# PROGRAM DESIGN FOR IMPACT

**The Issue:** Educators devote much time and effort to literacy supports and programs that reach many children, but we aren't making a difference in literacy rates. We need to focus on programs that result in a measurable impact on children's literacy, and then find a way to increase the number of children served by those programs.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Success is defined by number of children served and/or reported child and family satisfaction. | 1. Many programs reach large numbers of children and can report anecdotal stories of success and program satisfaction, but do not impact literacy rates program-wide. |
| 2. Children receive well designed literacy supports, but the sessions do not last long enough, or meet frequently enough, to make a difference. | 2. Finding the right dosage– amount of time on task needed to improve literacy skills– is vital. At-risk or struggling children need intensive literacy support early (Memo 2). |
| 3. Programs without measurable impact are brought to scale; focusing on "reach" – serving as many children and/or families as possible – before quality. | 3. We cannot expect real improvements in children's literacy outcomes unless we first verify that programs are effective, and then bring those effective programs to scale. |
| 4. A high quality and targeted program is brought to scale, but only parts of the program are used, or the program is watered down. | 4. Even a model program quickly loses its impact if not implemented correctly. |

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

### Identify Key Ingredients

Conduct ongoing evaluation to:

- understand whether a program or support is working, for whom it works, and under what conditions
- inform adjustments and mid-course corrections

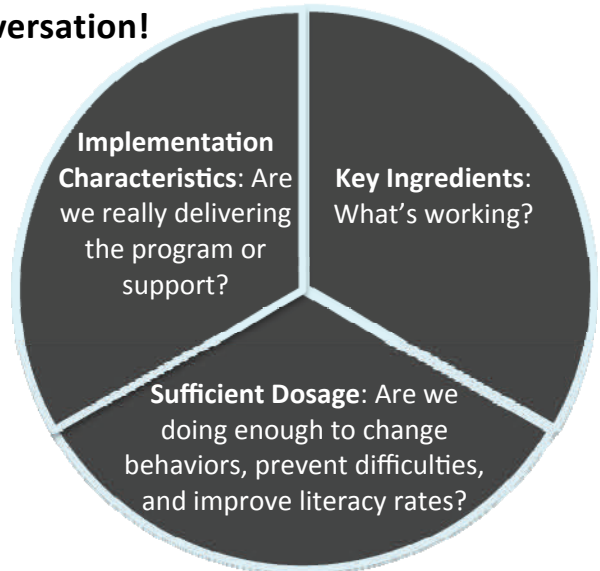### Provide Sufficient Dosage of High-Quality Programs

Determine if an increase in any of the following would advance children's literacy:

- how much time is spent in the program,
- how often it happens, or
- the frequency of contact with participants

### Support High-Quality Implementation

- provide ongoing professional development (Memos 8 & 9)
- continually monitor quality, ensuring services implemented match the characteristics of the tested program design

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!



**Implementation Characteristics**: Are we really delivering the program or support?

**Key Ingredients**: What's working?

**Sufficient Dosage**: Are we doing enough to change behaviors, prevent difficulties, and improve literacy rates?

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

# EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION PRACTICES

**The Issue:** Given that early literacy difficulties fuel future literacy problems, we need to do our best to prevent difficulties from the start. Fortunately, prevention has been estimated at a mere fraction of the costs of remediation, for budgets and children. For best literacy outcomes at-scale, we need to be much more focused on our children as readers before they are in grade 3.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Across many districts and states, third grade scores on high-stakes tests make up the first pieces of information on literacy rates collected and available at scale. | 1. Differences in young children's language and literacy skills can be captured early through age-appropriate assessments (Memo 5). |
| 2. Rather than funding early prevention efforts, many grants are tied to state test scores at grade 3 and above. | 2. Programs aimed at prevention are more effective than later remediation efforts, plus, they are less expensive. |
| 3. Struggling readers' difficulties are exposed and exacerbated with increased years of schooling. | 3. Preventive approaches used with the youngest children are easily embedded into daily instruction and can prevent the need for remediation later. |

### For More on This…

Learn about the multi-level prevention system, *Response to Intervention*, at www.rti4success.org

Find more information on using literacy data in the service of prevention in the book: *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux and S. Marietta

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

We need to uncover children's literacy weaknesses well before they are expected to read and write for academic success. To do so, sites should focus on early identification practices and prevention efforts. And remember, enrichment and remediation are the same for many young children!

### Assess Early

⇒ Starting in early childhood, use developmentally appropriate assessments to identify future literacy risks (Memos 5, 6, & 7)

⇒ Gather the data needed to focus on early identification and supports

### Fund Prevention Programs

⇒ Focus resources on preventing literacy problems (you will be more likely to improve outcomes — and for less money!)

