



Language Arts Literacy Program Review: Internal Report ~ 2012



West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District
Princeton Junction, New Jersey

“Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by, and intertwined with, knowledge of the world.....Literacy involves not just the reading of the word, but also the reading of the world.”

- Paulo Freire

Overview

This analysis of the K-12 Language Arts Literacy program is part of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District's comprehensive curriculum review process. The intent of the review is to assess the current program against local, state, and national standards in light of scholarly research, and community needs and expectations. This report represents a snapshot of the program and reflects its status at a particular point in time. The results of this review will help to establish areas of focus for continuous program improvement over the next three to five years.

Individuals who are able to use language to communicate effectively both understand the world around them and interact more successfully in that context. In an increasingly complex world, individuals are required to read, write, speak, listen, and view critically, strategically, and creatively - and respond effectively - in order to participate in and contribute to society.

Internal Review Committee

In addition to the external review conducted by PCG Education, an internal review committee was created to facilitate the operation of this program review and to collect additional data from district teachers. The committee collected feedback from teachers via an in-house generated survey focusing on delivery of instruction, curriculum, assessment, materials and resources (including technology), leadership and professional development, and communication and grading. The questions on this survey were created using information retrieved from conversations with teachers in grade level groups as well as on feedback forms which invited teachers to talk about what they believed was working well in the language arts program, what they believed was not working well, and how they wanted the program to develop at their particular level. The resulting information was clustered and used to create questions that became a survey distributed electronically to all K-12 teachers. Seventy-five K-3 teachers responded to the survey, thirty-two 4-5 teachers, thirty-one 6-8 teachers, and twenty-three 9-12 teachers. When pertinent, the results of this teacher survey and teacher comments are noted in italics in the appropriate parts of this report.

Committee Organization

In response to a request for broad-based representation on the committee, 17 people volunteered to be a part of the review process. As with previous reviews, the expertise of teachers, literacy specialists, and principals proved invaluable. The program review committee divided itself into three small task groups; these sub-committees examined the program at their respective levels and periodically shared the results of their work during full committee meetings over the course of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years.

Committee Membership

Martin Smith	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction
Deirdre Bova	K-12 Supervisor of Language Arts Literacy
Denise Mengani	Principal, Maurice Hawk School
Brian Stevens	Principal, Town Center School
Richard Kaye	Member, Board of Education
Penny Fisher	Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction, K-12
Juliana Johnson	Teacher Resource Specialist, Language Arts, K-3
Cynthia Mershon	Teacher Resource Specialist, Language Arts, 4-8
Ruthann Butterfield	Elementary Special Education Teacher
Joanne DeGoria	Reading Specialist
Caren DeSanctis	Middle School Language Arts Teacher
Bethann Kinney	Middle School Language Arts Teacher
Karen Levanduski	High School Special Education Teacher
Joan Ruddiman	Coordinator, Gifted and Talented Education
Andrea Scaturo	High School English Teacher
Barbara Sheridan	Reading Recovery Teacher
Paula Tessein	High School English Teacher
Christopher Wilson	Elementary Teacher

West Windsor-Plainsboro Language Arts Literacy Program Philosophy

“Language arts or English should be a kind of intellectual ‘homeroom,’ where a student can see the totality of his symbolic life...If the rest of the curriculum is to be divided up mostly by topics, then language arts must be not only the guardian of literature but the patron of general communication processes.”

- James Moffett

“Language can be the means of creating worlds and exploring ideas.”

- Frank Smith

“Language is the center piece of learning. It’s not just another subject but the means by which all other subjects are perceived.”

- Ernest Boyer

The National Council of Teachers of English, The International Reading Association, *The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards*, and *The Common Core State Standards* cite the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language as interrelated processes. A meaningful language arts literacy program provides experiences in **reading** (transacting with text), **writing** (composing texts), **extending reading and writing** (choosing what to read and write, developing a variety of strategies depending on the text, context, and one’s own purposes), **investigating language** (acquiring knowledge about language and how it functions in order to accomplish communicative purposes), and **learning to learn** (building knowledge or awareness of one’s own thinking processes and of what is entailed in the processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening). These experiences are informed by four fundamental assumptions about language, literacy, and learning. Not discrete or mutually exclusive, these four “lenses” overlap, color, and inform each other:

- Language use is an active process of constructing meaning from experience. Effective readers and writers use language actively and constructively to gain new ideas and insights.

- Language is inherently social. Language use occurs in a situation; we make meaning in collaboration with others.

- Language processes – reading, writing, speaking, listening – are interrelated. Each of the processes is enhanced by the use of the others.

- Learning is a human activity. Readers and writers bring their own fund of prior knowledge and experience which they orchestrate in ways unique to themselves to create meaning from language-based activities and encounters.

Literacy Program

DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION

Grades K-5

West Windsor-Plainsboro School District subscribes to a balanced literacy approach to literacy: a research- and standards-based model that balances reading with writing, explicit instruction with authentic application, and assessment with instruction. Balanced literacy is a comprehensive curriculum model that integrates various components necessary for students to acquire reading and writing skills. Within this well and deliberately planned structure, responsibility for learning is gradually released from teacher to students.

In balanced literacy, teachers introduce students to curriculum through direct, explicit instruction. They guide students' application and practice of skills and strategies, providing time for students to practice those skills and strategies until they can use them independently. Strategies begin as teacher-directed but become student-selected.

