# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

> **"** Once you learn to read, you will be **forever free**.**"**
>
> – Frederick Douglass

Among the many goals we have set for our schools, enabling children to become proficient readers may be one of the most crucial tasks. Acquiring literacy skills is a key educational outcome that also unlocks the world for children by allowing them to encounter new ideas and information, communicate with others and express themselves effectively in school and daily life.

This plan does not seek to offer a one-size-fits-all prescription to be applied across the District's diverse learning environments. Rather it offers guidance and describes and illustrates best practices related to literacy. It outlines the District's aspirations for what high-quality, evidence-based literacy experiences could look like and, more importantly, what it would mean for all children to have these sorts of experiences. Created as part of the District of Columbia's Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant, this CLP seeks to provide a roadmap or guide that local educational agencies (LEAs), schools and early childhood programs can use to develop their own local literacy plans grounded in evidence-based practices and customized to the unique community contexts and instructional approaches of the District's culturally- and linguistically diverse schools and early learning programs.

This plan was developed by a working group of nearly 50 District educators and literacy experts representing diverse perspectives and professional expertise, including classroom teachers in schools and early learning programs ranging from birth through postsecondary; school and LEA administrators from both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the public charter sector; literacy and instructional coaches; academic researchers; and staff from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Working in nine subcommittees focused on specific age ranges or student populations, these working group members reviewed the research and evidence-based literacy practices, outlined a portrait of a reader at each developmental stage, identified useful tools and resources and drafted relevant sections of the plan.

To provide a guide and resource for early learning programs, school and LEA staff, and the public, this plan proceeds in the following fashion:

- **SECTION 1:** INTRODUCTION

- **SECTION 2:** LITERACY INSTRUCTION

    - LITERACY INSTRUCTION: BIRTH THROUGH AGE 5

    - STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR GRADES K-12

    - LITERACY INSTRUCTION: GRADES K-5

    - LITERACY INSTRUCTION: GRADES 6-12

- **SECTION 3:** MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS FOR LITERACY

- **SECTION 4:** EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR LITERACY

- **SECTION 5:** DIVERSE LEARNERS

    - SUPPORTS FOR MULTILINGUAL AND ENGLISH LEARNERS

    - SPECIAL EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS

    - READING DIFFICULTIES

    - DYSLEXIA

- **SECTION 6:** COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESS MONITORING

- **SECTION 7:** PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT

# The District of Columbia defines *literacy* as:

*the ability to talk, listen, read and write, leading to the ability to communicate and learn. It is a combination of skills in vocabulary, receptive and expressive language, phonological awareness, knowledge of print, comprehension and printed materials.*

Literacy skills develop from birth through adulthood and support individuals in their daily activities inside and outside school. At every point along the cradle to career educational continuum, age-appropriate language and literacy skills form the foundation for learning across all educational domains. Learning to read by third grade is a predictor of later school success and helps make the acquisition of further knowledge possible (Hernandez, 2012). As learners progress through schooling and into the workforce, literacy is key to achieving self-sufficiency. In our information and digital era, an individual's ability to navigate text, communicate in writing, and assess sources of information is essential to successfully navigating the world and meeting many of our basic needs. Communications competencies, including reading, writing and speaking, are in high-demand across the labor market and are required for 90 percent of future jobs (Carnevale, Fasules and Campbell, 2020). Adults with strong literacy skills are much less likely to earn low wages or be dependent on public benefits than those with low literacy skills (Wood, 2010). Literacy also provides many of the experiences that enable individuals and communities to build meaning, live together and thrive: reading a book to a child, sending a message of care or concern to a loved one, encountering sacred texts, learning to see through the eyes of those whose beliefs and perspectives may differ from our own.

However, for too many District residents and students, these essential skills—and the joy and opportunities they confer—remain elusive. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), a survey of adult skills sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), found that 22 percent of District residents had literacy skills at the lowest levels of proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Although many adults who live in the District completed their education elsewhere, or many decades ago, data on the literacy skills of students enrolled in District schools today suggests that literacy proficiency remains a challenge.

The District has made considerable progress improving student outcomes over the past decade, with gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exceeding those of most other states. Although the District continues to make progress in most areas measured by NAEP, reading scores for District students were statistically flat in fourth grade from 2017 to 2019; while District students made real growth in eighth-grade reading, progress in reading for District eighth graders has been less than in math (Nation's Report Card, 2019).

More troubling, significant gaps still exist between students experiencing disadvantages, students of color, students with disabilities and English learners, compared to their peers not in these subgroups. In 2019, only 27.9 percent of Black/African American students and 37.5 percent of Hispanic/Latino students met or exceeded expectations on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) English language arts (ELA) assessment, compared to 84.8 percent of white students. In addition, only 9.8 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations. Just 20.2 percent of students identified as English learners met or exceeded expectations on PARCC ELA. And only 21.3 percent of students identified as "at risk" (a group that includes students who are homeless, in foster care, in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or support through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or one or more years behind in high school) met or exceeded expectations in reading. These results suggest that, among these populations of students, far too few are experiencing the kinds of literacy learning and success necessary to access opportunities and fulfill their potential.

The roots of literacy are laid early—from children's earliest moments and well before they enter school. And so, too, do literacy inequities begin early. According to findings from the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a holistic, population based tool used to measure children's ability to meet age appropriate developmental expectations at school entry, only 44 percent of District pre-K learners are considered "on-track" in the language and cognition domain, which includes language and early literacy skills, compared to 78-83 percent of children on track across the other developmental domains assessed by the EDI (UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, 2020). These data suggest that many children aren't gaining the rich language and early literacy experiences—either in home or in early care and education programs—that lay the foundations for later literacy.

It doesn't have to be this way. Children's attainment (or nonattainment) of literacy is neither the unavoidable outcome of innate aptitudes nor an inscrutable mystery beyond our understanding. Rather, through decades of research—from across multiple fields, including child and human development, linguistics, neuroscience, cognitive science and special education—scientists have developed a substantial body of research that enables us to understand what happens in the brain when children and adults engage in language and literacy tasks; the component skills and knowledge that compose literacy; how the brain acquires these language and literacy skills; and the instructional practices and learning experiences that enable children to master those skills (National Reading Panel, 2000; National Research Panel, 1998; Wolf, 2007). Crucially, this evidence also indicates that, with appropriate instruction and supports, even children and adults who struggle with literacy can become successful readers.

The District of Columbia's Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP) seeks to move the District, its schools, early childhood programs, educators and communities toward a reality in which all learners receive the effective literacy instruction and evidence-based interventions they need in order to become successful readers and all educators have the professional learning and supports they need to deliver effective instruction and evidence-based interventions.

The **Vision for Literacy** in the District of Columbia is that all learners ages birth through grade 12 will have access to high-quality literacy instruction and early experiences.

The **Guiding Principles for Literacy** provide guidance on the implementation of the District's Literacy Vision. To achieve this vision, the following conditions must be in place for all learners:

1. **INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION:** All learners should have access to an equitable, culturally and linguistically responsive, high-quality literacy curriculum and learning environment.

2. **ASSESSMENT:** High-quality literacy instruction must be accompanied by a comprehensive, standards-aligned formative and summative assessment system that is accessible to all learners, including students with disabilities and English learners.

3. **MULTI-TIERED SUPPORTS:** Using a multi-tiered framework, LEAs, schools and early care and educational settings provides proactive, data-driven systems and structures that support prevention, early identification and literacy interventions to support all learners, including students with disabilities and English learners.

4. **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:** Educators, administrators, teacher educators and school/program staff must have access to on-going and embedded professional learning opportunities aligned to evidence- and research-based practices and adult learning theory to improve literacy outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and English learners.

This CLP reflects the District's commitment to and belief that all children—across the District's diversity of communities, families, cultures, languages and abilities—have the capacity to and can, with the right instruction and supports, become successful readers.

# SECTION 2: LITERACY INSTRUCTION



> " The whole world opened up to me when I learned to read."
>
> - Mary McLeod Bethune

"The whole world opened up to me when I learned to read." Mary McLeod Bethune reminds us of the power that exists within educational spaces and the impact learning has on the futures of all learners. Literacy sparks curiosity, wisdom and adventure. Reading gives learners a window into the world and into their futures. Because reading is a foundational life skill that unlocks access to learning across all other content areas, it is imperative that all educators leverage a literacy framework that includes both 1) evidence-based strategies and 2) culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.

