Literacy Essentials

The Redford Union Schools, District #1 is in the process of implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) across the district. Critical to this system is Tier 1, where the core universal instruction and supports occur. We are also committed to following the Essential Instructional Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy created by the GELN and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. The documents created by the GELN provide research-based core instructional practices necessary to achieve high levels of student learning in literacy. Redford Union is dedicated to supporting staff with professional learning, coaching support, and providing the resources necessary for ALL our students to develop literacy knowledge and skills leading to improved reading achievement.

Balanced Literacy

The term "Balanced Literacy" encompasses and impacts several important aspects of literacy instruction. First, all of the components of literacy instruction are included: listening, speaking, reading, writing and word study. Second, there is a balance offered in instructional practices: whole class, small group and one-on-one, with differentiation of instruction to meet student needs at the forefront. Ongoing informal observations and ongoing assessment (example: monthly running records) is critical, as this information is used to drive instruction and provide appropriate differentiation. Third, this balance applies to the gradual release of responsibility: a gradual release of teacher support as the learner becomes more proficient/independent. This is the "I do/We do/You do" principle of scaffolding (from the most teacher support to the least):

Teacher leads/models →	Read aloud	Modeled Writing
Relinquishes some control/provides support→	Shared Reading	Shared/Interactive Writing
Explicit teaching/demonstration →	Guided Reading	Guided Writing
Provides support only if needed →	Independent Reading	Independent Writing

The goal of *balanced literacy instruction* is to create a community of readers and writers. We have to engage our students in meaningful, authentic literacy tasks. Students also need to be exposed to different genres and read for a variety of purposes. Rather than the traditional school model where the teacher imparts knowledge and students passively receive information and then complete assignments for a grade, we expect our teachers to use the constructivist model, where content is presented with explicit language and modeled by the teacher and then applied, with guidance, by the learner. It is the students constructing knowledge and meaning from their experiences.

Content ⇨ Activity ⇨ Language ⇨ Meaning

In a balanced literacy classroom, all students are immersed in literacy experiences all day. Children are engaged in a variety of reading and writing activities while some students are working in groups and others working individually. Students explore books of various genres not just in the library or during reading times, but also in science, math, and social studies. Materials in the classroom not only help students interact with text, but also serve as a motivator for reading. Students write books and reports in all of the content areas, as well as writing in student journals and notebooks. When needing a resource for more information, students use books, computers, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and word walls, as well as teachers and peers for assistance. Teachers facilitate language and literacy exploration with games and activities that students can use one-to-one, independently, or with peers.

In order to limit the number of behavior problems during the day, teachers demonstrate their own participation in language and literacy through modeling its use continually throughout the day, beginning with greeting students in the morning at the classroom door. PBIS research supports that being prepared for the day and being at your station on time is crucial for setting the tone for the day and reducing the number of behavior issues. Stick to a routine and keep yourself and students engaged in learning all day. Limit times off task by eliminating time-wasters such as group bathroom breaks and taking too much time walking to specials, recess or lunch. Be explicit about rules and expectations before a task begins.

The Classroom Environment

- It is important that your classroom be free from clutter. Consider eliminating a teacher desk and opt for using a kidney or u-shape table instead. Use rolling carts for supplies. Store items.
- Student desks/tables should be set up for grouping and student collaboration. Try to provide flexible seating options. Supplies should be organized and accessible to students, but store those items that may distract students from learning/working.
- Other areas of the room should all have a specific purpose, especially having one for gathering for your mini lessons, read-alouds, and group discussions. Don't overcrowd/overstimulate the environment. Be selective of what hangs on the walls. There can be multiple "anchor charts" hanging in a classroom for students to use as a guide. An anchor chart includes strategies or information pertinent to what the children are studying. Often, this chart is made ahead of time and added to during a mini-lesson.
- Use your Soundfield to talk at a conversational level. Your voice should project through the system just over background noise evenly throughout your classroom. You should never have to raise your voice. Consider using an attention getter such as "Give me Five".
- A classroom library should be organized so students are able to use it independently. Fountas and Pinnell recommend approximately 300-600 books in your library. Books should be kept in leveled bins/baskets with only one level in each basket. It is important to have books at EVERY student's reading level as well as at the students' interest level. Students are more likely to read more and enjoy reading when they are engaged in a book they want to read, authentic literature that aligns with their interests and needs. Organize non-leveled books by genre, theme, featured author, and mentor texts.

