



**General
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a MAISA Collaborative

Essential Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy

This compilation of the Essential Practices in Early Literacy 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.



BIRTH TO AGE 3



PREKINDERGARTEN



GRADES K TO 3



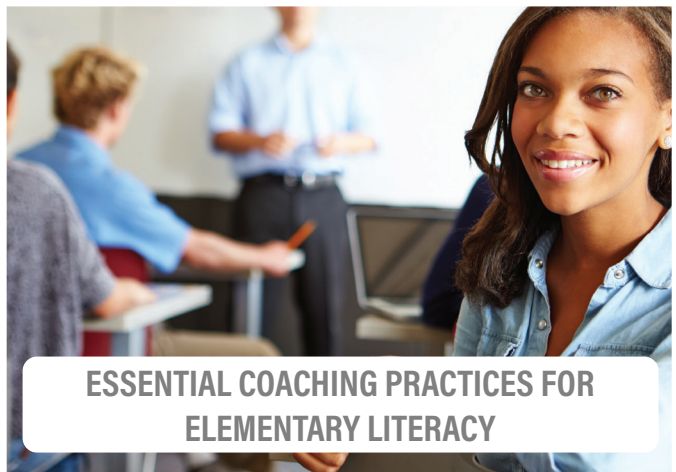
GRADES 4 TO 5

ESSENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES



ESSENTIAL SCHOOL-WIDE AND CENTER-WIDE PRACTICES IN LITERACY

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT



ESSENTIAL COACHING PRACTICES FOR ELEMENTARY LITERACY

COACHING PRACTICES

EVERY CHILDclassroomDay

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These materials are provided through a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Education



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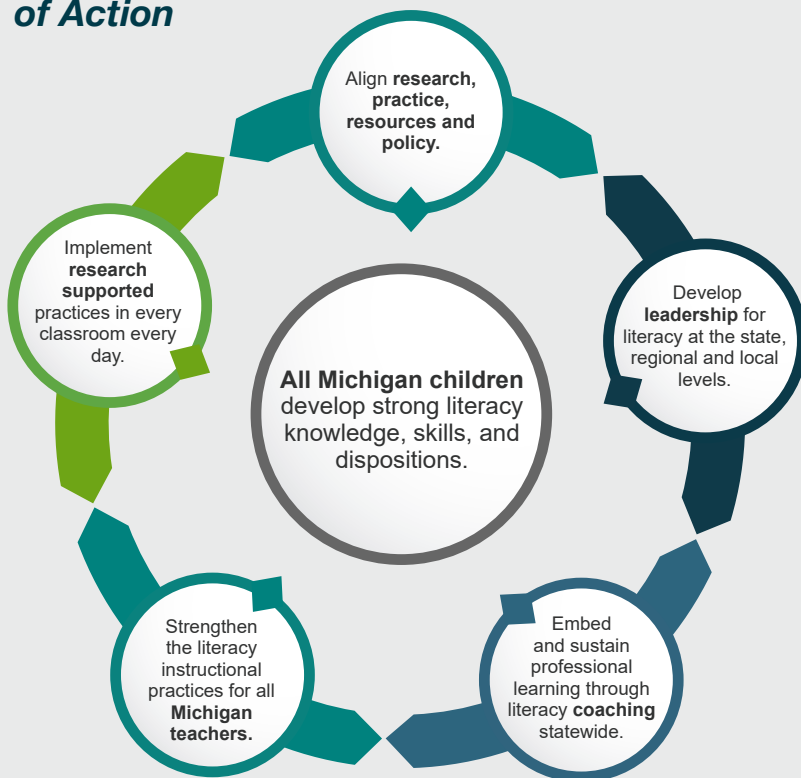
A LEADER'S GUIDE TO A THEORY OF ACTION FOR *Raising Michigan's Literacy Achievement*

The path to raising student achievement is not a direct line from funding to outcome. High levels of student achievement will result only when core instructional practices are defined with educator and system supports in place that contribute to literacy success for every student. These include the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Literacy Task Force (Early Literacy Task Force, 6-12 Task Force) *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy* (Birth to Age 3, Prekindergarten, Grades K-3, Grades 4-5) recommended for use in every classroom every day, *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy* in every school and center, and *Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy* in use by every literacy coach. For the *Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy* (Grades 6-12), it is important that the practices are used consistently in every classroom on a regular basis.



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Literacy Theory of Action



This theory of action requires a structure of supports from the system to the student level.

- If we have *Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy* articulated and adopted at the system level,
 - ▶ we can align **research, practice, resources and policy**.
- If we have aligned policies, funding, initiatives, and resources system wide,
 - ▶ we can develop **leadership** for literacy at the state, regional and local levels.
- If we have state-wide leadership capacity focused on literacy at the school and center level in an intentional, multi-year manner,
 - ▶ we can embed and sustain professional learning through literacy **coaching** statewide.
- If teaching teams and individual teachers are supported by quality coaching,
 - ▶ we can strengthen the literacy instructional practices for all **Michigan Teachers**.
- If we have the *Essential Instructional Literacy Practices* occurring in every classroom, every day,
 - ▶ **All Michigan children** develop strong literacy knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Each element is critical and will be attended to in ongoing evaluation and improvement of this initiative.

Professional learning design

As documented in the MAISA GELN ELTF *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy: Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades* and *Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy*, support of administrators' and teachers' development requires job-embedded ongoing professional learning. After being introduced to new knowledge, skills, and dispositions, administrators and teachers need opportunities to practice and receive feedback as they employ new learning in the school, center, and classroom. Resources provided through Michigan Department of Education grants are developing skills of ISD early literacy coaches and creating a sustainable system of resources, including:

- Essential practices in literacy instruction, coaching, school-wide and center-wide practices, and leadership;
- access to university researchers who are experts in the area of early literacy;
- professional learning opportunities and a network to provide ongoing support; and
- print, video, and digital resources about effective literacy instruction, coaching, and leadership.

“One size fits all” professional learning does not meet the needs of today’s educators. A blended training model of online and face-to-face experiences offers professional learning and corresponding wrap-around supports, including a statewide literacy mentors’ network. Instructional modules under development will provide a rich library of video instruction segments. Also under development is an online professional learning community to support all Michigan early literacy educators.

These intentional efforts will ensure a consistent, ongoing source of support for high-quality literacy instruction, resulting in improved literacy skills for all Michigan students.

COMMUNICATION POINTS FOR THE ESSENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN **Early, Elementary, and Disciplinary Literacy**

The Essential Instructional Practices in Early, Elementary, and Disciplinary Literacy are a list of research-supported instructional practices that, when implemented in the classroom, can have a positive impact on student literacy achievement. The use of these practices in every classroom, every day could make a measurable positive difference in the State’s literacy achievement. They should be viewed akin to medical practice guides, as they present a minimum “standard of care” for Michigan’s children.



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These Instructional Practices were developed by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) and the 6-12 Disciplinary Literacy Task Force and include the following:

- Essential Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy: Birth to Age 3
- Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten
- Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3
- Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy: Grades 4-5
- Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: Grades 6-12

Additionally, the MAISA GELN ELTF created a document that identified organizational practices in support of literacy development that systemically impact learning, and also a set of research-supported literacy coaching practices that can provide powerful job-embedded, ongoing professional development with a primary goal of enhancing classroom literacy instruction through improving teacher expertise. The documents are titled as follows:

- Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy
- Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy

All of the documents are intended to be used collectively to support a strong literacy system. High levels of student achievement will result only when core instructional practices are defined and educator and system supports are in place to contribute to literacy success for every student. These include the instructional practices recommended for use in every classroom every day, school-wide and center-wide essentials in every school and center, and coaching essentials in use by every coach. For the Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy, it is important that the practices are used consistently in every classroom on a regular basis.