## THE SCIENCE OF READING

The District's Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP) highlights three main research-based theoretical frameworks for reading instruction that are proven to increase student achievement while also improving teacher practice in literacy:

1. The Simple View of Reading, developed by Philip Gough and William Tunmer
2. The Six Stages of Reading Development, developed by Jeanne Chall
3. Scarborough's Reading Rope, developed by Hollis Scarborough

**The Simple View of Reading (SVR)** is a theoretical framework that defines the skills contributing to the early stages of reading comprehension. According to Gough and Tunmer (1986) reading comprehension is achieved when you pair two main skills: decoding (accurate and fluent word reading) and language comprehension (understanding the meaning of the words).

| DECODING (D) | X | LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION (LC) | = | READING COMPREHENSION (RC) |
|---|---|---|---|---|

(Learning to Read: The Simple View of Reading from the National Center on Improving Literacy)

Learning to decode and comprehend language does not develop naturally, it requires formal, systematic instruction in both word reading and comprehension starting as early as preschool. In order to support accurate and fluent word reading, the beginning stages of literacy instruction must support the development of:

- **Visual acuity** or the ability to see each letter and the word clearly;
- **Auditory perception** or the ability to produce the sound of each letter and understand what is heard; and
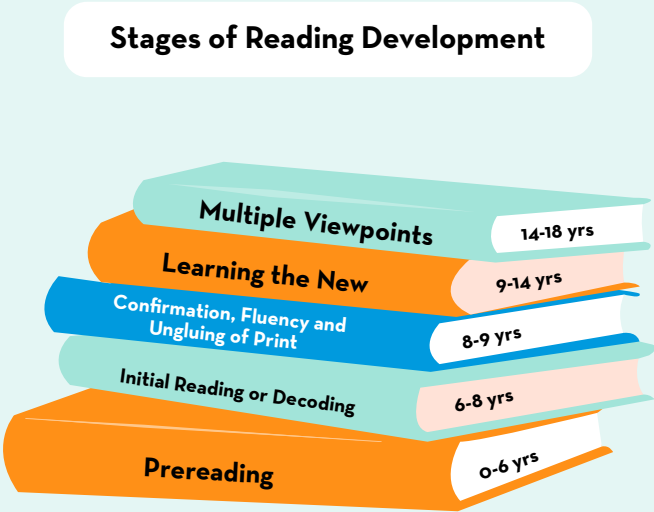- **Cognitive skills** where individual sounds (phonemes) are put together to pronounce the word.

Reading words accurately with increased fluency helps set the stage for figuring out what the text means. Repetitive practice supports development and the beginning of reading words for meaning thus strengthening comprehension. In addition to the visual and auditory repetition, background knowledge on a topic further supports a student's ability to read for meaning. If a learner understands the "why" of a topic or subject, their ability to comprehend the text is increased.

According to Reading Rockets (2019), the SVR formula and research say that a learner's reading comprehension can be predicted when we know their abilities to both decode and comprehend language. Educators who leverage SVR framework to support students' reading achievement should keep these considerations in mind:

- The SVR formula makes clear that strong reading comprehension cannot occur unless both decoding skills and language comprehension abilities are strong.
- Intervention for struggling readers is effective only when it addresses the student's specific weakness, which may be decoding, language comprehension, or both.
- Decoding and language comprehension skills are separable for both assessment and teaching, although both are required to achieve reading comprehension.
- SVR is supported by scientific research.

Ultimately, leveraging the SVR formula will support educators in not only understanding *how* students learn to read, but also *how to support* students if they are showing deficiencies in one or both areas of the formula. See the Professional Learning and Teacher Development section of this document for strategies around supporting educators in leveraging this framework.
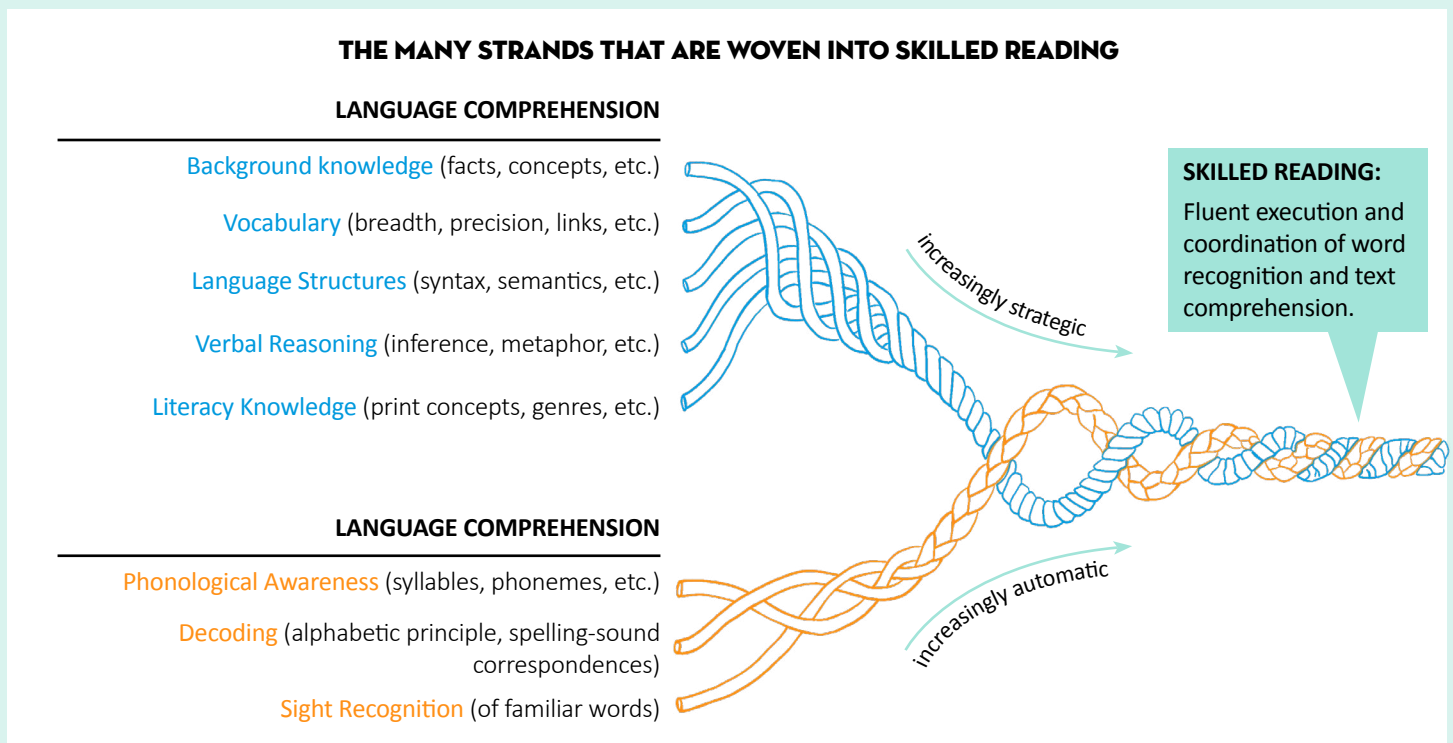
**The Six Stages of Reading Development** is a framework developed by Jeanne Chall (1983) who believed that learners needed a blended learning approach to develop as readers. Chall argues that students not only need a foundation in explicit and direct phonics instruction, but they also need to participate in reading rich environments to deepen knowledge and thought. As such, she developed the Chall's Stages of Reading Development to support the notion that in every stage learners have benchmarks that illustrate their progress on reading development. Each stage clearly outlines an age range, mastery characteristics, how to reach mastery and the correlation between reading and listening. (From the Stages of Reading Development, here)

**Stages of Reading Development**

- Multiple Viewpoints — 14-18 yrs
- Learning the New — 9-14 yrs
- Confirmation, Fluency and Ungluing of Print — 8-9 yrs
- Initial Reading or Decoding — 6-8 yrs
- Prereading — 0-6 yrs

**Chall's Stages of Reading Development**

| STAGE | | AGE | KEY CHARACTERISTICS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Pre-reading and pseudo-reading | Up to 6 | Pretend reading, turning pages. Some letter recognition, especially letters in own name. Often predicting stories and words. |
| 1 | Initial reading and decoding | 6-7 | Reading simple texts containing high frequency lexis. Chail estimated about 600 words understood. |
| 2 | Confirmation and fluency | 7-8 | Reading more quickly, accurately, playing more attention to meaning of words. How many written words understood? 3,000. |
| 3 | Reading for learning | 9-14 | Reading knowledge as motivation. |
| 4 | Multiplicity and complexity | 14-17 | Responding critically to what they read and analyzing texts. |
| 5 | Construction and reconstruction | 18+ | Reading selectively and forming opinions. |

**THE MANY STRANDS THAT ARE WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING**

**LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION**

Background knowledge (facts, concepts, etc.)

