

## Developing a High-Impact K-12 Literacy Curriculum Strategy: 7 Critical Attributes

Literacy is one essential key to choice and opportunity. School-age students, preschoolers, and those born into our fast-paced world face an altered future wherein foundational literacy abilities are merely the table-stakes for living a pleasurable and prolific life. Consequently, the pressure on educators and administrators to ensure equitable and effective access to a top-quality literacy curricula, and improved student outcomes, has never been greater.

Literacy and curriculum leaders are looking for new ways to improve and augment the PreK–12 ELA (English Language Arts) strategy and action plans in their schools and districts. Curricula development is a discipline, requiring a balance amongst several dimensions (continuous improvement in holistic instruction, performance assessment, and professional expertise) to propel the realization of district literacy writing, speaking, listening, and language goals and objectives.

Seven attributes can help frame a comprehensive literacy reform initiative across the literacy strands—reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

### 1. **Reach** to address all learners

Literacy leaders aspire to instruct with intent and provide learning with purpose. Educators utilize a variety of materials—from research-based print resources to powerful digital tools—to foster appropriate instruction and connect literacy to the lives of students.

The best literacy instruction continuum reaches all students right where they are—it's about the right tools, at the right time, for the right learner. High-impact literacy curricula utilize multi-level, tiered instructional frameworks which incorporate:

- Core comprehensive fundamentals encompassing ELA, EL, and AP

- Intervention literacy essentials to deliver specialized instruction
- Supplemental literacy choices, including blended and digital resources and platforms

## 2. **Relevance** upholds instructional individualization

Each student's literacy needs are unique. Literacy instruction should empower great teaching and afford student personalization, so schools can reach all learners and help them progress to higher levels of achievement.

Relevance in literacy is sustained by crafting attainable and clear goals for each student. Educators are delivering personalized learning to improve student academic outcomes by guiding students through the curriculum according to needs, skill levels, passions, and achievement. They are adopting customized pathways to ensure that students are academically capable and successfully prepared for the job market, further education, and life.

## 3. **Results** are gained via evidence-based approaches

Literacy instruction should inspire learning by engaging students via relevant, dynamic, and research-proven pedagogy and content. An approach that incorporates scientifically-based practices and strategies is the best way to catalyze the "aha" moments that power results.

Educators are employing evidence-based programs to deliver the academic rigor required to prepare students not only for high-stakes tests, but also for the complex problem-solving they'll face in future schooling and the workplace. Well-structured ELA programs that include rigorous, research-proven curriculum platforms will lift competency, meet state standards, and support ESSA accountability guidelines to ultimately drive literacy gains.

## 4. **Responsive** tools and platforms drive proficiency

Rich technology, connected learning, and personalized programs are changing how students learn and how teachers teach. Research shows technology-based instruction is reducing the time students reach a learning objective by 30 to 80 percent<sup>1</sup>. Literacy educators are leveraging new technologies and digital stacks to provide access to next-generation learning anywhere. Digital instruction not only connects education to real-world experiences; it promotes equity, access, and opportunity for all

students.

Student-centered, personalized instruction helps develop more responsibility for and control of learning. Students are offered choices around the pace, time, and location of online instruction. And personalized learning offers new ways to accomplish projects and nurture multiple modes of expression, including writing and speaking.

#### 5. **Real-time** assessment and monitoring speeds proficiency

Literacy leaders are embracing real-time assessment strategies based on increasingly higher educational standards for literacy instruction. Today's curriculum-aligned assessment programs deliver the data to inform better instruction and accountability.

Online assessment allows teachers to pre-assess students' readiness and interests at the start of a unit, before automatically serving up the appropriate interfaces, prompts, and instruction. Teachers can optimize decisions during the school year to help each student master new concepts and develop essential competencies.

Every digital interaction informs instructional strategies for students. Students progress based on objectives that are precisely tracked and easily viewed through graphical dashboards, so teachers can see where each student stands.

#### 6. **Reflective** practices integrate literacy in all content areas

Becoming literate means each student can read and understand a variety of subject matter texts to draw valid conclusions and participate in meaningful conversations around a given subject. Literacy action plans today incorporate proactive literacy strategies as an essential means to help all students master core content and connect with standards and objectives of specific content areas.

Content literacy instruction prepares students to read, write, and discuss using the language of science, social studies, mathematics, and English Language Arts. Students should acquire discipline-specific literacy skills, comprehension, and understanding of text structures so that they can successfully read a mathematics text, a science journal article, a primary source, or a Shakespearean play.

#### 7. **Ready** teachers optimize success

Literacy curriculum innovation includes continuous and

personalized professional improvement to ignite teacher performance and delivery.

Administrators are building literacy educators' capabilities through new professional development (PD) strategies. These strategies should align to both the district's goals as well as each educator's personal career goals.

Learning models including customizable curricula, online training, and just-in-time embedded courses are enhancing PD. Teachers are leveraging their colleagues' knowledge to build professional capacity, collaborating within professional learning communities, and tuning into crowd-accelerated innovation.

Whether delivered online or in classrooms, teachers need dedicated time to practice and construct learning opportunities for students that reflect effective pedagogy and instructional best practices.

Reach, Relevance, Results, Responsive, Real-Time, Reflective, and Ready. Together, these "7 Rs" form the baseline attributes of an impactful literacy curriculum plan that boosts literacy outcomes and prepares students for college and careers. They empower educators to enact pedagogy, allow students to take an active part in learning, accelerate students striving to achieve, and help assess the factors affecting completion and success. The "7 Rs" are critical elements of strategic planning for literacy—and literacy is a critical element of choice, opportunity, and lifelong learning.

Authored by: Lisa Carmona, Senior Vice President, PreK-12 Portfolio and Product Development, McGraw-Hill Education

## References

<sup>1</sup>Cohn, J., & Fletcher, J.D. (2010). What is a Pound of Training Worth? Frameworks and Practical Examples for Assessing Return on Investment in Training. Proceedings of the InterService/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Annual Conference. Arlington, VA: National Training and Simulation Association.