Some literacy instructional practices enjoy so much support in research that we should be using them in every classroom every day. For example, it should not be seen as acceptable for some schools to provide daily writing instruction for young children while others do not, or for some classrooms to conduct daily read-alouds for young children while others do not. Every child in every classroom every day should experience research-aligned literacy instruction. However, for an individual child, that may not include experiencing every practice in the Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy every day. For example, a teacher should provide small-group instruction each day, but not every child may experience instruction in a small group every day. Similarly, a teacher should collaborate with families every day, but the teacher may not be able to point to a collaboration (e.g., a conversation or lesson that intentionally builds on a family’s assets) with every child’s family every day. The phrase “as needed,” which appears a number of times in the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, illustrates the appropriate approach. We need to provide the literacy instruction that every child needs in every classroom every day.

The comprehensive set of practices can be accessed at literacyessentials.org

Formal and Informal Communication:

Formal/Written When referencing or communicating about the Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy as individual documents, always use the official document titles written below:	Informal/Conversational When referencing or communicating about the Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy as individual documents in conversation, the following titles should be used at the minimum:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy: Birth to Age 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth to Age 3 Essential Instructional Literacy Instructional Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PreK Essential Instructional Literacy Instructional Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K-3 Essential Instructional Literacy Instructional Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy: Grades 4-5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-5 Essential Instructional Literacy Instructional Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: Grades 6-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-12 Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy

Social Media Considerations:

- Referencing literacyessentials.org will automatically link the website in your post and help followers gain direct access to the resources.
- Please use the following hashtags when referring to the Essential Instructional Practices in Early, Elementary, and Disciplinary Literacy:
 - ▶ #MichiganLiteracy
 - ▶ #MiGELN
- Please consider tagging the following organizations when referring to the Essential Instructional Practices in Early, Elementary, and Disciplinary Literacy:
 - ▶ @MAISA_ISDs (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators)
 - ▶ @mieducation (Michigan Department of Education)

Modules and Sample Video Communication Points

Modules:

- A series of online professional learning modules have been developed to support educators in understanding and implementing the following:
 - ▶ Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten
 - ▶ Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3
 - ▶ Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy
 - ▶ Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy

The modules contain content presentations, including narrated slides, discussion prompts, "talking head" videos with researchers, and additional resources, accompanied by classroom videos that demonstrate aspects of each essential in practice. Reflection activities are included to support learners in checking their understanding and applying what they have learned to their own practice.

Videos:

- The classroom videos are snapshots of what the Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3 or PreK-K practices can look like in a classroom and are meant to be watched after the rest of the module for that Essential Practice has been viewed. The videos should be watched or used in conjunction with the modules for professional learning.

All modules and videos are found at literacyessentials.org.

For questions about the Essential Instructional Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy, contact Tonya Harrison, Director of Special Projects at tharrison@gomaisa.org.

For questions about professional learning, contact Erin Brown, MAISA Early Literacy Grant Project Coordinator at ebrown@gomasa.org.

For questions about access to the resources, contact Taylor Hoag, MAISA Administrative Assistant at thoag@gomasa.org.

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Essential Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy: Birth to Age 3

This document was developed by the **Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF)**, a subcommittee of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN), which represents Michigan's 56 Intermediate School Districts.



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

This document is intended to be read in concert with the Essential Instructional Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy: Prekindergarten. There is important overlap and continuity in these and other "Essentials" documents.

For more information, visit www.literacyessentials.org

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To reference this document: Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force (2018). Essential instructional practices in language and emergent literacy: Birth to age 3. Lansing, MI: Authors.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported literacy practices that should be a focus of professional development throughout the state. The focus of the document is on practices in individual interactions with children, rather than on center- or systems-level practices. The document focuses on infants and toddlers, as the first 3 years of life are when children learn the fastest and acquire the foundational skills that will support their development and learning for the rest of their lives. Improving language and literacy experiences in the infant and toddler years has the potential to improve "reading by third grade" outcomes. Early childhood programs can also help to address disparities in literacy achievement.

Research suggests that each of the ten practices in this document can have a positive impact on literacy development. We believe that the use of these practices in every care setting every day could make a measurable positive difference in the State's literacy achievement. They should be viewed, like practice guides in medicine, as a minimum "standard of care" for Michigan's children.

Language and emergent literacy skills develop rapidly during the first 3 years of life and are essential for later learning, along with other key skills for learning in the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive domains; this document focuses on practices to support language and literacy, though all domains of development are important. The main goal of emergent literacy during this time is to support language development, providing a foundation for literacy skills. From birth to age 3, language and literacy are one integrated domain. The core skills are understanding and using language and other forms of communication, and building vocabulary that reflects the child's understanding of the world. Some emergent literacy skills can also be encouraged directly, by exposing children to printed words, sharing reading experiences, and helping children become aware of sounds within words. When these experiences are fun and engaging, children develop a love of reading that will motivate them to learn to read. This document is written for early childhood practitioners who work with infants, toddlers, and their families (child care providers, early educators, home visitors, early interventionists), but the practices can be used by all adults who work with infants and toddlers and their families, in home-, community-, or early care and education (ECE)-settings. This document does not endorse any specific curriculum, but describes essential practices — specific ways of interacting with infants and toddlers — that should be infused throughout their learning experiences. Most of the practices should happen every day and be integrated into daily routines. Others should be less frequent because they focus on specific aspects of language, reading, and writing. This is not an all-inclusive list of every possible practice that supports language and emergent literacy, but instead, a description of the ones with the best evidence in the science of child development. Each recommended practice is based on current research, and may change when additional research provides more information on the best ways to support our youngest learners.

1. Create Safe, Secure, and Stimulating Environments

When infants and toddlers feel safe and secure, they can actively explore and focus on learning. When environments are stimulating, they support infants and toddlers to direct their own play, which provides adults with opportunities to engage in child-led conversations that support language development.

Create calm, predictable environments that support children's sense of safety.

- Care for children in small groups to reduce overstimulation.
- Use music and other sound intentionally, not as background noise.
- Create predictable but flexible routines (e.g., for sleep, eating, diapering/toileting, and play).
- Ensure children get enough sleep (infants: 13-14 hrs; toddlers: 10-13 hrs), including daytime naps.

Form consistent, close relationships to support children's sense of security.

- Care for infants and toddlers in primary caregiving groups, keeping the same caregivers/educators with children as long as possible.
- Interact affectionately and respond positively when children initiate physical or social contact.
- Respond quickly and calmly to children's physical and emotional needs, particularly distress.
- Communicate with adults and children in calm and consistent ways.

Create stimulating environments that encourage children's self-directed play and exploration, and use children's play as opportunities to support their language.

- Provide a variety of materials, including books, toys that promote eye-hand coordination (e.g., crayons, shape-sorters, blocks), role-playing toys (e.g., dolls, pretend food), music (e.g., rattles, drums), and art-making materials (e.g., paper, paint, markers, playdough).
- Reflect children's home cultures in music, decor, photos, and toys in early education and care settings.
- Place materials where crawlers and walkers can reach them on their own.
- Provide materials that can be used in more than one way; encourage children to choose their own toys and how they play with them.
- Use children's self-directed play as opportunities to label, describe, and explain what they play with and how they are playing.
- Plan enriching, playful experiences that intentionally and flexibly support development while building on children's interests.

2. Bring Attention to Print Concepts in Books and the Environment

Print concepts are understandings about how print works, and the functions it serves in our lives. Infants and toddlers learn about the many ways that print is used when we point out print concepts and printed words throughout the environment; creating a print-rich environment encourages adults to do this. Children learn print concepts about the mechanics of reading during book-sharing experiences.

Show children how print works, using both verbal and nonverbal strategies.

- Encourage children to touch and hold books and turn pages; comment on their actions with the book.
- Point to the print as you read it.
- Ask toddlers about simple print concepts (e.g., "Show me where to read.").
- Ask toddlers simple questions about print (e.g., "This is a P. Your name starts with P! Can you find another P?").
- Make comments about print (e.g., "That says 'help.'") and discuss the features of letters (e.g., "That is a D. It makes a /d/ /d/ /d/ sound, like dog and diaper.").

Show children that print has meaning and serves many purposes.

- Point to, read, and describe printed words in the environment, such as labels on shelves, packages, menus, and street signs, discussing purposes of the printed words (e.g., "That sign says 'blocks.' It tells us that this is where the blocks go on our shelves.").
- Show children that letters and words help readers understand what labels, menus, and signs say.

Create a print-rich environment that is meaningful to children.

