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Programs That Improve Student literacy (ELA) Skills in Classes from PreK to 12

Raising student achievement in the areas of literacy (ELA) **for all students** has proven difficult for



many school districts. Some districts have found themselves being required by the DOE/DESE to swap their present programs to a set of programs that have been approved as “Research Based” but need help with selecting the best program for the district. Some districts have implemented one of these “Research Based Programs” that is improving the achievement of some students, but are finding gaps that leave other students behind. In many districts secondary teachers are being asked to integrate discipline specific reading and writing instruction into their curriculum without the teachers receiving adequate training. These are

just a few of the district needs the following programs are designed to address. **One or a combination of these programs may be what is needed to fill the gaps that are in your present literacy (ELA) teaching K-12.**

Please note that Dr. Cavanaugh is also available to work out customized plans of training and/or coaching in the area of Literacy (ELA) instruction that fits your specific district needs.

Program 1: What To Do If Your “Researched Based” Literacy (ELA) Curriculum has Gaps That Leave Some Students Behind. Or, In Some Cases, Don’t Address Specific Essential Skills of Literacy.

Audience: *This workshop is appropriate for instructional leaders in your school district: assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction (or teaching and learning), building principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors, curriculum teacher leaders. Ideally instructional leaders would spend two full days diving deeply into the work; however, alternative scheduling such as a combination of 3- and 6-hour workshops that equal 12 hours can be arranged.*

This may also be done with a half day Introduction and one 6-hour session.

Finding the Gaps that are Lowering Your Scores: Your school district has purchased a new research-based ELA curriculum, and yet your scores remain flat. Some students continue to lag behind. And, you’re also finding instructional gaps in what the program presents to students. The truth: no program is perfect, but your curriculum and instruction, with modifications, can be.

This curricular and instructional interrogation takes place over two full in-district days or a combination of full and half days equaling 12 hours of training. The first day or 6 hours of workshop time begins not

with a deep dive into your curriculum, but first with an investigation into your student learning and profile data as well as classroom instructional practices. What do your progress monitoring tools tell you? MCAS? Locally designed common assessments and formative assessments? Student reading and writing behaviors? Classroom walkthroughs/observations? (Note: Districts will need to provide student learning data in advance, and come to the workshop with samples of student work. A schedule for conducting walkthroughs during reading and writing instruction will need to be developed for the first in-district day.) The first 6 hours of workshop time will be spent analyzing all of these data—both quantitative and qualitative. Within the context of this information, an analysis of your curriculum then makes sense.

Once equipped with an understanding of what the learning data and classroom walkthroughs have revealed, school district leaders can then dig into their researched-based ELA program—and how teachers are using it—to better understand why student learning isn’t accelerating as anticipated. This second 6-hour, in-district day presents the opportunity to name any “holes” in the program, to examine the time spent—and the *quality of time spent*—on literacy skill-building, and to address struggling students’ needs at Tier II. On this day, a growth plan will be written for your school district specifically.

Optional Next Step: The Consultant Working Directly With Teachers Directly as a Trainer or Coach After the Administrator Program: The consultant will be available to return and work with teachers specifically on aspects of the district’s growth plan, which may include addressing obstacles to comprehension, a lack of background knowledge, struggles to access vocabulary, lack of understanding of language structures, inability to engage in what is known as verbal reasoning, a lack of literacy knowledge, and too-few opportunities for writing for a variety of audiences and purposes.

For more information about any of these programs please email wribas@ribasassociates.com or call us at 781-551-9120.

Program 2: Teaching Discipline Specific Reading and Writing Strategies to Secondary Teachers in Math, Sciences, Physical Education, Fine Arts, Vocational and, Other Disciplines. Unlike Content Specific Literacy Strategies That Are Generalized Across Disciplines, These Strategies are Specific to Each Individual Discipline.

