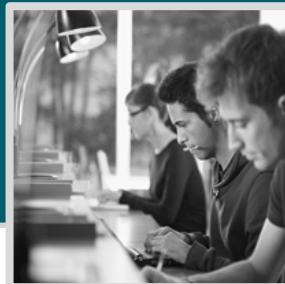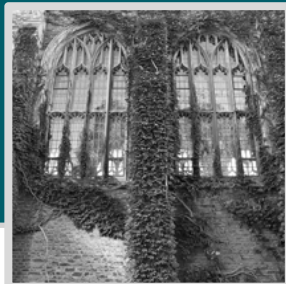# Best Practices in K-12 Literacy Models

November 2014

In the following report, Hanover Research examines the need for effective reading and literacy education, along with the role of assessment in literacy instruction. In addition, the report reviews four models designed to promote literacy education for all students.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

For decades, educators have sought effective strategies to improve student reading skills, and have debated the topic fiercely through what the National Education Association refers to as the "reading wars."[1] While the educational community has yet to identify one best solution, knowledge of how students learn to read has grown substantially in recent years. Today, a nationwide focus on assessment has promised to improve the understanding of student learning and inform instructional decisions for each individual student. This report provides an overview of effective strategies for improving reading instruction and assessment, with a focus on comprehensive literacy models aimed at fostering literacy for all students. The report is divided into three sections:

- **Section I** discusses the need for effective reading and literacy education, particularly in the elementary years. In addition, this section discusses the role of leadership in implementing effective literacy models.

- **Section II** examines primary forms of reading ability assessment and assessment tools. This section also profiles widely-used assessment tools.

- **Section III** profiles four comprehensive, research-supported models for organizing literacy instruction.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Researchers and educators have not established universal or standardized measures of reading ability for specific grade levels**. The most widely-used standardized measure of student reading ability, The Lexile Framework, does not report scores according to grade-level specific measurements. However, some states, like Washington State, outline their own expectations for reading ability at specific grade levels, and tailor assessment activities to support those expectations.

- **Researchers have identified five key components that are essential to success for students learning to read**. These components include comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics. Assessments that measure these components can indicate student progress in reading and identify those students who are at-risk of falling behind.

- **Research reveals several common key elements of successful literacy models**. These are not all student-specific or classroom behaviors. To maximize the likelihood of success, reading programs should be comprehensive and engage the school as well as parents and the community. Common elements of effective models incorporate:
    1. An emphasis on professional development.

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[1] "Reading Wars." National Education Association. http://www.nea.org/home/19392.htm

2. Individualized learning through one-to-one or small-group exercises.
3. Differentiated learning for different learning needs.
4. Regular data collection to provide accurate assessments of success and to inform instruction.
5. Well-defined goals and benchmarks, with specific strategies for implementation.

▪ **Effective district- and school-level leadership is required for the implementation of new programs, and reading initiatives are no different**. In addition to ensuring teachers receive sufficient professional development, principals and administrators should collect and analyze data to monitor student progress, give teachers adequate time and resources to support student learning, and provide oversight and management for interventions.

▪ **Leaders must implement district-, school-, and classroom-level strategies to substantially improve reading skill development**. The issues facing struggling readers are diverse and complex, and may require leaders to adopt strategies that directly address the quality and effectiveness of instruction, assessment, curriculum, resource allocation, and school climate. Leaders in literacy education overwhelmingly agree that any substantive improvement in student reading skills will require significant professional development across all levels of a given district.

▪ **Learning gaps emerge early**. Studies demonstrate that, if reading deficiencies are recognized in grade 1, students can "catch up" to grade level by the end of grade 2. The same ability to catch up is not identified in later grades, as grade level expectations become more difficult, and students fall further behind. Unfortunately, most schools do not identify reading skill deficits until grades 2 or 3.

# Section I: Measuring Reading Ability and Improving Reading in the Early Grades

The ability to read is an essential building block for a child's educational success. Over the past decade, research has underscored the importance of early literacy education, suggesting that students who do not learn to read proficiently by the end of grade 3 may never reach grade-level literacy standards.[2] Furthermore, studies show that students with poor literacy skills persisting into adolescence and adulthood are more likely to experience negative social outcomes, such as delinquency or social exclusion.[3] In this section of the report, Hanover Research examines the importance of early reading, measures of student reading ability by grade level, and strategies for improving early reading.

## Importance of Elementary-Level Reading

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam reveal that, in 2011, 33 percent of grade 4 students in the United States failed to achieve basic levels of reading achievement. This incidence rate was even higher among low-income students, ethnic minority groups, and students learning English as a second language.[4] Among grade 8 students, a national average of 24 percent of students did not achieve basic proficiency in reading on the NAEP assessment.[5] The elementary school years build a critical foundation for children's later learning. The idea that learning gaps emerge early in children's lives is "one of the better documented facts in education."[6]

**Research demonstrates that students' early learning experiences impacts their future learning across all subjects, not only reading**. Students learn concepts in elementary school that are built on in later years, and, without a successful foundation of appropriate skills and abilities, students may struggle in the upper grades. Therefore, the importance of early learning, and particularly early reading development, cannot be understated. The acquisition of reading skills in elementary school has far-reaching implications — for example, failure to achieve grade-level reading ability by the end of grade 3 is linked with higher rates of high school dropout.[7]

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[2] Mead, S. "Reading for Life." The American Prospect. June 13, 2010. http://prospect.org/article/reading-life-0
[3] Burroughs-Lange, S., and J. Douetil. "Literacy Progress of Young Children from Poor Urban Settings: A Reading Recovery Comparison Study." Literacy Teaching and Learning. 12:1. 2007. p. 20.
http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ899631.pdf
[4] "Grade 4 National Results." The Nation's Report Card.
http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2011/nat_g4.asp?subtab_id=Tab_1&tab_id=tab2#chart
[5] "Grade 8 National Results." The Nation's Report Card.
http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2011/nat_g8.asp?tab_id=tab2&subtab_id=Tab_1#chart
[6] "College and Career Readiness: The Importance of Early Learning." ACT Research and Policy. February 2013. p. 1.
http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ImportanceofEarlyLearning.pdf
[7] Hernandez, D. "Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation." Annie E. Casey Foundation. April 2011. p. 3.
http://www.aecf.org/~/media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Other/DoubleJeopardyHowThirdGradeReadingSkillsandPovery/DoubleJeopardyReport040511FINAL.pdf

## APPROACHES TO MEASURING STUDENT READING ABILITY AND READING LEVEL

While the importance of early reading is generally unquestioned among the education community, the approaches to measuring student reading ability may occur in different ways. The following subsection describes these general approaches.

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF READING

The National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) was convened by the United States Congress between 1997 and 2000 to review evidenced-based practices and research to determine the best practices in literacy instruction.[8] The Panel considered more than 100,000 published studies in identifying effective instructional methods and the sets of skills that children require in order to learn to read at different stages of their development. Further, the Panel published a guide for early reading up to grade 3 and noted particular skills that children should master at each grade level around phonics and word recognition, reading, spelling/writing, and vocabulary.[9] The grade 3 standards are outlined in Figure 1.1 below. However, it should be noted that this type of broad guidance on age-appropriate reading skills and instructional techniques does not serve as a true measurement tool. Further, the Panel has been criticized for the quality of its research-based review in omitting key research studies, misinterpreting the research base, promoting an ideological bias, or not providing enough guidance to stem misuse.

**Figure 1.1: NICHD Grade 3 Standards**

| |
|---|
| **Phonics and Word Recognition** |
| *By the end of grade 3, a child…* |
| ▪ Uses phonics knowledge and word parts (prefixes, roots, suffixes) to figure out how to pronounce words she doesn't recognize |
| **Reading** |
| *By the end of grade 3, a child…* |
| ▪ Reads with fluency |
| ▪ Reads a variety of grade 3 level tests (for example, story books, informational books, magazine articles, computer screens) with fluency and comprehension |
| ▪ Reads longer stories and chapter books independently |
| ▪ Summarizes major points from both fiction and non-fiction books |
| ▪ Identifies and then discusses specific words or phrases that interfere with comprehension |
| ▪ Discusses the themes or messages of stories |
| ▪ Asks "how," "why," and "what if" questions |
| ▪ Distinguishes cause from effect, fact from opinion, and main ideas from supporting details |
| ▪ Uses information gathered and his own reasoning to evaluate the explanations and opinions he reads about |
| ▪ Understands and reads graphics and charts |
| ▪ Uses context clues to get meaning from what she reads |
| **Spelling and Writing** |
| *By the end of grade 3, a child…* |

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[8] "National Reading Panel." National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. http://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/Pages/nrp.aspx/