- Use children's names and photos to label their belongings, cubbies, art, and other materials.
- Label bins and shelves with both pictures and words.
- Include words and images that are meaningful to children or useful in daily life (e.g., nursery rhymes, inspirational messages, grocery lists, packaging labels, menus, daily schedule, reminders).
- (See also Essential #8 for providing materials for reading and writing that are always available).

Use Developmentally Appropriate Literacy Experiences!

Avoid pushing children to read in this developmental period. There is no evidence that infants and toddlers can learn to read words conventionally, even when parents or educators use programs or materials attempting to teach infants or toddlers to read. Instead, there is evidence that having engaging and emotionally supportive book-sharing interactions with caregivers supports later reading development. Pressuring children to read can lead to bad reading habits and undermine their motivation to read. Instead, focus on creating fun learning experiences with books and print.



3. Share Books in Engaging Ways

Book-sharing fosters a love of reading when it is engaging and fun, and when children feel close to the adult reading. Book-sharing can be used to support comprehension and vocabulary when it is interactive, and when adults talk about the content of the book and link it to children’s interests and experiences. Children who start sharing books with their caregivers before age 1 have better language and literacy skills later on.

Read to children from birth, and read often, sharing a variety of books and other texts.

- Share different types of books and other texts (e.g., magazines, newspapers, websites) with infants and toddlers, including stories, information books (which provide factual knowledge), and poetry.
- Choose high-quality books to share with children, making sure that at least some of the books have rich vocabulary (many different words, some words that are not from everyday language), use full sentences (rather than just one word at a time), and have pictures related to the printed words.
- Choose books with stories and topics that are interesting and enjoyable for children, including topics related to their family and culture.

Foster a love of reading by making book-sharing engaging and fun.

- Sit together with children, letting them sit on your lap or next to you while sharing books.
- Let infants and toddlers choose the books.
- Read the same books over and over again if children are interested in them – children love to predict what happens or appears next in their favorite books.
- Invite children to interact with the books by turning pages and pointing to pictures or words.

Make book-sharing interactive to support understanding of concepts and vocabulary development.

- Use different voices, facial expressions, and gestures to engage children in the meaning of the contents in books, acting out the important parts of stories, and talking about new words or ideas.
- Comment on links between the ideas in the book to children’s experiences and interests.
- Comment on words that are new to children as you read books, and explain their meaning using words that infants understand or toddlers already say.
- Reinforce new words from books by talking with toddlers about the book topic so they can practice the new words themselves. Repeat new words and provide explanations or examples.
- Use questions and prompts to help children learn and label concepts in the book.

Low tech is best!

There is no substitute for adult-child interaction when it comes to language and emergent literacy. Limit television viewing and other screen time for children. If any, choose story-like, language-rich shows. Make television or tablet use interactive by watching with children and talking about what they see and hear.



4. Play With Sounds and Invite Children to Play With You

Infants are born paying attention to sounds of voices, and are attracted to higher-pitched and musical voices. Playing with sounds draws children's attention to the sounds in language and supports their skills for recognizing and working with the sounds of language (phonological awareness).

Encourage and respond to all sounds, from first coos to words and sentences.

- Imitate the sounds infants make, then expand on them with other vocalizations and words.
- Make eye contact and follow infants' facial expressions and eye gaze as you engage in sound play.

Use infant-directed speech with young infants to get and keep their attention.

- With infants less than 6 months old, use a higher pitched vocal tone, and stretch out the vowel sounds. Pause between phrases, and vary the pitch of your voice (e.g., "Hi baaaaby... See the biiiig bunny... She is soooo taaaall.").
- With infants less than 1 year old, use short phrases and repeat them several times.

Draw children's attention to the sounds of words using their names, songs, poems, and books.

- Sing songs with hand motions (which helps infants understand the meaning of the words) and let them "sing along" even before they can talk (e.g., Itsy Bitsy Spider; Sweet Potato Pie; I Can; or Wheels on the Bus). Draw children's attention to the sounds by clapping with the rhythm of a song.
- Share books, poems, and songs with rhymes (e.g., "Pat the cat sat on a mat.") or words that begin with the same sound (e.g., "Willy the whale likes wet water."). Play with the sounds in children's names. Talk about sounds in the words as you say them.
- Start by drawing children's attention to individual words (e.g., clap out the words in the sentence "The dog ran fast."). Next, draw attention to syllables (e.g., "Doorbell. That has two beats, doorbell. How many beats does pop-si-cle have?").

5. Enhance Two-Way Communication With Gestures

Gestures (hand and body motions used for communication) let preverbal children choose the topic of conversation and promote two-way communication between adults and young children, which encourages children's development of vocabulary. When toddlers combine two gestures, or combine gestures with words, this helps them learn to combine words and ideas into sentences.

Use gestures along with words to promote two-way communication.

- During play, use gestures to show what objects do (e.g., turn the plane propeller or make the frog hop).
- Use simple gestures while you sing so even preverbal children can learn to "sing along."
- During book-sharing, point to pictures as you read or talk about them. Use hand gestures to act out key concepts in the book.
- During care routines (meals, sleep, diapering), model gestures for the main concepts (e.g., "eat," "drink," "sleep," and "diaper") so preverbal children can learn to communicate their needs.
- Always talk while you gesture so children learn to pair the words with the gestures.

Encourage preverbal children to use gestures during book-sharing.

- Invite children to point to things they recognize in books by asking simple questions (e.g., "Where's the bunny?" and "Can you find the mouse?").
- Invite children to point to what they are interested in by asking open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you see on this page?" and "Which ones do you like?"). Then label and describe what they pointed to.

Respond to children's gestures to promote language.

- Use children's gestures as a cue for what to talk about. Translate their gestures into spoken words.
- Respond to children's gestures, and their gesture-word combinations, by repeating their message back and expanding on it.

6. Support Skills Across Developmental Domains That are Important for Writing

Writing is a multi-faceted activity about composing and communicating messages. It is supported by a set of skills including motor skills, understanding and using symbols, and creating messages for others. Early writing often looks like scribbles; this shows that children understand that writing has meaning and can communicate a message.

Provide opportunities for children to practice the motor skills needed for writing.

- Support fine-motor activities that build strength in small muscle groups in hands and fingers, such as working with playdough, finger painting, or picking up objects of different sizes, with hands then with tools.
- Provide a variety of age-appropriate materials to write, draw, and paint.
- Encourage all early forms of writing, including simple marks, scribbles, and drawing.

Give children natural opportunities to write or compose messages, and talk to them about the meaning.

- Talk about what they have drawn, marked, colored, or painted without evaluating it or assuming what it is. For preverbal children, comment on the composition (e.g., "I see that you used blue to make lines, and here is a red circle."). For verbal children, use open-ended prompts (e.g., "Tell me about your work," or "Can you tell me about this part?").
- Ask older toddlers what they have written when they are finished writing. Affirm their messages about the content, regardless of what their marks look like.

7. Converse With Children, Responding to Their Cues and Letting Them Choose the Topics

High-quality language interactions are central to supporting early language skills. Infants and toddlers need to hear a rich variety of language that is directly related to their attention and interests, and to be encouraged to communicate in all the ways they can — with facial expressions, hands and bodies, and voices. The same child-led, responsive interaction practices support both preverbal and verbal toddlers, but the practices can look a little different, depending on the child's age and communication skills.

High-Quality Language Interactions With Infants and Toddlers

	Preverbal Children	Verbal Children
Establish joint attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get on the infant's level physically. Be close so the infant can see, hear, and touch you. ▪ Watch infants closely to learn what they pay attention to — look to their eye gaze, facial expressions, body orientation, and actions. ▪ Make eye contact so it is clear that you and the infant are paying attention to each other (dyadic joint attention). ▪ Look at the things the infant is looking at or playing with so you and the infant are attending to the same thing (triadic joint attention). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Place yourself near the toddlers' activities, getting down at their eye level. ▪ Watch and listen to toddlers to learn what they are doing or trying to do. ▪ Look for opportunities to join the toddlers' activities without taking over. ▪ Comment on what toddlers are doing to let them know you are paying attention; wait for an invitation to join their play. ▪ Respond to toddlers' invitations to join their play or activity.