The Workshop Model

The workshop model is an incredibly efficient method of teaching reading and writing. Within the workshop structure, teachers are able to address both the whole group's needs as well as differentiating for the needs of small groups and individuals. By utilizing this instructional practice, educators are essentially getting the most "bang for their buck!" When successfully implemented, the workshop model allows teachers to not only meet standards but also provide students the time and support they need to grow into fluent readers and writers. Workshop is:

- A component of a balanced literacy block
- Standards based
- Driven by student assessment
- Differentiated instruction (by level, interest, groupings)

During a workshop lesson teachers can:

- **model** reading and writing in front of students
- have students spend time engaged in **independent** reading and writing
- have students **share** writing by helping you/classmates compose, revise or edit a piece of writing
- have student **share** in the reading by utilizing partner reading strategies
- confer with students, **guiding** their reading and writing and teaching them skills and strategies

The workshop structure is made up of the **mini-lesson, independent work time** and **share time.**

The **Mini-Lesson** is where the teacher teaches the students a skill or strategy through demonstration and direct instruction. The teacher also uses this time to outline the work to be done, including the expectations of the behavior and work to be done (sometimes at multiple stations).This is approximately 10-15 minutes.

Work Time is when the students are reading and writing and directly applying the lesson they just learned. This is also when teachers conduct small groups and individual conferences with students. This time is about 30-40 minutes. It is during this time that an ATA will be of good use, working with students who need support.

Share Time is when the teacher can reconvene the class to recap the learning, check for understanding (for example using exit slips) or giving a homework assignment. One or two students should have the opportunity to share with the rest of the class how they used the skill or strategy just learned or reinforced in the mini-lesson. Keep this short, to about 5 minutes, but don't skip this component!

Read-Aloud

Read-Alouds are key to modeling the joy of reading, language of books, and provide different exposure to reading genres. Teachers should provide several read-aloud sessions every day.

Teachers also select text to model specific reading strategies that will be used by readers during silent and/or partner reading. The process of reading aloud helps support students' listening comprehension skills as well as reinforce behaviors that readers will use to become independent, confident readers.

An interactive *read-aloud* is slightly different. Its focus is to encourage reflective thinking and enhance comprehension by guiding students in discussing the text. Redford Union uses Making Meaning lessons to teach/reinforce comprehension.

Shared Reading

Shared Reading is an interactive reading process usually done in a whole- group setting. In the primary grades, the teacher might use big books, charts, songs, poems, interactive writing, etc. The goal of *shared reading* is to teach comprehension skills, increase reading fluency, and support developing readers. It is also used to teach information in content areas such as social studies and science.

Guided Reading

Teacher works with small groups of students (6 or less) who are either grouped by level or by skill area, to read text carefully chosen at their Instructional level.

- Text Introduction
- Reading the text – students read independently (never round-robin).
- Discussion of text.
- Word Work
- Writing (optional)

MacGowan: First Grade teachers have leveled texts from the Pawprints collection and K and 1 have the Literacy Footprints collection to use. There is also a leveled library for teachers to access and use as needed. Staff use The Next Step in Guided Reading by Jan Richardson, which outlines the guided reading lesson format.

Beech: Teachers have access to guided reading materials in the Book Room, also following The Next Step in Guided Reading by Jan Richardson. All teachers have received a Guided Reading Binder with direction and support.

Independent, Self-Selected Reading

Students are given an opportunity to choose books they are interested in with the guidance of the teacher. Interest books as well as a range of leveled books (independent and instructional levels) should be a part of a student's book bag/box. Beginning readers can start by looking at the pictures, reading the words, and retelling the story. By giving students time to read independently each day, they will recognize sight words with automaticity, increase fluency, and practice comprehension skills.

Word Study/Vocabulary

Jan Richardson has outlined *word study* and the successive introduction of phonic elements *by level of text* in her book, The Next Step In Guided Reading. Word Study in a balanced literacy program can involve decoding words. For example, if studying the word "chain," students would be working on both digraphs ("ch") and vowel-vowel-consonant rimes ("ain"). Learning words phonetically in this way supports decoding and spelling abilities. Traditional spelling tests will no longer be a part of the literacy program.

MacGowan: Each teacher has an ELA binder to support additional word work. Automaticity of high frequency words is critical for beginning reading. Jan Richardson has incorporated word practice in her guided reading format.

Beech: Words Their Way and Making Words

Writing

(Redford Union uses the Being a Writer program)

Shared Writing

Shared Writing is a process by which the teacher and student(s) compose messages or a story together. The teacher does the writing and guides the writing process. The goal is to guide children in creating content and selecting phrasing/words. Teachers often ask "How can we say that?" to guide children's thinking during this process.

Interactive Writing

Interactive Writing is a process by which the teacher and students share the pen to create the content as well as the writing. Children are encouraged to stretch and listen for letters/sounds that are within their control, write high frequency words and other phonetic principles. The teacher fills in anything that is beyond their control at that point in *time*.

Guided Writing (Writer's Workshop)

Similar to Reader's Workshop, it includes a mini-lesson, teacher-student conferencing and small group instruction where teachers are working with students individually or in small groups at his/her table, or conferring with students at their own work station. This also includes a close/share in which students have an opportunity to model or express how they used the strategy during the workshop time.

Independent Writing

Independent Writing is when students are writing independently and practice a particular strategy during a portion of the writing workshop (generating ideas, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing), or when engaged in writing for any purpose.