

# Language Arts Literacy Philosophy

The Medford Lakes School District's Language Arts Literacy Curriculum is designed to prepare students to develop literacy skills and competencies in order to be equipped with the knowledge and decision-making skills necessary to assume their roles as active and informed citizens.

To achieve our mission for student literacy learning, our language arts curriculum actively engages learners in experiences that help them to construct and refine their knowledge about literacy in its various forms. Strategies for becoming effectively literate are an integral part of every-day classroom instruction. Students and teachers are actively involved in using the common language of readers, writers and viewers of information. This includes teachers modeling effective literacy behaviors through a gradual release model that provides multiple opportunities for students of all ages to purposefully participate in authentic literacy activities. The classroom climate is one in which "risk-taking in safety" is encouraged so that literacy attempts can be valued and nurtured as they develop. Students also actively participate in their literacy development by making choices related to topic, text and task. These student-centered choices are critical to the goal of developing in students a love of and desire to become life-long readers and writers.

According to Allington (2002), if we want to increase substantially the amount of reading that children do, it is important to give children books they can read and choices regarding which books they will read. Equally important to effective literacy instruction is the need to acknowledge the expansion of the definition of literacy in the twenty-first century.

Traditionally, literacy has been defined as a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups in society. With new technologies emerging every day, those practices are expanding to include a wider variety of media experiences and immediate virtual access to global audiences. To provide students with the necessary skills to participate fully in our expanding global community, we must design curriculum that immerses students in traditional modes of communication as well as emerging modes of technology. By participating in multi-dimensional literacy experiences, students will be prepared to become active members of a literate society.

To ensure our goals for students, both the strategies and structures of the literacy classroom are reflective of the best practices in literacy instruction.

In the classroom, blocks of time are available for sustained experiences in meaningful, authentic literacy tasks. The language arts literacy program is balanced with attention being given to reading, writing, word study, speaking, and listening, both within the language arts time block and across the curriculum. The importance of both the processes and products of literacy is also taken into account. In developing a literate classroom, instructional materials are varied to complement the diversity of literacy experiences.

A variety of rich texts such as trade books, articles, and artifacts of literacy dominate classroom literacy activities. Flexible grouping of children within the classroom by ability, interest and task accommodates and supports individual student needs. As Allington (2002) noted in his study of exemplary literacy classrooms, student success rests largely on the capacity of classroom teachers to provide expert, exemplary reading and writing instruction. This highly-effective teaching “is not regurgitation of a common script but is responsive to children’s needs” (p. 740).

Just as research-based instructional practices maximize and accelerate literacy development, thoughtfully-constructed assessments that match instruction, increase opportunities for students’ literacy achievement. Assessment helps the teacher learn about the individual strengths and needs of students so as to inform instructional practice. This kind of assessment therefore is a necessary and integral part of every-day classroom literacy experiences. Formative assessments are designed to provide constructive feedback to students and to assist teachers in modifying instruction. Multi-dimensional summative assessments are included to incorporate a variety of ways for students to demonstrate literacy knowledge (Winograd & Arrington, 1999; Cunningham & Allington, 1999). Such assessment practices are instrumental to addressing the primary purposes for literacy acquisition. “The goal of instruction is to prepare students to be full, literate members of our society and not just people who can pass a test” (Higgins, Miller, and Wegman, 2006, p. 318). This notion is supported in a study by Langer which found that students who are taught to read and write well will also be successful on standardized tests (in *Readicide* by Gallagher, 2009, p. 26).

Within this framework, our vision for developing literate citizens will be realized. All members of the classroom community will successfully use the language arts to communicate, analyze, evaluate, gain knowledge and enrich their understandings of events and ideas. Students will additionally gain the necessary competencies to think critically, and become self-directed learners who can be successful in an ever-changing global society.

## **GOALS FOR STUDENTS**

- develop an intrinsic value for and competency with all aspects of literacy: reading, writing, word study, speaking and listening;
- acquire the attitudes and habits of literate persons;
- become strategic in the creation, analysis and interpretation of texts;
- use a variety of literacy tools and technologies to extend understanding, gain new information and create original works;
- collaborate with others in the construction of meaning.

## **GOALS FOR TEACHERS**

### *Teachers will:*

- design authentic learning tasks that require students to actively construct their knowledge about literacy;
- model effective strategies for enriching student understanding of literacy concepts;
- create opportunities for students to use prior knowledge and life experiences to make connections and apply literacy skills and strategies in real life situations;
- challenge students to create, critique, analyze and evaluate multimedia texts, ideas and perspectives;
- reflectively and formatively assess student learning to inform and adapt instruction;
- participate in on-going professional development to enhance knowledge of content and strategies for effective literacy instruction.

## Program Description

Instruction in Language Arts Literacy formally begins in Kindergarten and proceeds through eighth grade. Reading and writing instruction is integrated to maximize opportunities for literacy learning to be developed. Integration of content and strategies across the curriculum is incorporated at all grade levels. Classes are organized into heterogeneous groupings, with core concepts being introduced to meet developmental needs and curriculum standards set for students at each grade level. Opportunities for flexible within-class groupings are provided to correspond to individual strengths, needs and interests throughout each of the five literacy blocks.

In the primary grades (K-2), blocks of time for Writer's Workshop, Reader's Workshop, Guided Reading, and Word Study are provided within the daily schedule.

In the upper elementary grades (3-5), blocks of time for Guided Reading, literature discussion groups, and Writer's Workshop. Integration of literary tasks with units of study in social studies, science and health are incorporated throughout the year.

In the middle school grades (6-8), opportunities for flexible scheduling are provided to create sustained blocks of time for completion of literacy tasks. Reader's Workshop, Writer's Workshop, Core Literature Study, literature discussion groups and Word Study/Vocabulary Development provide structures for individualization of instruction and accommodation of diversity within the heterogeneous language arts classroom. Integration of literature with units of study in other content areas is utilized throughout the year. Special education teachers at all grade levels follow this curriculum framework with appropriate modification as determined by individual needs and individual education plan specifications.



## College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

### A. Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

### B. Craft and Structure

- 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.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### C. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

### D. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

## College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

### A. Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### B. Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

### C. Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### D. Range of Writing

- Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

### A. Comprehension and Collaboration

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

### B. Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

## College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (Word Study)

### A. Conventions of Standard English

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### B. Knowledge of Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### C. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.