction 'underscores our state's commitment to specific, research-based practices to improve literacy achievement.

The suite of *Literacy Essentials* addresses critical practices that support literacy at the early ages, such as talking to infants and playing rhyming and singing games with toddlers. In the elementary grades, core literacy instruction practices focus on vocabulary, phonological (including phonemic) awareness, phonics, writing, and comprehension. Building knowledge with science and social studies along with critical thinking and communication is an equal priority to learning to decode and comprehend. In middle school and beyond, content learning leads with a commitment to being literate across all curricular areas. This includes practicing the specialized ways of reading, writing, thinking, and communicating in each discipline. The *Literacy Essentials* are research-informed and, when connected to standards-aligned core literacy curriculum, will provide students with a firm literacy foundation. The *Literacy Essentials* also address the need for commitment to literacy at the district and building levels, where family engagement, professional learning, decision-making based on data, and student motivation and engagement are present.

A commitment to the *Literacy Essentials* is a step in the direction of equity for our state. Also needed is a deep understanding of literacy development among those who are educating students. As noted in the learning progressions in Section 2, the process of developing strong readers and writers is multi-faceted. There are many components to be taught in the outlined progressions. In addition to following the outlined progression of skill development, teachers need to implement evidence-based practices specifically geared toward teaching those skills. Explicitly teaching the requisite skills of reading and writing development will ensure students across grade levels have the best opportunity to become successful readers and writers. This means teachers will use a combination of modeling, guided, collaborative, and independent practice during instruction. The skills within the reading and writing learning progressions are discussed briefly below. Addressing these skills will look different in classrooms for younger students than in those with older students.

Reading[16]

Decoding (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency)

Students bring a wide variety of lived literacy experiences when they first step into a classroom. Building on the knowledge that they have, the development of strong word recognition, and decoding abilities allows students to transform the print in books into spoken language. Explicit teaching of print concepts, phonological awareness, and phonics will establish a foundation for students to be able to read text accurately, at an

15 The suite of Essential Practices can be found at LiteracyEssentials.org

16 For more information about reading, see Adlof & Perfetti, (2014); Blachman et al., (2014); Gough & Tunmer (1986); Hoover & Gough, (1990); LiteracyEssentials.org; Moats & Tolman (2019); and Stahl & Nagy, (2006).

appropriate rate, and with expression. A student who cannot decode the words at a pace that allows him or her to understand, cannot comprehend what is written. Failure to master these reading foundational skills might result in persistent difficulties with reading throughout a child's educational career.

Educators can look for support to teach decoding in practices 4 and 5 in the Literacy Essentials: Prekindergarten and in the Literacy Essentials: Grades K to 3, and practice 4 in the Literacy Essentials: Grades 4-5.

Tips to support decoding

For students who are struggling with decoding and word recognition, teachers must determine which component skills within the learning progression need to be the focus of instruction. Difficulties in this area are at the core of most reading difficulties. Students who struggle with decoding often have difficulty understanding that sounds in words are linked to certain letter patterns. This poor phonemic awareness leads to struggles with word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension. Instruction and intervention vary at each phase of a student's progress in learning to decode and supports may be needed regardless of the student's age or assigned grade. Through proper screening and assessment, teachers can analyze the results to inform instruction and provide appropriate interventions.

Classroom instruction to scaffold students with decoding and word recognition into grade-level text can include having students listen to a recording or a fluent reader provide the content aloud. Incorporation of sets of texts written at varying reading levels into instruction can build background knowledge and can be used to engage students at all entry points of reading. Articles, music, novels, magazines, and online materials can be used to create text sets. These instructional strategies help students to become more automatic in recognizing words and mapping them into the brain.

To support students with fluency, teachers should model reading that demonstrates appropriate speed, expression, and accuracy. Creating opportunities for multiple, yet meaningful, re-reading of text will provide students with extra practice and improve reading fluency. Fluency practice can support students of all reading levels and can be done through incorporating practice in reading letter names, partial words, words, phrases, and sentences.

