North Dakota Literacy Needs Assessment: From Birth to Grade 12

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Prepared by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction &
North Dakota University System Institutional Research

Executive Summary

In the current report, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction assesses the needs of early childhood and K-12 students, educators, and school/district leaders regarding literacy instruction. The report compiles and analyzes discussions with educators, surveys, and student data from recent years. Needs and recommendations are presented for students, educators, educational leadership, and progress monitoring.

Student Needs & Recommendations. North Dakota's students need a guaranteed and viable curriculum (Marzano 2003). All students enrolled in the same grade or course should be exposed to the same rigorous curriculum. Students need teams of teachers building shared understanding of learning goals and assessment. The Multi-Tier System of Supports model also needs further refinement and a clearly defined reading strategy. Current assessment and response systems need review and plans for implementing refinements.

Educator Needs & Recommendations. More collaboration is needed between higher education teacher education programs and those working in the field is essential to ensure that training is aligned to content standards. After university training, educators also need diverse and ongoing professional development. Instructional coaching also remains essential. Educators particularly need support when it comes to properly using assessment data to tailor instruction. The need is especially pronounced for educators working with learners in early childhood. Furthermore, educators serving all grades also need more implementation support.

Educational Leader Needs & Recommendations. Leaders want to rise to today's literacy challenges, but they need professional development. Importantly, school staff need greater leader involvement in literacy prioritization and the development of a "culture of coaching." Altogether, leaders need to engage in system coaching, training, and implementation of rapid-cycle improvement; to implement hubs of tools for instructional goals through teamwork; to identify targets for systemic improvements; to develop intentional, well-staffed systems for students in transition; and to foster and support family/community engagement.

Monitoring & Evaluating Progress. North Dakota needs a systematic approach for monitoring and evaluating systemic progress on literacy instruction. It is recommended that there be a system evaluation plan that is developed for monitoring individual student progress as well as system-level effectiveness. Regular reporting between schools and the state is needed for such monitoring. Successful outcomes can be measured as decreases in students requiring interventions and increases in relevant staff training.

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Introduction

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) periodically assesses the needs of early childhood and K-12 students and educators regarding literacy instruction. These periodic assessments assist NDDPI with meeting the needs of educators and the students they serve through grants and other programs and opportunities.

As a follow-up to the needs assessment efforts from spring 2018, the current report reviews the priorities and goals of the 2023 North Dakota Literacy Plan, identifies gaps between those goals and school realities, and articulates the resulting needs of students, educators, and their school/district leaders. The 2024 North Dakota Literacy Needs Assessment compiles and analyzes discussions with educators, surveys, and student data from recent years. Insights gathered from these reports, surveys, and stakeholder consultations are interpreted and conveyed through the North Dakota Literacy Plan. The plan's Six Essential Elements of Literacy Practices – as well as the Literacy Skills Continuum for speaking and listening, reading, and writing is – are as follows.

1. **Leading for Impact.** Leaders work to influence school culture and build systems that ensure all learners receive an effective, high-quality literacy education.
2. **Supporting Professional Learning.** Leaders and teams align resources and develop processes to support instructional staff in improving knowledge and delivering literacy instruction.
3. **Engaging All Stakeholders.** Leaders and teams work to build system capacity to ensure all educators recognize and encourage student, family, and community member empowerment to shape a highly effective educational experience for each learner.
4. **Planning Standards-Aligned Curriculum.** Leaders and teams ensure the selection and use of methods, resources, and assessments to achieve the desired student outcomes defined in the North Dakota English Language Arts and Early Learning Content Standards.
5. **Assessing to Inform.** Leaders and teams facilitate data use and feedback to monitor and adjust all decisions impacting literacy.
6. **Instructing with Precision.** Leaders and teams define a precise, scientifically based system of literacy instruction to meet individual learner needs through a multi-layered system of support.
➢ **Skills Continuum:** Birth to Age 3 | Ages 3-5 | Grades K-3 | Grades 4-6 | Grades 7-12

Additionally, a key component of literacy instruction in North Dakota – and a recurring theme in the current needs assessment – is the *Multi-Tier System of Supports* (MTSS), a framework for providing students with the best opportunities to succeed. This approach provides core-content instruction and tailored interventions to meet student needs. It also involves frequent and ongoing progress monitoring for adjusting instruction and student goals. In MTSS, data are utilized to determine the resources allocated to improve student learning and staff's implementation of effective practices. Within the MTSS, Tier 1 represents core classroom instruction. Tier 2 represents targets small group instruction. Finally, Tier 3 represents intensive individual intervention.

Another important component of North Dakota's literacy education is the *Science of Reading*. This framework represents extensive scientific evidence as to how people learn to read. Drawing from education, linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience, the framework fosters understanding of how brains process sound and print symbols. This understanding helps educators understand proven efficient, explicit instructional methods. Importantly, the framework also offers guidance for instruction for students who are struggling to learn to read. Use of the framework of the Science of Reading is supported by state legislation and NDDPI resources.

Methodologies and Results Overview

The following is a description of the data sources, surveys, and stakeholder consultations used in creating this needs assessment. The methodologies used – including statistical analyses, survey processes, listening sessions, and focus groups – and basic findings are described for each resource that was generated and used in the current needs assessment report.

Literacy Proficiency on Statewide Summative Assessments

Statewide summative assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) are administered every spring to grades 3-8 and to grade 10 in districts that choose statewide summative assessments as their high school testing for accountability.[1] Following are several analyses using statewide summative assessments that shed light on the literacy needs of North Dakota's students.

Pandemic Disruption "Learning Loss." In May 2022, NDDPI and North Dakota University System Institutional Research staff provided a report to legislative management of the North Dakota General Assembly regarding students' "learning loss" resulting from COVID-19 learning disruptions and school districts' uses of emergency relief funds. In this report, individual students' proficiency was observed longitudinally from pre-pandemic to one year after pandemic disruptions, namely from spring 2019 to spring 2021. Additionally, cohorts of students from prior to pandemic disruptions were studied to estimate what proficiency levels would have likely been had the pandemic not occurred, allowing for a more precise understanding of pandemic-disrupted learning.

Mirroring the two-year timespan from spring 2019 to spring 2021, staff retrieved statewide summative assessment data from spring 2017 and spring 2019 to observe trends in a non-disrupted period. The consistency and comparability of ELA assessments of students in grades 3-8 restricted analyses to these grades. To be included in the analysis, a student must have had proficiency data from both 2019 and 2021 or both 2017 and 2019. The sample included the following students:

- 7,461 students moving through grades 3 to 5, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (pandemic disruption)
- 7,465 students moving through grades 4 to 6, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (pandemic disruption)
- 7,328 students moving through grades 5 to 7, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (pandemic disruption)
- 7,361 students moving through grades 6 to 8, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (pandemic disruption)

- 7,776 students moving through grades 3 to 5, 2016-17 to 2018-19 (comparison period)
- 7,776 students moving through grades 4 to 6, 2016-17 to 2018-19 (comparison period)
- 7,483 students moving through grades 5 to 7, 2016-17 to 2018-19 (comparison period)
- 7,215 students moving through grades 6 to 8, 2016-17 to 2018-19 (comparison period)

In statewide summative assessments, students are either proficient or not, and this binary outcome is also recorded at four levels: 1-Novice, 2-Partially Proficient, 3-Proficient, 4-Advanced. Additionally, staff gathered data on learning delivery mode (face-to-face, distance education, or hybrid education) in 2020-21. Delivery mode data were analyzed extensively. Analyses revealed stark differences in proficiency between:

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[1] Some districts choose 11th-grade ACT scores as their high school testing for accountability.

- students experiencing traditional/face-to-face education in the 2020-21 school year, and
- students experiencing any form of distance education for any period of the 2020-21 year.

Results are reported according to whether a student was proficient in ELA prior to the pandemic. Among students who were *not* proficient in 2019, those who relied on any distance education in the 2020-21 school year (N = 10,898) fared the worst. In 2021, this group of students was 51.0% novice, 30.8% partially proficient, 16.9% proficient, and 1.3% proficient. Meanwhile, those who experienced traditional/face-to-face instruction for 2020-21 (N = 4,576) fared better with proficiency rates of 46.2% novice, 33.9% partially proficient, 18.4% proficient, and 1.5% advanced. Importantly, data from the non-disruption comparison period (2016-17 to 2018-19) revealed that this latter group did not perform meaningfully worse than would have been expected without a pandemic disruption. In other words, pandemic disruptions had negative impacts on literacy for students with prolonged reliance on forms of distance education – *if* the student was non-proficient prior to the pandemic.

Among students who *were* proficient in ELA in 2019, the picture is quite different. There were no meaningful differences between the proficiency levels of those experiencing any distance education for 2020-21 (N = 9,662) and those experiencing traditional/face-to-face instruction for 2020-21 (N = 4,479). However, such students did display poorer proficiency than would have been expected without a pandemic disruption. Based on data from the non-disruption comparison period (2016-17 to 2018-19), this student group would have likely been 5.4% novice, 15.9% partially proficient, 47.5% proficient, and 31.3% advanced in 2021, had the pandemic disruptions not occurred. Instead, this previously proficient student group was 7.2% novice, 18.8% partially proficient, 48.0% proficient, and 26.0% advanced in 2021. Altogether, this means that students who were proficient prior to the pandemic experienced setbacks in their literacy regardless of their level of usage of distance education. As these students were performing well in – and likely enjoying – school prior to the pandemic, perhaps the disappointing experience of the spring 2020 school disruption left lasting motivational impacts that were not easily fixed by simply returning to traditional/face-to-face instruction.

