

2S Early Literacy

Principles of Professional Development

- High-quality professional development must connect to student learning goals that are clear and accepted by all. Professional development content is aligned with state literacy standards and district curriculum. Teachers focus on theory and practice underlying pedagogical content knowledge.
- Professional development involves active learning for teachers. Teachers make connections for what they are learning in professional development to classroom instruction.
- Professional development is embedded in the context of work in schools and classrooms. Teachers collaborate with instructional leaders such as principals, literacy coaches, and mentor teachers. Teachers are engaged in continuous and reflective processes of diagnostic teaching.
- Professional development is continuous and ongoing. Teachers need adequate time to engage in meaningful activity embedded in the daily routine of the school over an extended period of time. Long-term goal: teachers, with the support of literacy specialists, will continue to reflect on practice after they have participated in extended professional development.
- Professional development is based on an ongoing and focused inquiry related to teacher learning, student learning, and best practices in early literacy instruction. Active participation in professional development must be focused on inquiry and analysis related to their teaching. Through this process, the teacher makes successive intentional shifts in teaching based on the analysis of what students need to know, what instruction will support the students in developing knowledge or skill, and what the students learned through instruction.

- Coherence is evident in all aspects of the professional development. A systemic view in which professional development is seen as part of a focused effort on improving student learning is essential. District and building administrators agree on a course of action, focus resources (funding, technical resources) on that course, and then allow the necessary time for positive outcomes. All the stakeholders – state department of education, university pre-service and in-service program faculty, and district and building administrators – are willing to work together for coherence across the professional development system.

Prepared by the UETF Working Group on Early Literacy

Adequate Staffing to Support Early Literacy

Staffing that ensures the best preparation for children in the early stages of literacy learning needs to support differentiated instruction that responds to the great variation in student profiles and proficiency. First among the requirements to adequately support differentiated instruction is a small student-to-teacher ratio. This can be accomplished by having a cadre of professionals and assistants supporting literacy instruction.

Classroom teachers should be proficient in teaching beginning readers and writers and specifically prepared to work with English language learners. Beyond the basics of English phonology and grammar and of competence in reading instruction, certified teachers should be required to know the basics of first- and second-language acquisition and understand cultural diversity from a positive, additive perspective. The current requirements for preparing teachers to teach reading and diverse learners need to be strengthened and guaranteed.

Reading specialists and literacy coaches should be part of the core faculty where literacy instruction begins. The role of the specialist is critical in supporting differentiated instruction by analyzing frequent assessment data to monitor progress in decoding and comprehension that, in turn, informs appropriate instruction to be delivered to small groups of readers. Specialists are also critical for ongoing, embedded professional development that supports both new and veteran teachers in excellent literacy instructional practices. Especially for early literacy learning, occupational therapists are also critical members of the educational team. The coordination required between gross and fine motor skills and conceptual development takes place in the early stages of learning to read and write.

All districts should implement paraprofessional and volunteer training. Paraprofessionals and volunteers should not be used to supplant instruction. Along with specialists and the classroom teacher, they should participate in a well-articulated safety-net system based on frequent assessments leading to early recognition of potential problems as well as differentiated instruction/intervention made possible by utilizing all relevant adults in literacy instruction and practice.

All members of the literacy team would benefit from having cross-cultural understanding to provide culturally relevant curriculum and instruction and to support communication between home and school contexts.

Ongoing school- and district-based professional development planned specifically to support the instructional model should be required of all educators engaged in early literacy instruction. Since this is a considerable investment in individuals as well as teams of educators who work together, stability in staffing

individual schools should be a very high priority. When coaches, teachers, specialists, and assistants have the opportunity to collaborate and grow expertise in a common practice, their students are provided with consistent instructional methods and objectives from year to year. This reduces the confusion that results from frequent shifts in teaching approaches and permits students to focus on learning to read and write rather than on changing routines in the classroom.

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