- Components of balanced literacy, grades K-5:
 - Word Study (phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, vocabulary)
 - Interactive read-aloud with accountable talk
 - Shared reading (K-3)
 - Reading workshop
 - Writing workshop
 - Shared writing
 - Interactive writing (K-1)
- Routines for the delivery of instruction within reading and writing workshop are:
 - Mini-lessons
 - Independent work time - students read or write independently, in pairs, or in small groups
 - Guided reading
 - Strategy lessons
 - Conferences
 - Partnerships
 - Share time
- Teachers vary the method of delivery throughout the day and within one class period with instruction in:
 - Whole group
 - Small groups for cooperative and differentiated learning
 - Book clubs
 - Partnerships
 - Individual student/teacher conferences
- Balanced literacy facilitates differentiation by providing reading and writing practice at each student's independent level and allows for small group and conferring at instructional levels.

Grades 6-12

In the secondary literacy program, teachers introduce students to curriculum through direct, explicit instruction. They guide students' application and practice of skills and strategies, providing time for students to practice those skills and strategies until they can use them independently. Strategies begin as teacher-directed but become student-selected.

- Components of secondary literacy, grades 6-12:
 - Vocabulary study (pronunciation, spelling, part of speech, antonyms, synonyms, connotation, and denotation)
 - Close reading/active reading
 - Writing process for both formal and informal responses
- Routines for the delivery of instruction are:
 - Mini-lessons
 - Independent work time - students read or write independently, in pairs, or in small groups
 - Guided close/active reading
 - Comprehension strategy lessons
 - Conferences
 - Modeling
- Teachers vary the method of delivery throughout the class period with instruction in:
 - Whole group
 - Small groups for cooperative and differentiated learning
 - Individual student/teacher conferences

K-5 Strengths

- Consistency in routines and language used with students.
- Variation of delivery methods allows for differentiation.
- Classrooms organized to facilitate discussion; curriculum emphasis on accountable talk to construct meaning.
- Reading, writing, and word study are taught throughout the day.
- Teachers make informed material choices to ensure instruction is individualized and differentiated to include all students.
- All stakeholders (classroom teachers, principals, resource specialists, reading recovery teachers, basic skills teachers, special education teachers, and ESL teachers) are committed to student learning and their own professional growth.
- Teachers look for ways to support the achievement of ALL students.
- *Responsive Classroom* and the 21st Century Competencies are implemented throughout the day to promote independence, collaboration, and habits of mind.

6-12 Strengths

- Teachers utilize Multiple Intelligence theory to reach the needs of all learners.
- Classrooms organized to facilitate discussion; curriculum emphasis on accountable talk to construct meaning.

- Reading and writing is integrated throughout the class period.
- All stakeholders (classroom teachers, principals, resource specialists (6-8), special education teachers, and ESL teachers) are committed to student learning and their own professional growth.
- Teachers look for ways to support the achievement of ALL students.
- The 21st Century Competencies are implemented throughout the period to promote independence, collaboration, and habits of mind.

K-5 Recommendations

- Examine time allotted for the teaching of reading and writing within schools' literacy schedules.
Over two-thirds of the teachers surveyed - and current research - report the time allotted for reading and writing in the district is insufficient (*56% of K-3 teachers said "the schedule does not work for us" [in regard to teaching reading and writing] and 56% of grade 4-5 teachers said school schedules "need to change." Sixty-seven percent of K-5 teachers said they need more time to teach reading and writing effectively; Fountas & Pinnell, 2000, recommend 180 minutes per day for the teaching of reading and writing at grades 3-6; Allington, 2002*).
 - Teachers need more time to implement guided reading and other small group lessons (*Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Pressley, et al., 2001*).
 - Limit announcements and be mindful of special events, e.g., assemblies, taking place during reading/writing periods.
 - Develop consistency among grade levels within all schools with regard to the amount of time devoted to the teaching of reading and writing.
 - Per the **CCSS**, examine social studies and science curricula at all grades to find out how and where subject area standards align with the **CCSS** for language arts and how instruction can be made effective and efficient. Develop teachers' familiarity and facility with strategies for reading and writing in the content area.
- Examine the research on class size and its impact on learning, particularly the learning of struggling students.
- Leverage the opportunities for differentiation in all classrooms.
- Develop a plan that includes specific recommendations relating to how struggling students are identified, how their growth is assessed, and how the teachers who teach them will be trained. Opportunities that assist and support struggling writers need to be planned and provided; currently interventions focus only on struggling readers. (*Pinnell & Fountas, 2009, "If children are not thriving in spite of excellent classroom instruction, then they need extra help [xii];" "early intervention is supplemental teaching – extra help above and beyond good classroom instruction. This extra teaching should not take the place of opportunities to learn in the classroom" {p.11}; Allington, 2002; 69% of teachers said their ability to effectively teach struggling readers is impacted by the school schedule and insufficient time to teach reading and writing; 74% reported that the resource people who help them serve the struggling reader population help them teach these children effectively but 53% said they had insufficient time to work with these resource people; 69% said the decrease in pull-out programs negatively impacted the development of struggling readers; 44% felt inclusion programs do not provide the time and/or attention struggling readers need to succeed*).