Language Comprehension (oral language, vocabulary, background knowledge, comprehension)

Oral language, vocabulary, and ongoing knowledge-building should be integrated into literacy instruction and content area instruction. An oral language foundation for success can be created by developing language comprehension through rich conversations with and among students and through activities like reading aloud books that are rich in academic vocabulary. Vocabulary and reading comprehension are highly connected to one another; knowledge of word meanings accounts for 50-60 percent of the difference in reading comprehension between successful and struggling readers. Vocabulary instruction should be purposeful in developing broad knowledge of many words and deep knowledge of some to support students in their ability to understand what they are reading. Comprehension relies on multiple skills that contribute to understanding what is read. Since the goal of reading comprehension instruction is to influence, support, and extend the thinking processes during reading, it is critical that instruction focus on both language comprehension and decoding skills.

Educators can look for support to teach language comprehension in practices 3 and 7 in the Literacy Essentials: Prekindergarten and in the Literacy Essentials: Grades K to 3, practices 2 and 5 in the Literacy Essentials: Grades 4-5 , and practices 3, 5, 7, and 8 of the Disciplinary Literacy Essentials: Grades 6 to 12.

Tips to support language comprehension

Poor vocabulary can cause barriers to a student's access to grade-level text. In addition to ongoing teacher and student use of rich vocabulary and teaching word learning strategies as part of classroom instruction, teachers can focus on explicit instruction of academic vocabulary. Academic vocabulary words tend to have multiple meanings depending on the content area in which they are used. For example, when used in mathematics, the word "calculating" has a different meaning than when it is used in the context of describing a sneaky individual. This type of word can be confusing to a reader. Acknowledging the multiple uses that words have across contexts--for example, mapping words that are similar and opposite to the word "calculating"--can support a student in identifying what they already know and expanding their vocabulary.

Writing[17]

Transcription (handwriting, spelling, conventions, keyboarding)

Transcription skills include letter formation, handwriting and keyboarding fluency, spelling, and conventions including punctuation and capitalization. These skills are the foundation of written composition. Students need direct instruction in these skills, as well as time to process them and to develop and apply the skills for meaning. Spelling relies on attaching sounds to letters, breaking words into syllables, and attending to the parts of words that have meaning such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. When students struggle in writing, it may be due to lack of mastery of one or more of the foundational transcription skills. Automaticity of transcription can allow written expression to increase in length and quality.

Tips to support transcription

Direct, explicit instruction with plentiful feedback is key for students who struggle with handwriting, spelling, and conventions. Writing production and quality suffer when students must pay close attention to letter formation, keyboarding, and spelling. While students are receiving intervention to support more automatic transcription, classroom teachers can provide scaffolds for students to access grade-level writing activities. One suggestion is to have the student dictate their writing. Providing word banks with key vocabulary can support students who struggle with spelling. In addition, breaking the writing task into smaller chunks can be helpful in supporting students so less writing must be generated at a time.

Translation (grammar, sentence structure, writing process, text structure)

Translation involves generating and organizing ideas into written words, sentences, and paragraphs. It focuses more on the process of writing that includes planning, drafting, editing, and revising. For beginning and struggling writers, translation can be a taxing activity, so direct instruction and time to practice are important for writing success. Students who have not mastered transcription skills, might require greater teacher support throughout the planning process. Supports can include providing writing prompts and modeling translation behaviors. For students to achieve full mastery of writing, the teacher must provide instruction across various genres (narrative, informational, and opinion), explicitly focusing on the different text structures and sentence composition qualities of each genre.

17 For more information about writing, see Graham et al., (2012); Moats & Tolman, (2019); and Treiman (2017).

Tips to support translation

For students who struggle with generating and organizing their ideas, the scaffolds suggested for transcription can be useful. This area of skill also includes planning, drafting, and revising. Offering opportunities for short writing activities can be helpful for students who struggle with motivation and skill to write long passages. Examples of scaffolds include using sentence frames, stems, or prompts that provide structure so students can engage in more elaborate writing. Mentor texts that provide high-quality examples of writing can be used to support student-generated writing.

