North Dakota Literacy Plan

A Guide to Building Local Excellence in Literacy Education

2025 - 2026

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NDDPI NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Introduction

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Introduction

This comprehensive literacy framework is designed as a tool for system leaders and teams to strengthen their understanding of the systems that are necessary to develop proficient readers. By establishing coherent structures and practices across grade levels and subject areas, school systems can create the conditions necessary for all students to become proficient and confident readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers.

Building the 2025-26 literacy plan

In creating this latest iteration of the North Dakota State Literacy Plan, the writing team was focused on action. With the goal of improving reading outcomes across the state top of mind, this year's plan has been restructured to provide specific, action-oriented guidance by role, as well as research-based best practices that are narrowly focused on each chapter that local teams will include in their own literacy plans. This document was created with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including the North Dakota State Literacy Team, leaders representing institutions of Higher Education, experts from the state's Regional Education Agencies, and many other stakeholders who support children's literacy from Birth – Grade 12.

Although this new iteration of the plan is no longer organized around the Six Essential Elements, you will find them embedded throughout the document. Specifically:

- Information about **Leading for Impact** can be found in the District Administrator and School Leader sections.
- Suggestions for **Supporting Professional Learning** can be found in the Professional Development Plan sections.
- Recommendations for **Engaging All Stakeholders** can be found in the Family & Community Engagement Plan sections.
- Guidance for **Planning Standards-Aligned Curriculum** can be found in the Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum Plan sections.
- Recommendations for **Assessing to Inform** and **Instructing with Precision** can be found in the Instructional Pathways sections.

Key Actions by Role

The first section of this plan is organized by role, with specific guidance for educators at each level of the system to improve literacy outcomes:

- District Administrators
- School Leaders
- Instructional Support Specialists
- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers & Interventionists
- Caregivers & Educators Supporting Children Birth – Age 5

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Defining the 5 chapters of a local literacy plan

This plan is intended to provide guidance for educators to support students from birth through grade twelve in providing effective, evidence-based reading instruction. It outlines a comprehensive approach to improving student outcomes through five interconnected components. These same components will form the foundation of the local literacy plan that teams create, leveraging the asynchronous modules on the North Dakota Educational Hub.

Professional Development Plan

This chapter outlines a comprehensive approach to building educator capacity through ongoing, job-embedded professional learning. It emphasizes training aligned with the science of reading, instructional best practices, and High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) to ensure consistent implementation across all levels. It also addresses strategies to support implementation of new learning.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Focused on ensuring all students have access to a coherent, standards-aligned curriculum, this chapter defines practices that are needed to ensure consistency across classrooms and buildings. It emphasizes implementation of HQIM, common assessments, and collaborative planning to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment.

Instructional Pathways

The instructional pathways chapter provides a strategic framework to ensure all students receive high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction. It guides educators to apply practices aligned with the science of reading and provide differentiated instruction within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). It also emphasizes the importance of an effective assessment system and provides guidance for implementing effective targeted interventions.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

Addressing the critical points of transition between grade levels, this chapter provides strategies to maintain instructional continuity and support student progress and well-being. It includes recommendations for collaboration among educators and targeted supports to ease transitions and prevent learning gaps.

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Family & Community Engagement

This chapter emphasizes the importance of partnerships with families and community stakeholders in supporting literacy development. It outlines strategies for effective communication, shared decision-making, and authentic engagement to strengthen the home-school connection and promote literacy beyond the classroom.

How to navigate and use the literacy Plan

This literacy framework is also intended to be a dynamic, user-friendly tool that supports collaboration and action across the entire educational ecosystem. The next section contains a compilation of essential information regarding legislation, policies, and alignment with statewide literacy initiatives. Then, readers will find specific guidance by role, including action-oriented for each. Subsequent sections provide research-based best practices for each chapter of the literacy plan, as well as an overview of the Science of Reading. Finally, you can find a Self-Assessment and the Local Literacy Plan Template at the conclusion of this resource.

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Legislation, Policy, and Alignment with Literacy Initiatives

Legislation, Policies, and Alignment with State Literacy Initiatives

North Dakota's State Literacy Plan is deeply aligned with current legislation, statewide initiatives, and research-based practices that guide literacy development across the state. This section provides an overview of the key policies and frameworks that inform and support the plan's vision and implementation.

State Literacy Legislation

North Dakota has enacted legislation that reinforces the importance of early literacy instruction and intervention. These laws emphasize the use of evidence-based reading instruction, timely identification of reading difficulties, and targeted supports to ensure all students achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade. The State Literacy Plan reflects these legislative priorities and serves as a practical tool to support schools in meeting some of these mandates.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the North Dakota 67th Legislative Assembly prioritized the use of 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, which 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 reading curriculum is:

1. Scientifically based, evidence-based, and research-based.
2. Aligned with the Science of Reading—including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
3. 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.

Schools must certify to the Superintendent that they have:

- Qualified, highly effective K–3 teachers in place.
- Integrated diagnostic reading assessments.
- Employed evidence-based, research-aligned instructional resources.

The Superintendent:

- Provides ongoing compliance support.

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- Adopts implementation rules with K–12 coordination council input.
- Submits periodic reports to legislative management on effectiveness.

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:

- Prekindergarten
- Kindergarten
- Elementary education
- Special education

Required competencies include:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Assessing reading ability
- Identifying and remediating reading difficulties
- Use of scientifically and research-based curricula
- 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 2 years if full competency is not immediately met.

Read more about North Dakota Science of Reading legislation here.

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Dyslexia Guidelines and Supports

In alignment with state legislation on dyslexia, the 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.

Local school districts (including special education units and regional associations) must:

- Screen all children ≤ 7 years old using a universal dyslexia screener that assesses phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling, with tools approved by the Superintendent.
    - Approved screeners can be found in the Dyslexia section of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction website.
    - Screening must also be provided upon request of a parent, guardian, or teacher at any grade level.
- Provide follow-up evaluation for students identified at risk.
    - Additional assessments should clarify instructional needs and guide intervention planning.
- Deliver targeted intervention services to those showing dyslexia characteristics.
    - Services must be matched to specific skill deficits and delivered promptly.
    - Dyslexia does not automatically qualify a student for special education; students may be served through Title I or other supports.
- Assess intervention effectiveness using state-approved tools to gauge improvements.
    - Progress monitoring must be ongoing and used to adjust instruction.
- 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:
        - 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)
- Report compliance annually via the MIS01 report, including screening tools used and intervention processes.
    - The Superintendent must also report statewide implementation to legislative management.

Additionally, under HB 1131, the Superintendent of Public Instruction may issue credentials for dyslexia specialists, supporting districts that choose to build internal expertise.

This statute establishes a proactive and structured approach to identifying and supporting young learners at risk of dyslexia. By emphasizing universal screening, timely intervention, and professional training, North Dakota aims to catch reading challenges early and equip educators with the tools needed to help every student succeed.

Read more at the Educator's Guide to North Dakota Dyslexia Law.

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ND CLIMBS

North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy Improvement through Measured Building Systems, or ND CLIMBS, is a comprehensive, statewide initiative 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.

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 through competitive subgrants to:

- Early childhood programs (Birth–5)
- Elementary schools
- K–12 schools serving high-needs populations

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

1. 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.
2. Strengthen Instructional Leadership
   The initiative develops leadership pipelines by equipping principals and site leaders to create and sustain strong literacy cultures in their schools.
3. Invest in Professional Learning
   Teachers, coaches, and administrators receive job-embedded, ongoing professional development grounded in the Science of Reading. Support is tailored to different contexts (Birth–5, elementary, and secondary).
4. Support Effective Instruction
   ND CLIMBS ensures all educators have access to 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.
- Technical Assistance and Vendor Support
  ND CLIMBS schools receive direct support from literacy experts, technical advisors, and implementation partners to ensure fidelity and impact.

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Title Programs

Title I

Title I funding provides resources to schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. Funds must be spent on allowable Title I activities, targeted to students, their teachers, and families. Schools utilize funding for specific activities, including:

- Academic Support: Providing tutoring, supplemental instruction, and instructional materials
- Professional Development: Supporting teacher training to improve instructional quality
- Student Well-being: Offering counseling, school-based mental health services, and mentoring
- Community Engagement: Implementing family engagement programs to involve parents in their children's education.

Research shows that economically disadvantaged students frequently have lower rates of literacy than their peers, which has a significant impact on their achievement. For that reason, Title I funds are frequently used to support literacy programming for teachers, students, and families.

Title II

Title II Part A provides federal funds to states and districts to improve teacher and principal quality and effectiveness. The funds are allocated to professional development, recruiting and retaining high quality educators, supporting principals, addressing class sizes, and improving instruction for all students, particularly those in low-income communities.

Title III

Title III provides funding to states and school districts to improve the education of English learners and immigrant students. Effective instruction and family engagement are key pillars that are focused on through this work. Funding may be used for professional learning, instructional materials, family engagement, and supplemental support. Literacy instruction is a critical piece of supporting English Learners and is often funded through Title III.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) & Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)

CSI is a designation under the ESSA for schools that perform in the bottom 5% of Title I schools in the state, or for high schools with graduation rates below 67%. Identified schools are provided with additional resources, funding, and technical assistance from the state to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to improve student outcomes. TSI is a designation for schools with one or more consistently underperforming subgroup. If a school does not exit TSI status for three consecutive years, they will be designated as CSI. Support for CSI and TSI schools include:

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- Guidance and support that includes training on requirements and opportunities
- A Coaching Liaison will provide technical support
- Professional development on evidence-based instructional strategies and data-based decision making

Because literacy is essential to student achievement as well as longer-term outcomes like graduation rates, CSI and TSI improvement plans frequently include strategies to improve literacy instruction and ultimately proficiency.

21st Century Program

The 21st Century Program provides multi-year grants for out-of-school programs. These grants foster partnerships between schools, community organizations, and other entities to offer academic enrichment, youth development, and family support activities during non-school hours for students, particularly those in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

North Dakota has established Community Learning Centers to address 21st century needs. This program works to establish and expand community learning centers that provide students with academic enrichment opportunities along with activities designed to complement the students' regular academic program. They also offer families support related to literacy development. Schools can choose to work with any of the approved external organizations to support their 21st Century work.

Special Education

Schools must adhere to federal laws, including IDEA and Section 504, to ensure that students with disabilities receive free, appropriate education and related services in the least restrictive environment. Ensuring that all students receive an education that meets their needs is crucial to their success. Students that receive consistent, appropriate accommodations are going to be able to access learning, which wouldn't be possible otherwise. Adaptive accommodations like Braille materials, extended time, and reduced noise environments can improve success rates, although a comprehensive approach is needed to yield a higher impact.[4] Like the Structured Literacy approach that was developed by the International Dyslexia Association, many of the methods used to support students with disabilities will benefit all students and should be used universally.

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District Administrators

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District Administrators

District leaders play a key role in students' literacy outcomes. Ultimately, they are responsible for ensuring that instruction is effective and the conditions for learning exist in every school they lead. Effective district administrators align long-term plans and allocate resources to ensure that teachers are informed, that they have access to high-quality resources, and that supports are in place to support fidelity of implementation and continuous improvement.

Similarly, School Boards are tasked with the responsibility of hiring and managing a superintendent and holding them accountable for implementing best practices. School Boards should monitor literacy outcomes and ensure that funding is used for programs, resources, and staff that successfully improve student outcomes.

The sections below articulate the district administrator's role in each of the key levers to support literacy achievement. Use the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more about each chapter and create your local literacy plan.

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Key Actions	
Professional Development Plan	• Create a data-driven long-term plan • Prioritize time and budgetary resources to support PD • Ensure that PD is high-quality • Align implementation supports, including instructional coaching and teams
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Adopt HQIM that is aligned to ND standards • Prioritize resources to meet instructional needs and support teachers in implementing HQIM • Monitor fidelity and build capacity as needed
Instructional Pathways	• Set a vision and establish expectations for MTSS • Allocate funding and create policies to support assessments, intervention materials, and data analysis • Align schedules and staffing to support MTSS • Monitor fidelity and ensure alignment among stakeholders
Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Convene a district transition team • Develop aligned districtwide plans • Engage families to align around goals for key transitions • Set expectations to ensure policies are implemented with fidelity
Family & Community Engagement	• Set a vision and align policies to support engagement • Create infrastructure and provide support to execute evidence-based family engagement practices • Provide PD aligned to best practices • Establish collaborative relationships with community partners

Professional Development Plan

Effective leaders understand that providing professional learning is essential to improving student outcomes. Leaders take responsibility for increasing educator knowledge and providing ongoing support for implementation.

Create a Long-Term Plan

District leaders should collaborate with school leaders, instructional support specialist, and other stakeholders to do the following:

- Identify the professional learning needs of the system by first examining the current state, including recent performance data and historic trends, the needs and experiences of the student population, and the skill base of teachers.
- Develop a strategic plan for professional learning across the system that addresses the current reality and aligns with long-term literacy goals of the system.

Allocate Resources

District leaders must prioritize budgetary resources for professional learning and align necessary resources for follow-up supports like on-going coaching, grade-level meetings, department meetings, or PLCs. Along with financial resources, leaders should also consider time. This includes examining the schedule for professional learning, including what time is available during the school year as well as the summer months, which may have additional budgetary implications.

Ensure Quality and Sustainability

It is the district leader's responsibility to ensure that professional learning is highly effective. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines effective professional learning opportunities as ones that are data-informed, job-embedded, focused, sustained, emotionally responsive, supported by coaching, and collaborative and reflective.[2] Leaders should utilize an evaluation mechanism to track the quality and impact of professional learning. This data can be used to inform planning going forward as part of a continuous improvement model.

Align Implementation Supports

For professional development to have the desired impact on teaching and learning, district leaders must ensure that it is aligned with key implementation supports. Although much of the work to support implementation should happen at the school level, district leaders need to ensure that resources and time are prioritized to support the following systems and structures.[1]

[1] Kathleen Ryan Jackson, Dean Fixsen, and Caryn Ward, "Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework," (Chapel Hill: National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).

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- Instructional Coaching: Prioritize funding for an instructional coach position or create systems and build capacity for individuals who hold other roles to spend a portion of their time coaching.
- Data-Driven Teams: Incorporate opportunities for teaming when creating master calendars and schedules. For small districts where collaboration is particularly difficult, district administrators can seek out virtual opportunities for role-alike collaboration with other districts across the state.
- Fidelity Checks: While school-based staff typically conduct fidelity checks, district administrators can and should periodically join walkthroughs to norm with school leaders and gain first-hand insights into successes and areas for growth.
- Vision & Alignment: Ultimately, one of the most important things a district leader can do to support implementation is to make literacy part of the long-term vision and align systems and structures to support it. Leaders can send a clear message about the importance of literacy and remove obstacles posed by competing initiatives.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

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District leaders create the conditions that make a guaranteed and viable curriculum possible across schools. They ensure coherence, resource allocation, and accountability so that every school has the capacity to implement a high-quality curriculum with fidelity.

Align Curriculum

District leaders ensure that adopted instructional materials are aligned to state standards, vertically coherent from grade to grade, and horizontally aligned across classrooms. Leaders reduce variability by eliminating competing or redundant initiatives that dilute instructional focus, a key strategy to protect curriculum viability. When new resources are needed, district leaders convene a strategic adoption team to review proposals, test out sample materials, and ultimately select a set of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) that are aligned to teacher and student needs.

Allocate Resources

District leaders allocate resources strategically to sustain literacy implementation. They also allocate funds to address instructional gaps (e.g., through aligned intervention resources), ensuring that schools with higher levels of need receive the necessary support to fully implement the curriculum.

Monitor and Hold Schools Accountable

Guaranteeing curriculum requires district-level systems to monitor implementation. Leaders establish structures for reviewing data across schools, observing classroom practice, and ensuring schools follow pacing and instructional guidelines. Monitoring is not solely compliance-driven; it provides actionable feedback to schools about how to better implement the plan.

Build Capacity

District leaders are responsible for building the professional capacity of principals, instructional coaches, and teachers to carry out the curriculum with fidelity. This includes ongoing professional learning aligned to the literacy plan, as well as leadership development that empowers school leaders to protect instructional time and drive improvement. Leaders should incorporate learning tied to High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) into their professional development plans. Educators need both concentrated initial training when implementing a new HQIM and ongoing, job-embedded collaborative time to develop and hone HQIM instructional practices.[2]

Instructional Pathways

District administrators are central to translating the district's literacy vision into effective, system-wide implementation of appropriate instructional pathways for all students. They ensure that literacy instruction is aligned with the science of reading and embedded in an effective Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and they provide the infrastructure necessary for schools to deliver high-quality, differentiated instruction.

Set a Vision

District leaders foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement by guiding system-wide literacy efforts. They define and communicate a clear vision for literacy instruction aligned with the science of reading and MTSS and embed this vision into strategic plans and literacy goals to ensure consistent implementation across schools. They make MTSS effectiveness a district-wide priority through intentional decisions and actions.

Manage Resources

District administrators ensure the infrastructure and resources needed for effective literacy instruction and MTSS implementation are in place and distributed across the district aligned with school needs.

- Allocate funding for high-quality instructional materials, evidence-based intervention tools, reliable data systems, and sustained professional development.
- Ensure progress monitoring tools meet rigorous criteria for reliability, validity, and usability.
- Build time into schedules for assessment and instruction across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction.