Vocabulary (breadth, precision, links, etc.)

Language Structures (syntax, semantics, etc.)

Verbal Reasoning (inference, metaphor, etc.)

Literacy Knowledge (print concepts, genres, etc.)

*increasingly strategic*

**SKILLED READING:**
Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

**LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION**

Phonological Awareness (syllables, phonemes, etc.)

Decoding (alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences)

Sight Recognition (of familiar words)

*increasingly automatic*

https://dyslexiaida.org/scarboroughs-reading-rope-a-groundbreaking-infographic/

In addition to understanding *how* students learn to read (SVR) and the associated developmental stages (Chall's six stages), it is also vital that educators have a strong understanding of the intricacies related to each stage within reading development. Theorist Hollis Scarborough (2001) is credited with the development of **Scarborough's Reading Rope** which explores the intricacies within each strand (skill) needed to develop strong, proficient readers. The Reading Rope (illustrated above) is made up of upper and lower strands. When combined, the strands lead to skilled reading. Not only does the rope metaphor illustrate the intricacies of reading development well, it highlights the interconnectedness of language comprehension and word recognition.

When an educator understands each strand, critical planning and instructional decisions can be made to address the learning and development of all students. Additionally, the nuanced research allows educators to identify reading development gaps that may be hindering a student's pathway to proficient reading.

In addition to educators having a firm grasp of the three research-based reading frameworks, it is equally important that educators establish a foundation of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, which seek to ensure **all learners** have access to an **equitable, culturally and linguistically responsive, high-quality literacy curriculum and learning environment.**

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

**"Culture"** includes the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts" (livescience.com). In order to create welcoming and safe spaces, educator and student cultures must be honored, respected, learned and recognized. This involves opportunities to learn and share characteristics from our individual cultures in order to learn from and respect similarities and differences.

The research of Gloria Ladson-Billings in the early 1990s provided extensive research on **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)** to support educators in reaching all students and debunking myths about teaching African American students. Her scholarship has provided educators the foundational knowledge needed to support CRP. Building on Ladson-Billings' work, Django Paris and H. Samy Alim developed **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP),** where their research views "schools as places where the cultural ways of being in communities of color are sustained, rather than eradicated."

In the early 1990s, many educators believed that African American students were not achieving at the same pace as white students due to differences in their abilities; Ladson-Billings worked to shift the deficit thinking "cannot" to "can" through teacher preparation programs to ensure new teachers had strategies to address the needs of students in urban environments. According to Ladson-Billings, three components of the CRP framework must be implemented in tandem to respond to societal inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2014, see diagram below). Paris and Samy H. Alim's introduction of CSP builds on the *asset-based pedagogies* view by reinforcing that students' diversity adds value and strength to classrooms and communities found here.

| COMPONENT | DEFINITION | HOW TO IMPLEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Academic Success | The intellectual growth students experience as result of classroom instruction and learning experiences. | As a facilitator of learning, this is the opportunity to tap into developing metacognitive skills with learners during daily classroom instruction which involves various ways to reflect and respond to learning materials and activities in a safe and inviting way. Learners will be encouraged to ask questions and reflect on learning which will increase academic ownership and buy-in of content. |
| Cultural Competence | The ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultural origins while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture. | As an educator, ensure that you understand (know about and honor) the importance of culture and its role in education and the community. This will require a critical examination of one's own identity and culture to strengthen instructional practice. As diverse experiences will be celebrated and utilized throughout learning, all learners will see themselves and others during their learning experiences. |
| Critical Consciousness | The ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom and use the school knowledge to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems. | Educators have the opportunity to make classroom content relevant and connected to the real world so that students can develop and increase a socio-political mindset in which they are invited to recognize, evaluate and address issues in their individual environments. |

Zaretta Hammond (2015) also draws on the research of Ladson-Billings (1995) and adds neuroscience to the understanding of asset-based education. Hammond argues that **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)** is not a "bag of tricks" but instead a "pedagogical approach firmly rooted in learning theory and cognitive science" (Hammond, 2015). There is a transfer that must happen between pedagogy and practice to ensure the framework materializes into student growth, learning and development. Hammond's *Ready for Rigor,* A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching allows educators to unpack the necessary tools needed to support the whole learner while also exploring, reflecting and confronting their individual ideals, values and biases that come into the learning space and in some instances hinder the brain development of learners. Hammond writes, "the four core areas of the framework of are connected through the principles of brain-based learning." Below is a chart adapted from Hammond's *Ready for Rigor* Framework. (Hammond, 2015, p. 17)

| PRACTICE AREA | DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE |
|---|---|
| Awareness | Practitioners have the opportunity to explore the development of their sociopolitical lens, bringing consciousness to privilege and biases to ultimately challenge societal inequities. |
| Learning Partnerships | The focus here is on trust-building with students across difference to ensure deeper learning can happen in an environment that partners around social-emotional learning. |
| Information Processing | This practice focuses on building students' intellective capacity so that they can engage in deeper, more complex learning tasks. Here, practitioners get the tools needed to engage students in a meaningful way. |
| Community Building | In this area, practitioners focus on the learning environment to ensure that students feel socially and intellectually safe. Providing the safe space will allow students to be more self-directed with learning. |

Adapted from the *Ready for Rigor* Framework in Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain (Hammond, 2015).

As we consider what will work best for learners across the District, we must employ the practices, strategies and tools from CRT, CSP and neuroscience to support diverse students. Simultaneously, we must engage in learning and reflection to ensure educational spaces are safe and inclusive and support the needs of all learners with respect and acknowledgment of their individual cultural assets.
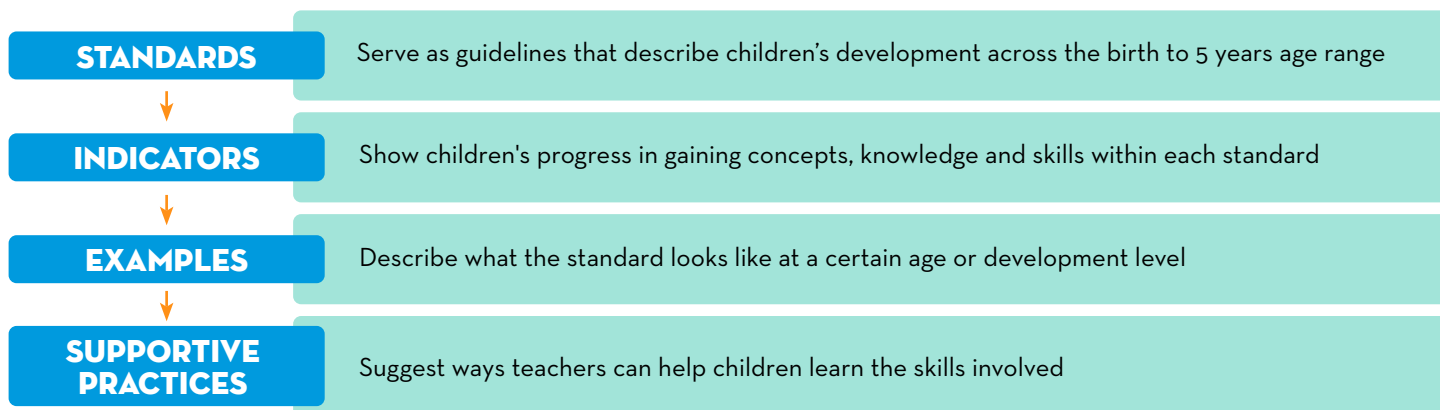
By coupling research-based reading instruction frameworks with culturally responsive and relevant strategies, District educators can support improved literacy outcomes for all students, regardless of content, grade level, or student demographics. In the next three subsections, the CLP will share relevant research and specific strategies for three age groups of literacy learners: birth through age 5, grades K-5 and grades 6-12.

