



## Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy

*Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades. A document of the Michigan General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force*

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. For a full list of representatives, please see the back page.



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

*This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy, Prekindergarten and Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy, Grades K to 3. The systems and practices outlined here provide school-level and program-level support for effective classroom instruction in prekindergarten and elementary literacy.*

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying systematic and effective practices that can be implemented at the organizational level in educational and care settings that serve young children. To meet the needs of all young learners, organizational practices must support literacy development in ways that systematically impact learning throughout elementary schools, early childhood learning centers, and other literacy-oriented learning environments and programs.<sup>1</sup>

Each of the ten recommended school-level or center-level systems and practices should occur in all Michigan prekindergarten and elementary school learning environments. These essential practices 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 in a variety of educational settings for young children. The document does not specify any particular programs or policies but focuses on research-based practices that can apply to a number of programs and settings. As the local systems and practices occur at the building or center level, it is the responsibility of the school, center, or program leadership to ensure that these systems and practices are implemented consistently and are regularly enhanced through strategic planning.

## 1. The *leadership team* is composed of instructional leaders committed to continuous improvements in literacy and ongoing attention to data.

**Under the guidance of the lead administrator, the school or program leadership team:**

- includes members with considerable and current expertise in literacy and early childhood education;
- promotes the implementation of evidence-based, high-quality literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned across the learning environment;<sup>2</sup>
- develops a vision, mission, set of goals, and educational philosophy that guide school climate and children's learning and that are shared school-wide and aligned across all ages and grade levels, including Pre-K, and across all professional roles for the purpose of continuous improvement;<sup>3</sup>
- maintains a comprehensive system for assessing children's strengths and needs and using that information to inform children's education;<sup>4</sup>
- focuses on multiple points of data and keeps the best interests of children paramount in assessment, knowing the primary purpose is to improve teaching and learning;<sup>5</sup>
- ensures a collaborative problem-solving approach that may include administrators, teachers, parents, aides, reading specialists, library media specialists, special educators, and others as needed;<sup>6</sup> and
- distributes leadership throughout the organization for the purpose of building leadership capacity among all staff.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The *organizational climate* reflects a collective sense of responsibility for all children and a focus on developing child independence and competence in a safe space.

**All adults—administrators, teachers, specialists, aides, and support staff—throughout the organization:**

- share and act upon a sense of responsibility for the literacy growth and overall wellbeing of every child that is grounded in the shared belief that every child can and will be successful, regardless of location, demographic, or program funding;<sup>8</sup>
- ensure that the entire learning environment is emotionally and physically safe, such that there are positive adult-child relationships and positive child-child relationships throughout the building;<sup>9</sup>

- support the development of children's independence by engaging them in such practices as planning for their own reading and writing growth, observing and regulating their own reading and writing, and monitoring their own growth toward their reading and writing goals;<sup>10</sup> and
- help all children develop perceptions of competence and self-efficacy in reading and writing through such practices as helping children identify and build on their academic strengths, providing specific feedback to help children grow, and modeling the thoughts and practices of successful readers and writers.<sup>11</sup>

## 3. The *learning environment* reflects a strong commitment to literacy.<sup>12</sup>

**Throughout the learning environment, there is evidence that:**

- literacy is a priority (e.g., amount, type, and nature of print experience);<sup>13</sup>
- instruction is built on explicitness, continuity, and responsiveness;
- literacy occurs throughout the day and is integrated into daily math, science, and social studies learning;<sup>14</sup>
- children and teachers are actively engaged with the school library, media center, and library media specialist;<sup>15</sup>
- children regularly read, write, speak, and listen for multiple purposes and across content areas and their written work is made prominently visible;<sup>16</sup>
- books and learning materials reflect diversity across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic locations, genders, and social roles (see also Essential #8);<sup>17</sup>
- guest readers and volunteers (e.g., parents, college students) are recruited and trained to support literacy in an ongoing manner;<sup>18</sup>
- events and activities generate excitement around books and other texts, for example through the announcement of the publication of the latest book in a series and posting of book reviews and recommendations throughout the school; and
- school staff aim to foster intrinsic motivation to read, making only temporary and sparing, if any, use of non-reading-related prizes such as stickers, coupons, or toys, and avoiding using reading and writing as "punishment."<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Ongoing *professional learning* opportunities reflect research on adult learning and effective literacy instruction.

**School, center, and program leaders ensure that professional learning opportunities are:**

- data informed so that they meet the needs and best interests of teaching staff and their students;<sup>20</sup>
- focused on the “why” as well as the “how” of effective whole-class and small-group instructional practices, with opportunities for teachers to observe effective practice and to be observed and receive feedback from mentors and coaches;<sup>21</sup>
- driven by a belief that teacher expertise is a strong predictor of child success;<sup>22</sup>
- collaborative in nature, involving colleagues working together (e.g., study groups, collaborative inquiry, and problem solving)<sup>23</sup> and inclusive of other classroom and school staff;
- focused on research-based instructional practices that are age, developmentally, and culturally appropriate and that support children’s literacy development (see Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy for Prekindergarten and Grades K-3);
- based in an understanding of knowledge and skills to be learned (see Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy for Prekindergarten and Grades K-3)<sup>24</sup>
- utilizing current research on motivation and engagement to support children’s learning; and<sup>25</sup>
- inclusive of modeling and instructional coaching with colleagues who demonstrate effective practices with children and provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their knowledge, practice, and goals in an ongoing and continuous manner (see Essentials Coaching Practices in Early Literacy).<sup>26</sup>

#### 5. There is a system for determining the allocation of *literacy support* in addition to high-quality classroom instruction with multiple layers of support available to children who are not reading and/or writing at a proficient level.<sup>27</sup>

