

Chapter 1: Development of the *Delaware Literacy Resource Guide*

RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Delaware educators recognize that literacy is the cornerstone of education and provides the building blocks for success. To be literate within contemporary society requires students to read, view, write, speak, listen, and think critically in order to make meaning of written, visual, and technologically based information. Within the school context, literacy competence is central to achievement in all areas of learning and remains a priority for all students as they progress through the early, middle, and later years of school in their journey to become lifelong learners and contributing members of society. According to the definition adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on February 15, 2008:

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Twenty-first century readers and writers need to:

- ♦ Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- ♦ Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- ♦ Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- ♦ Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneously information
- ♦ Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media text
- ♦ Attend to the ethically responsibilities required by these complex environments

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores from 2007 provided strong evidence that changes had to be made to literacy instruction at all grade levels; slightly more than 26% of eighth graders read below a “basic” level. NAEP documents describe the “basic” level in this manner:

Eighth-grade students performing at the Basic level should demonstrate a literal understanding of what they read and be able to make some interpretations. When reading text appropriate to eighth grade, they should be able to identify specific aspects of the text that reflect overall meaning, extend the ideas in the text by making simple inferences, recognize and relate interpretations and connections among ideas in the text to personal experience, and draw conclusions based on the text.” (NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade: <http://nces.ed.gov/help/sitemap.asp>).

McKenna and Walpole (2007) point out that this is not a new finding. In 1969, the year the NAEP originated, a similar statistic was found in the analysis of the NAEP scores. Some students in the NAEP study did not achieve sufficient fluency in automaticity of sight word recognition in the elementary grades. Vocabulary knowledge was also found to be inadequate for the requirements of content reading. In addition, a growing number of second language learners required more time to learn a second language and thus fell behind the language development of native English speakers.

Torgesen (as cited in McKenna & Walpole, 2007) compared proficient adolescent readers with less fluent readers and found several differences. The less proficient readers:

- Are less fluent with sight word vocabularies, which contain many thousands of words less than average readers.
- Understand the meaning of fewer words.
- Have less prior knowledge to support the integration of new conceptual knowledge.
- Are less skilled in using comprehension strategies to extend and elaborate comprehension as well as being unable to repair comprehension when it breaks down.
- May continue to struggle with basic word identification processes in middle and high school.

In her research, R. E. O'Connor (2007) found that some of these adolescent students struggling with word recognition may even require work in phonemic awareness, a foundational decoding skill, using the same manipulative strategy that is used with primary-grade students as part of their word-recognition intervention.

Researchers have documented that many students experiencing little success and continual frustration tend to experience continued failure. Students enter school with different levels of early literacy knowledge based partially on the types and number of hours of reading to which they have been exposed. Some students enter with as many as 1,200 hours of literacy experiences while others have had very few. Students who are behind in reading and language development lose more and more ground as they try to keep pace with their peers. They lose the opportunity to practice and to develop their proficiency in decoding and automatic sight word recognition, as well as extending vocabulary knowledge and concepts about the world. Struggling readers often have little intrinsic motivation to read. They are thus unable to develop a sense of self-efficacy, the belief that they can and will become proficient readers. This lack of self-efficacy usually contributes to the development of a negative self-image which in turn often results in behavior problems. Eventually, many of these students drop out of school impeding their opportunity to become contributing members of society.

In 2006, the National Governor's Association (NGA) announced that eight states were selected to receive grants of up to \$50,000 to help develop literacy plans and policies to improve adolescent literacy achievement. "With more than eight million adolescents between grades four and 12 identified as 'struggling readers,' states must focus on adolescent literacy education if they are to graduate more students from high school prepared for college and the workforce," said NGA Center Director John Thomasian. "Literacy instruction is one of the best tools we have to prepare all students for today's global economy" (NGA Awards Grants to Improve Adolescent Literacy 2/15/2006 from <http://www.nga.org>). Delaware was one of the eight states

to receive this grant, and as a result the Delaware Department of Education developed a comprehensive plan for systemic improvement in literacy achievement in grades K–12 known as the *Delaware Literacy Resource Guide*.

GOALS OF THE *DELAWARE LITERACY RESOURCE GUIDE*

The *Delaware Literacy Resource Guide* thus has three goals:

Goal 1:

To facilitate the teaching of all students to read, write, and construct meaning in a developmentally appropriate sequence which includes instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, and to foster motivation.

Goal 2:

To build literacy skills for all students that are consistent with the expectations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Response to Intervention (RTI).

Goal 3:

To ensure all teachers and all administrators have access to high-quality professional development and are well supported to promote literacy so that all students achieve grade-level expectations.

To accomplish these goals, this guide, when used in conjunction with district and school data, can serve as a tool to improve literacy programs thus impacting student achievement in all content areas by:

1. Raising awareness that literacy instruction is shared by all content areas throughout grades K–12.
2. Guiding and ensuring educators' decisions about high-quality professional development to meet the needs of ALL educators and students.
3. Ensuring scientifically based literacy research and best practices are implemented.
4. Promoting collaboration among educators, families, and communities to serve students' literacy needs.
5. Ensuring a consistent statewide and coordinated approach to the teaching of literacy by aligning instruction to the Delaware State Content Standards and Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs).
6. Recognizing and addressing the different learning needs of students.
7. Emphasizing the continuity of literacy learning through the early, middle, and later grades of school and across content areas.
8. Facilitating school-level planning through distributed instructional leadership that includes literacy improvement targets, aligned to state targets and based on formative and summative data.
9. Aligning student-achievement goals in district and school Success Plans.

