NORTH DAKOTA LITERACY PLAN

A Guide to Building Local Excellence in Literacy Education

2026-2027

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NDDPI NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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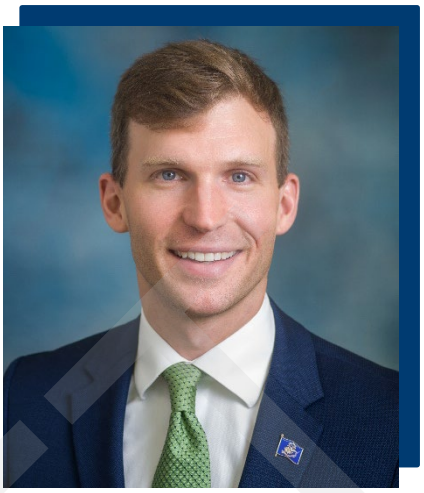
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ND Literacy Plan Foreword



Learning to read is the foundation of everything else a student will do in school. A child who reads well can access history, science, mathematics and literature. A child who struggles spends years working twice as hard to keep up with their peers. That is why literacy is not one priority among many in North Dakota. It is the foundational priority that makes the others possible.

This plan reflects decades of research known collectively as the Science of Reading. This body of evidence is drawn from cognitive psychology, linguistics, neuroscience and education that tells us how reading develops, why some students struggle and what works to help them. It is not a trend or a program. It is what we know to be true about how children learn to read, and North Dakota has chosen to act on it.

Our state has already done meaningful work. Legislation now requires evidence-based reading instruction in every K–3 classroom, demands reading competency for new teacher licensure and ensures early screening for students with characteristics of dyslexia. Through ND CLIMBS, we are investing $44.9 million in professional learning, instructional leadership and classroom support for schools serving our highest-need students.

But policy alone does not teach a child to read. Teachers do. This plan is built for teachers, principals, coaches and local leaders who support them. Each chapter moves from research to practice: how to build educator expertise over time, how to ensure every student receives the same essential content regardless of classroom, how to teach explicitly, how to use assessment to answer real questions, how to carry students through grade-level transitions without losing ground, and how to partner with the families who are a child's first and most influential teachers.

A plan is only as strong as its implementation. I encourage every district to use this

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document as a guide to build something local, specific and sustainable, with a team that has the authority and the data to see it through.

Every North Dakota student deserves to graduate Choice Ready, prepared to thrive in college, career or the military. That path begins with reading. Thank you for pouring into our students with a compassion for learning that will serve them for the rest of their life.

Levi Bachmeier
State Superintendent
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

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Introduction
Science of Reading in North Dakota







Introduction | Science of Reading in North Dakota

The Science of Reading (SOR) is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. According to the Science of Reading: Defining Guide (The Reading League, 2022), this research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The Science of Reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess, teach, and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties.

The Science of Reading is derived from researchers from multiple fields, including cognitive psychology, communication sciences, psychology, education, implementation science, linguistics, and neuroscience. The Reading League (2022) clarifies that the Science of Reading is NOT "an ideology or philosophy, a fad, trend, new idea, or pendulum swing, a political agenda, a one-size-fits-all approach, a program of instruction, or a single, specific component of instruction such as phonics."

The Science of Reading suggests that the most effective and efficient way to teach reading is by using structured literacy practices. Structured literacy instruction is explicit, systematic, diagnostic, and cumulative instruction in the foundational skills of reading (Cowan, 2016). In addition to the necessary foundational skills of reading, cognitive science has shown that a primary factor in understanding what one reads is the presence of relevant background knowledge and vocabulary. Natalie Wexler summarizes the current research by writing, "*... skipping the step of building knowledge doesn't work. The ability to think critically — like the ability to understand what you read — can't be taught directly and in the abstract. It's inextricably linked to how much knowledge you have about the situation at hand*" (Henson & Lafuente, 2020).

The following essential components, known as the Five Big Ideas (pillars) in Reading Instruction, were identified by the National Reading Panel (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS, 2000). Research

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continues to support the findings. Dr. Timothy Shanahan (2017) stated, "*evidence supporting instruction in the five areas in which NRP concluded were beneficial continues to accumulate — meaning that the case is even stronger today supporting the need for those kinds of teaching. The evidence is stronger now than it was in 2000.*

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Table 1 | Five Big Ideas of Reading Components

Five Big Idea Components	Description	Finding
Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic awareness is the conscious knowledge that spoken words are made up of smaller parts (individual speech sounds) called phonemes. Phonemic awareness provides students the basic foundation that helps them learn to read and spell.	The panel found that students who learned to read through specific instruction in phonemic awareness improved their reading skills more than those who learned without attending to phonemic awareness. Students who struggle with phonemic awareness might need instruction in larger units of sound classified as *Phonological* Awareness activities (syllable, onset-rime, alliteration, rhyming).
Phonics	Phonics instruction involves teaching students how the written letters correspond to the sounds of speech and how to use this knowledge in reading and spelling. This includes teaching the letter sounds, how complex spelling patterns are pronounced, and how to use this information to sound out words.	The NRP concluded that kindergarten and first-grade children who receive systematic and explicit phonics instruction are better at reading and spelling than those who do not receive this instruction. Systematic instruction is the direct teaching of letter-sound relationships in a logical sequence. Explicit instruction is structured, teacher-directed, engaging, and success-oriented. **Note: There is a mutually beneficial relationship between phonemic awareness and phonics, suggesting that these two skill areas should be taught simultaneously vs. sequentially.**
Fluency	Fluency is the ability to read text aloud with accuracy, speed, and proper expression. When students struggle with the mechanics of reading, they have no mental energy left to devote to understanding what they read. Oral reading fluency is important because there is a strong correlation between a student's ability to read grade-level text orally and their ability to comprehend text.	The panel found that reading fluently improved the students' abilities to recognize new words; read with greater speed, accuracy, and expression; and better understand what they read. Fluency can be practiced at the sound, word, phrase, sentence, and passage level.
Vocabulary	Vocabulary refers to knowledge and memory of word meanings. Oral vocabulary refers to the words used when speaking, while reading vocabulary refers to the words recognized in print. The mental dictionary includes both receptive and expressive vocabulary. Knowing a word may exist on a continuum from shallow to deep understanding.	The NRP found that both implicit and explicit approaches to teaching vocabulary were effective across the grades. Explicit instruction includes teaching students word meanings, techniques for determining word meanings from context, and the meanings of roots and affixes. The Panel concluded that vocabulary instruction improved reading achievement, as measured by reading comprehension tests.
Reading Comprehension	Reading comprehension refers to the process of understanding and interpreting information from text. It is the reason for reading. Comprehension strategies are intentional actions that a reader can take to increase the likelihood of understanding or remembering the information read.	The NRP concluded that 7 strategies have sufficient evidence supporting their use in reading instruction: asking questions, monitoring, summarization, question answering, story mapping, graphic organizers, and cooperative grouping.

Beyond the Five Pillars

While the five pillars provide the essential framework for literacy instruction, research from the National Reading Panel (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS, 2000) and insights from the Science of Reading (SoR) emphasize the need to go beyond these core components. To strengthen instruction, we integrate structured literacy principles within each pillar, adding critical elements such as explicit, systematic teaching, diagnostic assessment, and different types of practice. These additions ensure that instruction is not only comprehensive but also responsive to the needs of all learners.

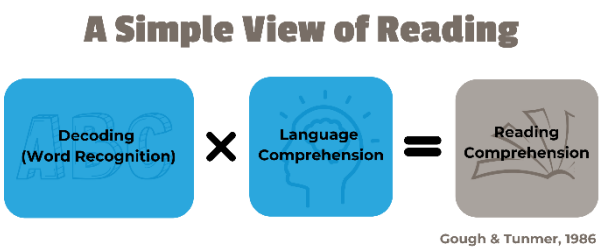
Literacy instruction must explicitly include instruction in syllable types, morphology, syntax, and semantics to ensure students develop a comprehensive understanding of language. Syllable instruction is embedded within the phonics pillar to support accurate decoding and spelling. Morphology, including the study of prefixes, suffixes, and roots, is essential across all grade levels to support vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Syntax and semantics are incorporated into comprehension instruction to help students derive meaning from increasingly complex texts.

The Simple View of Reading

The Simple View of Reading was developed by Philip Gough and William Tunmer in 1986. It is a scientific theory demonstrating that reading proficiency requires two main components: converting written words into speech (decoding) and understanding the meaning of that speech (language comprehension).

The equation is written as a multiplication problem, meaning that if there is a zero in either decoding or language comprehension, the overall reading comprehension yield will also be zero. Therefore, exposure to both learning the skills to read and background knowledge of the content are equally important for a child to become a successful reader.

Figure 1 | A Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

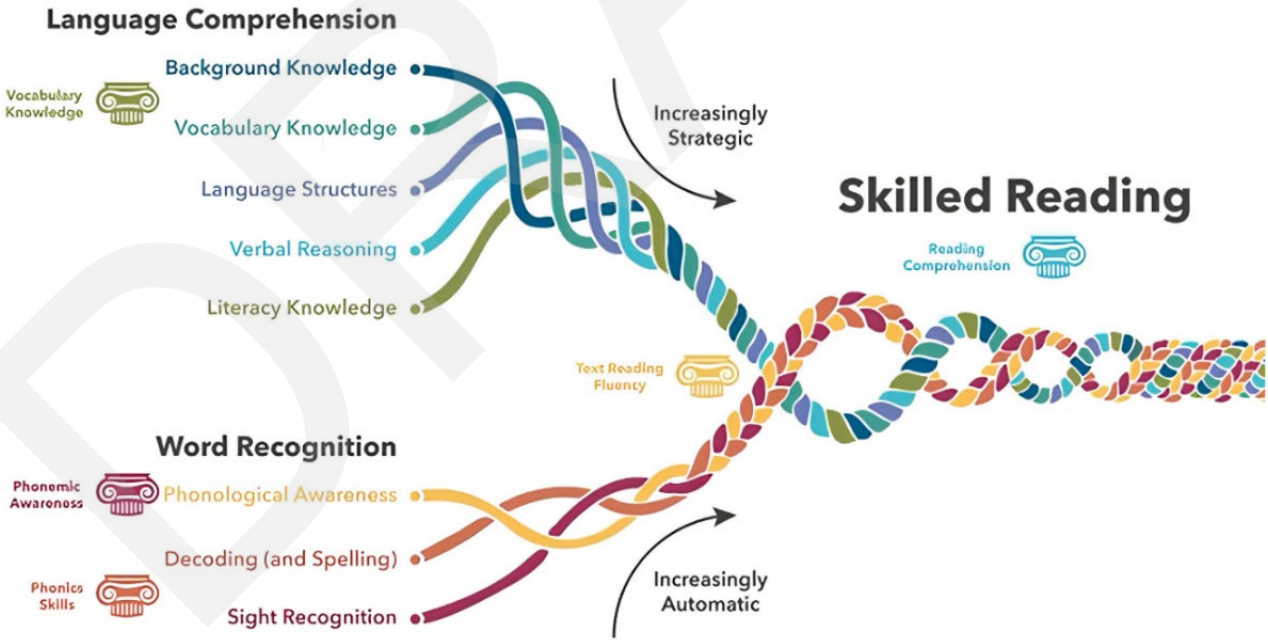


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Scarborough's Reading Rope and the Five Big Ideas of Reading

Dr. Hollis Scarborough (2001) compares skilled reading to the many strands of a rope as they develop over time. Each strand represents a separate skill that, when combined with the others, creates a strong, proficient reader. When any one strand (skill) is not acquired with fluency, it weakens the strength of the rope. The Reading Rope is divided into two parts: Language Comprehension and Word Recognition (Scarborough, 2001). Effective core (Tier 1) literacy instruction should encompass all components of the Reading Rope so that students learn to both decode and comprehend. Supplemental or Intensive (Tiers 2 or 3) small group instruction is where we can intensify and differentiate instruction to target specific skills. As educators plan instruction and work with students who struggle to read, it is helpful to be aware of the parts of the Reading Rope. In this visual, we have overlaid the National Reading Panel's 5 pillars of reading instruction to illustrate the connections among models.

Figure 2 | Scarborough's Reading Rope from AIM Institute overlaid with the Five Big Ideas of Reading (adapted by SEEC).



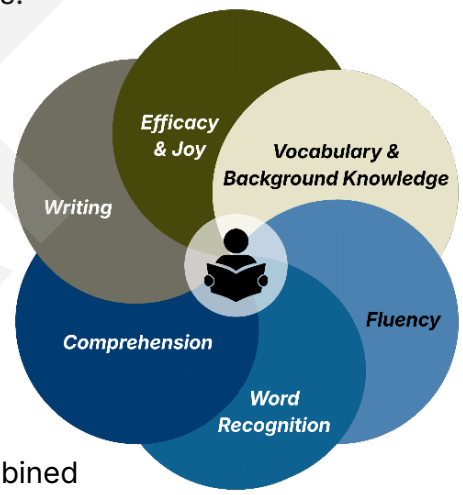
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Adolescent Literacy Instruction

Literacy instruction does not stop at upper-grade levels. In some ways, explicit instruction that attends to language features becomes more important as text complexity increases at upper grade levels. Literacy instruction at this level still includes word recognition, language comprehension, and writing. In grade 4 and beyond, instruction aligned with the Science of Reading should be embedded not just in English Language Arts (ELA) courses but also in content-area courses.

Student Achievement Partners (2021) explains adolescent literacy through six reading accelerators. Attending to these elements helps accelerate reading for all readers, especially older readers. Word recognition encompasses phonology, phonics, and automatic word reading. Comprehension includes multiple skills and strategies. In upper grade levels, there are increased expectations to write about learning and in response to text. Efficacy and joy are key for older readers as student agency plays a larger role in learning. This accelerator also explains the importance of moving past potential negative feelings about literacy and persisting with complex text. Vocabulary and background knowledge are combined because they are so interconnected. Finally, fluency is key for effortless reading and must be practiced at all grade levels.

Figure 3 | Six Reading Accelerators for Adolescent Literacy



The Reading Accelerators, Student Achievement Partners, 2021

The IES practice guide (Kamil et al., 2008) for Improving Adolescent Literacy recommends five promising practices that can be used across disciplines in all grade levels. These include providing explicit vocabulary instruction, direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction, opportunities for extended discussion of text, increased student motivation and engagement in learning, and scheduling intensive interventions for students needing extra support.

North Dakota Literacy Legislation

North Dakota has enacted legislation that reinforces the importance of early literacy instruction, intervention, assessment, and the provision of services to students with

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characteristics of dyslexia. These laws emphasize the use of evidence-based reading instruction, timely identification of reading difficulties, and targeted supports to increase the number of students who achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade and beyond.

The North Dakota 67th Legislative Assembly prioritized the use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to address learning loss and support educational recovery. A key focus was strengthening reading instruction, particularly in early grades.

To support this, North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) section 15.1-21-12.1 focuses on reading curriculum, content, and professional development.

Effective July 1, 2022, this statute mandates that all K–3 public and nonpublic schools must ensure that the reading curriculum is:

- Scientifically based, evidence-based, and research-based.
- Aligned with the Science of Reading and includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Delivered using systematic, direct instruction to ensure early reading proficiency.

Professional development requirements include:

- All current K–3 teachers and principals must complete training, covering the reading components above, before the 2022–23 school year.
- New hires or reassigned staff must complete training or demonstrate mastery within one year of placement.