Monitor Implementation Fidelity

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[2] National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, High-Quality Curriculum Implementation, 2020, https://www.niet.org/research-and-policy/show/policy/high-quality-curriculum-implementation.

District leaders ensure consistent and effective implementation of instructional pathways and MTSS through robust monitoring systems. They establish procedures to evaluate the quality and consistency of MTSS implementation across schools and use data to identify trends, address gaps, and guide continuous improvement.

Engage Stakeholders

District administrators foster inclusive and collaborative environments by engaging a broad range of stakeholders in instructional planning and implementation. They prioritize cross-department collaboration among curriculum, assessment, special education, and English learner teams to ensure coherence and responsiveness. They also communicate clearly with families about student progress and learning needs.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

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District administrators hold a key role in developing effective systems that can support smooth grade level transitions. Transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school are especially important and require particular emphasis from district leaders.

Create a Transition Team

The transition team will need to include multiple stakeholders with expertise in academic transitions, social transitions, and procedural transitions. Where possible, include, behavior specialists, principals and assistant principals, curriculum specialists, and community engagement specialists. During team meetings, review data to determine the success of student transitions and what additional supports may need to be provided. Data should be a combination of walkthroughs, staff surveys, focus groups, academic achievement and growth, and behavior statistics.

Develop Aligned Districtwide Plans

District administrators should set expectations for building leaders to develop strategic transition plans with SMART goals and clear action items focused on academic, social, and procedural transitions**.** They should create opportunities for collaboration to ensure there is alignment across schools and focus on transitions between buildings.

Engage Families

Creating meaningful partnerships between families and the school will help student transitions be much smoother. While most of this work will be up to building leaders, district administrators

can provide training around effective practices and set the stage for involving families in the process.[3]

Oversee Policy and Procedure

Administrators should put into place clear expectations to ensure consistency across all schools and maintain clarity for families with children transitioning at different schools. It is important that these policies follow all state and federal laws, including IDEA, ESSA, IEPs, and 504s.

Family & Community Engagement

The most effective family and community engagement occurs when district and school leaders collaborate to create systems that are sustainable and accessible. District administrators set expectations, provide resources, and hold schools accountable to nurture sustainable partnerships that directly support student achievement and well-being.

Establish Policies and a Vision

District leaders should establish a district-wide family engagement policy that requires schools to create opportunities that are accessible to all families. They can communicate a clear vision of shared responsibility for student success across schools, families, and communities.

Create Infrastructure and Supports

District leaders need to allocate funding for events, translation services, transportation, childcare, and any other resources that can help bolster family engagement in their community. That may include investing in technology platforms that allow schools to host hybrid meetings and share recordings. If possible, leaders should also designate Family Engagement Coordinators at both the district and school levels to ensure consistency.

Provide Professional Learning

In order for family engagement practices to shift, principals, teachers, and support staff must be trained on effective communication and strategies for engaging the families who are hardest to reach. Leaders should offer workshops for school leaders on building family partnerships aligned with district literacy and achievement goals.

District leaders can also coordinate learning sessions for families to share strategies for building literacy at home. These are most effective when they're community-based and open to the public, so that families can learn concrete strategies to support their child's literacy development.

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[3] Henderson, Anne T., Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family–School Partnerships.* New York: The New Press, 2007.

Collaborate with Community Partners

District leaders should establish partnerships with local businesses, libraries, and nonprofits to expand where and how engagement opportunities are offered. They should look for ways to provide community-based meeting spaces in rural or high-need areas so families can participate closer to home.

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School Leaders

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School Leaders

School leaders play an essential role in student learning and literacy achievement. Building-level leaders set the vision for their school and generate buy-in from teachers and staff. They provide feedback and hold staff members accountable for implementation of best practices. They also make key decisions around resourcing and scheduling that indicate priorities and enable initiatives to succeed.

The sections below articulate the school leader's role in each chapter of the local literacy plan. Use the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more about each chapter and create your local literacy plan.

	Key Actions
Professional Development Plan	• Collaborate with district leaders to create a long-term plan aligned with school needs • Communicate the value of PD to staff • Align implementation supports with new learning, including coaching systems, School Leadership Teams, PLCs, and fidelity checks
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Create master schedules that include an uninterrupted literacy block • Conduct regular observations and provide feedback • Support PLCs and promote high-quality collaboration • Reinforce HQIM and prioritized standards
Instructional Pathways	• Set a vision for literacy acquisition and targeted instruction • Establish an effective Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) • Align resources, PD, master schedules, and data systems to support MTSS • Monitor, evaluate, and improve implementation of MTSS
Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Provide PD and collaborative opportunities to support transition planning • Engage and support families • Coordinate with support services and personnel • Implement targeted transition programs
Family & Community Engagement	• Create a welcoming school environment • Emphasize consistency and ongoing family engagement • Lead family engagement events and build community partnerships • Hold staff accountable for communicating with families

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Professional Development Plan

Effective school leaders recognize that enhancing student learning begins with empowering educators through knowledge. They take ownership over teacher learning to ensure that literacy instruction is evidence-based and aligned to best practices.

Create a Long-Term Plan

School leaders should collaborate with district administrators to design a long-term professional development plan. They should use school-level insights, student data, classroom observations, and teacher input to design responsive, relevant professional development that is aligned with instructional goals.

Set the Tone

In order for professional development to be effective, teachers must be bought in. Leaders generate buy-in by communicating the value of learning new practices consistently and clearly. They foster a culture where growth and improvement are expected and encouraged, and they model active engagement and demonstrate investment in professional development to reinforce its value and importance to staff.[4]

Align Implementation Supports

Arguably the most important thing a leader can do to ensure that professional development is effective is to make sure it's not a one-time event. They should establish coaching systems that are aligned with professional development and foster clarity, accountability, continuous improvement and sustainable instructional change. If a dedicated instructional coach isn't available, leaders should provide frequent feedback and consider Peer Coaching to support teachers and build a coaching culture.

In addition, leaders should establish a data-driven teams that:

- Analyze both implementation fidelity (e.g., walkthroughs, meeting artifacts) and student performance data (e.g., benchmark assessments)
- Evaluate and adjust the Literacy Plan as needed.
- Analyze student performance data and make daily, weekly, and monthly instructional decisions.

Lastly, leaders sure ensure that they conduct regular fidelity checks themselves, to assess implementation of professional learning, High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), and other practices included in the Literacy Plan.

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[4] Dena Mortensen, "Five Action Steps for School and District Leaders Implementing the Science of Reading," (The Reading League, 2022).

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

School leaders are essential in ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum that supports literacy success. By setting clear expectations, aligning instructional practices, and monitoring implementation, leaders help create consistent learning experiences that give all students access to grade-level content and the time needed to master it.

Create Intentional Schedules

School leaders can make or break literacy instruction before the school year starts when they create the master schedule. Leaders at the elementary level should ensure that schedules include a daily, uninterrupted literacy block of 90-120 minutes (depending on grade level), free from non-instructional interruptions. They should regularly review instructional schedules, pacing guides, and teacher feedback to ensure that literacy curriculum can be taught effectively within available time and supports student mastery.

Provide Aligned Resources and Guidance

Although school leaders are not entirely responsible for purchasing and providing instructional guidance to teachers, it is essential that they collaborate with district administrators and other school staff to ensure that all teachers have the resources, including High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), they need to provide effective literacy instruction and clear guidance on how to use them in the time provided. This includes:

- Providing supplemental materials if needed to ensure that literacy instruction aligns with the Science of Reading
- Ensuring that content area teachers, particularly at the secondary level, have instructional materials that include literacy strategies for all students.
- Providing pacing guides that include realistic guidance to cover all essential concepts within the school year.
- Leveraging common assessments to ensure that there is instructional alignment across classrooms.
- Providing targeted feedback to hold teachers accountable for implementing HQIM and instructional guidance effectively.

Establish Collaborative Structures

Collaboration is critical to ensuring a consistent instructional experience across classrooms. Leaders must establish and protect collaborative time, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), co-planning sessions, and grade-level data meetings. They should also set clear expectations around the use of clear, purposeful agendas that drive instructional improvement. Leaders should also facilitate data-driven dialogue and shared decision-making to identify barriers and co-develop solutions for consistent literacy implementation across the building.

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Instructional Pathways

School leaders play a critical role in shaping and sustaining instructional pathways that drive improved literacy outcomes. By establishing an effective Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), they can ensure that every student has access to high-quality, standards-based instruction throughout their academic journey. This process must be driven by leaders, because it requires collaboration across the system to meet all students' needs.

Establish MTSS Structures

Leaders must first ensure that staff understand what MTSS means, why it's important, and what changes it requires to their practice. Schoolwide systems that require collaboration hinge on buy-in from the adults involved, and it's up to building leaders to set the tone for the work. They can do this by providing ongoing, reflective professional development on instructional pathways, MTSS, the Science of Reading, and evidence-based literacy practices to support continuous improvement.

In addition, leaders must

- Establish well-structured MTSS teams with clearly defined roles and decision-making processes.
- Develop a comprehensive schoolwide assessment plan that includes clear timelines for universal screening and benchmark assessments and incorporates diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, and curriculum-based assessments.
- Allocate and adjust resources, staffing, and funding based on student needs to ensure access to effective materials, interventions, and data tools that support literacy success.
- Design and protect master schedules that allocate time and dedicated staff for assessment, instruction, and interventions to support MTSS implementation.

Monitor and Evaluate

Complex systems like a schoolwide MTSS program require continuous improvement. Leader should track instruction, interventions, assessments, and decision-making processes across all tiers to determine their effectiveness. They should also collaborate with MTSS teams to set evaluation plans for short- and long-term goals, and hold regular data review meetings to monitor fidelity and assess outcomes.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

Effective student transitions require intentional planning and collaboration across the school community. School leaders play a pivotal role in guiding this work and strengthening literacy development across all grade levels.

Create a Welcoming School Environment

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School leaders should create a positive, inclusive culture where new students feel safe and supported. This can include leading or supporting orientation programs, school tours, and peer mentoring for incoming students. They should also ensure that staff use trauma-informed, student-centered approaches during transitions.

Lead Staff Collaboration and Training

At the building level, leaders should organize professional learning focused on grade-level transitions and student needs. They can promote a team-based approach among teachers, counselors, and support staff by creating effective systems and structures to communicate about student needs across grade levels. During this collaborative time, leaders should help teachers prepare for academic, social, and procedural transitions.

Engage and Support Families

To engage parents as partners in transitions, particularly those that require students to move to a new school, building leaders should:

- Foster open communication by proactively sharing what families can expect in the new grade or school environment.
- Lead or support parent information sessions, back-to-school nights, and other opportunities for meaningful engagement.
- Be responsive and available to address parent questions or concerns throughout the transition process.

Coordinate Support Services

Leaders should ensure that counselors, social workers, and intervention staff are mobilized to support student adjustment and overall well-being. They should create systems to identify academic concerns early—especially in literacy—and establish intervention systems before testing to maximize instructional time. They should also monitor and respond to behavioral, emotional, and social concerns that may emerge during transitions.

Implement Targeted Transition Programs

School leaders should lead the development of school-based transition initiatives, such as:

- Summer bridge programs
- Peer buddy systems
- Advisory periods or homerooms focused on connection

They can use student surveys and focus groups to identify transition challenges and inform improvements to future practices.

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Family & Community Engagement

Strengthening family engagement is essential to advancing literacy outcomes for all students. When families are actively involved and informed, they can reinforce literacy goals at home and contribute to a coherent learning experience. School leaders set the tone for engagement and are often the public face of the school to families and the community.

Build Systems

School leaders should prioritize creating a welcoming environment in their building. They should emphasize consistency and shared responsibility for family engagement with staff, while integrating family engagement into school operations so it becomes ongoing, not just event-based. This should include clear expectations for regular communication with families, leveraging tech tools to create opportunities for dialogue, and establishing systems to track engagement.

Lead Events and Build Partnerships

School leaders should promote and participate in events that connect families, schools, and community members and organizations. They should actively seek out opportunities to partner with community organizations, particularly when they can enrich students' learning experiences. Local libraries, businesses, and nonprofits may be able to donate books, participate in literacy-focused events, or provide extended learning opportunities tied to student interests.

Ensure Accountability

The school leader is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all school staff engage families and the community appropriately and effectively. They should use tools like call logs, attendance sheets, and surveys to monitor engagement, and they can review engagement data at school and district levels to identify strengths and guide improvements.

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Instructional Support Specialists

Instructional Support Specialists

Instructional Support Specialists – which may include curriculum directors, instructional coaches, and anyone else who supports teachers' professional growth – play an important role in literacy improvement and student achievement. These leaders support the implementation of high-quality instruction by collaborating with teachers, modeling best practices, and providing ongoing coaching. They help build teacher capacity through professional development, data-informed feedback, and instructional planning. Their work ensures that literacy initiatives are sustained and aligned with school goals. In smaller school systems, administrators and/or members of the Literacy Team may play the role of an Instructional Support Specialist.

The sections below articulate the Classroom Support Specialist's role in each chapter of the local literacy plan. Use the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more about each chapter and create your local literacy plan.

Key Actions	
Professional Development Plan	• Model effective literacy instruction and support planning • Build teachers' content knowledge • Provide targeted, data-driven instructional coaching • Leverage data for continuous improvement, including through PLCs
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Observe and provide feedback on fidelity of curriculum implementation • Support teachers to plan and implement effective differentiation • Facilitate and support PLCs
Instructional Pathways	• Provide targeted guidance to teachers on how to align Tier I instruction, interventions, and assessments • Support effective assessment and data systems • Provide coaching supports focused on effective implementation of MTSS
Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Analyze incoming data to support instructional readiness • Facilitate collaboration across grade-levels • Provide coaching and professional development focused on supporting students through academic, social, and procedural transitions
Family & Community Engagement	• Collaborate with school and district leaders to set expectations for engagement • Provide training and coaching to support implementation of best practices

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Professional Development Plan

Providing training and coaching to teachers is a core part of the role of an instructional support specialist. While district and school leaders are ultimately responsible for strategically planning professional learning, instructional support specialists should contribute to planning conversations and play a vital role in delivering and sustaining it. Research shows that professional development alone is not sufficient to change teacher practice. Ongoing support—often led by instructional support specialists—is key to ensuring implementation and impact.[5]

Model Effective Practices

In order for teachers to implement new practices, they need to see what it looks like in action. Instructional support specialists should model effective literacy instruction through co-teaching or demonstration of lessons using adopted HQIM while teachers observe. They can also support lesson planning by helping teachers align instruction with grade-level standards, HQIM, and literacy frameworks so that teachers know how to put all of the pieces together.

Build Content Knowledge

Instructional support specialist should facilitate targeted professional learning on evidence-based literacy practices, such as phonology, phonics, vocabulary development, morphology, and comprehension strategies. They can offer microlearning sessions or job-embedded PD that focused on specific instructional techniques or literacy components, even when teacher time and capacity to engage in professional development is low. Lastly, they can build knowledge by curating and sharing high-quality resources that support curriculum implementation and instructional planning.

Provide Instructional Coaching

In order for professional development to have the desired impact on instruction, it must be supported by coaching. Instructional support specialists should provide differentiated coaching tailored to individual teacher needs, experience levels, and student data. They can start by guiding teachers to set professional goals related to literacy instruction, and they can help teachers monitor their progress over time. Coaching can be aligned explicitly to those goals as well as to student achievement data. For school systems that do not have access to coaches, instructional leaders in any role and build coaching capacity among staff by encouraging peer-led support structures such as video reflection and peer observation, especially when a dedicated instructional coach is unavailable.

Leverage Data for Impact

In addition to coaching, collaborative structures like Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) should be aligned to professional development in order to support implementation. Instructional support specialists should plan and lead PLCs or other collaborative team meetings focused on analyzing student performance and making data-driven instructional decisions.

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[5] Kathleen Ryan Jackson, Dean Fixsen, and Caryn Ward, "Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework," (Chapel Hill: National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Instructional support specialists play a vital role in helping teachers deliver a guaranteed and viable curriculum with consistency and effectiveness. While district and school leaders establish expectations and teachers implement them, support specialists provide the coaching, modeling, and instructional expertise that ensure curriculum fidelity and responsiveness to diverse learner needs.

Coach for Curriculum Fidelity

Instructional support specialists can ensure curriculum fidelity by providing job-embedded coaching that helps teachers translate curriculum frameworks and standards into practical, effective daily lessons. They actively support this process by modeling lessons and co-teaching to demonstrate powerful, research-aligned literacy instruction utilizing High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Crucially, coaches establish feedback loops to reinforce the consistent and accurate implementation of essential curriculum components, ensuring that all students receive the core instruction as intended.

Use Data to Inform Instruction

Instructional support specialists play a key role in ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum by guiding teachers through the analysis of formative and interim assessment data to consistently monitor student progress in literacy. Based on this performance data, they help teachers make critical instructional adjustments such as pacing, student grouping, and strategy use. Furthermore, instructional support specialists are essential in helping teams maintain curriculum viability by analyzing the scope and sequence against student needs and available instructional time, ensuring that all essential content is covered effectively without being rushed or abandoned.