Babies are born able to process language and quickly become aware of the language(s) used around them in order to begin practicing using language on their own. Reading, talking and singing with infants and young children helps to build their understanding of the language they will come to use themselves. Reading to young children helps them understand how text works and positions them to increase their language and literacy skills throughout their lives.

The early literacy phase is the time from birth to age 5 before children are conventional readers (Raising Readers, 2020). Early language and literacy skills lay the foundation upon which every child's education rests. In turn, a critical role of laying this foundation is families', caregivers' and early educators' understanding of how children learn to read. When a young learner receives the necessary experiences to develop strong language and literacy skills, they become able to achieve personal autonomy and pursue their aspirations. If families, caregivers and early educators provide rich experiences that reflect an understanding of the pedagogy of early literacy and how young children learn, all children can develop age-appropriate early language and literacy skills.

The District of Columbia Early Learning Standards (DC ELS) include indicators for children birth through pre-K, as well as exit expectations for pre-K and kindergarten learners. DC ELS focus on the whole child and include a broad range of domains because young children's learning and development are interrelated and cross all areas of learning, including communication, language and literacy. These standards provide educators and families with information about expectations for what children need to know and do and describe how children progress at various ages and development levels. The DC ELS acknowledge the essential role of the teacher in intentionally guiding children's learning and development in a high-quality early care and education environment in partnership with families. The chart below shows how the early learning standards are organized.

| STANDARDS | Serve as guidelines that describe children's development across the birth to 5 years age range |
| INDICATORS | Show children's progress in gaining concepts, knowledge and skills within each standard |
| EXAMPLES | Describe what the standard looks like at a certain age or development level |
| SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES | Suggest ways teachers can help children learn the skills involved |

# ELEMENTS OF EARLY LITERACY INSTRUCTION

The District recognizes the need to have a comprehensive approach that integrates the different elements of effective literacy instruction which intentionally aligns strategies and supports in achieving the established goals for all children in culturally and linguistically responsive ways in partnership with families. The District's approach to early literacy is grounded in the belief that by using a multi-tiered framework, local LEAs, schools and early care and education programs can provide proactive, data-driven systems and structures that support prevention, early identification and literacy interventions to support all learners, including students with disabilities and English learners.

Early literacy skills have a clear and strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills (i.e., decoding, oral reading, fluency, reading comprehension, writing and spelling). Before children start school, they become aware of systematic patterns of sounds in spoken language, manipulate sounds in words, recognize words and break them apart into smaller units, learn the relationship between sounds and letters and build their oral language and vocabulary skills. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) found that all these skills were precursors to children's later growth in the ability to decode and comprehend text, to write, and to spell. Experiences at home and in early care and education programs contribute to children's development of these early literacy skills.

Effective early literacy instruction has important elements that assist in improving children's early literacy learning experiences. Each element of effective early literacy instruction has a direct connection to the DC ELS with a specific standard(s) and supportive practices facilitated by each element. (Please see appendix A for more details.) These elements include:

## Element 1: Positive Adult-Child Relationships

Young children's language and literacy learning benefit from interactions with adults who are responsive to their interests and sensitive to their current level of language development (Slegers, 1996; Dickinson & Neuman, 2007). During the infant and toddler years, children need many one-on-one interactions with caring adults to support their oral literacy development. For example, families can talk to very young children and respond to their attempts to engage with simple language and frequent eye contact.

Young children also need families, caregivers and early educators to play with, talk with, sing to and listen to them. Fingerplay and other learning games can play an important role in developing children's language and literacy skills. In preschool, children need positive and nurturing relationships with teachers who can model reading and writing behaviors, engage in responsive conversations and foster their interests in learning to read and write (NAEYC, 1998; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Learning occurs within the context of relationships. Caring families, caregivers and early educators matter in a young child's life. Responsive and supportive interactions with adults are essential to children's learning. Positive adult-child relationships are the foundation for other adult practices that support children's language and literacy development, such as: being intentional in initiating and engaging in back-and-forth exchanges; responding to verbal and nonverbal cues; responding to statements, questions and texts read aloud to children; and skill building.

## Element 2: A Print-Rich Environment

Children need materials to support their literacy development. Books, papers, writing tools and functional signs that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to young children should be visible throughout the learning environment or in children's homes (e.g., collecting menus, pointing out signs and indicating where there is print in the environment) so that children can see and use these materials for multiple purposes. In such settings, families, caregivers and early educators can draw children's attention to specific letters and words in the environment whenever it is appropriate.

When children have access to writing tools with which to express themselves in symbolic ways, they are motivated to learn. Children also engage in more reading and writing activities in print-rich environments (Slegers, 1996; The Access Center, 2007). Families, caregivers and early educators can provide age-appropriate materials such as crayons, markers, papers and manipulatives to support infants and toddlers.

In addition to accessible writing tools, children also need time to explore literacy. During free-choice periods, families, caregivers and early educators can encourage children to engage in literacy-related activities such as:

- Sharing and sending messages to friends;
- Creating menus for a restaurant;
- Writing grocery lists; and
- Making invitations to classroom events.

These activities help children understand what readers and writers do before they acquire the skills necessary to read and write. When literacy is an integral part of their daily activities, children actively construct their own literacy knowledge and strategies and learn to read and write naturally and playfully (Teale & Yokota, 2000).

## Element 3: Integrated Language Explorations in the Curriculum

The curriculum should be intellectually engaging and challenging to expand children's knowledge of the world and vocabulary. Investigating real topics or events that are meaningful to children should be a primary feature of the curriculum. When children investigate, they have opportunities to ask questions and use their literacy skills to explore their world and the world around them.

In formal early care and education settings, early educators can establish time each day for learners to present their thoughts in symbolic ways (e.g., drawings or illustrations). Intentionally explaining vocabulary and content (at home or in formal care settings) can support children's acquisition of rich subject-specific vocabulary (e.g., telescope as part of a unit about space and planets). Most young children are eager to learn literacy when they discover that it is useful for exploring the environment and for communicating with others (NAEYC, 1998; Neuman, 1998; Lin, 2001).

Families, caregivers and early educators may use the practices below in supporting children's language explorations within their home and learning environment:

- Display children's drawings and writing with dictated captions that explain their meaning;
- Encourage frequent lap-reading, showing and talking about illustrations and by reading simple texts aloud.
- Provide a variety of sturdy cardboard and cloth books for infants to explore.
- Share books with infants, following their interest in the pictures and textures of books.
- Throughout the day, model the use of new words introduced earlier in the day.
- When getting ready to read a new book to children, tell them the names of the author and illustrator.
- Go on a "book hunt" in the classroom, asking children to find a book by the way you describe its cover.

## Element 4: Reading and Writing Activities

Listening to stories and discussing them are very important activities at home and in early care and education classrooms. For very young children, who normally have very short attention spans, storytimes work best when they are short (about 5-10 minutes) and conversational. Families, caregivers and early educators can share cardboard books, nursery rhymes, books with photographs or drawings of animals, people and brightly colored objects. They can also discuss what they see in illustrations starting with the cover and moving to the end. Through these activities, children learn to focus their attention on words and pictures (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). In preschool, children need daily exposure to books that are age appropriate and depict a wide range of children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Families, caregivers and early educators can intentionally and repeatedly read books to individual children or to small groups of children multiple times a day; these readings should be from books that positively reflect children's identity, differing abilities, home language and culture.

Speaking with inflection when reading to young children helps to convey meanings. Families, other caregivers and early educators may either stop and ask questions or encourage children to enjoy the language and the rhythm of the book. After readings, children should have opportunities to talk about what was read and focus on the sounds and parts of language as well as the meaning of the book. Group discussions followed by the retelling of a story using pictures or actual objects are effective devices for engaging children and enhancing their understanding of the stories.

Children not only need to listen to books, they also need to have chances to read independently. Having a library corner with comfortable furniture that encourages children to read by themselves is a central part of the learning environment. Varying levels and varieties of reading materials, such as age-appropriate fiction, nonfiction and poetry reading materials should be provided to broaden children's reading experiences. Below are additional considerations:

- Good lighting and lively displays or arrangements of readily accessible books encourage children to stay in the library;

- Encourage children to do book talks to encourage others to read it; and

- Allow opportunities for children to read to audiences, including peers, families or even stuffed animals.

Writing is a critical activity in early care and education classrooms because it supports the integration of important language and emergent literacy skills that lay the foundation for children's reading skills. The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) report (2008, p. vii), identifies ''medium to large predictive relationships'' between young children's writing skills and later measures of literacy development.