[9] "A Child Becomes a Reader: Kindergarten through Third Grade". National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/Pages/k-3.aspx#endofthird

| |
|---|
| ▪ Correctly spells previously studied words |
| ▪ Independently reviews her own written work for errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation |
| ▪ Begins to use literary words and sentences in his writing, such as figurative language |
| ▪ Combines information in compositions from a variety of sources, including books, articles, and computer information |
| ▪ With assistance from teachers and classmates, edits and revises her compositions to make them easier to read and understand |
| ▪ Discusses her own writing with other children and responds helpfully to the writing of other children |
| **Vocabulary** |
| *By the end of grade 3, a child…* |
| ▪ Wants to learn and share new words at school and at home |
| ▪ Uses clues from context to figure out word meaning |
| ▪ Uses her knowledge of word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words to figure out word meaning |
| ▪ Increases his vocabulary through the use of synonyms and antonyms |
| ▪ Is able to use different parts of speech correctly, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs |
| ▪ Develops her vocabulary and knowledge through independent reading |
| ▪ Explores and investigates topics of interest on his own |
| ▪ Uses a variety of sources to find information, including computers |

Source: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development[10]

However, despite the potential weaknesses of the Panel's reading guidance, it confirms that the general components of **early reading milestones should address phonics and word recognition, reading, spelling/writing, and vocabulary.** Similarly, the Early Reading Assessment Committee of the Kansas State Department of Education identifies five identical, essential components of reading. Figure 1.2 highlights these five measures of reading ability in greater detail.

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[10] Ibid.

**Figure 1.2: Kansas State Department of Education Measures of Reading Ability**

| READING COMPONENT | RELEVANCE AS MEASURE OF ABILITY |
|---|---|
| **Comprehension** | Described in the National Reading Panel report as "the essence of reading," comprehension has been variously defined in education research literature. The most current theory of comprehension holds that comprehension is "a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning" that is contingent on the reader, the activity, and the reading context. |
| **Vocabulary** | A student's vocabulary has been understood to have significant importance to reading ability for over 50 years. In particular, vocabulary is "critical to reading comprehension" and, as such, students with poor vocabularies "will likely encounter difficulty decoding and comprehending text." |
| **Fluency** | Fluency, like vocabulary, is linked to reading comprehension and is defined as the "ability to read text with appropriate pace (i.e., rate), accuracy, and proper expression." Researchers note that fluency consists of "much more than the number of words read per minute." Measures of fluency include:<br><br>▪ **Pace/Rate**: The speed at which text is read, either orally or silently ("the number of words read correctly per minute"), ranging from "slow and laborious reading to consistently conversational".<br><br>▪ **Smoothness:** Automatic word recognition. "Smoothness ranges from frequent hesitations, sound-outs, and multiple attempts at words to smooth reading, where most words are recognized automatically, and word-recognition and structure difficulties are resolved quickly, usually through self-correction."<br><br>▪ **Prosody:** Reading with expression while "using the rhythms and patterns of spoken language," the components of which are separated into pitch, stress, and juncture. |
| **Phonemic Awareness** | Phonemic awareness is considered to be a subset of phonological awareness; "phonological awareness refers to an overall awareness of the sounds spoken in the language" and consists of several levels of awareness: word level, syllable level, onset and rime level, and phoneme level (phoneme counting, isolation, segmentation, blending, deletion, and substitution). |
| **Phonics** | An understanding of the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent is essential for students to able to decode unknown words. Elements of phonics likely to be measured include knowledge of: consonants, short vowels, blends, digraphs, long vowels, and vowel combinations. |

Source: Kansas State Department of Education[11]

## GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

As the essential components of reading are generally agreed to address phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, there are also general expectations for mastery at different ages or grade levels. The Office of Public Instruction for Washington State provides a useful overview of its state grade-level expectations for reading ability. These expectations "describe the knowledge and skills that students should acquire from kindergarten through high school," and form a continuum that "students would expect to experience along the pathway to reading proficiency," as shown in Figure 1.3.[12]

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[11] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments." Kansas State Department of Education, 2007. pp.12-14.
http://www.swprsc.org/pages/uploaded_files/kansas_guide_to_early_reading.pdf
[12] "Reading K–10 Grade Level Expectations: A New Level of Specificity," Office of Public Instruction, Washington State.
pp.4-5. https://www.k12.wa.us/reading/pubdocs/ReadingEALR-GLE.pdf

**Figure 1.3: Washington State Reading Competencies by Grade Level**

| GRADE | COMPETENCIES |
|---|---|
| **Kindergarten** | In kindergarten, students understand and apply concepts of print, phonological and phonemic awareness. They expand their oral language skills and gain meaningful vocabulary for reading. Students demonstrate comprehension by participating in a variety of responses when listening to or viewing informational and literary text. They are interested in a variety of books. |
| **Grade One** | In first grade, students apply concepts of print, phonological and phonemic awareness, oral language skills, and phonics. They continue to expand their reading vocabulary and demonstrate comprehension by participating in a variety of responses. Students choose and read a variety of books for pleasure. |
| **Grade Two** | In second grade, students become fluent as readers and apply comprehension and vocabulary strategies to a wide variety of literary and informational text. They demonstrate comprehension by participating in discussions, writing responses, and using evidence from text to support their thinking. Reading for pleasure continues to be an enjoyable habit. |
| **Grade Three** | In third grade, students select and combine skills to read fluently with meaning and purpose. They apply comprehension and vocabulary strategies to a wider variety of literary genres and informational text. Students demonstrate comprehension by participating in discussions, writing responses, and using evidence from text to support their thinking. They read for pleasure and choose books based on personal preference, topic, or author. |
| **Grade Four** | In fourth grade, students read skillfully with meaning and purpose using appropriate comprehension and vocabulary strategies. Students read, discuss, reflect, and respond, using evidence from text, to a wide variety of literary genres and informational text. Students read for pleasure and continue to choose books based on personal preference, topic, theme, or author. |
| **Grade Five** | In fifth grade, students broaden and deepen their understanding of informational and literary text. Students reflect on their skills and adjust their comprehension and vocabulary strategies to become better readers. Students discuss, reflect, and respond, using evidence from text, to a wide variety of literary genres and informational text. Students read for pleasure, choosing books based on personal preference, topic, genre, theme, or author. |
| **Grade Six** | In sixth grade, students are aware of the author's craft. They are able to adjust their purpose, pace and strategies according to difficulty and/or type of text. Students continue to reflect on their skills and adjust their comprehension and vocabulary strategies to become better readers. Students discuss, reflect, and respond, using evidence from text, to a wide variety of literary genres and informational text. Students read for pleasure and choose books based on personal preference, topic, genre, theme, or author. |
| **Grade Seven** | In seventh grade, students are aware of their responsibility as readers. They continue to reflect on their skills and adjust their comprehension and vocabulary strategies. Students refine their understanding of the author's craft. Oral and written responses analyze and/or synthesize information from multiple sources to deepen understanding of the content. Students read for pleasure and choose books based on personal preference, topic, genre, theme, or author. |
| **Grade Eight** | In eighth grade, students integrate a variety of comprehension and vocabulary strategies. They are able to adapt their reading to different types of text. Oral and written responses analyze and/or synthesize information from multiple sources to deepen understanding of the content. Students refine their understanding of the author's craft, commenting on and critically evaluating text. They continue to analyze and/or synthesize information from multiple sources to deepen understanding of the content. |
| **Grades Nine and Ten** | In ninth and tenth grades, reading is purposeful and automatic. Readers are aware of comprehension and vocabulary strategies being employed, especially when encountering difficult text and/or reading for a specific purpose. They continue to increase their content and academic vocabulary. Oral and written responses analyze and/or synthesize information from multiple sources to deepen understanding of the content. Readers have greater ability to make connections and adjust understandings as they gain knowledge. They challenge texts, drawing on evidence from their own experience and wide reading. |

Source: Office of Public Instruction, Washington State[13]

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[13] Competency descriptions quoted from: Ibid.

### DEVELOPMENTAL SCALES: THE LEXILE FRAMEWORK FOR READING

Similarly, the Lexile Framework for Reading precisely measures student reading ability along a normed, developmental spectrum. **However, despite being one of most widely used reading assessments, the Lexile Framework does not report students' ability levels as grade-equivalents.** MetaMetrics, the company that developed the Lexile Framework, notes that grade-level equivalents are "a deceptively simple way to characterize a student's test score."[14] Similarly, the International Reading Association discourages the misuse of grade equivalents. In 1991, the Association crafted a resolution stating that the IRA "strongly advocates that those who administer standardized reading tests abandon the practice of using grade equivalents to report performance of either individuals or groups of test-takers."[15] Instead, the Lexile Framework represents a normed measure on a "developmental scale of reading ability", and reports on typical performance levels at different age groups.[16]

Therefore, **Lexile scores alone do not constitute standards of excellence at different grade levels, but rather serve as a reflection of reading ability in relation to the Lexile developmental scale.** States may align bands of Lexile scores to their specific learning standards or to the Common Core State Standards. This report includes a deeper profile of the Lexile Framework in Section II, starting on page 22.

### STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING IN THE EARLY GRADES

Districts that achieve substantial improvements in student reading scores often do so through the implementation of district-wide changes that extend beyond the scope of classroom instruction. The barriers to reading skill development are complex, and improvement necessitates an approach that incorporates district-, school-, and classroom-level changes.

### DISTRICT LEVEL STRATEGIES

Experts argue that **a district-level focus on literacy is essential not only for the improvement of student reading scores, but also for the improvement of student performance overall**. A 2010 report of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) on the role of district leaders in improving student outcomes recommended literacy professional development for all district stakeholders:

> Efective districts invest in the learning not only of students, but also of teachers, principals, district staff, superintendents and school board members. Low-performing schools are not likely to turn around unless educators who work in the schools have extensive opportunities to learn and implement more effective practices to engage students in learning challenging materials. Because many students enrolled in low-performing schools have trouble reading, these schools

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[14] "Lexile Measures and Grade Levels." The Lexile Framework for Reading. https://lexile.com/about-lexile/grade-equivalent/

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

must initially make literacy the centerpiece of professional development.[17]

In 2011, the Council of the Great City Schools identified common factors among urban districts that have shown improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These common factors, presented in full below, include effective leadership, quality teachers, and effective use of student data:

✓ **Leadership and Reform Vision**. Each district benefited from strong leadership from their school boards, superintendents, and curriculum directors. These leaders were able to unify the district behind a vision for instructional reform and then sustain that vision for an extended period.

✓ **Goal Setting and Accountability**. The higher-achieving and most consistently improving districts systematically set clear, system-wide goals for student achievement, monitored progress toward those instructional goals, and held staff members accountable for results, creating a culture of shared responsibility for student achievement.

✓ **Curriculum and Instruction**. Each district also created coherent, well-articulated programs of instruction that defined a uniform approach to teaching and learning throughout the district.

✓ **Professional Development and Teaching Quality**. Each district supported their programs of instruction with well-defined professional development or coaching to set direction, build capacity, and enhance teacher and staff skills in priority areas.

✓ **Support for Implementation and Monitoring of Progress**. Each district designed specific strategies and structures for ensuring that reforms were supported and implemented district-wide and for deploying staff to support instructional programming at the school and classroom levels.

✓ **Use of Data and Assessments**. Finally, each district had regular assessments of student achievement and used these assessment data and other measures to gauge student learning, modify practice, and target resources and support.[18]

Although not noted in the Council of the Great City Schools report, **district leaders are also responsible for ensuring the fair and appropriate allocation of resources.** Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, for example, has substantially reduced achievement gaps in math and reading at the elementary level by increasing resources for "Red Zone" schools, which predominantly serve minority and low-income students.[19]

Finally, district-level leaders have an obligation to clearly communicate district-wide strategies for improving student outcomes. The Council of the Great City Schools noted that

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[17] Bottoms, G., Schmidt-Davis, J. "The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership." Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, pp. iv-v. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/Three-Essentials-to-Improving-Schools.pdf

[18] Bulleted items taken nearly verbatim from: Casserly, M., et. al., "Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban School Districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress." Council of the Great City Schools, 2011, p. 163. http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/4/Pieces%20of%20the%20Puzzle_FullReport.pdf

[19] Bottoms, et. al., Op. cit., p. 40.

a reading initiative implemented by Boston Public Schools likely failed to substantially improve student outcomes because "philosophical differences at the central office level over approaches to literacy instruction contributed to a lack of coherence in reading instruction district-wide."[20]

## SCHOOL-LEVEL STRATEGIES

**School-level improvement requires strong leadership from building leaders committed to high-quality instruction and the promotion of a positive school climate**. Often, school building leadership plays a critical role in the development of an environment that supports effective instruction. A 15-year longitudinal investigation of Chicago elementary schools found that schools likely to improve student reading scores were substantially more likely to also have "strong teacher cooperative relationships focused on curricular alignment."[21]

Finally, The Center on Instruction developed a guide for principals seeking to develop an effective reading program in their elementary schools that consists of three "critical tasks for principals as literacy leaders," summarized below:

- **Providing leadership for effective classroom instruction**: This is achieved by ensuring that teachers have ongoing professional development, providing adequate materials to support high-quality instruction, and monitoring classroom instruction through principal walk-throughs.

- **Providing leadership for data-based decision making:** This is achieved by determining what are appropriate assessment tools, identifying the questions which need to be addressed through assessment results, holding decision-making meetings, and choosing and utilizing a data management system.

- **Providing leadership for school-level planning and implementation of effective interventions**: This is achieved by developing a schedule that allows time for interventions, providing sufficient personnel to deliver small-group interventions, identifying appropriate instructional programs to support interventions, providing professional development to teachers involved in interventions, and providing oversight, energy, and follow-up in managing the intervention system.[22]

Leaders in education place a particularly strong focus on professional development for classroom teachers. Education policy and leadership expert Richard Elmore asserts that teacher skill development, along with curriculum reform and shifts in student engagement, are each essential, co-related components of school improvement:

> You can't alter the skill and knowledge of the teacher when you stay in a low-level curriculum. If you alter the content without changing the skill and knowledge of teachers, you are asking teachers to teach to a level that they don't have the skill and knowledge to teach to. If you do either one of those things without changing

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[20] Casserly, et. al., Op. cit., p. 161.
[21] Bryk, A. "Organizing Schools for Improvement." *Kappan*, 91:7, 2010, p. 26.
   http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/bryk_organizing-schools_pdk.pdf
[22] "Teaching All Students to Read in Elementary School," Op. cit., pp. 11-24.

the role of the student in the instructional process, the likelihood that students will ever take control of their own learning is pretty remote.[23]

Experts further note that professional development is necessary not only to improve instructional practices, but also to enhance the use of student data:

> Benchmark assessments, either purchased by the district from commercial vendors or developed locally, are generally meant to measure progress toward state or district content standards and to predict future performance on large-scale summative tests. A common misconception is that this level of assessment is automatically formative. **Although such assessments are sometimes intended for formative use—that is, to guide further instruction for groups or individual students—teachers' and administrators' lack of understanding of how to use the results can derail this intention**. The assessments will produce no formative benefits if teachers administer them, report the results, and then continue with instruction as previously planned—as can easily happen when teachers are expected to cover a hefty amount of content in a given time.[24]

## CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Classroom-level strategies for improving reading skill development are thus bolstered through school-level and district-level leadership, which are critical in creating an environment that supports best instructional practices and the effective use of student data.

The National Research Council (NRC) has extensively studied reading strategies and effective practices for improving reading performance in young students. Arguing that "most reading problems can be prevented by providing effective instruction and intervention in preschool and in the primary grades," The NRC outlines the following five classroom strategies:

1. **Teach essential skills and strategies.**
   o Effective reading teachers teach skills, strategies, and concepts.
2. **Provide differentiated instruction based on assessment results and adapt instruction to meet students' needs.**
   o Effective teachers recognize that one size does not fit all and are ready to adapt instruction – both content and methods.
3. **Provide explicit and systematic instruction with lots of practice – with and without teacher support and feedback, including cumulative practice over time.**
   o Students should not have to infer what they are supposed to learn.
4. **Provide opportunities to apply skills and strategies in reading and writing meaningful text with teacher support.**
   o Students need to be taught what to do when they get to a "hard word."
5. **Do not just "cover" critical content; be sure students learn it – monitor student progress regularly and reteach as necessary.**

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[23] Elmore, R. "The (Only) Three Ways to Improve Performance in Schools." Harvard Graduate School of Education. http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/leadership/leadership001a.html

[24] Chappuis, S., Chappuis, J. "The Best Value in Formative Assessment." *Educational Leadership*, 65:4, 2008, pp. 14-19. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec07/vol65/num04/The-Best-Value-in-Formative-Assessment.aspx

o Effective teachers adjust their teaching accordingly to try to accelerate student progress.[25]

## READING ASSESSMENTS

Researchers agree that "in schools with effective classroom reading instruction, students receive regular brief reading assessments."[26] Overall, assessment of student reading abilities allows educators to respond appropriately to instructional needs or deficits of all students. Johnson, Pool, and Carter recommend assessing the following measures of reading ability in the early grades in order to screen for students who may be at future risk of reading difficult:[27]

- **Grade One: Word Identification Fluency (WIF)**
  - o "WIF has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of reading outcomes for [first] grade students." Johnson et al. suggest that a "universal screen for [first] graders include measures of WIF" and that students identified as at risk should have their progress monitored continually.

