



Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation  
of Middle Grades (5-9) and  
High School (7-12) Teachers

Michigan State Board of Education

Approved

March 12, 2024

# **Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

## **Development of the Standards**

With the goal of accelerating the literacy development of Michigan’s learners, state leaders initiated a series of actions beginning in 2015. These actions have included aligning policies, funding, and resources to develop literacy leaders within the state, sustain research-supported and job-embedded professional learning to develop teachers’ instructional skills, and implementing research-supported practices in every classroom every day. Integral to the reform of the MDE teacher certification structure are the narrower grade level bands of PK-3, 3-6, 5-9, and 7-12. The narrowing of grade level bands set the stage for stakeholder development of focused content preparation standards for [Lower Elementary Education \(PK-3; ZO\)](#) and [Upper Elementary Education grades 3-6; ZP\)](#) whereby Literacy has its own subset and MTTC that candidates must pass in addition to Math, Science, Social Studies, and the Professional Knowledge and Skills subtests. Thus, every teacher is a teacher of literacy. The case for this shared responsibility of learner literacy development was necessary for teachers of the disciplines working with 5-9/7-12 learners. Beginning in October 2020, the Michigan Department of Education convened a group of stakeholders including teachers in grades 5-12, literacy specialists, literacy coaches, reading and literacy curriculum and instruction experts, and college and university teacher preparation educators, to review and revise Michigan’s 2002 [Certification Standards for the Preparation of All Secondary Teachers in Reading Instruction](#).

The stakeholder group leveraged the General Education Leadership Network’s [Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12](#) and the International Literacy Association’s 2017 [Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals: Middle/High School Classroom Teacher](#) as the foundations for new standards. The group drafted standards appropriate for well-prepared beginning teachers. Stakeholders representing higher education faculty, adolescent reading literacy specialists, disciplinary specialists, and practicing special education professionals with expertise in exceptional needs and disabilities, including but not limited to dyslexia, offered feedback on the revised draft standards. Additional feedback was solicited from selected stakeholders representing pre-K-12 schools and districts, intermediate school districts, college and university teacher education programs, the education research community, and teacher and administrator professional organizations. All feedback was reviewed by the original stakeholder group for refinement of the draft standards. Stakeholder group meetings culminated in May 2022.

These standards were presented to the Michigan State Board of Education (SBE) on October 10, 2023, followed by a period of public comment through December 11, 2023. This public comment was solicited through an online survey. A total of 42 individuals participated in the public comment survey. All public comment feedback was reviewed by representatives of the original stakeholder committee, which made slight adjustments to the proposed standards. MDE consultants presented the final version of the standards to the SBE on March 12, 2024, wherein the standards were approved.

# **Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

## **Preface to the Standards**

Preparing today's educators to intentionally apprentice adolescent learners into the language and literacy practices of their disciplines matters. Educators who are prepared to teach disciplinary literacy develop a lens to surface the language and literacy demands of their disciplines as a facet of their developing pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). This supports them in enacting interactive and systematic problem-based instruction as a context for learners to develop the language and literacy necessary to engage in thinking, reading, writing, communication, and collaboration within these disciplines (Goldman et al., 2016; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Mergendoller et al., 2006; Moje, 2015; Sungar & Tekkaya, 2006). Educators prepared to support disciplinary literacy development become intentional in integrating diverse texts and abundant reading opportunities to investigate authentic problems or inquiries as a part of standards-aligned instruction in disciplinary reading, writing, speaking and listening. They can model for their learners how to engage in patterns of thinking typical of their disciplines to evaluate and use evidence, identify and critique the claims of others, conduct their own investigations in order to draw conclusions; and communicate for a variety of purposes and audiences (Applebee et al., 2003; Conley, 2008; Deshler et al., 2001; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Goldman et al., 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Greenleaf et al., 2023; Learned, Stockdill & Moje, 2011; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Moje et al., 2000; Rainey & Moje, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Spires et al., 2018; Walker & Bean, 2005)

When educators can recognize the language and literacy demands of their disciplines, they are also better prepared to recognize when, how, and why learners struggle to access their curriculum. They can discern when a text is less "considerate" and demands too much, and then provide additional scaffolds to help learners navigate the structures and features unique to disciplinary texts (Fisher et al., 2023). Educators can bridge students' existing schema with new knowledge of content and the world, texts, language, and disciplinary discourse and practices (Greenleaf et al., 2023). They can identify what words are "worth using" (Townsend, 2021) in order to accelerate the development of learners' academic language and maximize their access to disciplinary content by teaching those words in context. And they can anticipate what language at the word, sentence, and discourse levels learners will need in order to develop the metadiscursive awareness needed to communicate effectively within their disciplines (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013; Fang, 2012; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Moje, 2007, 2015; Nagy & Hiebert, 2011; Walqui & Bunch, 2019; Walqui & Lier, 2010).