Facilitate Curriculum-Focused Collaboration

To foster a unified and consistent approach to literacy, instructional support specialists can facilitate curriculum-focused collaboration. They lead Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and data discussions that are consistently centered on shared literacy priorities and student outcomes. Coaches also extend the impact of initial professional learning by facilitating targeted workshops and providing follow-up support directly related to the curriculum and implementation of HQIM. By anchoring teacher collaboration in clear curriculum goals, coaches promote consistency in instructional practice across all classrooms.

Instructional Pathways

Instructional support specialists play an important role in establishing instructional pathways for literacy, because they are able to operate at the system level and shift practices beyond a single classroom. They frequently sit on schoolwide MTSS teams and support both data-driven decision making as well as the design of supplemental and intensive interventions. Their work

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ensures that all students have access to high-quality literacy experiences targeted to their needs.

Align Instruction Across Tiers

Instructional support specialists are uniquely positioned to provide targeted guidance that ensures that core instruction, interventions, and assessments are aligned and reflect evidence-based approaches. They are able to connect dots between what's taught in Tier I instruction and the interventions provided in Tier II and III settings, to ensure that resources are appropriate and instructional supports are cohesive. They can also provide professional development and coaching specifically focused on effective instruction at each Tier.

Guide Assessment and Data Use

Instructional support specialists can promote effective use of assessment and data systems to ensure that instructional decisions are data-driven and aligned with student learning goals. This may include training on assessment systems, particularly in early elementary when literacy assessments often require one-on-one facilitation.

Foster Collaboration

Instructional support specialists should partner with grade-level teams, interventionists, and other leaders to establish and continuously improve collaborative structures. They can encourage effective collaboration through self-reflection and facilitate open dialogue to promote a culture of continuous improvement. This culture shift is essential for school systems to improve literacy outcomes, because successfully establishing instructional pathways for all students requires the entire system working together.

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Grade-Level Transition Plan

Similar to their support for MTSS and Instructional Pathways, instructional support specialists are often leaders on transition teams because of their ability to support across grade levels and sometimes even buildings. play a key role in grade-level transitions by supporting curriculum alignment and teacher capacity.

Support Academic Readiness

Instructional support specialists can analyze incoming student data, including trends over time, to inform instructional planning and ensure that teachers are proactively planning for their incoming class of students. They can leverage trend data to help teachers across grade levels adjust their long-term instructional plans and strategies to ensure that students are prepared for academic transitions.

They can also organize and support articulation meetings between sending and receiving grade-level teachers and promote consistent language, expectations, and instructional practices across grade levels to ease transitions for students.

Support Social and Procedural Readiness

Although not a core part of their role, instructional support specialists may have opportunities to contribute to plans for social and procedural transitions as well as academics. They can provide professional development and coaching around best practices to support students through

change, including how to make the classroom a space that feels safe for students to ask questions and share anxieties. Instructional support specialists may also have a unique vantage point to help spot potential procedural transitions that frequently cause challenges for students and can be addressed through careful planning and preparation.

Family & Community Engagement

Family and community engagement is important to students' academic success. Instructional support specialists can foster effective family communication by promoting positive engagement strategies and encouraging staff to share successful practices that build strong school-home partnerships.[6] This can include professional development and coaching activities, including:

- Sharing strategies for maintaining positive, two-way communication between school and families.
- Supporting the development of policies that welcome families and encourage open dialogue.
- Creating and distributing family-friendly resources aligned with literacy practices.
- Training staff on frameworks like the Dual Capacity-Building Framework to guide engagement practices.
- Encourage sharing of successful engagement strategies to build collective capacity.

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[6] Fullan, Michael. *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. 5th ed. New York: Teachers College Press, 2015.

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General Education Teachers

General Education Teachers

General education teachers provide the majority of direct literacy instruction to students and play an essential role in their development. They are charged with learning and consistently implementing best practices for literacy instruction in their classrooms every day.

The sections below articulate the General Education Teacher's role in each chapter of the local literacy plan. Use the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more about each chapter and create your local literacy plan.

Key Actions	
Professional Development Plan	• Set goals for professional growth • Engage in new learning and provide feedback • Independently explore professional development resources
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Implement HQIM with fidelity • Provide differentiation and scaffolding for all students • Utilize data from assessments to adjust instruction • Engage in collaboration to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment
Instructional Pathways	• Deliver high-quality core instruction aligned to the Science of Reading • Use data from multiple assessments to identify student needs • Provide targeted and intensive interventions • Collaborate across teams and stakeholder groups to support students
Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Collaborate across roles and grade levels to support student transitions • Engage families by sharing transition information and resources • Advocate for student needs • Support social-emotional readiness and create a safe environment for questions and concerns
Family & Community Engagement	• Communicate instructional expectations with families • Provide resources and invite families to participate in students' literacy development • Build trusting, collaborative relationships with families • Align with community resources to support literacy

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Professional Development Plan

Ongoing professional learning is essential for teachers to stay abreast of research and implement best practices in their classrooms. While district and school leaders are responsible for planning professional learning, teachers should actively engage and ensure that they leave prepared for implementation. In particular, teachers should do the following to ensure they're making the most of learning opportunities:

Set Goals

- Create short-term and long-term objectives for professional growth.
- Identify personal goals for improving literacy instruction that align with school-wide literacy priorities and student needs.

Engage in Learning

- Attend workshops, coaching sessions, Professional Learning Communities, and/or online courses that align with instructional goals.
- Collaborate regularly with colleagues and support staff (e.g., interventionists, special education teachers, classroom support specialists) to exchange strategies and refine practices.
- Embed evidence-based literacy practices into daily instruction, track student progress, and reflect on effectiveness to continuously improve instructional practice.

Provide Feedback

- Share feedback on professional development sessions, suggest topics or formats, and collaborate in planning school-wide professional learning.

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Explore Resources

In addition, teachers can seek out additional professional development opportunities that align with their personal goals. Studying literacy frameworks, instructional guides, and curriculum tools are a good place to start. Teachers can also collaborate informally with their colleagues informally to learn new strategies and identify additional resources to support literacy. Lastly, teachers are encouraged to use the North Dakota Professional Development website and Professional Learning Flow Chart for guidance on professional learning opportunities.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

A guaranteed and viable curriculum ensures that all students receive consistent access to essential literacy knowledge and skills. While leaders set expectations and provide resources, student achievement ultimately depends on teachers delivering essential content within the available instructional time.

Implement Curriculum with Fidelity

Teachers should utilize their High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) to teach essential literacy standards and provide all students with access to prioritized content.[7] Using HQIM ensures that instruction is systematic and aligned with the Science of Reading. Teachers should also leverage any provided pacing guides, scope and sequence documents, and curriculum frameworks to align lessons across classrooms and school buildings and ensure that essential content is covered within the school year.

Provide Differentiation and Scaffolding

It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that instruction meets student needs through differentiation and scaffolding. HQIM should provide access points for students with a wide range of language development and learning needs, but it requires preparation and internalization from the teacher. General education teachers should also adapt their teaching methods to meet student needs without changing core content to uphold consistent delivery of prioritized literacy standards.

Use Assessment to Inform Instruction

When teachers across a school system implement common assessments with fidelity, it allows leaders and teams to monitor student progress and make instructional decisions that ensure all students can achieve mastery of essential standards. Teachers should use formative and interim assessments to routinely monitor student progress, identify misconceptions, adjust pacing, and plan small group instruction.

Collaborate with Colleagues

In addition to using assessment data in their own classrooms, teachers should use data to drive collaboration with their colleagues and improve instruction across the school or system. Collaboration through PLCs allows teachers to align instruction with prioritized literacy standards and the most effective instructional strategies across classrooms. Authentic collaboration creates consistency within a school or system and ensures access to effective instruction for all students.[8]

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Instructional Pathways

An essential component of effective literacy instruction is the work that teachers do to provide targeted instruction to individual students based on need. The creation of these high-quality instructional pathways ensures that all students are able to develop essential literacy skills and become proficient readers and writers. Teachers play a core role in this work by executing effective instruction at every Tier of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and by sharing their professional judgment to ensure that every student is placed correctly in the right pathway.

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[7] Robert J. Marzano, *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003).

[8] Robert J. Marzano, *A New Era of School Reform: Going Where the Research Takes Us* (Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2000).

Make Collaborative, Data-Driven Decisions

First, teachers must implement assessments, including universal screeners and diagnostics, with fidelity. As the year progresses, progress monitoring data should also be collected and shared routinely to ensure that the school is accurately tracking student growth and ongoing needs. Once data is collected, teachers participate in PLCs and possibly in schoolwide MTSS teams to analyze student data and determine what tiers of support are needed. Teachers contribute by sharing both their analysis of the data and their knowledge of each individual student, to ensure that placements are flexible and responsive to real student needs.

Deliver High-Quality Core Instruction (Tier I)

General education teachers are responsible for delivering Tier 1 instruction to all students. This includes:

- Implementing evidence-based, structured literacy practices grounded in the Science of Reading, including explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Creating language-rich classrooms that foster oral language, print awareness, and engagement with grade-level texts through intentional whole and small group interactions.
- Collaborating with colleagues and engage in ongoing professional learning to refine Tier 1 practices and ensure alignment with MTSS pathways and evidence-based literacy instruction.

Provide Targeted Supplemental Instruction and Intensive Interventions (Tiers II and III)

Depending on the school and system, the general education teacher may or may not be responsible for providing Tier II and Tier III intervention. Regardless, they are responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions take place and monitoring student progress to determine whether instruction is effective. Teachers who support Tier II and III intervention should:

- Deliver explicit, systematic instruction aligned with core instruction to address specific skill gaps in small-group settings.
- Use the gradual release of responsibility model ("I do, we do, you do") to scaffold learning and build student independence during intervention.
- Use diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to continuously monitor student progress and adjust instructional supports-such as frequency, intensity, or duration – in real time to meet individual learning needs.

Teachers how are not responsible for delivering interventions should collaborate with specialists, support staff, and special education teachers to coordinate Tier II and Tier III interventions that meet individual student needs.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

General education teachers play a critical role in successful grade-level transitions, as students spend the majority of their time at school in their classrooms. By participating in school and/or

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district transition planning, teachers can have a significant impact on student success. While teachers may also play a role in planning for transition events (e.g., 9th grade orientation), they are critical in creating a successful transition experience for their incoming students each year and setting up students for a successful transition when they leave their class at the end of each year. Teachers should also communicate openly and frequently with their colleagues in other grade levels and, if applicable, other schools to advocate for students and share information that will help teachers provide the instructional and social-emotional supports needed for each student.

As teachers engage in this work, they should consider the three types of transitions that students go through – Academic, Social, and Procedural.

Prepare Students for Academic Transitions

- At the beginning of the school year, introduce new expectations and routines explicitly and provide plenty of opportunities for students to practice with feedback.
- Gradually increase expectations and provide opportunities for independence throughout the year.
- Ensure that rigor is aligned with grade-level standards, and utilize district-adopted High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) to ensure that instruction feels consistent across grade levels.
- Engage in vertical alignment discussions with colleagues and intentionally prepare students for what they can expect at the next grade level.

Prepare Students for Social Transitions

- Help students reflect on their growth by celebrating achievements and setting personal goals for the next grade.
- Create a safe space for questions and concerns about the transition to reduce anxiety and build confidence.
- Incorporate SEL strategies (e.g., journaling, class discussions, role-playing) to support emotional readiness for change.

Prepare Students for Procedural Transitions

- Collaborate with other teachers and staff to identify relevant procedural transitions for students at each level.
- Engage students in transition activities such as visiting next year's classroom, meeting new teachers, or exploring the upcoming schedule.
- Create opportunities to preview new procedures, such as visiting new parts of the building, learning how to use lockers, understanding technology procedures, etc.

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Family & Community Engagement

Because students spend the majority of their school time with their classroom teacher(s), general education teachers are the primary point of contact for most families. When teachers and families can develop authentic partnerships, students succeed – particularly in their literacy development.

Share Instructional Expectations and Resources

Teachers should communicate instructional goals and strategies with families in simple, jargon-free language and create opportunities for families to ask questions and contribute insights. They can also share information about instructional materials and how families can reinforce learning at home, as well as recommendations for developmentally appropriate books and games to support literacy development.

Create Opportunities for Two-Way Communication and Partnership

Teachers set the tone for collaboration with families, and they have an opportunity to invite parents in as true partners. They can do this by:

- Maintaining regular, strengths-based communication with families to share progress and prepare them for expectations in the next grade.
- Building trust through empathy, curiosity, and consistent engagement, recognizing the teacher's role in initiating and sustaining family partnerships.
- Inviting authentic dialogue and seeking input and feedback from families on instructional decisions

Leverage Community Resources

Teachers also have an opportunity to strengthen community partnerships. They can identify local partners such as libraries, cultural centers, health clinics, and businesses that can support literacy development and find ways to integrate them into the classroom. That might include soliciting book donations, organizing field trips, or inviting guest readers to pique students' interest and make real world connections.

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Special Education Teachers & Interventionists

Special Education Teachers & Interventionists

Special education teachers and interventionists play an essential role in ensuring that all students acquire literacy skills. They are charged with learning and consistently implementing best practices for literacy instruction in their classrooms and with targeted groups of students every day.

The sections below articulate the role of Special Education Teachers and Interventionists in each chapter of the local literacy plan. Use the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more about each chapter and create your local literacy plan.

Key Actions	
Professional Development Plan	• Set goals for professional growth • Engage in new learning and provide feedback • Independently explore professional development resources • Look for connections between strategies for General Education classrooms and supporting students with IEPs
Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Provide individualized scaffolding and differentiation to help students access grade-level learning • Provide push-in or pull-out small group instruction aligned with district policies and procedures • Utilize data from assessments to adjust instruction • Engage in collaboration with General Education teachers to ensure alignment
Instructional Pathways	• Deliver high-quality core instruction aligned to the Science of Reading • Use data from multiple assessments to identify student needs • Provide targeted and intensive interventions • Collaborate across teams and stakeholders to support students
Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Collaborate across roles and grade levels to support transitions • Coordinate transition meetings and document plans aligned with local, state, and federal guidelines • Engage families and share transition information and resources • Advocate for student needs • Prepare students for academic, social, and procedural transitions
Family & Community Engagement	• Communicate instructional expectations with families • Provide resources and invite families to participate in students' literacy development • Build trusting, collaborative relationships with families • Align with community resources to support literacy

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Professional Development Plan

Ongoing professional learning is essential for everyone in an instructional role to understand key research and implement effective practices with students. Special Education teachers, interventionists, and anyone in a student support role may have to seek out more professional development opportunities on their own than a General Education teacher might, but they should also actively engage in the professional learning that's provided to them and look for ways to make connections to their work. In particular, Special Education teachers and interventionists should do the following to ensure they're making the most of learning opportunities:

Set Goals

- Create short-term and long-term objectives for professional growth.
- Identify personal goals for improving literacy instruction that align with school-wide literacy priorities, your specific role, and the needs of the students you support.

Engage in Learning

- Attend workshops, coaching sessions, Professional Learning Communities, and/or online courses that align with instructional goals.
- Collaborate regularly with colleagues and support staff (e.g., General Education teachers) to exchange strategies, refine practices, and ensure alignment.
- Embed evidence-based literacy practices into daily instruction, track student progress, and reflect on effectiveness to continuously improve instructional practice.

Provide Feedback

- Share feedback on professional development sessions, suggest topics or formats, and collaborate in planning school-wide professional learning.

Explore Resources

In addition, Special Education teachers and interventionists should seek out additional professional development opportunities that align with their personal goals and advocate for opportunities to learn strategies that are specific to their roles. This might include studying literacy frameworks, instructional guides, and General Education curriculum resources to understand grade-level expectations and align practices with core classroom materials. In addition, Special Education teachers and interventionists are encouraged to use the North Dakota Professional Development website and Professional Learning Flow Chart for guidance on professional learning opportunities.

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Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Special Education teachers, interventionists, and student performance specialists ensure that students with disabilities have access to a guaranteed and viable curriculum while also receiving the individualized support necessary to be successful. Their work embodies the

principle that a curriculum is truly guaranteed only when *all* students, regardless of background or ability, are provided the opportunity to learn prioritized content.

Provide Access to Essential Standards

Special education teachers ensure students with disabilities access the same key literacy standards as their peers by adapting instruction and support without lowering expectations. This approach reinforces that all students deserve equal access to essential learning.

Individualize Supports Within the Curriculum

A viable curriculum recognizes that students learn at different rates and need varying support. Special education teachers align accommodations and specialized instruction with IEPs while staying focused on key literacy standards, balancing curriculum fidelity with student needs. Special educators should leverage multiple data sources to make instructional decisions, monitor student progress, and adjust as needed.

Collaborate with General Education Teachers

Special education teachers align strategies with other teachers to ensure consistent instruction and avoid gaps or overlap, supporting a cohesive and viable curriculum.

Advocate for Inclusive Practices

Special education teachers advocate for inclusive literacy through universal design for learning, helping ensure all students can access a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Their work promotes fairness, access, and opportunity for all learners.

Instructional Pathways

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Special Education teachers, interventionists, and student performance specialists play a vital role in advancing literacy outcomes for all learners, especially those with diverse needs. Grounded in the Science of Reading and aligned with MTSS, their work ensures that instruction is targeted, inclusive, and data-driven. Special education teachers and interventionists build and implement instructional pathways for students with and without IEPs, all with the goal of ensuring that every student's unique learning needs are met.