High-Quality Language Interactions With Infants and Toddlers

	Preverbal Children	Verbal Children
Talk to children about their interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk about things infants are doing and paying attention to (parallel talk). ▪ Narrate what you do as you do it (narrating/self-talk). ▪ Warn infants before changing what you are doing (anticipatory talk). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk about what toddlers do, see, and hear, and what they might think or feel. ▪ Let toddlers know ahead of time what you are going to do. Explain your reasons for doing what you do.
Encourage children to choose the topic of conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invite and encourage infants to choose their own toys and activities. ▪ Comment on what infants choose to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask toddlers what they want to do. ▪ Support toddlers' activity choices. ▪ Comment on toddlers' choices.
Use child-directed speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use a calm, warm tone of voice. ▪ Use a musical tone of voice, with higher-pitched tones, to get young infants' attention. ▪ Use short, simple sentences. ▪ Repeat key words or phrases. ▪ Emphasize key words with exaggerated voice, face, and gestures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use a calm, warm, and normal tone of voice, and speak slowly and clearly. ▪ Use longer sentences with more complex, adult-like grammar. ▪ Use a variety of sentence types, including questions.
Respond to children's communication cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respond to infants' facial expressions, sounds (cooing, babbling), and body language (gestures, head turns, squirming). ▪ Interpret infants' interests, experiences, and intentions, and translate them into words. ▪ Listen and watch for infants' cues that they are done interacting (glancing or turning away, fussing, moving away). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respond to toddlers' facial expressions, vocalizations, words, and body language. ▪ Interpret toddlers' interests, intentions, and internal states. Translate them into words and connect them to their context. ▪ Follow toddlers' leads when they end the interaction.
Imitate and expand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repeat infants' vocalizations or words back to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repeat toddlers' words and phrases, re-phrasing to use the words correctly (e.g., Toddler: "Me go." Adult: "You're saying you want to go?"). ▪ Repeat toddlers' words and add another idea. (e.g., Toddler: "Me go." Adult: "You want to go? I want to go, too. Who should we take with us?").
Extend what children say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk about what infants are doing, what they are seeing and hearing, and what they might want or be trying to do (sportscasting: out-loud play-by-play of infants' actions and experiences). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk about things connected to toddlers' interests and activities. ▪ Talk about things beyond the here and now (feelings and thoughts, events in the past or future, people not present).
Keep the conversation going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage infants to vocalize again. ▪ Engage in face-to-face vocal turn-taking. ▪ Ask simple questions and wait for an answer. ▪ Respond to any cue from the infant and keep the exchange going. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask open-ended questions about what toddlers are doing. ▪ Use "I wonder" statements that invite toddlers to think about what is possible. ▪ Respond to all communication attempts and keep the conversation going.

8. Provide Materials for Reading and Writing That are Always Available to Children

Infants and toddlers learn best when they pursue their own interests in ways that utilize and build on their own skills. Environments and routines should provide them with the freedom to explore books and use writing and drawing materials at their own pace and in their own ways.

Provide children access to many different, high-quality books in all settings.

- Place books within children's reach so they can access books any time.
- Make sure children have access to their favorite books and ones that reflect their home language, family, and culture.
- Simple books are just as effective as ones with expensive features such as lift flaps.

Give children opportunities to write in whatever forms they can.

- Provide children with a variety of writing materials and surfaces on which to write (e.g., crayons or markers on paper, chalk on chalkboard or sidewalk, sticks in sand).
- Provide toddlers with opportunities to write meaningfully (e.g., "signing" their name, writing a grocery list, or checking off items from a list).

Low tech is best!

There is no evidence that technology supports language and literacy learning in the infant and toddler years, including electronic books and technology designed for education. The key to language development is active, back-and-forth communication between children and adults; limit the things that detract from these high-quality interactions.

- Limit children's access to electronic toys, tablets, phones, and media.
- Focus on books and writing materials, rather than electronic toys, games, and apps.

9. Monitor Language Development, Screen for Early Delays, and Refer Families to Services as Needed

Toddlerhood is when language delays first appear, and when early intervention is most effective. Delays in early language development may cause challenges in behavior regulation and social interactions; if not addressed, these delays lead to later difficulties in language and literacy.

Screen and monitor children's hearing.

- Ensure that infants' and toddlers' hearing is screened regularly.
- Monitor hearing for possible deficits that may be due to frequent ear infections.

Screen and monitor children's social communication behaviors, understanding of language, and ability to talk.

- Take families' concerns about their child's language seriously.
- Assess children's language and communication together with families.
- Make sure the person who screens the child's language is familiar to the child so the child is sufficiently comfortable and can show what they know.

- Use a validated screening tool to monitor children's abilities to understand language and to communicate with gestures and words.

Screen multiple-language learners in culturally and developmentally appropriate ways.

- Screen children in their primary home language.
- Screen and assess children learning two or more languages in both/all languages.
- Involve families in screening the child's language.

When screening indicates a hearing deficit, or a risk of delay in development, refer families in Michigan to Early On for further evaluation:

www.1800earlyon.org

10. Work With Families to Promote Home Language and Literacy Environments That are Rich and Responsive

Infants' and toddlers' primary learning environment is their home, and their first and most consistent educators are the family members with whom they live. The home language and literacy environment has a strong and lasting effect on language skills, emergent literacy, and related social and academic skills.

Create positive, goal-oriented relationships between families and educators.

- Acknowledge families' roles in their child's development and learning. Ask for parent and family insights about their child's interests and needs.
- Take a strengths-based approach that recognizes that all families have the ability to support their child's development. Help to maximize those abilities.
- Refer families to services that can support their own health and well-being so they can be calm, attentive, and responsive to their infants and toddlers.
- Ask about and prioritize families' goals for their child's development and learning.
- Support families in their home language whenever possible.

Work within families' home routines to support infants' and toddlers' language and emergent literacy.

- Point out and encourage things families already do that support their children's language and literacy (e.g., talking about what interests their child, responding to child cues, and asking questions to keep the conversation going).
- Point out child behaviors that are communication cues, help families interpret these cues and respond in ways that support language development and emergent literacy. Show how families can explore and play with objects, talk, and use gestures during everyday routines with children.
- Help families identify ways to change their child's environment and routines to be calm, consistent, and stimulating (e.g., keep consistent meal and bedtime routines, maximize children's sleep, and reduce extra noise that may disrupt children's concentration).
- Communicate that all family members — mothers, fathers, siblings, and others — are part of the child's home language and literacy environment and can support their development.

Show families they can support language and emergent literacy in many ways in addition to "reading," including:

- Sharing books with pictures.
- Story-telling.
- Singing, rhyming, chanting, rapping, or other word play.

Incorporate families' culture and language in all settings.

- Represent the child's cultural background and home language (if it has a written form) in books, labels, and other materials.
- Provide families with children's books (to borrow or keep) in their home language or most comfortable language.
- Encourage families to communicate with their children in their most comfortable language. Recognize that the ability to speak multiple languages has many social and cognitive benefits for children.

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Process for Development and Review

This document was developed by the Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF), 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 Early Literacy 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 Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy



Online | gomaisa.org/geln

Online | literacyessentials.org

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General Education Leadership Network

a MAISA Collaborative

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten

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.



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy: Birth to Age Three, and the Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3. There is important overlap and continuity in these three documents, and some children will benefit from instructional practices identified in multiple documents.

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan's capacity to provide effective and equitable early literacy practices for every child every day. The document identifies research-supported instructional practices in prekindergarten that should be a basis of professional learning, policy, and instruction throughout the state. Research indicates that each of these practices can have a positive impact on literacy development. The use of these practices in every classroom every day is expected to make a measurable positive difference in the state's literacy achievement. The practices should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting a minimum "standard of care" for Michigan's children. Other documents available at literacyessentials.org address other age groups, grade levels, and aspects of education systems, including coaching practices, school-level practices, and systems-level practices.