- At grades 4-5, continue to develop teacher understanding of and ability to implement successful and effective reading and writing workshops (*Over 70% of teachers responding to the survey said the workshop model was a successful format for reading/writing instruction: “Using a workshop model helps us incorporate language arts into daily instruction. Students have consistent blocks of time and experiences in reading and writing, so they are able to use strategies on a regular basis. Having consistent and detailed curriculum materials helps teachers to plan for effective workshop instruction. Our curriculum is designed to facilitate student engagement and independent use of strategies”*). Research supports this classroom model, e.g., Allington, 1988; Allington & Johnston, 2002; Atwell, 1998; Au, Carroll, & Sheu, 1997; Bender, 2007; Calkins, 1994, 2000; Calkins, et al, 2003, 2006, 2010; Cambourne, 2000; Cazden, 1988; Davis & Hill, 2003; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, Martin, 2012; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Graves, 1983; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Holdaway, 1979; Keene & Zimmerman, 1979; Lattimer, 2003; Miller, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001; Nichols, 2008; Pearson & Fielding, 1996; Ray, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

6-12 Recommendations

- Consistency in routines and language used with students as per the **CCSS**. (*Parents commented that they would like “more focused writing instruction” and “deeper writing skills”*).
- It is recommended that we maximize the time allotted for the teaching of reading and writing (6-8). There seems to be a wealth of research in both directions, but in order to make an informed decision, a group should examine all the data. *Time needed for reading instruction: Theory and best practice from across research in the fields of reading and middle level education ASSUME reading instruction is integral in all subject areas AS WELL as integrated into all content areas. Reading at the middle level is a complex metacognitive process. Besides reading on their own daily for at least ½ hour, (Atwell, 1987) students need to be with the reading teacher daily to process what they have read in discussion and with teacher guided lessons that build reading strategies for both efferent and aesthetic reading. Reading strategies and habits of mind are then applied through guided instruction in content areas. This does not take into consideration the time needed for developing writing skills.*
- At grades 6-12, continue to develop teacher understanding of and ability to implement successful and effective student-centered classrooms. (*According to the National Council for Teachers of English, The Secondary Section recommends the following five-year plan: “Collect evidence of support for teacher examination, development, and implementation of effective classroom practices that increase the frequency and quality of teacher-student interactions intended to improve students' language competency”*).
- Make every effort to balance the number of students in classes.
- Examine opportunities that assist and support struggling readers and writers.
- Examine social studies and science curricula at grades 6-8 to find out how and where subject area standards align with the **CCSS** and how instruction can best be tailored to be effective and efficient. Develop teachers' familiarity and facility with strategies for reading and writing in the content area.

CURRICULUM

Grades K-5

Developing and improving literacy instruction is an ongoing process in the district. The Literacy Council, with representatives from each school and grade level, has worked to develop a curriculum and units of study in reading and writing at each grade, level K-8 . The adoption of the reading and writing curriculum, aligned to the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)*, has facilitated rigor, consistency, and clarity of expectations within the language arts literacy program.

Grades 6-12

Developing and improving literacy instruction is an ongoing process in the district. Representatives from each school and grade level have worked to develop curricula aligned to the *CCSS*, which has facilitated rigor, consistency, and clarity of expectations within the language arts literacy program.

K-5 Strengths

- Literacy Council (a district committee with representation from every grade level, K-8) has selected and developed reading and writing units of study at each grade level (with significant input from the Teachers College *Curriculum Calendar*, but from other professional resources as well). Curriculum documents are clear, explicit, vertically aligned, and research-based. They are aligned to the *CCSS* and district benchmarks.
 - Curriculum documents define what students should know and be able to do.
 - Documents written using the backward design model outlined in *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998).
 - All units of study recommend professional resources/mentor texts to support teachers as they develop classroom reading/writing programs.
 - Units of study written deliberately to provide clear “road maps” for teachers to follow.
 - All units of study available, by grade level, on WW-P Staff Resource Site to support teachers as they implement daily curriculum.
 - Documents soon to be available to parents/public on district website.

6-12 Strengths

- The curriculum’s mentor texts provide a variety of options for students.
- Advanced Placement Language and Composition and Advanced Placement Literature and Composition courses are offered at both high schools.
- The team teaching structure allows for the opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.
- All units of study are available, by grade level, on the WW-P Staff Resource Site to support teachers as they implement daily curriculum.
- Documents soon to be available to parents/public on district website.

K-5 Recommendations

- Ongoing revision to the curriculum as we continue to study the **CCSS**, and as new research informs our understanding of best practice (88% of teachers responding to the survey said the content/format of the language art curriculum units of study were “working well”):
 - Increased attention to direct instruction of speaking and listening, i.e., the *talk* curriculum.
 - Extended integration of reading and writing in science and social studies.
 - Using source material in writing and appropriately citing those sources.
 - Increased emphasis on text-based questioning and discussion.
 - Using strategies that encourage and facilitate close reading of complex texts.
 - Consideration of new literacies for use in language arts (digital books, blogs, wikis, etc.)
- Continue to research and explore best practice in word study/spelling/vocabulary and provide professional development opportunities/resources for staff to facilitate consistency across classes and schools (Bear, et al., 1996; Ganske, 2000, 2006, 2008; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Snowball & Bolton, 1999; Wilde, 1992; Nagy, 1979; Biemiller, 2003; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Beck, et al., 1982; Nagy & Scott, 2000).
- Develop curriculum for word study (K-3) and shared reading (K-2). (Approximately one-half of teachers surveyed report needing additional professional development related to word study and shared reading; Bear, et al., 1996; Ganske, 2000, 2006, 2008; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Snowball & Bolton, 1999; Wilde, 1992; Parkes, 2000; Daunis & Iams, 2007).
- Review curriculum materials currently used for word study for alignment with the **CCSS** (Bear, et al., 1996; Ganske, 2000, 2006, 2008; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Snowball & Bolton, 1999; Wilde, 1992)
- Ongoing vertical and horizontal curriculum articulation among teachers to ensure an appropriately rigorous language arts program (nearly half of teachers surveyed report an interest in additional vertical articulation opportunities and nearly two-thirds an interest in horizontal articulation).
- Guidelines need to be added to the grades 4-5 language arts curriculum explaining how shared reading (69% of teachers expressed a need for additional professional development, Daunis & Iams, 2007; Parkes, 2000), guided reading (47% of teachers expressed a need for additional professional development; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and repeated reading (Chard, et al., 2002; Shanahan, 2006), as well as other strategies that develop fluency and comprehension (especially for struggling readers), can be effectively used in grades 4-5. Continue teacher professional development regarding **CCSS** “Language” standard using the written guide to teaching grammar in all writing units of study (53% of teachers requested additional professional development around teaching language conventions, mechanics, etc.; Angelillo, 2002; Ehrenworth, 2005; Weaver, 1996).