### Build Strong Early Literacy

⇒ Use curricula that embed enrichment into daily instruction, benefiting at-risk young students and boosting literacy skills for all (Memo 15)

⇒ Focus efforts on the youngest students who are more likely to see the support as enjoyable

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

- *Is on-going assessment data available to inform understanding of children's literacy development, starting in early childhood?*

- *Are resources prioritized to support prevention programs from the earliest ages?*

- *Are support programs in place to embed enrichment into daily instruction in early education and care settings, and in the primary grades?*

*Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9*

# WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW AND DO

**The Issue:** While site leaders are eager to advance children's literacy development, they often lack the deep understanding of literacy needed to improve instructional practice and children's outcomes. To ensure that reform results in improvement and not just change, leaders must be well educated on children's literacy development and the specific needs of their populations.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. The site leaders encourage educators to improve literacy instruction, but the leaders are not clear on what quality instruction looks like. | 1. The site leaders need to develop their own professional knowledge base in literacy, and deeply understand what good instruction looks like. |
| 2. Much of leaders' time is taken up on managerial and operational work that is removed from day-to-day instruction. | 2. When leaders' time is primarily focused on instruction, educators are more effective and committed, and children's literacy outcomes improve. |
| 3. Educators are held accountable for promoting children's literacy development, but often not provided with adequate support or training. | 3. Educators need support to deliver high-quality instruction. Site leaders are responsible for ensuring structures are in place to provide that support (Memos 8 & 9). |

### For More on This...

Much of the guidance provided here is drawn from *Building a New Structure for School Leadership* by Elmore

You can also find guidance from:

*Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching* by Curtis & City

*Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by Lesaux & Marietta

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

Improvements will occur at scale only when the leaders at each site:

- understand the specifics of literacy development,
- interpret student literacy data,
- know their site's instructional strengths and weaknesses,
- and can translate these understandings into corresponding guidance for educators.

### Build Your Professional Knowledge to Inform Your Literacy Improvement Efforts

**Develop a comprehensive knowledge about *literacy***

- Understand the categories of literacy competencies (skills-based and knowledge-based) and the intricacies of literacy development (Memo 4)
- Learn about best practices for comprehensive literacy instruction at each grade level
- Understand how to interpret different types of assessments (e.g., diagnostic, screening, and outcome), in order to provide instructional guidance and plan for professional development (Memo 7)

**Develop a comprehensive knowledge about *your site's literacy strengths and needs***

- Analyze children's literacy data trends over time and use that data to determine instructional plans that match your population's needs
- Observe and support educators in your setting and discuss best practices for literacy instruction
- Examine your site's practices around family partnerships and target efforts to meet children's specific literacy learning needs (Memos 10 & 11)

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

# LITERACY UNPACKED: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LITERACY?

**The Issue:** To make decisions that have a positive impact on children's literacy outcomes, leaders need a keen understanding of literacy itself. But literacy is a complex concept and there are many key misunderstandings about what, exactly, literacy is.

## Unpacking Literacy Competencies

In this memo we focus specifically on two broad categories of literacy competencies: *skills*-based competencies and *knowledge*-based competencies.
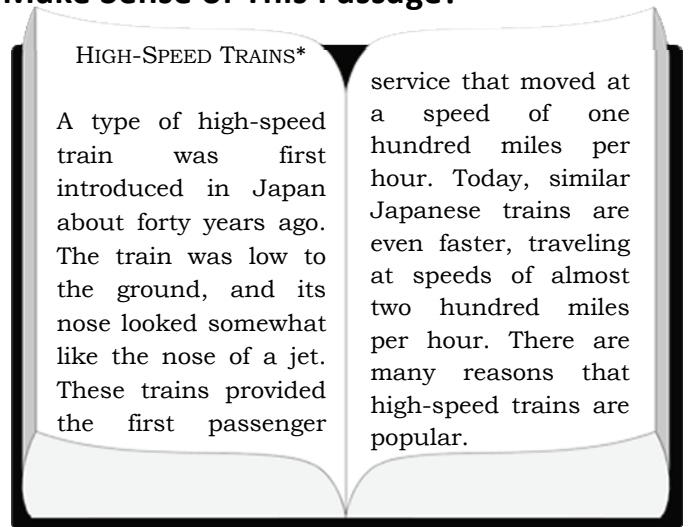
**Literacy**
Reading, Writing, Listening & Speaking

**Skills**
- Concepts about print
- The ability to hear & work with spoken sounds
- Alphabet knowledge
- Word reading
- Spelling
- Fluency