Throughout this document, we use the term "teachers" to encompass educators in home-based, center-based, and school-based settings. We use the term "classroom" broadly to encompass any indoor and outdoor learning environments that are used to provide education to young children. We use the term "prekindergarten" to encompass the two to three years after toddlerhood and before beginning kindergarten.

Core Commitments

The MAISA GELN Early Literacy Task Force is united in our belief that all children thrive when research deeply informs practice; education builds on every child’s interests and individual, cultural, and linguistic assets; and educators hold high expectations for all children’s development. Indeed, the Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy were built upon the premise that it is unacceptable for some Michigan children to experience research-supported instructional practices while others do not—especially in cases in which the quality of instruction is determined by children’s socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural, or other background characteristics. We are committed to an education system in which educators, families, communities, and children are respected and supported. We are also committed to working against all forms of bias that cause harm and that lead to inequitable education, in literacy and across all areas of development.

Enabling Conditions

Use of the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy* should occur daily in school or childcare settings that are supportive and effective for children not only in literacy, but in all areas of development. There are many wide-ranging conditions that enable children to thrive in all areas of development, including literacy. A few key examples of such conditions include:

- an asset orientation toward children and their families and communities
- positive relationships between and among teachers, children, and families
- opportunities for children to develop healthy identities
- culturally relevant¹, responsive², and sustaining³ pedagogical approaches throughout the day
- a playful approach to teaching and learning and lots of opportunities for children to play
- sufficient time for physical activity, meals, and play

For additional information about enabling conditions, see the [*Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades*](#).

Robust Resources

This document offers instructional practices, not a curriculum or curricular resources. Districts and other educational organizations, in consultation with educators and other experts, should provide, at minimum, curriculum materials that address all areas encompassed in early childhood curricula and that include abundant materials to read to young children (see Essential Eight). Educators, districts, and other educational organizations should use frameworks⁴ that can guide the selection of materials and the design of curricular units and lessons. Frameworks that are used should attend to such factors as alignment to research; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the goals of multiple stakeholders, including national and state organizations (e.g., standards documents), local educators, library media specialists, members of the local community, families, and children themselves. Materials should be coordinated and adapted as needed to reflect findings from research.

Essential Practices

The recommended instructional practices are to occur throughout the day, largely integrated into opportunities for learning in all other areas, not in an isolated block identified as “English Language Arts” or “Literacy.” Oral and written language development should not be the only focus of prekindergarten education. There should be ample room for development in other areas. Later academic achievement is predicted not only by oral and written knowledge and skill but also by mathematics learning, knowledge of the natural and social world, and certain aspects of social, emotional, and physical development⁵.

It is also important to understand that this is not an exhaustive list of research-supported instructional practices, although practices not on this list should be carefully scrutinized with respect to alignment to research on literacy instruction. We should actively resist neglecting any of these research-supported practices. Every child in every classroom deserves teachers who implement each of these research-supported practices because they are important, interconnected, and necessary.

Within and across the prekindergarten years, practices should be implemented in developmentally sensitive and responsive ways. All practices listed below are for regular classroom instruction (i.e., Tier 1) and are appropriate for children of all linguistic backgrounds who are learning an alphabetic language. Within all practices, opportunities should be provided for translanguaging, that is, for children to draw on their full linguistic repertoire, including both nonverbal and verbal means of communication and all dialects and languages they are learning.

1. Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play and throughout the learning environment ⁶

Reading and writing materials are not only present but used throughout the learning environment in both teacher-led and child-led play.

- Within daily opportunities for dramatic play, the teacher provides, models use of, and encourages children’s engagement with appropriate literacy artifacts, such as:
 - order pads, menus, and placemats for a pizza parlor
 - traffic signs, maps, blueprints, and building-related books in the block/construction area
 - envelopes, stationery, postcards, stamps, and actual mail for a post office
 - waiting room reading material, a schedule, and a prescription pad for a doctor’s office
- Within centers and other areas of the classroom, children are encouraged to interact with reading and writing materials, such as:
 - books related to construction or building in the block or construction area
 - simple recipes for making snacks
 - labels that indicate where items go
 - children’s names, for example, on cubbies and sign-in sheets, which may vary over time (e.g., first, with photos, then later, without photos)
 - writing materials in each area of the classroom for drawing and writing—for example about objects being observed in the science area
 - story-related and replica toys (e.g., a miniature fire station play set)
 - digital tools aligned to screen-use guidelines and with carefully curated, research-aligned digital games and applications, digital picture books, e-books, and videos

2. Read aloud with reference to print ⁷

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

- running fingers under words
- noting specific features of print and letters (e.g., “That is the letter ‘d’, like in Deondre’s name.”)
- asking children where to start reading and where to go next at the end of a line of text (i.e., return sweep)
- counting words
- pointing out print within pictures

3. Interactive read-alouds with a comprehension and vocabulary focus ⁸

The teacher reads aloud, in culturally and developmentally responsive ways, age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital, described in Essential Eight, including by:

- reading sets of texts that are thematically and conceptually related
- reading some texts multiple times with varied instructional foci
- engaging in higher-order discussion among children and teacher before, during, and after reading (e.g., with open-ended questions that invite children to respond in their own words and draw upon their knowledge and experiences)
- providing child-friendly, culturally relevant explanations of words within the text
- revisiting words after reading using tools such as movement, props, video, photo, examples, and nonexamples that support children in relating new words to known words and encourage children to say the words aloud
- using the words at other points in the day and over time
- teaching clusters of words related to those in the text, such as vocabulary related to garden or gardening

4. Play with sounds inside words ⁹

Although phonological awareness as a construct does not involve letters, phonological awareness instruction is best provided primarily in connection to letters. Teachers support phonological awareness development through various activities, such as:

- listening to and creating variations on books with rhyming or alliteration
- singing certain songs (e.g., “Willoughby, Wallaby Woo,” “Down by the Bay,” “The Name Game,” “Apples and Bananas”)
- sorting pictures and objects by a sound or sounds in the name of each object
- playing games and leading transitions that feature play with sounds (e.g., alliteration games, a transition that asks all children whose names begin with the “mmm” sound to move to the next activity)
- engaging in “robot talk” or the like (e.g., the teacher has a robot-sounding puppet say the sounds “ffff” “iiii” “shhhhh,” and children say “fish”)

5. Brief, clear, systematic, and explicit instruction¹⁰ in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and how the letters are shaped and formed¹¹

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

- a high-quality alphabet chart¹²
- cards with children’s names
- attention to how the teacher and children form and articulate sounds¹³
- opportunities to write the letters while learning their sounds
- alphabet books with appropriate keywords (please see the first bullet of this Essential)
- lowercase letters embedded in pictures of objects that begin with a primary sound of that letter (e.g., a lowercase “a” embedded in the image of an apple)
- references throughout the day (e.g., “That sign says the store is open. The first letter is ‘o.’ It makes the ‘oh’ sound: oooooopen.”)

Research suggests that we should set a benchmark of children naming 18 uppercase and 15 lowercase letters by the end of prekindergarten and should teach letter-sound associations rather than letter names or sounds alone. High-frequency word instruction is not appropriate for prekindergarten.

6. Interactions around writing¹⁴

Adults engage in deliberate interactions with children around writing. Opportunities for children to write their names, informational, narrative, and other texts that are personally meaningful to them are at the heart of writing experiences. Children progress through a series of phases of writing development, from drawing as writing to scribbling to letter-like forms to random letter strings to representing some sounds in words with letters to (after preschool) representing all sounds in words. Attention should focus on sharing ideas, rather than just forming letters and spelling words, as children move through phases of writing development. Deliberate interactions around writing include the use of interactive writing and scaffolded writing techniques.

- Interactive writing involves children in contributing to a piece of writing in which the teacher leads the writing and addresses children’s developmental strengths and needs through explicit teaching, modeling, and involving children in writing in order to jointly compose a text. With the teacher’s support, children determine/compose the content of the message, count the words, stretch words, listen for sounds within words, think about letters that represent those sounds, and write some of the letters. The teacher uses interactive writing as an opportunity for instruction—for example, regarding the directionality of writing, purposes for writing, and specific sound-letter relationships.
- Scaffolded writing involves the individual child in generating a message the child would like to write. The message is negotiated and repeated with the child until it is internalized. The teacher draws one line for each word in the message using a highlighter or pen. The child writes one “word” per line, where the “word” might be a scribble, letter-like form, random letter string, or one or a few letters within the word.