Equity in literacy instruction starts with educators who have deep knowledge of literacy development and evidence-based instruction practices. However, teacher knowledge alone is not enough to improve access to quality literacy learning for all students. Literacy development begins before birth and people continue to grow in literacy through their lifetime, so learning cannot happen only during the school day. Time for differentiation, intervention, independent reading and writing, and acceleration must be purposefully included during and outside of the school day. In all places where literacy learning happens, children can be encouraged by the adults in their lives to embrace the importance, purpose, and empowerment that comes with being a reader and a writer. To maximize learning opportunities, adults can work within school, family, and community partnerships to provide access to quality literacy learning.

Educators can look for support in teaching writing in practice 6 the Literacy Essentials: Prekindergarten and in the Literacy Essentials: Grades K to 3, practices 2 and 5 in the Literacy Essentials: Grades 4-5 , and practices 3, 5, 7, and 8 of the Disciplinary Literacy Essentials: Grades 6 to 12.

What to Look For When Classrooms Provide Instruction on the Technical Aspects of Literacy Learning:

1. High quality curriculum, materials, and resources that align to the grade-level progressions provide the foundation for classroom instruction.
2. Teachers refer to the suite of essential practices for literacy published by a partnership between the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) to inform appropriate grade-level application of the reading and writing progressions.
3. The school provides interventions for students who are not making progress in reading and writing as defined by the grade-level progressions.
4. Teachers provide scaffolds to help struggling students more easily access grade-level reading and writing activities.

SECTION 4: THE ROLE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Supporting Family Engagement and Literacy[18]

Effective family engagement is associated with positive outcomes for students, including improved literacy outcomes. There are connections between literacy resources at home and students' literacy development. For instance, children from homes with more books and with more family reading experiences perform higher on reading achievement tests than children from less reading-rich environments. Additional benefits are seen when families work with their children on specific literacy skills, such as writing and phonics activities, as supported by classroom teachers. Other home activities that support literacy development include writing grocery lists and "thank you" notes; making trips to businesses in the community or to the park that spark conversations; and family discussions and debates. Children have more positive attitudes about reading and writing when families communicate the importance of literacy learning and the role of reading and writing for achieving present and future goals.

When educators and families partner, they become co-creators of environments and experiences that support students in ways that improve literacy outcomes and life success. Both educators and families can be supported by learning about family engagement strategies that improve student education experiences and literacy learning. This section addresses family engagement practices that educators can use to support student success; and more specifically, these practices support access to literacy in ways that serve to eliminate potential disparities of race, class, and ethnicity. Educators can increase the success of family engagement efforts by nurturing cultural responsiveness to the practices, values, traditions, understandings, and ideologies of the families they serve. The Michigan Department of Education MiFamily: Michigan's Family Engagement Framework provides strategies for educators to expand and strengthen home-school partnerships. These strategies are described in the following examples.

Home-School Partnerships[19]

Home-school partnerships support family engagement efforts. Educators use these partnerships to foster personal relationships, respect, and mutual understanding with families in ways that value and support home cultures. When families are engaged in partnerships that encourage and celebrate family culture, students receive richer learning experiences and experience enhanced learning outcomes. Through these partnerships, literacy learning can be strengthened by shared efforts among the family, educator, and community to support student achievement. The following section provides an overview of six types of activities that schools can use to promote engagement and student outcomes while honoring family cultures.

Parenting

Educators can offer parenting activities to help families establish home environments that support students. Educators can offer workshops, videos, or social media messages to share age-appropriate parenting resources that support families in identifying and communicating goals and dreams for their children. Sharing those goals and dreams can help educators provide more individualized literacy supports for students. Family engagement strategies may also include workshops for families on ways to read aloud to children or help with literacy-related

18 For more information about family engagement, see Auerbach (2009); Gest et al., (2004); Mapp & Kuttner, (2013); and Bryk et al., (2010).