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 15.1-13-35.1 requires demonstration of reading instruction competency for teacher licensure, effective July 1, 2023.
This standard applies to initial licensure candidates in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, elementary education, and special education. Required competencies include:

- Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension
- Assessing reading ability, identifying and remediating reading difficulties, the use

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of scientifically and research-based curricula, and systematic direct instruction

Candidates must:

- Document mastery of these competencies through an accredited teacher preparation program, or
- Demonstrate equivalent training or mastery of the topics

Provisional Licensure:

- A provisional license may be issued for up to two years if full competence is not immediately met.

Starting with the 2010-11 school year, the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 15.1-07-32 requires each school district to provide one full-time equivalent Student Performance Strategist for every 400 students in kindergarten through grade three. These strategists must be licensed elementary teachers or hold a special education endorsement and serve as tutors or instructional coaches, supporting both students and teachers. Districts must document and report the time spent on one-to-one or small group tutoring and instructional coaching to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Dyslexia Guidelines and Supports

In alignment with state legislation on dyslexia, this plan emphasizes early identification, appropriate screening, and the use of structured literacy approaches that meet the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. Educators are encouraged to implement instruction grounded in the Science of Reading and to use diagnostic data to guide targeted interventions. The plan promotes professional learning and instructional strategies that align with North Dakota's dyslexia guidance to ensure equitable access to reading success for all learners.

NDCC 15.1-32-26 (Dyslexia Screening & Intervention) defines dyslexia as a neurobiological learning disability characterized by difficulties with word recognition, decoding, and spelling, regardless of general intelligence.

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The International Dyslexia Association revised its definition of dyslexia in 2025 to include a greater emphasis on oral language, secondary consequences of dyslexia, and the importance of early intervention. Dyslexia requirements for Local School Districts and Special Education Units include:

- Screen all children 7 years old and younger using a universal dyslexia screener that assesses phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling. The list of approved screeners can be found on the NDDPI website. Screening must also be provided upon request of a parent, guardian, or teacher at any grade level.
- Once screening has identified students needing further support, informal diagnostic assessments must be used to match the intervention to the students' needs. A progress monitoring tool must be used to adjust the intervention and assess progress in targeted literacy skills.
- Schools must plan and deliver targeted intervention services to students showing risk for or characteristics of dyslexia. Students identified with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia may be served through the school's regular Multi-Tiered System of Support instruction and intervention process, by Title I or literacy specialists, or by other academic support systems within the school. This may or may not include special educators.
- Offer professional development to K–3 and special education staff on dyslexia characteristics and intervention methods (e.g., phonological awareness, sound–symbol relationships, encoding/decoding).
    - Training may count toward licensure renewal.
    - Districts are encouraged to use a tiered model for training:
        - Level I: Awareness for all educators
        - Level II: Assessment & intervention pathway development for reading instruction
        - Level III: Dyslexia specialist certification (e.g., Orton-Gillingham, ND credential)

Additionally, NDDPI created a credential for dyslexia specialists (NDCC 15.1-02-16) to support districts that choose to build internal expertise. Read more at the Educator's Guide to North Dakota Dyslexia Law (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.-a).

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Comprehensive Literacy Improvement Competitive Federal Grant

North Dakota's Comprehensive Literacy Improvement through Measured Building Systems, or ND CLIMBS, is a competitive federal grant opportunity for eligible entities aimed at dramatically improving literacy outcomes from birth through grade 12. Funded by the Federal Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant, ND CLIMBS represents a strategic investment in people, systems, and professional capacity to ensure that all children in North Dakota become proficient readers (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.-b).

ND CLIMBS is grounded in the belief that high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction must be accessible to every child, regardless of geography, background, or ability. The initiative promotes a coherent and collaborative approach to literacy across schools, districts, and early childhood settings, centered on the Science of Reading and a systems-building framework.

North Dakota received $44.9 million in federal funding to support ND CLIMBS from 2024 through 2029. Funds are distributed to schools serving high-needs populations through competitive subgrants to early childhood programs (Birth–5), elementary schools, and secondary schools.

The program is intended to strategically focus on the following areas:

- Build Collaborative Literacy Systems: ND CLIMBS helps schools and early learning centers develop comprehensive literacy plans that align leadership, instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional learning.
- Strengthen Instructional Leadership: The initiative develops leadership pipelines by equipping principals and site leaders to create and sustain strong literacy cultures in their schools.
- Invest in Professional Learning: Teachers, coaches, and administrators receive job-embedded, ongoing professional learning grounded in the Science of Reading. Support is tailored to different contexts (Birth–5, elementary, and secondary).
- Support Effective Instruction: ND CLIMBS ensures all educators have access to

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evidence-based curricula, instructional materials, and coaching to meet the diverse needs of students.

To sustain momentum and provide localized support, ND CLIMBS funds and facilitates:

- Literacy Leadership Improvement Networks (LLINs): Professional communities for principals and school leaders focused on planning and implementing building-wide literacy strategies.
- Early Literacy Coordinators Network: Supports early childhood literacy leaders through bi-monthly meetings, coaching, and resources for building foundational literacy practices.
- Educator Improvement Networks: ND CLIMBS schools receive direct support from literacy experts and technical advisors.

Understanding Implementation Science

Implementation science provides the overarching framework for translating a Local Literacy Plan from written intentions into consistent, sustainable practices. Drawing primarily on the National Implementation Research Network's (NIRN) Active Implementation Frameworks (Metz & Bartley, 2012), implementation should be understood not as a single event or final step, but as an ongoing process of building the conditions, supports, and capacity needed to put evidence-informed practices into effective use. Implementation science connects all sections of the Local Literacy Plan by helping literacy teams consider what they are implementing, who is responsible for implementation, the organizational systems and leadership needed to support the work, the data to be used to monitor progress, and how the team will continuously improve. In this way, implementation science provides a common lens for moving from planning to action and ensuring that professional learning, curriculum and instructional materials, instructional practices, assessment, transitions, and family and community engagement work together toward improved literacy outcomes for students.

Getting Started: Developing a Team

Successful implementation begins with identifying who will do the work. NIRN emphasizes that an Implementation Team is not simply a group with a name or a

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committee that meets periodically; it is a group of people with the knowledge, skills, authority, and responsibility to support effective implementation, monitor progress, address barriers, and continuously improve the work. For a Local Literacy Plan, the existing literacy team may serve as the Implementation Team when its role expands beyond developing the plan to intentionally supporting implementation across the school or district.

When developing the literacy team, consider including perspectives and expertise necessary to address instruction, implementation, leadership, systems, data, and the experiences of those most directly affected by the work. Depending on the local context, this may include district and school administrators, literacy or instructional leaders, classroom teachers representing relevant grade levels, special education and intervention staff, assessment/data personnel, professional learning or coaching staff, and representatives who can bring family, community, or student perspectives. NIRN emphasizes the importance of including multiple actors and perspectives, establishing clear roles and governance, and ensuring that teams have the leadership support and authority needed to carry out their functions. The goal is not to create the largest possible team, but to ensure that the team has the right expertise, representation, relationships, and decision-making authority to identify needs, coordinate supports, use data, remove barriers, and sustain implementation.

Goal Setting

Once the literacy team is established, the next step is to identify what the team intends to accomplish and how it will know whether its efforts are making a difference. Goals provide direction for implementation and help teams maintain focus on the literacy outcomes and practices that matter most. Effective goals should be grounded in a clear understanding of current conditions and student needs, aligned with the purpose of the Local Literacy Plan, and specific enough to guide action and decision-making. Rather than identifying a long list of goals, teams should prioritize a manageable number of meaningful outcomes that can be monitored over time.

From an implementation science perspective, goals should address both student

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outcomes and implementation outcomes. Student outcome goals describe the changes the team wants to see in learners, while implementation goals describe the changes needed in educator practice or in the systems that support that practice. For example, a team might establish a student outcome goal of *increasing ELA proficiency* while also establishing an implementation goal focused on *increasing consistent use of an identified evidence-informed instructional practice*. Establishing both types of goals helps teams determine not only whether students are improving but also whether the practices and systems necessary to produce that improvement are being implemented effectively. This distinction allows the literacy team to use data to determine whether adjustments are needed in the practice itself, in implementation supports, or in both.

Conclusion: When Policy Meets Practice

Taken together, the research and policy landscape point to a clear path for improving literacy in North Dakota. The Science of Reading, supported by decades of evidence, shows that skilled reading depends on both word recognition and language comprehension, which is why explicit, systematic instruction must be paired with rich vocabulary and background knowledge. State legislation reinforces this vision, and the chapters that follow turn it into practice. Professional learning builds educators' knowledge and skills, while a guaranteed and viable curriculum with high-quality instructional materials ensures that every student has access to evidence-based content. The instructional pathways then bring that content to life through explicit instruction, a coherent system of assessment that includes universal screening, informal diagnostics, progress monitoring, and outcome measures, and intensification that matches support to student need. Because students' needs shift over time, supporting students through grade-level transitions ensures that the progress they've made doesn't get lost when they change grades or schools, and family and community engagement extends literacy learning beyond the classroom walls. Implementation science ties these components together, offering strong teams, measurable goals, and continuous use of data so that plans become consistent, sustainable practice. By aligning each of these elements, North Dakota schools and districts can ensure that every child has the opportunity to become a proficient reader.

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Chapter 1
Professional Learning









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Chapter 1 | Professional Learning

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Professional Learning section of their literacy plans:

- **Assess** educator needs using evidence from multiple data sources (ex. student outcomes, observations, educator knowledge, and educator perspective)
- **Align** a professional learning plan with the stage of implementation, leveraging a differentiated approach
- **Design/Select** professional learning using the features of effective professional learning for transfer to practice beyond the initial training

Professional learning is a critical lever for improving literacy outcomes. When designed and implemented effectively, it results in meaningful changes to educator practice that directly impact student learning. However, not all professional learning leads to improvement. To have the desired impact, professional learning should be thoughtfully planned, intentionally designed, and rooted in a system's long-term goals rather than a series of events.

This chapter will address three key questions to support educator teams with developing the Professional Learning section of a Local Literacy Plan:

- ✓ ***WHAT*** *is professional learning?*
- ✓ ***WHY*** *is it important to plan for the learning needs of educators?*
- ✓ ***HOW*** *do educator teams plan targeted professional learning to meet needs and improve literacy outcomes?*

WHAT is professional learning?

Defined as "structured professional learning that results in changes to educator practices and improvements in student learning outcomes," effective professional learning recognizes that educators, as adult learners, require relevant, problem-centered

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opportunities to apply new knowledge within their instructional context (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knowles et al., 2020). Drawing on the work of Malcolm Knowles, professional learning should:

- actively engage educators in the learning process,
- build on their prior experiences, and
- focus on immediate application to classroom practice.

Studies have demonstrated a positive link between educator professional learning, teaching practices, and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

There are some differences between pedagogy (how children learn) and andragogy (how adults learn). According to Knowles' theory of andragogy, adults need independent and self-directed opportunities to internalize and apply their learning (Knowles et al., 2020). To address these differences, professional learning for adults should include four principles:

1. Adults should be involved in planning their instruction.
2. Adults' experience is the foundation for adding new information.
3. Adults want to learn things that are focused on helping them solve problems.
4. Adults prefer learning things that are immediately relevant to their situation.

North Dakota legislation, NDCC 15.1-21-12.1, requires that all educators and principals serving students in grades K-3 receive training in scientifically based reading instruction practices. The intent of this mandate is to ensure curriculum and instruction align with:

- the science of how reading is learned and processed by the brain,
- systematic and direct (explicit) instructional methods,
- processes, including assessments and resources, to diagnose, monitor, and inform reading instruction that meet each child's unique needs.

The Professional Development Decision-Making Flowchart outlines options for ND educators to meet this legislative requirement. It is intended to provide guidance on selecting the most appropriate Science-of-Reading professional learning option by role.

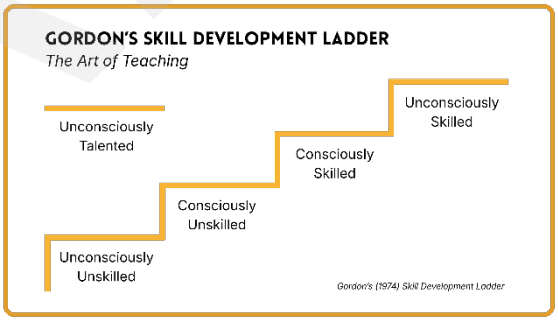
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WHY is it important to plan for the learning needs of educators?

Learning a new skill is easier said than done. The four stages of learning help individuals understand that new skills are learned at varying rates and that learning can sometimes be uncomfortable. Thomas Gordon's work, known as Gordon's Ladder, in partnership with Noel Burch, describes these four stages (Learning Forward, n.d.; Whipple, 2015):

Stage 1: Unconsciously Unskilled: Individuals are unaware of gaps in their knowledge or skills and do not yet recognize the need for learning.
Stage 2: Consciously Unskilled: Individuals recognize gaps in their knowledge or skills and understand that additional learning is needed. This awareness marks the beginning of skill development.
Stage 3: Consciously Skilled: Individuals begin to apply and practice the skill. They understand how to perform it correctly but must think carefully and work intentionally while using it.
Stage 4: Unconsciously Skilled: With continued practice and application, the skill becomes easier and more natural over time. Individuals can perform the skill with little conscious effort.

Figure 4 | Gordon's Skill Development Ladder



The conscious competence model, as shown in Figure 4, helps all learners understand the process of skill acquisition.

HOW do educator teams plan targeted professional learning to meet needs and improve literacy outcomes?

When considering professional learning that results in enhancement of educator practices and improves student learning outcomes, careful consideration is critical. According to the Learning Policy Institute's Effective Professional Development report, there are seven features of effective professional learning (Table 1):

1. Is content focused;
2. Incorporates active learning;
3. Supports collaboration;

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4. Uses models of effective practice;
5. Provides coaching and expert support;
6. Offers feedback and reflection; and
7. Is of sustained duration.

The features of effective professional learning outlined in Table 1 below describe what high-quality professional learning should include and provide an example and a non-example of each feature.

Identifying these features alone is just the beginning in ensuring meaningful changes in educator practice occur to meet student learning needs. School leaders must also determine how to prioritize and differentiate professional learning efforts based on their system's current needs.

In practice, educators, schools, and districts rarely start from the same place across all educators or initiatives. Some educators may be new to the system and require foundational knowledge, while others may already demonstrate strong implementation and are ready to deepen or refine their practice. As a result, professional learning must be intentionally designed to meet educators where they are and to move practice forward coherently and strategically.