Provide Targeted Supplemental Instruction and Intensive Interventions (Tiers II and III)

Depending on the school and system, Special Education teachers and interventionists may play a key role in providing Tier II and Tier III interventions. In particular, interventionists and educators in similar roles often implement small group and individual interventions for students identified by the MTSS team. When they are delivering intervention, educators should:

- Deliver explicit, systematic instruction aligned with core instruction to address specific skill gaps in small-group settings.
- Use the gradual release of responsibility model ("I do, we do, you do") to scaffold learning and build student independence during intervention.
- Use diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to continuously monitor student progress and adjust instructional supports-such as frequency, intensity, or duration – in real time to meet individual learning needs.

Make Collaborative, Data-Driven Decisions

Special Education teachers and interventionists frequently support assessment, both for students in their case load as well as for universal screening of all students. Special Education teachers should sit on the MTSS team and have a significant role in identifying students for additional supports and monitoring progress. This will ensure that interventions are implemented with fidelity and students ultimately receive an appropriate placement. Special Education teachers should collaborate with leaders and their General Education colleagues to ensure that interventions and progress are documented in accordance with all federal and state laws.

Advocate for Student Needs

Special Education teachers can also support students with disabilities by promoting access to high-quality literacy instruction for all students, developing IEPs with literacy goals, and ensuring instruction is accessible and responsive to individual needs. Special Education teachers also play an important role in communicating with families to help them understand their child's learning needs and engage them as partners in instruction and intervention.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

Special Education teachers, interventionists, and student performance specialists play an important role in grade level transition planning, particularly for students with IEPs and 504 plans. They should be aware of any state or federal transition plan requirements for students on their caseload and be proactive about meeting those requirements. Students with disabilities are likely to need more support during grade level and building transitions, so Special Education teachers and educators in student support roles should be thoughtful and proactive in their planning.

Create Transition Plans

Special Education teachers have a leadership role in transition planning. They should:

- Lead or participate in end-of-year meetings involving general education teachers, related service providers, administrators, and parents/guardians to discuss the student's needs for the upcoming year.
- Update or develop transition-related goals (if applicable) in the IEP, ensuring the receiving team understands the plan moving forward.
- Design more comprehensive transition plans when the student is moving to a new building or program, including visits, shadowing, or virtual tours.

Review and Update Documentation

Special Education teachers are responsible for all relevant documentation related to transition planning and student success. They must:

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- Ensure all legal documents (IEPs, BIPs, 504s) are current, accurate, and clearly outline the student's present levels of performance, goals, services, and accommodations.
- Progress Monitoring Data: Provide up-to-date academic and behavioral data, charts, assessments, and notes to support ongoing services.

Prepare the Student

Special Education teachers, interventionists, and others in student support roles have an opportunity to play a key role in preparing students for transitions. Educators should consider how to prepare students for the academic, social, and procedural elements of transitions, including:

- Helping students understand their own learning needs, accommodations, and how to advocate for support in the next grade.
- Discussing upcoming changes with the student in developmentally appropriate ways, easing anxieties and building confidence.
- Ensuring that supports remains appropriate and aligned with the student's needs and grade-level expectations.
- Recommending adjustments or reevaluations if the student's needs have changed significantly.

Family & Community Engagement

Special Education teachers, interventionists, and others in student support roles play an important role in family engagement. Although it may look different in each school or system, these educators are often uniquely positioned to foster meaningful relationships that support academic and behavioral growth.

Share Instructional Expectations and Resources

Special Education teachers should communicate instructional goals and strategies with families in simple, jargon-free language and create opportunities for families to ask questions and contribute insights. They can also share information about instructional materials and how families can reinforce learning at home, as well as recommendations for developmentally appropriate books and games to support literacy development.

Create Opportunities for Two-Way Communication and Partnership

Special Education teachers have an opportunity to build close relationships with families of the students they support. They set the tone for the relationship by:

- Facilitating individualized communication that respects family voice and student needs
- Collaborating with families to co-develop intervention plans and progress monitoring tools
- Ensuring accessibility through translated materials, flexible meeting formats, and responsive practices based on family needs
- Using data from IEP meetings, intervention reviews, and family feedback to inform instructional decisions

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- Clearly including all families in any event that is organized by the school, so that Special Education students are not an afterthought at events.

Leverage Community Resources

Special Education teachers, interventionists, and student performance specialists also have an opportunity to strengthen community partnerships. They can identify local partners such as libraries, cultural centers, health clinics, and businesses that can support literacy development and find ways to integrate them into the classroom. That might include soliciting book donations, organizing field trips, or inviting guest readers to pique students' interest and make real world connections.

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Caregivers & Educators Supporting Children from Birth – Age 5

Caregivers and Educators Supporting Children Birth – Age 5

Caregivers and early childhood educators play an essential role in building a foundation of literacy. They are charged with learning and consistently implementing best practices for literacy instruction in their classrooms and with targeted groups of students every day.

The sections below articulate the role of Families, Caregivers, and Early Childhood Educators in each of the key elements of literacy development.

Key Actions	

Professional Development Plan	• Early childhood educators:
	  ○ Engage in provided professional learning and seek out additional opportunities to learn about literacy development
	• Caregivers and families:
	  ○ Look for vetted organizations like the CDC to understand developmental milestones in language development

Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum	• Understand key milestones for language development from Birth – Age 5 • Align formal and informal learning supports to developmentally appropriate milestones
Instructional Pathways	• Implement developmentally appropriate language instruction • Utilize assessments, including informal observations, to make instructional decisions

Grade-Level Transition Plan	• Early childhood educators:
	  ○ Actively plan for Kindergarten readiness, including academic and social-emotional factors
	• Families and caregivers:
	  ○ Engage actively with school systems to support children as they enter school

Family & Community Engagement	• Early childhood educations should actively engage families through home visits and/or communication and collaboration that centers the family • Families and caregivers should participate actively in their child's education

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Professional Development Plan

Early Childhood Educators

Well-informed early childhood educators are essential in ensuring that children have a solid literacy foundation and are ready for kindergarten. Educators should actively engage in professional development that is provided by district, school, or organization leaders, while also seeking out professional growth to supplement and enhance their development. A key component of effective professional learning is that it is based on the most current research. Because research is constantly evolving, educators should look to trusted resources, such as the International Dyslexia Association, as a guide.

Caregivers and Families

Caregivers, parents, and family members should seek out information about childhood development and literacy acquisition. This may come from local schools as well as non-profits, the city, and local libraries. Organizations like the CDC also provide evidence-based guidance for families around developmental milestones, including speaking and language development.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

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Caregivers and early childhood educators should promote early literacy development, which requires families to have access to high-quality, engaging, and developmentally appropriate books. At this stage, caregivers and educators build early literacy through oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, and print concepts. The following guidance can help families and early learning centers select texts to support literacy development:

Age-Appropriate Content and Format

- Infants (0–12 months): Sturdy board books with high-contrast images, simple text, and sensory elements (touch-and-feel, lift-the-flap).
- Toddlers (1–3 years): Books with repetition, rhyming patterns, predictable language, and interactive elements.
- Preschoolers (3–5 years): Books with more complex stories, rich vocabulary, relatable characters, and early concepts (e.g., counting, feelings, family).

Language-Rich Texts

- Choose books with rich, descriptive language to support vocabulary growth.
- Include books in the family's home language to support bilingual language development and cultural identity.
- Look for books that encourage dialogic reading, books that prompt questions and conversations.

Engaging and Relatable Themes

- Focus on everyday experiences: family, friendship, emotions, routines, nature, animals, and kindness.
- Seek stories that affirm children's sense of belonging and identity.

Illustrations that Support Understanding

- Choose books with clear, vibrant illustrations that reinforce the text and help children make sense of them.
- Wordless picture books can also help build storytelling and sequencing skills.

Books That Invite Repetition and Interaction

- Repetition helps with memory and language development. Books that children want to read repeatedly are powerful tools.
- Interactive books (songs, rhymes, call-and-response) support engagement and bonding between children and readers.

Instructional Pathways

Caregivers and educators supporting children from birth to age five play a foundational role in shaping early instructional pathways that promote literacy, language, and overall development.

Create Nurturing, Language-Rich Environments

When adults interact with young children, it builds their language development. Caregivers and educators of children from birth should engage children in meaningful conversations, model expressive and receptive language, and embed vocabulary-building opportunities into daily routines and play. This interaction fosters communication skills and sparks curiosity while promoting social-emotional growth by encouraging interaction, empathy, and self-expression.

Utilize Developmentally Appropriate Instruction

Adults can support early language development through intentional, play-based, and routine-driven learning experiences. They should:

- Embed language and literacy development into daily routines and play.
- Align practices with early learning standards and the Science of Reading.
- Support foundational skills such as vocabulary, oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge.
- Differentiate instruction to meet individual needs.

At home, families can support literacy development by:

- Reading with children every day to build an understanding of the concept of print and the connection between letters and meaning.
- Talking with children every day to develop language skills and vocabulary.
- Playing with children every day to connect new ideas to familiar concepts and experiences.
- Exploring with children to build their knowledge and exposure to new ideas.

Families should refer to the North Dakota Legendary Learners Guide for more resources and activities to support literacy development at home.

Data-Based Decision Making

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Although children under aren't systematically assessed for literacy skills, caregivers and educations should monitor language and communication development as a foundation for learning, social interaction, and emotional well-being. Caregivers are encouraged to use developmental milestones (e.g., CDC guidelines) to identify children who may need additional support. Early childhood educators should also analyze observational data and milestone progress to inform instructional planning.

Grade-Level Transition Plan

Caregivers and early childhood educators' involvement is crucial for kindergarten readiness. Without this collaboration, the kindergarten teacher begins the school year with a blank slate. Early collaboration can make a huge difference at the beginning of the school year, ultimately impacting student learning throughout the year. Families, early childhood educators, and grade school teachers play complementary roles in preparing children for new expectations, environments, and routines.

Caregivers

1. *Support emotional readiness:* By talking positively about the upcoming change and addressing fears or anxieties with reassurance and encouragement, the child feels excited and secure.
2. *Establish routines:* Begin practicing kindergarten routines (e.g., bedtime, morning schedule, using a backpack and lunchbox) while encouraging independence in tasks like dressing, toileting, and cleaning up, so that children are prepared for school expectations.
3. *Participate in school readiness events:* Attend orientation sessions, open houses, or transition programs, and visit the new school with your child—especially if they haven't been inside the building before – to ensure students are comfortable with the school space.
4. *Communicate with educators*: Share insights about your child's personality, needs, and background, and ask questions or express any concerns about their transition or readiness to equip the teacher with information to provide targeted instruction.

Early Childhood Educators

1. *Prepare the child academically and socially:* Foster key skills for kindergarten readiness, including foundational literacy and numeracy, self-help abilities (e.g., putting on a jacket, opening lunch containers), and social-emotional skills like turn-taking, following directions, and managing emotions.
2. *Conduct developmental assessments:* Share observational data, developmental checklists, and progress reports with receiving teachers or schools, and identify any areas where the child may need additional support in kindergarten (e.g., speech, attention, motor skills).
3. *Collaborate with kindergarten teachers:* Participate in transition meetings or data-sharing sessions with kindergarten staff, offering insights into the child's learning style, strengths, and areas of concern.

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4. *Facilitate transition activities:* Organize events such as kindergarten classroom visits, meet-the-teacher events, story time or lunch in a kindergarten setting, and use books, stories, or dramatic play to simulate "going to kindergarten."
5. *Support families in the transition process:* Provide families with information about kindergarten expectations, suggestions for at-home readiness activities, and support with enrollment or special education processes, if applicable.

Family & Community Engagement

In early childhood settings, educators lay the foundation for family-school partnerships by helping caregivers understand how language and literacy emerge through everyday interactions. Engagement at this stage is rooted in trust and shared learning goals. The early childhood teachers should:

- Invite families to share family practices, home languages, and observations about their child's learning.
- Engage families through home visits, caregiver conferences, and informal check-ins that center on family voice.
- Participate in professional learning that supports reflection on beliefs about families and alignment of instruction with family strengths.

The participation of the caregiver prior to elementary school can significantly impact a child's later success in life. When children are exposed to rich vocabulary, text, puzzles, and critical thinking at home, it begins to help their brain develop literacy skills. Children benefit when caregivers use resources and materials at home that reinforce the concepts that are being taught and discussed at school.

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Best Practices to Support Literacy Improvement

Professional Development Plan

Effective professional development and learning are essential components of continuous improvement. However, to have the desired impact, professional learning must be thoughtfully planned and rooted in a system's long-term goals. North Dakota legislation, NDCC 15.1-21.12.1, requires that all teachers 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 to:

- 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 meets each child's unique needs.

Teams should consider the following best practices for professional development when creating a long-term plan to develop staff.

High-quality professional development aligns resources and processes to support all staff in a continuously growing understanding of literacy knowledge and evidence-based instructional practices. This is accomplished by promoting opportunities for all stakeholders to engage deeply in learning, thus strengthening the overall culture of literacy and cultivating lasting change across systems. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes, incorporating the following elements:[9]

Data Informed *Uses learning evidence to determine needs*
Job Embedded *New learning addressed in a timely and relevant manner*
Emotionally Responsive *Creates intellectually safe learning environments*
Supported by Coaching *Instructional and peer coaching implement new learning with fidelity*
Collaborative & Reflective *Offers ongoing opportunities for implementation, collaboration, and reflection to improve literacy instruction*
Sustained *New learning is practiced and refined. Follow-up training expands knowledge of previous understandings and is responsive and data-informed*
Focused *Clearly defined learning outcomes and expectations are provided*

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[9] U.S. Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Every Student Succeeds Act: Conference Report (to accompany S. 1177), 114th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 114–354 (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2015), https://www.congress.gov/114/meeting/house/104246/documents/CRPT-114HRPT-S1177.pdf.

The next section unpacks the elements of effective professional learning to further support systems in their understanding of how professional learning can best sustain knowledgeable and well-equipped teachers.

Data-Informed Professional Learning

Highly effective professional learning is born out of the examination of data. Examining data can help identify student needs or implementation gaps within a system. This approach can help ensure that the learning is targeting the right issues, addressing specific needs.

> **Literacy Example:** A school examines both student performance data and implementation data. They discover that students in grades K-2 struggle with phonics skills. Teacher observations reveal a trend in non-explicit phonics instruction with insufficient practice and application time for students. The school then searches for professional learning in explicit phonics instruction and identifies the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) as a training opportunity that meets these criteria.

Job-Embedded Professional Learning

Job-embedded professional learning refers to learning that is rooted in the situations teachers encounter with their students. Rather than general professional learning that could be independent of student, school, or district contexts. The benefit of job-embedded learning is that it affords an opportunity for teachers to examine new learning in reference to their own classrooms and apply concepts and skills in their own personal context. When professional learning synchronizes with the priorities and focus areas for a system, it coheres with what teachers are already working towards making it more impactful.

> **Literacy Example:** A school has a newly adopted HQIM. Along with the initial two-day summer training on the new materials, the school has planned for on-going support and learning throughout the year around these new materials. The school has established regular sessions with grade level teams for collaboration around issues they have encountered in their implementation. The curriculum director visits these meetings to answer questions that teachers have. These sessions also allow for pacing alignment across classrooms.

Focused Professional Learning

Similar to job-embedded learning, professional learning that is focused means that it is relevant and directly focused on the needs of students and content with which educators are engaged. When learning is centered on the specific needs a system is experiencing, it can directly answer the most pressing issues teachers face. When possible, allowing educators agency in selecting topics most relevant to the issues they are facing can be a powerful tool not only to offer direct solutions to educators, but also in building trust between leadership and faculty.

> **Literacy Example:** A district has discovered that seventh and eighth grade students are struggling with comprehension tasks in informational texts. First through fourth grade students are showing weakness in phonemic awareness. Given these indicators, the system decided to hold two different learning series, one for K-4 teachers and another for 6-8 grade teachers. The 6-8th grade teachers will hone their teaching strategies around complex text, knowledge coherence, vocabulary, and text-based responses. The K-5th grade teachers will engage in learning around phonemic awareness practices.

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Emotionally Responsive Professional Learning

Professional learning that is emotionally responsive addresses how lived experiences factor into learning. To create impact across populations, effective professional learning should directly address potential barriers. Geneva Gay, a researcher on this topic stated, "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference for students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly." It is important to look for whether professional learning include these considerations.

> **Literacy Example:** A school has recently had an increase in its population of English Learners. Many teachers are concerned about the support they can supply in their classrooms. The school has planned a learning session on metalinguistic awareness. In this session, teachers get an opportunity to learn how multilingual students benefit from metalinguistic awareness, like examining cognates, to facilitate text comprehension across languages.

Collaborative and Reflective Professional Learning

Providing opportunities for professional learning to be collaborative has multiple benefits. When a school is looking for system-wide change and growth, using a collaborative approach provides a broader base of understanding and organically creates support systems. Teachers are actively discussing the material, fueling thought and innovation around the topic. Collaborative work builds trust in a professional community which can serve implementation efforts long after the professional learning session is complete. Integrating reflection and inquiry into the learning, supports teachers in internalizing the material.