As indicated in Essential One of this document, materials for writing are available throughout the classroom as well as in an area primarily devoted to opportunities to write, and adults engage regularly to support children in classroom areas where writing may occur.

7. Extended conversation ¹⁵

Adults engage in interactions with children that regularly include:

- responding to and initiating conversations with children, with repeated turns back and forth on the same topic
- encouraging talk among children through the selective use of open-ended questions, commenting on what children are doing, offering prompts (e.g., “Try asking your friend how you can help.”), and scaffolding higher-order discussion, particularly during content-area learning
- modeling and providing practice with discussion that encourages a variety of ways for children to communicate with one another and the teacher (e.g., gestures, multiple languages, multiple dialects, and all of their linguistic resources)
- talking, including narrating and explaining, within dramatic play experiences and content-area learning, including intentional vocabulary-building efforts
- extending children’s language (e.g., The child says, “Fuzzy.” The adult says, “That peach feels fuzzy to me, too. What else do you notice about it?”)
- discussing past and future events
- storytelling/story acting (individually and collaboratively dictating stories, acting out stories, and serving as an audience for others’ stories)

8. Provision of abundant reading, listening, and viewing material in the classroom ¹⁶

The teacher reads aloud, interacts with children around, and provides access to:

- a wide range of books and other texts, print and digital, including information books, poetry, and storybooks that are physically accessible to children (i.e., within children’s reach), that portray groups of people in ways that are multidimensional, not all the same, and that challenge stereotypes
- books and other materials connected to children’s interests, including texts that reflect children’s backgrounds and cultural experiences, texts that reflect the backgrounds and cultural experiences of others, and texts that incorporate both, including class- and child-made books
- recorded books, videos, and digital picture books with and without written words and animations
- books from the classroom, school, and/or public library that teachers support children in borrowing to bring home and/or in accessing digitally (e.g., through MeL.org)
- comfortable places in which to look at books, frequently visited by the teacher(s) and by volunteers recruited to the classroom in order to support and encourage children’s engagement with texts

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

The teacher:

- engages in observation and other forms of assessment that are not biased by race, socioeconomic status, or other factors and that are guided by:
 - the teacher’s understanding of language and literacy development
 - the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten and, if applicable, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework
- observes in multiple authentic contexts—including play, learning centers, outdoors, and whole- and small-group experiences—to inform specific instructional targets
- employs assessment tools that are considered appropriate for prekindergarten contexts
- uses information from observations and assessment tools to plan and carry out instruction and engage in interactions with children

10. Collaboration with families, caregivers, and the community in promoting literacy¹⁷

Families, caregivers, and the community engage in language and literacy interactions with their children that can be drawn upon and extended in preschool. Preschool educators should work together to incorporate family, caregivers, and community funds of knowledge, assets, and perspectives into the classroom. Classroom teachers should serve as connectors between schools and families by:

- inviting families, caregivers, and community members:
 - to read, present, and lead activities that share their personal and professional knowledge and engage children in literacy experiences in school
 - to work together with teachers to develop ways to build upon and further incorporate literacy-promoting strategies into everyday activities, such as cooking, communicating with friends and family, and traveling in the bus or car
 - collaborating with families and caregivers regarding ways to read aloud to children and engage children in discussions during reading and writing
 - incorporating songs, oral storytelling, and other texts from children’s homes and communities into classroom activities (e.g., from cultural institutions in the community, neighborhood businesses)
 - promoting literacy milestones (e.g., pretend-reading, which some parents mistakenly believe is “cheating” but is actually a desired activity in literacy development)
 - encouraging families to speak with children in their home/most comfortable language, whether or not that language is English
 - providing literacy-supporting resources, such as:
 - books and other materials from the classroom and digital libraries that children can borrow, use, or keep that reflect Essential Eight, bullet one
 - children’s magazines, videos, and digital picture books with and without words
 - information about judicious, adult-supported use of educational television and applications that can, with guidance, support literacy development
 - announcements about local events
 - passes to local museums (for example, through www.michiganactivitypass.info)
 - ideas that promote children’s interactions with family members while engaging in literacy and language activities (e.g., writing books together about the child and their family)
- See also Essentials Eight, Nine, and Ten of the [*Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades*](#).

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- 13 Children’s linguistic backgrounds and their speech and language development affect how they pronounce sounds. Teachers should not focus on getting children to pronounce sounds the way that they do. Rather, teachers’ focus should be on making sure that each child has a sound that they consistently associate with that letter, and teachers should make sure that the way the child pronounces the sound in a word allows them to connect that word to the concept. It is extremely important to be aware of children’s speech and language development and linguistic backgrounds when teaching the alphabet and to approach the process with an asset-oriented view of children’s language(s).
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Process for Development and Review

This document was developed in 2016 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. Its update was published in 2023 (lead updating team, in alphabetical order: Emily Caylor, Nell K. Duke, Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, Mary Patillo-Dunn, and Tanya S. Wright). The Task Force included representatives from the following organizations, although their participation does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the organization they represent:

313 Reads	Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
Early Childhood Administrators’ Network, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts	Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative
English Language Arts Leadership Network of Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts	Michigan Reading Association
General Education Leadership Network of Intermediate School Districts in Michigan	Michigan State University
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning	Michigan Virtual University
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators	Oakland University
Michigan Association of Media Educators	Reading NOW Network
Michigan Association of Supervisors of Special Education	Regional Educational Media Centers Association of Michigan
Michigan Department of Education	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.” to “Input and feedback on drafts of the original and updated document were elicited from other stakeholders, resulting in a number of revisions to the document.

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten



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General Education Leadership Network

a MAISA Collaborative

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy

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.



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy, Prekindergarten. There is important overlap and continuity in these two documents, and some children will benefit from instructional practices identified in the prekindergarten document beyond the prekindergarten year.

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan’s capacity to provide effective and equitable early literacy practices for every child every day. The document identifies research-supported instructional practices for kindergarten through third grade that should be a basis of professional learning, policy, and instruction throughout the state. Research indicates that each of these practices can have a positive impact on literacy development. The use of these practices in every classroom every day is expected to make a measurable positive difference in the state’s literacy achievement. The practices should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting a minimum “standard of care” for Michigan’s children. Other documents available at literacyessentials.org address other age groups, grade levels, and aspects of education systems, including coaching practices, school-level practices, and systems-level practices.

Core Commitments

The MAISA GELN Early Literacy Task Force is united in our belief that all children thrive when research deeply informs practice; education builds on every child’s interests and individual, cultural, and linguistic assets; and educators hold high expectations for all children’s development. Indeed, the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy* were built upon the premise that it is unacceptable for some Michigan children to experience research-supported instructional practices while others do not—especially in cases in which the quality of instruction is determined by children’s socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural, or other background characteristics. We are committed to an education system in which educators, families, communities, and children are respected and supported. We are also committed to working against all forms of bias that cause harm and lead to inequitable education, in literacy and across all subjects and domains.

Enabling Conditions

Use of the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy* should occur in a school day that is supportive and effective for children not only in literacy, but in all areas of development. There are many wide-ranging conditions that enable children to thrive in all school subjects and domains, including literacy. A few key examples of such conditions include:

- an asset orientation toward children and their families and communities
- positive relationships between and among teachers, children, and families
- opportunities for children to develop healthy identities
- culturally relevant¹, responsive², and sustaining³ pedagogical approaches throughout the day
- sufficient time for physical activity, meals, and play

For additional information about enabling conditions, see the [Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades](#).

Robust Resources

This document offers instructional practices, not a curriculum or curricular resources. Districts and other educational organizations, in consultation with educators and other experts, should provide, at minimum, curriculum materials that address literacy development, science, social studies, and mathematics and that include abundant materials for young children to read (see Essential Eight). Educators, districts, and other educational organizations should use frameworks⁴ that can guide the selection of reading materials and the design of curricular units and lessons. These frameworks should attend to such factors as alignment to research; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the goals of multiple stakeholders, including national and state organizations (e.g., standards documents), local educators, library media specialists, members of the local community, families, and children themselves. Materials should be coordinated and adapted as needed to reflect findings from research.