6-12 Recommendations

- Ongoing revision to the curriculum as we continue to study the **CCSS**, and as new research informs our understanding of best practice.
 - Increased attention to direct instruction of speaking and listening.
 - Extended integration of reading and writing in science and social studies (6-8).

- Using source material in writing and appropriately citing those sources.
- Increased emphasis on text-based questioning and discussion.
- Using strategies that encourage and facilitate close reading of complex texts.
- Consideration of new literacies for use in language arts (digital books, blogs, wikis, etc.)
- Re-examine semester courses for grades 11-12 to better align with the *CCSS*.
- Continue to research and explore best practice in grammar/vocabulary and provide professional development opportunities/resources for staff to facilitate consistency across classes and schools.
- Develop curriculum for word study (6-8) and revise word study instruction (9-12).
- Review curriculum materials currently used for word study for alignment with the *CCSS*.
- Maintain ongoing vertical and horizontal curriculum articulation among teachers to ensure an appropriately rigorous language arts program.
- Implement teacher professional development regarding *CCSS* “Language” standard using the recently written guide to teaching grammar in all writing units of study.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment informs and guides instruction. Using a wide variety of assessment tools allows teachers to determine student progress with respect to literacy development and plan instructional practice accordingly. Common assessments are administered in the beginning of each school year as baselines for reading, writing, and word study. They are used for placement and during the year as needed to monitor growth over time. The same assessments are used at the end of the year. They include:

Grades K-5

- The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), K-3; Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) K-8 Assessment for Independent Reading Level; Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System
 - Individually administered assessments that provide an analysis of comprehension, miscues, fluency, and students’ reading processes in general
 - Identify which level of texts students can read independently so they can practice, with success, all the reading strategies they are learning during reading workshop
- The Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA)
 - Identifies which spelling patterns students control, which they use but confuse
- On Demand Narrative Writing Assessment
 - Writing is compared to benchmarks on a continuum; strengths and challenges noted to plan instruction.
- Kindergarten Baselines
 - Letter and sound identification
 - Book and print awareness (Concepts of Print)
 - High frequency word list
 - On Demand writing

Teachers incorporate ongoing assessment into classroom practice to gather the information needed to adjust daily teaching and learning. These adjustments help to ensure students achieve targeted standards-based learning goals within each reading and writing unit. Students also gain insight and receive feedback about their learning through guided self-assessment. Teachers take anecdotal notes, use student work, checklists, or rubrics as records to inform further instruction.

Some formative assessments are:

- Observations
 - Conferences
 - Examination of reading notebooks or response logs where students record their learning or evidence of understanding
 - Writing notebooks
 - Reading logs
 - Pre- and post- unit on demand writing
 - Spelling tests

 - Portfolios are also used to collect samples of student work K-3 and are passed from teacher to teacher
- NJASK is administered to students in grades 3-5.
 - All district grade 3 students are administered a timed, prompted writing task in the late spring. The writing samples are scored by district teachers; the writing and scores are examined for information about the district's writing program and for evidence of students' writing habits and behavior.

K-5 Strengths

- All classroom teachers K-5 are using running records early in the year and again at the end of the year to determine students' independent reading levels. These assessments also guide teachers when placing readers in small groups for direct instruction at their independent level (*Clay,1985; Beaver,2006; Johnston,1992; Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, 2010; TCRWP K-8 Assessment for Independent Reading Level*)
- On demand writing assessments are given at the beginning of each writing unit of study and compared to a developmental continuum to evaluate students' abilities and also to make instructional decisions for that writing unit (*77% teachers report they are using pre- and post-assessments in writing units of study*).
- The Developmental Spelling Analysis is given to determine students' stage of spelling development and to plan their spelling instruction. (Ganske, 2000)
- A variety of assessments are being used to identify struggling learners and communicate with parents.
- Portfolios are kept at K-3 to facilitate teacher communication regarding student growth.
- Other assessment tools, such as the Gates-MacGinite Reading Test, and the Slosson Oral Reading Test are used as needed.

K-5 Recommendations

- Develop and offer on-going professional development that will expand teachers' ability to use running record data as assessment that informs instruction. (*Clay,1985; Beaver,2006; Johnston,1992; Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, 2010; TCRWP K-8 Assessment for Independent Reading Level*)
- Provide time at regular intervals for teachers to work together to look at assessments and student work.
- Offer teachers opportunities to discuss the purposes, rationale, and uses of various reading and writing assessments for the purpose of 1) understanding these assessments; 2) using the data created by these assessments successfully; 3) determining which assessments should be selected as common assessments for grades K-5 across the district (*72% of teachers report they use assessments daily to inform instruction; 81% use assessment to identify struggling readers/writers; 78% use assessments when talking with parents about students' strengths and challenges*).
- Provide teachers with optional assessment tools as needed.
- K-3 performance assessments piloted last year in informational reading/writing should be expanded and improved upon.
- A record keeping system (of teachers' choice) needs to be used by all teachers for the purpose of effectively and efficiently organizing and recording formative assessment data like portfolios and student work.
- Assessments chosen to evaluate students' performance and growth should align with the schools' goals using ongoing, embedded staff development through district and school-based workshops, share sessions, grade level planning, out-of-district staff development opportunities, and ongoing sessions scheduled through our district partnership with Columbia University.
- Improve consistency in the use and contents of portfolios (*70% of teachers report they find portfolios useful*).