- **Grade Two: WIF and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)**
  - o "In the beginning of the year, assessments of ORF and WIF should be used as screening tools." Moreover, student progress should be monitored systematically to "help 'catch' students who respond adequately to instruction and do not require more intense intervention."

- **Grade Three: ORF**
  - o "**ORF measures are one of the only screening tools currently described in the literature for this grade level**. However, as with Grade [Two], classification accuracy is not adequate to warrant its use as a sole criterion for intervention decisions. Additionally, schools will need to examine decision rules for a variety of subpopulations, as research has indicated that higher levels of accuracy can be reached when cut-scores are adjusted for various populations, such as ELLs."

- **For all grades**: Johnson et. Al. note that screening for possible reading problems is only the first step in a much more comprehensive process. Once at-risk students have been identified, "more comprehensive assessments of their reading ability should be conducted to inform appropriate intervention placements." They also note that "focusing on improving the skill targeted by a screening tool" is not an effective intervention strategy on its own.

Ultimately, detailed assessments are needed to identify students' reading abilities and needs, and the next Section of the report explains assessments in greater depth.

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[25] Bulleted points taken verbatim from: "Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers: Key Components for Effective Teaching." RTI Action Network.
http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tier1/effectiveteaching

[26] Ibid.

[27] Johnson, E.S., J. Pool, and D. Carter. "Screening for Reading Problems in Grades 1 Through 3: An Overview of Select Measures,"RTI Action Network. http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/assessment/screening/screening-for-reading-problems-in-grades-1-through-3

# SECTION II: STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING GRADE-LEVEL LITERACY

Since at least 2001, every state independently measures and defines grade level proficiency in English Language Arts as part of federal Title I requirements. Recently, many states have begun to collaborate on the development of common standards and assessments through the Common Core State Standards and two state testing consortia, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). While there is not one best method for assessing student reading and some education experts discourage the use of grade level equivalents in measuring student literacy, there are many promising frameworks for measuring student reading levels, particularly in grade 3.

Assessment plays a crucial role in collecting data about student progress to guide both classroom instruction and district policies regarding reading instruction and interventions. Studies by Kameenui et. al., and Carlisle and Rice emphasize the importance of assessment in providing data for decision-making. According to Carlisle and Rice, reading comprehension assessments serve the following purposes: [28]

- State and district evaluation of programs and curricula
- Identification of children at risk for reading problems
- Diagnoses of children's reading problems
- Measurement of student progress during instruction or intervention

The Kansas Department of Education considers assessment to be part of a cycle that informs instruction, rather than a separate activity. On a four to six week cycle, teachers gather assessment data, analyze the results, and use the results to design instruction and adjust teaching practices. For progress monitoring, teachers repeat the process and determine how their revised teaching practices have affected student learning. According to the Kansas Department of Education, "establishing a data-driven instruction cycle creates a structure to monitor student progress in a systematic way, thus ensuring that instructional time is not lost throughout the school year."[29]

## TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

Literature on reading comprehension assessments indicates two primary types of early elementary assessments, given at different points in the instructional cycle. Teachers give **formative assessments** to guide instructional decisions while lessons are still occurring. Formative assessments are typically informal measures used to gauge students' progress.

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[28] Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Paris, S. "Assessment of Reading Comprehension." Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network, 2007. p. 2.
http://literacyencyclopedia.ca/pdfs/Assessment_of_Reading_Comprehension.pdf
[29] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments," p. 5. Op cit.

On the other hand, **summative assessments** are typically formal measures used to evaluate student performance when instruction is completed.[30] Teachers of students in grades K-3 are more likely to use formative, informal assessments than summative assessments to monitor reading comprehension.[31]

## FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Formative assessments provide teachers with feedback that they can use to adjust ongoing instruction. Screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, and progress monitoring assessments are types of formative assessments that teachers may administer during the instructional process. Teachers use brief screening assessments at the beginning of the school year to identify students who may need further diagnostic assessment or instructional support. Students who perform poorly on screening assessments must take comprehensive diagnostic assessments that provide detailed information about students' reading abilities. To determine students' progress and plan differentiated instruction, teachers give progress monitoring assessments periodically throughout the school year.[32]

Observations, class exercises, and customized tests developed by publishers can all be used as informal, formative assessment tools. [33] According to one study, **the informal assessments that teachers use most frequently include oral retellings, answering questions, and cloze tasks**. Oral retellings of text that students hear, view, or read assess students' understanding of main ideas, sequences of events, and narrative elements. Research shows that retelling facilitates comprehension and oral language in young students, and that assessments of retellings correlate with reading comprehension scores. Answering questions after viewing, hearing, or reading text assesses memory and language. One study found that students' comprehension of narrative elements in picture books during grades K-2 is correlated with their reading comprehension scores one to two years later. Finally, cloze tasks require children to supply missing words in text, and remain popular tools for informal assessments.[34]

Summative assessments evaluate student performance after instruction is completed, and document what students know and do not know. Scores on summative assessments often determine final grades. Summative assessment tools include performance ratings and publisher- or teacher-made tests.[35]

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT SELECTION

The "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments" offers a set of pertinent questions that educators may consider when selecting assessments. Figure 2.1 presents these questions, divided into groups based on their primary area of concern.

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[30] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[31] Paris, S., Op. cit., p. 3.
[32] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments," Op. cit., pp. 7-8.
[33] Ibid., p. 7.
[34] Paris, S., Op. cit., p. 4.
[35] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments," Op. cit., p. 8.

**Figure 2.1: Considerations for Selecting Assessments/Assessment Tools**

| DETERMINING TEST OBJECTIVES | UTILIZING TEST RESULTS | INVESTMENTS IN TRAINING, INFRASTRUCTURE, TECHNOLOGY, OR TIME |
|---|---|---|
| What is the specific purpose for the assessment? | How are test results meaningful and usable for instructional design? | How much time per student or class will the assessment(s) occupy? |
| Do the purposes of the assessment stated by the authors match the needs (purposes) of the school? How? | How will the results be reported? (charts, graphs, narrative, other) | Who will administer the assessment(s), and who will train the administrators? |
| Which students will be assessed? Are the assessments administered individually or in groups? | How will the results be used? Are the results in a format that supports their use? | Will professional development be available for any phase of the assessment (administration, interpretation, and planning) process? |
| Who will receive/use the assessment results? (Teachers, state officials, district office, principal, parents, student teams) | Where will the information be stored? | Will the assessment(s) be part of the school's QPA, NCA, Title I, or At-risk plan? |

Source: Kansas State Department of Education[36]

Numerous commercially available assessment tools enable educators to evaluate students' reading comprehension skills at different points in the instructional process. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory maintains a database of reading assessments that allows users to search for assessments by grade level, norm- and criterion-referenced tools, and by reading competency skills assessed.[37] Similarly, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, offers a tool that allows visitors to search for intervention tools based on grade level, effectiveness rating, and delivery method.[38] However the IES database is not restricted to literacy interventions.

Figure 2.2 provides an overview, conducted by the Kansas State Department of Education, of commercially available assessment tools that can be used to assess reading proficiency in K-3 students. For each, the figure indicates to which grades that assessment tool applies, its use (screening, diagnostic, or progress monitoring), and the reading components that it measures. Similar lists are also available for reading assessments for older grade levels, such as the SEDL Reading Assessment Database.[39]

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[36] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments," Op. cit., pp. 18-19.
[37] "Reading Assessment Database." SEDL, 2013. http://www.sedl.org/reading/rad/database.html
[38] "Find What Works." Institute of Education Statistics What Works Clearinghouse. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx
[39] "Reading Assessment Database." SEDL. http://www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/rad.cgi?searchlang=&andorgrades=any&gradehigher=yes&referenced=&andor=all&searchname=&andor2=all&searchsubtests=&andorelements=any&sortby=name+of+tool&resultsperpage=50&camefrom=search&submit=Search

