

SUCCEEDING IN READING:

AN EARLY LITERACY SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

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FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The Department of Education has established a framework for the early identification of and effective support/intervention practices for students experiencing difficulties in the early stages of literacy:

Guiding Parameters

- early identification
- intensive support
- a focus on grades primary and one
- transferable strategies developed to extend to grades two and three
- literacy development of all students will be assessed to identify need
- built on sound research, evidence and professional expertise
- focus on learning, largely in the regular classroom environment
- flexible approaches to ensure responsiveness to students as individual learners as needed
- teacher professional learning, reflection and collaboration on instructional practices

Approach

- focused, developmentally appropriate instruction
- immersion in rich oral and text language and literacy experiences
- struggling students identified during their primary year
- enhanced resources and support for primary teachers
- classroom-based, department-approved assessments to identify students in need of intensive support, to inform learning strategies and to support instructional planning
- daily concentrated intervention generally in small groups of one to three over a series of weeks

Roles

- classroom teachers and early literacy teachers engaged in joint planning and instructional design
- ongoing consultation and conversation with school-based specialists (including resource teachers, speech-language pathologist) and the school's administration
- professional learning needs supported by school boards with concentration on site-based activity
- student progress monitored at board level with an annual summary shared with the department to support provincial level reporting of student success
- Department responsiveness to individual board-identified needs, including professional and student learning resources or other requested services

This framework has been developed based on educational research and the collective experience and expertise of classroom teachers, specialist teachers, school board personnel, and the Department of Education staff. The approach will be evidence based focusing on early identification, concentrated instruction, and intervention practices that will give young learners the support they need to boost their development as readers and writers.

This Early Literacy Support Framework is based on four guiding principles:

1. Early literacy development provides all students with a strong foundation for future success and achievement
2. Early interventions and supports must be timely, based on best practices, and developmentally appropriate for each student
3. Classroom teachers are crucial to the students' ability to succeed
4. Teachers will work collaboratively with and be supported by instructional leaders at the school, school board, and department level

This Early Literacy Support Framework is designed to provide focused, developmentally appropriate instruction for early elementary students, while immersing them in rich oral and text language and literacy experiences. This framework is founded on an early literacy teacher working in collaboration with the classroom teacher to support students, generally in small groups. Protected time will be set aside for these teachers to work with small groups of students on a daily basis. Most often this work will take place in the classroom to allow students to benefit from more intensive literacy instruction as part of the classroom program.

BACKGROUND

This Early Literacy Support Framework provides support to students in grades primary and one who need assistance with oral language, reading, and/or writing development, as well as development of strategies that are transferable to support students in grades two and three. This framework builds on effective practices that are already in place in schools and school boards across the province. It will maintain the Department of Education's commitment for intensive support to the students in greatest need, while providing further supports to a greater number of our youngest students. This framework will:

- Provide flexible supports to meet the needs of small groups or individuals as determined by each student's learning profile and developmental progress
- Provide focused, developmentally appropriate instruction for young students, while immersing them in rich language and literacy experiences
- Provide concentrated blocks of time every day for students to work with an early literacy teacher and/or their classroom teacher
- Build on the effective assessment, instructional practices, and interventions that are already in place
- Recognize the expertise of classroom teachers and provide them with opportunities to broaden their skills through ongoing, site-based professional learning

- Engage classroom teachers and early literacy teachers in joint planning and instructional design
- Identify and implement research-based best practices that support early literacy development (including reading, writing, and oral language development)

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Education recognizes the importance of early literacy development and support. Research clearly shows that early, intensive interventions are critical to student success in later years. Children who successfully acquire literacy skills in grades primary and one are well prepared to succeed in later grades. On the other hand, children who struggle with reading are at a disadvantage. These students often fall behind their peers, continue to struggle in the later grades, and are less likely to pursue post-secondary studies. A very recent study confirms that students who are unable to read in grade three are four times less likely to graduate when compared to students who can read proficiently.¹ Early identification of struggling students in grades primary and one is crucial to ensuring that teachers are able to provide the necessary interventions and supports to ensure that students succeed.