Importantly, these proficiency trends were poorer for students from low-income families, Native American students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. As such, these student groups have heightened needs for effective literacy instruction.

Literacy Trends, 2019-2023. The North Dakota State Automated Reporting System (STARS) was used to identify student literacy trends in recent years. Table 1 shows the counts of students participating in the North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA) per grade. Some changes in student counts are due to COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions while others are due to more districts opting to use 11th-grade ACT results for accountability in place of 10th-grade NDSA results. Finally, some changes in student counts are due to demographic change in North Dakota. In any case, the NDSA provides a useful, broad snapshot of student literacy over recent years. This allows for the identification of points of struggle or success.

Tables 2-4 show students' average scores on the NDSA for reading literary text, reading informational text, and writing and language, respectively.

Table 1. Student Counts for English Language Arts State Assessment

Age/Grade Group	Grade	Spring 2019	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	2019-2023 Overall Trend
Gr. K-3	3	9,301	9,242	9,337	9,480	↑
Gr. 4-6	4	9,377	8,897	9,360	9,312	Varies
	5	9,360	8,889	8,909	9,445	Varies
	6	9,314	9,007	8,995	8,956	↓
Gr. 7-12	7	9,001	9,144	9,081	9,049	Varies
	8	8,612	8,997	9,145	9,075	↑
	10	3,765	2,889	2,450	2,516	↓

Table 2. Average Scores for Reading Literary Text by Grade

Age/Grade Group	Grade	Spring 2019	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	2019-2023 Overall Trend
Gr. K-3	3	579	568	565	567	↓
Gr. 4-6	4	594	589	588	588	↓
	5	613	615	613	614	Steady
	6	633	630	631	631	↓
Gr. 7-12	7	633	627	625	627	↓
	8	650	644	640	643	↓
	10	647	649	650	652	↑

Table 3. Average Scores for Reading Informational Text by Grade

Age/Grade Group	Grade	Spring 2019	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	2019-2023 Overall Trend
Gr. K-3	3	578	571	566	568	↓
Gr. 4-6	4	590	587	588	587	↓
	5	617	611	611	608	↓
	6	637	625	626	625	↓
Gr. 7-12	7	629	634	629	630	Varies
	8	654	643	638	641	↓
	10	663	655	657	655	↓

Table 4. Average Scores for Writing and Language by Grade

Age/Grade Group	Grade	Spring 2019	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	2019-2023 Overall Trend
Gr. K-3	3	574	567	569	572	Rebound
Gr. 4-6	4	596	575	585	578	↓
	5	615	614	614	609	↓
	6	632	624	633	636	Rebound
Gr. 7-12	7	623	617	628	627	Rebound
	8	642	643	638	640	Varies
	10	648	643	655	650	Rebound

For the most part, students' average reading performance has been on the decline since the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions (see Tables 2-3). Although many North Dakotan students returned to face-to-face learning more swiftly than students in other states – protecting North Dakota students form the worst academic outcomes in the pandemic era – disruptions to reading-based proficiency are evident. Meanwhile, grades 6-12 students' writing and language proficiency shows more recovery from pandemic-related disruptions (see Table 4). Altogether, these findings suggest that when it comes to average student needs, reading proficiency may need more assistance for continual recovery from pandemic disruptions. However, all facets of literacy represent a clear need for grades 5 and below and, by extension, from birth to age 5.

Weaknesses on State Standards. Results of the 2023 NDSA were examined to determine areas of weakness within each grade assessed. Cambium, the test's vendor, flags state standards where student performance reflects an area of weakness. Table 5 shows the content standards that reflect areas of weakness within literacy.

Table 5. Areas of Weakness on 2023 NDSA (Based on 2017 Content Standards)

Grade 3, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	**3.RI.2** Determine the main idea of a text and recount the key details to explain how they support the main ideas.
		3.RI.6 Identify first and third-person points of view.
		3.RI.7 Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).
	Reading Lit. Text	**3.RL.2** Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures to determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
		3.RL.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.
	Writing	**3.W.1** Write opinion pieces on familiar topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.
		3.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Grade 4, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	**4.RI.6** Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event of topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.
	Writing	**4.W.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
		4.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
Grade 5, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	**5.RI.5** Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.
	Writing	**5.W.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
		5.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
Grade 6, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	**6.RI.5** Describe how a paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.
		6.RI.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
		6.RI.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visuals, tables, charts, and graphs) as well as in written text to develop a coherent understanding of a topic/issue.
		6.RI.9 Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).
	Reading Lit. Text	**6.RL.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and explain how it is conveyed through particular details.
		6.RL.3 Describe how a particular story or drama's plot unfolds as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
		6.RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone. (Figurative language may include simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification; sounds may include onomatopoeia, rhyme, and rhythm).
	Language	**6.L.2** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
	Writing	**6.W.1** Write arguments to support the claim(s) (thesis statement) with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

		6.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
Grade 7, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	7.RI.8 Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound, and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.
	Reading Lit. Text	7.RL.5 Analyze how an author uses an entire text's (e.g., short story, drama, poem) form or structure to develop ideas.
		7.RL.7 Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version.
	Writing	7.W.1 Write arguments to support the claim(s) (thesis statement) with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
		7.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
Grade 8, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	8.RI.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.
	Reading Lit. Text	8.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot.
	Writing	8.W.1 Write arguments to support the claim(s) (thesis statement) with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
		8.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
Grades 9-10, Areas of Weakness	Reading Info. Text	9-10.RI.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and/or interact over the course of a text.
	Reading Lit. Text	9-10.RL.6 Analyze how cultural experiences influence particular points of view in diverse works of literature.
		9-10.RL.9 Find connections between texts to analyze and evaluate how effectively an author draws on other texts in a specific work (e.g., through allusions, prequels, sequels; transforming an earlier story).
	Writing	9-10.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
		9-10.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Professional Development Surveys

Four surveys conducted from fall 2020 to fall 2023 examined school and district staff experiences with, and needs for, professional development related to literacy instruction. Staff recruited to participate were employed by one of the 27 districts from around the state that were participating in a literacy grant opportunity during the relevant time period, resulting in 4,048 responses in total. In Table 6, response rates are provided.

Table 6. Staff Recruited for Literacy PD Surveys & Response Rates

Staff Types	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	All Years
Licensed Personnel					
N Recruited	6,401	6,037	6,105	6,212	24,755
Response Rate	22.0%	17.4%	6.8%	14.2%	15.2%
Aides/Paraprofessionals					
N Recruited	2,323	233	n/a	n/a	2,556
Response Rate	10.0%	24.9%	n/a	n/a	11.3%
All Personnel					
N Recruited	8,724	6,270	6,105	6,212	27,311
Response Rate	18.8%	17.7%	6.8%	14.2%	14.8%

Recruitment of aides/paraprofessionals to participate in the surveys was discontinued after two rounds of data collection because access to these non-licensed personnel's emails was limited. Licensed personnel included administrators (e.g., principals), teachers, and other non-licensed personnel (e.g., instructional coaches). Counts of types of respondents can be found in the table immediately below.

Table 7. Respondents of Literacy PD Surveys

Staff Types	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	All Years
Administrators	102	104	12	30	248
Teachers	1,141	781	378	818	3,118
Other Licensed Personnel	166	168	24	34	392
Aides/Paraprofessionals	232	58	n/a	n/a	290
All Personnel	**1,641**	**1,111**	**414**	**882**	**4,048**

Survey questions asked respondents about professional development related to literacy instruction. Respondents provided information about both the professional development they received over the last school year and what they want in the future. Namely, respondents were asked about their participation and interest in the following literacy-related professional development themes:

- *Leadership (organizational structures, processes, roles, & teams within a building or district)*
- *Instruction & intervention (program & practice implementation)*
- *Educational state content standards (including curriculum alignment)*
- *Assessment & evaluation (processes to monitor students or systems)*

- *Family & community engagement (understanding intentional work with families for student success)*

Respondents were also asked about their participation and interest in the literacy-related professional development via the following formats:

- *Webinar, seminar, workshop, conference session, class, or course*
- *Professional learning community (PLC), mentorship, professional observation of a colleague/site, or book study with colleagues*
- *Using instructional coaching*
- *Accessing information on your own (professional reading of books or internet sources)*

Table 8 reveals that literacy-related professional development is common (reported in 87.9% of responses), but not all themes are equally common. Professional development on instruction and intervention is most common (reported in 69.7% of responses), followed by assessment and evaluation (39.5%) and educational state content standards (29.3%). Professional development focused on family and community engagement was the least common across years overall (24.3%), and the rates decreased in recent years. Professional development focused on leadership was also not very common overall (25.1%), but common among administrators (57.7%).