Audience: *Typically, middle and high school teachers struggle with this area the most. This includes both classroom teachers as well as fine arts and physical education teachers. However, it may also be appropriate for elementary teachers who are struggling to integrate their literacy instruction into math and other content areas.*

These workshops require a minimum of six hours overall for teachers, with the ideal model being two 3-hour sessions. The consultant can present to teachers of all disciplines simultaneously in the workshops, and will be available to return for additional days if the District wants to conduct literacy walkthroughs to support the teachers who are implementing formal disciplinary literacy curricula.

It should be noted that for nearly a decade State Curriculum Frameworks in MA, NH, RI, ME, VT, and CT have required content-area teachers to teach discipline-specific literacy strategies and discourses. Unfortunately, most of these teachers have received no training in how to *explicitly* teach reading, writing, speaking, listening, inquiry, or domain-specific vocabulary; for years they have simply assigned and assessed reading and writing, assuming students possessed the literacy skills to be successful. This

course explores the ways in which content knowledge is accessed through specific disciplinary literacies.

By the end of the six hours spent with the consultant, teachers will be able to identify the disciplinary literacy of the content area(s) they teach, evaluate the comprehension complexity of a variety of content-area texts, grow their students' diverse literacy strategies, and use literacy to shape content instruction. Teachers will develop lessons in real time, as secondary teachers from multiple disciplines roll up their sleeves and work on strategies for their specific disciplines.

Teachers will be asked to come to the workshop with samples of the literacy-based lessons they are currently using, including the texts kids are currently engaging with and the writing tasks kids are asked to complete. The consultant will demonstrate how a variety of discipline-specific texts that students might read and write, including but not limited to print and electronic media, audio and visual texts, can be used to scaffold content learning and meet district and state content standards. By the end of the sessions, teachers will be able to identify their students' diverse literacy strategies and practices. This includes vocabulary acquisition strategies, especially to support conceptual understandings of content. If the consultant is able to meet with teachers during two 3-hour sessions, teaching tools and formative assessments can be analyzed, revised, and used to shape future instruction. Writing will be examined as both a means of growing and demonstrating content area knowledge. One of the greatest byproducts of these instructional changes will be increased literacy growth and achievement as well as improved public-facing scores for your District.

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Program 3: Maximizing the Effectiveness of Your Literacy (ELA) Blocks in K and Elementary Classrooms.

Audience: Literacy/ELA Coaches, School Administrators, Teaching and Learning Administrators

In two 6-hour sessions or a combination of 3 and 6-hour sessions, your school district can analyze the efficacy of your K to 5 literacy instruction and develop a time-sensitive growth plan, specific to your district's identified curricular and instructional needs. This workshop is appropriate for instructional leaders in your school district: assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction (or teaching and learning), building principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors, curriculum teacher leaders. Ideally instructional leaders would spend two days diving deeply into the work; however, alternative scheduling such as a combination of 3 and 6-hour sessions can be arranged. Administrators will need to come to the first session with student learning data, samples of student work, and a plan to conduct classroom walkthroughs to observe reading and writing lessons. The district's K-5 literacy curricula will need to be provided to the consultant prior to our first meeting.

Essentially, school districts' literacy blocks should include three main areas for literacy learning at the elementary level: (1) **Foundational Skills**—systematic instruction with active practice in foundational skills *every day* in grades K–3, with



additional opportunities for practice as needed in grades 4 and 5; (2) **Engaging with Complex Text**, which demands attention the nature of the text, the ability of the reader, the complexity of the reading tasks, and the cultural responsiveness and engagement of the text; and (3) **Writing**, with a focus on craft and structure, for different purposes and audiences as well as to support content-area learning.

Knowing that, consider this: A single classroom teacher, tasked with ensuring that *all students* are effectively engaged in meaningful literacy learning, must design multiple lessons during the ELA block to ensure that disparately-abled students are engaged in systematic instruction with active practice in foundational skills *every day*, reading texts of appropriate complexity *every day*, participating in text-based discussions *every day*, and practicing their writing—with a focus on craft and structure—for a variety of purposes and audiences *every day*. If that sounds Herculean, it should—because it is!