**Figure 2.2: Kansas State Department of Education K-3 Assessments**

| ASSESSMENT TOOL | GRADES ASSESSED | ASSESSMENT TYPE | | | READING COMPONENTS | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | SCREENING | DIAGNOSTIC | PROGRESS MONITORING | PHONEMIC AWARENESS | PHONICS | COMPREHENSION | VOCABULARY | FLUENCY |
| Assessment of Literacy and Language (ALL) 2005 Edition | K-1 | X | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Bader Reading and Language Inventory, 5th Edition (BRLI) | K-3 | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Basic Reading Inventory, 9th Edition (BRI) | K-3 | | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Comprehensive Reading Inventory (CRI) 2007 Edition | K-3 | | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Developmental Reading Assessment – 2 (DRA-2) | K-3 | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Diagnostic Assessments of Reading, 2nd Edition (DAR) | K-3 | | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 6th Edition (DIBELS) | K-3 | X | | X | X | X | X | | |
| Early Reading Diagnostic Assessment, 2nd Edition (ERDA) | K-3 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test, 3rd Edition | K-3 | X | | X | | | | X | |
| Gates MacGintie Reading Tests, 4th Edition | K-3 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Gary Oral Reading Tests-4 (GORT-4) | K-3 | | X | X | | X | X | | |
| Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation, 2001 Edition (GRADE) | K-3 | | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, 2nd Edition | K-1 | | X | | | X | | | |
| Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 4th Edition (PPVT) | K-3 | X | | | | | | X | |
| Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) | 1-3 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Process Assessment of the Learner (PAL), 2001 Edition | K-3 | X | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Qualitative Reading Inventory- 4 (QRI-4) | K-3 | | X | | | X | X | | |
| Rigby ELL Assessment Kit Elementary, 2007 Edition | K-3 | X | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Rigby Reads, 2005 Edition | K-3 | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Stanford 10 Full Battery, 10th Edition | K-3 | Summative | | | X | X | X | X | |

Source: Kansas State Department of Education[40]

## WIDELY USED ASSESSMENTS

This subsection provides more detailed descriptions of three of the most widely used reading skill assessments. **The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), are process-oriented assessments. The Lexile Framework is a product-oriented measure of student reading comprehension.**

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[40] "Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments," Op. cit., pp. 18-19.

## PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS LITERACY SCREENING (PALS)

PALS is designed to inform instruction and identify students in need of additional support. The assessment was initially developed by the University of Virginia in 1997, and is now used in all 50 states for early identification and intervention purposes.[41] Educators may administer the assessment at the beginning of the school year as a screening measure and at mid-year as a progress monitoring measure.[42]

In young children, PALS effectively measures alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print concepts—all skills considered by experts to be essential precursors to literacy development.[43] **For children in kindergarten through grade 3, PALS also serves as an effective measure of the development of more complex oral reading fluency skills, including oral reading accuracy and speed and oral reading expression**. Development of reading fluency is considered a key measure of skills essential for reading comprehension, as fluency "provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension."[44]

PALS has also been identified as an effective tool for use in conjunction with Response to Intervention frameworks. Although the screening is currently only available for Prekindergarten through grade 3, a version appropriate for students in grades 4-8 is in the pilot stage.

The figure on the following page describes the specific tasks for assessing students' reading grade level in grades 1-3. All students taking the assessment are required to complete the entry-level and level A tasks. Those who score below the score benchmark for those assessments are administered the level B and C tests to obtain further diagnostic information.

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[41] [1] "Background of PALS." University of Virginia. https://pals.virginia.edu/rd-background.html
[2] "PALS Overview." Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
    http://www.palswisconsin.info/about_overview.shtml
[42] "PALS 1-3 Around the Year 2013-2014." PALS Marketplace. http://www.palswisconsin.info/documents/PALS1-3Calendar_2013-2014_final.pdf
[43] Townsend, M., Konold, T. "Measuring Early Literacy Skills: A Latent Variable Investigation of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschool." Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 28:2, 2010, p. 115
[44] "Fluency Assessment." University of Virginia.
    http://www.readingfirst.virginia.edu/prof_dev/fluency/section1_p.html

**Figure 2.3: PALS Description of Tasks**

**REQUIRED TASKS (ENTRY-LEVEL AND LEVEL A)**

- **Spelling** : Students spell words that represent phonics features necessary to be successful at each grade level. Teachers score spelling according to the presence of these particular phonics features in each word. Spelling may be administered whole group, small group, or individually.
- **Word Recognition in Isolation:** Students read words provided in leveled word lists.
- **Oral Reading in Context** (Level A, required for all students) – Students are asked to read a leveled passage (determined by student's score on Word Recognition in Isolation task) while the teacher takes a running record to determine student's instructional reading level. Assess accuracy, fluency, reading rate, comprehension.
- **Letter Sounds** (required Fall of 1st grade only. Also part of Level B tasks, below.) – Students are asked to produce the sounds of 23 letters of the alphabet and three consonant digraphs (ch, sh, th).

**LEVEL B**

- **Alphabet Recognition** – Students are asked to name 26 lower-case letters of the alphabet.
- **Letter Sounds** – Students are asked to produce the sounds of 23 letters of the alphabet and three consonant digraphs (ch, sh, th).
- **Concept of Word** – Students are taught a rhyme in advance of assessing their concept of word. A students' concept of word is assessed using a picture sheet of the rhyme, as well as pointing and word identification in the context of a small book format and then in a word list.

**LEVEL C**

- **Blending** – Students are asked to blend individual phonemes together to come up with a word (includes, two-, three- and four-phoneme words).
- **Sound to Letter** – The teacher says a word (e.g. map). The student segments a specific phoneme within that word and tells the teacher the letter that represents the phoneme (includes beginning, middle, and ending phonemes).

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction[45]

## DEVELOPMENT READING ASSESSMENT (DRA)

The DRA is described as "a formative reading assessment in which teachers are able to systemically observe, record, and evaluate changes in student reading performance."[46] The assessment measures oral reading fluency and reading comprehension levels for students in kindergarten through grade 8. The DRA is part of the following four-step evaluative system that includes guidance for teachers on the effective use of assessment results:

- **Step 1**, Reading Engagement: Observe student reading habits, preferences, and goals.

- **Step 2**, Oral Reading Fluency: Analyze and record oral reading.

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[45] "Pals 1-3." Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. http://www.palswisconsin.info/teachers_pals13.shtml
[46] "One Teacher, One Student." Pearson. p. 2.
http://assets.pearsonhomeschool.com/asset_mgr/current/201327/ReaBro121705DRA2+sampler_lo.pdf

- **Step 3**, Comprehension: Evaluate how well students understand the information they have read.

- **Step 4**, Teacher Analysis: Use assessment results to personalize instruction to meet the needs of every learner.[47]

A student's DRA score places them on a continuum correlated with four progressive reading levels, as shown in the figure below.

**Figure 2.4: DRA Level Continuum**
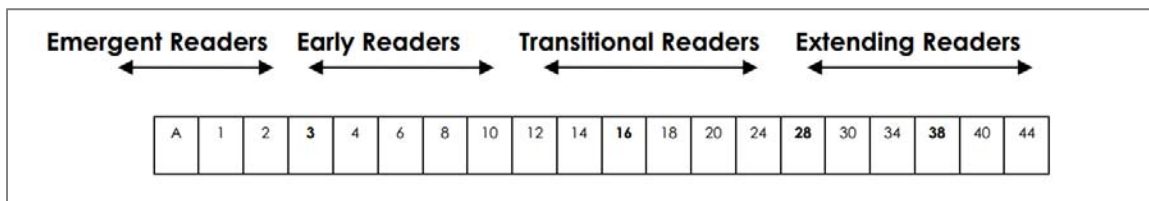


Source: Pennsynvania Department of Education.[48]

Each level on the continuum is correlated with grade-level expectations. For example, beginning in grade 3, students are expected to fall on the "extending readers" category of the scale (designating a score of 28-38) and should be able to demonstrate the following skills:

- Select books for a variety of purposes

- Read texts independently

- Read longer text over several sessions without losing track of story and meaning

- Read silently with good understanding

- Read new genres with some support

- Self-initiate previewing text making multiple predictions

- Read smoothly, with effective expression and attention to punctuation

- Use strategies automatically

- Retell demonstrating a very good understanding of text that is organized and sequential; includes main ideas, important details about characters, setting, and events, and vocabulary and specialized phrases from the text

- Use background knowledge and experience to interpret the story
  Link the story to other literature[49]

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[47] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: "Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition PLUS (DRA2+)." Pearson. http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZ4Z4&PMDbProgramID=23662
[48] "DRA Summary." Phoenixville Area School District. http://www.pasd.k12.pa.us/cms/lib02/pa01001354/centricity/domain/34/dra_summary.pdf
[49] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: Ibid.

## THE LEXILE FRAMEWORK

The Lexile framework is a widely used system for assigning Lexile scores to students on the basis of reading ability and to books on the basis of text complexity. Considered the most widely used measure of reading ability, the Lexile has been praised as an effective tool for matching students with appropriate texts.[50] Each year, approximately 35 million U.S. students receive a Lexile score.[51]

Critics of the Lexile framework express concern over the framework's system for classifying texts, more so than the framework's assessment procedures for measuring student skills. The framework's measures of text complexity are largely based on sentence and word length, which critics argue do not necessarily capture the complexity of the ideas expressed in a text and limits the tool as a means of informing text selection.[52]

Makers of the Lexile framework, however, emphasize that the framework was not designed to dictate which texts students may or may not read.[53] Furthermore, while MetaMetrics, the parent company responsible for the Lexile framework, has published materials that indicate the grade levels roughly associated with each Lexile score range, this information is not intended for use in placement or instructional decision making.[54] Within the Lexile system, there are no direct correspondences between students' Lexile reading level and grade level.