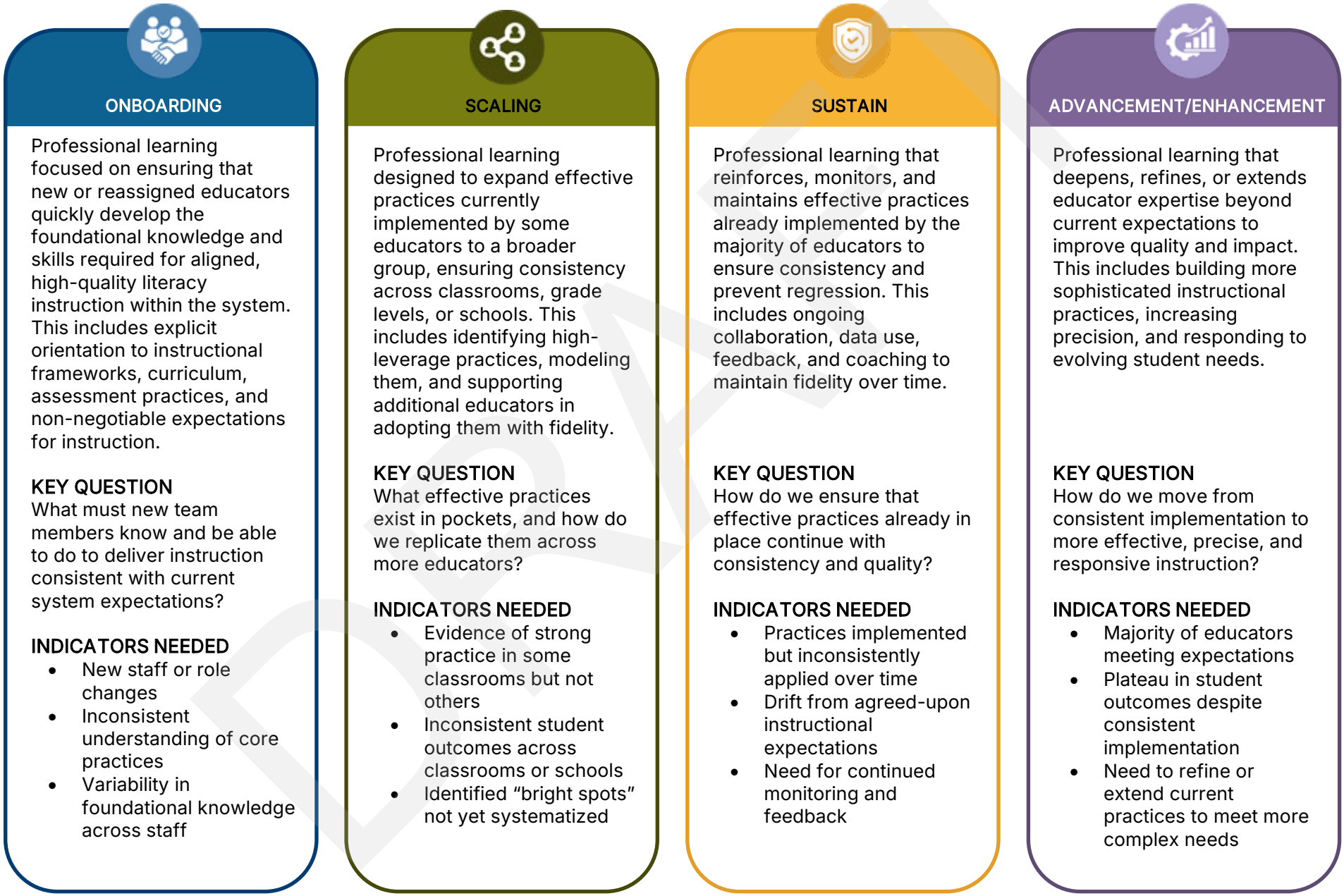
To support decision-making regarding professional learning, the following continuum helps school leaders assess professional learning needs across four key stages: onboarding, scaling, sustaining, and advancing/enhancing. While these areas are presented as a progression, educators and teams may enter the continuum at different points depending on their current level of implementation.

This ensures that professional learning is not one-size-fits-all but targeted, responsive, and aligned with the system's specific needs. Figure 5 below defines each component of the Professional Learning Needs and Planning Framework, as well as key questions and indicators of need.

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Figure 5 || Professional Learning Needs and Planning Framework

A framework for assessing and addressing professional learning needs to strengthen literacy instruction and improve student outcomes.



IMPORTANT REMINDERS: Multiple areas may exist simultaneously within a system. | Use data and evidence to determine where you are on the continuum. | Select the professional learning focus that will have the greatest impact at this time.

While the Professional Learning Needs Continuum helps leaders determine what type of professional learning is needed, it does not, on its own, ensure that new learning will transfer into classroom practice. Further, Sanetti (2020) describes a 17-year lag between educational research and practice, with only 14% of research translated into practice, as we wait for systems to change and adapt (Figure 6). However, attending to the seven features of effective professional learning helps decrease the time gap and increase the percentage of practices implemented.

Figure 6 | Research to Practice Gap



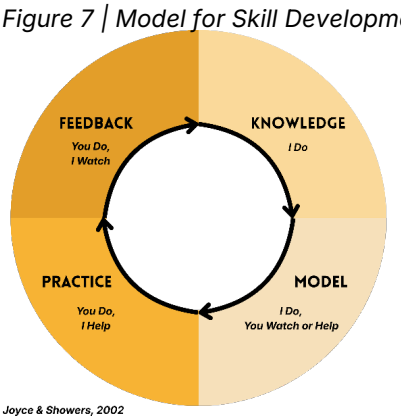
Another way to address the research-to-practice gap is to include coaching and feedback in the training model. Foundational research by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002) demonstrates that very little of the training provided to educators transfers into accurate classroom practice without follow-up support.

The Joyce and Showers model for skill development (Table 2 & Figure 7) provides a clear framework for how professional learning translates into practice, emphasizing the importance of theory, modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching as essential components of effective implementation, which can reduce the time lag and increase the percentage of proven practices implemented in classroom settings. This research underscores a critical point: professional learning must extend beyond initial training and include ongoing, job-embedded support to impact instructional practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Table 2 | Training Components and Attainment of Outcomes

COMPONENTS	KNOWLEDGE	SKILL	TRANSFER
Study of Theory	10%	5%	0%
Demonstration	30%	20%	0%
Practice	60%	60%	5%
Peer Coaching	95%	95%	95%

Figure 7 | Model for Skill Development



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The NDSoR Professional Development Catalog outlines professional learning and implementation support options for ND educators. In addition, the LIFT-ND Tool is a resource that supports the classroom implementation of research-based literacy practices by providing opportunities for feedback and coaching.

Effective professional learning is one of the most significant investments a district makes in improving literacy outcomes. Educators determine the quality of that investment not by the number of professional learning opportunities provided, but by the extent to which they change their instructional practice and students experience improved literacy achievement. When designed and implemented with this level of coherence and intentionality, professional learning becomes a powerful driver of instructional improvement and improved literacy outcomes for all students. A comprehensive professional learning plan should therefore reflect a coherent system that intentionally develops educator expertise over time through evidence-based learning experiences, differentiated supports, and ongoing coaching.

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Table 3 | Features of Effective Professional Learning

Feature	Explanation	Example	Non-Example
Content Focused	Professional learning focused on teaching strategies aligned with specific curriculum content supports educators' learning in their classroom contexts. This element includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in an area such as literacy.	At the beginning of the school year, this school's K-3 educators enrolled in LETRS training. To meet SoR state requirements, educators completed both Volume 1 and Volume 2. During the first year, the course instructor conducted individual educator check-ins, reviewed student data, established goals with each educator, and observed classroom instruction to assess implementation of phonics, word recognition, and spelling practices. Following each observation, the instructor and educator participated in a debrief and, when appropriate, incorporated lesson modeling aligned with educator goals. In addition, the K-3 educators, along with their school leaders, participated in bi-weekly PLC discussions focused on student data related to LETRS content and reading achievement per student per grade level. At the beginning of the second year, the focus shifted to Volume 2 objectives in oral language and vocabulary, reading comprehension, and the reading-writing connection. Educators implemented the same systematic skill development cycle for the new objectives.	At the beginning of the school year, all educators attended a half-day motivational speaker session that used a 'call-to-action' model. This model encouraged participants to take immediate, practical steps toward achieving their goals and dreams.
Incorporates Active Learning:	Active learning directly involves educators in designing and testing teaching strategies, allowing them to experience the same style of learning they are designing for their students. Such professional learning uses authentic artifacts, interactive activities, and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning. This approach moves away from lecture-based learning models and environments that have no direct connection to educators' classrooms and students.	After multiple years of intensive, explicit professional learning targeting SoR goals in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary, school leaders identified reading comprehension as an area for improvement based on student data. All educators enrolled in professional learning targeting seven comprehension strategies. Throughout the school year, REA specialists and school leaders introduced, modeled, observed, and coached educators in the use of the seven strategies (asking questions, monitoring, summarization, question answering, story mapping, graphic organizers, and cooperative grouping). School leaders scheduled reading comprehension progress monitoring at specified intervals and compiled end-of-year data. When comparing student pre- and post-data, school leaders observed significant improvements in each grade-level composite with a high percentage of improvement per individual student comprehension skill level.	Prior to the start of the school year, one of the school's full-day professional learning goals for all educators was to improve reading comprehension. The school's instructional coach delivered a three-hour presentation on high-impact comprehension strategies during one of the back-to-school sessions. School leaders planned to check in with educators throughout the year to determine whether additional support was needed. However, school leaders did not develop or implement a reading comprehension fidelity tool, and they did not conduct follow-up check-ins.

Feature	Explanation	Example	Non-Example
Supports Collaboration	High-quality professional learning creates space for educators to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts. By working collaboratively, educators can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school, and/or district.	Phonemic awareness was a focus area of the school year's professional learning for K–2 educators. Those educators attended a full-day professional learning course focused on the three main phonemic awareness skills research and strategies known to be the most vital for reading: isolating sounds (initial and final), segmenting sounds, and blending sounds. The school organized dedicated time for educators to study and apply these skills and expected educators to incorporate them into lesson plans during reading blocks. School leaders conducted classroom visits and follow-up meetings to promote reflection and peer feedback. The professional learning specialist also met with educators individually and in grade-level teams to provide support and guidance.	Two first-grade educators received permission to attend a professional learning opportunity targeting phonemic awareness. Upon returning, both educators met with their colleagues to discuss the highlights of the learning. As both educators began their school year, they incorporated high-impact phonemic awareness skills into lesson planning. Over time, however, the practices faded due to a lack of ongoing collaboration and support.
Uses Models of Effective Practice:	Curricular models and instructional modeling provide educators with a clear vision of effective practice, which may include modeling strategies in colleagues' classrooms, with or without students present; co-teaching; observing classroom instruction; and reviewing video or written examples of accomplished teaching.	As a result of educators attending a professional learning opportunity focused on high-impact teaching strategies known as 'Explicit Instruction,' district leaders established a goal to strengthen implementation of the gradual release model in all classrooms. School leaders collected data on the use of the "I Do, We Do, You Do" model and on student performance before, during, and near the end of the school year. Educators first participated in virtual learning with an expert to grow their knowledge. Throughout the year, school leaders and instructional leaders supported implementation through classroom observations, lesson-planning discussions, co-teaching, and instructional modeling. At the end of the year, school leaders analyzed data, including student interviews, and found significant growth in student performance and understanding of classroom content	Four educators attended a workshop that included a segment on the gradual release model. Each educator had a varying response to the information: two educators reported that this model was already being used in their classrooms, a third educator felt as though it would be impossible for her to include yet another strategy within her classroom, and the fourth educator was excited to learn more and begin the implementation of this high-impact strategy. Upon returning to the classroom, the fourth educator viewed a variety of videos, added the model to her lesson plans once per week, and began to implement the strategy. School leaders did not collect data to evaluate its effectiveness. Following an attempt to brainstorm with the other three educators, the fourth educator was unsure of what changes to implement.

Feature	Explanation	Example	Non-Example
Provides Coaching and Expert Support	Coaching and expert support involve sharing expertise on content & evidence-based practices, with a focus directly on educators' individual needs.	As a follow-up to the UFLI training K-2 educators received, the lead instructor conducted rounds with each educator. The instructor set goals with each educator based on individual skill levels within the context of delivering literacy instruction. The instructor conducted classroom observations and debriefs, co-taught lessons, and modeled instruction tailored to each educator's needs. Educators strengthened and refined their newly acquired skills through this ongoing support. Students whose educators participated in this feedback model showed significant gains with improved skill application of phonics skills across content throughout the school day.	As a follow-up to the UFLI training K-3 educators received, the school's instructional coach met with each educator one week after the training. During that meeting, the instructional coach reviewed highlights from the training. The instructional coach directed educators to schedule additional meetings as questions or concerns arose regarding UFLI implementation. A first-grade educator requested two meetings throughout the year. No other coaching sessions were requested.
Offers Feedback and Reflection	High-quality professional learning frequently provides built-in time for educators to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating reflection and soliciting feedback. Feedback and reflection both help educators to move toward the expert visions of practice thoughtfully.	A school has identified vocabulary improvement as a school-wide goal. At the beginning of the school year, all educators participated in a full-day professional learning opportunity focused on learning and applying an explicit vocabulary routine, which included word classes, semantics, roots/affixes, morphology, and writing. School leadership established a system for educator teams to discuss and track implementation data at regular meetings. School leaders also developed and implemented a walk-through fidelity tool to collect data and provide educators with feedback on the vocabulary routine's delivery and fidelity. Midway through the year, school leaders facilitated a refresher session that enabled educators to collaborate, analyze implementation data, and solve problems related to vocabulary routine implementation.	School leaders informed educators that current data indicated vocabulary knowledge and use as an area of need for more than half of the student population. School leaders then asked educators to place greater emphasis on vocabulary instruction within their content areas.

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Feature	Explanation	Example	Non-Example
Sustainable Duration	Effective professional learning provides educators with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.	A school's fall benchmark data indicated that multiple classrooms have 40% or more of their students who are not proficient in reading fluency. Educators conducted reading diagnostics and found that more than half of those students demonstrated adequate phonics skills but lacked reading fluency. School leadership scheduled professional learning targeting five key reading fluency strategies across grade levels and content areas, 'Improving Reading Fluency'. Following the initial professional learning experience, school leaders developed a two-year implementation plan to integrate all five strategies into daily instruction across classrooms and content areas. With guidance, school leaders developed a system for educator teams to discuss and track implementation data, gain feedback via a reading strategies walk-through tool, and participate in monthly educator collaboration. Midway through the year, school leaders facilitated a refresher session that enabled educators to collaborate and address implementation challenges with the reading fluency strategies. Although not all students achieved fluency proficiency, year one spring benchmark data indicated that all students improved their fluency rates, with only 15% remaining below proficiency. However, those students remaining below fluency proficiency made great gains in phonics-focused work, as indicated by their diagnostic data.	School data indicated a need in reading fluency. Educators did not conduct reading diagnostics and instead provided all students with the same amount of decoding and fluency practice during daily intervention time. End-of-year data indicated slight improvements in both decoding and fluency for some students, with limited growth in overall fluent reading per spring benchmark data.

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The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Professional Learning section of their literacy plans:

- **Assess** educator needs using evidence from multiple data sources (ex. student outcomes, observations, educator knowledge, and educator perspective)
- **Align** a professional learning plan with the stage of implementation, leveraging a differentiated approach
- **Design/Select** professional learning using the features of effective professional learning for transfer to practice beyond the initial training

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Chapter 2
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum







Chapter 2 | Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum & High-Quality Instructional Materials

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum & High-Quality Instructional Materials section of their literacy plans:

- **Determine** Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum (GVC)
- **Map** ND ELA Standards horizontally and vertically
- **Determine** a process to align HQIM to the ND ELA Standards
- **Monitor** implementation of GVC

This chapter will address three key questions to support educator teams with developing the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum & High-Quality Instructional Materials section of a Local Literacy Plan:

- ✓ **WHAT** is a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum and what are High-Quality Instructional Materials?
- ✓ **WHY** is it important to plan for a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum with High-Quality Instructional Materials?
- ✓ **HOW** do schools implement a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum and High-Quality Instructional Materials?

WHAT is a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum and what are High-Quality Instructional Materials?

The guaranteed aspect of a GVC requires that all students enrolled in the same class, course, or grade level receive instruction in the same grade-level content, regardless of the educator assigned to them. Instructional experiences may vary, but the essential knowledge and skills do not. If what educators teach is different from one classroom to the next, the curriculum is not guaranteed (Marzano et al., 2014).

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While the “guaranteed” portion of GVC defines what is taught, the “viable” portion of GVC ensures there is sufficient protected instructional time for educators to teach grade-level content explicitly and for students to practice, learn, and master it within a school year. The viable aspect of a GVC recognizes that teaching the curriculum and covering the curricular resource are two very different things. Because a viable curriculum means that essential knowledge and skills can be taught within the given instructional time, schedules must allow adequate time to teach, practice, assess, and intervene to support learning. If the amount of essential knowledge and skills educators are responsible for exceeds what they can reasonably teach within the allotted time, the curriculum is not viable (Marzano et al., 2014).