19 For more information about school-family partnerships, see Epstein et al., (2019).

homework. The school might provide resources in family literacy to support adult reading and writing as needed. In addition, districts can offer workshops for educators on how to deepen their relationships with students' families.

A family engagement liaison can be hired by districts to develop and expand positive culture and climate in schools. The liaison can develop and implement strategies that support family and school relationships. Like other staff members, this individual can help create welcoming school climates, foster relationships among families, develop a social network for families within the school, and support connections to the community. Through these efforts, the family liaison can support cultural responsiveness in the school community and can help families navigate the school system to advocate for their children.

What to Look For When Schools Engage Families in Parenting Activities:

1. Schools provide opportunities to build relationships with families in ways that inform educators about the goals, strengths, and talents of the students.
2. Educators offer family and parenting workshops that are accessible to the family.
3. Family and parenting workshops address topics and issues that parents request through surveys and interviews prior to the event.
4. Educators provide families with information and resources on how to develop home conditions that support learning.
5. Schools provide a family engagement liaison to help families navigate the school system and advocate for their children.
6. Educators offer families home visits to better understand a student and his/her family.

Communicating

Home-school partnerships are strengthened when schools create patterns for two-way communication between educators and families. Districts can provide educators with training that supports effective family communication practices. Schools can design communication plans for educators to share information about school programs and class instruction and for families to provide information on the progress of their students. School personnel can encourage two-way communication by making positive remarks about students during in-person conversations, phone calls, texts, or emails with families. Educators increase two-way communication by using technology such as text and email, so parents can interact easily with them. To support communication with families who do not speak English, schools can provide printed and digital materials in the home language and arrangements can be made for translation during conversations.

Communication efforts are important in supporting students' literacy learning. Families need to know about their child's success on grade-level learning goals. Educators can share literacy learning data and information on how they are supporting students and how families can reinforce that support. Families also need access to communication channels for sharing any concerns they have about their child's literacy progress. Educators might consider offering literacy learning workshops at the beginning of the school year to share reading and writing goals, offer specific homework expectations, and provide ways for families to contact the school for additional literacy supports.

What to Look For When Schools Engage Families Through Communication:

1. The school provides parent-teacher-student conferences on literacy goals and progress. Depending upon the age and capability of the student, some of these conferences are led by the students themselves. In all cases, the conferences include successes and challenges and what the teacher and family can do to support literacy success.
2. Language translators are available for families.
3. Clear information is available on school policies, available programs, reforms, and transitions for students.
4. A parent portal is available for families to support home learning, safety, and social connections.

Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities strengthen home-school partnerships. Schools can recruit, train, and organize family volunteers in ways that support students. Through volunteering, families and others who can share their time and talents are mobilized to support student activities. Volunteer activities can occur at the school or in other locations that are convenient to families such as a community center or public library. Volunteers can assist individual teachers by helping students practice specific literacy skills, or can help in the school library or media center. Teachers could support volunteers to provide tutoring: before, during, or after school or during the summer with learning that connects to the classroom and student needs.

What to Look For When Schools Engage Families in Volunteering:

1. A school or classroom volunteer program is developed and promoted to support students and their families. The program may include peer coaching and supports or opportunities to provide individualized supports for students.
2. A parent room or family center is available for volunteers to do work, lead and participate in meetings, and to house resources for families.
3. Family volunteers are recruited (and supported) to read to and with the students, serve as literacy tutors, or support learning in after-school programs.

Learning at Home

Educators can build home-school partnership by providing information, support, and resources to families about how to help their children learn at home. Activities for learning at home might include daily activities such as measuring for a recipe, creating a shopping list, and writing “thank you” notes. Other learning at home supports can include setting aside time for homework and a quiet place to learn. Educators can offer resources and options for summer programs or other learning opportunities that will support reading and writing success. Educators can also provide suggestions for how families can engage in conversations with their children about school progress and identify learning goals.