**Knowledge**
- Concepts about the world
- The ability to understand & express complex ideas
- Vocabulary
- Oral language skills
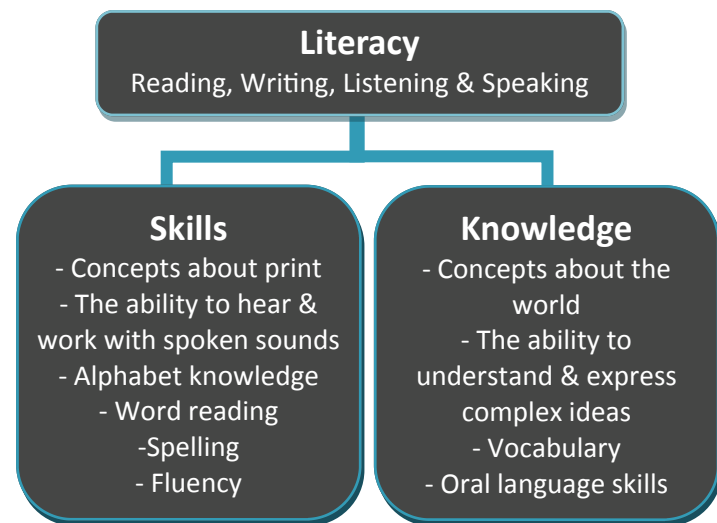
## Why Is This Distinction Meaningful?

| | Skills-Based Competencies | Knowledge-Based Competencies |
|---|---|---|
| **Developmental Processes** | Typically mastered by 3rd grade | Develops from infancy through adulthood |
| **Instructional Implications** | Highly susceptible to relatively brief instruction | Requires sustained instruction, beginning in early childhood |

With adequate instruction, skills-based competencies are mastered by 3nd grade for the average student. Yet the development of knowledge-based competencies must be supported with good instruction throughout schooling. For many children, especially from academically vulnerable populations, knowledge-based competencies are more likely to be key sources of academic difficulties.

## What Competencies Does a Reader Need to Make Sense of This Passage?

HIGH-SPEED TRAINS*

A type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train was low to the ground, and its nose looked somewhat like the nose of a jet. These trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, similar Japanese trains are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour. There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular.

\* Passage adapted from Good & Kaminski (2007)
*Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*, 6th ed.

| Skills-Based Competencies | |
|---|---|
| | Map sounds onto letters (e.g., /s/ /p/ /ee/ /d/) and blend these to form a word (speed) |
| | Recognize spelling patterns (e.g., the "-igh" family found in the word "high") |
| | Read fluently – about 115 words per minute |

| Knowledge-Based Competencies | |
|---|---|
| | Understand the meaning of words in this context (e.g., "service" has 37 possible definitions!) |
| | Make meaning of the text using relevant background knowledge (e.g., conceptual knowledge about trains and jets and travel) |
| | Use cognitive strategies (e.g., when reading the second sentence, if the child initially pictures a human nose, he must be able to adjust when the comparison to a jet's nose is read) |

## The Bottom Line for PreK to 3rd Efforts:

Skills-based competencies are necessary but not sufficient for early literacy development; later reading comprehension and academic success depend mostly on strong knowledge-based competencies.

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

*Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY ASSESSMENT

**The Issue:** Effective practice starts with effective assessment. To monitor young children's literacy development, educators need an assessment approach that provides timely and crucial information. Yet in many settings, an early, ongoing and comprehensive approach to literacy assessment is not in place.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Waiting to formally identify and support struggling readers until state tests show failing results. | 1. There is no reason to wait: a child's vocabulary at age 4 is predictive of third grade reading comprehension. Early literacy screening is needed to provide timely supports (Memo 2). |
| 2. Seeing early literacy assessment as only the job of educational settings. | 2. Communities need to start earlier to prevent literacy problems. Community health clinics and pediatric practices should implement language/ literacy screenings and monitoring. |
| 3. Forgoing literacy assessment with young children due to concerns that these assessments are developmentally inappropriate, or that their results are not valid. | 3. Neglecting to regularly assess young children's literacy development can do more harm than good. In fact, assessment-driven remediation and enrichment activities look similar in the early years and are often enjoyed by young children! |

### For More on This...

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux & S. Marietta.

## Self-Study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

Young children need ongoing assessments to support their literacy development. Review the appropriate section below to steer a self-study of your early literacy assessment approach:

**Early education, early care & PreK-3rd**

Key strategy: To respond to children's literacy needs, ensure there is a tight link between assessment and instruction

Self-study:

- *Do we use data from early, ongoing assessments to inform our priorities for:*
  - *preventive practices* (Memo 2)?
  - *professional development* (Memos 8 & 9)?
  - *curriculum* (Memos 14-16)?
  - *family partnerships* (Memos 10 & 11)?