The North Dakota English Language Arts Standards (2023) and/or the North Dakota Early Learning Standards are broad learning goals that define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Standards are applied statewide to ensure consistency in educational experience. Because of the expanse of ND ELA content standards and the limited time available for instruction throughout the school year and K-12 educational experience, educators can identify a subset of ND standards, often referred to as priority or power standards, to be taught beyond exposure to a level of understanding (Flygare et al., 2022).

While ND does not mandate a specific curricular resource, ND CC 15.1-21-02 establishes an expectation to meet state standards. Additionally, ND CC 15.1-21-12.1 Reading Curriculum – Content outlines required content for reading instruction. ND schools have local autonomy to select High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) to serve as curricular resources for teaching grade-level content.

WHY is it important to plan for a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum with High-Quality Instructional Materials?

Educators plan for a GVC because of the proven impact the work has on student success (Warrick, 2018). Students cannot acquire essential knowledge and skills without adequate time to practice and learn. The following commitments are essential and can support

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collaborative conversations with educators to build capacity to create a district-wide GVC.

- Every student receives access to grade-level learning regardless of the assigned classroom.Approved curricular resources, instruction, assessment, and intensification align to the ND ELA standards for instructional coherence.
- Educators teach for understanding and mastery instead of covering essential knowledge and skills with a focus on depth of understanding over coverage.
- School leaders protect instructional time for the greatest impact on student achievement.
- Educator teams establish common expectations for instruction to collect student evidence for meaningful and actionable use of assessment data.
- Individual educators do not have the option to disregard, replace, or skip the prioritized grade-level content.

HOW do schools implement a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum and High-Quality Instructional Materials?

To establish a curriculum that is both guaranteed and viable, educators must engage in a process to build a common understanding of what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. District leaders and content-area specialists should guide and support educators as they collaborate to analyze standards (Heflebower et al., 2021). Educators intentionally focus on what matters most**.** As educators work together to understand what they should teach and what students must learn, shared knowledge and a common understanding become foundational for a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Marzano Resources developed a multi-step process for standards prioritization (Flygare et al., 2022; Heflebower et al., 2021). To streamline this process for ND educators, ND educator writing teams have engaged in developing ND-prioritized standards and proficiency scales for our educators. The ND Prioritized Standards support educators throughout this process. Educators may access grade-level ND ELA prioritized standards at the ND Standards-Based Learning website. Each document features a table of contents followed by a proficiency scale for each priority standard. The proficiency scale provides a learning progression with student performance levels one through four (Flygare et al.,

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2022). The proficiency scale documents provide clarity for all stakeholders regarding vocabulary, foundational skills, standard-level rigor, and advancement for students who perform beyond the standard. The example below illustrates an ND Proficiency Scale:

Figure 8 | Example ND Proficiency Scale ELA 1.F.6 Foundations of Literacy: Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Score	Explanation
4.0 Score	In addition to score 3.0, the student demonstrates in-depth inferences and applications that go beyond what was taught. For example: - Use multisyllabic words and identify the number of syllables. - Use multisyllabic words and identify the number of phonemes.
3.5 Score	In addition to score 3.0, in-depth inferences and applications with partial success.
3.0 Score	The student exhibits no major errors or omissions. Blend four or more phonemes to produce a spoken word or syllable.
2.5 Score	No major errors or omissions regarding 2.0 content and partial knowledge of the 3.0 content.
2.0 Score	The student exhibits major errors or omissions regarding the more complex ideas and processes. Recognizes or recalls specific essential vocabulary such as: - Blend - Phoneme - Syllable Performs basic processes such as: - Repeat spoken sounds. - Identify spoken, one-syllable words. - Identify individual phonemes. - Blend words up to three phonemes.
1.5 Score	Partial knowledge of the 2.0 content, but major errors or omissions regarding the 3.0 content.
1.0 Score	With help, the student exhibits a partial understanding of the 2.0 content, but no the 3.0 content.

Horizontal and vertical alignment of content will help educators organize instruction across time and grade levels. Vertical alignment ensures continuity of learning across grade levels, while horizontal alignment promotes consistency in learning goals, essential knowledge and skills, and assessments within each grade. Vertical alignment contributes to a smooth transition process from one grade to the next. Educator clarity about what to teach and when to teach it allows students to grow into the best possible readers and writers. The example below illustrates the horizontal and vertical content alignment efforts of an ND school district. The standards mapping example provides teachers with a structure for knowing what to teach and when. The prioritized standards are placed on the map according to when the teacher begins instruction of the standard. All standards

are taught before spring assessment followed by year-end targeted instruction to transition grade levels.

Figure 9 | ELA Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Standards Mapping

Staff	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May
K	K.F.2	K.F.6 K.F.13 K.F.7	K.F.12 K.F.8 K.F.9	K.F.5 K.R.3B K.C.3	K.R.3A K.W.4	K.L.1 K.W.1	K.R.5 K.W.5	K.L.2	K.F.14	Review, gap skills, advancement
1	1.F.5 1.F.6 1.F.13	1.R.3B 1.F.8 1.F.9 1.R.3A	1.R.2 1.L.1	1.W.1 1.L.2	1.R.5 1.F.7	1.R.6	1.W.3	1.C.1 1.W.5	1.F.14 1.W.4 1.F.12	Review, gap skills, advancement
2	2.R.6 2.F.8	2.F.9 2.F.13 2.L.1	2.R.1 2.W.2 2.L.2	2.R.2 2.R.3.B	2.F.10 2.F.12 2.R.3.A	2.F.14 2.W.4	2.C.3 2.R.5	2.W.3	2.W.5	Review, gap skills, advancement
3	3.L.1 3.F.8 3.F.9 3.F.14 3.W.2	3.R.3B 3.W.5	3.R.3A W3	3.F.10 3.R.5	3.IR.4 3.R.9 3.R.2 3.W.4	3.R1 3.F12	3.L.2	3.R.6	3.F12	Review, gap skills, advancement
4	4.F.8 4.F.9	4.L.2 4.L.1 4.W.5	4.R.5 4.F.10 4.IR.3	4.W.6 4.R.3A 4.R.3B 4.R.8	4.IR.4 4.R.7 4.F.14	4.W.3 4.R.6 4.R.9	4.F.12 4.R.1 4.R.2	4.W.2 4.C.1	4.W.4	Review, gap skills, advancement
5	5.W.5	5.R.7 5.L.1 5.L.2	5.R.8 5.IR.3 5.F.14 5.R.2	5.R.3A 5.R.6 5.F.9	5.IR.4 5.R.4	5.W.4 5.W.2 5.F.8	5.W.3 5.R.3B 5.R.9	5.W.6 5.F.12 5.C.1	5.R.1 5.R.2 5.F.10	Review, gap skills, advancement
6	6.L.1	6.W.5 6.W.6 6.R.3B	6.W.2 6.R.4 6.R.2	6.W.1	6.W.1	6.IR.1 6.IR.2 6.C.6	6.IR.1 6.IR.2 6.C.6	6.R.8 6.R.7 6.R.5	6.R.3A 6.R.9	Review, gap skills, advancement
7	7.R.4	7.R.2 7.W.1 7.L.1	7.W.2 7.R3A&B 7.IR.2	7.IR.1 7.W.3 7.W.6	7.R.5 7.IR.3	7.R.7 7.IR.4	7.R.9 7.IR.5 7.W.5	7.R.8	7.R.6 7.C.6	Review, gap skills, advancement
8	8.R.4 8.IR.3	8.L.1 8.R.5 8.W.1 8.IR.2	8.IR.4 8.W.5 8.W.2 8.R.3A&B	8.W.3 8.W.6 8.R.2 8.IR.1	8.R.7 8.W.7 8.C.2	8.R.8 8.R.9	8.W.4 8.IR.5	8.R.6 8.C.6	8.C.7	Review, gap skills, advancement
9-10	9-10.R.4	R.2 IR.2 W.1 L.1	IR.4 W.2 R.7	R.9 W.6 IR.3	C.2 R.8 IR.1	W.3 IR.5	W.4	C.7 C.6	C.1	Review, gap skills, advancement
11-12	R.4 C7	W.1 W.6 IR.2 R.2	W.1 W.6 IR.2 R.2	R.7 W.3 IR.1	C.2	R.9 W.4 IR.4	W.6 R.8	C.6	C.1	Review, gap skills, advancement

Establishing a GVC is not a one-time event. A GVC requires a commitment between educators to teach what the team has agreed upon. Educators achieve a GVC when they deliver explicit classroom instruction using school-approved High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) aligned to the Science of Reading. Sustaining a GVC is a dynamic process of building a shared knowledge of what students should know and be able to do. Revisiting common understanding and commitment, coaching educators, and providing training and support for the work will be required (Heflebower et al., 2021).

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Table 4 | Examples & Non-Examples of a Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum

Type of Curriculum	Action Items	Example	Non-Example
Guaranteed	Determine what will be taught. What do we want students to know and be able to do?	Every third-grade classroom in the district teaches the same priority ELA standard each quarter. One teacher uses a different text set, and another uses a different approach. All students are still taught, provided practice, and assessed on the same essential knowledge and skills, so a student's learning does not depend on which classroom students are assigned.	Two third-grade teachers in the same building each choose which standards to emphasize. One spends most of the year on writing, and the other prioritizes reading. A student's exposure to grade-level content depends on their assigned classroom.
Viable	Ensure there is sufficient protected instructional time for educators to teach grade-level content to a level of understanding expected at grade level within a school year.	A district team plans for priority standards with the instructional minutes in the literacy block. They organize what can be taught, practiced, assessed, and re-taught within the school year. School leaders protect the literacy block from interruptions such as assemblies and pull-outs.	Teachers are expected to teach every standards-aligned lesson in the adopted curricular resource within a 60-minute block that is regularly shortened. Teachers rush through lessons to "cover" content, and students do not have time to practice or master it.
Guaranteed & Viable	Map ND ELA Standards horizontally and vertically	School educators determine what critical grade level content will be taught and when it will be taught. Kindergarten through second-grade teachers meet to map how phonemic awareness and phonics standards progress across the three grades. Teachers within each grade agree on what students will know by the end of each quarter, and they use those agreements to plan instruction and assessments.	Each grade-level team develops its own scope and sequence without seeing the other grades'. Second-grade teachers find that students arrive without skills the first-grade team assumed another grade would teach, and some skills are taught twice.

In practice, a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum is foundational to using approved HQIM, providing standards-aligned explicit instruction, examining ongoing assessment, and responding to student evidence. When educators engage in these practices, they create greater opportunities for all students to learn at high levels.

The North Dakota Science of Reading Curriculum Materials Guidance Document is intended to support ND school personnel in making informed investments in evidence-based curricular resources. This resource provides a five-step decision-making process for local consideration. The North Dakota Literacy Collaborative can support districts by facilitating this process.

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum & High-Quality Instructional Materials section of their literacy plans:

- **Determine** Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum (GVC)
- **Map** ND ELA Standards horizontally and vertically
- **Determine** a process to align HQIM to the ND ELA Standards
- **Monitor** implementation of GVC

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Chapter 3a
Instructional Pathways: Explicit Instruction









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Chapter 3a | Instructional Pathways: Explicit Instruction

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Instructional Pathways: Explicit Instruction section of their literacy plans:

- **Identify** the elements and foundational principles of explicit instruction
- **Adopt** an instructional framework and evaluate it for explicit instruction
- **Communicate** expectations for instructional framework implementation
- **Monitor** instructional framework implementation

ELA core instruction is the foundation of a comprehensive literacy system. Schools should ensure that every student has daily access to standards-aligned, evidence-based literacy instruction through high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and effective instructional practices. Explicit instruction provides a structured, systematic approach for teaching essential literacy knowledge and skills.

Explicit instruction is an instructional methodology, not a separate literacy curriculum or program. Schools use explicit instructional practices to deliver the content of the North Dakota Academic Content Standards through the school's guaranteed and viable curriculum and school-approved HQIM and instructional practices.

This chapter will address three key questions to support educator teams with developing the Instructional Pathways: Explicit Instruction section of a Local Literacy Plan:

- ✓ **WHAT** is *Explicit Instruction*?
- ✓ **WHY** is it important to plan for and deliver *Explicit Instruction*?
- ✓ **HOW** do educator teams implement *Explicit Instruction*?

WHAT is Explicit Instruction?

In *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, Archer and Hughes (2011) define explicit instruction as:

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"A structured, systematic and effective methodology for teaching academic skills. It is called explicit because it is an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures" (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 1). Explicit instruction is carefully designed teaching that makes important learning processes visible to students. It provides clear explanations and demonstrations, guided practice, frequent opportunities for students to respond, monitoring, feedback, and sufficient practice as students develop skills and mastery.

Explicit instruction is not synonymous with lecture, teacher talk, scripted teaching, or one curricular resource. It includes intentional planning and responsive teaching designed to maximize students' successful engagement with critical content.

Dr. Anita Archer organizes the elements of explicit instruction into four interconnected topics: Content, Design of Instruction, Delivery of Instruction, and Judicious Practice. Table 5 below lists the four topics and the elements assigned to each.

Table 5 | Elements of Explicit Instruction

Topic	Elements of Explicit Instruction
Content	• Focus instruction on CRITICAL content. Teach essential knowledge, skills, strategies, vocabulary, and concepts. • BREAK DOWN new material into obtainable chunks.
Design of Instruction	• Design ORGANIZED and FOCUSED lessons. • State clear lesson GOALS. • REVIEW prior knowledge and skills. • I DO: Provide step-by-step demonstrations and modeling. • WE DO: Provide guided practice. • YOU DO: Provide opportunities for students to apply learning with decreasing support.
Delivery of Instruction	• Require FREQUENT RESPONSES. • MONITOR student performance closely. • Provide immediate, affirmative, and informative/corrective FEEDBACK. • Maintain a BRISK PACE.
Judicious Practice	• Provide judicious PRACTICE through deliberate, retrieval, distributed/spaced, and cumulative practice.

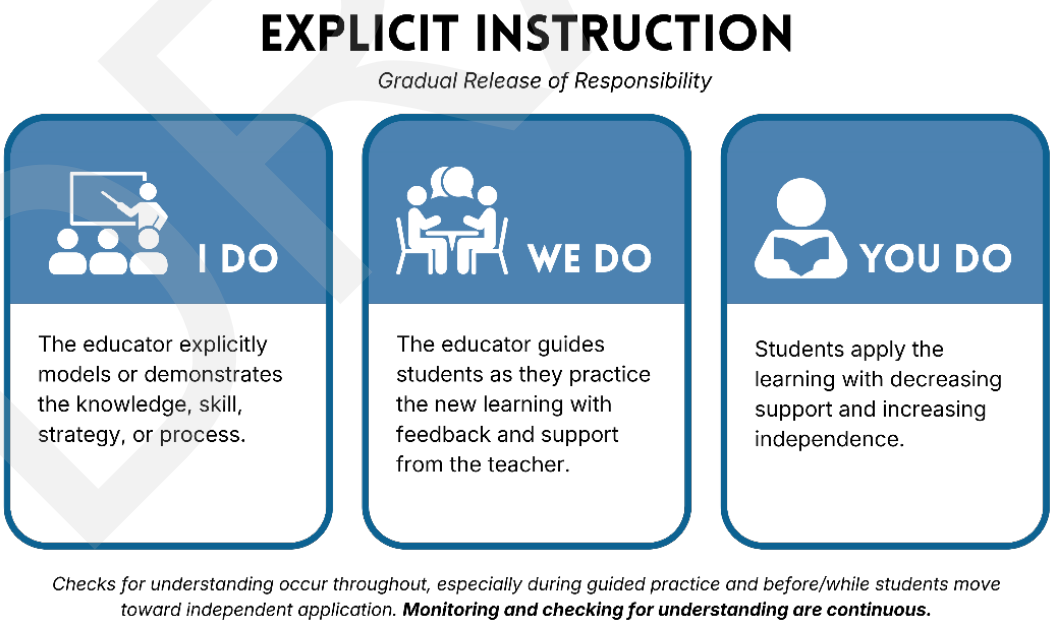
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School teams use the elements to examine their current instruction and identify the instructional practices that will be consistently expected during literacy instruction. The four topics that follow work together rather than as isolated practices:

Content: Explicit instruction begins with identifying the critical knowledge and skills students need to learn. Complex knowledge and skills are broken into manageable, attainable chunks and sequenced so that students can successfully acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.