Table 8a. Reported Rates of Staff Receiving Any Literacy-Related PD

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	90.2%	92.3%	91.7%	100.0%	92.3%
Teachers	88.1%	88.1%	87.3%	92.9%	89.3%
Other Licensed Personnel	87.3%	89.9%	100%	97.1%	90.1%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	66.8%	63.8%	n/a	n/a	66.2%
All Personnel	**85.1%**	**87.5%**	**88.2%**	**93.3%**	**87.9%**

Table 8b. Rates of Literacy-Related PD on Leadership

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	63.7%	51.0%	50.0%	63.3%	57.7%
Teachers	23.6%	19.7%	17.7%	17.6%	20.3%
Other Licensed Personnel	44.0%	39.3%	62.5%	47.1%	43.4%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	25.9%	15.5%	n/a	n/a	23.8%
All Personnel	**28.5%**	**25.4%**	**21.3%**	**20.3%**	**25.1%**

Table 8c. Rates of Literacy-Related PD on Instruction & Intervention

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	58.8%	72.1%	83.3%	90.0%	69.4%
Teachers	72.0%	67.0%	67.7%	75.9%	71.2%
Other Licensed Personnel	73.5%	70.8%	83.3%	85.3%	74.0%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	49.6%	37.9%	n/a	n/a	47.2%
All Personnel	**68.1%**	**66.5%**	**69.1%**	**76.8%**	**69.7%**

Table 8d. Rates of Literacy-Related PD on Educational State Content Standards

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	25.5%	20.2%	41.7%	30.0%	24.6%
Teachers	30.9%	27.5%	36.2%	32.2%	31.0%
Other Licensed Personnel	30.7%	23.8%	62.5%	38.2%	30.4%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	14.2%	12.1%	n/a	n/a	13.8%
All Personnel	**28.2%**	**25.5%**	**37.9%**	**32.3%**	**29.3%**

Table 8e. Rates of Literacy-Related PD on Assessment & Evaluation

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	40.2%	32.7%	41.7%	63.3%	39.9%
Teachers	42.6%	35.9%	39.7%	44.0%	40.9%
Other Licensed Personnel	39.8%	33.3%	54.2%	52.9%	39.0%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	25.9%	20.7%	n/a	n/a	24.8%
All Personnel	**39.8%**	**34.4%**	**40.6%**	**45.0%**	**39.5%**

Table 8f. Rates of Literacy-Related PD on Family & Community Engagement

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	46.1%	36.5%	25.0%	23.3%	38.3%
Teachers	24.2%	31.1%	15.3%	15.3%	22.5%
Other Licensed Personnel	30.1%	33.3%	41.7%	14.7%	30.9%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	21.6%	25.9%	n/a	n/a	22.4%
All Personnel	**25.8%**	**31.7%**	**17.1%**	**15.5%**	**24.3%**

Table 9 shows the extent to which respondents are interested in receiving more professional development in the five literacy-related themes. The most in-demand literacy-related professional development themes are instruction and intervention (53.5%) and assessment and evaluation (39.0%). These themes were also those most commonly reported among respondents who received literacy-related professional development. This suggests that there is some degree of alignment of what professional development is available with actual demand.

However, the third most in-demand professional development theme was family and community engagement (28.5%), despite it being the least common theme for professional development that has been accessed. This suggests that there is a distinct need for more professional development focused on leveraging family and community engagement to further literacy. Furthermore, the fact that such professional development has been less common in recent years suggests the need for it is not being met.

Finally, 22.1% of respondents were interested in professional development focused on state content standards and 21.0% of were interested in the leadership theme. Although the degree of interest in the various themes varies, there is enough interest in each one to consider each theme in-demand.

Table 9a. Interest in More Literacy-Related PD on Leadership

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	43.1%	51.6%	66.7%	48.1%	48.1%
Teachers	16.0%	19.6%	14.0%	15.1%	16.4%
Other Licensed Personnel	34.1%	47.3%	42.9%	32.1%	39.9%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	21.1%	16.4%	n/a	n/a	20.2%
All Personnel	**20.3%**	**26.8%**	**16.7%**	**16.9%**	**21.0%**

Table 9b. Interest in More Literacy-Related PD on Instruction & Intervention

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	51.0%	66.3%	66.7%	55.6%	58.4%
Teachers	47.7%	61.7%	55.0%	48.5%	52.1%
Other Licensed Personnel	57.3%	71.3%	71.4%	64.3%	64.3%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	47.6%	61.8%	n/a	n/a	50.4%
All Personnel	**48.9%**	**63.7%**	**56.0%**	**49.3%**	**53.5%**

Table 9c. Interest in More Literacy-Related PD on Educational State Content Standards

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	13.7%	15.8%	22.2%	14.8%	15.0%
Teachers	18.8%	24.3%	21.3%	23.3%	21.5%
Other Licensed Personnel	26.8%	34.0%	35.7%	35.7%	30.9%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	22.0%	21.8%	n/a	n/a	22.0%
All Personnel	**19.8%**	**24.8%**	**22.0%**	**23.5%**	**22.1%**

Table 9d. Interest in More Literacy-Related PD on Assessment & Evaluation

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	37.3%	38.9%	55.6%	44.4%	39.5%
Teachers	37.0%	42.7%	40.3%	35.6%	38.4%
Other Licensed Personnel	42.1%	56.7%	64.3%	46.4%	49.4%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	31.3%	32.7%	n/a	n/a	31.6%
All Personnel	**36.8%**	**43.9%**	**41.8%**	**36.3%**	**39.0%**

Table 9e. Interest in More Literacy-Related PD on Family & Community Engagement

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	34.3%	42.1%	33.3%	33.3%	37.3%
Teachers	26.5%	28.8%	26.7%	23.7%	26.4%
Other Licensed Personnel	33.5%	40.0%	42.9%	50.0%	37.9%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	30.0%	34.5%	n/a	n/a	30.9%
All Personnel	**28.2%**	**32.1%**	**27.6%**	**25.1%**	**28.5%**

Given school and district staff interest in further literacy-related professional development, it is important to support staff access to professional development in the favored formats. Table 10

reveals which formats for delivering literacy-related professional development are more popular.

Table 10a. Interest in Webinar/Seminar/Workshop/Conference/Class Formats

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	60.8%	71.6%	88.9%	77.8%	68.2%
Teachers	60.3%	70.2%	63.3%	64.4%	64.0%
Other Licensed Personnel	79.3%	86.7%	92.9%	82.1%	83.1%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	59.9%	67.3%	n/a	n/a	61.3%
All Personnel	**62.2%**	**72.7%**	**65.3%**	**65.5%**	**65.9%**

Table 10b. Interest in PLC/Mentorship/Professional Observation/Book Study Formats

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	57.8%	68.4%	44.4%	55.6%	61.4%
Teachers	46.8%	57.3%	56.7%	58.0%	53.2%
Other Licensed Personnel	49.4%	65.3%	57.1%	75.0%	58.4%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	35.7%	41.8%	n/a	n/a	36.9%
All Personnel	**46.2%**	**58.7%**	**56.3%**	**58.6%**	**52.9%**

Table 10c. Interest in Using Instructional Coaching

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	38.2%	45.3%	33.3%	29.6%	39.9%
Teachers	27.1%	35.8%	27.7%	30.0%	30.0%
Other Licensed Personnel	34.8%	40.7%	42.9%	32.1%	37.4%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	27.3%	34.5%	n/a	n/a	28.7%
All Personnel	**28.6%**	**37.4%**	**28.5%**	**30.0%**	**31.2%**

Table 10d. Interest in Accessing Information on One's Own (Reading Books/Web Sources)

Staff Types	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	All Years
Administrators	27.5%	28.4%	22.2%	37.0%	28.8%
Teachers	30.7%	36.1%	37.3%	35.2%	33.8%
Other Licensed Personnel	36.6%	38.7%	35.7%	42.9%	37.9%
Aides/Paraprofessionals	28.6%	30.9%	n/a	n/a	29.1%
All Personnel	**30.8%**	**35.4%**	**36.8%**	**35.5%**	**33.5%**

The most popular format of literacy-related professional development is a *webinar, seminar, workshop, conference session, class, or course* (65.9% overall interest), followed by *a professional learning community (PLC), mentorship, professional observation of a colleague/site, or book study with colleagues* (52.9% overall interest). There is still a considerable amount if interest in the remaining formats; namely, 33.5% responses indicated interest in *accessing information on your own (professional reading of books or internet sources)* and 31.2% of responses indicated interest in *using instructional coaching*.

Furthermore, the 31.2% interest in instructional coaching may underestimate the degree of need for professional development in this format. Conversations with literacy instructional coaches

often reveal a reluctance on the part of some teachers to welcome instructional coach input despite the potential to significantly benefit from it. When relationships between coaches and teachers are developed, interest in instructional coach support tends to further develop as well.

Literacy Coach Cadre and Teacher Surveys

In February 2024, ninety-eight literacy instructional coaches in North Dakota gathered for a Literacy Coach Cadre professional development event. A brief survey was conducted during the gathering in which seventy-nine coaches participated, resulting in a response rate of 80.6%. Respondents identified the age/grades of students who their work supports and answered two other questions. First, they selected from a list of needs which met the following criteria: *What does your district or building system need more of (compared with what is already available) in order to help your students achieve literacy proficiency?* Next, they were invited to provide an open-ended response to the following question: *Is there more you'd like to share about your district or building system's needs when it comes to helping your students achieve literacy proficiency?*

Teachers were also invited to respond to the same survey questions via emails from NDDPI in April-May 2024, and 364 teachers responded. Due to uncertainty regarding how many teachers noticed the opportunity to participate in the survey, the response rate is undetermined.

Table 11 displays how instructional coaches responded in the survey, revealing the percentage of respondents who selected the need from the list provided. Most instructional coach respondents serve multiple age/grade groups. Those who serve children from birth to age 3 (whether exclusively or alongside other ages/grades) reported the largest number of needs, followed by those serving ages 3-5 or grades 7-12.

Overall, the most frequently selected need for the sample was *implementation support for educators*. Additional staff and professional development were also top needs. However, top needs within student age/grade groups varied. *Implementation support for educators* was also the most frequently selected need for coaches serving grades k-12, but top needs differed for coaches serving ages 0-5. The top needs for those serving ages 0-3 are *improved systems for instructional outcomes (scheduling, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, etc.)* and *assessment & data supports*. Meanwhile, the top need for those serving ages 3-5 was *professional development knowledge for leaders*.