**Community health clinics & pediatric practices**

Key strategy: Include a language development checklist as part of regular visits

Self-study:

- *Are measures of language development part of the standard protocol?*
- *Are the results used to initiate conversations about healthy language development and encourage language-building practices?*
- *When appropriate, do we use what we learn from literacy assessments to link children and families with additional services (e.g., state-funded early intervention programs)?*

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

## COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT:
## TOWARDS A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF LITERACY

> **For an introduction to literacy skills and knowledge, read *Literacy Unpacked* (Memo # 4)**

**The Issue:** When early literacy assessments are in place, they often provide only a partial or limited understanding of children's overall literacy abilities. The lack of comprehensive information can misinform instructional needs.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Screening and monitoring children's skills-based competencies (e.g., letter sounds and names) without assessing knowledge-based competencies (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension). | 1. Measuring children's progress in one type of competency can mask significant weaknesses in the other; both are needed for literacy success (Memo 4). |
| 2. Not screening and monitoring vocabulary and language development in settings that serve academically vulnerable populations. | 2. Many children growing up in low-income and non-English-speaking homes need additional support to develop knowledge-based competencies, but their needs go undetected and unmet. |
| 3. Because of imbalanced assessment practices, instruction often does not match children's literacy learning needs, focusing predominantly on the skills that were assessed. | 3. To focus instruction on the many competencies necessary for literacy success, educators need information from multiple measures. |

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Process!

To determine if your current approach to literacy assessment is comprehensive, fill in this matrix for your site and then use the questions below the chart to discuss the significance of your findings.

| Age level | Assessment | What is it measuring? | Skills | Knowledge |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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- *Are we measuring both skills- and knowledge-based literacy competencies?*
- *Is one area taking priority over another?*
- *Are there gaps in certain areas and/or at certain age-levels?*
- *Do we have lingering questions about any of our assessments (e.g., what the test measures or how it is used)?*

### For More on This…

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux & S. Marietta.

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

# LEAD FOR LITERACY MEMO

*Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9*

## COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT:
## MAKING SENSE OF TEST TYPE AND PURPOSE

**The Issue:** Within an assessment battery, different types of testing tools are needed, with each tool serving a clear and specific purpose. Yet there is much confusion about the intended and appropriate use of assessments; some types of assessments are overused while others are not used at all.

## A Primer on Assessment Type

**Diagnostic Assessments**
*How should I focus my daily instruction?*

- Gather in-depth information about children's instructional needs
- Provide immediate feedback on instruction
  (e.g., end-of-unit tests, running records)

**Screening Assessments**
*Are children meeting benchmarks?*

- Determine which children are at risk for difficulties in particular literacy components
- Provide information on how children are performing relative to same-aged peers using a valid, external benchmark
  (Find examples at www.rti4success.org )

**Progress Monitoring Assessments**
*Are children responding to instruction?*

- Determine if instruction is helping children make adequate progress or if they need more intensive interventions
- Provide a reference point for children's performance outside of day-to-day activities
  (Find examples at www.rti4success.org )

**Outcome Assessments**
*Are we delivering quality instruction?*

- Gauge achievement levels for the site's overall population and for particular groups (e.g., children growing up in low-income or non-English-speaking homes)
- Determine effectiveness of the site's program(s)
  (e.g., the state test)

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Using one assessment for many different purposes. | 1. Often publishers claim that one test can provide multiple types of information. In reality, most tests can serve one purpose well. |
| 2. *Not* using screening or progress monitoring assessments as part of the assessment battery, and instead relying on diagnostics. | 2. To understand literacy risk, settings need measures that have an external benchmark, especially for screening and progress monitoring. Diagnostic assessments (even those from a formal kit) do not provide a valid and reliable external benchmark. |
| 3. Thinking standardized assessments are inauthentic or too removed from instruction to be useful. | 3. While the tasks may seem disconnected or silly, standardized literacy assessments give clear indications of risks and often reveal problems that may not be apparent from day-to-day interactions alone. |

## The Bottom Line:

A comprehensive assessment approach uses —

- measures of literacy skills and knowledge (Memo 6)
- a combination of assessment types

**For More on This…**

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux & S. Marietta.

