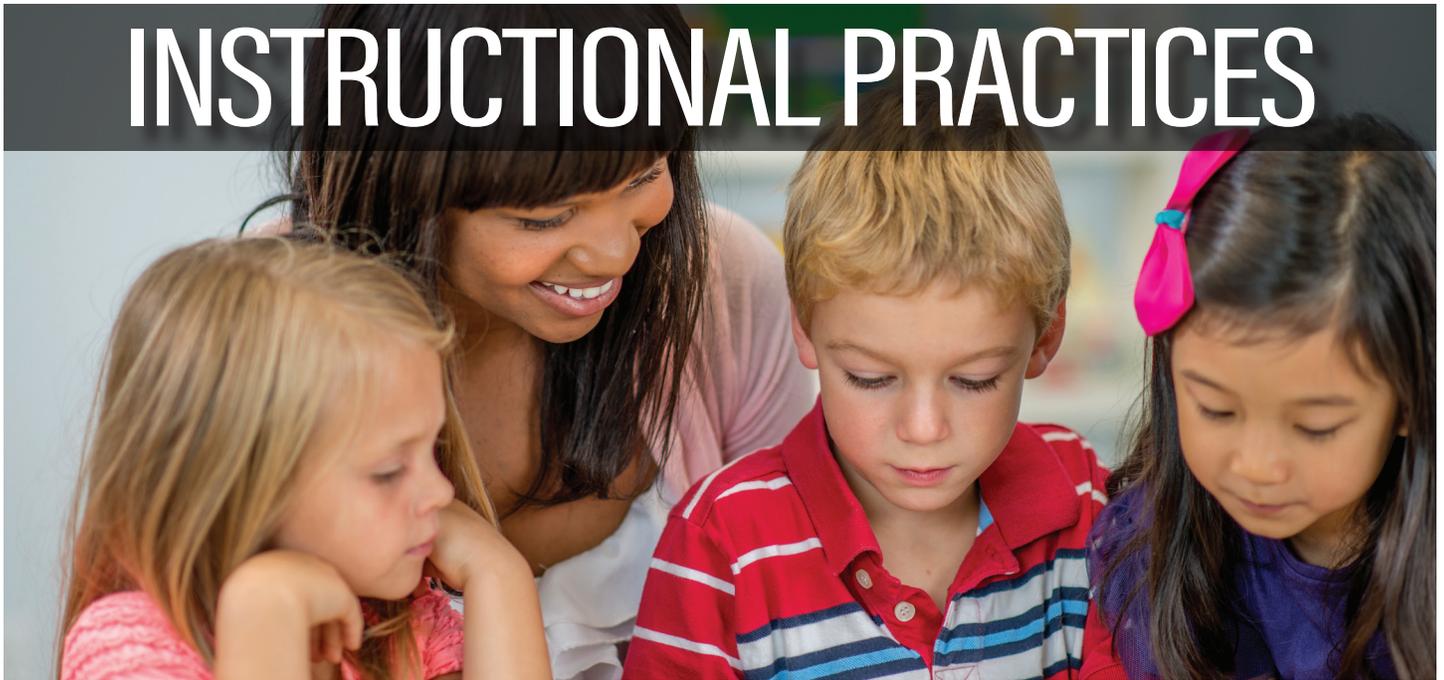




Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy

By the **Early Literacy Task Force**, a subcommittee of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN), which represents Michigan's 56 Intermediate School Districts. For a full list of representatives, please see the back page.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES



This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy, Kindergarten - Grade 3. There is important overlap and continuity in these two documents.

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported literacy instructional practices that could be a focus of professional development throughout the state. The focus of the document is on classroom practices, rather than on school- or systems-level practices (which will be addressed in a future document). The document focuses on prekindergarten, as literacy knowledge and skills developed in the preschool years predict later literacy achievement.¹ Prekindergarten education has the potential to improve "reading-by-third-grade" outcomes. Early childhood programs can also help to address disparities in literacy achievement. Research suggests that each of the ten practices in this document can have a positive impact on literacy development. We believe that the use of these practices in every classroom every day could make a measurable positive difference in the State's literacy achievement. They should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting a minimum 'standard of care' for Michigan's children.

The practices listed can be used within a variety of overall approaches to literacy instruction and within many different structures of the day; the document does not specify one particular program or approach to literacy instruction. We limited the list to ten practices; there are other literacy instructional practices that may be worthy of attention. In addition, new literacy research could alter or add to the instructional practices recommended here. For these reasons, choosing to enact the practices on this list would leave considerable agency and choice for individual districts, schools, centers, and teachers.