What to Look For When Schools Engage Families by Supporting Learning at Home:

1. Information is provided to families about skills required at each grade level.
2. Families are invited to plan and participate in literacy nights where reading and writing activities that can be done at home are demonstrated.
3. Access is provided to books, learning guides, and other materials that allow students to see themselves and their family in texts.

4. Educators share information with families on homework policies and how to monitor, discuss, and help with schoolwork at home.
5. Resources are provided to families on how to help students improve specific literacy skills.

Decision-Making

Home-school partnerships are strengthened when school leaders involve families in decision-making. Decision-making activities can range from parent-perception surveys to engagement on leadership teams. The activities must allow families to participate in meaningful ways that influence school policies, programs, and practices that affect their own and other children. School leaders can recruit and support family members to serve on a School Improvement Team, Parent-Teacher Association/Organization, or on other teams and committees. These opportunities allow educators to engage in collaborative activities with families. Decision-making activities include a diverse range of family and community voices that represent the families being served and the community where the school is located. Family involvement must be inclusive of language and cultural representation; a school's family liaison might be helpful in supporting all families engage in decision-making activities.

What to Look For When Schools Engage Families in Decision-Making:

1. Families are recruited and supported to serve on school leadership teams.
2. Leadership workshops are provided to help family members and students be confident in their collaboration with the school.
3. Family liaisons help ensure that parent surveys are completed and barriers are overcome so family members can successfully serve on leadership teams.

Collaborating with the Community

Community collaboration activities can be explored to strengthen home-school partnerships. Educators can identify and integrate resources and services from the community to enhance school programs, family practices, and student learning. Collaboration with the community supports the relationship of schools and families with community groups, organizations, agencies, and individuals. Community resources can assist and enrich literacy learning among students strengthen the community.

Schools and communities can collaborate to identify and or develop literacy-connected programs and services that are available to families, educators, and students. Educators can also collaborate with businesses and agencies on special projects to support literacy. Some school partnerships include working with barbershops, salons, and laundromats to offer books for children to read while waiting.

What to Look For When Schools Collaborate with Families and the Community:

1. Educators partner with a local library, museum, or businesses to present a "Literacy Night" event for students and their families. Families are given free passes and/or transportation to the attraction to encourage return visits.
2. Educators collaborate with business partners to build book collections for classroom and school libraries and books for students to take home.
3. A project is organized for students to read to senior citizens at a local center or facility.

SECTION 5: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT EQUITY IN LITERACY

This guidance document addresses multiple aspects of student engagement, literacy learning, and family partnerships to ensure evidence-based practices are used to improve access to literacy in ways that reduce class, racial, and ethnic disparities. The suggestions offered are not inclusive of all possibilities for supporting literacy learning. For that reason, there are reference links throughout the guide, along with several appendices to support educators in deepening their learning and ability to support students and their families. The appendix resources are summarized below.

Appendix A: Celebrating Authors of Color and Their Works of Literature

This document was developed by the Michigan Department of Education to share and honor authors of color and their literary works. The authors and their works are categorized by the age or grade level of the reading material. This list will be expanded over time.

Appendix B: Resources to Support Equity in Literacy

The resources in the annotated list in Appendix B support the topics addressed in this document. They include additional research, tools, and information to support educators in their own development of literacy and approaches to instruction to increase students' engagement and ultimately student success in literacy learning. The resource list will be updated and revised over time.

Appendix C: Equity Training Opportunities and Resources

To fully value the diversity of the students being served, educators must explore and address their implicit, and often unintentional, biases. Professional learning is a tool that can be used to help educators in their ongoing journey to increase their cultural competency, use inclusive teaching practices, and improve action towards anti-racism. The resources in Appendix C include suggestions for online and face-to-face efforts in equity learning. The examples included are not exhaustive, but offer considerations for school-based professional learning communities and opportunities for personal learning sessions.