Table 11. Literacy Coach Cadre Survey Results

What does your district or building system need more of in order to help your students achieve literacy proficiency?	Full Sample (N=79)	Serving Ages 0-3 (N=7) Highest Need Group	Serving Ages 3-5 (N=16) High Need Group	Serving Gr. K-3 (N=50) Moderate Need Group	Serving Gr. 4-6 (N=58) Moderate Need Group	Serving Gr. 7-12 (N=37) High Need Group
1) Implementation support for educators	87.3%	85.7%	87.5%	88.0%	86.2%	91.9%
2) Staff	84.8%	71.4%	75.0%	78.0%	82.8%	91.9%
3) Professional development	79.7%	85.7%	87.5%	74.0%	81.0%	86.5%

knowledge for educators						
4) Professional development knowledge for leaders	79.7%	85.7%	93.8%	78.0%	79.3%	89.2%
5) Improved expectations for instructional fidelity	78.5%	85.7%	81.3%	72.0%	75.9%	83.8%
6) Higher-quality staff	78.5%	85.7%	81.3%	70.0%	72.4%	89.2%
7) Improved family communication, support, and engagement	77.2%	71.4%	81.3%	68.0%	74.1%	83.8%
8) Resources for struggling students (books, tutoring, technology, etc.)	68.4%	85.7%	75.0%	70.0%	63.8%	67.6%
9) Improved systems for instructional outcomes (scheduling, MTSS, etc.)	62.0%	100%	62.5%	54.0%	56.9%	67.6%
10) Dedicated collaboration time	62.0%	85.7%	75.0%	60.0%	56.9%	56.8%
11) Facility improvements	57.0%	71.4%	62.5%	58.0%	60.3%	56.8%
12) Updated curriculum and intervention materials	54.4%	71.4%	56.3%	48.0%	56.9%	70.3%
13) Building leader dedicated to literacy improvement	50.6%	42.9%	43.8%	44.0%	46.6%	51.4%
14) Assessment & data supports	46.8%	100%	62.5%	42.0%	44.8%	54.1%
15) Increased school board priority on literacy	44.3%	42.9%	37.5%	40.0%	41.4%	43.2%
16) Other supplies and materials	41.8%	71.4%	62.5%	48.0%	44.8%	40.5%

Table 12 displays how teachers responded to their survey, revealing the percentage of respondents who selected the need from the list provided. Teachers who serve children from birth

to age 3 (whether exclusively or alongside other ages/grades) reported the largest number of needs, followed by those serving ages 3-5.

Overall, the most frequently selected need for the sample was *implementation support for educators,* similar to what instructional coach respondents reported. Top needs within student age/grade groups did vary somewhat. Teachers serving ages 0-5 near-uniformly reported *professional development knowledge for educators* as a major need. Meanwhile, the top need for teachers serving grades 7-12 was *resources for struggling students (books, tutoring technology, etc.).*

Table 12. Teacher Survey Results

What does your district or building system need more of in order to help your students achieve literacy proficiency?	Full Sample (N=374)	Serving Ages 0-3 (N=32) Highest Need Group	Serving Ages 3-5 (N=69) High Need Group	Serving Gr. K-3 (N=187) Moderate Need Group	Serving Gr. 4-6 (N=123) Moderate Need Group	Serving Gr. 7-12 (N=99) Moderate Need Group
1) Implementation support for educators	85.3%	96.9%	88.4%	87.7%	87.8%	76.8%
2) Resources for struggling students (books, tutoring, technology, etc.)	84.0%	96.9%	91.3%	81.8%	85.4%	80.8%
3) Staff	77.3%	93.8%	81.2%	82.9%	82.1%	66.7%
4) Improved family communication, support, and engagement	72.7%	90.6%	87.0%	69.0%	69.9%	67.7%
5) Professional development knowledge for educators	71.1%	100.0%	94.2%	72.7%	77.2%	55.6%
6) Dedicated collaboration time	68.7%	93.8%	85.5%	61.0%	67.5%	69.7%
7) Updated curriculum and intervention materials	66.3%	84.4%	75.4%	59.9%	65.9%	61.6%
8) Other supplies and materials	64.7%	90.6%	82.6%	64.2%	62.6%	57.6%
9) Professional development knowledge for leaders	61.8%	96.9%	79.7%	62.0%	63.4%	56.6%

10) Improved expectations for instructional fidelity	61.0%	84.4%	65.2%	62.6%	61.0%	59.6%
11) Higher-quality staff	59.9%	87.5%	71.0%	58.3%	61.8%	58.6%
12) Improved systems for instructional outcomes (scheduling, MTSS, etc.)	59.1%	84.4%	73.9%	59.4%	61.0%	59.6%
13) Increased school board priority on literacy	52.4%	84.4%	60.9%	47.1%	48.8%	48.5%
14) Building leader dedicated to literacy improvement	51.6%	87.5%	66.7%	48.7%	46.3%	50.5%
15) Assessment & data supports	50.0%	81.3%	66.7%	48.1%	49.6%	44.4%
16) Facility improvements	47.1%	75.0%	65.2%	42.8%	39.8%	43.4%

Twenty-eight of the instructional coach respondents and 111 of the teacher respondents provided open-ended responses regarding their building or system needs for furthering student literacy. Following is a summary of the themes that emerged within these responses:

1. **Literacy Education**
    a. Concerns about the sustainability of literacy initiatives, particularly after the expiration of the CLSD grant.
    b. The need for consistent explanations of proficiency and literacy across disciplines.
    c. Challenges in implementing and integrating literacy resources into the curriculum.
2. **Teacher Training and Support**
    a. Lack of support for teachers in implementing provided materials and resources.
    b. Desire for more training for teachers, administrators, and coaches in literacy.
    c. Recognition of the need for time for teachers to learn and plan for implementation.
3. **Impact of Grants and Funding**
    a. Worries about the potential loss of momentum and growth in teacher development without effective coaches after current grant funding ends.
    b. Questions about sustaining progress beyond the grant period and concerns about a lack of long-term capacity building.
4. **Staffing Challenges**
    a. Shortages of teachers, aides/paraprofessionals, and special education staff.
    b. Issues with attracting and retaining qualified staff, with suggestions that higher pay could help address the shortages.
5. **Resource Management**
    a. Challenges in aligning and effectively using the multitude of resources available in

elementary schools.
   b. The need for intervention resources that address comprehension and encoding, beyond decoding.
6. **Facility Improvements and Curriculum Coordination**
   a. Requests for facility improvements and a full-time curriculum coordinator.
   b. Emphasis on clear expectations and focus during a period of transition with new schools and leadership.
7. **State Support and Prioritization**
   a. Calls for state support to emphasize the priority of literacy initiatives for administrators.
   b. Concerns about how decisions based on surveys may impact educational strategies and priorities.
8. **Sports vs. Literacy Priorities**
   a. Criticism of spending on sports-related roles instead of allocating resources to literacy supplies, materials, and libraries.
9. **Student and Behavior Challenges**
   a. Recognition of the impact of student behaviors on effective instruction.
   b. Acknowledgment of difficulties in resolving behavior challenges, impacting overall student proficiency.
10. **Community Engagement and Mental Health Support**
   a. Calls for more support staff, including paraprofessionals, and the need for intervention resources that address various student needs.
   b. Requests for support from the state in emphasizing the importance of literacy initiatives to administrators.
11. **Access to Resources and Materials**
   a. Teachers face bureaucratic hurdles in acquiring necessary literacy materials due to strict grant management.
   b. There is a need for students to have access to quality literacy materials at home, not just at school.
   c. Teachers express a need for updated and consistent curricular materials, particularly those aligned with the Science of Reading and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) student assessments used by some districts.
   d. Educators need specific materials, such as phonics books, small group intervention materials, and spelling/writing resources.
12. **Professional Development and Training**
   a. Teachers report insufficient professional development on new curricula and literacy strategies, including a need for Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for all educators.
   b. New teachers struggle with a lack of support, while seasoned teachers purchase materials themselves and seek additional training on their own.
13. **Systemic and Administrative Support**
   a. There's a need for cohesive implementation and buy-in across departments and content areas.
   b. Reduction of Bureaucratic Red Tape: The process of justifying expenses and navigating paperwork is time-consuming and counterproductive.
   c. Smaller Class Sizes and More Staffing: Teachers call for smaller class sizes and additional support staff, such as interventionists and paraprofessionals, to better address individual student needs.

14. **Parental and Community Engagement**
    a. Increased efforts are needed to involve parents and the community in literacy development, emphasizing the importance of reading at home.
    b. Respondents emphasized the importance of early childhood education and support for parents and caregivers in promoting literacy from birth to five years.
15. **Intervention and Support for Struggling Students**
    a. There is a need for effective interventions for students who struggle with literacy but do not qualify for special education.
    b. Interventions should not be limited to early grades but should more often extend through middle and high school.
16. **Consistency and Alignment**
    a. Teachers express a need for consistent and aligned literacy curriculum and instruction across grade levels.
    b. There is a call for vertical alignment in phonics and writing instruction from early grades through high school.
17. **Classroom Management and Administrative Policies**
    a. Behavioral supports are needed for classroom management and addressing student behavior. This is critical to creating an environment conducive to learning.
    b. Respondents see a need for more accountability for implementing literacy programs and greater collaboration time among teachers to plan and deliver effective literacy instruction.
18. **Technology and Digital Literacy**
    a. Educators emphasized the need to teach students how to evaluate and use digital information effectively.
    b. Respondents suggested that better integration and use of technology tools provided by school districts is needed.
19. **Funding and Equity**
    a. It is necessary to ensure equitable access to high-quality literacy instruction and resources across all schools and districts, particularly for schools with higher poverty rates.
    b. Respondents stressed the importance of sustained funding to support ongoing professional development, curricular updates, and literacy interventions.