Assessment informs and guides instruction. Using a wide variety of assessment tools allows teachers to determine student progress with respect to literacy development and plan instructional practice accordingly. Common assessments are administered in the beginning of each school year as baselines for reading, writing, and word study. They are used for placement and during the year as needed to monitor growth over time. The same assessments are used at the end of the year. They include:

Grades 6-12

- Writing Assessment (ERB)WrAP
- High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)
- NJASK administered to students in grades 6-8.

Teachers incorporate ongoing assessment into classroom practice to gather the information needed to adjust daily teaching and learning. These adjustments help to ensure students achieve targeted standards-based learning goals within each reading and writing unit. Students also gain insight and receive feedback about their learning through guided self-assessment. Teachers take anecdotal notes, use student work, checklists, or rubrics as records to inform further instruction. Some formative assessments are:

Grades 6-8 Strengths

- Observations
- Conferences
- Examination of reading notebooks or response logs where students record their learning or evidence of understanding
- Writing notebooks
- Reading logs
- Pre- and post- unit on demand writing
- Spelling tests

Grades 9-12 Strengths

- Observations
- Conferences
- Examination of student writing
- Pre- and post- reading and writing assessments
- Spelling/vocabulary tests
- Common assessments (i.e. Summer reading, literary analysis, vocabulary, AP writing and multiple choice)

6-12 Recommendations

- Develop and offer on-going professional development that will expand teachers' ability to use a variety of assessments that inform instruction.
- Provide time at regular intervals for general education and special education teachers to work together to look at assessments and student work.
- Offer teachers opportunities to discuss the purposes, rationale, and uses of various reading and writing assessments for the purpose of 1) understanding these assessments; 2) using the data created by these assessments successfully; 3) determining which assessments should be selected as common assessments for grades 6-12 across the district.
- Provide teachers with optional assessment tools as needed.
- A record keeping system (of teachers' choice) needs to be used by all teachers for the purpose of effectively and efficiently organizing and recording formative assessment data like portfolios and student work.
- Assessments chosen to evaluate students' performance and growth should align with the schools' goals (i.e., *CCSS*) using ongoing, embedded staff development through district and school-based workshops, share sessions, grade level planning, and out-of-district staff development opportunities.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES INCLUDING TECHNOLOGY

To implement a balanced literacy model, a wide range of curriculum materials are used in all district schools. Classroom libraries, grade level libraries, and book rooms are the most often used resources. Document cameras, LCD projectors and SMARTBoards are being incorporated

during lessons in shared/active reading, reading/writing workshop, and word study.

The quality and quantity of texts and technology available to teachers directly affect their ability to teach language arts literacy and the 21st century competencies successfully to all students. Materials that facilitate individualized and differentiated instruction need to reflect students' learning and interest levels.

Teachers rely on school and district designed curriculum resources, professional books, materials (provided by Teachers College staff developers K-8), and online resources as instructional resources.

The Teacher Resource Specialists for Language Arts, Technology, and Exceptionality (K-8) are seen as valuable resources that support both teachers and students.

K-5 Strengths

- All classrooms have leveled libraries that are accessible to students.
- Units and supplemental materials are posted and frequently updated on the Staff Resource Site.
- Teachers appreciate and use the resources available to them.
- Teachers use their professional experience and knowledge, as well as curricular suggestions, to make informed text choices for their classroom reading/writing programs.
- Teachers are collegial with their resources and share with one another via email, grade level meetings, lunch meetings, etc.
- Principals are highly supportive in helping teachers obtain needed materials.

6-12 Strengths

- All buildings have access to educational materials.
- Units and supplemental materials were recently posted on the district Staff Resource Site.
- Teachers use their professional experience and knowledge, as well as curricular suggestions, to make informed text choices for their classroom reading/writing programs.
- Teachers are collegial with their resources and share with one another via email, grade level meetings, lunch meetings, etc.
- Principals are highly supportive in helping teachers obtain needed materials.

K-5 Recommendations

- Provide each classroom in district with up-to-date technology needed to support instruction and ensure consistency, including special education and ESL classrooms. *(6% of teachers reported they had access to all of the technology they need to teach language arts, 53% said they had access to technology only if they reserve it, and 34% felt the technology they need is not available on a regular basis).*
- Continue teaching teachers to use and integrate technology effectively in language arts teaching *(6% of teachers rated their overall level of expertise in using technology in their language arts program as "expert," 69% as "intermediate," and 25% as "beginner").*

- Revise curriculum documents, per the *CCSS*, to include additional technology instruction and opportunities to use technology within the language arts curriculum.
- Review book collections to determine needs and establish consistency in:
 - The quantity, quality, and organizational systems in guided reading collections. Each school needs bookrooms or locations where multiple sets of books are housed for the purpose of guided reading/small group reading instruction and shared reading (*56% of teachers report they need more multiple copies of guided reading texts*).
 - All teachers need multiple copies of books for guided reading that reflect the student levels in their class and individual books for classroom libraries (*63% of teachers report they do not have enough books in leveled classroom libraries; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; O'Connor, et al., 2002*).
 - All teachers need additional books to support students' independent reading in reading units of study (*Over one-half of teachers report they do not have enough books for students when engaged in reading units of study; Allington, 2001*).
- Per the *CCSS*, classroom libraries need to be updated to engage a new generation of readers and to ensure students see themselves and the global community reflected in curriculum materials in all areas of literacy development.
- Grade levels need updated materials to support the district curriculum units in reading and writing as changes are made in response to the *CCSS*.
- It is recommended that all teachers receive the appropriate units of study on writing by Lucy Calkins and colleagues that will be published by Heinemann in spring of 2013.