**Element 6: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness**

According to the National Institute for Literacy (2001), phonemic awareness is the ability to think about and work with individual sounds in spoken languages. Before children learn to read, they need to be aware of how sounds work. Early educators should integrate phonemic awareness instruction daily in the curriculum to help children learn to read and spell. Instruction can start with having children categorize the first phonemes — the smallest functional unit of speech — in words and then progress to more complicated combinations.

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), "Phonics skills must be integrated with the development of phonemic awareness, fluency and text reading comprehension skills." Developing skills in blending and manipulating phonemes has been found to permit many children to develop strong reading abilities. Table 1 below shows ages at which children typically develop various phonological skill (DC ELS, 2019).

**Table 1: Typical Development of Phonological Skills**

| AGE | SKILL DOMAIN | SAMPLE TASKS |
|---|---|---|
| 0-12 months | Babbles and experiments with tone and pitch | Vocalize, "Ba, ba, ba. BA, BA, BA." |
| 12-18 months | Repeats words; joins in singing random words of simple songs | Say, "Horse," when their teacher points to a picture and prompts, "I see a horse." |
| 19-36 months | Joins in songs, rhymes, refrains and word games with repeating language sounds | Say, "Baby bee," as the teacher sings, "I'm bringing home a baby bumble bee…" |
| 3 years old | Plays with language, experimenting with beginning and ending sounds | While playing a memory game, laugh when they turn over a card with a pig and say, "Wig! No, pig!" |
| 4 years old | Rote imitation and enjoyment of rhyme and alliteration | **pool, drool, tool**<br>"Seven silly snakes sang songs seriously." |
| 5 years old | Rhyme recognition, odd word out | "Which two words rhyme:<br>**stair, steel, chair**?" |
| | Recognition of phonemic changes in words | "*Hickory Dickory Clock*. That's not right!" |
| | Clapping, counting syllables | **truck** (1 syllable)<br>**airplane** (2 syllables)<br>**boat** (1 syllable)<br>**automobile** (4 syllables) |

**Element 7: Using Differentiated Teaching Strategies to Meet Children's Needs**

In literacy-rich classrooms, some children are able to learn the skills and strategies necessary for reading and writing through engagement in meaningful activities. Fingerplays, songs, poems, games, chants and book listening, and discussion all help children to pick up new vocabularies, understand the similarities and differences in language and develop phonemic awareness (NAEYC, 1998; Neuman, 1998; Bulloch 2009). However, it is important for families, caregivers and early educators to adjust teaching strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive and according to children's interests and needs.

Some children need explicit, direct instruction where families, caregivers and early educators are intentionally providing activities and learning experiences for children to learn specific skills. In order to master a skill and make the learning experiences meaningful, families, caregivers and early educators must try to achieve a balance between activities and skill practices (NAEYC, 1998; Neuman, 1998; Schickedanz, 1998; Teale & Yokota, 2000). If a child fails to make expected progress in literacy learning or if their literacy skills are advanced, early educators may need to prepare more individualized instructional strategies to meet the child's needs.

**Element 8: Family Engagement**

Family engagement is the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children's development, learning and wellness (Children's Bureau, 2016). Child development facilities and schools must engage families as essential partners in supporting children's language and literacy development by providing intentional support to families. Family engagement can happen in the home, early care and education settings, at school and in the community. The family's engagement in the child's learning is an important predictor of a child's success. Children are healthier and ready for school when early learning programs build positive, ongoing and goal-oriented relationships with families.

Family engagement is most successful when programs and early educators build genuine relationships with families to support overall family well-being and children's healthy development. These partnerships are strongest when they are grounded in a common focus – a partnership between educators, families and others with the shared goal of helping children grow and thrive. The specific goals of the partnership for each family may vary and can depend on family preference, culture and economic or social factors. Still, a true partnership honors a family's strengths and culture and relies on mutual respect and shared goals for the child. Effective family partnerships include intentional strategies for supporting families from underrepresented communities. Partnerships should foster a genuine two-way exchange between programs or educators and families and proceed from an asset-based approach that respects and values cultural and linguistic diversity and are responsive to families' culture(s) and home language(s) (Auerbach, 2009; C. W. Cooper, 2009).

Early care and education programs and LEAs can develop goals and strategies for supporting families in their critical roles in children's literacy development. Programs' strategies for partnering with families must build parents' and other caregivers' confidence and competence in practices that directly support the language and literacy skills development of children. By communicating with families, offering resources and guidance for literacy development at home and developing strategic family partnerships, early care and education programs can create holistic and sustainable support systems for early learners. Language and literacy support for families offered by schools and communities should:

- Provide all families opportunities to be active supporters of their children's language and literacy development;
- Promote language and literacy interactions at home that are enjoyable for children and families;
- Provide clear, timely understanding for families about their children's progress;
- Equip families with the developmentally appropriate strategies and resources they need to support their children's learning, such as access to books;
- Promote literacy in families' home languages;
- Incorporate the interests and cultures of children and their families; and
- Communicate high learning expectations for all children (Boone, et. al., 2017; Caspe & Lopez, 2017; Richards-Tutor, et. al., 2015).

Having a strong early literacy foundation is key for children to succeed in the transition from early care and education to the formal school setting, kindergarten and beyond.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

In July 2010, the District of Columbia adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), with the aim of ensuring students across the country graduate from high school prepared to succeed in College and Career. The CCSS were created in collaboration with teachers, school administrators and experts and define the knowledge and skills students should acquire in their pre-K through grade 12 academic careers. The grade-level standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

The CCSS, Anchor Standard 10 requires kindergarten through grade 12 students to read and comprehend a wide variety of text types at increasingly challenging levels (CCSS, 2021). In order for students to proficiently and independently engage with complex texts at their grade level, they must have exposure to a comprehensive reading, research and writing English language arts (ELA) curriculum that promotes building content knowledge through science and social studies content (Duke, 2020). Knowledge and comprehension are connected and work in tandem with students' ability to comprehend complex text to demonstrate proficiency with anchor standard 10. In addition to leveraging disciplinary literacy content knowledge within a comprehensive literacy curriculum, teachers should attend to students' comprehension skills with active text engagement strategies, such as text discussion, to clarify and summarize key ideas from the text. Additionally, a solid tier I curriculum should provide students with opportunities to make predictions and generate questions using their background knowledge and information presented in the text (Castles, Rastle &Nation, 2018). In addition to providing students with an opportunity to decode, acquire language and reading comprehension, a high-quality curriculum will also incorporate assessment opportunities to measure student progress, which includes screening, diagnostic and progress monitoring in the areas of phonics, print concepts, vocabulary, morphology/word analysis, comprehension and fluency. "Intentional teachers gather data that are needed to guide instruction, ensuring that all children grow and learn" (Blessing, 2019). In these ways, the standards connect to intentional uses of data to drive instructional change.

## SHIFTS IN ELA INSTRUCTION

Not only do the CCSS call for increased attention to rigor and text complexity, but also a shift in pedagogy, known as the *ELA Shifts*. The focus on knowledge-building, evidence and complexity supports the mission of closing the opportunity gap and make learning transferable across grade bands and content areas. Achieve the Core describes the three shifts in ELA as a frame that describes how these standards raise expectations across multiple areas of students' educational experience, including instructional materials, classroom practice and assessment. The shifts illustrate how college- and career-ready standards contribute to transformative changes in the classroom that will better prepare students for opportunities after high school.

1.  *Complexity* – Practice regularly with complex texts and its academic language.

2.  *Evidence* – Ground reading, writing and speaking in evidence from text, both literary and informational.

3.  *Knowledge* – Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.

Intentional and careful planning for literacy instruction with these three shifts as a guide allow learners to also develop their cognitive muscles that will support learning in the future.

## HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

The second Guiding Principle for Literacy in the District states that all learners must have access to high-quality literacy instruction. High-quality materials should provide opportunities for students to listen, read, speak and write about their understanding of texts. Learners should have access to materials including classroom libraries and opportunities to form the same conclusion/answer as they listen and read grade-level texts using various modalities. Learners should be able to demonstrate understanding different genres and texts of varying levels of complexity which can be measured through activities and materials to include oral presentations, read-alouds, shared writing, writer's workshops, Socratic seminars, group think tanks and explicit phonics instruction.