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux

# DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE

**The Issue:** While most educators receive professional development (PD) focused on literacy skills and strategies, at scale current efforts aren't working to improve children's literacy. If we are serious about training educators to deliver instruction that will boost literacy rates, then we need to make PD for educators more directly connected to children's needs and more intensive.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Choosing PD based on the latest educational fad or general offerings by outside organizations. | 1. PD is only effective when the professional learning is directly related to children's needs, based on data (Memo 5). |
| 2. Providing brief, isolated PD sessions. | 2. PD opportunities should be ongoing, connected, and part of a long-term improvement plan (Memo 1). |
| 3.Designing a PD plan that does not address the specific needs of the most academically vulnerable children at the site. | 3. A PD plan is not complete if all students' needs are not addressed, particularly those students who are at risk for later difficulties (Memo 2). |

### For More on This…

- The <u>FirstSchool</u> partnership at the University of North Carolina and their paper, *21st Century Teacher Education for FirstSchool: A Model of Collaborative Inquiry*

- <u>Reading Rockets</u> for more information about how principals can support teachers

- <u>*Fixing Teacher Professional Development*</u> by H. Hill

## Self-Study for Impact:

Use these guiding questions to steer the design and selection of effective professional development:

### Based on Site-level Needs

- Do we have a PD strategy in place that is tightly connected to children's specific literacy needs at our site (Memos 5, 6, & 7)?

- Is this PD effort part of a long-term improvement plan guided by:
  1) patterns in child data,
  2) staff professional needs, and
  3) organizational goals?

- Is PD connected to the curriculum (Memo 16)?

### Intensive and Continuous Support for Educators

- Are our PD opportunities building off of each other, encouraging in-depth learning (Memo 1)?

- Does the PD design promote ongoing training that is embedded in daily practice?

- Does the PD design integrate theory and rationale with practice-based activities (e.g., case studies, data analyses, demonstrations, lesson designs)?

- Are post-PD supports part of the plan (e.g., materials, learning communities; Memo 9)?

## IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE

**The Issue:** Even when professional development (PD) is appropriately designed to advance children's literacy (Memo 8), PD will not translate into improved instructional quality and increased literacy development if it is not implemented effectively.

### What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Educators engage in data-driven PD (Memo 8), but struggle to implement the new ideas learned. | 1. Educators need support as they take new ideas from PD and put them into use. Leaders are responsible for ensuring that structures are in place to facilitate the link between professional learning and actual practice (Memo 3). |
| 2. Educators initially implement new ideas learned during PD, but lose momentum over time, and in the end, practice doesn't change. | 2. PD will only be effective if leaders organize learning communities so that educators have opportunities to encourage each other and discuss implementation issues on an on-going basis. |
| 3.PD sessions are organized such that educators are passive participants and their learning is compromised. | 3. PD sessions need to be interactive, with time for collaboration and reflection, and with actionable take-aways for educators. |

**Key Strategies for Impact:**

To implement professional development that truly results in literacy improvement, start the process using this checklist as a guide.

### A checklist for the leadership team

☐ Educator participation is at the core of all PD sessions. At each session…

   ☐ educators openly share thoughts, discuss perspectives, and raise questions (even when the question may reflect a lack of understanding).

   ☐ the environment is active, engaging to all.

   ☐ participants acquire new knowledge, reflect on the ideas with colleagues, and give feedback.

☐ Structures are in place that support educators as they apply new ideas to everyday practice.  This means...

   ☐ materials necessary for implementing new knowledge are available and accessible.

   ☐ formal collaboration time (e.g., designated opportunities for educators to share newly-acquired knowledge with other educators at the site) encourages mutual support and communal advancement.

   ☐ non-evaluative observations and feedback are part of the on-going routine.

   ☐ schedules and classroom locations are organized to best encourage informal discussions about instruction.

# LEAD FOR LITERACY MEMO

*Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9*

## DESIGNING FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**The Issue:** Despite the potential for partnerships with families that boost children's literacy development, most plans to engage families are not literacy focused. Updating the design of your family partnership plan—with children's literacy needs at the core—can make a difference in literacy and academic outcomes.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Families want to support their children's learning, but there is no plan in place to capitalize on this commitment. | 1. Educators need to equip families with information and home literacy activities that will support their children's literacy learning. |
| 2. Leaders commit to school-family partnerships, but rarely focus on building relationships with families that foster children's literacy development. | 2. A key goal of the school-family partnership must be to boost literacy rates, and leaders must show commitment to that goal. |
| 3. The site's plan for school-family partnerships was designed without input from families. | 3. Family representatives, staff, and leaders must work together to develop a school-family partnership plan that will boost literacy. |
| 4. Educators are the link between families and schools, but often don't have the training necessary to help families support their children's literacy. | 4. For educators to understand and support home literacy practices, professional development must be part of a school-family partnership plan (Memos 8 & 9). |

## Self-study for Impact:

As you go through the process of tightening your site's link between literacy learning and family engagement, use this checklist:

### Put Children's Literacy Learning at the Core!

- ☐ Appoint an individual (or team) with knowledge about literacy (Memos 3 & 4) to lead the family partnership effort
- ☐ In collaboration with family and staff representatives, examine current: 1) family partnership efforts, 2) trends in literacy at the site
- ☐ Use this accumulated information to set goals for advancing literacy in partnership with families
- ☐ Update your family partnership plan to include specific actions that will change or improve behaviors and impact children's literacy skills (Memo 1)