Teachers at grades 4-5 need a primary professional resource for teaching reading workshop, specifically *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* (Calkins, et al., 2010). There are several copies of this set in each building, but teachers need to have their own copy, just as they have their own teacher's manual in math, social studies, etc.

- Teachers need further instruction on the lesson-planning program and how to write effect lesson plans.

6-12 Recommendations

- Provide each classroom in district with current and/or up-to-date technology (*6% of teachers reported they had access to all of the technology they need to teach language arts, 53% said they had access to technology only if they reserve it, and 34% felt the technology they need is not available on a regular basis*).
- Continue teaching teachers to use and integrate technology effectively in language arts teaching.
- Revise curriculum documents to include additional technology instruction and opportunities to use technology within the language arts curriculum.
- Review book collections to determine needs and establish consistency in:
 - The quantity, quality and organizational systems in reading collections. Each school needs centralized bookrooms or locations where multiple sets of books are housed for the purpose of building a library to reflect *CCSS* standards.
 - All teachers need multiple copies of books for reading that reflect the student levels in their class and individual books for classroom libraries (6-8).
- Classroom materials need to be updated to engage a new generation of readers and to ensure students see themselves and the global community reflected in curriculum materials in all areas of literacy development. (*Over half of the teachers believe that the genres, authors and*

time periods represented are only adequate or poor. We need to “revisit the texts” because “choices are outdated”; parents expressed a desire for “current material” and several mentioned that they would like student choice to play a role in facilitating a desire for reading outside of school).

- Grade levels need updated materials to support the district curriculum units in reading and writing.
- It is recommended that all teachers receive the appropriate units of study on writing by Lucy Calkins and colleagues that will be published by Heinemann in spring of 2013 (6-8). Teachers at grades 6-8 need a primary professional resource for teaching reading workshop, specifically *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* (Calkins & Tolan, 2010). There are several copies of this set in each building, but teachers need to have their own copy, just as they have their own teacher’s manual in math or social studies.
- Teachers need further instruction on the lesson-planning program and how to write effect lesson plans.

LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Grades K-8

Leadership and professional development opportunities are in place that enable instruction to take place in a coordinated, cohesive, and equitable manner among the K-8 schools. Leadership for the literacy program resides primarily with principals, the curriculum supervisors, the teacher resource specialists, and the Literacy Council with support from the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Building consistently excellent practice in literacy instruction across grade levels and among schools has been an important goal during the last several years in West Windsor-Plainsboro.

Professional development is a lifelong, collaborative learning process that supports the growth of individuals, teams, and schools through a combination of workshops, share groups, and daily engagement in learning. West Windsor-Plainsboro teachers are actively engaged in learning about literacy and participate in professional development in a variety of settings and structures.

Our district has a history of providing teachers with significant professional development opportunities. Teachers have two in-school professional half-days and are reimbursed for attendance at out-of-district workshops to support their individual professional improvement plans. Faculty meetings/grade level meetings are sometimes used as professional development time for and graduate-level courses are fully reimbursed.

The district has also been involved in a language arts literacy initiative with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University since 2004. This initiative has helped the district to develop and refine its reading and writing program based on national standards and research-based best practices in kindergarten through grade eight.

As a Teachers College affiliate school, K-8 teachers receive five days of professional

development directed by a staff developer during each school year; principals participate in these staff development days with their faculty. The topics covered by the staff developer are planned by the principals, the staff developer, the K-12 Language Arts Literacy Supervisor, and the Language Arts Resource Specialists based on the needs of the K-5 staff, district initiatives, and trends in literacy research.

K-8 administrators also receive professional development in meetings with Laurie Pessah, Senior Deputy Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) at Columbia University. Laurie meets with principals and supervisors five times during the school year, focusing on topics related to staff developers' work; she follows these conversations with visits to classrooms in the K-8 buildings.

From September to June, each of the K-8 schools sends ten teachers to Teachers College for five "Calendar Days" to develop knowledge of literacy teaching. Attendees share the information provided in these full-day seminars with their colleagues in faculty meetings or share groups. Also, the district sponsors a bus to Teachers College "Saturday Reunions" in the fall and spring so that all teachers can easily attend the day-long offering of literacy workshops.

The district's partnership with TCRWP has helped to build consistency in language arts curriculum and assessments within schools and across buildings. This initiative has offered teachers the opportunity to work with colleagues to expand and deepen their knowledge of literacy and best practice.

Grades 9-12

Professional development is a lifelong, collaborative learning process that supports the growth of individuals, teams, and schools through a combination of workshops, share groups, and daily engagement in learning. West Windsor-Plainsboro teachers are actively engaged in learning about literacy and participate in professional development in a variety of settings and structures.

Our district has a history of providing teachers with significant professional development opportunities. Teachers have two in-school professional half-days and are reimbursed for attendance at out-of-district workshops to support their individual professional improvement plans. Faculty meetings/ department meetings are sometimes used as professional development time for and graduate-level courses are fully reimbursed.