Research strongly suggests that high-quality, Tier I materials have large effects on student learning and results may mimic those associated with teacher effectiveness. ELA curriculum should be coherent and connected across the various elements rather than fragmented and executed in isolation. Fragmented curriculum leads to lost opportunities for authentic tasks that tie together all elements of reading instruction. Additionally, Tier 1 materials should be vertically aligned across grade bands from K-12 as this coherence directly ties to student achievement outcomes.

High-quality curricular materials are an important lever for achieving equity. Underserved student groups, including students of color, English learners and students with disabilities are less likely to have access and exposure to high-quality materials in class. In a multi-district 2018 study, TNTP found that students of color spend a substantial amount of class time using curricular materials that are below grade level or lacking in rigor, which widens the achievement gap (TNTP, 2018). A high-quality curriculum intentionally builds upon the cultural wealth and experiences of students to deepen learning (Gay, 2002). The absence of high-quality curriculum can and will contribute to exacerbated inequities.

All students in K-5 must be engaged in reading, writing, speaking and listening instruction in authentic ways during or throughout the school day. The goal of a reader or listener is to use language to understand the message the writer or speaker is attempting to convey, while the goal of the writer or speaker is to use language to communicate an intended message to the targeted audience. Gaining skill and proficiency in literacy in the elementary grades is critical for future academic and lifelong success.  Research demonstrates that students who cannot read on grade level by grade 3 are at an increased risk to not graduate from high school by age 19, compared to children who do not read on grade level by grade 3. Additionally, 88 percent of students who do not earn a high school diploma struggled to read on grade level by grade 3 (Weyer & Casares, 2019). Thus, being on grade-level reading by grade 3 is identified as a critical milestone in literacy. If students are not proficient readers by grade 4, much of all subject matter across the content areas will be incomprehensible.

Within a traditional elementary school (grades K-5), children transition from learning to read (initial reading and decoding) to reading to learn. As children become aware of and master the relationship between sounds and letters and begin applying knowledge to text, they are able to read words accurately using knowledge of alphabetic principles. Proficiency, at this stage, depends on phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, decoding, automatic word recognition, knowing the meaning of most words, constructing meaning through connections and background knowledge, and monitoring comprehension.

Jeanne Chall's stage theory (1996) (described earlier) suggests that children develop reading proficiency skills on a continuum. The skills within each stage are dependent on one another to ensure learners master the developmental continuum. Additionally, skills introduced may continue to be fostered in subsequent stages. Liben and Liben (2003) suggest that the goal of elementary literacy instruction is to allow students to develop foundational capacities and the confidence as young readers. They describe the *both/and* approach to reading instruction with an equal focus and emphasis on foundational reading skill development and comprehension of complex texts.

Thus, it is essential for educators to understand the developmental continuum to support learners in achieving literacy success. However, the process of acquiring literacy proficiencies is an ongoing process that continues to develop throughout life. Therefore, educators must be skilled in understanding not only the respective skills for their students but also the vertical progression of literacy development to be able to appropriately meet the needs of all learners.

Students in grades K-5 must acquire a solid foundation of early literacy skills in order to build reading fluency and stamina. In the elementary grades, foundational skills must be intentionally taught and practiced. The components of early literacy are designed to build knowledge and foundational skills in the areas of print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition which provides the brain what it needs to learn how to read. Through the use of decodable texts, students can focus on practicing their reading abilities. Once mastered, these skills form the foundation from which students can comprehend the words and sentences they read and begin to make meaning for themselves.
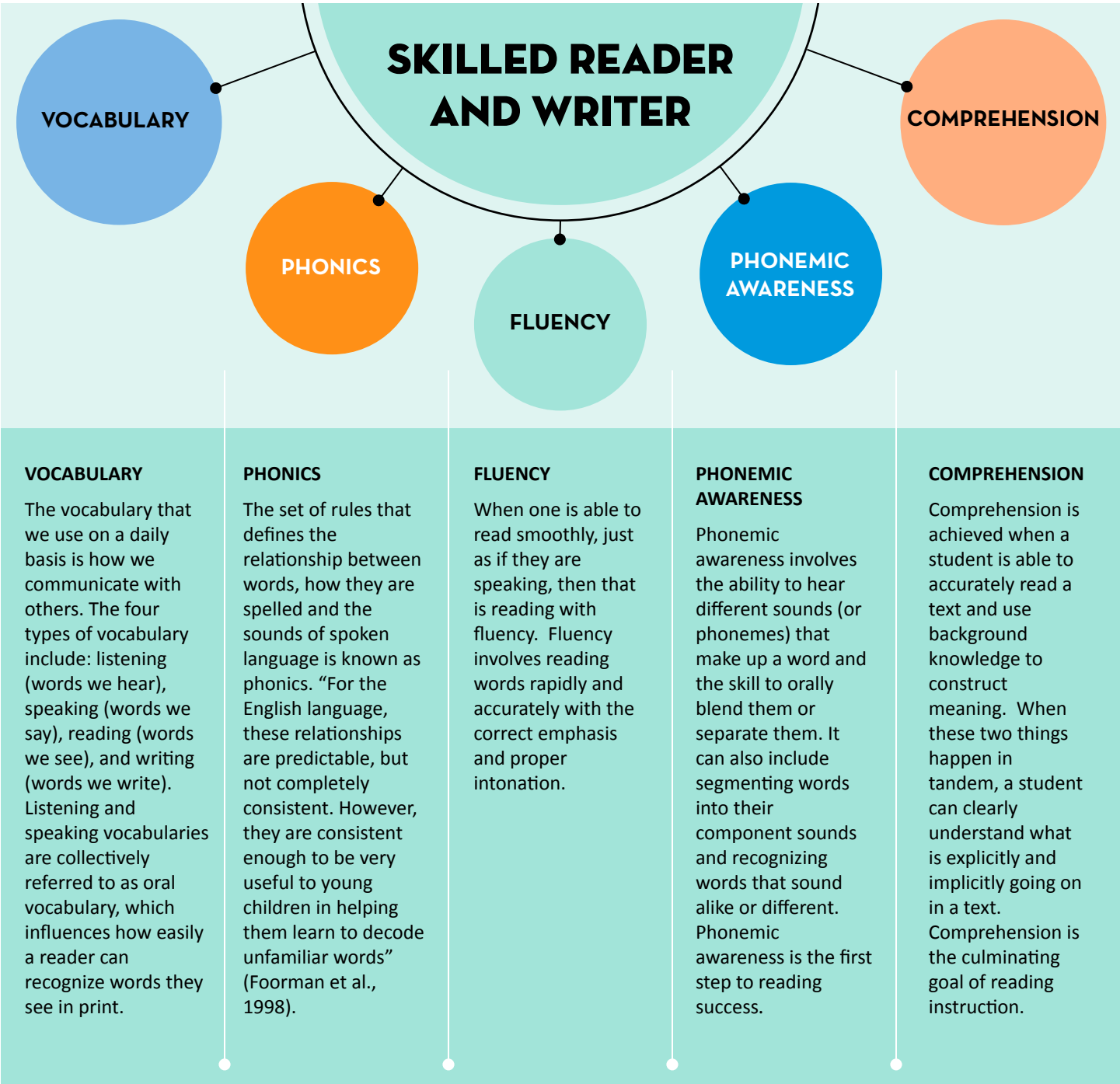
However, mastery of foundational standards is not the singular goal of instruction; understanding texts and being able to express meaning is the true goal of comprehension in the elementary grades. The remaining standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language are meant to be addressed holistically, with the text at the center.

## AREAS OF READING AND WRITING COMPETENCY

Teaching students to read accurately and fluently and with comprehension is a goal that should ideally be achieved by the end of grade 3. However, explicit instruction in the skills that will help students achieve a thorough level of reading comprehension should be continued through grade 5. According to the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000), years of scientific research indicates that basic reading and writing require competence in the following five areas:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

The approach to teaching these five essential components of effective reading and writing should be systematic and effective. "**Systematic instruction** reflects ... skills and concepts [that] are taught in a planned, logically progressive sequence. **Explicit instruction** means the teacher clearly states what is being taught and models effectively how it is used by a skilled reader" (Associates, 2004). When instruction is systematic and explicit, students will master the skills necessary to become skilled readers as depicted in Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001). For more information, see the beginning of Section 2: Literacy Instruction.