Design of Instruction: Educators intentionally design organized and focused lessons around a clear learning goal. Prior knowledge and prerequisite skills are reviewed, new learning is modeled, students receive guided practice, and opportunities are planned for students to demonstrate understanding before greater independence is expected. The gradual release of responsibility sequence is commonly referred to as: I DO → WE DO → YOU DO.

Figure 10 | Gradual Release of Responsibility Model



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1. Delivery of Instruction: Effective delivery brings the lesson design to life through purposeful educator and student interactions. Educators provide frequent opportunities for all students to respond, monitor student performance, provide timely and specific feedback, and maintain a brisk pace that maximizes academic learning time.

2. Judicious Practice: Judicious practice provides strategically planned opportunities for students to retrieve, apply, and strengthen critical knowledge and skills over time. Practice may include retrieval, deliberate, distributed/spaced, and cumulative practice. Practice connects to student learning needs and provides sufficient opportunity for students to develop accuracy, fluency, and independence.

The following table was adapted from the work of Dr. Anita Archer and developed in response to educator requests. Examples and non-examples for the four topics and thirteen elements of explicit instruction are provided to demonstrate application in classroom practice.

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Table 6 | 13 Elements of Explicit Instruction

Element of Explicit Instruction	Notes	Example	Non-Example
Focus instruction on CRITICAL content.	*Teach essential skills, strategies, vocabulary, and concepts that are most beneficial for students.*	The educator teaches phoneme segmentation because it is a foundational practice for decoding and spelling before introducing less essential enrichment activities.	Students spend the entire reading block making decorative alphabet letters while receiving little instruction in phonemic awareness or decoding.
BREAK DOWN new material (complex skills and strategies) into smaller steps (obtainable chunks).	*Teach complex tasks step by step, using "digestible bites" to prevent cognitive overload.*	An educator breaks the essay-writing process into brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing.	Students receive the prompt "Write an argumentative essay" without instruction on the individual parts or the writing process.
Design ORGANIZED and FOCUSED lessons.	*Keep lessons clear, structured, and aligned with learning objectives.*	A lesson follows a logical progression: review previous learning, introduce the objective, model identifying the theme, guided practice, independent practice, and lesson closure.	The educator jumps between vocabulary, grammar, independent reading, and writing activities without connecting them to a clear learning target.
Begin lessons with a clear statement of the lesson GOALS.	*Start each lesson by explicitly stating the objective so students know what they are learning and why.*	"Today, we will learn how to find the main idea in a passage so that we can better understand what we read."	The educator launches into reading a passage without telling students what they are expected to know and be able to do.
REVIEW prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction.	*Connect new learning to previously learned material to strengthen understanding.*	Before introducing the letter p, students quickly review previously learned letter sounds for s, a, m, and t through rapid oral practice.	The educator introduces a new letter-sound correspondence without reviewing previously taught sounds, causing students to forget earlier learning.
I DO: Provide step-by-step demonstrations.	*Provide step-by-step demonstrations and model processes clearly before asking students to complete tasks on their own.*	The educator models annotating a complex informational text while thinking aloud: "This sentence introduces the author's claim, so I will underline it."	The educator says, "Annotate the passage," but never demonstrates how proficient readers annotate text.
We DO: Provide guided practice.	*Provide guided practice to help students practice new skills with educator support during instruction.*	After modeling decoding multisyllabic words, the educator and students decode several words together using the same strategy before the students work independently.	Students move directly from the educator's explanation to independent practice without educator support.

Element of Explicit Instruction	Notes	Example	Non-Example
You DO: Provide opportunities for students to apply learning with decreasing support.	*Checks for understanding (CFU) are formative assessments embedded throughout instruction to ensure students grasp the material before moving to independent work. Misconceptions can be addressed with immediate feedback before independent practice.*	Students identify the author's point of view in a new passage while the educator circulates and checks responses before moving students on to independent work.	The educator assumes students understand, since no one asks questions, and proceeds to the next lesson.
Require FREQUENT RESPONSES.	*Keep students engaged through active participation, such as choral responses, reading together, and questioning.*	During a vocabulary lesson, the educator asks, "Everyone, what does 'enormous' mean?" and students respond in unison.	An educator lectures for 15 minutes without any student opportunities to respond.
MONITOR student performance closely.	*Continuously check student understanding and adjust instruction as needed.*	During partner reading, the educator circulates, listens to individual students read aloud, notes decoding errors, and immediately provides support.	Students read independently for 25 minutes while the educator works at their desk without observing student reading.
Provide immediate, affirmative, and informative (corrective) FEEDBACK.	*Give timely, specific feedback to reinforce correct responses and correct errors.*	A student incorrectly identifies the theme as "friendship." The educator responds, "Friendship is the topic. Let's look at what the author is teaching about friendship. The theme is that trust must be earned."	The educator simply says, "That's wrong," and moves to another student without explaining the misconception.
Deliver the lesson at a BRISK PACE.	*A brisk pace means delivering content efficiently, maintaining student engagement, and minimizing downtime. Lessons progress smoothly without unnecessary delays while giving students enough time to process and respond.*	An educator asks a question, gives students 3–5 seconds to think, then calls on a student for a response. The educator quickly confirms or corrects the answer and moves on, keeping the lesson flowing.	An educator allows long pauses between questions, spends excessive time on minor details, or gets off track with unrelated discussions, causing students to lose focus.
Provide judicious PRACTICE (deliberate, retrieval & spaced).	*Judicious review involves strategically revisiting key concepts and skills over time to reinforce learning and prevent forgetting. This includes distributed practice, spiraling content, and cumulative review.*	An educator regularly revisits vocabulary words taught earlier in the year, integrating them into new lessons and assessments to ensure retention.	An educator assumes students remember a concept from months ago, which leads to confusion when the topic reappears in a task or test.

WHY is it important to plan for and deliver Explicit Instruction?

In *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, Archer and Hughes (2011) note that research has "succinctly built a case that research over time and from various perspectives provides a strong base of support for using explicit instruction to teach academic skills and content" (p. 13).

In literacy, evidence supports explicit instruction in foundational reading skills, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. Explicit instruction provides students with clear models, guided practice, opportunities to respond, feedback, and sufficient practice to develop accuracy, fluency, and independence. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guides recommend explicit and systematic instruction, modeling, guided practice, and cumulative review in foundational literacy instruction.

Explicit instruction creates conditions that support learning by:

- making critical learning clear and accessible
- reducing unnecessary cognitive demands
- providing models of successful performance
- providing guided practice before independent application
- increasing opportunities for students to respond
- allowing educators to identify misconceptions quickly during monitoring
- providing students with immediate and informative feedback
- maximizing time engaged in academic learning
- providing repeated opportunities to retrieve and practice critical knowledge and skills

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive review of the research. Rather, the research establishes the rationale for schools to intentionally incorporate explicit instructional practices within their literacy practices. However, school teams may use the following resources to deepen their understanding of evidence supporting explicit literacy instruction:

- *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching* (Archer & Hughes, 2011)

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- *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* (Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 2016)
- *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (Kamil et al., 2008)

HOW do educators implement Explicit Instruction?

"The underlying Principles of Effective Instruction can be viewed as the underpinnings of effective, explicit instruction, while the elements of explicit instruction can be seen as methods to ensure that the principles are addressed in designing and delivering instruction" (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 4). The table below presents the six principles of effective instruction, along with descriptors for educators to review and discuss.

Table 7 | Dr. Anita Archer's Principles of Effective Instruction

Principle	What It Means for Instruction
Optimize engaged time/time on academic task.	Maximize the amount of time students are actively engaged in meaningful academic learning.
Promote high levels of success.	Provide sufficient support and practice so students experience successful learning and can build toward independence.
Increase content coverage.	Teach critical academic content effectively and efficiently.
Increase time in instructional groups.	Provide students with meaningful opportunities for educator-led instruction and guided practice rather than relying primarily on independent seatwork.
Scaffold instruction.	Provide support during learning and gradually reduce that support as students develop independence.
Address different forms of knowledge.	Support students in knowing what something is, how to perform it, and when/where to apply it.

The principles of effective instruction provide a foundation for schools as they examine their instructional framework. This process often begins with an important question: *How will an established instructional framework improve instruction and increase student success.*

An instructional framework streamlines evidence-based practices for school-wide consistency, strengthens teaching practices, and increases student success because an instructional framework:

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- Provides a shared language and clear expectations for high-quality teaching across the school.
- Ensures coherence, reduces initiative overload, and aligns planning, instruction, feedback, and professional learning around a common vision of effective practice.
- Supports educators in planning intentionally, implementing consistently, reflecting on impact, and refining practice over time.
- Allows standards-aligned instruction and HQIM implementation to be monitored for impactful instruction and student success.

The Explicit Instruction Framework starts with planning instruction before design and delivery of instruction:

1. Select critical content.
2. Break down content into obtainable chunks.
3. Sequence the content chunks for learner success.
4. Integrate clear examples and non-examples.

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Table 8 | Explicit Instruction Framework

Design of Instruction	Action Steps	Delivery of Instruction
Opening – Introduction	1. Gain attention. 2. Review prior knowledge and prerequisite skills. 3. State clear lesson goal(s) and purpose.	*Throughout Instruction:* • Provide frequent opportunities to respond to all learners • Monitor responses while moving about to support learners • Provide targeted feedback to learners on the learning task • Maintain a brisk pace for teaching the critical content to students • Optimize Academic Time for Student Success
Body – Instruction	1. Provide organized, focused lessons. 2. I Do - Provide clear, direct instruction and demonstrations with modeling and examples. 3. We Do - Provide rich guided practice to work and learn together. 4. You Do - Prior to independent work, check for student understanding to confirm understanding	*Throughout Instruction:* • Provide frequent opportunities to respond to all learners • Monitor responses while moving about to support learners • Provide targeted feedback to learners on the learning task • Maintain a brisk pace for teaching the critical content to students • Optimize Academic Time for Student Success
Closing - Review & Preview	1. Retrieval review of critical content to confirm student knowledge. 2. Preview content for next task and/or lesson.	*Judicious Practice* • Provide connected, judicious practice based on learner needs • Optimize Academic Time for Student Success

Implementing an instructional framework serves as a bridge connecting the evidence-based practices directly to daily, classroom-level student learning. An example of an Explicit Instruction Framework is provided in the table above for Literacy Plan writing teams to adopt or adapt.

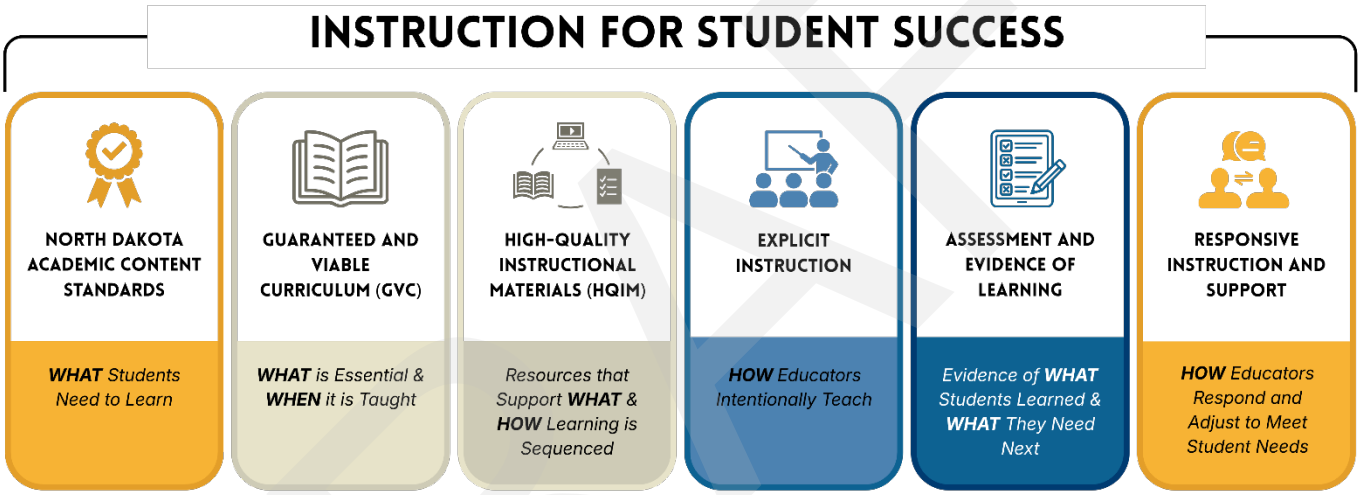
Instruction for student success does not occur by chance. As illustrated in Figure 11, it results from standards-aligned intentional planning, high-quality instructional materials, evidence-based instructional practices, ongoing attention to student learning, and responsive teaching. The goal is for every student to experience consistent access to

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critical literacy learning, effective instructional practices, appropriate support, and meaningful opportunities to learn at high levels.

When educators engage in these practices, they create greater opportunities for all students to learn at high levels because every student is afforded greater access to rigorous literacy learning and the opportunity to become a proficient reader, writer, and thinker.

Figure 11 | Instruction for Student Success



The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Instructional Pathways: Explicit Instruction section of their literacy plans:

- **Identify** the elements and foundational principles of explicit instruction
- **Adopt** an instructional framework and evaluate it for explicit instruction
- **Communicate** expectations for instructional framework implementation
- **Monitor** instructional framework implementation

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Chapter 3b
Instructional Pathways:
Assessment





Chapter 3b | Instructional Pathways: Assessment

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Instructional Pathways: Assessment section of their literacy plans:

- **Conduct** an assessment audit
- **Build** an assessment calendar
- **Follow** a data review protocol
- **Communicate** the flow of assessment results to stakeholders

This chapter will address the following questions to support educator teams in developing the Instructional Pathways: Assessment section of a Local Literacy Plan:

- ✓ **WHAT** *are the four types of assessment included in a comprehensive system?*
- ✓ **WHY** *is a comprehensive assessment system important?*
- ✓ **HOW** *do educators implement the four types of assessment?*

WHAT are the four types of assessment included in a comprehensive system?

Before educators use assessment data to inform instructional decisions, they must understand the technical quality of the assessment tools they use. A comprehensive assessment system relies on four distinct types of data (Harlacher et al., 2024):

1. universal screening data
2. diagnostic data (formal and informal)
3. progress monitoring data (general outcome measures and mastery monitoring)
4. outcome data (summative assessments)

Each type of data serves a specific purpose in a district-wide literacy model. To ensure these assessment tools guide teaching effectively, educators must first evaluate them using two core standards: reliability and validity.