Each one of these ten recommended instructional practices should occur every day regardless of the specific program or framework being used in the classroom. The recommended instructional practices are to occur throughout the day, largely integrated into opportunities for learning in all other areas, not in an isolated block identified as “English Language Arts” or “Literacy.” Literacy instruction should not dominate the prekindergarten day; in the long term, that approach is counterproductive. Later academic achievement is predicted not only by literacy knowledge and skill, but by mathematics learning, knowledge of the natural and social world, and certain aspects of social, emotional, and physical development.² Finally, it is important to read this document in relation to the State of Michigan’s expectations for literacy development in prekindergarten,³ which should garner careful attention in all Michigan prekindergarten programs and be one focus in observing classroom practice and children’s development. The endnotes provide references to some research studies that support the practices listed. An exception is instructional practice #9, for which we were unable to locate closely supporting studies with preschool-age children.

1. Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play and throughout the classroom⁴

Reading and writing materials are not only present but used throughout the classroom environment.

- Within daily opportunities for dramatic play, the teacher provides, models use of, and encourages children’s engagement with appropriate literacy artifacts, such as:
 - ▶ order pads, menus, and placemats for a pizza parlor
 - ▶ traffic signs, maps, blueprints, and building-related books in the block/construction area
 - ▶ envelopes, stationery, postcards, stamps, and actual mail for a post office
 - ▶ waiting room reading material, a schedule, and prescription pads for a doctor’s office
 - ▶ a copy of books, such as *The Little Red Hen*, labeled puppets and objects from the story
- Within centers and other areas of the classroom, children are encouraged to interact with reading and writing materials, such as:
 - ▶ books related to construction or building in the block or construction area
 - ▶ simple recipes for making snacks
 - ▶ labels that indicate where items go
 - ▶ children’s names, for example on cubbies and sign-in sheets, which may vary over time (e.g., first with photos, then, later, without photos)
 - ▶ writing materials in each area of the classroom, for drawing and writing about objects being observed in the science area

(See also instructional practice #8.)

2. Read aloud with reference to print⁵

Daily read alouds include verbal and non-verbal strategies for drawing children’s attention to print, such as:

- running finger under words
- noting specific features of print and letters (e.g., “that is the letter *D* like Deondre’s name”)
- asking children where to start reading
- counting words
- pointing out print within pictures

3. Interactive read aloud with a comprehension and vocabulary focus⁶

The teacher reads aloud age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital, including sets of texts that are thematically and conceptually related and texts that are read multiple times, with:

- higher-order discussion among children and teacher before, during, and after reading
- child-friendly explanations of words within the text
- revisiting of words after reading using tools such as movement, props, video, photo, examples, and non-examples, and engaging children in saying the words aloud
- using the words at other points in the day and over time
- teaching of clusters of words related to those in the text, such as vocabulary related to the garden or gardening

4. Play with sounds inside words⁷

Children are supported to develop phonological awareness, or conscious awareness of sounds within language, and especially, a type of phonological awareness called *phonemic awareness*, which involves the ability to segment and blend individual phonemes within words, through various activities, such as:

- listening to and creating variations on books with rhyming or alliteration
- singing certain songs

6. Interactions around writing¹²

Adults engage in deliberate interactions with children around writing. Opportunities for children to write their name, informational, narrative, and other texts that are personally meaningful to them are at the heart of writing experiences. These deliberate interactions around writing include the use of interactive writing and scaffolded writing techniques.

- Interactive writing involves children in contributing to a piece of writing led by the teacher. With the teacher's support, children determine the message, count the words, stretch words, listen for sounds within words, think about letters that represent those sounds, and write some of the letters. The teacher uses the interactive writing as an opportunity for instruction, for example regarding the directionality of writing, purposes for writing, and specific letter-sound relationships.
- Scaffolded writing involves the individual child in generating a message the child would like to write. The message is negotiated and repeated with the child until it is internalized. The teacher draws one line for each word in the message using a highlighter or pen. The child writes one "word" per line, where "word" might be a scribble, letter-like forms, random letter strings, one or a few letters within the word, or all sounds within the word, depending on the child's writing ability. The teacher and the child read and reread the message.

(e.g., "Willoughby, Walloughby..."; "Down by the Bay"; "The Name Game"; "Apples and Bananas")

- sorting pictures and objects by a sound or sounds in their name
- games and transitions that feature play with sounds (e.g., alliteration games, a transition that asks all children whose name begins with the *mmm* sound to move to the next activity)
- "robot talk" or the like (e.g., the teacher has a puppet say the sounds "fffff" "iiiiii" "shhhh" and children say *fish*)

5. Brief, clear, explicit instruction⁸ in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and how letters are shaped and formed⁹

Instruction that has been shown to be effective in fostering development of letter-sound knowledge is supported by tools such as:

- a high-quality alphabet chart
- cards with children's names
- other key words to associate with letter-sounds (e.g., *d is for dinosaur*)
- alphabet books with appropriate key words
- references throughout the day (e.g., "That sign says the store is open. The first letter is o. It makes the "oh" sound: ooopen.")