### VOCABULARY

The vocabulary that we use on a daily basis is how we communicate with others. The four types of vocabulary include: listening (words we hear), speaking (words we say), reading (words we see), and writing (words we write). Listening and speaking vocabularies are collectively referred to as oral vocabulary, which influences how easily a reader can recognize words they see in print.

### PHONICS

The set of rules that defines the relationship between words, how they are spelled and the sounds of spoken language is known as phonics. "For the English language, these relationships are predictable, but not completely consistent. However, they are consistent enough to be very useful to young children in helping them learn to decode unfamiliar words" (Foorman et al., 1998).

### FLUENCY

When one is able to read smoothly, just as if they are speaking, then that is reading with fluency. Fluency involves reading words rapidly and accurately with the correct emphasis and proper intonation.

### PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Phonemic awareness involves the ability to hear different sounds (or phonemes) that make up a word and the skill to orally blend them or separate them. It can also include segmenting words into their component sounds and recognizing words that sound alike or different. Phonemic awareness is the first step to reading success.

### COMPREHENSION

Comprehension is achieved when a student is able to accurately read a text and use background knowledge to construct meaning. When these two things happen in tandem, a student can clearly understand what is explicitly and implicitly going on in a text. Comprehension is the culminating goal of reading instruction.

Ideally, students should master the overall progression of reading and writing skills for each grade level on a specific timeframe. **See Appendix B** for a table showing the progression of these reading and writing competencies from kindergarten through grade 5 (adapted from the CCSS and the English Language Arts/English Development Framework for California Public Schools K-12). The process represents a continuum of complexity that is grounded in basic decoding skills and moves toward increasingly complex levels of comprehension. Each step in the process is essential and meaningful, and "students cannot and should not bypass any critical skills necessary for fluent and meaningful reading just because of their chronological age" (Moats, 2001). It is important to note that teaching reading is a revolving process of modeling for students and coaching, which guides students toward independent application.

## IMPORTANCE OF SOLID TIER I CURRICULUM

Curriculum and standards play an important role in *what* and *how* students develop their literacy skills for college and career readiness (Pimental, 2017 & CCSS, 2021). "Multiple component areas play key roles in literacy acquisition, and teachers' attention to these areas within a language arts block is important" (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014, p. 1354). The CCSS address foundational skills in kindergarten through second grade; however, research suggests students continue to work at solidifying their foundational skills up until the end of third grade in service of fluent decoding of basic to more complex words (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). A Tier I curriculum also known as the core curriculum should be aligned with state standards with the intent to provide high-quality instruction to all students. Within an elementary literacy program of study, foundational skills are the early reading skills, such as the ability to segment and manipulate sounds through phonemic and phonological awareness and linking sounds to letters through automatic awareness of the alphabetic principle. These skills are needed for students to make the leap from letter-sound awareness to fluent decoding and encoding at their appropriate grade level (Institute of Education Sciences (IES), 2016). To support students in developing these early literacy skills, teachers and students must have access to research-based systematic and structured phonics curriculum that provide students with multiple opportunities to practice and apply their early literacy skills with activities that promote word segmentation, rhyming, word building and blending (IES, 2016).

In grades 4-5, teachers should leverage a Tier I curriculum with an emphasis on morphology (the study of forms of words) to support students with building onto their early literacy skills by focusing on meaningful instruction on word parts and how they are combined. Students who experience explicit morphology instruction have stronger awareness of word structure, which is essential for students in decoding multisyllabic words, and understanding the meaning of words in complex texts (Moates, 2010). Students in the upper elementary grades should engage in word study activities focused on root words, prefixes, suffixes, affixes and inflectional endings in service of supporting students with fluent decoding and overall text comprehension.

## K-5 LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL TAKEAWAYS:

The CCSS encompass the foundational skills learners need to develop academically to prepare them for increasingly complex texts and tasks.

- Foundational skills are a critical component of brain development (See Introduction for Literacy Instruction).

- Elementary literacy instruction should also focus on building student knowledge and academic language.



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

## INTRODUCTION TO SECONDARY LITERACY

As students transition from elementary to secondary schools, the focus on literacy builds on the skills and knowledge students received for the first half of a student's educational journey. As secondary educators accept the baton, their focus is typically on building, expanding and enhancing foundational literacy skills so learners can access more rigorous texts and tasks and ultimately prepare learners to enter into a global society. Learners entering grade 6 are reading to learn as they develop and progress through the continuum of reading. Another consideration for educators is the new demands of reading and writing across content areas. In most instances, *Disciplinary Literacy* is known as literacy skills specialized in history, science, mathematics, literature or other subject matters (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008). It is not introduced as a concept; instead, students are expected to be literate across subject areas with little to no literacy support for those areas. The CCSS draws attention not only to nonfiction reading, but complex writing, academic discourse and language skills, which show the rigorous demands of literacy. "As students advance through grades, their literacy instruction should become increasingly more complex and discipline-based and should support students' understanding of complex texts in each content area" (Zygouris-Coe, 2012). This change in awareness to literacy provides the chance to position literacy as an essential component in all content areas and thus provide learners and educators the tools and resources need to be successful.

Additionally, the CCSS have an intentional focus on rigor, complexity, range of texts and tasks. The need for literacy-rich environments in secondary school has become more apparent as the rigor in the progression of reading increases drastically in grades 6-12. The chart below illustrates what learners should be able to read and comprehend at the end of each year.

### Reading Progression Chart

| GRADE | WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO BY THE END OF YEAR |
|---|---|
| 6 | By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. |
| 7 | By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 6-8 texts complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. |
| 8 | By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |
| 9-10 | By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 9–10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |
| 11-12 | By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

From The Common Core State Standards, **Appendix A,** pg. 10

## SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND LITERACY STANDARDS

As stated previously, the CCSS has changed the way literacy educators think about K-12 instruction. New research on text complexity required educators to make numerous planning considerations to ensure learning opportunities are balanced across the text complexity triad (qualitative measures, quantitative measures, and reader-task considerations). The figure below is an annotated example of the text complexity considerations for a secondary text, *The Longitude Prize.* This demonstrates some of the planning considerations associated with text complexity needed to ensure accessibility to complex grade-level texts and tasks.

Educators can use various resources, including planning templates and rubrics, to support measuring text complexity. Using these tools will not only increase familiarity with the nuances of text complexity but also support educators in making critical planning considerations for learning.

The CCSS shifts in ELA were designed to guide secondary educators to prepare students for college and careers. Educators will use the shifts for pedagogical and instructional implementation of the  CCSS in reading, writing, speaking and listening in secondary instruction.

1. *Complexity* – Practice regularly with complex texts and academic language.

2. *Evidence* – Reading, writing and speaking in evidence from text, both literary and informational.

3. *Knowledge* – Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.

| QUALITATIVE MEASURES | QUANTITATIVE MEASURES |
|---|---|
| **Structure**<br><br>The text is moderately complex and subtle in structure. Although the text may appear at first glance to be a conventional narrative, Dash mainly uses narrative elements in the service of illustrating historical and technical points. The long quote adds to the structural challenge.<br><br>**Language Conventionality and Clarity**<br><br>Language is used literally and is relatively clear, but numerous archaic, domain-specific, and otherwise unfamiliar terms are introduced in the course of citing primary historical sources and discussing the craft, art, and science of navigation. The quote further adds an archaic language burden.<br><br>**Knowledge Demands**<br><br>The text assumes relatively little prior knowledge regarding seafaring and navigation, but some general sense of the concepts of latitude and longitude, the nature of sailing ships, and the historical circumstances that promoted exploration and trade is useful to comprehend the text.<br><br>**Purpose**<br><br>The single, relatively clear purpose of the text (not fully apparent in the excerpt but signaled by the title) is to recount the discovery of the concept of longitude. But this is not readily apparent from the excerpt. | Various readability measures of *The Longitude Prize* are largely in agreement that the text is appropriate for the grades 9–10 text complexity band. The Coh-Metrix analysis notes that the text is primarily informational in structure despite the narrative opening. (Recall from "Why Text Complexity Matters," above, that research indicates that informational texts are generally harder to read than narratives.) While the text relies on concrete language and goes to some effort to connect central ideas for the reader, it also contains complex syntax and few explicit connections between words and sentences. |
| | **READER-TASK CONSIDERATIONS** |
| | These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student's motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed. |
| | **RECOMMENDED PLACEMENT** |
| | Various quantitative measurements place The Longitude Prize into the grades 9–10 text complexity band; the qualitative analysis would indicate there are enough complex features to warrant its placement in the tenth grade.<br>• ATOS: 10.5<br>• DRP®: 66<br>• Lexile®: 1300L<br>• Reading Maturity: 8.67 SourceRater: 10.7 |

From, Supplemental Information for **Appendix A** of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: New Research on Text Complexity.