K-5 Strengths:

- Teacher willingness to take advantage of professional development opportunities in and out of the school district.
- Professional development opportunities are supported through the district budget and school allocation of time, space, and money.
- The district's nine-year reading/writing initiative with Teachers College, Columbia University is providing valuable professional development for K-8 teachers and supporting them as they implement research-based reading/writing workshop in their classrooms. Teachers are finding the TC sessions valuable in learning new teaching strategies,

broadening their literacy knowledge base, and in the time spent sharing ideas with colleagues.

- The share groups and professional book clubs offered to teachers in each building are well attended and provide opportunities for important conversation and exchange of ideas.
- A great variety of courses and seminars are provided for faculty in literacy and the technology.
- Principals support professional book clubs in their buildings by attending meetings and providing texts for teachers.
- New teachers have a mentor and 10 days to consult with and observe master teachers.
- A Teacher Resource Specialist is available to collaborate with teachers regarding curriculum and professional materials, lesson plans, etc.

6-12 Strengths:

- Professional development opportunities are supported through the district budget and school allocation of time, space, and money (6-8).
- The district's nine-year reading/writing initiative with Teachers College, Columbia University is providing valuable professional development for K-8 teachers and supporting them as they implement research-based reading/writing workshop in their classrooms. Teachers are finding the TC sessions valuable in learning new teaching strategies, broadening their literacy knowledge base, and in the time spent sharing ideas with colleagues.
- The share groups and professional book clubs offered to teachers in each building are well attended and provide opportunities for important conversation and exchange of ideas (6-8).
- New teachers have a mentor and 10 days to consult with and observe master teachers.

K-5 Recommendations:

- Teachers would benefit from more articulation and cross-grade level meetings. This articulation is critical in planning and discussing curriculum – what is working, how the topics/strategies/skills in one grade level support and extend the topics/strategies/skills taught in other grade levels, etc. (*nearly half of teachers surveyed report an interest in additional vertical articulation opportunities and nearly two-thirds an interest in horizontal articulation: "Opportunity to talk with and interact with other teachers deepens and extends teachers' understanding of the language arts curriculum and classroom practice."*).
- Beginning teachers will benefit from having master teachers who follow district curriculum as their mentor. The mentoring program offers suggestions and support to mentors and mentees, but the model of a superior, interested, and committed teacher is important when inexperienced teachers are learning and growing their craft (*Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004*).
- In addition to mentors, new teachers may benefit from a thoughtfully planned series of workshops, specifically for language arts and before they begin teaching in September, that support their understanding and implementation of the reading and writing curriculum. (Attendance at Teachers College workshop days and Saturday Reunion days may be encouraged, also). New teachers report that they need more time to talk about the delivery of curriculum with administrators, other teachers, and teacher resource specialists who can provide them with the specific support they need to access, understand, and deliver the language arts curriculum (*Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004*).

- Teachers would benefit from time to meet with grade level colleagues to discuss curriculum/instruction and/or observe other teachers' classrooms to see reading/writing workshop in action. (*Almost half of the teachers surveyed said they would like time to discuss daily implementation of curriculum and to visit colleagues' classrooms and have time to talk with that colleague about the lesson observed*).
- Continue district reading/writing initiative with Teacher College, Columbia University. (*88% of teachers reported professional development opportunities with TC helped them implement important reading/writing strategies in their classrooms and broaden their literacy knowledge base; 62% said this training allowed them to spend effective time with colleagues discussing classroom issues; 56% requested the staff developer visit more often and 72% asked that the staff developer be included as a presenter in district in-service days: "Working with Teachers College has made me a better reading and writing teacher, enabled me to differentiate instruction more effectively for my students, and offer my students more effective and engaging opportunities to develop reading and writing skills"*).

6-12 Recommendations:

- Encourage teachers to take advantage of professional development by providing alternate solutions for classroom coverage. Due to the lack of substitute supervision (9-12), teachers are reluctant to leave their classrooms.
- Professional development opportunities need to be supported through the district budget and school allocation of time, space, and money (9-12), i.e., Common Core Institute. (*57% believe that there is not adequate professional development to meet the needs of all learners, and 61% believe there is not enough collaboration with colleagues; teachers commented on the "limited funding to go to outside seminars" and they feel the process is "not convenient and doesn't encourage teachers to take part"*).
- Teachers would benefit from more articulation and cross-grade level meetings. This articulation is critical in planning and discussing curriculum – what is working, how the topics/strategies/skills in one grade level support and extend the topics/strategies/skills taught in other grade levels, etc. (*Write a plan for ongoing staff development to assist teachers in modifying instructional techniques that take advantage of reduced class size. These efforts may include such experiences as conference attendance, in-service courses, college courses, teacher support groups, and writing projects*).
<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/classsizessecondary>
- Offer a variety of courses and seminars providing information for faculty in literacy, instruction, and technology, i.e., brown bag. (*According to the National Council for Teachers of English, "Simply reducing class size alone does not necessarily result in improved achievement when instructional methods do not change. Therefore, attention to staff development while addressing class-size reduction goals will assure maximum benefits for students*). <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/classsizessecondary>
- Re-examine the structure of the administrative role to better support the teachers in the areas of performance, lesson design, resources, and pedagogy.
- New teachers should be especially encouraged to attend workshop days and Saturday Reunion days at Teachers College. If they could be paired with their mentors or other interested/experienced teachers, these experiences would be particularly helpful (6-8).

COMMUNICATION AND GRADING

Parents are their children's first reading and writing teachers. Because they do not spend every day with those children in their classrooms, however, they may be unfamiliar with what a reading and writing workshop look like, what balanced literacy is, and how their children are actually acquiring reading and writing skills over the course of a school year. It is our job as a district to familiarize parents with the district language arts program. School districts need a protocol for planning and implementing programs and relaying information to parents to ensure consistent messages reach them in a variety of easily accessible formats; parents need to feel information is readily available and the effort is being made to make curriculum and instruction transparent and understandable to people who are not professional teachers.