Essential Practices

The *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy* should occur throughout the day, including in science and social studies, not exclusively in an isolated block identified as “English Language Arts” or “Literacy.” At the same time, literacy instruction should not take the place of science, social studies, or other curricular areas, nor of addressing standards in all other areas. That approach is counterproductive because later academic achievement is predicted not only by literacy knowledge and skills but also by mathematics learning, knowledge of the natural and social world, and certain aspects of physical, social, and emotional development.

It is also important to understand that this is not an exhaustive list of research-supported instructional practices, although practices not on this list should be carefully scrutinized with respect to alignment to research on literacy instruction. We should actively resist neglecting any of these research-supported practices. Every child in every classroom deserves teachers who implement each of these research-supported practices because they are important, interconnected, and necessary.

All practices listed below are for regular classroom instruction (i.e., Tier 1) and are appropriate for children of all linguistic backgrounds who are learning an alphabetic language. Within all practices, opportunities should be provided for translanguaging, that is, for children to draw on their full linguistic repertoire, including both nonverbal and verbal means of communication and all dialects and languages they are learning.

1. Deliberate, research-informed efforts to foster literacy motivation and engagement within and across lessons ⁵

The teacher:

- creates opportunities for children to see themselves as successful readers and writers by providing appropriately challenging tasks, defining success criteria, scaffolding, providing explicit feedback, incorporating diverse texts and authors that allow children to see that people who are like them in various ways can be successful authors, and other practices
- provides daily opportunities for children to make choices in their reading and writing (choices may be a limited set of options or from extensive options but within a specified topic or genre)
- offers regular opportunities for children to collaborate with peers in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, such as through pair and small-group discussions of texts of interest and opportunities to write within group projects
- helps establish purposes for children to read, write, and discuss in and out of school, beyond being assigned or expected to do so, such as for their enjoyment/interest, to answer their questions about the natural and social world, to address community needs, to communicate with a specific audience, and to draw on and affirm their identities
- uses additional strategies to generate excitement about reading and writing, such as book talks, updates about book series, and child-centered activities, including incorporating children's interests, involving children in classroom management decision-making processes, and engaging them in creating a positive learning environment. The teacher avoids attempting to incentivize reading through nonreading-related prizes, such as stickers, coupons, or toys, and avoids using reading and writing as "punishment" (e.g., "If you can't listen, I'm going to send you to sit and read")

2. Read-alouds of age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital, including culturally relevant texts ⁶

Read-alouds involve:

- sets of texts across read-aloud sessions that are thematically and conceptually related and that offer opportunities to learn that children could not yet experience independently
- modeling of appropriate fluency (accuracy, automaticity, and prosody) in reading
- child-friendly explanations of words, concepts, and information within the text; revisiting words after reading and using tools such as movement, props, videos, photos, examples, and nonexamples; and engaging children in saying the words aloud and using the words at other points in the day and over time
- interactivity, including higher-order discussion among children and between children and teachers before, during, and after reading
- instruction depending on the grade level and children's needs that:
 - develops **print concepts**, such as developing children's directionality by running a finger under the words and asking where to start, with texts being sufficiently visible to children so they can see specific features of print
 - models application of knowledge and strategies for **word recognition** (see Essential Three)
 - builds **knowledge of the structure and features of text**, including, with regard to structure, key story elements and common informational text structures (compare-contrast, cause-effect, problem-solution, description, and sequence), and with regard to text features, tables of contents, diagrams, captions, and indexes
 - describes and models **comprehension strategies**, including activating prior knowledge/predicting, questioning, visualizing, monitoring and fix-up, drawing inferences, and summarizing/retelling
 - describes and models strategies for ascertaining the meaning of unfamiliar **vocabulary**

3. Small group and individual instruction, using a variety of grouping strategies, most often with flexible groups formed and instruction targeted to (i.e., differentiated by) children’s observed and assessed needs in specific aspects of literacy, including both writing and reading development (and therefore not by perceived general “ability” or “level”) ⁷

The teacher:

- ensures that children frequently experience small-group instruction and use most of their time in small groups to actually read and write (or work toward this goal in kindergarten and early first grade)
- coaches children as they engage in reading and writing—for example, with reading prompts focusing primarily on identifying words based on letters and groups of letters in words, monitoring for meaning, and rereading and with writing prompts focused on genre, ideation, organization/structure, and mechanics
- employs practices for developing reading **fluency**, such as repeated reading; echo reading; paired, partner, or dyad reading; and continuous or wide reading (many of these practices can also be used with the whole group)
- includes explicit instruction, as needed, in **word recognition strategies**, including multisyllabic word decoding, **text structure, comprehension strategies**, oral language, vocabulary, writing goal-setting, and **writing strategies**
- is deliberate in providing quality instruction to children in all groups, with meaning-making the ultimate goal of each group’s work

While the teacher is with children in small groups, examples of research-supported activities in which children could engage include writing (e.g., in response to reading, in alignment with content-area instruction), repeated reading, dyad reading, brief handwriting practice, research-proven computer-adaptive literacy programs, listening to and reading along with recorded books.

4. Activities that build phonological awareness (grades K and 1) ^{8,9}

Teachers promote phonological awareness development, particularly phonemic awareness development. Although phonological awareness as a construct does not involve letters, phonological awareness instruction is best provided primarily in connection to letters. It entails explicit instruction¹⁰, demonstration, play with sounds in words, and engaged study of words, such as by:

- listening to and creating variations on books and songs with rhyming or alliteration
- sorting pictures, objects, and written words by a sound or sounds (e.g., words with a short-“e” sound versus words with a long-“e” sound)
- doing activities that involve segmenting sounds in words (e.g., Elkonin boxes, in which children move tokens or letters into boxes, with one box for each sound in the word), which supports orthographic mapping and spelling unfamiliar words
- doing activities that involve blending sounds in words (e.g., “robot talk” in which the teacher says “/f/ /i/ /sh/” [i.e., the sounds “ffff” “iiii” “shhhh”] and children say “fish”), which supports decoding
- creating daily opportunities to write meaningful texts in which children listen for the sounds in words to estimate their spellings

5. Explicit instruction ¹¹ in letter-sound and sound-letter relationships ¹²

Earlier in children’s development, such instruction will focus on letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, how letters are shaped and formed, and decoding and spelling simple words (e.g., consonant-vowel-consonant [CVC] words with short vowels).

Later in children’s development, the focus will be on more complex letter-sound relationships, including digraphs (two letters representing one sound, as in “sh,” “th,” “ch,” “oa,” “ee,” and “ie”), blends or consonant clusters (two or three letters representing each of their sounds pronounced in immediate succession within a syllable, as in “bl” in “blue,” “str” in “string,” or “ft” as in “left”), diphthongs (two letters representing a single glided phoneme as in “oi” in “oil” and “ou” in “out”), common and less common spelling patterns (e.g., “-ake” in “cake” or “rake,” “-all,” “-ould”), and patterns in multisyllabic words, all as reflected in each child’s oral language.

Instruction fosters flexibility in children, given that, in English, there are often multiple ways to spell a given sound and multiple sounds that a given spelling can represent.

High-frequency words are taught with full analysis of letter-sound relationships within the words (i.e., not by sight/memory), even in those that are not spelled as would be expected and/or that reflect relationships not yet learned.