> **Literacy Example:** In a recent professional learning session on explicit instruction, the school organized the time into segments: full group informational sessions and small group discussion and practice sessions. The facilitator tasked the small groups with revising a lesson plan to ensure it is explicit. Groups were able to collaborate with each other on their lesson plans during the session and then post-session, these groups remained attached for follow-up activities. Teachers visited each other's classrooms and set up a time to meet following the visit for reflection and discussion.

Professional Learning Supported by Coaching

Coaching, whether conducted by an Instructional Coach or provided by other school personnel or peers, can help guide and facilitate teachers' learning in the context of their practice. By following up professional learning with coaching and feedback, the teachers have the opportunity to apply the learning and grow their understanding in the context of actual real-world teaching. This type of real-world application can be invaluable to address misconceptions, solidify understanding, and create consistent implementation across classrooms. Coaching can take many forms and can include modeling strategies, visiting classrooms of seasoned practitioners, collaborative analysis of student work, and observation and feedback. This is further explored in the following section (Implementation Supports).

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Literacy Example: As a follow-up to the LETRs training K-2 teachers received, the instructional coach is conducting rounds with each of the teachers. The coach and the teachers set goals based on the individual teacher's skill level within the context of delivering structured literacy instruction. The coach supports each with classroom observations and debriefs, co-teaching, and lesson modeling tailored to the individual teacher. Through this model, the teachers can further affirm and adjust their expertise with the new skills. In a school without a dedicated instructional coach, professional learning communities can provide similar support through peer collaboration and feedback.

Sustained Professional Learning

Research confirms that changes in instructional practices that impact student growth cannot be achieved in short, isolated professional learning sessions. Lasting change demands sustained effort over time that is both rigorous and cumulative. Learning that includes multiple engagement opportunities around a single concept or practice has a much greater chance of translating to lasting change. Allowing teachers to return to concepts over time, in PLCs or faculty meetings, and to have active application in their classrooms supported by feedback and discourse greatly increases the chance of creating lasting impact. This is further explored in the following section (Implementation Supports).

Literacy Example: A school has identified increasing student engagement as a school-wide goal. At the start of the school year, all staff participated in a full-day training on engagement strategies. School leadership has established that PLCs will devote time to discussing and tracking implementation data at their regular meetings. Additionally, the school has adopted a walk-through procedure where leadership will collect data and give feedback to teachers. At mid-year, they plan an in-service day devoted to a refresh on engagement strategies as well as an opportunity for collaborative problem-solving. Each PLC will share their implementation journey with the larger community.

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Additionally, quality professional learning is rooted in the most current research. Because research is constantly evolving, it is important that educators look to trusted resources as a guide. In the field of literacy, some trusted resources include:

- The International Dyslexia Association
- The Reading League
- The Center For Reading Science
- The University of Florida Literacy Institute
- Reading Rockets

Finally, for professional learning to have the desired impact on adult practice and student learning, it must be aligned with strategic implementation supports. In fact, research shows that very little of the training provided to teachers transfers into their classroom practice without follow-up support.[10]

[10] Joyce Showers and Beverly Showers, "Student Achievement through Staff Development," (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002).

Type of Training Provided	Skill Development	Accurate Use in the Classroom
Theory & Knowledge	5%	0 – 5%
Theory & Modeling	50%	5%
Theory, Modeling, Practice, & Feedback	90%	5%
Theory, Modeling, Practice, Feedback, & Coaching	90%	75 – 90%

The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) and the Center on School Turnaround (WestEd) defined implementation drivers to support sustained changes in teacher practice in similar terms.[11] First they state the importance of foundational practices such as staff selection and initial professional development. Additional drivers echo many of the elements named by ESSA: the importance of having data-driven teams, on-going coaching, and aligned leadership focused on student growth. NIRN also points to the need for fidelity checks. To effectively implement new practices, schools must create systems to measure fidelity. The information collected is essential to the continuous improvement process because it tells leaders and teams the degree to which training and support has been successful and what changes may need to be made to the implementation plan.

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[11] Kathleen Ryan Jackson, Dean Fixsen, and Caryn Ward, "Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework," (Chapel Hill: National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Improving literacy outcomes requires a coherent set of practices that are consistently implemented across classrooms, schools, and districts. Research emphasizes that a guaranteed and viable curriculum is essential to student achievement. A guaranteed and viable curriculum is one that clearly identifies essential literacy standards and ensures they can be taught to mastery within the available time. Teams should include the following best practices when planning to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Guaranteed Curriculum

In standardizing the curriculum expectations, information, and requirements, a school system can ensure that all students in each grade level receive consistent instruction, regardless of their teacher. This consistency allows students to excel from one grade to the next, without gaps in skills or knowledge. A guaranteed curriculum establishes high expectations and end of year goals that can be assessed at strategic points throughout the year.

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High Quality Instructional Materials

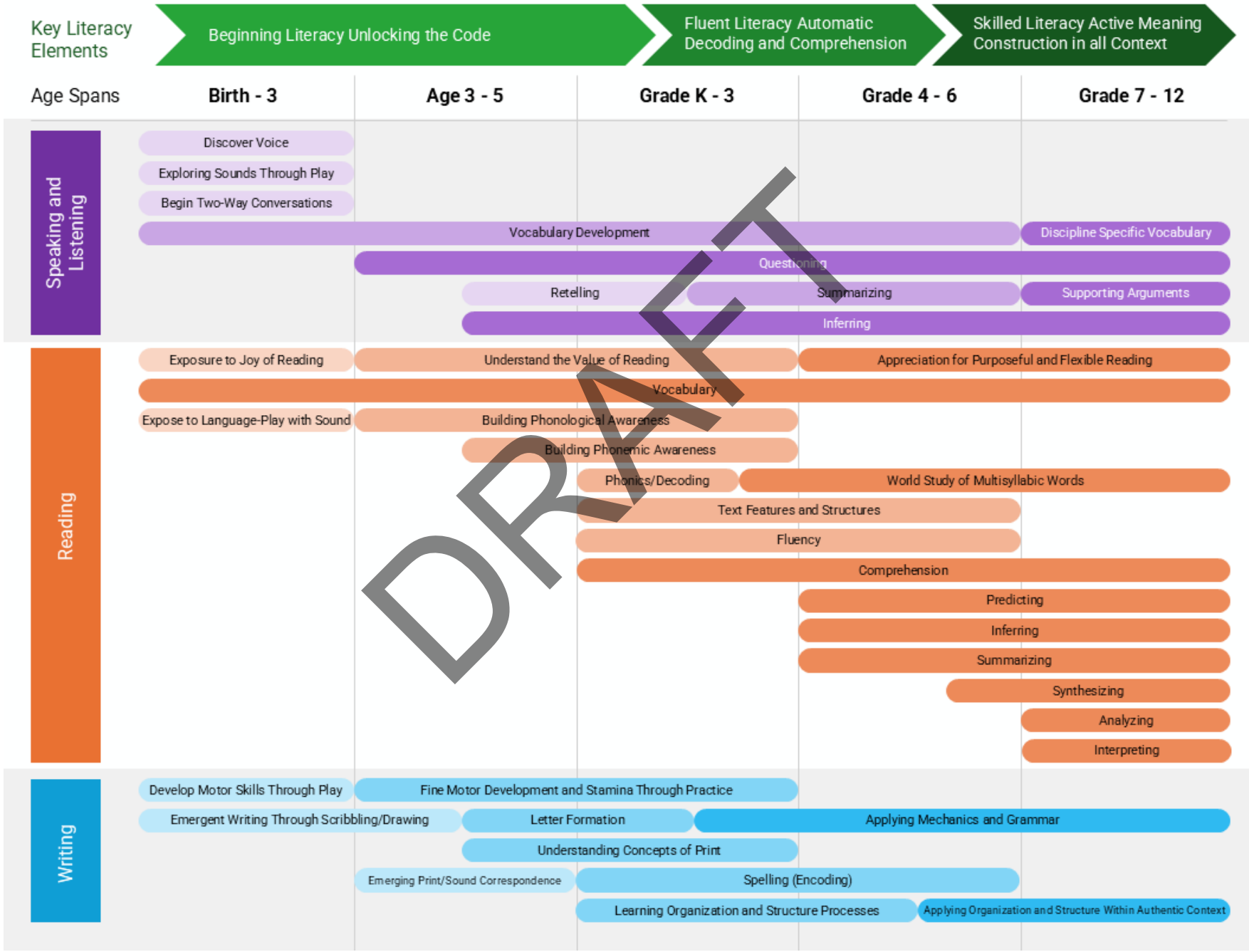
High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) play a vital role in helping educators deliver rigorous, standards-aligned instruction rooted in the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy. Rather than just delivering content, HQIM enables intentional planning and instructional decision-making. Key elements of HQIM include:

- Supports standards-aligned planning across grade levels using effective practices.
- Guides on what to teach, when to teach it, and how to ensure access to grade-level content for all students.
- Includes scripted lessons that are helpful for those unfamiliar with Structured Literacy.
- Requires dedicated time for teachers to study the research, understand the program design, and analyze instructional sequences.

Selected HQIM should align with North Dakota Content Standards and result in student mastery. When planning instruction, teachers should begin with the North Dakota English Language Arts Standards (2023) and/or the North Dakota Early Learning Standards, ensuring that Prioritized Standards serve as a focal point for lessons. These resources can be used to:

- Unpack standards into teachable components.
- Sequence learning to build knowledge and skills over time.
- Design scaffolds and supports that meet diverse learner needs.
- Identify critical reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards.

The North Dakota Literacy Skills Continuum serves as a helpful reference for teachers to ensure that instruction is aligned to clear targets that are developmentally appropriate at each age. It illustrates typical progress in literacy skill development from birth through grade 12. This continuum can be a tool for observing group and individual progress related to age and grade level development


Key Literacy Elements
Beginning Literacy Unlocking the Code
Fluent Literacy Automatic Decoding and Comprehension
Skilled Literacy Active Meaning Construction in all Context
Age Spans
Birth - 3
Age 3 - 5
Grade K - 3
Grade 4 - 6
Grade 7 - 12
Speaking and Listening
Discover Voice
Exploring Sounds Through Play
Begin Two-Way Conversations
Vocabulary Development
Discipline Specific Vocabulary
Questioning
Retelling
Summarizing
Supporting Arguments
Inferring
Reading
Exposure to Joy of Reading
Understand the Value of Reading
Appreciation for Purposeful and Flexible Reading
Vocabulary
Expose to Language-Play with Sound
Building Phonological Awareness
Building Phonemic Awareness
Phonics/Decoding
World Study of Multisyllabic Words
Text Features and Structures
Fluency
Comprehension
Predicting
Inferring
Summarizing
Synthesizing
Analyzing
Interpreting
Writing
Develop Motor Skills Through Play
Fine Motor Development and Stamina Through Practice
Emergent Writing Through Scribbling/Drawing
Letter Formation
Applying Mechanics and Grammar
Understanding Concepts of Print
Emerging Print/Sound Correspondence
Spelling (Encoding)
Learning Organization and Structure Processes
Applying Organization and Structure Within Authentic Context

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Additionally, evidence-based research practices must be embedded into the HQIM. Teachers should ensure instruction is explicit, systematic, cumulative, and comprehensive.[12] This should include a trajectory that begins with phonemic awareness and then moves into phonics, decoding, and fluency. Reading comprehension will only be possible if students are fluent readers with developed vocabulary.[13]

Effective use of an evidence-based HQIM will also require thoughtful pacing and intentional practice. Teachers should follow guidance provided by the materials while understanding how students build skills over time. Important considerations include:

- Maintaining a "perky pace" as defined by the HQIM and curriculum.[14]
- Reinforcing skills across multiple days and units, allowing for cumulative practice and deeper understanding.[15]
- In the primary grades, begin with sounds before introducing graphemes and then show the sound-spelling correspondence, building on students' existing oral language knowledge.[16]
- Support listening comprehension with read-aloud texts that may be two years above students' reading level.[17]
- Provide consistent exposure to complex texts to strengthen background knowledge and vocabulary development.[18]

Within the HQIM, there should be opportunities for differentiation that keep all students engaged and include multiple access points for learning. Support will be necessary for students that need more repetitions, time, or other shifts to master the appropriate skills.

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[12] International Dyslexia Association. "Effective Reading Instruction." *International Dyslexia Association*. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://dyslexiaida.org/effective-reading-instruction/
[13] International Dyslexia Association. "Structured Literacy Instruction: The Basics." *Reading Rockets*. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/about-reading/articles/structured-literacy-instruction-basics
[14] Archer, Anita L., and Charles A. Hughes. *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. Guilford Press, 2010.
[15] Lexia. "What Is Structured Literacy? Understanding the 3 Principles of Structured Literacy Instruction." *Lexia Blog*, June 23, 2025. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.lexialearning.com/blog/the-3-principles-of-structured-literacy-instruction
[16] Jiban, Cindy. "What the Science of Reading Tells Us about How to Teach Decoding — Including Phonics." *Teach. Learn. Grow.* February 14, 2025. NWEA. https://www.nwea.org/blog/2025/what-the-science-of-reading-tells-us-about-how-to-teach-decoding-including-phonics/
[17] Fisher, Douglas, and Nancy Frey. "Speaking and Listening in Content Area Learning." *Reading Rockets*. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/comprehension/articles/speaking-and-listening-content-area-learning
[18] Reading Rockets. "Types of Texts and How to Use Them." *Reading Rockets*. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/choosing-and-using-classroom-texts/types-texts-and-how-use-them

Common Assessments

A balanced and aligned assessment system is essential for tracking student progress and ensuring high achievement across all schools. To ensure a curriculum is guaranteed, schools should:

- Use formative assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of daily core instruction and ensure that students across all classrooms are progressing at a consistent pace.
- Review the assessments within the HQIM for alignment to standards and develop consistent procedures for testing, grading, and data analysis.
- Ensure assessments follow a clear K–12 progression and include comprehensive writing rubrics.

Disciplinary Literacy

At the secondary level, it is essential that school systems embed literacy instruction within content area instruction. As students progressively improve their reading comprehension, they will shift from learning to read to reading to learn; this typically happens in fourth grade.[19] Reading proficiency unlocks opportunities for literacy to be strategically embedded into the curriculum across content areas. Once students reach the secondary level, it is important that this happens on a consistent basis. Students should have frequent opportunities to apply their reading, comprehension, speaking, listening, and writing skills in multiple content areas.

Viable Curriculum

Viability means that the course of study focuses on essential concepts and allows time for skill mastery, promoting deep understanding over superficial coverage. To stay on pace, teachers must follow the lesson timing closely and may benefit from training in explicit instruction to strengthen their practice.

Protected Literacy Block

A key component of a viable literacy curriculum is establishing and maintaining a protected literacy block. This ensures that all students receive the high-quality, uninterrupted instruction they need to meet grade-level expectations. The following guidelines outline the essential elements of an effective literacy block:

- Provide at least 90 minutes of daily literacy instruction.[20] Students grade K-3 will benefit from 120 minutes of daily literacy instruction.

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[19] "Enabling the Shift from Learning to Read to Reading to Learn." *IMSE Journal*, January 22, 2023. IMSE. https://journal.imse.com/the-shift-from-learning-to-read-to-reading-to-learn/
[20] Reading Rockets. "An Example of the 90 Minute Reading Block." *Reading Rockets*. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/curriculum-and-instruction/articles/example-90-minute-reading-block

- Instructional time should be evenly divided between language comprehension and word recognition.[21]
- Avoid pull-outs or interruptions during this block.
- Leaders and instructional coaches should conduct regular observations and provide feedback to ensure:
    - The time is being used effectively.
    - Teachers are implementing the HQIM with fidelity.
- Smaller class sizes, especially in the lower grades will impact outcomes. School and district leaders should consider ways to include all staff for instruction during the literacy block.[22]

Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

For a curriculum to be viable, it needs to be vertically and horizontally aligned. Vertical alignment ensures continuity of learning across grade levels, while horizontal alignment promotes consistency in learning goals, content, and assessments within each grade. Vertical alignment contributes to a smooth transition process from one grade to another and ensures that students achieve long-term learning goals over time. Teachers need dedicated time to unpack the lesson and the associated standard, review the sequence, and understand the cumulative review process to implement the course of student with fidelity. Teachers benefit from seeing the 10,000 foot birds eye view of the units, year, and K-5, 6-8, or 9-12 trajectory.

Pacing guides are a key component of horizontal alignment, because they provide important insight into the daily amount of time needed to complete each lesson as well as the number of days required to complete all units within a grade level. Horizontal alignment ensures that all students receive instruction tied to essential standards in the appropriate grade level, regardless of school or teacher.

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[21] Core Knowledge Foundation. "The Baseball Experiment: How Two Wisconsin Researchers Discovered the Comprehension Gap Is a Knowledge Gap." *Core Knowledge*, accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.coreknowledge.org/baseball-experiment-two-wisconsin-researchers-discovered-comprehension-gap-knowledge-gap/

[22] Antoniou, Faye, Mohammed H. Alghamdi, and Kosuke Kawai. "The Effect of School Size and Class Size on School Preparedness." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (February 26, 2024). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1354072.

Instructional Pathways

A strong literacy plan must include well-defined instructional pathways that ensure all students receive high-quality, targeted literacy instruction. These pathways should be grounded in the science of reading, responsive to student needs, and supported by professional development and data-informed decision-making.

The following best practices offer a framework for designing and implementing effective instructional pathways that promote literacy achievement across all student populations.