Stakeholder Consultations

A series of stakeholder consultations/conversations were facilitated to gather further insight into literacy instruction needs. Listening sessions with North Dakota teams focused on literacy were facilitated in March and April 2024. Additionally, three focus groups were facilitated at the NDDPI Literacy Convening & Showcase event in April 2024.

Listening Session: Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant Advisory Team. This team includes NDDPI staff who work directly with the field to further education and with each other to implement and coordinate educational programs throughout the state. A dozen team members participated in a facilitated discussion in March 2024. The discussion focused on needs related to literacy instruction that they observe in their roles. The discussion highlighted several key points that are described below.
Schools Identified by NDDPI for Improvement. These schools struggle with delivering

grade-level content to students, particularly students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Interventions are often remedial rather than providing exposure to grade-level material, hindering progress.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). There is concern that students identified within Tier 2 (needing small group instruction) and Tier 3 (needing intensive individual intervention) spend too much time in interventions, leading to a separate curriculum and a feeling of being tracked instead of "mainstreamed" or caught-up on grade-level standards. The focus should be on providing interventions outside of/in addition to regular instruction.

Section 504. Parents are frustrated with the lack of accommodations in general education classrooms, leading to overreliance on interventions and specialist teachers. There's a need for more training on accommodations and adherence to U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requirements.

Alignment to State Standards. Better alignment of MTSS to state standards, and utilizing funds effectively to improve outcomes, were discussed as needs in the field.

After-School Programming. There is a need for better support and professional development for staff involved in after-school and summer programs, especially in addressing core academics and student needs.

Dyslexia Screening and Assistive Technology. Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of some forms of dyslexia screening and the integration of assistive technology into instruction to support students with language-based disorders.

Socioemotional Needs. COVID-related disruptions have exacerbated socioemotional needs, especially in early childhood education, leading to challenges in addressing basic behaviors and preparing students for school. When children develop better language skills, they are less emotionally reactive and engage in less conflict because they can understand others and be better understood.

Secondary School Focus. There is a need to ensure that secondary students receive exposure to grade-level instruction, with a clear understanding of the distinction between interventions and core instructional materials.

Overall, the discussion of the CLSD Advisory team highlighted the importance of aligning interventions with grade-level content, providing effective accommodations, addressing socioemotional needs, and integrating quality dyslexia screening and assistive technology to support student learning.

Listening Session: North Dakota State Literacy Team. The State Literacy Team includes thirteen educators and administrators serving and supporting students from around the state. Positions include various program coordinators and directors, literacy coaches, principals, and interventionists. Additionally, two faculty members of the Mayville State University Teacher Education Program serve on the State Literacy Team. This group develops and updates the North Dakota Literacy Plan and is directly involved in instruction and administration related to student literacy.

In April 2024, a listening session was facilitated for the purpose of the current needs assessment. Team members were asked to share what needs related to literacy instruction they observed in their work in the field. Following are themes that emerged.

Early Childhood Needs. Meeting young children's literacy needs is a challenge given that Kindergarten is not legally required. Students who miss Kindergarten ultimately miss many opportunities for neurological and cognitive growth that is supportive of literacy. Importantly, when early childhood literacy needs are met, other positive academic and behavioral outcomes are achieved. Students are more prepared to learn and engage in socially appropriate behavior when

their language is understood, due to their emerging proficiency in spoken language. Because they can be understood instead of misunderstood and frustrated, as they seek to communicate with educational staff and peers, they are more prepared to learn.

Family/Community Engagement and Early Childhood/Elementary Education Needs. The State Literacy Team has found that the CLSD grant has been instrumental in generating family and engagement that is supportive of children's literacy, including creative approaches that better target the intended families. The increase in direct opportunities and support for young families regarding literacy allows for more kindergarten readiness. Maintaining this programming and its literacy benefits requires ongoing financial support. There was some interest in partnering with organizations such as Parents Lead for further emphasis upon parental support and communicating the importance of engaging parents in literacy education.

Secondary Education Needs. The listening session revealed distinct challenges with fostering literacy in secondary education. Implementing the MTSS is more challenging with secondary school students who have a more structured school day. Requiring additional courses can unfortunately contribute to absenteeism, showing that other solutions are needed. Some solutions proposed include greater coordination and collaboration among teachers of differing content areas. There is a need for a shared framework and common language among such teachers so the relevance of literacy across subjects is evident. Non-ELA teachers need training in literacy as it relates to their subject area content and ELA teachers need training in working with students who display literacy proficiency below their grade level.

Role of Technology. The role of technology in students' lives also poses a challenge to literacy, and one that educators, administrators, and families need to better appreciate. Screen time has replaced time that could otherwise be spent reading, both outside of and inside the classroom. Young children may know how to scroll on a touch screen but not how to turn a page. Parents provide children with screen time that they believe is educational or otherwise beneficial when it is not supportive of literacy or learning in general. Educators need professional development to differentiate helpful versus unhelpful use of technology and to support more digital literacy for themselves and their students.

Professional Development and Instructional Coaching. Even when highly relevant professional development can be made available, *implementing* the ideas and insights from professional development remains a challenge. Instructional coaches are essential for ensuring that professional development received by teachers can be effectively implemented such that learners benefit. A culture of coaching and cyclical feedback within a school building greatly supports the application of professional development and the acceptance of feedback by teachers. A need was expressed for an education hub with resources for various aspects of instruction, coaching, information on learning initiatives, and other learner supports.

Maintaining and Leveraging Existing Progress for More Literacy Gains. The CLSD grant has empowered North Dakota's schools to build infrastructure in terms of staff, materials, and teaching methods for student literacy. The challenge moving forward is making this continuing work sustainable and ever improving. Administrators need help understanding how the work of supporting student literacy will continue. Additionally, instructional coaches can be most effective when resources are allocated such that they are specialists (serving a specific building or grade span) rather than generalists (serving multiple buildings or all grades, being an interventionist and a coach at the same time, etc.).

English learner and special education intervention collaboration with coaches is also a challenge due to differing lenses and expertise. Communication is essential in helping bridge the gaps.

Teacher Preparation Programs/Licensure Considerations. Possible shortcomings were

noted in teacher preparation programs. Teachers may also not have adequate training on implementing MTSS programs with fidelity. There may also be inadequate training for teachers on how to effectively use technology in instruction. Implementation science, mental health, and classroom management related to behavioral concerns were also referenced as concerns that teacher preparation programs may have a role in addressing. Concern was raised about the move to a K-8 licensure to enhance flexibility in filling teaching positions and removing emphasis upon specialized skills needed for the earlier grades.

Focus Groups: Literacy Needs for Ages 0-5, Grades K-6, and Grades 7-12. Three focus groups were facilitated at the NDDPI Literacy Convening & Showcase event in April 2024, each focusing on an age/grade group of literacy needs. Focus group participants were literacy instructional coaches, teachers, and administrators. Some participants participated in more than one focus group, with approximately forty individuals participating in total across the three focus groups.

There was a strong consensus among focus group attendees that the CLSD grant has had an extremely beneficial effect on student literacy. The grant has also empowered school districts to build an infrastructure of staff and instructional methods/materials that will continually improve and accomplish more and more gains in literacy – *if* financial support for resources and staff can continue to be provided.

Literacy Needs for Serving Ages 0-5. The conversation with staff serving learners from birth to age 5 indicated that some schools have established which assessment tools are providing helpful assessment data. Improvements in resources due to existing grant funding has resulted in improved teacher retention, which had previously been a severe struggle. The grant has also helped by bringing understanding and support through instructional coaching. Existing grant funding has additionally increased support for early childhood training opportunities that were more scarce previously due to funding limitations.

There continued to be room to grow in terms of communication of early childhood training opportunities. It has been a struggle to fully establish mentorship and guidance for staff serving learners from birth to age 3. Meanwhile, the Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training was lauded and recommended for wider usage.[2] Literacy leaders in schools and districts continue to research areas of opportunity for early childhood.

One ongoing early-learning project involves getting books to the in-home daycares in the area. The play is to rotate in new books every quarter. There are also plants to provide backpacks with literacy resources for families to check out. There is a desire for continued funding for books to read with their families to foster family engagement. Another strategy at present involves "story time" with families on Fridays when there is no school. This involves busing learners in the community to attend the story time.

Another project highlighted by a district involves working with childcare providers to provide free literacy training to childcare staff. There is also a family partnership entity that collaborates with the grant's staff also to facilitate family engagement.

Another district has worked to build capacity in the early childhood area. They are using the Science of Reading, LETRS training, and mentoring for instructors of early childhood through high school. This is their first experience with instructional coaching of staff working with learners in early childhood.

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[2] Through funding set aside during the 68th ND Legislative Assembly, NDDPI has offered each public school district an opportunity to receive $2,000 per elementary building serving K-3 students for LETRS training. This will ensure that one educator is fully trained in LETRS.

One participant in the conversation remarked that in many cases, the legislature sees preparing kids for kindergarten as the parents' responsibility. However, the reality is that without intervention, many children are not ready for kindergarten. One district has used current grant funding to hire two retired teachers to help in work with daycares and identify development delays in students.

Once the current grant funding ends, it will not be possible to sustainably continue such programming unless new funding is provided. Small districts tend to "braid" funding as a necessity, which makes some grant requirements challenging to follow for both current and potential future funding.