Research suggests that we should set a benchmark of children naming 18 upper case and 15 lower case letters by the end of pre-K¹⁰ and should teach letter-sound associations, rather than letter names or sounds alone.¹¹

7. Extended conversation¹³

Adults engage in interactions with children that regularly include:

- responding to and initiating conversations with children, with repeated turns back and forth on the same topic
- encouraging talk among children through the selective use of open-ended questions, commenting on what children are doing, offering prompts (e.g., “Try asking your friend how you can help”), and scaffolding higher-order discussion, particularly during content-area learning
- engaging in talk, including narration and explanation, within dramatic play experiences and content-area learning, including intentional vocabulary-building efforts
- extending children’s language (e.g., The child says, “Fuzzy”; the adult says, “Yes, that peach feels fuzzy. What else do you notice about it?”)
- stories of past events and discussion of future events

8. Provision of abundant reading material in the classroom¹⁴

The classroom includes:

- a wide range of books and other texts, print and digital, including information books, poetry, and storybooks accessible to children

- books and other materials connected to children’s interests and that reflect children’s backgrounds and cultural experiences, including class- and child-made books
- recorded books
- books children can borrow to bring home and/or access digitally at home
- comfortable places in which to look at books, frequently visited by the teacher(s) and by adult volunteers recruited to the classroom

9. Ongoing observation and assessment of children’s language and literacy development that informs their education

The teacher engages in:

- observation and assessment that is guided by
 - ▶ an understanding of language and literacy development
 - ▶ the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten (2013) and, if applicable,
 - ▶ the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (2015)
- observation that occurs in multiple contexts, including play
- use of assessment tools that are considered appropriate for prekindergarten contexts
- use of information from observations and assessment tools to plan instruction and interactions with children

10. Collaboration with families in promoting literacy¹⁵

Families engage in language and literacy interactions with their children that can be drawn upon and extended in prekindergarten. Prekindergarten educators help families add to their repertoire of strategies for promoting literacy at home, including:

- incorporating literacy-promoting strategies into everyday activities such as cooking, communicating with friends and family, and traveling in the bus or car
- reading aloud to their children and discussing the text
- encouraging literacy milestones (e.g., pretend reading, which some parents mistakenly believe is “cheating” but is actually a desired activity in literacy development)
- speaking with children in their home/most comfortable language, whether or not that language is English¹⁶
- providing literacy-supporting resources, such as:
 - ▶ books from the classroom that children can borrow or keep
 - ▶ children’s magazines
 - ▶ information about judicious, adult-supported use of educational television and applications that can, with guidance, support literacy development
 - ▶ announcements about local events
 - ▶ passes to local museums (for example, through www.michiganactivitypass.info)

(Endnotes)

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- 8 Explicit instruction involves telling children what you want them to know, rather than expecting that they will infer this information. For example, explicit instruction about the letter L might include (although not necessarily all at once) the following: "This [pointing] is the letter called *ell*. Ell stands for the ll sound. Latoya's name starts with the ll sound: LLLatoya. Lion also starts with the ll sound: llllion. You can make ell with a straight line down and a short line across, like this [demonstrating], or you can make ell with just a straight line down, like this [demonstrating]."
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Process for Development and Review

This document was developed by the Early Literacy Task Force, a subcommittee of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN), which represents Michigan's 56 Intermediate School Districts. The Task Force included representatives from the following organizations, although their participation does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the organization they represent:

Bay-Arenac Intermediate School District	MAISA English Language Arts Leaders Network
Eaton Regional Educational Service Agency	Michigan Department of Education
Genesee Intermediate School District	Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
Huron Intermediate School District	Michigan Reading Association
Ingham Intermediate School District	Michigan State University
Iosco Regional Educational Service Agency	Monroe County Intermediate School District
Jackson County Intermediate School District	Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
Kalamazoo Public Schools	Oakland Schools
Lenawee Intermediate School District	Ottawa Area Intermediate School District
Lewis Cass Intermediate School District	Reading Now Network
Livingston Educational Service Agency	Regional Education Media Center Association of Michigan
Macomb Intermediate School District	Saint Clair County Regional Educational Service Agency
Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District	Saint Joseph County Intermediate School District
Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education	Southwest Michigan Reading Council
Michigan Association of Computer Users in Learning	University of Michigan
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators	Washtenaw Intermediate School District
MAISA Early Childhood Administrators Network	Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency

Feedback on drafts of the document was elicited from other stakeholders, resulting in a number of revisions to the document.



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