Effective literacy support enables all students to comprehend what they are reading, find appropriate words for what they want to say, and communicate their knowledge effectively through writing. Supports will build abilities in four key areas:

<i>Comprehension</i>	the ability to understand, reflect on, and learn from a text
<i>Fluency</i>	the ability to read text with appropriate phrasing and expression
<i>Accuracy</i>	the ability to identify words accurately
<i>Motivation</i>	engaging in the reading process and developing a passion for reading and learning

These abilities are identified under the key strands of reading and viewing (comprehension), speaking and listening (literate conversation), and writing and representing (communication).

The supports required to reach each of these unifying concepts are:

- building background knowledge
- knowing and strategically applying a repertoire of comprehension strategies
- developing oral language and vocabulary
- modeling and teaching accurate, fluent reading and fluent writing
- making reading and writing connections

Underlying all of the supports to reach our literacy goals is motivation — engaging in literacy processes and developing a passion for reading and learning

¹ Sparks, Sarah D. “Study: Third Grade Reading Predicts Later High School Graduation.” Education Week. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/04/the_disquieting_side_effect_of.html

EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

All students need to develop the motivation to read with accuracy, fluency and comprehension in order to have success in future grades. These four areas and strands are interrelated; while a specific intervention may focus on addressing a student's ability in one of these areas, it will inevitably touch on the others as well. For example, students often struggle with fluency, especially if they have had less exposure to story-telling and opportunities to converse with others in an authentic way, printed materials, books, and reading and writing at home or in a pre-school program. Students who are still struggling with individual words often lose track of the meaning in the text, and in turn, comprehension suffers. As a result, the student becomes frustrated and loses the motivation to continue reading. Early identification of problems such as these is vital to ensure that these struggling students get the supports they need to succeed.

It is important in the primary year to provide students with a wide variety of oral/aural language experiences. This type of exposure is important for students to be able to develop a sense of how language works in a variety of contexts. Classroom teachers will identify children experiencing difficulty in grade primary and develop instructional strategies to provide more intensive support.

In the latter part of the student's primary year, as part of this Early Literacy Support Framework, teachers will use an alternate ranking method to identify students who may require more intensive literacy instruction in their grade one year. The use of alternate ranking methods is common practice in Nova Scotia's public schools. This ranking will be shared with grade one teachers at year-end transition meetings.

Grade one students will be initially assessed at the classroom level using elements of the *Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* to be considered for early literacy support.

The assessments will be used in the identification of students in need of additional support and the monitoring and reporting of student progress by school boards. The assessment measures will also capture data on each grade one student's literacy skill, and will inform early literacy support strategies and instructional planning.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

This Early Literacy Support Framework is designed to provide flexible supports to students who require more intensive literacy instruction. Support will be the joint responsibility of the classroom teacher and the early literacy teacher. All instructional plans will be based on well researched best practices that support early literacy development. Identified students will receive daily support, generally in small groups of one to three, usually in the regular classroom environment; however, this framework is flexible in order to be developmentally appropriate for each student, and to provide additional supplementary instruction when necessary.

At the grade primary level, classroom teachers will work with early literacy teachers to develop effective instructional strategies for their students. These strategies will provide additional supports to students struggling with oral language and the earliest stages of print awareness. School boards will work with the Department of Education to identify additional resources to support literacy development at the grade primary level.

At the grade one level, classroom teachers will work with early literacy teachers to tailor the instructional supports to meet the needs of their students, based on each student's learning profile. This focused, individual approach to reading and writing interventions will ensure that literacy challenges are addressed before they become entrenched and before they affect the student's confidence. It will also allow teachers to build on the individual strengths of each student and what each student has under control, to keep students motivated as they progress in their learning. For example, if a student has good communication abilities but poor comprehension, teachers will choose instructional strategies that reinforce the student's strengths in writing, while building his/her abilities in comprehension. In this way students will work to improve their literacy abilities while seeing themselves as successful learners.