Literacy Needs for Serving Grades K-6. Positive outcomes stemming from current funding were reported; however, continued growth is needed. English Learners and lower-income students at the elementary level need additional support. After about second grade, student engagement in reading programs decreases due to competing activities. More staff, time, and guidance are needed to support Native American students with literacy. There may need to be more collaboration with higher education to help prepare teachers and address teacher turnover.

Existing grant funding has helped build leadership's capacity to brainstorm solutions. For one district, current grant funding has the purchase of manipulatives and other resources and programming that helps students learn encoding, decoding, and other learning functions.

Early in the current grant stream, some districts made training very available that focused on building professional learning communities (PLCs) to support MTSS utilization. The MTSS process in the early grades helps focus attention on the core skills, emphasizing prevention instead of intervention. This is significant because if a student has not mastered decoding skills by 5th grade, they are substantially less likely to become fluent readers.

Some educators have had to cancel student interventions due to inadequate availability of substitute teachers. Common interventions can be handled by some substitute teachers, but specialists are needed for less common interventions.

Momentum is building around coaching practices with the current grant funding. Gains have been made in supporting teachers in the classroom by educating coaches on coaching strategies. It is noted that teachers must have a say in conceptualizing and measuring their growth, with coaches meeting them where they are.

One district that began with three coaches at the beginning of the current grant has since decreased to two coaches and may decrease to only one should additional funding not be available. A second district stressed that they are having a harder time retaining teachers with the teacher shortage worsening. Altogether, funding is necessary for adequate staffing and for essential training, such as the LETRS training. One particular district currently provides LETRS training for all new teachers, but sustaining such widespread training requires sustainable support.

Literacy Needs for Serving Grades 7-12. An important focus for staff serving students in grades 7-12 is building disciplinary understandings of literacy across content areas. This involves shifting mindsets as to what counts as literacy. It can be challenging to get teachers of some disciplines to see their role in literacy. In high school in particular, resources are less available and there is only so much available and literacy-relevant professional development. Freedom and flexibility with available classroom resources is important so teachers have more flexibility for instruction.

Once students get to high school, it is challenging to close those gaps in literacy due to competition with the graduation requirements, among other deadlines. Further, some teachers are simply not trained to do the interventions. Special Education teachers have a wide range of specialties, but they still may not help all students. Teachers need additional resources to aid in scaffolding student learning. It was suggested that making literacy coaches part of school

improvement teams may help build understanding of disciplinary literacy and arranging for the right resources to be available.

It was mentioned that there is a common misconception that secondary students come to high school already inherently literate. Professional development and teacher preparation programs can do more to ensure that secondary teachers have relevant knowledge of how to serve students who struggle with literacy.

Focus group participants identified that principals need more training and support to address literacy and develop a 5-year vision for improving literacy. Ultimately, it is harder to move the needle on literacy district leadership and coaches and teachers are not on the same page.

Finally, more grant funding can help support disciplinary literacy and supplemental resources. It could also support summer and after-school programs for struggling readers, including English learners.

Key Findings: Literacy Goals, Gaps, and Needs

Within the 2023 North Dakota Literacy Plan, the North Dakota State Literacy Team identifies six focus goal areas or "essential elements" to be harnessed to shape the literacy instruction experiences for all students in early education programs through grade 12. Namely, the essential elements are *leading for impact*, *supporting professional learning*, *engaging all stakeholders*, *planning standards-aligned curriculum*, *assessing to inform*, and *instruction with precision*. All six focus areas are conceptualized to be incorporated simultaneously in a school system and curriculum. In the following section, essential elements goals are reviewed and findings from data reports, surveys, and stakeholder consultations are used to determine relevant needs. Kept in mind are target groups and levels of need as conceptualized by Witkin and Altschuld (1995):

- Level 1 (primary) – *service receivers*: students
- Level 2 (secondary) – *service providers*: educators and leaders
- Level 3 (tertiary) – *resources and solutions*: working conditions, collaborative and evidence-based culture, coaching and other professional development, etc.

Leading for Impact

Leaders work to influence school culture and build systems that ensure all learners receive an effective, high-quality literacy education.
Leaders are responsible for creating, managing, and supporting teams that share the goal and responsibility of every learner achieving proficient literacy skills. They train and expect all team members to understand individual and team responsibilities toward reaching that common goal.
A leader is someone who has influence. Some leaders, such as superintendents, principals, instructional coaches, and school board members, are assigned by employment or appointment. But others rise naturally from roles such as teachers, mentors, media specialists, family, community members, and even students.
Great leaders support collaborative and innovative strategies to meet the needs of all learners, including students and adults.

–2023 North Dakota State Literacy Plan

School leaders need professional development in order to lead for impact. Over half of Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents indicated that having more of a *building leader dedicated to literacy improvement* would be necessary to move student literacy forward.
Many leaders want to rise to the challenge. In the literacy professional development surveys, 57.7% of responses from school/district administrators indicated a desire for more professional development on *leadership* themes such as *organization structures, process, roles, and teams within a building or district*. Staff working under the administrators feel even more strongly. Specifically, 79.7% of Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents and 71.1% of teacher survey respondents reported that *professional development knowledge for leaders* was essential to improve student literacy in their building or district.
Surveys further revealed several school-culture features that can be supported by leaders. Importantly, several resources can be sought by leaders and are understood as critical for moving student literacy forward. Among survey respondents, 62.0% literacy coaches and 68.7% of teachers reported that *dedicated collaboration time* among staff was needed to improve student literacy. Leaders can help support a culture of collaboration by structuring time and expectations in ways that make room for collaboration. In terms of resources, a significant majority of these same

survey respondents reported needs for more staff, resources for struggling students (e.g., tutoring technology), and facility improvements. Additionally, among those surveyed who support students from birth to age 3, 71.4% of literacy coaches and 90.6% of teachers said that *other supplies and materials* beyond those already listed within the survey are necessary to move literacy forward.

Supporting Professional Learning

Leaders and teams align resources and develop processes to support instructional staff in improving knowledge and delivering literacy instruction.

Professional development and learning may be defined as the key to continuous improvement. North Dakota legislation, NDCC 15.1-21.12.1, requires that all teachers and principals serving students in grades K-3 will receive training in scientifically based reading instruction practices. However, professional learning should not be limited to a specific role or category of teacher. "Research shows that no in-school factors matter more than teaching and leadership, and educators, like students, need continual opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills to enable all students to reach [transition readiness]" (Learning Forward & Education Counsel, 2017).

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Instructional coaches and teachers desire more training for teachers, administrators, and coaches in literacy. Indeed, 79.7% of literacy coaches and 71.1% of teachers reported in their respective surveys that *professional development knowledge for educators* was needed to move student literacy forward in their building or district. Additionally, the professional development surveys revealed substantial interest in additional professional development among educators and leaders. There is demand for all topics offered in the survey, but demand can be ranked in the following order:

1. Instruction & intervention (program & practice implementation)
2. Assessment & evaluation (processes to monitor students or systems)
3. Family & community engagement (understanding intentional work with families for student success)
4. Educational state content standards (including curriculum alignment)
5. Leadership (organizational structures, processes, roles, & teams within a building or district)

Additionally, the CLSD team identified that professional development is needed for school staff who are involved in after-school and summer programming, particularly with regard to core academic needs of students.

In order to meet staff needs for professional development, it is important to support the professional learning being made available in popular formats. All formats are fairly popular and thus will have their audience, but formats can be ranked in terms of popularity in the following order:

1. Webinar, seminar, workshop, conference session, class, or course
2. Professional learning community, mentorship, professional observation of a colleague/site, or book study with colleagues
3. Accessing information on your own (professional reading of books or internet sources)
4. Using instructional coaching

While using instructional coaching is the least popular format, it is still fairly popular with 31.2% of survey responses indicating interest in the format. Additionally, leaders and coaches can help develop a "culture of coaching" in which instructional coaching for educators becomes familiar, normalized, constructive and enjoyable. Such a culture helps educators realize the benefits of coaching and, according to stakeholders in the field, this results in increased interest in using coaching in a continual fashion. Also relevant is the fact that 78.5% of Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents indicated that *improved expectations for instructional fidelity* was necessary to move literacy forward in their building or district.

Engaging All Stakeholders

Leaders and teams work to build system capacity to ensure all educators recognize and encourage student, family, and community member empowerment to shape a highly effective educational experience for each learner.

A stakeholder is any person or entity invested in a school's and its students' welfare and success. Research indicates three overlapping, mutually reinforced "spheres of influence" that positively influence students' social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development (Epstein et al., 2019):
• *School (administrators, personnel, students)*
• *Family (immediate and extended caregivers)*
• *Community (all potential partners-organizations, agencies, elected officials, etc.)*
<div align="right">—2023 North Dakota State Literacy Plan</div>

Across various audiences consulted or surveyed for this needs assessment, past and existing funding that has been supportive of student literacy has been instrumental. Of particular note, this funding has generated family engagement that is conducive to early childhood literacy, including creative approaches that target often marginalized families.

Stakeholders report that increasing opportunities and support for young families for literacy promotion allows young learners to be more kindergarten-ready. It is believed that maintaining such programming and its literacy benefits requires ongoing state and federal financial support.

Other opportunities for growth and improvement exist. In the literacy professional development surveys, 38.3% of responses from administrators, 22.5% of responses from teachers, and 30.9% of responses from other licensed personnel indicated a desire for more professional development focused on *family and community engagement*.

Another opportunity identified by the CLSD team relates to the frustration among parents when Section 504 accommodations are not made in general education programs. More fidelity to Section 504 designations and more collaboration between students' families and educators is warranted.