MetaMetrics has also published research indicating that the Lexile bands provide the text complexity and align with the college and career readiness focus of the CCSS.[55] The Lexile bands were recently updated to better align with the challenging requirements of the CCSS for English Language Arts. Figure 2.5 on the following page demonstrates the current Lexile bands and the "stretch" bands identified to align with the Common Core standards. These adjusted Lexile bands allow educators to better understand how student scores on Lexile assessments align with required standards, and will support teachers in identifying students who will need additional supports or interventions to meet the new standards.

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[50] "Lexiles: A System for Measuring Reader Ability and Text Difficulty." Scholastic, 2008, p. 3.
http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/sri_reading_assessment/pdfs/SRI_ProfPaper_Lexiles.pdf
[51] Harvey, C. "An Inside View of Lexile Measures: An Interview with Malbert Smith, III." Knowledge Quest, 39:4, 2011.
[52] [1] "Appendix A: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects." Common Core State Standards, p. 7.
http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf
[2] Miller, D. "Guess My Lexile." Education Week, 25 July 2012.
http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/book_whisperer/2012/07/guess_my_lexile.html
[53] Harvey., Op. cit.
[54] "Lexile-to-Grade Correspondence." The Lexile Framework for Reading. https://www.lexile.com/about-lexile/grade-equivalent/grade-equivalent-chart/
[55] "Common Core Standards." The Lexile Framework for Reading. https://lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/

**Figure 2.5: Alignment of Lexile Bands to CCSS**

| GRADE BAND | CURRENT LEXILE BAND | "STRETCH" LEXILE BAND |
|---|---|---|
| K-1 | N/A | N/A |
| 2-3 | 450L-725L | 420L-820L |
| 4-5 | 645L-845L | 740L-1010L |
| 6-8 | 860L-1010L | 925L-1185L |
| 9-10 | 960L-1115L | 1050L-1335L |
| 11-CCR | 1070L-1220L | 1185L-1385L |

Source: Lexile[56]

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[56] "Text Complexity Grade Bands and Lexile Bands." The Lexile Framework for Reading. https://lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/text-complexity-grade-bands-and-lexile-ranges/

# SECTION III: LITERACY MODELS

The following section describes four comprehensive literacy models, which aim to improve student literacy and reading abilities across a school or district. The following models typically emphasize professional development, are highly assessment driven, and differentiate instruction based on student need. In addition, many of the models feature clear guidelines with concrete measures of success, which allow district to know when each measure is implemented successfully.

## OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – COMPREHENSIVE K-12 LITERACY MODEL

The Oregon State Department of Education has developed a comprehensive framework to support state, district, and school-level work in promoting literacy. The goal of the K-12 literacy framework is for ensure that "at all Oregon K-3 students read at grade level or higher each academic year, no later than grade 3, and that all students progress at grade level or higher in reading throughout their school career."[57] The framework emphasizes the respective roles that the state, district, and individual schools play in literacy education, and has created separate implementation guides for each level.

The Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework is organized around to six major components, shown in the figure below.

**Figure 3.1: Oregon Literacy Framework**



Source: Oregon Department of Education[58]

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[57] "Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework." Oregon Department of Education. p. 1.
ttp://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/elarts/reading/literacy/entire-framework.pdf
[58] Ibid., p. 10.

A brief description of each component, as they relate to schools, follows:

- **Goals**: An overarching goal for every Oregon school should be to ensure that all students read at grade level or higher each academic year. Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) in Reading/Literature is used to determine whether students have met the summative goal and are able to read proficiently at grade level in grades 3 through high school.

- **Assessment**: Reliable and valid assessments are used to determine if students have met key reading goals. A comprehensive system of formative and summative reading assessments should be a central part of each school's reading plan. Formative measures of reading should be used to determine if students are on track for grade-level reading. These formative measures should include early measures of phonemic awareness and alphabetic understanding that determine if students are developing foundational reading skills. Formative measures should also include measures of fluency and comprehension that help determine if students are developing advanced skills necessary to read complex academic material.

- **Instruction**: High-quality reading instruction in Oregon's K-12 Literacy Framework involves the integration of **six guiding principles**:
  1. Making sufficient time to teach reading and use it effectively.
  2. Using data to form fluid instructional groupings.
  3. Focusing instruction on the essential elements of reading.
  4. Differentiating instruction based on student need.
  5. Teachers utilize research-based strategies, programs, and materials.
  6. Schools differentiate instruction based on what supports students need to reach target goals.[59]

**In addition, the framework states the importance of leadership and a continuing commitment to professional development**. Leadership should been coordinated between the state, district, and school levels for the framework to succeed. School leadership is charged with establishing the necessary infrastructure to support teachers and monitoring instruction to tailor professional development to teachers' needs or areas of weakness. Professional development should be "coherent, multifaceted, and on-going," and should include coaching as a central component. In addition, professional development is provided on a school level, since this this allows facilitators to focus on more specific classroom instructional practices.[60]

The final component, **commitment**, emphasizes the importance of attitude and motivation in successfully implementing the model:

> Commitment consists of a vision that inspires and motivates the staff and the broader school-wide community, including parents and school board members, to do whatever it takes to ensure students learn to read in K-3, continue to read at

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[59] Bulleted items adapted from: Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[60] Ibid., p. 13.

grade level or higher each year in school across the instructional areas, demonstrate proficiency in the Essential Skill of Reading, and earn an Oregon Diploma.[61]

The framework also provides clear guidelines for each instructional guiding principle. For example, the state developed recommended times for daily reading instruction to satisfy the first instructional guiding principle that teachers set aside adequate time to teach reading. Figure 3.2 below contains these detailed requirements.

**Figure 3.2: Recommended Time Allocations for Reading Instruction for ALL Students**

| GRADE LEVEL | AMOUNT OF INSTRUCTION (DAILY) |
|---|---|
| K–3 | • 90 minute reading block |
| 4-5 | • 90 minute reading block and literacy-connected learning across the instructional areas |
| 6-8 | • 40-60 minute reading class for all students (grouped based on skill level) and separate from English language arts<br>• 2-4 hours of literacy-connected learning across the instructional areas |
| 9-12 | • 2-4 hours of literacy-connected learning across the instructional areas |

Source: Oregon State Department of Education[62]

The Oregon Department of Education indicates that the Literacy Framework is aligned to the Common Core State Standards, and that the two can work in tandem to promote student achievement. The CCSS address the "what" of teaching— namely, the grade level expectations for students. The framework indicates how the CCSS are to be taught, and "ensure(s) that students who are at risk of not meeting the grade-level expectations will be able to meet them, and that students who are reading at grade level or above will continue to make commensurate progress."[63]

## PARTNERSHIP IN COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY & COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION MODEL

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock has founded a Center for Literacy, which seeks to use "literacy as a lever for educational change that leads to significant increases in teacher knowledge and student achievement."[64] The Center has created four nationally-recognized training models, including the Partnership in Comprehensive Literacy (PCL) and Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM)) The CIM is a more targeted Response to Intervention model, while the PCL is a school-wide reform movement dedicated to

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. I-5.

[63] "K-12 Reading: Common Core Instruction Overview." Oregon Department of Education. p. O-3.
http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/elarts/reading/literacy/overview.pdf

[64] "Center for Literacy." University of Arkansas at Little Rock. http://ualr.edu/literacy/

increasing student achievement as a whole.[65] The PCL offers schools the structure for "implementing, coordinating, and assessing a comprehensive literacy design for continuous school improvement." The PCL program emphasizes the relationship between the previously listed components and educational agencies (public schools, universities, state education departments, and foundations), and sees school change as "a dynamic, continuous process that requires commitment and collaboration at many levels."[66] The key points emphasized by the PCK model include:

- Continuous development of teacher expertise through ongoing intensive professional development;

- Continuous collaboration between teachers, and between teachers and administrators;

- A systems approach that integrates assessment, teaching, and learning across all grades and units within a school;

- A powerful Response-To-Intervention (RTI) approach called the Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM); and

- Literacy coaching as a key leadership position to guide, facilitate, monitor, and improve the school change process.[67]

The PCL website summarizes the 10 features of the model:

- **Feature 1—A Framework for Literacy** uses a workshop approach for meeting the needs of all students, including a balance of whole group, small group, and individual conferences within an integrated, inquiry-based curriculum.