In these two 6-hour workshops (or combination of 3 and 6-hour sessions), administrators and lead teachers will analyze gaps in your district’s literacy curriculum and instruction and develop a time-sensitive growth plan to help teachers be more effective as they implement curriculum and design literacy instruction, ensuring that teachers meet *every* student’s needs. The workshop is designed to help administrators support teachers in their development of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and writing instruction that engages and challenges all students, regardless of what programs the district has purchased. In carrying out this work, it is recommended that teachers at the same grade level design curriculum, instruction and assessments together, as many hands tend to make a heavy load lighter.

Optional Next Step: The Consultant Training and Coaching the Teachers Based on the Work with the Administrators.

The district may also use the consultant by having her return and work with teachers specifically on aspects of the district’s growth plan. This can be a combination of workshops and coaching. We know that running a school or a district often stretches us so thin that setting time aside specifically for instructional leadership becomes near-to impossible.

Program 4: A Process for Adopting the Best “Research Based” Literacy (ELA) Program for Your District.

Audience: A district team assigned to assessment and recommend the best “research based” literacy (ELA) program for our district.

In recent years, national literacy discourse has debated the importance of the science of reading as foundational to literacy instruction, while state Boards of Education have developed lists of “approved” literacy programs and, in some places, the press has published the reading programs used by individual school districts. Amidst all this controversy, school districts have felt the pressure to adopt research-based literacy programs. If you find yourself in this place and you are seeking a consultant to guide the very complex process of adoption, we can help as you choose, implement, and sustain your new product.

This process will require a consultant to be in your district for 20 to 30 hours, preferably after the regular school day, working closely with the group of stakeholders who make up your Research-Based Literacy Program Adoption Team.

The literacy consultant will guide your team through the five phases of adoption:

- (1) Develop your goals for adoption.** Why a new product? How will you articulate the need for the new product, both within the district and also to your school community? This phase should

include discussions about the anticipated timeline, budget, and learning goals, and it must identify the stakeholders who will undertake this adoption process on behalf of the District.

(Note: In Massachusetts, PRISM program grants will support educators in evaluating, selecting, implementing, and sustaining evidence-based, culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, systems, and structures in order to achieve high and equitable rates of literacy proficiency.)

- (2) Conduct the initial research.** Beyond alignment to curriculum standards, what criteria will inform your evaluation of the products? Remember that EdReports helps support your learning, but those reports do not provide prescriptive answers. Will you consult with other districts' leaders who have chosen new programs? Will you review the learning data of schools that have adopted programs you have interest in? Ultimately, during this phase you should have your list of evaluation criteria solidified and have whittled down your list of "finalists," so to speak, by which we mean two to four programs to research extensively.
- (3) Engage in a deep study of the programs.** Using the criteria you developed in Phases I and II above, closely evaluate the programs you are considering for adoption. Remember that there should be no more than four programs under consideration at this point. You can reach out to publishers to get samples of the materials and/or request presentations from those publishers. You may wish to pilot lessons or units to determine the ease of use of the product, to gauge students' responses to the lesson(s), and to identify the strengths and potential gaps in the product. You can also visit other schools where the product is being used; you may wish to review their student learning data as well.
- (4) Select a program.** In this phase, you will report out to the school and greater community about the new program you have chosen. How does it match the goals you initially set for the district? What are the anticipated benefits to students? What is the cost? The timeline for implementation? When will teachers have the materials in their hands?
- (5) Determine what implementation and support structures.** Develop a timeline for implementation that includes spiraling professional development, opportunities for teachers to offer feedback, and for ongoing support. Often implementation of a new product results in an "implementation dip," as teachers become familiar with the product and its demands. Ensure that there is an ongoing support mechanism for teachers, including time for them to observe implementation in each other's classrooms as well as structured time for talking about challenges and strengths of the program.

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