Worth noting, the topic of *family and community engagement* was the third most popular professional development topic in the professional development surveys. However, it was ranked last in terms of professional development that has been accessed. This mismatch between popularity and accessibility reflects a clear need. This impression is further reinforced by the fact that 77.2% of Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents and 72.7% of teacher respondents reported that *improved family communication, support, and engagement* is critical for improving student literacy.

Planning Standards-Aligned Curriculum

Leaders and teams ensure the selection and use of methods, resources, and assessments to achieve the desired student outcomes defined in the North Dakota English Language Arts and Early Learning Content Standards.

Learners receive instruction that delivers state-approved standards to proficiency within a guaranteed and viable framework. Mastery of these standards and learning outcomes ensures students obtain literacy skills along a continuum presented in a developmentally appropriate sequence to access lifelong leisure, informational, and practical literacy skills and strategies.

–2023 North Dakota State Literacy Plan

Literacy coaches and teachers surveyed pointed toward the need for consistent explanations of proficiency and literacy across disciplines, as there are challenges in implementing and integrating literacy resources into the curriculum. Relatedly, the need for better alignment between MTSS and state standards was shared by the CLSD team in describing what they had observed while supporting educators in the field.

Plenty of school staff members embrace the idea of improving their depth of understanding of curriculum and standards. In the literacy professional development surveys, 24.6% of responses from administrators, 31.1% of responses from teachers, and 30.4% of responses from other licensed personnel indicated a desire for more professional development focused on *educational state content standards*.

These statistics may underestimate the need given that 2017 standards are being phased out and 2023 standards are being phased in, necessitating some efforts to ensure a smooth transition. Indeed, 87.3% of coaches and 85.3% of teachers surveyed reported that *implementation support for educators* was needed for their district or building to help students achieve literacy proficiency. *Updated curriculum and intervention materials* were reported as necessary by over half of these literacy coaches and nearly two-thirds of said teachers. Implementation support is surely always helpful, but in a time of transition, this is especially true.

Finally, the CLSD team also identified that the schools identified for improvement particularly struggle with providing students – especially those receiving special education – instruction based on grade-level standards. Too many students spend a majority of instructional time in remedial instruction. Such schools' staff need more support with embracing the "core plus more" approach to instruction in which all students receive core instruction even if they need to receive "more" (i.e., interventions and remedial instruction).

Assessing to Inform

Leaders and teams facilitate data use and feedback to monitor and adjust all decisions impacting literacy.

According to North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), assessments are used to perform two functions:

• *Measure and improve student achievement.*
  ▪ *Use results and indicators to adjust instruction to guide student learning.*
  ▪ *Use results to engage students and families in goal setting.*
• *Evaluate and improve systemic practices.*
  ▪ *Identify trends in student achievement across grade levels and student growth over time to inform decisions.*
  ▪ *Identify areas needing intervention and acceleration.*

- *Identify where support, staffing, or professional development is needed.*

<div align="right">–2023 North Dakota State Literacy Plan</div>

Around half of Literacy Coach Cadre and teacher surveys respondents reported that greater *assessment data and supports* are essential for moving forward on student literacy. In the literacy professional development surveys, 39.5% of responses indicated an interest in professional development on *assessment and evaluation*. Administrators, teachers, and other license personnel were roughly equally interested, showing a broad need and area of interest for professional development. Furthermore, 62.0% of Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents and 59.1% of teacher respondents reported that *improved systems for instructional outcomes (scheduling, MTSS, etc.)* are needed to improve student literacy.

The need appears to be especially intense for advancing literacy in the youngest children. Among Literacy Coach Cadre survey respondents who support students from birth to age 3, 100% said that more *assessment and data supports* are necessary to move literacy forward. Among the teacher respondents serving this age group, 81.3% felt the same.

Instructing with Precision

Leaders and teams define a precise, scientifically based system of literacy instruction to meet individual learner needs through a multi-layered system of support.

Instructing with precision starts with understanding the progression of literacy development, science-based practices, strategies, and interventions that promote active student engagement while meeting the literacy needs of all. The North Dakota Literacy Plan provides resources to support understanding these critical components to plan effective literacy instruction for all age levels.

<div align="right">–2023 North Dakota State Literacy Plan</div>

Disruptions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have had lingering impacts around the nation. The impacts in North Dakota are highly dependent on whether a student was proficient prior to the pandemic and how swiftly they returned to face-to-face or otherwise standard instruction. Sensitivity to individual students' "learning loss" recovery needs is essential.

Broadly speaking, students' average reading performance has been declining since the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions. In contrast, for students in grades 6-12, writing and language proficiency has shown more recovery from pandemic disruptions. For younger students, all facets of literacy represent a clear need for "learning loss" recovery.

Standards-level results from the 2023 NDSA add to the nuance of the picture of student literacy. While writing and language proficiency has seen more recovery from pandemic disruptions, writing proficiency remains a weak point for students overall. Two key writing standards were identified as points of weakness for every grade assessed by the NDSA. The standards can be summarized as follows, although the standards are properly tailored to each grade level in practice:

- Write opinion pieces, or make arguments, while providing reasons or evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly through relevant content.

Altogether, reading and writing both remain important areas of need for students. While writing proficiency has experienced some post-pandemic recovery, it remains a challenging area for students. Various facets of reading both literary and informational text also reveal students need

precision in instruction in order to make reading proficiency games.

The CLSD team identified that students identified within Tiers 2-3 within the MTSS are spending too much time in interventions, leading to a separate curriculum from core instruction. This keeps students from catching up on grade-level instruction. The team also shared that effective dyslexia screenings and the integration of assistive technology into instruction are key to supporting literacy for students with learning disabilities.

Importantly, educators and leaders recognize their need for professional development to support instruction in their schools. In the literacy professional development surveys, 53.5% of responses indicated a desire for more professional development on *instruction and intervention*. This interest in instruction and intervention professional development is driven by all staff types, with 58.4% of administrators, 52.1% of teachers, 64.3% of other licensed personnel (e.g., instructional coaches), and 50.4% or aides/paraprofessionals reporting such interest.

Monitoring and Meeting Needs: Recommendations

There was a strong consensus among of the stakeholders consulted for this needs assessment that past and existing funding for literacy has had an extremely beneficial effect on student literacy. Funding has also empowered school districts to build a staff and instructional methods/materials infrastructure that will continually improve and accomplish more and more gains in literacy – *if* financial support for resources and staff can continue to be provided from the state and federal government. Altogether, a variety of needs have been identified for furthering student literacy and they can be addressed through the continued provision of financial support. Following, needs and recommendations are identified with regard to students, educators, educational leadership, and progress monitoring.

Students

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. North Dakota's students need a guaranteed and viable curriculum or *GVC* (Marzano 2003). Within the idea of a GVC, *guaranteed* refers to all students who are enrolled in the same grade or course be exposed to the same rigorous curriculum. If the curriculum varies per teacher or classroom, then the high-quality, rigorous curriculum is not guaranteed as it should be. *Viable* refers to the fact that teaching the curriculum and covering the curriculum are not the same. Content may be covered but it is not truly taught unless and until students learn what the teachers are teaching. If the content assigned is inappropriate for the time allotted for learning it, then the curriculum fails to be viable. Ultimately, a GVC requires that teams of teachers work together to build a shared understanding of what students should learn and how they should be able to demonstrate said learning. Age and grade-appropriate guaranteed, viable curricula will meet the needs of North Dakota's learners.

From Birth to Age 5. North Dakota's youngest learners need a GVC that is aligned with the state's Early Learning Standards and the Science of Reading from birth to age 5. The elimination of contrary practices and materials and fidelity to the implemented GVC are necessary steps.

There are particular issues for this age group that warrant special attention as well. For instance, the CLSD and state literacy teams noted that COVID-related disruptions have exacerbated socioemotional needs for the youngest learners, leading to challenges in addressing basic behavioral expectations and preparing students for the demands of school. Further, the fact that kindergarten is not legally required leads to a major missed opportunity for neurological and cognitive growth that supports literacy. The teams also emphasized that literacy plays an underappreciated role in children's behavior. This is because, when children develop better language skills, they are less emotionally reactive because they can understand others and they can articulate their own needs better. This leads to more communication that is understood and, in turn, less frustration. Thus, literacy and student behavior affect one another bidirectionally.

Additionally, holistic and culturally informed approaches when serving learners in early childhood are important. The North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services details in its 2023 preschool development grant's final report that acknowledgement of Native American cultural values can be supportive of Native American children in early childhood. In this cultural framework, peers can be teachers and leaders too. For instance, toddlers can be motivated to engage in more speaking to keep up with their peers who are talkative. Leaving room for culturally diverse conceptualizations of learning and leadership can support peer-driven developmental growth.

Kindergarten to Grade 6. North Dakota's elementary students need a GVC that is aligned with the state's English Language Arts Standards and the Science of Reading for grades K-3 and 4-6.

As with early learners, the elimination of contrary practices and materials and fidelity to the implemented GVC are key steps.

Naturally, there are particular issues for this age group that warrant special attention as well. Stakeholder conversations and assessment data reveal that English learners, Native American students, and lower-income students in these grades continue to particularly need additional support. Educators also find that student engagement in reading programs competes with other activities, suggesting that creative approaches to fitting reading programs into busy schedules are necessary.

Importantly, the stakeholders consulted for this needs assessment shared that elementary school represents a critical period that determines whether a student can truly advance their literacy in secondary education. For instance, experience has taught some educators that if students have not developed decoding skills by grade 5, they may lose interest and motivation in reading moving forward into grades 6-12. Given the critical nature of decoding in reading, the continuation of programs and resources dedicated toward necessary related interventions is key.