- Reliability: The consistency of a measurement. If a student takes the same test today and again tomorrow, will the student receive a similar score? Schools should

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aim for a reliability coefficient of approximately 0.90. This means that 90% of the differences in students' test scores are attributable to their actual knowledge and skill levels, while the remaining 10% is due to random errors (such as a student making a careless mistake, getting lucky on a guess, or feeling tired on test day).

- Validity: Does the test measure what it claims to measure? Validity is specific to the purpose. A tool may be valid for screening but completely invalid for diagnostic decisions.

Educational leaders and classroom teachers must recognize a critical principle: a test cannot be valid unless it is first reliable. Just as an inconsistent yardstick cannot produce meaningful measurements, an unreliable assessment cannot provide trustworthy data. When educators use reliable assessment tools, they can confidently interpret the data to target student needs.

1. Universal Screening Assessment

Advances in the science of reading enable educators to screen all students to quickly identify who is on track and who may need additional support to meet future literacy goals. Schools should administer screening assessments two to three times each year (fall, winter, and spring) to answer the essential question: *"Which students need support?"*

There are two broad categories of screening assessments used in schools: Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs) and Computer Adaptive Tests (CATs).

Lower Elementary Grade Levels: Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs)

In the lower elementary grades, the use of Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs) is highly recommended for literacy. North Dakota Century Code requires that students up to age 7 are assessed using an approved dyslexia screener. When selecting the screener, educators should be aware that CBMs are standardized tools used to index a student's basic academic competence. Rather than testing a specific classroom curriculum program or content, they measure foundational, grade-level reading skills. In addition, CBMs:

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- serve both as a sub-skill mastery measure and a general outcome measure.
- are especially effective for assessing early reading development because they measure both the accuracy and automaticity of a skill.
- are standardized and include directions, prompts, timing, and scoring procedures.

It's also important to note that most of the research that originally validated the CBM assessments was conducted among a wide range of students, including those with specific learning disabilities and students who speak other languages.

Upper Elementary and Secondary Grade Levels: Computer Adaptive Tests (CATs)

In the upper elementary and secondary grade levels, Computer Adaptive Tests (CATs) serve as adequate universal screening tools for reading risk. Computer adaptive technology adjusts test items in real time based on the student's previous answers, making items more difficult after correct responses and providing easier items after incorrect answers. Because of this, no two students experience the same test.

While the overall composite score on a CAT is statistically reliable for screening, leadership teams and teachers should note the following constraints:

- Avoid sub-test reports for planning: CATs are designed to find an overall score quickly, which means a student may encounter very few (or no) items within a specific sub-skill. Using sub-test breakdowns for individual instructional planning is not advised.
- Limit system-level use: Because every student takes a completely different set of test items, CAT data is not built for system-level planning, progress monitoring, or drafting IEP goals.
- Restrict frequency: CATs are designed to be delivered a maximum of 3 times per year.

Although both CATs and CBMs can be used for universal screening, they differ significantly in how they are administered and the types of information they provide. Table 8 highlights the key distinctions between these assessment approaches (Stollar & Winn, 2026).

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Table 9 | CATs and CBMs

Criteria	Computer Adaptive Test (CATs)	Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs)
Task	Receptive Task (Multiple Choice)	Expressive Task (Timed doing task for 1 min.)
Time	8 - 30 minutes	1 minute each
Type of Assessment	Universal Screener 3x/year	• Universal Screener 3 x / year • Progress Monitoring weekly or bi-weekly • Diagnostic when educators "Survey Back" to point of skill break down and analyze errors
Examples	• STAR Early Literacy • STAR Reading • NWEA MAP • aReading from FastBridge • AUTOreading from FastBridge	• Acadience, FastBridge • First Sound Fluency • Phoneme Segmentation Fluency • Letter Name Fluency • Letter Sound Fluency • Word Reading Fluency • Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)

Interpreting Screening Scores: Norm-Referenced vs. Criterion-Referenced

Once screening data is collected, educators must understand how to interpret the resulting scores. The type of score interpretation determines whether educators are measuring a student against their peers or a specific benchmark goal.

- Norm-Referenced Interpretations: These compare a student's performance directly to a larger national or local peer group (e.g., the ACT or traditional percentile ranks). This tells you *where a student ranks*, but not necessarily what skills they have mastered.
- Criterion-Referenced Interpretations: These compare a student's performance to an absolute standard or benchmark that predicts future academic success (e.g., *Acadience* or *FastBridge*). Brown and Stollar (2025, p. 36) state that:
  A criterion-referenced benchmark goal is the minimum score that predicts reading performance in the future. In other words, the benchmark goal is the 'lowest level of okay' performance. Students who score at or above the benchmark goal have an 80 to 90 percent chance of being okay readers in the future. Students who score below benchmark have about a 40 to 60 percent chance, and students who score well below benchmark have only a 10 to 20 percent chance.

It's important to note that these numbers reflect the predictions if the instruction doesn't change. Instructional adjustments can alter students' learning trajectories.

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Administrators and data teams should consider the following two key points when interpreting screening assessment data:

- Establish baseline targets: Criterion-referenced benchmark goals serve as research-based minimum cut points for screening decisions and clear targets for subsequent progress monitoring.
- Aim past the minimum: Educators should view the baseline benchmark goal strictly as the "lowest level of okay." Systems should always strive to raise student performance above the baseline benchmark, where a student's statistical likelihood of future reading success climbs into the safer 90%-99% range.

2. Informal Diagnostic Assessments

Once universal screening identifies which students need additional support, educators must shift from asking *who* needs support to asking: "*What specific kind of support do they need*?" Informal diagnostic assessments answer this question by pinpointing a student's exact academic strengths and immediate instructional needs. When using diagnostic tools within a comprehensive assessment system, administrators and teachers should keep two rules in mind:

Informal diagnostic assessments generally do not require parent permission: In this instructional context, diagnostic assessments are *not* the formal evaluations used by school psychologists to determine special education eligibility. Because these tools are used strictly for designing daily instruction, formal parental consent is generally not required.

Target only students who miss the benchmark: Delivering informal diagnostic assessments to every student is a poor use of school time. Educators should only administer informal diagnostics to students who score below the screening benchmark and for whom the next instructional steps are unclear.

While most informal diagnostic assessments are administered individually to allow teachers to observe a student's processing errors closely (such as phonics or decoding

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inventories), some can be administered efficiently in group settings (such as spelling inventories).

3. Progress Monitoring Assessments

Once targeted instruction or intervention begins, educators use progress monitoring assessments to answer a critical question: "*Is the support working*?"

Progress monitoring is often misunderstood as a single, uniform activity. In reality, it involves two distinct feedback loops, both of which serve useful but separate roles in tracking student progress (The IRIS Center, 2023):

Mastery Monitoring: This evaluates whether students have learned the concepts or standards recently taught. Educators use mastery monitoring to measure proficiency in a specific skill or standard at the end of a lesson or instructional unit. It helps teachers determine whether students have learned enough to move on to the next sequential instructional step.

General Outcome Measurement (GOM): This uses brief, repeated, and standardized probes—such as Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs) like *Acadience*, or *FastBridge*—to track a student's growth toward a long-term goal. Rather than checking a single isolated skill, GOM samples a broader set of foundational reading skills over time to predict overall reading competence. It helps educators determine whether an intervention is intensive enough to effectively close the achievement gap.

By integrating both feedback loops into their comprehensive assessment plan, leadership teams can build a reliable, predictive roadmap that ensures every student moves steadily toward grade-level literacy success.

4. Outcome Assessments

While progress monitoring provides real-time information to adjust ongoing instruction, schools also need a mechanism to measure long-term cumulative success. Outcome assessments (also known as summative assessments) evaluate student learning and

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academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period (such as the end of a school year).

In North Dakota, schools administer the ND A+ English Language Arts (ELA) Summative Assessment to all students in grades 3–8 and 10.

The blueprint of this state assessment balances core literacy components:
Reading: Comprises approximately 70% of the assessment weight.
Writing: Comprises approximately 30% of the assessment weight.

Utilizing Summative Data for System-Wide Growth

While outcome assessments are lagging indicators of student performance, they provide vital data for instructional leadership:

- Identify Systemic Gaps: Rather than using this end-of-year data to adjust day-to-day student interventions, educators should analyze school- and district-wide assessment trends to isolate specific academic standards that cohorts of students have not mastered.
- Audit Instructional Rigor: Data teams can leverage trend lines to flag grade-level instructional areas or curricular materials that require greater systemic rigor to effectively support student proficiency on state standards.

Students who score below established benchmarks on the universal screening tools are statistically less likely to demonstrate proficiency on the state summative exam unless intensive, tier-two or tier-three structural interventions disrupt that trajectory (Solis, et al., 2014).

A comprehensive assessment system is only as powerful as the instructional changes it drives. When school leadership teams and classroom teachers align their practices around reliability, validity, and the unique purposes of these four types of assessment, data ceases to be a chore and becomes a clear roadmap for ensuring every student reads proficiently (Table 10).

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Table 10 | Overview of the 4 Types of Assessment

Type of Assessment	Definition	Question the Assessment Answers	Example	Non-Example
Screening	brief, standardized indicators given to all students 2-3 times per year.	• Who might need help? • Is Core (Tier 1) instruction on track?	• Acadience (K-12, free option available) • Adolescent Assessment of Literacy (3-12, free option available) • Capti-Read Basix (3-12) • FastBridge (K-12)	• Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)
Diagnostic	formal or informal assessments given to at-risk students to determine their skill gaps and plan instruction	• Who might need help? • Is Core (Tier 1) instruction on track?	• Informal Diagnostic Assessments • Adolescent Assessment of Literacy (3-12, free option available) • Capti-Read Basix (3-12) • Phonics & Word Reading Survey (mid-K-12) • Spelling Inventory (1-12)	• Running Record
Progress Monitoring	brief, frequent measures sensitive to small increments of growth	• Is the student improving with this instruction?	• General Outcome Measures (GOM) assess both accuracy and automaticity • Acadience (K-12, free option available) • FastBridge (K-12) • Mastery Monitoring typically assesses accuracy, or the extent to which students have learned the material taught in the current unit • NAVVY progress monitors mastery of ND standards • Formative assessments such as end-of-unit assessments, projects, presentations • An informal diagnostic can sometimes be used to monitor mastery over time	• Woodcock-Johnson IV
Outcome	typically group-administered assessments given annually	• Did students meet grade-level expectations?	• ND A+ (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10) • ACCESS for ELs • ACT	• C-TOPP Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing

WHY is a comprehensive assessment system important?

A coordinated assessment system is vital. Longitudinal research shows that students who struggle with foundational reading at the end of first grade rarely catch up without targeted, intensive intervention. When a school district implements an infrastructure containing all four assessment types, educators can stop looking at data in isolation. Instead, information from each tool dynamically informs the others, providing the comprehensive data necessary to bring most students to grade-level benchmarks.
Assessment is a non-negotiable component of effective literacy instruction. While explicit instruction focuses on intentionally planning and delivering high-quality lessons, assessment provides the ongoing feedback loop that proves whether students are actually learning what was taught. Together, instruction and assessment form a continuous improvement cycle: educators teach, gather evidence of learning, analyze student performance, and adjust instruction to drive reading proficiency.
No single test can answer every instructional question. Different assessments serve distinct, non-overlapping functions. When used together for their intended purposes, they provide a complete picture of student literacy development. This clarity allows schools to:

- Strengthen and audit core (Tier 1) instruction
- Identify specific skill gaps early
- Provide timely, targeted, and evidence-based interventions
- Monitor student progress along a predictable growth trajectory
- Evaluate the overall systemic effectiveness of district curricular choices

Ultimately, a comprehensive assessment system ensures that high-stakes school decisions are grounded in objective evidence rather than assumptions or intuition. This structural shift moves assessment away from a compliance or accountability exercise, transforming data into an active, everyday mechanism for ensuring every student reads proficiently.

HOW do educators implement the four types of assessment?

Understanding the purpose of each type of assessment is only the first step. Building a comprehensive assessment system requires clear, district-wide implementation

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expectations to ensure that data consistently and systematically drives instructional decisions across every classroom.

To guide this implementation, educators can anchor their assessment practices in the Simple View of Reading (SVR), introduced in the Introduction. The SVR demonstrates that reading proficiency is the product of two distinct cognitive skill sets. Because these two domains multiply rather than add, a deficit in either area completely derails reading comprehension. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment system must isolate and evaluate both components independently:

- Word Recognition (Decoding): Assessed through specific metrics like phonemic awareness screeners, phonics inventories, and oral reading fluency measures.
- Language Comprehension: Assessed through listening comprehension metrics and vocabulary screeners.

Figure 12 | D/LC/RC (Decoding, Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension)



When a student falls below the "lowest level of okay" on a universal screener, the SVR provides data teams with the diagnostic roadmap necessary to isolate the breakdown and determine the next instructional moves (Table 11).

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Table 11 | Diagnostic Roadmap

If Diagnostic Data Reveals...	...The Student's Profile Is:	...The Next Instructional Move Is:	...Progress Monitoring (CBM) Focus:
Weak Decoding skills Strong Language Comprehension	Decoding Deficit	Provide targeted, explicit intervention in foundational phonics, phonemic awareness, and word-attack strategies (Tier 2/3).	Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), Word Reading Fluency (WRF), or Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)
Strong Decoding skills Weak Language Comprehension	Language Deficit	Maintain core decoding instruction. Provide targeted intervention in vocabulary building, background knowledge, and sentence structures.	Listening Comprehension or Oral Language measures
Weak Decoding skills Weak Language Comprehension	Mixed Deficit	Provide intensive, multi-tiered intervention addressing both foundational decoding skills and language/vocabulary acquisition.	Sub-skill mastery tracking paired with general reading CBMs
Strong Decoding skills Strong Language Comprehension	On Track	Maintain high-quality, explicit core (Tier 1) instruction. Provide enrichment and extension activities.	Universal Screening benchmarks (3x/year)

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Instructional Pathways: Assessment section of their literacy plans:

- **Conduct** an assessment audit
- **Build** an assessment calendar
- **Follow** a data review protocol
- **Communicate** the flow of assessment results to stakeholders

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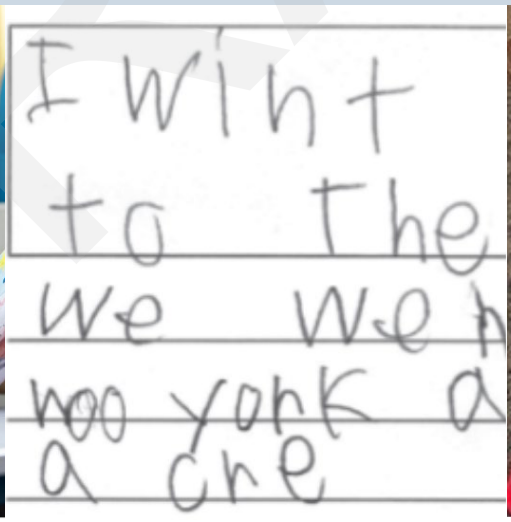
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Chapter 3c
Instructional Pathways:
Intensification







Chapter 3c | Instructional Pathways: Intensification

This chapter will address the following questions to support educator teams with developing the Instructional Pathways: Intensification section of a local Literacy Plan.

- ✓ **WHAT** is Intensification?
- ✓ **WHY** Intensify?
- ✓ **HOW** do educators intensify?

CONTENT COMING SPRING 2027!