### Get the school community invested!

- ☐ Incorporate input from families into the updated plan for school-family partnerships
- ☐ Clearly communicate the specific plan for the school-family partnership, and the rationale behind it, to the whole community
- ☐ Provide educators with professional development (Memos 8 & 9) that builds:
  - ☐ knowledge about how school-family partnerships will improve children's literacy outcomes
  - ☐ capacity to support families' literacy practices

### For More on This…

*Beyond the Bake Sale:*

*The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships*

by A.T. Henderson, K.L. Mapp, V.R. Johnson, & D. Davies

*School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* by J.L. Epstein & colleagues

## IMPLEMENTING FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**The Issue:** In many educational settings, particularly those serving vulnerable populations, the literacy benefits of productive and positive school-family partnerships are missed. Implementing a literacy-based family partnership plan effectively is essential for changing behaviors that impact children's literacy development.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Communicating only with families who initiate conversations about their children's learning. | 1. *All* families want to support their children's learning; it is the responsibility of site leaders and staff to leverage this common goal and build partnerships. |
| 2. Interacting with families primarily when children misbehave or problems arise. | 2. Solid relationships between educators and families are more productive for learning and behavior, and make potentially tough conversations easier. |
| 3. Interacting with families primarily when there are school social events. | 3. Social events are helpful for building relationships, but not enough for building literacy! Productive family partnerships revolve around children's learning and progress. |
| 4. Engaging in a one-way information campaign from school to home (e.g., report cards, newsletters). | 4. Two-way channels of communication about children's learning and progress help families and educators support literacy development. |

### For More on This…

♦ Check out Encouraging Your Child to Read, produced by Harvard Graduate School of Education for the documentary, *Waiting for "Superman"*

♦ Home language-building activities are available at Washington Learning Systems and Reading Rockets

♦ Get ideas for interactive homework at Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

For partnerships with families to have an impact on children's literacy development , they must revolve around the common goal of supporting children's learning. With this goal in mind, leaders and staff should:

### Build relationships with *all* families

- Connect families to your community [e.g., welcome families on site, conduct home visits, encourage volunteerism (Memos 12 &13)]
- Regularly create forums for families to ask questions
- Make interpreters available for non-English speaking families
- Translate newsletters into languages families understand

### Share literacy progress with families

- Provide families with regular, timely, and accessible updates about their children's literacy progress
- Check in to make sure that families understand their children's literacy needs and how to help them

### Encourage families to read, talk, and play

- Provide tools to help families connect home activities to classroom learning (e.g., word games, conversation starters, all types of books—including multilingual and wordless picture books)
- Give concrete suggestions on texts to read at home, on games that build literacy skills, and on how to have elaborative conversations
- Suggest community activities that will build children's knowledge and support their literacy development

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

- *Have we included all families in our partnership efforts, valuing and honoring our families' diverse strengths?*
- *Do we communicate regularly with all families about their children's literacy in ways that are honest, respectful, and useful?*
- *Do we regularly provide specific activities that families can engage in at home to promote literacy learning?*

# DESIGNING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FOCUSED ON LITERACY

**The Issue:** Volunteers are a potentially powerful resource for supporting children's literacy development, but in too many cases, they are underutilized and/or mismanaged. This missed opportunity for impact is especially unfortunate given current budgetary struggles across the nation.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Having minimally trained volunteers work with the children who have the greatest needs. | 1. Children who require individualized support need highly-skilled adults who work with them regularly. |
| 2. Using a spur-of-the-moment approach for assigning tasks to volunteers. | 2. Volunteer initiatives work best when volunteers' roles are clearly defined and match their interests, skills, and schedules. |
| 3. Delegating tasks that are not linked in some way to children's literacy learning. | 3. Volunteers' time and efforts have an impact on children's literacy development when the work is connected to the site's literacy improvement plans (Memo 10). |

### For More on This…

*School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, 3rd edition* by J.L. Epstein & colleagues

*The Administrator's Guide to School-Community Relations, 2nd edition* by G.E. Pawlas

Find examples of successful volunteer programs at the John's Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

**1. Generate a plan that outlines the roles of volunteers within your site's literacy improvement effort**

**2. Assign volunteers to responsibilities that:**
- **free-up the time of experienced professionals**
- **match volunteers' interests, skills, and schedules (and, of course)**
- **facilitate children's literacy development!**

**For example, volunteers might:**

**Perform ongoing tasks**
(e.g., organize or prepare lesson materials, log books taken/returned from a lending library, construct bulletin boards to celebrate literacy progress)

**Provide literacy block assistance**
(e.g., supervise children at learning centers while trained staff work with struggling learners, read aloud to children as the teacher conducts assessments or provides small-group instruction)

**3. Delegate a leader (e.g., teacher leader, parent liaison, literacy coach) or leadership team to provide ongoing support and supervision to volunteers**

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

These self-study questions will help steer your decisions and strategies for impact.