Grades 7-12. North Dakota's secondary school students need a GVC that is aligned with the state's literacy-relevant standards across all disciplines. A properly aligned curriculum will identify the right practices for incorporating disciplinary literacy skills across all content areas. Indeed, stakeholder consultations emphasized the need for more collaborative and systemic coordination across content areas so that student literacy is the project of all secondary educators.

Multi-Tier System of Supports. The MTSS model needs further refinement and a clearly defined reading strategy, *MTSS-R*. Current assessment processes and response systems need review and plans for implementing refinements. Staff training is an essential need and a recommended goal moving forward.

Educators

Teacher Preparation. Starting with the training that educators-to-be receive at their universities, shortcomings were noted during stakeholder consultations. More collaboration between higher education teacher education programs and those working in the field is essential to ensure that university students receive teacher preparation that is connected to current standards, needs, and expectations. In particular, the teacher preparation curriculum and practicum need to be aligned to the Science of Reading.

Professional Development. After university training, educators also need diverse and ongoing professional development. Of particular need is professional development on instruction and intervention (program and practice implementation), assessment and evaluation (processes to monitor students or systems), family and community engagement (understanding intentional work with families for student success), educational state content standards (including curriculum alignment), and after-school and summer programming with regard to the core academic needs of students participating.

Many educators prefer to receive their professional development in the form of a webinar, seminar, workshop, conference session, or course. Many also prefer utilizing a professional learning community, mentorship, professional observation of a colleague/site, or book study with colleagues.

Multiple stakeholders have also expressed how technology in students' lives also poses a challenge to literacy, and one that educators, administrators, and parents need to appreciate. For instance, screen time has replaced a lot of reading time. Educators need professional development

to differentiate when technology is and is not helpful and to support digital literacy for students.

Instructional Coaching and Implementation Support. While the use of instructional coaching is not the most favored form of professional development among teachers, it remains essential. Educators particularly need support when it comes to properly using assessment data to tailor instruction. The need is especially pronounced for educators working with learners in early childhood. Furthermore, educators serving all grades also need more implementation support. Indeed, even when highly relevant professional development can be made available, *implementing* the ideas and insights is not always straightforward.

While instructional coaching is very important for addressing these needs, educators would also benefit from more streamlined "hubs" of resources for various aspects of instruction, coaching, information on learning initiatives, and other learner supports.

Leaders

Professional Development. School leaders need professional development in order to lead for impact. Over half of Literacy Coach Cadre and teacher survey respondents indicated that having more of a *building leader dedicated to literacy improvement* would be necessary to move student literacy forward. A large majority of Literacy Coach Cadre and teacher survey respondents reported that *professional development knowledge for leaders* was essential to improve student literacy in their building or district.

Leaders want to rise to these challenges, but they need professional development opportunities to be made available. Within the professional development surveys, a majority of responses from school/district administrators indicated a desire for more professional development on *leadership* themes such as *organization structures, process, roles,* and *teams within a building or district*.

Coaching and Systems Development. Teachers and literacy coaches want support from the state in emphasizing to administrators the prioritization of literacy initiatives. Generally, survey and stakeholder discussions pointed toward a desire for greater leader involvement in literacy prioritization. Further, they identified resource management as important for literacy. Essentially, school staff need leaders to structure district and school building decisions to optimize resources dedicated to literacy. Often, this comes in the form of school staff needing their leaders to secure additional staff in order to improve the work environment.

Staff look to leaders to build a school culture that moves student literacy forward. Around two-thirds of Literacy Coach Cadre and teacher surveys' respondents want their school culture to include *dedicated collaboration time* to improve student literacy. Through professional learning and dedicated effort, leaders can foster such a culture of collaboration by structuring time and expectations accordingly. Furthermore, developing a "culture of coaching" within a district or building system helps educators realize the benefits of coaching and, in turn, use coaching in a continual fashion.

The Literacy Coach Cadre survey demonstrated children in early childhood have some distinct heightened needs when it comes to literacy instruction and support. There is a particular need for more resources for struggling students, such as special books and tutoring technology. Additionally, these youngest students need their educational systems improved for fostering better literacy outcomes (e.g., better scheduling on the part of systems and better usage of MTSS).

Altogether, leaders need to:

- engage in system coaching, training, and implementation of rapid-cycle improvement,
- create and implement hubs of tools for specific instructional goals through teamwork,
- identify targets for systemic improvements on student literacy, and
- develop intentional, well-staffed systems for students in transition between systems, buildings, classrooms, or programs.

Family and Community Engagement. Stakeholder consultations revealed that literacy grant funding has been instrumental in forming and facilitating family engagement for children in early childhood and early elementary education. The continuation of such family engagement is essential for continually leveraging family-school collaboration to further literacy from the youngest leaders and on.

Monitoring and Evaluating Progress

North Dakota needs a systematic approach for monitoring and evaluating systemic progress on literacy instruction. It is recommended that there be a system evaluation plan that is developed for monitoring individual student progress as well as system-level effectiveness. Regular reporting between schools and the state is needed for such monitoring. Successful outcomes can be measured as decreases in students requiring MTSS Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Further evidence of successful outcomes includes widespread training of school staff and leaders and implementation of training content.

Conclusions

The current literacy needs assessment showcases the educational needs and highlights recent performance on the North Dakota Literacy Plan priorities. This report compiles and analyzes discussions with educators, surveys, and student data from recent years. All stakeholders consulted reported the beneficial impact that existing literacy initiative funding has had on improving student literacy outcomes and enhancing school district capacity for leveraging instructional personnel and resources for literacy education. Confidence was expressed that recent gains can continue with sustained financial resources.

It is recommended that North Dakota pursues a guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC; Marzano, 2003), ensuring that all educators deliver consistently rigorous curricular content aimed at meeting the educational needs of all learners. Achieving this requires educators within and across learner age groups collaborating to eliminate inconsistent materials and practices while ensuring educational success.

While all learners have literacy education needs, distinct needs exist for each age group. The youngest learners need additional social-emotional learning supports to instill appropriate social behaviors and preparation for the demands of school. Educators and policymakers should continue efforts to make kindergarten legally required to strengthen opportunities for neurological development, cognitive growth, cultural awareness (especially with Native American cultures), and literacy development for learners. Importantly, literacy fosters ready-to-learn behavior and such behavior, in turn, fosters greater literacy.

Stakeholder feedback and assessment results for kindergarten to grade 6 noted English learners, Native American students, and lower-income students as needing greater support. Based upon recent findings of research and experience relating to decoding skills and future literacy learning development, the programs, resources, interventions, and assessments related to decoding skills attainment should be a focus for kindergarten to grade 6.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of enhanced systemic coordination across all disciplines in grades 7-12 to ensure that literacy development is a priority. A GVC is especially important in this effort, along with collaboration between K-12 and higher education teacher preparation programs so future educators exhibit the appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for literacy instruction.

North Dakota should focus on differentiated instructional coaching and implementation support as an essential resource for fostering student success. Effective use of assessment data in tailored instruction was highlighted by educators, especially those working in early childhood. North Dakota should also continue to pursue more readily accessible resources within educational "hubs" tailored to instruction, coaching, information on learning initiatives, and other learner supports.

Recent gains in literacy have been made through enhancing family and community engagement, especially for children in early childhood and early elementary education. North Dakota districts should continue this engagement focus as an essential part of an overall collaborative approach to foster literacy for children of all ages.

School leaders should leverage specifically tailored support and resources for prioritizing a "culture of coaching" through strategic, data informed resource management. This includes ensuring staff have sufficient dedicated collaboration time, adequate literacy instructional resources, access to quality professional development opportunities, intentional support of MTSS systems, and adding new staff members as necessary.

Stakeholders broadly agreed that further refinement and development of the MTSS model is

needed, toward development of *MTSS-R* specific reading strategies. To achieve this, North Dakota should facilitate enhanced staff training that focuses on assessment processes, response systems, and systematically evaluating the impact of these systems on student learning.

Stakeholders identified education preparation programs weaknesses in ensuring that educators are adequately equipped for literacy instruction. North Dakota needs enhanced collaboration with educator preparation programs to ensure that educators possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to facilitate instruction aligned to current standards, needs, and expectations, including the Science of Reading.

The state should also continue to leverage differentiated professional development as a central tenet in the effort to improve student literacy. These opportunities should showcase experiential learning, mentorship, and professional learning communities as appropriate to enhance value and impact. School leaders need experiential learning opportunities on topics such as optimal organization structures, process management, roles, and teams within a building or district that can positively impact student literacy. Classroom educators need professional development on topics such as instruction and intervention, assessment and evaluation, family and community engagement, educational state content standards, appropriate technology implementation, and after-school and summer programming.

North Dakota should implement a systematic approach for regularly monitoring student and school-level progress on literacy outcomes through regular reporting that can inform student interventions. The training of school staff in literacy topics should be monitored as well.

The analysis, findings, and recommendations contained within this report will help North Dakota develop impactful leadership, support professional learning, engage stakeholders, implement standards-aligned curriculum, effectively use assessment to inform instruction, and differentiate instruction to meet specific needs of learners. Stakeholders are universally appreciative of the recent funding received and acknowledge its crucial role in helping achieve literacy learning gains. North Dakota stakeholders can enthusiastically pursue growth in literacy for all learners through intentional collaboration, GVC implementation, and tailored professional development by responsibly leveraging financial and stakeholder resources.

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