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Chapter 4
Grade-Level Transitions









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Chapter 4 | Grade-Level Transitions

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the grade-level transition section of their literacy plans:

- **Build/Identify** a Transition Team made of a variety of stakeholders
- **Identify** the transitions within your system
- **Identify** goals with aligned activities at each major transition
- **Monitor** goals and activities

This chapter will address three key questions to support educator teams with developing the Grade-Level Transition section of a Local Literacy Plan:

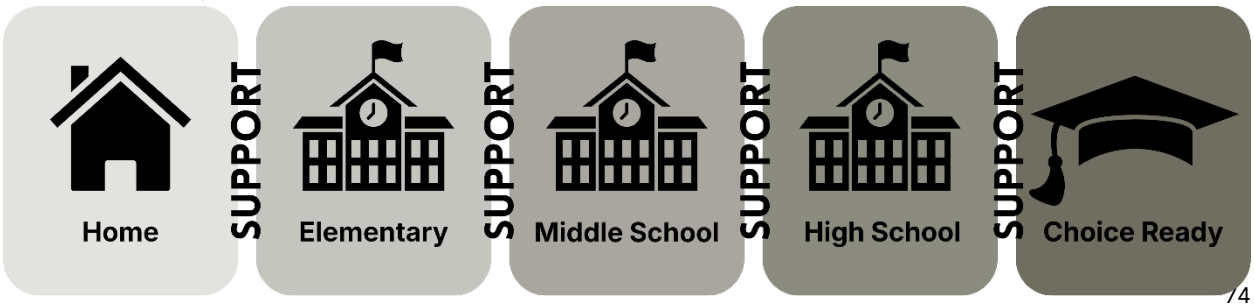
- ✓ **WHAT** *is a grade-level transition?*
- ✓ **WHY** *is it important to plan for grade-level transitions?*
- ✓ **HOW** *to plan for grade-level transitions?*

WHAT is a Grade-Level Transition?

According to Anderson et al. (2000), "In the United States, there typically are four major systemic transitions: home-to-school, elementary school to middle/junior high school, middle/junior high school to high school, and high school to college, work, or the military" (p. 325). This document focuses on the four major transitions defined above. However, each year within a child's education is a transition in itself with increased expectations.

The image in Figure 13 shows which transitions require support within a single system. The transitions depend on the school system and may include other types of schools, such as preschools, home or virtual schools, and colony schools.

Figure 13 | Transition Pathway: Home to Elementary to Middle to High to Choice Ready



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WHY is it important to plan for grade-level transitions?

At each grade-level transition, there is a distinct increase in academic rigor. North Dakota ELA standards are strategic in their expectation for students to navigate increasingly complex text and produce more sophisticated writing over time. Because of the cumulative nature of literacy skills, students are at risk of unfinished learning over time, which is felt most strongly at the grade level transitions.

In addition, students are expected to use literacy skills to show understanding across content areas, such as science and social studies, at a rapidly increasing rate beginning in upper elementary school. Throughout a student's educational experience, grade-level transitions can significantly influence academic outcomes, either accelerating or hindering learning progress. For this reason, it is essential to students' success that school systems plan proactively for grade-level transitions.

HOW to plan for grade-level transitions?

Form a Grade-Level Transition Team

The Grade-Level Transition Team proactively manages the shift students experience when moving to a new grade level or school building, as these transitions are often sources of stress and can lead to declines in performance, attendance, and/or engagement. A dedicated transition team creates a seamless continuum of learning by ensuring that the new environment builds upon prior experiences and expectations. This proactive approach mitigates student anxiety, promotes a stronger sense of belonging, and ultimately sustains academic momentum, which is particularly vital during key developmental moves like home-to-school, elementary to middle school or middle to high school.

The Grade-Level Transition Team should be cross-functional and ideally include administrators from both the sending and receiving schools, a counselor, a family or community representative, and a mix of educators from the current grade and the next grade to ensure vertical alignment. School systems may already support these transitions through teams such as BARR, MTSS, or Family Engagement.

Responsibilities of the team include:

- Analyze student data (academic performance, attendance, discipline referrals)

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- Develop, implement, and evaluate structured grade-level transition activities
- Create systems that support communication and data sharing across schools when applicable.

Identify Grade-Level Transitions that Require Planning

School systems and Transition Teams should proactively prepare students for three key types of grade-level transitions as they advance in their school career. These look different across the grades; however, the three types are in play during each transition.

- Academic Grade-Level Transitions: Prepare students for increased curriculum rigor and new study, organization, and learning strategies, as well as make plans for unfinished learning
- Social Grade-Level Transitions: Support students as they navigate change, friendships, and peer relationships.
- Procedural Grade-Level Transitions: Familiarize students and families with new environments, routines, and policies.

Academic transitions are the key consideration within a local literacy plan. Therefore, specific literacy transitions may be identified in your context, such as those across data systems, curriculum materials, and intervention documentation.

Transition from Home-to-School or Kindergarten

The first significant grade-level transition students encounter is from home, childcare, or pre-K to kindergarten. Schools must prioritize communication and engagement with families to support student success. Schools can prepare students and families for the move to kindergarten by implementing proactive engagement and orientation programs. North Dakota Health and Human Services *School Readiness for Legendary Learners* provides a comprehensive overview of how to support this transition from birth (North Dakota Health and Human Services, 2025).

Transition from Elementary to Middle School

The next significant grade-level transition that students experience is the one from elementary to middle school. Research by the Association for Middle Level Education

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emphasizes that young adolescents need support through multiple grade-level transitions occurring simultaneously: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional (King, n.d.). This grade-level transition can be particularly difficult because it occurs during puberty, when limbic system development outpaces prefrontal cortex maturation. This means that all grade-level transitions will be more difficult, and it makes social grade-level transitions particularly challenging.

Elementary and middle school teams should collaborate regularly to support vertical alignment and prepare students for increased academic rigor. This may be completed as part of a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. Data-based decision-making is also key during transitions between grade levels and at major transition points. Using literacy assessment data to pinpoint unfinished learning and plan for supports at the next grade level is imperative to ease the transition. Documentation of support sustains the continuation of those supports during the new transition and is critical at each juncture.

Transition from Middle to High School

The start of ninth grade is a pivotal moment for students. Research shows that students' performance in ninth grade is predictive of future outcomes, making a successful grade-level transition essential (Roderick et al., 2014). Schools can support successful grade-level transitions through freshman academies, mentoring programs, and extended orientation opportunities.

Although students begin to mature in high school, middle-to-high school transitions coincide with peak periods of risk-taking behavior and intensive identity exploration (Benner, 2011). To support students through this grade-level transition, schools should proactively prepare them for increased academic rigor, build their social navigation skills, provide education on risk prevention, and help them begin planning for their futures.

Providing student agency is critical at this level. Schools should actively engage students in grade-level transition planning and gather feedback regarding their needs and experiences. Literacy should be emphasized throughout this process, as it is one of the most important skills students need as they move on to life after high school. This

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includes reviewing middle school assessment data to support course enrollment decisions and identify the supports students need.

Transition to Choice Ready

A successful system monitors students' academic and social-emotional needs throughout their high school careers, providing timely interventions to ensure students are prepared for the independence and demands of their chosen next steps. Schools can support students through the grade-level transition to choice readiness by offering a robust and personalized postsecondary planning system, such as North Dakota Choice Ready. This support should begin early to ensure that students are on track academically, as indicated by passing core courses and accumulating credits, which is the strongest predictor of high school graduation and post-secondary success. Necessary literacy skills include the ability to read and analyze technical texts, write and speak effectively, and comprehend workplace documentation, among others.

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Table 12 | Transition Considerations

Transition	To Provide	Implementation Considerations	Example	Non-Example
Kindergarten	Provide transition opportunities that help students and families understand kindergarten expectations, academic readiness, and social-emotional development.	• Provide a family orientation to the school that includes faces that will be familiar, held during times caregivers and students can attend • Connections to community services, such as the public library • Collecting information on assessments to understand students' current literacy knowledge, including Alphabet Knowledge, Phonological Awareness, Oral Language, and Print Awareness	Kindergarten registration day occurs before school starts and includes a school tour with kindergarten educators, who collect literacy assessment data before or at the start of the school year.	Kindergarten registration day includes a school tour led by the PTO and the principal. Literacy assessment information is not collected until the benchmark window.
Elementary to Middle School:	Provide a range of academic, social, and procedural supports to help students successfully navigate this transition.	• Vertical alignment conversations from elementary to middle, and at each grade-level transition (i.e., second to third). • Reviewing data for instructional support planning and documentation, especially within literacy subskills • Peer buddy, mentoring, and interdisciplinary teams for social transitions • Advisory programs to build adult relationships	A fifth-grade team meets with a sixth-grade team throughout the school year to discuss grade-level expectations for writing and reading across curriculum resources.	6th grade educators begin their year based on the curricular resource or pacing guide without consideration for incoming students or data.
Middle to High School:	Provide a range of academic, social, and procedural supports to help students navigate this transition successfully.	• Vertical alignment conversations with middle school programs • Reviewing data for instructional support planning and documentation • Freshmen academies or summer bridge programs • Peer mentoring and orientation opportunities throughout the school year • Advisors or advisories times for support	8th- and 9th-grade educators meet to determine a common note-taking protocol across content areas.	High school educators use different assessment terminology than middle school educators.
High School to Choice Ready	Provide a range of supports throughout this transition, including strong counseling and advising models.	• Prioritize disciplinary literacy skills across the content areas • Explore career paths with students, identifying necessary skills and education, and developing targeted coursework plans • Provide targeted college knowledge and application assistance via campus tours, and scholarship and financial aid advising • Facilitate access to CTE courses/programs, apprenticeships, and job shadowing opportunities	Students receive practice in discipline-specific literacy skills based on their aspirations, such as reading a technical manual.	Students practice general reading skills without connecting literacy practice to the specific texts, tasks, or literacy demands of their chosen career or area of interest.

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Transitions for Students with IEPS/504s

Successful grade-level transitions for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans depend on early, collaborative, and individualized planning. Ideally, grade-level transition efforts begin at least a semester in advance and involve meetings between current and future educators, related service providers, caregivers, and, when appropriate, the student. These meetings serve to review and update support plans based on the student's strengths, challenges, and the demands of the new environment (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 215).

An often-overlooked aspect of grade-level transition planning at this age is the explicit teaching of independence and self-advocacy. These skills—such as understanding their IEP or Section 504 Plan, recognizing their learning preferences, and communicating their needs—are especially vital as students move into more demanding academic settings (Izzo, 2006). Educators also require ongoing professional learning in Special Education law, inclusive instructional practices, and behavior management strategies to ensure teams implement IEPs and Section 504 Plans with fidelity (Friend & Cook, 2023). Additional guidance regarding transitions for students with IEPs is available on the ND DPI Special Education website.

Identify Grade Level Transition Goals and Timelines

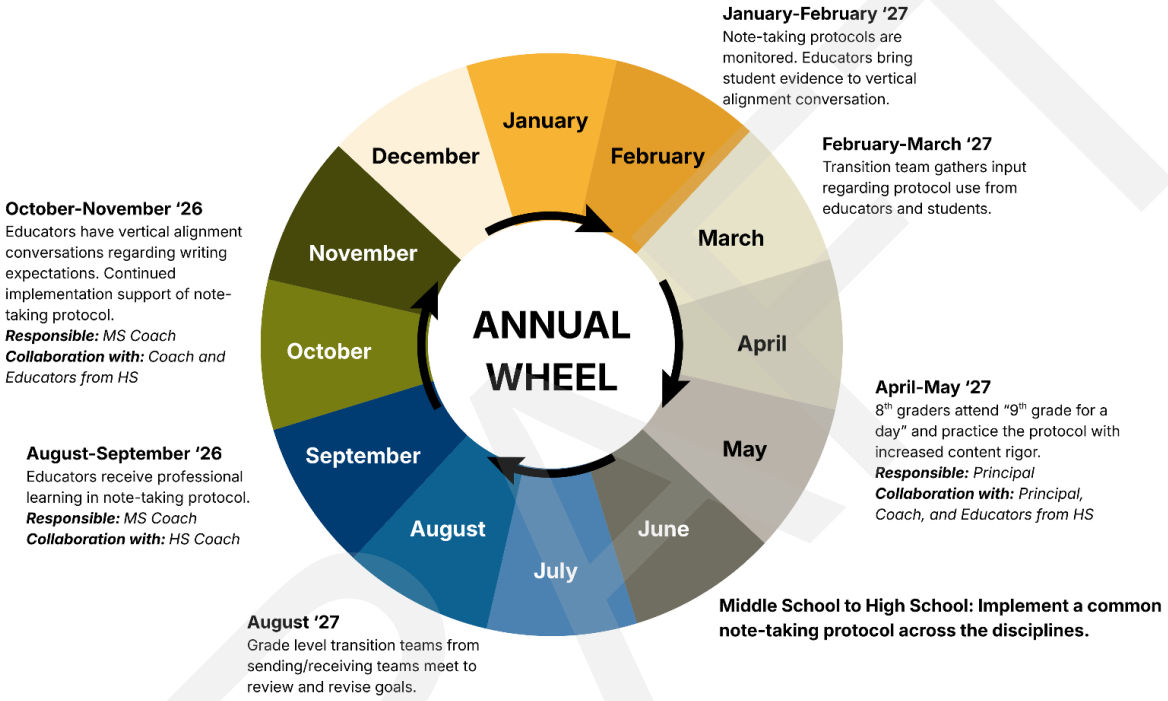
Goals for grade level transitions may or may not be separate from other work within your local literacy plan. Academic transition goals will likely be aligned to the work of guaranteed and viable curriculum, instruction and intensification, or assessment and data-based decision-making. Vertical alignment conversations around literacy expectations, priority standards, instructional routines, curricular resources, assessment information, and intervention supports may also be appropriate starting places. Some social and procedural goals may be linked to family and community engagement work. Other social and procedural goals may be identified, but they should be related to the school's literacy work. For example, transition teams may identify a common note-taking protocol to be used from middle school through high school. This is a procedural goal that supports literacy.

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Monitoring Goals and Activities

Monitoring the transition team's goals can be daunting, but a simplified timeline or visual can help with planning and assigning tasks. One visual (Figure 14) is provided below and adapted from the work of Baric et al. (2026).

Figure 14 | Monitoring Goals and Activities



The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the grade-level transition section of their literacy plans:

- **Build/Identify** a Transition Team made of a variety of stakeholders
- **Identify** the transitions within your system
- **Identify** goals with aligned activities at each major transition
- **Monitor** goals and activities

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Chapter 5
Family Engagement







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Chapter 5 | Family and Community Engagement

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Family and Community Engagement section of their literacy plans:

- **Identify** one or two key practices to implement
- **Establish** consistent ways to communicate back and forth with families about literacy
- **Provide** families with practical strategies that support literacy
- **Create** at least one opportunity for families to provide input on literacy
- **Identify** and connect to local organizations that also support children and families

This chapter will address three key questions to support educator teams with developing the Family and Community Engagement section of a Local Literacy Plan:

- ✓ **WHAT** *is Family and Community Engagement?*
- ✓ **WHY** *is it important to include Family and Community Engagement into a local literacy plan?*
- ✓ **HOW** *do educator teams incorporate Family and Community Engagement in their local literacy plan?*

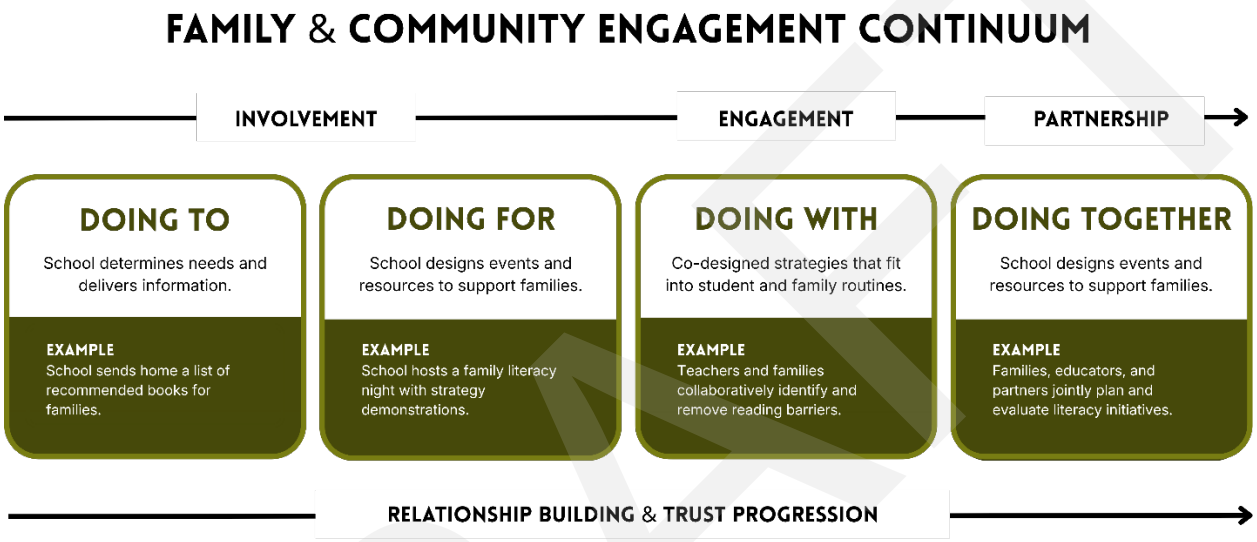
WHAT is Family and Community Engagement?

Family and community engagement is the intentional partnership among schools, families, caregivers, and community organizations to support every student's literacy development through shared responsibility, reciprocal communication, and coordinated action. Literacy is more than an academic skill; it is a life skill, and, as such, families and community organizations have a significant role to play. An effective plan for family and community engagement embraces the role each stakeholder plays in supporting students and intentionally builds trust and authentic partnerships.

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Engagement is more than involvement. Involvement is doing to, while engagement is doing with. Schools may provide many opportunities for families and community members to participate, but participation alone does not necessarily create meaningful engagement. Authentic engagement recognizes families and community partners as assets, collaborators, and co-creators in supporting student learning (Figure 15).

Figure 15 | Involvement, Engagement, Partnership continuum (Central Regional Education Association, 2026)



Not every interaction needs to be a shared decision-making experience. Informing families and providing resources are still important components of family engagement. The goal is to intentionally create opportunities for families and communities to move beyond receiving information or services and toward meaningful partnership when their voice, experience, and expertise can strengthen the work.

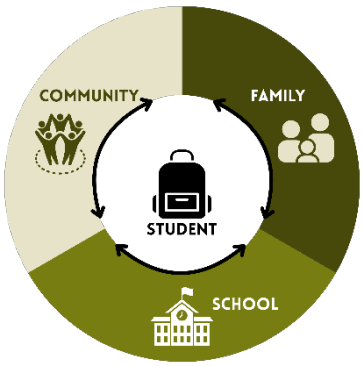
WHY is it important to include Family and Community Engagement in a local literacy plan?

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction emphasizes that "Families are the first and most influential teachers of their children" (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.-a, para. 2). Students benefit when the messages they receive about literacy are consistent across school, home, and community. Shared expectations create more opportunities to practice literacy skills, celebrate growth, and respond early when students need additional support.

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Research demonstrates that when schools intentionally connect the three spheres of influence, students benefit from a coordinated system of support that promotes their social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development (Epstein, 2018).

Figure 16 Three Spheres of Influence Adapted from Epstein (2018)



Three Spheres of Influence

- *School* – Administrators, educators, staff, and students
- *Family* – Immediate and extended caregivers
- *Community* – Partners, organizations, agencies, elected officials, and others who support student learning

Schools, families, and community partners should view literacy as a shared responsibility. Because students spend far more time outside school than inside it, literacy development depends upon consistent opportunities to read, write, speak, and listen across home, school, and community settings. When families, caregivers, community organizations, cultural institutions, and local businesses are actively involved, students experience literacy as a vital, real-world skill rather than just an academic task. Engaged communities help to (Constantino, 2016):

- Reinforce literacy at home and in everyday environments
- Bridge cultural and linguistic gaps so instruction is relevant and reflects students' backgrounds
- Expand access to resources, such as books, technology, and enrichment opportunities
- Build trust between schools and families through consistent communication and partnership
- Promote generational change by equipping families with literacy tools and advocacy skills

HOW do schools incorporate Family and Community Engagement in their local literacy plan?

Effective family and community engagement is intentional, ongoing, and embedded within a school's literacy system rather than limited to isolated events or activities. Drawing on the research of Joyce L. Epstein and Steven M. Constantino, and on the guidance of the

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North Dakota Department of Public Instruction's family engagement work, five key practices provide a framework for developing meaningful partnerships that support literacy achievement. Together, these practices help schools build trust, strengthen communication, empower families as partners in learning, and leverage community resources to improve outcomes for all students (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.-

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Table 13 | Family and Community Engagement Key Practices

Key Practice	Implementation Considerations	Example	Non-Example	*Reflection*
Establish a Culture of Welcoming: Schools create a welcoming culture by ensuring every family feels respected, valued, and included as an essential partner in literacy development. Welcoming environments extend beyond the school office—they are reflected in school culture, communication, events, and daily interactions.	• Ensure all families receive a welcoming introduction to the school's literacy vision, instructional approach, and available supports. • Create inclusive school environments that reflect the languages, cultures, and identities of the families being served. • Review school policies, procedures, and events through the lens of family accessibility and belonging. • Train all educators on family-centered customer service, culturally responsive practices, and relationship-building. • Offer flexible opportunities for family participation at varying times, locations, and formats (in-person and virtual). • Regularly seek feedback from families about how welcomed, respected, and supported they feel. • Intentionally build relationships before concerns arise by celebrating student success and maintaining positive contact throughout the year.	A teacher makes positive contact with families early in the year, before there is a concern about the student.	The first contact a family receives is a call about a behavior or academic concern.	*What would a family experience, see, or hear that would tell them, "We are glad you are part of our school community"?*
Communicate Effectively: Effective communication is timely, understandable, two-way, and focused on building trust. Families need meaningful information that empowers them to support literacy learning.	• Develop a district communication plan that outlines how literacy information will be shared consistently throughout the year. • Use multiple communication methods (email, text, phone calls, apps, newsletters, social media, websites, etc.) to reach families. • Ensure communications are translated into home languages and written in family-friendly language free of educational jargon. • Provide regular updates on literacy initiatives, instructional priorities, and student progress. • Create opportunities for families to ask questions, provide feedback, and participate in dialogue rather than simply receiving information. • Share celebrations, student successes, and examples of literacy learning occurring in classrooms. • Clearly communicate available intervention supports, enrichment opportunities, and community literacy resources.	Families have multiple ways to ask questions and provide feedback.	The school sends newsletters or announcements but provides few opportunities for two-way communication.	*If a family wanted to understand what their child is learning in reading right now, how easily could they find that information?*

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Key Practice	Implementation Considerations	Example	Non-Example	*Reflection*
Engage Families in Instruction: To build trust and alignment, families benefit from understanding what students learn and how educators deliver instruction.	• Provide overviews of literacy instructional materials and explain how they support reading, writing, speaking, and listening development. • Use family-friendly language to describe key components of literacy instruction (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing). • Host family literacy nights, curriculum events, or virtual sessions that demonstrate instructional routines and provide practical strategies families can use at home. • Translate curriculum materials and instructional overviews into families' home languages whenever possible. • Transparently share assessment information that helps families understand their child's progress toward grade-level expectations. • Provide access to classroom literacy resources such as decodable texts, book lists, writing rubrics, and digital learning platforms. • Offer simple, everyday literacy activities families can incorporate into routines such as reading together, storytelling, conversations, writing lists, or visiting libraries. • Communicate that supporting literacy does not require families to become educators; it requires creating opportunities for meaningful language and literacy experiences.	A family literacy event allows caregivers to practice a strategy with their child.	A family literacy night primarily consists of a presentation, with families passively listening.	Are we asking families to "do school at home," or are we helping families create meaningful literacy experiences in everyday life?
Share Decision-Making: Effective family engagement moves beyond participation to an authentic partnership. Schools value family contributions and use family perspectives to strengthen school improvement efforts.	• Include family representatives on literacy leadership teams or school improvement committees. • Seek family input when developing, implementing, and evaluating the local literacy plan. • Use surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, and/or advisory councils to gather meaningful feedback from diverse family voices. • Share how family input influences decisions and communicate resulting actions. • Ensure decision-making opportunities are accessible by providing flexible meeting times, virtual participation, translation, and childcare when possible. • Encourage families to co-design literacy events, workshops, and engagement opportunities. • Regularly evaluate family engagement practices using feedback from families and educators.	Schools provide accessible opportunities for families to participate in decision-making.	Participation requires families to attend meetings during the school day with no alternative options.	*What decisions about literacy are currently made "for" families that could instead be made "with" families?*

Key Practice	Implementation Considerations	Example	Non-Example	*Reflection*
Connect with the Community: Community partnerships expand opportunities for students and strengthen literacy beyond the classroom. Literacy thrives when schools, families, caregivers and community organizations work together toward common goals.	• Identify community organizations that can support literacy development (libraries, early childhood programs, businesses, higher education, service organizations, museums, healthcare providers, etc.). • Develop partnerships that increase student access to books, technology, tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment opportunities. • Coordinate community literacy events such as family reading nights, book distributions, author visits, or literacy celebrations. • Promote local library programs, summer reading initiatives, and community learning opportunities. • Invite community members to participate as guest readers, mentors, volunteers, or literacy ambassadors. • Align messaging across community partners to reinforce the importance of literacy from birth through graduation. • Evaluate partnerships regularly to ensure they are advancing the district's literacy goals and meeting family needs.	The district creates a shared calendar or communication network for community literacy opportunities.	Families must independently discover and navigate community literacy resources.	*What assets already exist in our community that could help students experience literacy beyond the school day?*

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When developing a local literacy plan, districts should consider the following practical steps:

1. Start with one or two priorities. Identify the family and community engagement practices that are most important for your district right now rather than trying to address everything at once.
2. Make communication clear and two-way. Establish consistent ways to share information about literacy learning and student progress while also creating simple opportunities for families to share questions, feedback, and perspectives.
3. Give families practical ways to support literacy. Provide families with a small number of manageable, evidence-aligned strategies and resources they can use during everyday activities such as reading, talking, writing, and learning together.
4. Include family voice in literacy decisions. Create at least one meaningful, ongoing opportunity for families and caregivers to provide input on literacy priorities, practices, or resources—and use that input to inform decisions.
5. Use existing community connections. Identify local organizations and resources that already support children and families and look for practical ways to connect those partnerships to the district's literacy goals.

The following key considerations can support ND school personnel in crafting the Family and Community Engagement section of their literacy plans:

- **Identify** one or two key practices to implement
- **Establish** consistent ways to communicate back and forth with families about literacy
- **Provide** families with practical strategies that support literacy
- **Create** at least one opportunity for families to provide input on literacy
- **Identify** and connect to local organizations that also support children and families

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Chapter 5 Citations:

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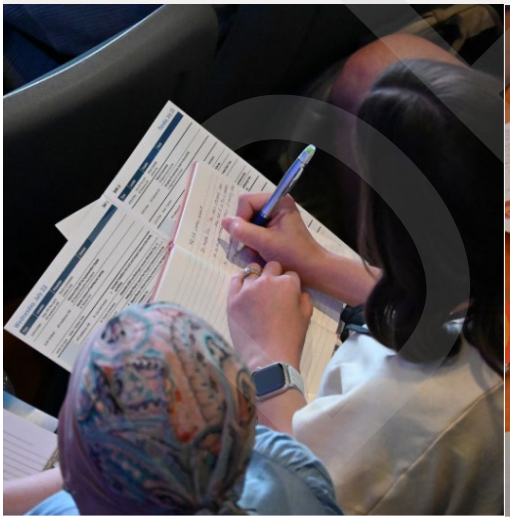
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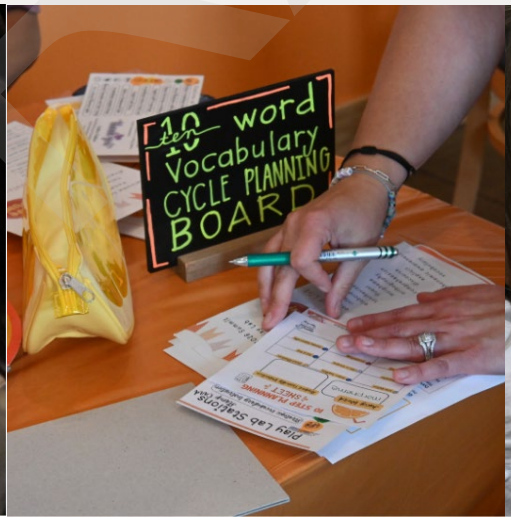
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Glossary







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Glossary

1. *Academic Grade-Level Transitions:* prepare students for increased curriculum rigor and new study, organization, and learning strategies
2. *Advancing/Enhancing:* deepening and extending expertise beyond current expectations
3. *Andragogy:* how adults learn
4. *Coaching:* a systematic, results-oriented process in which coaches facilitate the enhancement of work performance and student learning
5. *Consciously Skilled:* beginning to apply and practice a skill, understanding how to perform the skill correctly, but not with automaticity
6. *Consciously Unskilled:* recognizing gaps in knowledge or skills and understanding that additional learning is needed
7. *Continuum:* a sequence of values or elements making up an entire scope within a range
8. *Feedback:* a response, provided by a colleague, used to guide student learning through teacher performance
9. *Grade-Level Transition:* when a student moves from one grade level to another
10. *Guaranteed Curriculum:* ensures that all students have access to and an opportunity to learn the same essential, standards-aligned knowledge and skills, regardless of classroom, teacher, or school, so that content is not omitted or left to individual teacher discretion
11. *Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC):* a coherent, standards-aligned curriculum that identifies the essential knowledge and skills all students are expected to learn and ensures those expectations can be taught within the time available
12. *High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM):* standards-aligned, evidence-based, content-rich, coherent, and accessible instructional resources designed to support effective teaching and student learning; a comprehensive sequence of learning experiences that includes the content, lessons, texts, tasks, assessments, and teacher supports needed to address grade-level standards

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13. ***Modeling:*** demonstrating a skill or routine for others to learn or produce
14. ***Onboarding:*** a formal process of integrating employees into an organization, including orientation, training, and support systems to equip them for their roles and responsibilities
15. ***Pedagogy:*** how children learn
16. ***Practice:*** methods and strategies employed repeatedly to become proficient
17. ***Procedural Grade-Level Transitions:*** familiarize students and families with new environments, routines, and policies
18. ***Professional Learning:*** structured professional learning that results in changes to educator practices and improvements in student learning outcomes
19. ***Scaling:*** expanding effective practices for growth across the broader organization, ensuring consistency
20. ***Social Grade-Level Transitions:*** support students as they navigate change, friendships, and peer relationships
21. ***Sustaining:*** a process that reinforces, monitors, and maintains effective practice currently implemented in the majority of the organization as a means to ensure consistency and prevent regression
22. ***Theory:*** a system of ideas intended to explain something usually based on general principles
23. ***Unconsciously Skilled:*** through continued practice and application with little conscious effort needed
24. ***Unconsciously Unskilled***: unaware of gaps in knowledge or skills, not yet recognizing the need for learning
25. ***Viable Curriculum:*** ensures that the essential standards-aligned content can be effectively taught and learned within the instructional time available; prioritizes the most important knowledge and skills so that there is sufficient time for instruction, practice, feedback, and mastery

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Updated for the 2026-2027 School Year.

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