- **Feature 2—Coaching and Mentoring** uses contingent scaffolding, coaching cycles, and a gradual release model for increasing teacher efficacy.

- **Feature 3—Model Classrooms** are constructivist settings where teachers meet together to apprentice one another in implementing the literacy framework.

- **Feature 4—High Standards** are based on state, national, and professional standards that align with specific benchmarks along a literacy continuum.

- **Feature 5—Accountability** includes a school-wide, seamless assessment system with multiple measures for evaluating success, including formative and summative assessments, student portfolios, intervention assessment walls, and school reports

- **Feature 6—System Interventions** are structured within a Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM) that includes two waves of literacy defense. The first wave is K-3, including Reading Recovery and small group interventions; and the second wave is 4-12, including classroom interventions and supplemental group interventions.

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[65] "Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Description." University of Arkansas at Little Rock. http://ualr.edu/literacy/description-2/

[66] "The Ten Features." University of Arkansas at Little Rock. http://ualr.edu/literacy/the-ten-features/

[67] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: "CLM Program Requirements, Description, and Application Information." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/coe/special-programs/richard-o-jacobson-center-comprehensive-literacy/partnerships-comprehensive-litera-2

- **Feature 7—Collaborative Learning Communities** are embedded into the school climate, including literacy team meetings, professional learning communities, teacher book clubs, peer observations, cluster visits, teacher conferences, and demonstration lessons.

- **Feature 8—Well-Designed Literacy Plan** is developed and revised for continuous school improvement, including short and long-term goals with specific benchmarks for progress monitoring.

- **Feature 9—Technology** is naturally embedded into teaching and learning contexts. Students use technology to seek information, conduct research, and produce projects. Teachers use technology for professional learning, collaboration, and research.

- **Feature 10—Spotlighting and Advocacy** are techniques for disseminating information on the model, including news releases, research articles, school reports, conference presentations, and other advocacy efforts.[68]

**The creators of the PCL model express that the most successful school reform movements are well-defined and have specific strategies to support implementation**. Therefore, the model incorporates a number of concrete, measureable goals and directions for schools. For example, classrooms are instructed to create classroom libraries with at least 20 books per student, at a range of skill levels and genres. In addition, the plan lays out a suggested schedule for literacy coaches, indicating that 50 to 60 percent of their time should be working with teachers, while 20 to 30 percent should be spent with struggling readers.[69] The model also uses teachers as the leaders of school improvement initiatives, and stresses the importance of aligned instruction and assessments.[70]

The tier of interventions specified in Feature 6 is described below. The Center for Literacy indicates that the interventions are not "static and linear," and instead are designed to be "dynamic and interactive." Note that tiers 2 and 3 are not consecutive tiers, but rather are two different options for meeting student needs, each with different levels of intensity.[71]

- **Tier 1**: Core classroom program with differentiated small group instruction. Classroom teacher provides additional support to lowest group.

- **Tier 2**: Small group with intensity that relates to group size and expertise; duration in group depends on student need.

- **Tier 3**: 1:1 with Reading Recovery in 1st grade; 1:2 group or reading/writing conferences in upper grades.

- **Tier 4**: Referral process after student has received intervention in layers 1, 2, and 3.[72]

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[68] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: "The Ten Features." Op. cit.

[69] Dorn, L. "The Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy (PCL) Model." University of Arkansas at Little Rock. p. 16. http://ualr.edu/literacy/files/2013/02/pcl-overview.pdf

[70] Ibid., p. 3.

[71] Ibid., p. 25.

[72] Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid.

Research supports the effectiveness of the PCL model. One study of over 21 Arkansas PCL sites found that reading achievement in grades 1-3 increased at least 20 percent over the previous year (before the PCL model was implemented). By grade 2, over 85 prevent of these students had earned a score of "proficient" on state standardized assessments. At one district with a 99 percent poverty rate, 100 percent of grade 1 students scored proficient on the district's standardized reading assessment.[73]

## THE LITERACY COLLABORATIVE

The Literacy Collaborative is a nationally recognized literacy model created by experts in the field of literacy and reading in conjunction with The Ohio State University and Lesley University.[74] Since its inception in 1986, the Collaborative has partnered with numerous districts across the nation to implement a comprehensive literacy framework, assist with the development of a school leadership team, provide trainings for school-based literacy coaches, and ensure tiered instruction to meet students' diverse learning needs.[75]

The two major components of the Literacy Collaborative include on-site professional development (culminating in the creation of a school leadership team) and an instructional model aligned with the Common Core Standards in English and Language Arts. The professional development model follows a concrete implementation timeline and requires a five-year commitment from each school involved. In the first year of implementation, the literacy coach is trained and the school develops a literacy leadership team comprised of classroom teachers, administrators, the literacy coach, and any other individuals involved in reading instruction.[76] This leadership team is charged with guiding the entire implementation process at their respective school, and is responsible for:

- Communicating the goals and outcomes of Literacy Collaborative with the home and school community;

- Engaging the school community in discussion about literacy teaching and learning; and

- Developing an evaluation plan for measuring student progress and monitoring program effectiveness through data collection and analysis.[77]

The program is implemented in the classroom in year two, when the literacy coaches provide over 40 hours of job-embedded professional development for all teachers. In years two through four, teachers meet with literacy coaches regularly to learn the new literacy teaching framework, and to refine their own teaching skills. Student assessment is also

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[73] "Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy." Georgia State University.
  http://readingrecovery.education.gsu.edu/reading-recovery-program/comprehensive-intervention-model/partnerships-in-comprehensive-literacy/
[74] "About Us." The Literacy Collaborative. http://www.literacycollaborative.org/about/
[75] Ibid.
[76] "Our Model: Professional Development Model." The Literacy Collaborative.
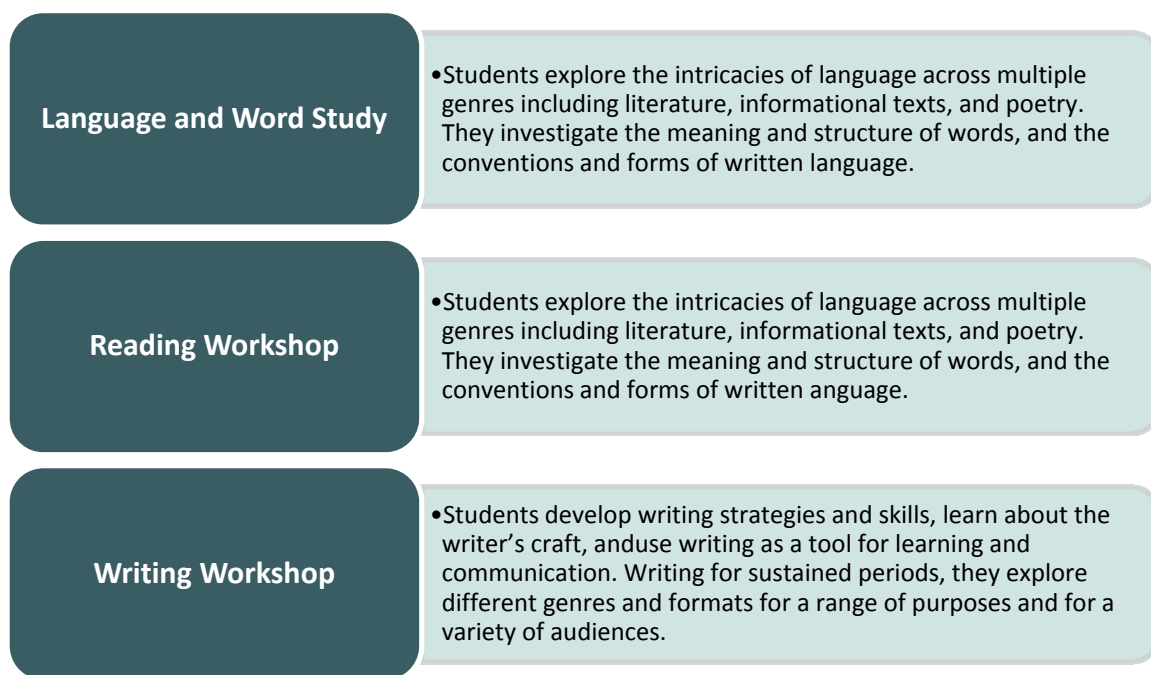  http://www.literacycollaborative.org/model/
[77] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: Ibid.

emphasized through individual assessment, data collection, and analysis. The Literacy Collaborative is expected to be fully implemented by year five.[78]

The Literacy Collaborative framework is "student centered" and offers instructors considerable flexibility in organizing instruction. The three central components of literacy instruction within the framework are summarized in the figure below.