As much as is effective and makes good sense, supported instruction will occur within the classroom environment. Maintaining the continuity between classroom instruction and specific, focused interventions has a number of benefits. First, the struggling student is able to largely stay with his/her class and benefit from the regular academic and social environment. The student is not isolated from his/her peers and is not made to feel different. Other students will also benefit from this inclusive instruction. As the classroom teacher is working in collaboration with the early literacy teacher, every student will have the opportunity to benefit from high quality literacy instruction. Put simply, the same knowledge and expertise that teachers use to help a child who is struggling will benefit a student who is progressing without difficulty. Finally, by collaborating with the early literacy teacher, the classroom teacher has the opportunity to develop and strengthen his/her repertoire of instructional practices.

The classroom teacher and the early literacy teacher will meet at regular intervals for instructional planning sessions to ensure that the supports and interventions are the best match for the student's literacy development, as determined by ongoing assessments. Classroom teachers and early literacy teachers will also consult regularly with other school-based specialists, including resource teachers and speech-language pathologists, who may be able to provide additional expertise and/or support.

Administrative support at both the school and school board level is vital for this Early Literacy Support Framework to be successful. Principals must ensure that the time allocated for classroom and early literacy teachers to work with students is protected. The principal must also work with school board staff to ensure that teachers have the resources they need in order to provide their students with timely, effective supports.

School board staff will be responsible for monitoring the progress and success of the intervention strategies. School boards will provide an annual summary report to the Department of Education to support provincial level reporting of student success. School boards will also develop and implement plans to address the professional learning needs of early literacy teachers and classroom teachers, calling upon the Department of Education to provide targeted support. As much as possible, the professional learning needs of teachers will be addressed through site-based activity, which encourage and support teacher reflective practices related to their own instruction. The Department of Education will provide supportive professional and student learning resources, and be available to provide other focused services as requested by individual boards.

ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Effective early literacy instruction does not happen in isolation. The classroom teacher and the early literacy teacher must work in partnership with parents, families, community groups, and instructional leaders at the school, school board, and department levels. This Early Literacy Support Framework recognizes the importance of a system-wide, supportive approach to literacy instruction. The Department of Education will set aside resources to support the work of schools and school boards in implementing the Early Literacy Support Framework. Department staff will work closely with all partners to provide teachers with the supports they need to provide quality literacy instruction and timely, coordinated support to students.

Department staff will support school boards in engaging with classroom teachers, early literacy teachers, and school board staff to help develop a collaborative school-based approach to early literacy interventions. This will involve providing onsite support to teachers, and engaging with parents, families, community groups, and partner agencies to promote literacy beyond the school.

Department consultants and coordinators will work closely with partners in education to identify new promising practices and resources to support the work of classroom and early literacy teachers as well as the instructional leaders in the school. Department staff will also provide teachers, principals and school board staff with up-to-date research and materials to ensure they have the best resources to support student learning.

BENEFITS BEYOND THE GRADES PRIMARY AND ONE CLASSROOMS

This Early Literacy Support Framework is focused on providing supports to students in grades primary and one. Research shows that providing supports in the early grades has the greatest impact on student success going forward. That said, the instructional techniques that classroom teachers put into practice in grades primary and one are likely to also benefit the students in higher grade levels.

This framework is built around providing focused supports to meet the student's developmental stage and individual challenges, rather than his/her grade level. This framework further promotes collaboration between instructional leaders and classroom teachers. The instructional techniques will be transferable and beneficial to teachers beyond grades primary and one. By collaborating and sharing best practices with their colleagues, teachers of our youngest students will promote effective literacy instruction at all grade levels. In this way the Early Literacy Support Framework supports schools and school boards in developing professional learning communities (PLCs).

School board and department staff will also work with parents, families, partner organizations and community groups, to deliver literacy support training to parents and volunteers, and to promote community based literacy projects. Promoting literacy outside of the school will reinforce what is being taught in the classroom and provide students with an enriched learning experience that speaks to the culture, heritage, and language of their homes and communities.