- *Are volunteers' roles explicitly linked in some way to children's literacy learning?*
- *Are volunteers freeing up the time of highly skilled staff members, allowing learners to receive targeted support?*
- *Are volunteers' interests and skills well-matched with their responsibilities?*
- *Are volunteers receiving ongoing support and supervision?*

## IMPLEMENTING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FOCUSED ON LITERACY

**The Issue:** When used wisely, volunteers can make an impact on children's literacy skills (Memo 12). However, many educational settings lack attention to recruiting, managing and monitoring volunteers in a way that would create sustained and effective volunteer programs.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Drawing on the same small group of school community members as volunteers. | 1. Effective volunteer programs recruit widely from all members of the school community (Memo 11). |
| 2. When volunteers arrive, busy practitioners decide on the spot how to use them. | 2. Effective volunteer programs waste no one's time; a person (or team) delegates volunteers' responsibilities in advance. |
| 3. Program impact – if monitored – is gauged solely by counting the number of volunteers and their hours at the site. | 3. Effective volunteer programs are regularly monitored using indicators of program quality and children's achievement (Memos 1 & 5-7). |

### For More on This…

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (3rd edition) by Joyce L. Epstein and Associates (2009).

You can also find guidance from Epstein and her group at the National Network of Partnership Schools website.

## What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

The person (or team) delegated to lead and sustain the effort should take responsibility for:

**1. Wide Recruitment** — **Bolstering School-Community Partnerships**

- Invite all families to partner with the site through volunteering
- Create flexible schedules for volunteers
- Value a wide range of contributions        (Memo 11)

**2. Ongoing Support** — **Ensuring the Program Is Carried out as Planned**

- Train volunteers
- Hold regular meetings
- Check in with staff and volunteers on an ongoing basis regarding participation and commitment
- Keep volunteers invested by showing them how they help advance children's learning

**3. Strategic Monitoring** — **Using Multiple Indicators of Effectiveness**

Gather and analyze information that reflects:
- Child learning
- Patterns of volunteer involvement (e.g., who participates and what are their roles)
- Feedback from program participants (e.g., staff, volunteers)        (Memos 1 & 5-7)

## Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

These self-study questions will help steer your decisions and strategies for impact.

- *Are we communicating with all members of the school community, inviting them into our volunteer program?*
- *Is a diverse group of families involved?*
- *Is the program being carried out as planned?*
- *Are we using multiple indicators of program effectiveness?*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF USING A LITERACY CURRICULUM

**The Issue:** It's a big job to design cohesive, rigorous literacy instruction, especially instruction that promotes language and knowledge building. Yet many teachers are expected to both design and deliver literacy instruction day-after-day, and month-after-month, throughout the school year.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Providing teachers with literacy frameworks or standards without providing supportive instructional resources. | 1. A curriculum provides content and pedagogical strategies educators need to help children meet standards. |
| 2. Thinking of a curriculum as something that limits teachers' choices and effectiveness. | 2. A high-quality curriculum is a resource that creates a platform for supporting good teaching. |
| 3. Having too many different instructional approaches and programs in use, limiting opportunities to develop shared professional knowledge and practices. | 3. A curriculum is a tool for institutionalizing professional knowledge and effective practices across classrooms, programs, and settings. (This is especially critical in settings with high staff turnover.) |
| 4. Having too many different instructional approaches and programs in use, creating a disconnected learning environment for children as they move from classroom-to-classroom and grade-to-grade. | 4. A curriculum is a tool for building the kind of instructional cohesion children need to accumulate skills and knowledge over time. |

## Self-study for Impact:

Use these guiding questions to determine how you are supporting instructional design so that teachers can focus on instructional delivery.

### Supporting Teachers

- Are educators at each level able to draw (primarily) from one curriculum to deliver high quality and comprehensive literacy instruction that meets standards?
- Does the curriculum lend itself to staff-wide professional development (Memo 8)?
- Do educators have a shared professional language that enables them to discuss and refine their instructional approaches and practices (Memo 9)?

### Supporting Students

- Is a curriculum in place that provides the site's children with a cohesive learning experience as they grow, meeting standards at each level?
- Does that curriculum support instruction of comparable quality across classrooms (Memo 1)?
- Do at-risk and struggling readers receive support that is aligned with daily literacy instruction?