Raising beginning educators' awareness of the disciplinary language and literacy needed in schools can also foster their awareness of learners' existing funds of knowledge from their out-of-school contexts. Educators who are prepared to support disciplinary literacy learn to engage in community networking to surface the rich language and literacy skills their students have already developed within their families, cultural backgrounds and community spaces. Rather than positioning the language and literacy skills that learners cultivate outside of school as being less legitimate or valuable, our beginning educators can affirm, amplify and leverage students' home language and literacy skills as rich resources for disciplinary learning (Baker-Bell, 2020; García et al., 2017; Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Moll et al., 1992;

## **Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

Walqui & Bunch, 2019). This, too, is necessary in order for beginning educators to bridge together their students' rich language backgrounds and literacy skills with the new language and literacy practices they are developing within schools.

Most importantly, beginning educators who are prepared to teach disciplinary literacy position their learners as insiders within their disciplines. Ensuring beginning educators can support learners in developing general academic literacy as well as disciplinary literacy is of vital importance to the economy and our democratic citizenry. In Michigan, where over 270,000 students have been identified as being unprepared with the literacy skills to enter the workforce or college and career training, it is "estimated that the cost of illiteracy to U.S. businesses and taxpayers is approximately \$225 billion each year" (General Education Leadership Network, n.d.). Therefore, supporting the development of learners' general academic and disciplinary literacies ensures they are equipped to be productive citizens. More than that, learners who have developed disciplinary literacy can "navigate from their home, community, and national cultural practices and discourses to and from those disciplines they are expected to learn in school" (Moje, 2015, p. 258). As a result, learners can experience belonging, efficacy and affirmation, seeing themselves as insiders within schools and the academic disciplines into which they are being apprenticed—and can imagine themselves as insiders in the contexts they will inhabit in the future.

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## **Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

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## **Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

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**Introduction to Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of  
Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

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## **Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

### **I: Foundational Knowledge:**

Well-prepared beginning teachers in middle grades and high school will be able to:

- 1.1. Demonstrate knowledge of major theoretical, conceptual, and evidence-based components of literacy, disciplinary literacy, and disciplinary literacy instruction, including:
  - academic language and vocabulary,
  - reading comprehension and instruction,
  - critical thinking and analysis,
  - speaking, listening, and viewing, and
  - writing and writing processes.
- 1.2. Demonstrate knowledge of the range of definitions and conceptualizations of text and consider implications for / connections to concepts such as digital literacies and visual literacies.
- 1.3. Explore and recognize a range of compelling reasons for students to engage in literacy, including the following:
  - 1.3.a. writing in the discipline and how to establish authentic purposes and audiences for disciplinary writing during instruction.
  - 1.3.b. reading in the discipline and how to establish authentic purposes for disciplinary reading during instruction.
  - 1.3.c. presenting and listening in the discipline and how to establish authentic purposes and audiences for presenting and listening to presentations.
- 1.4. Demonstrate awareness of the importance of making literacy processes and learning relevant to all students through an understanding of their individual identities, including their funds of knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, culture, and performance styles. They will be able to:
  - 1.4.a. recognize how student instruction is impacted by teacher identity and learn about the identities of adults and children in the learning community.
  - 1.4.b. demonstrate an understanding that literacy learning is best framed around problems and questions that set purpose for the use of literacy practices.
- 1.5. Explore and draw on the relationship between verbal and visual texts as mutually supportive methods for meaningful communication. Model strategies for reading and interpreting visual texts implementing tools such as Visual Thinking Strategies.



## **Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

- 1.6. Classify, describe, and model the dispositions, strategies, and patterns of thinking typical in academic disciplines.
- 1.7. Classify, describe, and model strategies for effective oral communication in academic disciplines.
- 1.8. Evaluate how language is used in powerful and effective ways in the discipline based on the purpose, audience, context, and genre of a verbal or visual text and consider implications for instruction. They will be able to:
  - 1.8.a. identify tiered vocabulary words relevant to their content area in connection with a given verbal and/or visual text, content expectation, or topic and identify appropriate instructional strategies for these words (e.g., morphemic analysis, teaching multiple meanings of a word).
  - 1.8.b. present vocabulary as language in use (as opposed to words from decontextualized lists) and identify opportunities for students to talk about and use new words.

### **II: Curriculum Planning and Instruction:**

Well-prepared beginning teachers in middle grades and high school will be able to:

- 2.1 Engage in reflection throughout instructional planning, teaching, and selection of texts and materials to affirm diversity, advance equity, enact inclusion, and improve their teaching practices.
- 2.2 Demonstrate the ability to evaluate instructional resources, including published curricular materials, for appropriateness in terms of educational context.
- 2.3 Identify available school-wide literacy supports, structures, and resources. (Literacy coaches, school librarians, curriculum coordinators, department chairs, mentor teachers, MTSS Supports, etc.). They will be able to:
  - 2.3.a. collaboratively participate in ongoing inquiry with colleagues, mentor teachers, and literacy specialists.
  - 2.3.b. identify strategies educators use to forge family, community, and school relationships to enhance students' content and literacy learning.
- 2.4 Articulate the importance of differentiating instructional processes and product expectations based on frequent, formative, growth-oriented

## **Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

feedback that affirms high academic expectations and supports students' literacy development in their discipline.

- 2.5 Select a wide range of high-quality diverse and multimodal texts authentic to the disciplines of varying complexity, structure, and genre to support student inquiry around authentic disciplinary problems. They will be able to select and use evidence-based instructional strategies and materials to develop students':
- reading and reading comprehension,
  - vocabulary,
  - critical thinking,
  - writing as a process,
  - listening and speaking, and
  - viewing and visual representations.
- 2.6 Plan disciplinary-specific, problem-based inquiries that engage students in developing and asking questions. They will be able to:
- 2.6.a. design opportunities for students that offer choice in modality, topic, medium, etc. in their reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing.
  - 2.6.b. design opportunities for students to collaborate with peers in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing, and plan for the facilitation of these opportunities.
  - 2.6.c. consider and plan for opportunities to connect instruction and content to student identities, communities, and literacy practices.
- 2.7 Build learning progressions to meet students at their point of understanding and scaffold to support movement along the progression, in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing. They will be able to:
- 2.7.a. develop plans to integrate strategic vocabulary instruction into a lesson and explicitly teach words that build necessary knowledge for reading and writing texts of instruction.
  - 2.7.b. justify choices between individual, partner, small group, or whole group activities that intentionally align with student learning objectives.

### **III: Assessment and Evaluation:**

Well-prepared beginning teachers in middle grades and high school will be able to:

## **Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

- 3.1 Identify data sources that would explain student progress in the discipline and explain the function/purpose of each. They will be able to:
  - 3.1.a. explain the importance of engaging students in the development of learning goals, as well as in supported, productive self- and peer-assessment and feedback.
  - 3.1.b. use student work to determine students' disciplinary literacy strengths and needs; select and administer other formal and informal assessments appropriate for assessing students' disciplinary literacy development.
- 3.2 Evaluate the implications of language and literacy development on different assessment forms or types. They will be able to:
  - 3.2.a. engage in observation and assessment guided by an understanding of, and respect for, the student as a member of cultural and linguistic communities.
  - 3.2.b. pose culturally responsive questions that foster textual understanding and higher-order engagement with a variety of multimodal texts.
- 3.3 Demonstrate an understanding of assessment as an opportunity to identify and build upon student strengths, as well as to address areas of improvement. They will be able to:
  - 3.3.a. differentiate instructional processes and product expectations based on frequent, formative, growth-oriented feedback that affirms high academic expectations and support for all students.
  - 3.3.b. elicit student thinking to draw conclusions about the student's progress in the disciplinary content.
- 3.4 Compare and contrast the strengths, limitations, reliability, and validity of discipline-specific assessments. They will be able to:
  - 3.4.a. design and practice a variety of assessment types (observational, peer-peer evaluation, reflection, benchmark), formats (multiple choice, project-based), and purposes (for learning, of learning).
  - 3.4.b. prioritize observation and assessment that is closest to actual reading and writing (e.g., prioritizing student work/writing as data for making instructional decisions as opposed to relying on standardized test scores, which can mask proficiencies and areas in need of development).

# **Disciplinary Literacy Standards for the Preparation of Middle Grades (5-9) and High School (7-12) Teachers**

## **IV: Learners and the Literacy Environment:**

Well-prepared beginning teachers in middle grades and high school will be able to:

- 4.1 Honor all learners, positioning them as sense-makers capable of doing meaningful work and as humans worthy of love and affirmation. They will be able to:
  - 4.1.a. learn about and appreciate students' cultural, religious, family intellectual, and personal experiences and resources to inform literacy instruction.
  - 4.1.b. tap into students' funds of knowledge in support of developing their disciplinary literacy knowledge and unique identities.
- 4.2 Demonstrate understanding of theories and concepts related to adolescent verbal and/or visual literacy learning and apply this knowledge to learning experiences that develop motivated and engaged literacy learners. They will be able to:
  - 4.2.a. practice incorporating visual, digital, and print texts and experiences designed to differentiate and enhance students' disciplinary literacy and the learning environment.
  - 4.2.b. engage students with online texts, databases, and multimodal tools in the service of investigations.
- 4.3 Create physical and social literacy-rich environments that use routines and strategies for independent and collaborative learning. They will be able to:
  - 4.3.a. establish compelling reasons and allocate time for whole-group, small-group, and paired discussion of verbal/visual texts, using a range of discussion and grouping strategies.
  - 4.3.b. provide modeling and instruction to teach students how to generate their own higher-level questions about verbal/visual texts.
- 4.4 Promote responsible digital citizenship in literacy and language learning experiences.

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