The Role of Libraries

School Librarians

Multiple studies[1] in over 20 states, including Michigan, show that schools with a school library staffed by a full-time certified teaching school librarian have a high impact on increasing student achievement. These benefits are gained regardless of socio-economic or education levels of the community. Additionally, at-risk students benefit more than not-at-risk students from the presence of a full-time certified school librarian.[2]

Library-media specialists are specifically trained not only to build and maintain collections that support K-12 curriculum and self-directed learning opportunities; they also curate diverse collections that include multiple perspectives and culture. A diverse collection enables students to see themselves and people different from them in literature, to help build empathy and respect for others.[3]

Public Libraries

Public libraries offer equal and open access to information to meet the needs of all students and their families/caregivers. Public librarians are at the forefront of efforts for digital inclusion, including offering internet hot spots and digital devices for use by families and children without digital access, as well as e-books and other electronic resources.

Established public library programs are an excellent resource for teachers, students, and parents. The 2014 American Library Association's (ALA) Digital Inclusion Survey[4] found that:

- virtually all libraries (98 percent) offer free public Wi-Fi access
- 95 percent of libraries offer summer reading programs to forestall the "summer slide" in
- reading achievement experienced when learning "takes a holiday "between school terms
- close to 90 percent of libraries offer basic digital literacy training, and significant majorities of them support training related to new technology devices (62 percent), safe online practices (57 percent), and social media use (56 percent)
- a significant majority of libraries host social connection events for adults (61 percent) and teens (60 percent), such as book discussion groups or gaming programs
- 45 percent of libraries provide early-learning technologies for pre-K children.
- more than one-third of all libraries provide literacy, GED prep, STEAM, and afterschool programs

Not only do public libraries offer access to learning, but they encourage a love of reading through engaging programs and their diverse collections. In 2019, Michigan's 651 public libraries offered a combined total of 101,619 programs aimed at youth; the programs supported classroom visits, early literacy storytime sessions, information literacy trainings, STEM programs, summer reading, teen engagement, and more.

The digital resources, programming, and diverse collections provided to communities by their public libraries offer meaningful collaboration opportunities for schools. Such partnerships create a community in which students can not only discover the love of reading but can also see themselves

reflected in and supported by the community where they live. Educators are encouraged to use the Michigan Library Directory to contact their local public library directly, to learn about their resources and discuss collaboration opportunities.

Michigan eLibrary

Statewide support for digital equity is provided by the Michigan eLibrary (MeL), which offers resources to all schools and libraries across Michigan. MeL offers "24/7/365" access to reading and research materials for students who are learning at a distance. Whether the focus is on content-specific curriculum, Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy or the Michigan Integrated Technology Competencies for Students, MeL has eResources that support teaching and learning at every grade level. Connections to Google Drive and Google Classroom also support remote learning. Educators can learn more about MeL eResources through a MeL's Educator Guide. They can connect to Grades K-5 and Grades 6-12 eResources by visiting MeL.org.

1 https://bit.ly/evidSLib
2 http://bit.ly/MIslliteracy
3 For more discussion on the importance of learners experiencing "windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors", see Bishop, R. (1990).
4 Clark & Perry (2015)

Conclusion

This guidance document is a compilation of evidence-based literacy strategies, initiatives, and programs to improve access to literacy and literacy proficiency, with special attention to reducing class, racial, and ethnic disparities. In some regards, this document is a starting point in looking at literacy beyond simply the technical literacy skills to be taught to a consideration of the children whom we are teaching and of the contexts from which they come to us each day to be educated.

Teachers, literacy coaches, literacy coordinators, principals, superintendents, and other educators begin to establish a school culture that champions equity and inclusion when they engage in their own learning and self-study. To fully engage children, especially children who are historically marginalized and thus often not served well in schools, educators must help students to feel that they are seen and heard in the classroom. This effort takes intentionality and is easier said than done. Educator commitment to professional growth in how to engage historically marginalized children, and particularly children of color, is essential to student success. Students need to engage actively in literacy, to learn to shape ideas through acts of reading and writing. School leaders and educators are encouraged to use this guide to support their own journey and by extension the journeys of their students in bringing equity to the teaching of literacy.

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