Pg. 10

## STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION

In conjunction with the three shifts the CCSS, emphasis is placed on Standards-Based Instruction (SBI) which is most effective when educators have a solid grounding in the knowledge and skills that students need to master, coupled with the content within each standard in alignment with grade-level targets. In order for this to happen, schools must have strong "systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating understanding or mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education." (From: www.edglossary.org/standards-based/)

| STANDARD | SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE | WHAT STUDENTS MUST KNOW AND DO | INSTRUCTION NEEDED TO MASTER THE STANDARD |
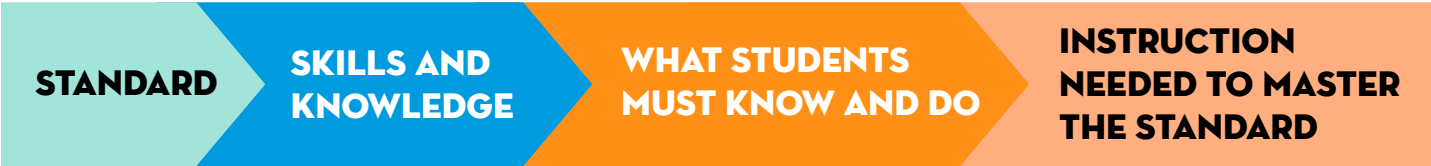
Much like elementary students, students should be engaging with a high-quality, standards-based curriculum for Tier 1 instruction as well. Components of a high-quality curriculum not only support students in their development as measured by the reading continuum (Chall, 1983) it reinforces the three shifts of the Common Core in ELA instruction. Educators must focus on "the general goal of standards-based learning [which] is to ensure that students are acquiring the knowledge and skills that are deemed to be essential to success in school, higher education, careers, and adult life." (www.edglossary.org/standards-based/)

## GRADE-LEVEL TEXTS

All learners should receive daily literacy instruction using complex, grade-level texts. This premise departs from years of research that advocated students use leveled readers and texts to fill gaps and reduce or prevent struggle. Current scholarly consensus points out that reading on "level" does not lead to overall student improvement in reading; instead, this further widens the gap. Not only does reading complex, but grade-level text also promotes it creates an equitable learning environment for all learners. You deny students the right to improve their reading comprehension, argues Jiban, "if you don't grant them access every day to some meaty grade-level text" (Jiban, 2020). Providing learning opportunities with rigorous texts and tasks allow students to tap into the cognitive part of their brain which will support brain development and increases the chances for academic achievement. The District of Columbia seeks to provide all learners with a rigorous and equitable learning experience in literacy.

### Writing in Secondary Literacy Spaces

Before exploring the specific demands of the CCSS in writing, below are a few overarching considerations educators should keep in mind when teaching and assessing strong student writing.

| TYPE OF WRITING | INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS | PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Expository writing | As students read a complex text, they take notes and make annotations to process their thoughts through writing. They might observe repetition of words or phrases; investigate the relationship of various figures of speech in a text or texts; or make a connection between central ideas of one text to another. | • What are the reader's expectations? <br><br> • What information do they expect that the piece of writing will provide? <br><br> • What are the reader's goals in reading, and in what context are they reading? <br><br> • How can the writer most effectively communicate the essential information? |
| Argumentative writing | In this form of writing, students take an arguable position about a text or topic and provide clear reasoning in support of their position. | |
| Narrative writing | It is focused on story, meaning it has a narrative plot with an inciting moment, rising action, climax and dénouement. The narrative writing standard can refer to fiction or creative nonfiction. | |
| Writing for research | Through research writing, students find, read, and synthesize various data to offer a perspective about a topic. | |

By applying this general framework, writing focuses on the expectations, goals, situations and needs of the readers. Taking these overarching questions of writing and audience as a starting point, these are the most common and most assessed forms of student writing based on the CCSS.

## DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

As students transition into secondary education, they will encounter specific conventions and expectations of particular disciplines more frequently. The literacy classroom provides learners with opportunities to practice and reflect on the differences and similarities of the different types of writing. In other subjects (mathematics, science, social studies and technical subjects), students can then further reflect on more discrete differences of expectations for writing within particular disciplines. The general framework of considering the audience holds: what does the reader expect to learn from this piece of writing, and how can the writer most effectively communicate the essential information?

In addition to reading to understand and writing to convey an understanding of grade-level complex texts, the CCSS draw attention to the modes of language through the speaking standards. In addition to attention to speaking, there is a direct connection to listening; thus we have the speaking and listening standards. The CCSS outlines two sections to support students with mastering skills in oral communication and collaboration.

- **CCSS.SL.6: Comprehension and Collaboration** at the anchor level means that learners can engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts and issues through individual expression and building on the thoughts of others.

- **CCSS.SL.4: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas** at the anchor level asks learners to present claims and finding logically while maintaining some elements of formal presentation.

Not only do the speaking and listening standards present the question of: How often do students have the opportunity to express themselves by engaging in discussion? Those standards encourage educators to know their students' abilities related to comprehension, writing and speaking and listening in order to engage students in a variety of discussions.
(From: www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/6/)

As educators plan opportunities for speaking and listening, many variables must be considered to optimize the time allotted for effective and engaging opportunities to collaboratively present comprehension of, and ideas related to text. Gonzalez (2015) shares 15 formats for structuring class discussions within the strategies, placing emphasis on engagement, equity and rigor and sharing with readers the amount of prep needed for successful implementation.

| HIGH-PREP STRATEGY | LOW-PREP STRATEGY | ONGOING STRATEGY |
|---|---|---|
| *Philosophical Chairs* at the "basic" level involves a statement with two possible stances to be read aloud. Students move to one side of the learning space that coincides with their response and take turns defending the position selected. | *Hot Seat* one student takes on the role of a character from the text. While sitting in front of the class that student responds from the point of view from the selected character. | Teach-OK is an opportunity for students to reteach a concept or idea from class to a peer. This "re-teach" happens on demand and can occur at any time. This is an opportunity to check for understanding (or formative discussion) on a specific skill or concept. |

Adapted from: The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies by Jennifer Gonzalez

Within the context of literacy instruction, "language" refers to conventions of writing, an understanding of language (grammar and syntax, for example) and vocabulary. According to Appendix A of the CCSS, "the Standards take a hybrid approach to matters of conventions, knowledge of language, and vocabulary." This means students should acquire "language" skills and knowledge through reading, writing, speaking and listening *and* through direct instruction. Take for example, the figure below.

| STRAND | STANDARD |
|---|---|
| Reading | R.CCR.4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative and figurative meanings and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. |
| Writing | W.CCR.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach. |
| Speaking and Listening | SL.CCR.6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. |

The language standards are the final piece of the puzzle bringing literacy instruction together. The final set of standards show the incorporation of each strand of the Scarborough's Rope, which with intentional planning and instruction ensure that we are creating and supporting proficient readers. Introduction to Literacy Instruction" only that part needs to be blue not the whole sentence.

The ELA evidence tables provide educators with examples of the skills and subskills of each standard allow educators to plan for instruction of concrete skills while spiraling in other skills and standards and can be used to support planning, instruction, data analysis and professional learning.

**To prepare students to meet the expectations of college and career, educational systems must be strengthened to:**

- Provide teachers time for planning instruction collaboratively, to ensure students are receiving accessible and inclusive daily classroom instruction, this includes targeted and specific supports as needed for: general education, special education, English learners and students with disabilities;

- Implement of evidence-based practices and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy to guide literacy strategies; and

- Ensure content-rich, diverse, high-quality instructional materials are aligned to the  science of reading and encompass all content areas.

For more information about serving diverse learners affectively within the general education classroom, visit these sections of the CLP.

- English Learners

- Special Education

-  Special Education Considerations for Literacy Instruction

- Evidence-Based Practices for Literacy

Combining opportunities for practicing new strategies and techniques will positively impact student achievement, and encourage opportunities for sincere collaboration that will empower educators to transform the current state of literacy instruction and achievement in the District.