Alignment to the Science of Reading

The science of reading is a body of research that explains how children learn to read. This research is translated into classroom practice through Structured Literacy, a research-based approach that emphasizes explicit, systematic instruction in foundational literacy skills.

Structured Literacy benefits all learners—especially those with dyslexia or reading difficulties—by focusing on the structure of language, including sounds, letters, words, and sentences. Lessons are carefully sequenced and grounded in the science of reading, ensuring clear and direct instruction that builds strong reading foundations.

Instruction in Structured Literacy is:

- Explicit**:** Concepts are taught directly, not assumed to be learned through exposure.
- Systematic and Cumulative**:** Skills are introduced in a logical order, building on previously learned material.
- Diagnostic**:** Teachers continuously assess and adjust instruction based on student needs.
- Multisensory**:** Instruction engages visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile pathways to enhance memory and learning.

Structured Literacy addresses every layer of language learning—from the smallest units of sound to the meaning of entire texts. Each component is taught explicitly and systematically to support decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

Delivering instruction that is explicit**,** cumulative**,** and sequential empowers students to build literacy skills with clarity and confidence. By focusing on foundational areas—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—Structured Literacy ensures deep understanding before advancing, laying a strong foundation for lifelong reading success. As school systems work to create or improve instructional pathways for students, it is essential that they start by examining instruction – core instruction as well as interventions – and ensuring that it is aligned to research-based best practices for literacy.

Data-Driven Teams

School systems should establish data-driven teams, including a schoolwide Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Teams and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), because educational

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efforts must be responsive, systematic, and focused on verifiable student outcomes. Data-driven teams shift the focus from merely teaching content to analyzing whether students are actually learning it, making the problem of student underperformance a shared institutional responsibility rather than an individual teacher's failure. This systematic approach ensures that interventions, resources, and instructional practices are constantly aligned with student needs, which is crucial for mitigating factors that lead to off-track performance or dropout. Ultimately, these teams create a culture of continuous improvement by providing educators with the structure and capacity to manage complex academic and behavioral challenges.

These teams should be aligned to ensure both system-level oversight and granular instructional focus.

- Schoolwide MTSS Team: The schoolwide MTSS team should be composed of administrators, counselors, specialists (like school psychologists or social workers), and grade-level team leads. This team's primary responsibility is monitoring schoolwide data (e.g., attendance, course failure rates, On-Track data) to identify systemic problems, allocating resources (Tiers 2 and 3 interventions), and overseeing the transition planning for key checkpoints like the freshman year.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): PLCs are the instructional and operational core, structured by grade level or content area. They must regularly meet to analyze common formative and summative assessment data, collectively identify students who need support, refine specific instructional practices, and develop shared curriculum units. The work of the PLCs feeds up to the MTSS team, allowing for the strategic deployment of school-level resources in support of data-identified student needs.

In very small systems, membership in these teams may overlap. When that happens, teams should be intentional about identifying which meetings will focus on each topic to ensure that everything is addressed.

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Tiered Supports

A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a proactive, strengths-based framework that integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and support all learners. It empowers educators to make data-informed decisions about instruction, intervention, and program improvement, ensuring that every student receives the support they need to succeed.

At the heart of MTSS is the ability to deliver instruction that is targeted, responsive, and aligned with developmental progress. The framework is built on four essential components:

- Screening
- Progress Monitoring
- Multi-Level Intervention System
- Data-Based Decision Making

MTSS is a collaborative effort involving district administrators, school leaders, specialists, teachers, families, and community members—all working together to create effective instructional pathways for all students.

Screening

Universal screening is a foundational component of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), designed to proactively identify students who may be at risk and to guide instructional decisions. Conducted universally three times per year, effective screening ensures that educators can proactively identify students who need additional instructional support. When combined with a diagnostic, screening provides a comprehensive view of student performance, enabling well-informed, responsive instruction.

When selecting a screening tool, teams should ensure that it meets the following key criteria:

- Brief**:** Quick and easy to administer
- Reliable**:** Produces consistent results
- Valid**:** Accurately measures intended skills
- Aligned**:** Supports meaningful learning goals

Diagnostics

Schools should use a diagnostic assessment for students who score below grade level, to learn more about their specific instructional needs. A universal screener only identifies which students are at risk, not why they're struggling or what their specific skill deficits are. A diagnostic assessment serves to drill down into a student's performance to precisely pinpoint the underlying skill gaps (e.g., identifying whether the issue is phonemic awareness, fluency, or comprehension).

This process prevents guesswork and allows teachers to align intervention to the exact needs of the student, ensuring resources are used efficiently and the student receives the most targeted, effective support. Implementation should occur immediately after the initial screening data is reviewed, with the diagnostic tool chosen specifically to break down the domain in which the student showed risk. The results are then used by the MTSS team to plan a highly specific Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention and select an appropriate progress monitoring tool to track the targeted skill.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is a key component of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), involving the frequent and systematic collection of data to evaluate student performance, responsiveness to instruction, and the effectiveness of interventions. Using reliable and valid tools, educators track student growth over time and make informed instructional decisions. Measures must be appropriate for the student’s grade or skill level and administered consistently to ensure accuracy.

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When selecting a progress monitoring tool, teams should ensure that it meets the following key criteria:

- Brief and efficient to administer
- Reliable and valid
- Sensitive to student growth
- Allows for repeated measurement
- Includes typical growth rates and benchmarks
- Provides alternate forms of equal difficulty
- Specifies minimum acceptable growth and performance benchmarks
- Includes reliability and validity data for scores

For students receiving only Tier I instruction, progress monitoring should occur monthly. For students receiving Tier II supplemental instruction, progress monitoring should occur at least biweekly. For students receiving Tier III intensive interventions, progress monitoring should occur weekly.

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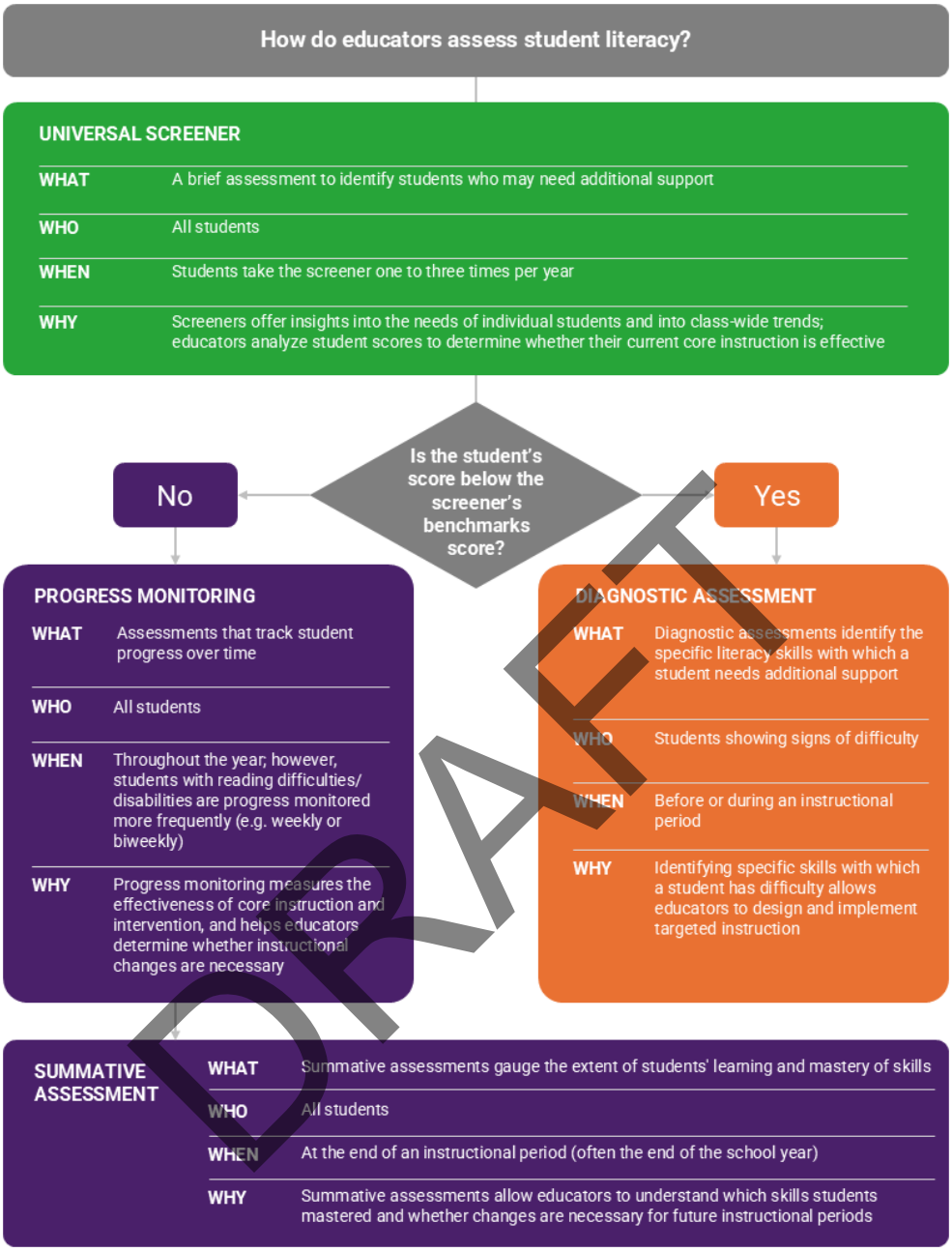

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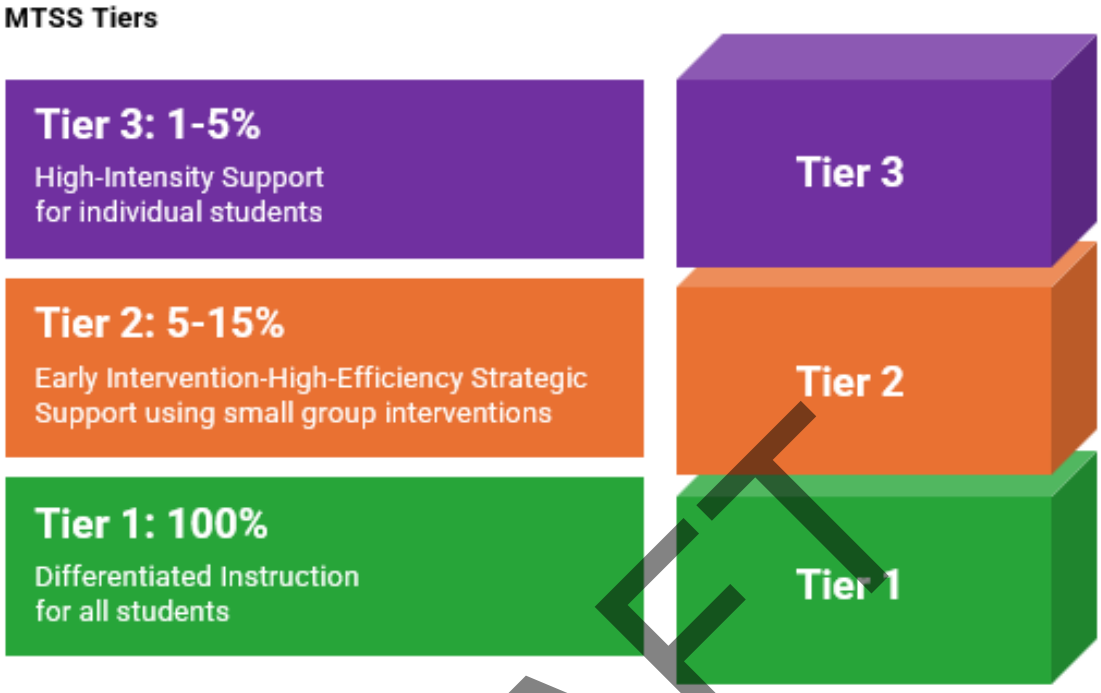
Multi-Level Intervention System

The Multi-Level Intervention System is a core component of MTSS, organizing instructional and intervention supports into three tiers of increasing intensity. Each tier is designed to meet students where they are, ensuring that all learners receive appropriate, evidence-based instruction aligned with their needs. [23]

[23] Adapted from James Madison University, *MTSS Tier 2 & 3 Handout*, accessed September 10, 2025, https://www.jmu.edu/chbs/gradpsyc/counseling/_files/mtss-tier-2-3-handout.pdf.



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Tier 1: Core Instruction

- Delivered to all students
- Includes all components of Structured Literacy
- Aligned with state or agreed-upon standards
- Utilizes HQIM suitable for all learners, including English learners and students with disabilities
- Instruction is adapted for students performing above, on, or below grade level
- Teachers use data to address individual learning need

Tier 2: Supplemental Intervention

- Provided in addition to Tier 1
- Focused on specific skill gaps identified through data
- Includes components of structured literacy with increased practice and feedback
- Aligned with Tier 1 to reinforce foundational skills

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

- Individualized Support
- Provided for students who are not responding to Tier 2
- Tailored to specific student needs
- Delivered by trained, experienced staff
- Weekly progress monitoring guides adjustments

Secondary Literacy Supports

When it comes to supporting literacy at the secondary level, an effective MTSS process is key to student success. When students are no longer receiving explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills, it's essential to continue embedding literacy instruction across the curriculum and providing targeted interventions for students who need additional support to be successful.

Secondary schools must embed comprehensive literacy supports directly into grade-level instruction, rather than treating reading as a subject isolated to English class, because content area success (in history, science, and math) increasingly depends on complex text comprehension and disciplinary writing skills. For students who are struggling readers, the challenge is magnified as they are expected to read longer, more abstract texts, leading to disengagement and course failure, which are significant early warning indicators for dropping out.

To ensure students can be successful, secondary schools must also implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for literacy. The first step is to consistently identify struggling readers early, ideally through a universal screener administered across all students at key transition points (e.g., 9th grade). Students identified as being significantly below grade level should then receive a diagnostic assessment to pinpoint the exact nature of their skill deficit (e.g., fluency, decoding, or comprehension). Based on these precise data, schools must then create opportunities for targeted intervention—Tier 2 small-group instruction or Tier 3 individualized support—that is both evidence-based and delivered with fidelity by trained interventionists. This systematic approach ensures all students receive the necessary core instruction while providing intensive, data-driven support to close foundational reading gaps. Without this type of targeted, systematic support, students who struggle to read at the secondary level are at significant risk of dropping out.

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Grade-Level Transition Plan

Every time that a student transitions to a new grade level, there is a risk of learning loss. At each transition, and especially when students move to a new school, there is often a distinct increase in academic rigor. Students are also expected to take increased levels of ownership over their learning each year. In addition, students are expected to use literacy skills to show understanding across content areas at a rapidly increasing rate beginning in upper elementary school. Over the course of a child's entire education, grade level transitions can lead to the addition or loss of an entire year of learning, depending on how they are executed. For that reason, it is essential to students' success, and particularly their literacy success, that school systems plan proactively for grade level transitions. The following best practices should guide grade-level transition planning.

Creating a Transition Team

School systems should create a Transition Team to proactively manage the shift students face when moving to a new grade level or school, as these transitions—academic, social, and procedural—are often points of stress and can lead to a dip in performance, attendance, or engagement. The intentional planning offered by a dedicated team helps create a seamless continuum of learning, ensuring the new environment builds on, rather than abruptly breaks from, the previous one. 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 elementary to middle or middle to high school.

The team should be cross-functional and ideally include administrators from both the sending and receiving schools, a Transition Coordinator or Counselor, a representative of the Family and Community Engagement Team, and a mix of teachers from the current grade and the next grade to ensure "vertical alignment." Their responsibilities should include analyzing student data (academic performance, attendance, discipline referrals) to identify students most at risk for a difficult transition. They should also develop, implement, and evaluate structured transition activities such as "step-up" days, summer bridge programs, parent orientation meetings, and curriculum alignment workshops for teachers. Crucially, they must establish clear, consistent, two-way communication with families about new expectations and opportunities.

Lastly, transition teams should also ensure that systems are in place to enable communication and data sharing across schools (if applicable). When students transition between buildings, there should be active structures that allow teachers to share and access student performance data, communicate with other teachers and relevant school staff about student needs, and ensure that every teacher has what they need to provide effective instruction for their incoming class of students.

Academic, Social, and Procedural Transitions

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School systems should proactively prepare students for three key types of transitions as they advance to a new grade level or school building. These factors should be considered when planning for each grade level transition, whether the student is moving to a new school or not.

Academic Transitions

- Addressing the shift in curriculum content and rigor (e.g., the jump from middle school to high school-level coursework).
- Teaching new study skills, organizational methods, and independent learning strategies needed for the next level (e.g., managing expectations from multiple teachers, longer-term assignments).
- Ensuring curricular alignment between the sending and receiving grades/schools to prevent gaps or unnecessary repetition.

Social Transitions

- Managing the increased peer influence and changes in social dynamics, especially during middle and high school transitions.
- Helping students cope with the emotions of change (e.g., anxiety, fear, loss of familiar relationships).
- Creating opportunities for students to build new peer and adult relationships in the new environment (e.g., mentorships, "step-up" days, orientation activities).