**School, center, and program leaders ensure that:**

- instruction and additional supports are layered across learning environments, including the home, and:
  - are coherent and consistent with instruction received elsewhere in the school day and occur in addition to, not instead of, regular literacy instruction;<sup>28</sup>
  - are differentiated to the individual child’s specific profile of literacy strengths and needs;<sup>29</sup>

- highly trained educators are those teaching the children needing the most support;<sup>30</sup> and
- teachers are supported in using and reflecting on analyses of multiple, systematic internal assessments (e.g., universal screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring tools) and observation as appropriate in an on-going basis to: identify individual child needs early and accurately; tailor whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction; and measure progress regularly.<sup>31</sup>

#### 6. Organizational systems assess and respond to *individual challenges* that may impede literacy development.

**School, center, or program systems and leaders ensure that:**

- any potential learning, physical, visual, regulatory, and social-emotional needs that require specific conditions and supports are identified;<sup>32</sup>
- all assessments of such needs are culturally unbiased;<sup>33</sup>
- every adult has access to research-informed strategies and tools to address each child’s demonstrated needs, including, for example, strategies for improving socio-emotional skills such as emotional understanding and techniques for helping children develop executive function skills such as planning;<sup>34</sup>
- children with significant needs receive coordinated, intensive supports and services that include continued collaboration among teachers, interventionists, family, and others whose expertise is relevant (e.g., special education teacher, school psychologist, school nurse, social worker);<sup>35</sup> and all adults intentionally work to:
  - identify child behaviors that may impede literacy learning and the conditions that prompt and reinforce those behaviors;
  - modify learning environments to decrease problem behaviors;
  - teach and reinforce new skills to increase appropriate behavior and preserve a positive learning environment;
  - draw on relationships with professional colleagues and children’s families for continued guidance and support; and
  - assess whether school-wide behavior problems warrant adopting school-wide strategies or programs and, if so, implement ones shown to reduce negative behaviors and foster positive interactions,<sup>36</sup> with particular attention to strategies or programs that have been shown to have positive impacts on literacy development.<sup>37</sup>



## 7. Adequate, high-quality *instructional resources* are well maintained and utilized.

**Leaders and systems within the school, center, or program ensure that:**

- teachers have consistent access to resources, including technological and curricular resources, that support research-informed instruction in all components of literacy instruction and that provide continuity across ages and grade levels;
- teachers have appropriate professional development and support for effective use of available technologies, materials, and resources;<sup>38</sup>
- each child has access to many informational and literature texts in the classroom and school, with culturally diverse characters and themes, that they want to read and that they can read independently or with the support of others;<sup>39</sup> and
- well-stocked school libraries and/or media centers, with library media specialists, offer a large collection of digital books, print books, and other reading materials for reading independently and with the support of others to immerse and instruct children in varied media, genres of texts, and accessible information.<sup>40</sup>

## 8. A consistent *family engagement* strategy includes specific attention to literacy development.

**Members of the learning organization engage with families by:**

- prioritizing learning about families and the language and literacy practices in which they engage to inform instruction, drawing from families' daily routines that build on culturally developed knowledge and skills accumulated in the home (e.g., inviting families to share texts they read and write as part of their lives at home or at work);<sup>41</sup>
- providing regular opportunities for families to build a network of social relationships to support language and literacy development (e.g., connect families with community organizations that provide access to books or other educational supports);<sup>42</sup>
- working collaboratively, as teachers and specialists, to plan various levels of instructional supports, assess the efficacy of those supports, and adjust accordingly;
- fostering familial and community participation in the education of children and the work of the learning environment;<sup>43</sup>

- empowering families to communicate about and impact the educational environment at school, as well as strengthen the educational environment in the home, regardless of education level, income, or native language of the primary caregivers;<sup>44</sup> and
- offering research-based guidance on how families can support literacy development (see Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy for Prekindergarten and Grades K-3).<sup>45</sup>

## 9. An ambitious *summer reading* initiative supports reading growth.<sup>46</sup>

**The school, center, or program supports summer reading development by:**

- facilitating opportunities for every child to read books and access texts during the summer, including summer reading programs offered through school and public libraries;<sup>47</sup>
- emphasizing books of high interest to children and offering book selections within the likely range of reading levels within each class;<sup>48</sup>
- providing instruction at the end of the school year to re-emphasize reading comprehension strategies and orient children to summer reading by encouraging use of effective strategies while reading at home;<sup>49</sup> and
- providing structured guidance to parents and guardians to support reading at home, such as by encouraging parents and guardians to listen to their child read aloud, discuss books with their child, and provide feedback on their child's reading.<sup>50</sup>

## 10. A network of *connections in the community* provides authentic purposes and audiences for children's work and helps facilitate use of quality out-of-school programming.

**Connections beyond the school, center, or program walls provide:**

- organization-wide and classroom-level partnerships with local businesses and other organizations that facilitate opportunities for children to read and write for purposes and audiences beyond school assignments;<sup>51</sup>
- access to opportunities for individualization, for example through one-on-one tutoring;<sup>52</sup> and
- opportunities for children to develop literacy outside of the school hours, including through engaging in out-of-school time library, community, and school programs in the summer and after school.<sup>53</sup>

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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:

Early Childhood Administrators' Network, MAISA

English Language Arts Leadership Network, MAISA

General Education Leadership Network, MAISA

Kalamazoo Public Schools

Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning

Michigan Association of Supervisors of Special Education

Michigan Department of Education

Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association

Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative

Michigan Reading Association

Michigan State University

Michigan Virtual University

Reading NOW Network

REMC Association of Michigan

Southwest Michigan Reading Council

Technology Readiness Infrastructure Grant

University of Michigan

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

## Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy

