

Pennsylvania State Literacy Plan

Reading: Focus of Instruction

Summary

Birth to Age 5

Early development of essential competencies, listed below, enhances and enriches the development of “conventional literacy skills” in the years before formal schooling begins.

- Experiences with oral language, engagement in listening and speaking, development of print concepts, and book awareness provide the consistent repetitions of early concepts needed to become a reader.
- Phonological awareness is an important building block that leads to successful reading.
- Experiences that build world and word (vocabulary) knowledge of preschoolers serve as a fundamental building block.
- Beginning readers use a variety of information to acquire meaning from text.
- Learners benefit from opportunities with pictures, symbols, letter/sound correspondence (phonics), and familiar words.

Grades K-5

- The learning focus for K-5 students begins with the development of the foundational skills (See [PA Core Standards](#), Foundational Skills K-5):
book handling
print concepts
phonological awareness
phonics and word recognition
fluency
- At the same time, there must be an emphasis on the development of vocabulary and comprehension so that students see reading as a meaning-making process. “The foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines” (Common Core State Standards (CCSS), 2010, p. 15).
- As beginning readers increase their proficiency in word recognition skills and develop strategies to use language comprehension skills to link prior knowledge to new information in books, leading to the ability to comprehend, evaluate and appreciate text.
- “To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and information texts” (CCSS, 2010, p. 10).

- Literacy demands change and intensify quickly after third grade. Upper elementary students are expected to learn new words, new facts, and new ideas from reading, as well as to interpret and summarize the texts they read. Combining literacy skills and content knowledge requires a new level of sophistication.
- Learning gradually shifts to deeper comprehension in the intermediate grades supplemented with instruction in word study and fluency as needed.
- Instruction should be differentiated. Struggling readers will need direct, explicit, and systematic instruction with foundational skills. Good readers will need less practice with foundational skills than struggling readers.
- The point is to teach students what they need to learn and not what they already know—to discern when specific children or activities warrant more or less attention.

Grades 6-12

- “The skills that students learn through fourth grade are absolutely critical to later success, but they are simply not enough. Adolescent literacy is a shifting landscape where the heights get higher, the inclines steeper, and the terrain rockier...” (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy [CCAAL], 2010, p. 10).
- *Time to Act* (CCAAL, 2010) describes the changes students encounter as they transition to secondary grades:

Texts become longer – Students need to develop reading stamina.

Word complexity increases – Students need to develop technical and all-purpose academic vocabularies, with increasing demands on word recognition, pronunciation, fluency, and meaning-making.

Sentence complexity increases – Students need to understand complex relationships among ideas signaled through connective words set in long and complicated sentences.

Structural complexity increases – Students need to recognize and use text structure to identify several logical relationships between ideas.

Graphic representations become more important – Students must synthesize information from graphs, charts, tables, illustrations, and equations, with written text to grasp the full meaning of content-area texts.

Conceptual challenge increases – Students must synthesize from one task to another and from one set of concepts to another, and build logical relationships across multiple aspects of a given conceptual domain with the information they glean from texts.

- The overarching goal is stated clearly in the final Reading Anchor Standard: “Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” (CCSS, 2010, p. 10).
- Reading at the middle and high school level is characterized by increasing text complexity and focusing on informational text.
- Interacting with text through close reading, analysis, and interpretation is essential.
- A deep reading of text should engage the reader in interacting with the text to discern not only the craft of the writer, but the connectivity to other texts and the ability to cite evidence to support a conclusion.