### For More on This...

Check out the Winter 2011 issue of the American Educator, featuring articles on how a quality curriculum is necessary for achieving the Common Core Standards. Highlights include:

- *The Spark of Specifics* by D. Senechal
- *Beyond Comprehension* by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

# SELECTING A COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY CURRICULUM

**The Issue:** A comprehensive curriculum is needed to provide young children with literacy learning environments that meet high standards (Memo 14). Many educators need guidance, however, when trying to select or assemble a curriculum that advances teaching and learning.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Selecting a curriculum that targets the various components of literacy (e.g., phonics, vocabulary), but only in isolation. | 1. Preparing children for academic success means embedding literacy instruction within a rigorous content-based framework for knowledge-building (Memo 4). |
| 2. Having multiple literacy curricula and programs in use within and across classrooms. | 2. If teachers are expected to assemble a curriculum by pulling from a number of sources, they need an overarching framework to assemble these into a cohesive approach. |
| 3. Selecting a curriculum based on sales and marketing, including free sample materials, and making a decision within too tight a timeframe. | 3. Selecting a curriculum requires a team-based process that is informed by unbiased guidance, the needs of the setting's children and adults, and a pilot phase that enables thorough review. |

### For More on This…

## Self-Study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

Use this checklist to guide the selection of comprehensive curricular resources. A comprehensive curriculum has the following:

### Think *Rigorous*!

☐ Content-based units of study. Units should combine:
- ☐ purposeful, explicit opportunities for developing knowledge-based competencies
- ☐ systematic and explicit instruction that targets skills-based competencies

(Memo 4)

*Why these features?* A curriculum that promotes comprehensive literacy development embeds skills-based competency instruction in language-rich and content-rich units of study.

### Think *Cohesive*!

☐ A long-term plan for teaching and learning that includes structured, daily lesson models
☐ Consistent unit features to facilitate teaching and learning
☐ Supporting materials that provide additional review and practice of the content taught in class

*Why these features?* A curriculum with these features will support instructional coherence and consistency within and across classrooms and grade levels.

### Think *Engaging*!

☐ A classroom arrangement with literacy-enriched learning centers featuring a wide variety of books and visuals
☐ Structured learning tasks and routines that promote interactive play and inquiry

*Why these features?* Educators need clear steps and quality materials to create a literacy-enriched learning environment that is structured, interactive, and engaging.

# IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY CURRICULUM

**The Issue:** It is not enough to select a literacy curriculum and place the guide and materials in the educator's hands. Effective curricular implementation is a process, led by a leadership team, that is focused on providing educators with ongoing support to deliver high-quality literacy instruction.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

| Common Pitfalls | What We're Learning |
|---|---|
| 1. Educators are provided a day's training and a manual, but not on-going support with curriculum implementation. | 1. Instruction improves when the site's leaders provide educators with the necessary support and training to implement a curriculum with fidelity (see Memos 8 & 9). |
| 2. A curriculum is adopted but not delivered by all educators consistently or as intended (e.g., "dipping" in and out). | 2. Children need to experience consistent learning routines; they benefit from a long-term, content-rich learning plan that will help them accumulate skills and knowledge over time (see Memos 4 & 15). |
| 3. Educators are held accountable for implementing a curriculum with fidelity, but often not provided with adequate support or opportunities to collaborate. | 3. Effective implementation takes time, requires leadership support, and demands opportunities to collaborate; even the highest quality materials do not automatically translate into better practice. |

### For More on This…

- The National Center on Response to Intervention features guidance and tools for implementing school-wide practices
- McREL Keys to Learning has a section on implementing curriculum effectively
- Fidelity of Implementation within an RTI Framework by Daryl Mellard is a free publication online that has sample observation checklists

## Key Strategies for Impact: A checklist for the leadership team

☐ Develop your own knowledge of the curriculum

*Why?* Leadership needs a firm understanding of a new curriculum to provide effective guidance and support.

☐ Provide educators with training opportunities before and during implementation, and personally participate. Training should include:

- A rationale for the curriculum's design and lessons
- Guidance on how to carry out the various components of the curriculum

*Why?* Curricula are not intuitive and therefore require ongoing training. Continuous training improves implementation quality , builds collective commitment to the curriculum, and gets new staff up to speed.

☐ Set up and perform regular formal and informal observations of educators using the curriculum

- Gather specific information on educators' strengths and needs
- Monitor the quality of curriculum implementation

*Why?* Information obtained through classroom observations can be used for tailoring professional development to educators' needs, and ensuring all children experience comparable instruction.

☐ Facilitate conversations about instructional practice and improvement

*Why?* A curriculum provides a shared professional language that enables educators to discuss and refine their instructional practices during meetings and planning time.

☐ Make curricular materials available to address the individual needs of struggling or at-risk students, as well as children who need enrichment

*Why?* Individualized student support is most effective when it corresponds with classroom learning.

Find this memo and others at http://isites.harvard.edu/lesaux