Procedural Transitions

- Familiarizing students with new physical environments (e.g., locker combinations, school maps, cafeteria routines, finding bathrooms).
- Teaching the daily routines and expectations of the new classroom or school (e.g., how to enter class, turn in papers, hall pass procedures).
- Communicating changes in discipline or attendance policies and other rules that differ from the previous grade level or building.

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Transition to Kindergarten

The first significant transition that a student encounters is the transition from home, day care, or pre-K to Kindergarten. At this stage, communication and engagement with families is critical to student success. Schools can prepare students and families for the transition to kindergarten by implementing proactive engagement and orientation programs. For students, this preparation could involve fun, family-oriented events held in the summer that allow children to spend time in the kindergarten classroom, meet teachers, practice following routines (like lining up and sitting for circle time), and become familiar with the school environment. For families, preparation should focus on open, two-way communication and building a partnership. This includes hosting informational workshops on kindergarten expectations, academic readiness skills, and social-emotional development, as well as providing opportunities for one-on-one meetings with the teacher or a school counselor. By offering home-visits, providing easy-to-read materials in multiple languages, and connecting families to essential community services (such as health

and dental screenings), the school system can ensure that families feel welcomed, informed, and empowered as their child's first teacher.

As students enter Kindergarten, their literacy development will often shift from informal exposure to explicit instruction. Children can enter Kindergarten with a wide range of literacy skills, from incomplete knowledge of the alphabet to fluent reading abilities. Schools should be prepared to gauge students' reading abilities as they enter school and provide the instruction necessary to create a level playing field.

Elementary to Middle School

The next significant transition that students experience is the one from elementary to middle school. This transition can be particularly difficult because it occurs during puberty, when limbic system development outpaces prefrontal cortex maturation. This means that all transitions will be more difficult, and it makes social transitions particularly challenging. Schools can support students through this transition through peer mentoring programs, academic scaffolding, social skills training, and strategic family engagement. Coordination between elementary and middle school teachers should start at the beginning of the school year to discuss vertical alignment, and so that the elementary teachers can make sure they are setting students up for increased rigor in middle school.

Research by the Association for Middle Level Education emphasizes that young adolescents need support through multiple transitions occurring simultaneously: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional.[24] Successful transition programs create smaller learning communities, interdisciplinary teams, and advisory programs that help students build consistent adult relationships.[22]

Middle to High School

Although students have begun to mature when they reach high school, middle to high school transitions coincide with peak risk-taking behavior periods and intensive identity exploration.[25] To support students through this transition, schools should proactively make a plan to prepare students for increased academic rigor, build their social navigation skills, provide education on risk prevention, and help them to begin planning for their futures. At this level, students can be actively engaged in transition planning and can provide more specific feedback on what they need.

The start of ninth grade, which typically represents the start of high school, is a pivotal moment for students. Research shows that students' performance in ninth grade is predictive of future

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[24] Shauna King, "Transitions with the Brain in Mind," Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), accessed September 30, 2025, https://www.amle.org/transitions-with-the-brain-in-mind/.
[25] Aprile D. Benner, "The Transition to High School: Current Knowledge, Future Directions," *Educational Psychology Review* 23, no. 3 (April 2011): 299–328, accessed September 30, 2025, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3182155/.

outcomes, making a successful transition essential.[26] Effective transition supports might include freshman academies, mentoring, and extended orientation periods that continue throughout the first semester. Literacy should be emphasized throughout this process, as it is one of the most important skills students will need as they move on to college or a career.

Transition to College or Career

The final transition that K-12 school systems need to plan for is the transition from high school to college or career. Schools can support students through the transition to college or a career by offering a robust and personalized system of Postsecondary Planning. This support should begin early, ensuring that students are On-Track academically by passing core courses and accumulating credits, as this is the strongest predictor of high school graduation and postsecondary success. Key supports include implementing a strong counseling and advising model that helps students explore career paths, identify necessary skills and education, and develop targeted coursework plans (e.g., advising on AP, IB, or vocational courses). Schools should also provide targeted college knowledge and application assistance, including financial aid advising (FAFSA), scholarship workshops, and campus visits. For students opting for career pathways, the school system should facilitate access to career and technical education (CTE) programs, apprenticeships, and job shadowing opportunities that directly link academic learning to in-demand professional skills. Overall, a successful system monitors students' academic and social-emotional needs throughout their high school careers, providing timely interventions to ensure they are prepared for the independence and demands of their chosen next steps.

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, transition efforts begin at least a semester in advance and involve meetings between current and future educators, related service providers, parents, and, when appropriate, the student. These meetings serve to review and update support plans based on the student's strengths, challenges, and the new environment's demands.[27]

To minimize disruption, critical documentation—such as IEPs, 504 Plans, progress data, and behavior plans—should be shared ahead of the new school year, ideally accompanied by concise teacher summaries.[28] Additionally, schools should offer individualized orientation experiences, such as campus tours, meet-and-greets with key staff, and visual supports like schedules and maps. These supports help reduce student anxiety, especially for those with

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[26] Melissa Roderick et al., "Preventable Failure: Improvements in Long-Term Outcomes when High Schools Focused on the Ninth Grade Year" (Research Summary, University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, April 2014), https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/On-Track%20Validation%20RS.pdf.

[27] Donna M. Mertens and Amy B. Wilson, *Program Evaluation Theory and Practice: A Comprehensive Guide* (New York: Guilford Press, 2018), 215.

[28] Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria G. Dove, *Co-Teaching for English Learners: A Guide to Collaborative Planning, Instruction, Assessment, and Reflection* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2021), 95.

executive functioning challenges or autism spectrum disorders.[29] Maintaining continuity in supports is essential; any instructional, technological, or therapeutic service that was effective in the previous setting should carry over unless purposefully adjusted with data-informed reasoning.[30]

An often-overlooked aspect of transition planning is explicitly teaching students independence and self-advocacy. These skills—such as understanding their IEP or 504 Plan, recognizing their learning preferences, and communicating their needs—are especially vital as students move into more demanding academic settings.[31] Educators also require ongoing professional development in special education law, inclusive instructional practices, and behavior management strategies to ensure IEPs and 504 Plans are implemented with fidelity.[32]

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[29] Colleen A. Thoma and Christina Bartholomew, "Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities," *TEACHING Exceptional Children* 38, no. 1 (2005): 60–65.
[30] National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), "Effective Practices for Transition Planning," accessed September 9, 2025, https://transitionta.org
[31] Margo Vreeburg Izzo, "Implementing Secondary Transition Evidence-Based Practices," *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* 29, no. 1 (2006): 2–19.
[32] Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook, *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2023), 132.

Family & Community Engagement

Family and community engagement is key to student academic achievement and is particularly important to children's literacy development. Literacy is more than an academic skill – it's 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 that each stakeholder plays in supporting students and intentionally seeks to build trust and authentic partnerships. The following best practices should guide the development of a family and community engagement plan.

Three Spheres of Influence

When school systems intentionally recognize and connect the three spheres of influence, students experience a seamless support system for social, emotional, cognitive, and academic growth.[33]

- *School* – administrators, educators, staff, and students
- *Family* – immediate and extended caregivers
- *Community* – partners, organizations, agencies, elected officials, and others who support student learning

Literacy should be positioned as a shared community responsibility. When families, community organizations, cultural institutions, and local businesses are actively involved, students experience literacy as a vital, real-world skill, not just an academic task. Engaged communities help to:[34]

- 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.

Establishing a Family & Community Engagement Team

In order to effectively align stakeholder groups, school systems should establish a dedicated Family and Community Engagement team. This team should be cross-functional and should

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[33] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
[34] Steven M. Constantino, *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2016).

ideally include a lead FACE Coordinator/Specialist, school-based staff like Parent Liaisons or Community School Directors, a district-level administrator to ensure systemic priority, and crucially, family and community leaders to help guide efforts. In smaller school systems, this team may include teachers, school leaders, and support staff who frequently interact with families. The team's primary function should be to build capacity and authentic two-way relationships, moving beyond simple communication to genuine shared decision-making. Their work should include strategic asset mapping to identify community resources, developing effective communication strategies, providing workshops to both staff (on best practices) and families (on supporting learning), and considering structures like advisory councils to ensure family and community voices are integral to school and district improvement planning.

Evidence-Based Frameworks for Family Engagement

Leaders should ground family engagement in relationships, empowerment, and shared leadership, as defined in Constantino's Five Principles for Family Engagement.[35]

- Create a welcoming culture where every family feels valued and respected.
- Build two-way communication that is trust-based, respectful, and consistent.
- Empower families with knowledge, tools, and confidence to support learning
- Include families in decision-making to strengthen shared leadership and accountability.
- Leverage community resources (business, cultural institutions, organizations) to extend learning beyond school walls.

The Dual-Capacity Framework presents another approach, focused on family engagement as a capacity-building process, not a one-time event.[36]

- Focus on building capacity in both educators and families so they can partner effectively.
- Align engagement efforts with student achievement and school improvement goals.
- Provide structured opportunities for professional learning, family workshops, and collaborative planning.

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The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

(Version 2)

[35] National Education Association, *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning* (Washington, DC: NEA, 2011).
[36] Karen L. Mapp and Paul J. Kuttner, *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships* (Austin, TX: SEDL, 2013).

To implement the Dual Capacity-Building Framework effectively, schools and districts need access to clear tools and guidance that facilitate meaningful family engagement. The North Dakota Family Engagement Toolkits provide research-based strategies that link engagement efforts to student achievement and school improvement, planning tools that help leaders and teachers structure family engagement with clarity and consistency, and implementation guides that break down concepts into concrete steps, ensuring staff know how to apply strategies aligned with the framework's core principles. These resources are especially valuable for early childhood programs, school systems, and community partners working together to build relational, collaborative, and learning-centered partnerships with families.

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Engaging Families in Instruction

To build trust and alignment, families and community stakeholders must understand what students are learning and how instruction is delivered. Schools and districts should:

- 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., phonics, comprehension strategies, vocabulary building).
- Host family curriculum nights and/or virtual sessions that walk caregivers through their instructional approach and explain how to support students at home with concrete skills.
- Translate curriculum materials and overviews into home languages to ensure all families can access key information.

- Transparently share data that helps families understand their student's progress within the context of grade-level learning goals.

Engagement deepens when families have access to the same materials students are using in the classroom. Districts and schools can:

- Provide take-home or digital copies of decodable texts and writing rubrics.
- Offer guidance on how to use these materials during home reading routines.
- Ensure that digital platforms used for instruction (e.g., reading apps, literacy platforms) are accessible to families and accompanied by training or tech support when needed.
- Encourage community partners, like afterschool programs and libraries, to align with or support the same instructional materials.

Building Community Partnerships

In addition to engaging families, school systems should look for opportunities to build partnerships with community members and local organizations. It is important that educators take an asset-based approach to community partnerships by focusing on the existing strengths, resources, talents, and positive attributes within the community and its members, rather than dwelling on deficits, needs, or problems. Instead of asking "What is the community lacking?", an asset-based school asks, "What does the community already have that can contribute to student success?" This shift in perspective views community organizations, local businesses, families, and residents not as burdens to be fixed, but as powerful partners and sources of expertise that can enrich the educational experience, offer unique opportunities, and support student learning. This approach is important because it fosters mutual respect and authentic engagement, leading to more sustainable, effective, and collaborative partnerships built on shared vision and ownership. Partnerships will look different depending on the strengths and needs of each individual community, but may be used to:

- Provide interest-based learning experiences for students
- Gain access to a wide range of books and educational media
- Provide extended learning opportunities for students
- Create shared learning spaces for students and families

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The Science of Reading

Teachers and educational leaders must have a thorough understanding of systematic, evidence-based reading instruction in order to provide explicit, effective instruction to all students. Explicit literacy instruction is essential because learning to read is not a natural process; it must be systematically taught. The human brain is not wired for reading in the same way it is for speaking. Instead, it must build new neural connections between the areas responsible for vision, language, and sound processing. Without intentional instruction, especially in the early years, many children, particularly those with dyslexia or limited exposure to language, struggle to develop the foundational skills needed for proficient reading. Reading acquisition is a complex process and requires significant knowledge and skill to teach effectively. Ongoing professional development on the Science of Reading, as well as specific strategies and content to teach it effectively, are crucial to ensuring that all students can read on grade level.

The brain learns to read by connecting print to speech sounds (phonemes) and then linking those sounds to their meanings. Skilled reading depends on building a strong phonological processing system (letter-sound mapping) and a visual word form area that allows for automatic word recognition. This process is not automatic and requires explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction, especially in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Research shows that skilled reading depends on the development of the "reading circuit," which integrates phonological processing, orthographic mapping, and meaning-making.[37] Understanding how the brain learns to read gives teachers insight into why some students struggle and why specific instructional methods (like phonics-based, explicit instruction) are more effective than others.

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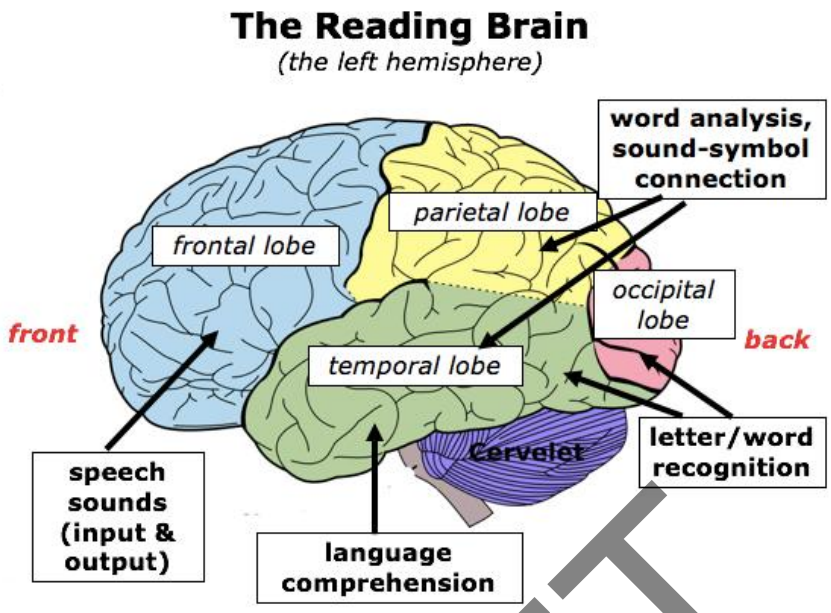
[37] Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 17–34.



The Five Pillars of Literacy

Effective literacy instruction must include explicit instruction in each of the following pillars:

<u>Phonemic Awareness</u>

- The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.
- *Why it matters:* It's a key predictor of reading success and supports decoding and spelling.

<u>Phonics</u>

- The relationship between sounds and the letters that represent them (phoneme-grapheme correspondences).
- *Why it matters:* Enables students to decode (read) and encode (spell) words accurately.

<u>Fluency</u>

- The ability to read text accurately, with an appropriate rate and expression.
- Why it matters: Fluent readers free up mental energy for comprehension and enjoy reading more.

<u>Vocabulary</u>

- The body of words a person knows and understands.
- *Why it matters:* A strong vocabulary supports comprehension, oral expression, and academic success.

<u>Comprehension</u>

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- The ability to understand, remember, and communicate what is read.
- *Why it matters:* It is the ultimate goal of reading to make meaning from text.

Teachers need to understand not only what each pillar entails, but also how they interact and build upon one another over time.

Ehri's Phases of Word Reading Development

Linnea Ehri's theory outlines how children learn to read words through a progression of phases, each reflecting increased understanding of the alphabetic system and more efficient word recognition. Her model highlights the developmental nature of reading acquisition and the importance of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics.

> *"All teachers, especially those working with the youngest learners, can use this information to make instructional decisions that accelerate the reading acquisition process."*
>
> ▪ Dr. Linnea Ehri[38]

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Pre-Alphabetic Phase

- *Description:* Children rely on visual cues (e.g., logos, word shapes, pictures) to "read" words.
- *Characteristics:*
  - Little or no letter-sound knowledge
  - Memorization based on context or visual features
- *Instructional Focus:*
  - Oral language, print awareness, letter exposure
  - Rich vocabulary and shared reading

Partial Alphabetic Phase

- *Description:* Children begin using some letter-sound correspondences, usually the first or last letter, to identify words.
- *Characteristics:*
  - Recognizes some letters and sounds
  - May guess words based on initial sound and context
- *Instructional Focus:*
  - Phonemic awareness (especially initial sounds)
  - Explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships

Full Alphabetic Phase

- *Description:* Children can decode words using complete letter-sound correspondences and begin to store words in memory.
- *Characteristics:*
  - Sounding out unfamiliar words accurately

[38] Linnea C. Ehri, "Learning to Read and Learning about Phonemic Awareness," in *Explaining Phonics Instruction: An Educator's Guide*, ed. D. Ray Reutzel (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2004),

    - Building a sight word vocabulary through decoding
- *Instructional Focus:*
    - Systematic phonics
    - Decodable texts
    - Encoding (spelling) and word-building activities

Consolidated Alphabetic Phase

- *Description:* Children recognize larger word chunks and read more efficiently and automatically.
- *Characteristics:*
    - Uses syllables, morphemes, and word families to decode
    - Fluent word reading with minimal effort
- *Instructional Focus:*
    - Morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots)
    - Multisyllabic word reading
    - Vocabulary and fluency development

Understanding Ehri's phases helps teachers identify where students are in their word-reading journey and tailor instruction to meet those developmental needs. It strengthens their ability to deliver explicit phonics instruction, assess decoding skills, and move students toward automatic word recognition. Without this knowledge, teachers may miss critical windows for instruction or use strategies misaligned to students' current phase.