**Figure 3.3: Language and Literacy Framework (K-8)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Language and Word Study** | • Students explore the intricacies of language across multiple genres including literature, informational texts, and poetry. They investigate the meaning and structure of words, and the conventions and forms of written language. |
| **Reading Workshop** | • Students explore the intricacies of language across multiple genres including literature, informational texts, and poetry. They investigate the meaning and structure of words, and the conventions and forms of written anguage. |
| **Writing Workshop** | • Students develop writing strategies and skills, learn about the writer's craft, anduse writing as a tool for learning and communication. Writing for sustained periods, they explore different genres and formats for a range of purposes and for a variety of audiences. |

Source: The Literacy Collaborative[79]

**The tool is highly flexible** in that it allows for "variation in content; differentiation through whole group, small group and individual instruction informed by systematic documentation of student progress; and a balance of teacher-directed instruction with inquiry learning."[80] The Literacy Collaborative is supported by numerous large-scale studies, including a recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and a four year study of over 8,500 students conducted by researchers from Stanford University and the University of Chicago. Highlighted findings from the research include:

- The IES study used DIBELS and Terra Nova assessments to measure the literacy skills of students in grades K-2 in 17 Literacy Collaborative schools where 40 percent of the students were low income. **Student literacy growth increased by an average of 16 percent in Year 1, 28 percent in Year 2, and 32 percent in Year 3.**

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[78] Ibid.

[79] "A Language and Literacy Framework for Literature and the Content Areas (K-8)." The Literacy Collaborative. p. 1. http://www.literacycollaborative.org/docs/framework.pdf

[80] "Our Model: Instructional Model." Literacy Collaborative. http://www.literacycollaborative.org/model/instructional/#implementation

- An Indiana University's Center for Education Evaluation and Policy study found that both low-poverty and high-poverty **Literacy Collaborative schools showed substantially greater year-to-year improvements on the state's 3rd grade reading test than schools with no literacy interventions**.

- Literacy Collaborative researchers at Ohio State analyzed 2nd grade reading scores in 52 Literacy Collaborative schools over five years (1996-2001). **While the entering skills of the kindergarten students remained the same, the average 2nd grade scores rose from 40 to 49 (on a scale of 0-100) —** with the greatest gains achieved in schools where more than 50% of students received free or reduced-price.[81]

## THE LITERACY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

Developed by national literacy experts, the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) is an instructional system that fosters student literacy with the goal of college and career readiness for all students. The LDC does not prescribe a particular curriculum, or provide pre-packaged curricular items. Instead, LDC "relies upon the wisdom of teacher practice, helping teachers take ownership of their own professional growth to drive more powerful outcomes for their students."[82]

**The LDC was designed by teachers and, as such, is highly focused on classroom instruction**. The "building blocks" for the system are two to four week instructional modules, which specify a primary teaching task, along with daily "mini-tasks" used to work toward the primary task. Continuous Assessment is used to guide the model. Below, we present the summary of the LCD module as defined by its creators:

- **Section 1: What Task?** Creating an exemplary teaching task is the first and most important step in the LDC design process. LDC provides teachers with collections of "template tasks," or CCSS-aligned templates that they use to design rigorous and engaging teaching tasks for students. In each module, the teaching task (what students are asked to do) drives the decisions in the next module steps: what skills the students must learn and develop and what instruction needs to occur. The rest of the module flows from this first, most essential, step.

- **Section 2: What Skills?** Teachers identify and define the precise skills that their students will need to develop in order to complete the module's teaching task.

- **Section 3: What Instruction?** Teachers build an explicit instructional plan through which they engage students in "mini-tasks" that develop their literacy skills and guide them toward completing the assignment. Student work generated from the mini-tasks provides teachers with important information about which skills students have acquired and which skills need more time and practice so that students will be successful on the final product.

- **Section 4: What Results?** After teaching the module, teachers score the resulting student work against the LDC rubric and analyze the results, reflect on the entire process, and make revisions to the module to create an improved version to use in

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[81] Bulleted items taken nearly verbatim from: "Research and Outcomes." Literacy Collaborative.
http://www.literacycollaborative.org/research/
[82] "Overview." Literacy Design Collaborative. http://ldc.org/how-ldc-works/overview

the future and/or share with other teachers. The LDC framework also includes an opportunity for teachers to design and give a summative assessment related to the teaching task.[83]

These four sections combine to create a cyclical model depicted in the following diagram, where the student results inform the teaching tasks.

**Figure 3.4: LDC Module Outline**
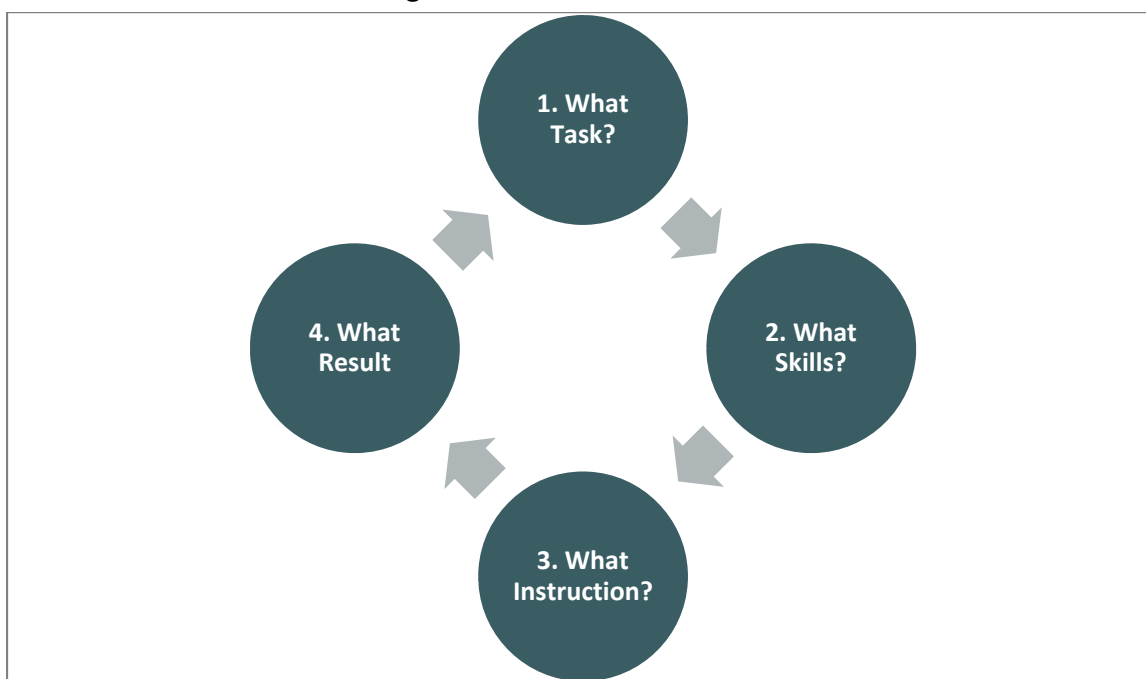


Source: Literacy Design Collaborative[84]

Since the LDC was piloted in the 2011-2012 school year, research on student outcomes is still in its infancy. However, the initial studies conducted by researchers at Research for Action focused on teachers' responses to the tool and yielded positive results. An overwhelming majority (93 percent) of teachers using the LDC indicate that the tools promote literacy instruction in science, social studies, and other secondary classrooms—a central component of the Common Core standards. In addition, 87 percent believe the LDC supports college and career readiness, and 78 percent believe that the tool makes instruction more engaging for students. Finally, almost 80 percent of teachers reported better-quality writing from their students after implementing the LDC.[85]

In addition, in conjunction with research at the Stanford Center for Assessment, the LDC has created a process to confirm its alignment to the Common Core State Standards. The LDC will be validated using a "jurying" process, which "looks at how richly the tasks and modules

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[83] Bulleted items taken verbatim from: ""Modules." Literacy Design Collaborative. http://ldc.org/how-ldc-works/modulesz

[84] Ibid.

[85] "Research." Literacy Design Collaborative. http://ldc.org/ldc-results/research

engage academic content to build CCSS-aligned skills."[86] The jurying process involves checking the primary teaching task for four features:

- Task clarity and coherence

- Task content, including the extent to which central issues in a discipline are engaged

- Texts to be read, looking at features like their academic value and their suitability for developing CCSS reading skills

- Student-written products to be created, with attention to opportunities for CCSS-aligned skills development and to the selection of the types of writing valued in a particular field[87]

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[86] Tools to Ensure CCSS Alignment." Literacy Design Collaborative. http://ldc.org/how-ldc-works/tools-to-ensure-ccss-alignment
[87] Bulleted items taken nearly verbatim from: Ibid.

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