K-5 Strengths

- Teachers and parents have many opportunities to communicate regularly and easily.
 - Every teacher has an email account.
 - Every teacher has a website that is updated to provide parents with information.
 - Beginning in grade 3, all students have an agenda book that they use to record homework assignments and notes/messages from teachers and parents.
- Parent/teacher conferences are held after the first eight weeks of school and then on an ongoing basis as needed.
- The district website provides information for parents about district, school, and community activities.
- All current district curricula are being readied for publication on the district website.

6-12 Strengths

- Teachers and parents have many opportunities to communicate regularly and easily.
 - Every teacher has an email account.
 - Every teacher has a website that is updated to provide parents with information (6-8).
 - All students have an agenda book that they use to record homework assignments.
- Parent/teacher conferences are held after the first eight weeks of school (6-8) and then on an ongoing basis as needed (6-12).
- The district website provides information for parents about district, school, and community activities.
- All current district curricula are being readied for publication on the district website.
- Incorporation of Infinite Campus to further parent communication.

K-5 Recommendations

- Report cards need on-going revision for clarity, and to reflect changes in curriculum and the *CCSS (63% of K-3 teachers report wanting changes to their report cards; approximately 80% of parents said their understanding of their child's needs in reading and writing was strong or sufficient).*
- Implement parental communication protocols to keep parents adequately informed about literacy initiatives, events, and student progress *(77% of parents wish to continue to receive*

information about their child's reading and writing progress).

- Parent information programs/publications need to be on-going and easily accessible to all parents.
- More parent programs need to be offered, both during the day and in the evening, and written information that parents can access on the district website and/or in building newsletters needs to be a regular offering of the reading/writing program. Some of this information may need to be provided in a paper format for those parents who do not have access to a computer (*Over 60% of parents said their understanding of the reading and writing program was strong or sufficient; 42% requested information sessions that focused on reading/writing program goals; 70% requested web-based information to learn about reading/writing program goals; 48% requested support sessions to learn about reading/writing strategies and how they can support students at home; 52% requested information sessions that explained the new CCSS; 62% requested sessions that teach them about reading/writing assessments).*

6-12 Recommendations

- Lesson-planning program and grade book program need on-going revision for clarity, and to reflect changes in curriculum and the **CCSS**.
- Parent information programs/publications need to be on-going and easily accessible to all parents.
- More parent programs need to be offered, both during the day and in the evening, and written information that parents can access on the district website and/or in building newsletters needs to be a regular offering of the reading/writing program. Some of this information may need to be provided in a paper format for those parents who do not have access to a computer (9-12).
- Offer on-going norming sessions on rubric scoring using student work for the purpose of alignment.
- Align grade book weighting percentages, as well as point allocation. (*Teachers addressed a need for consistent expectations for both formal writing assignments [57%] and teaching grammar [52%]. One suggestion was a shared electronic folder for support material [35%].*)

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

The time, reflections, and feedback that constituencies throughout the district provided enabled the development of this report; multiple perspectives and data sources, including an external review, were utilized to provide the report with a more complete picture of the K-12 language arts literacy program. The goal was to recognize the strengths and best practices within schools and provide direction for areas of future growth. Emerging from the data are some key conclusions:

- Acknowledge the numerous strengths in the language arts literacy program including the workshop model, a challenging curriculum that has already begun to be aligned to CCSS, teacher resource specialists, differentiation for individual students based on teacher's assessment of multiple measures, and teachers' commitment to learning and their own professional growth. Overall, student achievement is strong.
- Expand current best practices so that they are more consistent across grade levels and classes. Ensure that instruction is always aligned to research-based best practices of balanced literacy instruction and the CCSS, and that it is continually revised as new research emerges.
- Adjust time spent on curriculum and instruction to align with most effective practices in literacy development. Provide on-going professional development opportunities across curriculum in all content areas for all teachers to meet the requirements of CCSS.
- Continue to look for ways to support the achievement of all students, at all grade levels, especially those struggling with reading and writing. Evaluate and strengthen support for students, especially for those struggling with literacy, in affirmation of our mission to develop the competencies of all of our students.
- Examine the level of support for coaching and supervision of teachers at the K-3, 4-5, and 6-12 levels.
- Examine how we assess student progress and use that information to inform practice, provide feedback, and report achievement. Create and offer ongoing professional development that will expand teachers' ability to use assessment data that informs instruction.
- Consider using portfolios to document student growth and inform smooth transitions from grade to grade.
- Revise report cards to reflect the changes made in the curriculum to meet the requirements of the CCSS.
- Update technology needed to support instruction and insure consistency across all schools, including teachers of special education and ESL.
- Update classroom libraries, print and digital, and collections of multiple copies of texts needed to engage a new generation of readers. Ensure students see themselves and the global community reflected in curriculum materials in all areas of literacy development.
- Provide further and continuing K-12 vertical and horizontal curriculum articulation. This will ensure an appropriately rigorous language arts program.

The district sees this review as an opportunity for the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District to continue development of a language arts literacy program that responds to the needs of 21st century learners and prepares all students for the demands of high school, college, and the

workforce. We hope to build not only skilled, but also excited, lifelong readers and writers.

The recommendations in this report will take time to implement in a thoughtful, coherent way. Further research and data collection may be necessary in some areas. Time and support for teacher professional development and additional funding for instructional resources, staff, and technology are critical to the successful implementation of these recommendations.

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