Scarborough's Reading Rope[39]

Scarborough's Reading Rope illustrates how skilled reading is formed by intertwining two key strands: word recognition and language comprehension.[40] Word recognition includes phonological awareness, decoding, and sight word recognition, while language comprehension includes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. As these components strengthen and weave together, they support fluent, accurate reading with a strong understanding. The model emphasizes the importance of providing explicit, systematic instruction in both decoding and language skills to foster proficient reading.

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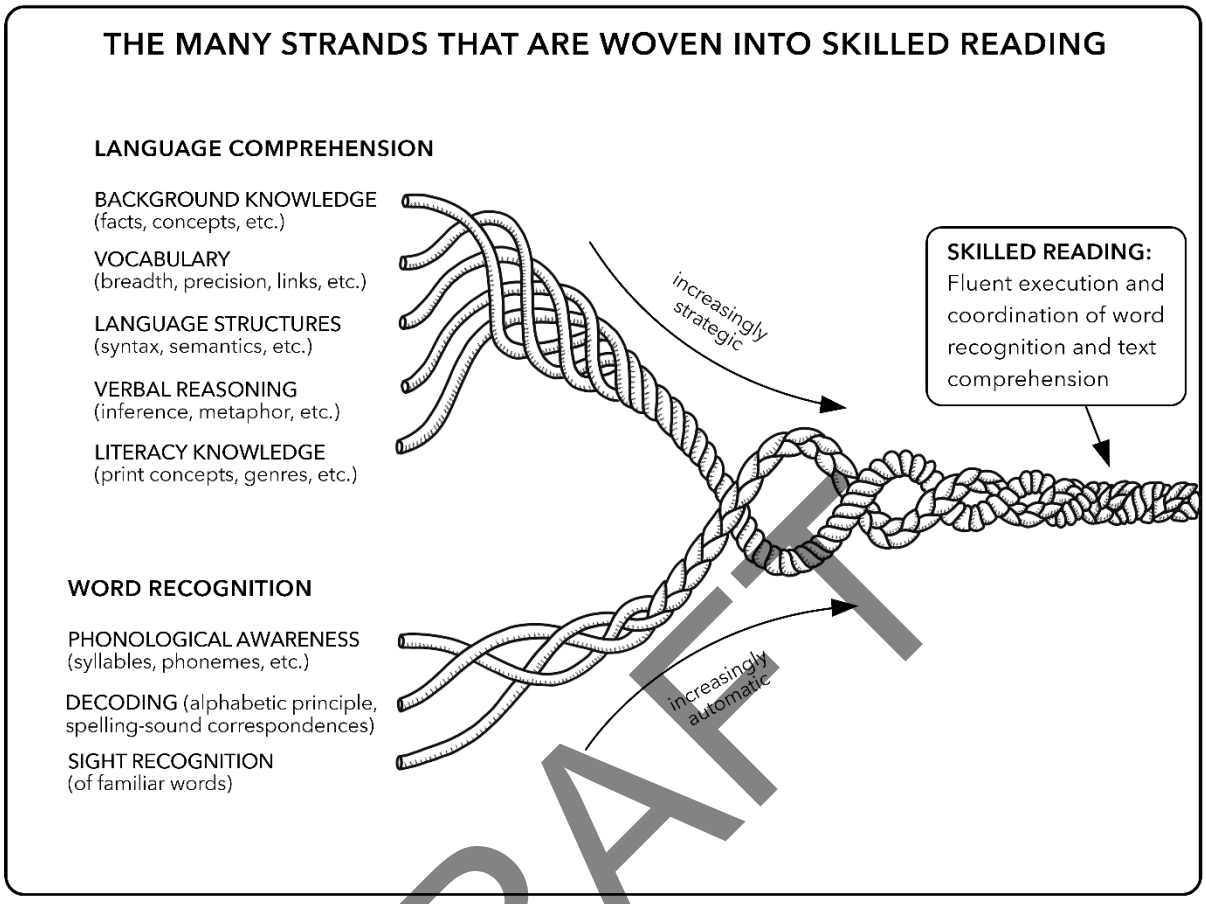
[39] *Scarborough's Reading Rope.* Adapted from Landmark Outreach, *Scarborough's Reading Rope*, accessed September 10, 2025, https://www.landmarkoutreach.org/strategies/scarboroughs-reading-rope/.
[40] Hollis S. Scarborough, "Connecting Early Language and Literacy to Later Reading (Dis)Abilities: Evidence, Theory, and Practice," in *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*, eds. Susan B. Neuman and David K. Dickinson (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 97–110.



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Scarborough's Reading Rope helps teachers understand the full scope of reading development and the importance of addressing both decoding and comprehension in daily instruction. It supports teachers in identifying which strands may be weak for individual students and how to strengthen them through intentional planning. Without this understanding, instruction can become fragmented or overly focused on one area. Professional Learning on this framework ensures a balanced, research-based approach to literacy that meets the needs of all readers.

Recent research continues to affirm that explicit and systematic literacy instruction is essential for developing strong reading skills, particularly in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension.[41] Unlike implicit or discovery-based methods, explicit instruction provides clear, direct teaching of concepts, while systematic instruction follows a logical sequence that builds foundational knowledge over time.

[41] International Literacy Association, *Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction* (Newark, DE: ILA, 2019), https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/ila-meeting-challenges-early-literacy-phonics-instruction.pdf.

Secondary Literacy Instruction

At the secondary level, instruction aligned to the Science of Reading should be embedded not just in English Language Arts courses, but also in content area courses. The core evidence-based practices that should be embedded across the secondary curriculum are:

Advanced Foundational Skills (Word Recognition)

All secondary teachers should embed the following word recognition practices into instruction:

- *Morphology Instruction:* This is the most crucial skill for older students. In both ELA and content courses (like Science or History), teachers should explicitly teach prefixes, suffixes, and Latin/Greek roots (morphemes) to help students decode and determine the meaning of complex, multisyllabic vocabulary (e.g., teaching *geo-* to unlock *geology*, *geography*, *geothermal*).
- *Fluency Practice:* Use repeated oral reading of short, engaging passages (often 5-10 minutes daily) to increase the speed and accuracy of word recognition, which frees up cognitive resources for comprehension. This practice is highly effective in intervention settings and can be a warm-up in ELA.

Language Comprehension

The following practices should be embedded into Tier 1 instruction across all subjects to build comprehension skills for students at all ability levels:

Practice	*ELA Application*	*Content Course Application*
Vocabulary	Systematic, explicit instruction of high-utility, tier-two academic words and domain-specific words.	Pre-teach 3-5 key technical vocabulary words central to the day's lesson (e.g., osmosis, due process) using student-friendly definitions and multiple exposures.
Knowledge Building	Design units around rich, engaging topics that use text sets (a variety of texts, media, and visuals) to build deep background knowledge before tackling complex anchor texts.	Activate and build prior knowledge before reading dense chapters. Use structured activities like KWL charts, short videos, or brief discussions to ensure students have the necessary context to comprehend the material.
Text Structure	Explicitly teach students to identify and utilize common organizational patterns (e.g., compare/contrast, sequence, problem/solution) to anticipate text content.	Teach students to identify discipline-specific structures (e.g., cause-and-effect in History, procedure/results in a lab report) to guide note-taking and summarizing.
Comprehension Strategies	Modeling think-alouds; teachers verbalize their own thought processes—asking questions, clarifying confusion, and making inferences—while reading challenging texts.	Guide students through "close reads" of challenging passages. Use graphic organizers specific to the content area (e.g., a process diagram in Science) to help students organize information.

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Self-Assessment

Self-Assessment

Use the following self-assessment to identify strengths and areas for growth in your current literacy program. This reflection will be used to guide the creation of your Local Literacy Plan; refer to the asynchronous learning modules in the North Dakota Educational Hub to learn more.

Learning 1	Developing 2	Embedding 3	Innovating 4
• The need for improvement has been established among stakeholders. • Initial research and discussions are taking place	• Initial plans for improvement have been made but are not yet consistently implemented	• The continuous improvement process is in place • There is consistent, systemwide implementation	• Progress is closely monitored, and adjustments are made based on data • There is collective ownership of the work

	Learning 1	Developing 2	Embedding 3	Innovating 4
Professional learning opportunities are evidence-based, aligned to a long-term strategic plan, and meet the ESSA characteristics for effective professional learning.				
Professional learning topics are identified based on data, including student outcomes and evidence of teacher practice				
Professional learning sessions include opportunities for collaboration and reflection.				
Professional learning is strategically supported by coaching, data-driven team structures, and fidelity checks.				
	Learning 1	Developing 2	Embedding 3	Innovating 4
Teachers use HQIM as a foundation for planning rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that is responsive to student needs and grounded in evidence-based practices.				

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Teachers plan instruction aligned to prioritized essential standards and implement common assessments to ensure that all students are reaching proficiency across the system.				
Curriculum includes explicit instruction of foundational skills in grades K-3 and emphasize disciplinary literacy in grades 4-12.				
Teachers have opportunities to collaborate and align curriculum horizontally (within a grade level course) and vertically (across grade levels).				
	Learning 1	**Developing 2**	**Embedding 3**	**Innovating 4**
Schools have established data-driven teams and processes to analyze data and plan for targeted instruction.				
Screeners and diagnostic assessments are administered routinely and used to identify students in need of additional support.				
There are systems and structures in place to provide effective Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III instruction.				
At the secondary, literacy supports are embedded in daily instruction and students who demonstrate additional need are provided with targeted literacy interventions.				
	Learning 1	**Developing 2**	**Embedding 3**	**Innovating 4**
There is a transition team in place that includes a variety of stakeholders including school, district, and family members.				
Transition plans include strategies to support increases in rigor and independence of academic expectations.				
Transition plans include proactive support for changes in social and procedural expectations and experiences.				
School systems have clear, concrete plans in place for the transitions to Kindergarten, Middle School, High School, and College/Career.				
	Learning 1	**Developing 2**	**Embedding 3**	**Innovating 4**
There is a family and community engagement team in place that plans proactively for engagement opportunities throughout the year.				

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Schools are a welcoming place for families and community members.				
Families are embraced and supported as partners in supporting students' literacy development.				
Community assets are leveraged to support schools' efforts to increase literacy.				

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Local Literacy Plan Template

Local Literacy Plan Template

Introduction

Literacy Implementation Team *Select varied representatives who can provide input, make decisions, and enact literacy strategies within the system.*	
Name	**Role**
Add rows as needed	

Literacy Achievement Goals	
3-Year Goal *What specific, measurable improvements will you see in student literacy achievement if you implement best practices for 3 years?*	**Annual Goal** *What specific, measurable improvements will you see in student literacy achievement at the end of this year if you implement your plan with fidelity?*

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Professional Development Plan

Current State *What literacy-focused professional learning have teachers already received? What needs did you identify in your self-assessment?*	**Desired Outcome** *What will be true at the end of this year if you implement your professional development plan with fidelity?*

Literacy PD Focus Area(s) *What professional development needs will you focus on this year?*	**Data-Informed** *What data or evidence led you to select this focus area?*	**ESSA Tier(s) of Evidence** *How will you ensure that PD is evidence-based?*

Sustainability Plan

Sustainability Plan	
Job-Embedded *How will you ensure that literacy PD aligns with existing systems and structures?*	
Collaborative & Reflective *How will you create opportunities for teachers to collaboratively implement and reflect on new learning?*	

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Supported by Coaching *How will you align formal and informal coaching supports (e.g. learning walks, fidelity checks, peer observation) with literacy PD?*	

Professional Development Timeline					
July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
January	February	March	April	May	June

Key Action Items	
District Administrators will…	
School Leaders will…	
Instructional Support Specialists will…	
General Education Teachers will…	

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Special Education Teachers & Interventionists will…	

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Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Plan

Current State *What curriculum materials do teachers currently have access to? What curriculum/pacing guidance already exists? What needs did you identify in your self-assessment?*	**Desired Outcome** *What will be true at the end of this year if you implement your guaranteed and viable curriculum plan with fidelity?*

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)	
Do your current literacy resources align to the following characteristics of HQIM?	❑ Aligned to Academic Standards ❑ Aligned to Evidence-Based Literacy Practices ❑ Supports All Learners, Including English Learners and Students with Disabilities ❑ Includes Comprehensive Teacher and Student Materials
Do you need to adopt any new materials this year? If yes: • *Which grade level(s) and/or content areas?* • *What process will you follow to select HQIM?*	

K-3 Curriculum	
Protected Literacy Block *How will you schedule an uninterrupted, literacy block and protect the time from disruptions?*	

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Explicit Instruction of Foundational Skills *How will you ensure that teachers have the resources, knowledge, and skills necessary to explicitly teach foundational literacy skills?*	

4-12 Curriculum	
Disciplinary Literacy *How will you ensure that 4th – 12th grade teachers in all content areas have the resources, knowledge, and skills necessary to embed literacy instruction into their daily lessons?*	

Alignment & Accountability	
Curriculum & Pacing Guidance *How will you create and share curriculum maps, pacing guides, and any other guidance necessary to implement resources effectively?*	
Fidelity Checks *How will you monitor fidelity to the curriculum?*	

Key Action Items	
District Administrators will…	
School Leaders will…	

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Instructional Support Specialists will…	
General Education Teachers will…	
Special Education Teachers & Interventionists will…	

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Current State *What systems currently exist for student placement and targeted instruction? What needs did you identify in your self-assessment?*	**Desired Outcome** *What will be true at the end of this year if you implement your instructional pathways plan with fidelity?*

Data-Driven Teams	
School-Level MTSS Team *Who will sit on school-level MTSS team(s)? When will they meet?*	
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) *How will PLCs be structured? When will they meet?*	

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Assessment Plan & Testing Windows

Assessment Plan	
Universal Screening *What screener will you use to assess students at the beginning of the year and benchmark their progress at the middle and end of the year?*	

Testing Windows (Screener)		
Beginning of Year	*Middle of Year*	*End of Year*
Diagnostic Assessment(s) • How will you determine which students will be given a diagnostic assessment? • How will that data be analyzed and used to inform instruction? • When will you administer diagnostic assessments, and who will administer them?		
Progress Monitoring		
Students Receiving Tier 1 Instruction Only	*Students Receiving Tier 2 Supplemental Intervention*	*Students Receiving Tier 3 Intensive Intervention*
Assessment: Frequency: Administered By:	Assessment: Frequency: Administered By:	Assessment: Frequency: Administered By:

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Targeted Instruction	
Core Instruction	

How will you ensure that Tier 1 instruction is delivered effectively, including appropriate differentiation and small group instruction?	
Supplemental Intervention *How will you deliver Tier 2 instruction at the appropriate levels of intensity?*	
Intensive Intervention *How will you deliver Tier 3 instruction at the appropriate levels of intensity?*	

Key Action Items	
District Administrators will…	
School Leaders will…	
Instructional Support Specialists will…	
General Education Teachers will…	
Special Education Teachers & Interventionists will…	

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Grade-Level Transition Plan

Current State *What systems currently exist to support grade-level transition? What needs did you identify in your self-assessment?*	**Desired Outcome** *What will be true at the end of this year if you implement your grade-level transition plan with fidelity?*

Student Supports	
Transition Team *Who will serve on the district transition team? When will they meet?*	
Academic Transition *How will you proactively plan to support students' academic transition, including preparing them for increased rigor and independence?*	
Social Transition *How will you prepare students for the social-emotional aspects of grade level transitions, including new classmates and teachers?*	
Procedural Transition *How will you proactively prepare students for new procedures, including transportation, switching classes, lockers, etc.?*	

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Key Transition Plans *How will you proactively support students through each of the following key transitions:*	
Kindergarten Entry	
Elementary to Middle School	
Middle to High School	
Post-Secondary Readiness	

Key Action Items	
District Administrators will…	
School Leaders will…	
Instructional Support Specialists will…	
General Education Teachers will…	

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Special Education Teachers & Interventionists will…	

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Family & Community Engagement Plan

Current State *What systems currently exist to support family & community engagement? What needs did you identify in your self-assessment?*	**Desired Outcome** *What will be true at the end of this year if you implement your family & community engagement plan with fidelity?*

Family & Community Engagement Team *Select varied representatives who can provide input, make decisions, and enact strategies to engage families and community entities.*	
Name	**Role**
Add rows as needed	

Engaging Families	
Welcoming Environment *How will actively make school(s) a welcoming environment for families?*	
Communication & Relationships *How will teachers, leaders, and staff build strong relationships with families? What communication systems will you use to ensure families are well-informed?*	

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Academic Partnerships *How will you engage families to support literacy efforts at home?*	

Engaging Community Members	
Asset Mapping What assets exist in your community that could be leveraged to support literacy?	
Community Partnerships *How will you create partnerships with key community members and organizations?*	

Family and Community Engagement Events *Use the space below to make a plan for family & community events throughout the school year*					
July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
January	February	March	April	May	June

Key Action Items	
District Administrators will…	

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School Leaders will…	
Instructional Support Specialists will…	
General Education Teachers will…	
Special Education Teachers & Interventionists will…	

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