Instruction in letter-sound relationships is:

- verbally precise and involves multiple channels, including opportunities to say, read, and write/spell words
- informed by careful observations of children’s reading and writing and, as needed, assessments that systematically examine knowledge of specific sound-letter relationships
- taught systematically in relation to students’ needs and aligned with the expectations of the Michigan K-3 Standards for English Language Arts
- accompanied by opportunities to apply the knowledge of the letter-sound relationships taught by reading books or other connected texts that include those relationships (i.e., texts in which most of the words are decodable based on what children have learned up to that point in the scope and sequence in addition to being written with attention to other factors, such as engagingness and the extent to which the reader is likely to be able to create a mental image associated with the meaning of the word [imageability])
- reinforced by coaching children during reading, most notably by prompting children to attend to the letters in words, recognize letter-sound relationships they have been taught, and monitor for meaning (not to identify words but to monitor/cross-check whether the word that has been decoded makes sense)

6. Research- and standards-aligned writing instruction on a daily basis and across content areas in the school day¹³

The teacher provides opportunities for children to write a variety of texts for a variety of purposes and audiences. To support children in doing so, the teacher provides:

- interactive writing experiences in grades K and 1, in which the teacher leads the writing and addresses children’s developmental strengths and needs through explicit teaching, modeling, and involving children in writing in order to jointly compose a text
- instruction that fosters children’s motivation and engagement with writing in alignment with Essential One
- instruction in writing processes and strategies—that is, teaching children a set of steps they can engage in independently to research, plan, revise, and edit writing, using a gradual release of responsibility
- opportunities to study models of writing, particularly opinion, informative/explanatory, and narrative texts (real and imagined), including texts by diverse authors (see Essential 8)
- explicit instruction in letter formation, with frequent, brief practice in writing specific letters, handwriting fluency (moving toward automaticity with authentic writing while maintaining legibility), spelling strategies (e.g., listening for sounds in words, syllable breaking, morphemic analysis), capitalization, punctuation, sentence construction (e.g., sentence combining), keyboarding (first expected by the end of grade 3¹³), and word processing

7. Intentional and ambitious efforts to build vocabulary and knowledge, including content and other cultural knowledge, throughout the day¹⁴

The teacher:

- selects vocabulary words to teach from read-alouds of literature and informational texts and from content-area curricula
- introduces word meanings to children during reading and content-area instruction using child-friendly explanations and providing opportunities for children to pronounce the new words and see the spelling of the new words
- provides many opportunities for children to review and use new vocabulary over time, including discussing ways that new vocabulary words relate to one another and to children’s existing knowledge, addressing multiple meanings or nuanced meanings of a word across different contexts, and encouraging children to use new words in meaningful contexts (e.g., discussion of texts, discussion of content-area learning, semantic maps, writing)
- teaches, models, and provides practice with discussion processes and protocols and encourages a variety of ways for children to communicate with one another and the teacher (e.g., gestures, multiple languages, and all of their linguistic resources)
- teaches morphology (i.e., the meaning of word parts), including common word roots, cognates, prefixes, and suffixes

8. Abundant reading material in classroom and school libraries and reading opportunities in the classroom¹⁵

The classroom includes:

- a wide range of books and other texts (print, audio, video, and digital), including information books, poetry, and storybooks that children are supported in physically accessing (rather than being hidden away) that portray groups of people in ways that are multidimensional, not monolithic, and that challenge stereotypes
- books and other materials connected to children's interests, including texts that reflect children's backgrounds and cultural experiences, texts that reflect the backgrounds and cultural experiences of others, and texts that incorporate both, including class- and child-made books
- teacher-supported access to books from the classroom, school, and/or public library that children can borrow to bring home and/or access digitally
- comfortable places in which to read books, frequently visited by the teacher(s) and adult volunteers recruited to the classroom in order to support and encourage children's engagement with texts
- opportunities for children to engage in the reading of materials of their choice every day, with supports that include:
 - a) instruction and coaching in how to select texts,
 - b) instruction and coaching in employing productive strategies during reading,
 - c) feedback on children's reading, and
 - d) post-reading response activities, including text discussion

9. Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children's language and literacy development that informs their education¹⁶

The teacher:

- engages in observation and other forms of assessment that are not biased by race, socioeconomic status, or other factors and that are guided by
 - the teacher's understanding of language and literacy development (which must be continuously developed)
 - the Michigan K to 12 Standards for English Language Arts
- prioritizes observations during reading and writing, with a focus on observations informing the next steps in instruction (e.g., specific spelling patterns to reteach, specific genre features that don't appear to require further instruction)
- administers assessments of specific aspects of literacy development and of reading and writing as a source of information to identify children who may need additional instructional support and to build on the strengths of each child
- employs formative and diagnostic assessment tools for the purpose of identifying specific instructional strengths and needs (e.g., assessing knowledge of specific sound(s)-letter(s) relationships, assessing knowledge of specific vocabulary words taught, reading and writing strategies being used and not used) in order to inform next steps in classroom instruction

10. Collaboration with families, caregivers, and the community in promoting literacy¹⁷

Families, caregivers, and the community engage in language and literacy interactions with children that can be drawn upon and extended in kindergarten through third grade. Educators should work together to incorporate family, caregivers, and community funds of knowledge, assets, and perspectives into the classroom. Classroom teachers should serve as connectors between schools and families by:

- inviting families, caregivers, and community members:
 - to read, present, and lead activities that share their personal and professional knowledge and engage children in literacy experiences in school
 - to work with teachers to develop ways to build upon and further incorporate literacy-promoting strategies into everyday activities, such as cooking, communicating with friends and family, and traveling in the bus or car
- collaborating with families and caregivers regarding ways to read aloud to children and engage children in discussions during reading and writing
- incorporating songs, oral storytelling, and other texts from children’s homes and communities into classroom activities (e.g., from cultural institutions in the community, neighborhood businesses)
- promoting children’s out-of-school reading
- supporting families in fostering academic literacy learning at home and in after-school settings, including over the summer months (e.g., staffing after-school tutoring programs, providing materials for summer reading, providing structures for summer reading)
- encouraging families to speak with children in their home/most comfortable language, whether or not that language is English
- providing literacy-supporting resources, such as:
 - books and other materials from the classroom and digital libraries that children can use or keep that reflect Essential 8, bullet one
 - information about judicious, adult-supported use of educational television and applications that can, with guidance, support literacy development
 - announcements about local events
 - passes to local museums (for example, through www.michiganactivitypass.info)

See also Essentials Eight, Nine, and Ten of the [Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades](#).

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- 11 Explicit instruction involves telling children what you want them to know rather than expecting that they will infer this information. For example, explicit instruction about the letter "l" might include (although not necessarily all at once) the following: "This [pointing] is the letter called ell. *Ell* stands for the /lll/ sound. Latoya's name starts with the /lll/ sound: LLLatoya. Lion

- also starts with the /lll/ sound: /llllion/. You can make *ell* with a straight line down and a short line across, like this [demonstrating], or you can make *ell* with just a straight line down, like this [demonstrating].”
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Process for Development and Review

This document was developed in 2016 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. Its update was published in 2023 (lead updating team, in alphabetical order: Emily Caylor, Nell K. Duke, Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, Mary Patillo-Dunn, Amanda Wowra, and Tanya S. Wright). The Task Force included representatives from the following organizations, although their participation does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the organization they represent:

313 Reads	Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
Early Childhood Administrators' Network, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts	Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative
English Language Arts Leadership Network of Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts	Michigan Reading Association
General Education Leadership Network of Intermediate School Districts in Michigan	Michigan State University
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning	Michigan Virtual University
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators	Oakland University
Michigan Association of Media Educators	Reading NOW Network
Michigan Association of Supervisors of Special Education	Regional Educational Media Centers Association of Michigan
Michigan Department of Education	Southwest Michigan Reading Council
	Technology Readiness Infrastructure Grant
	University of Michigan

Input and feedback on drafts of the original and updated document were elicited from other stakeholders, resulting in a number of revisions to the document.

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3



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Online | literacyessentials.org

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**General
Education
Leadership
Network**

a MAISA Collaborative

Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy

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.



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy, Grades K to 3. There is important overlap and continuity in these two documents, and some students will benefit from instructional practices identified in the K to 3 document beyond the K to 3 years.

Purpose

The purpose of the document is to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported instructional practices that could be the focus of professional development throughout the state. The focus of the document is on classroom practices, rather than on school- or systems-level practices (which are addressed in the document: Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy). Research suggests that each of these ten practices in every classroom every day could make a measurable positive difference in the State's literacy achievement. They should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting a minimum 'standard of care' for Michigan's children.

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

The recommended practices should occur throughout the day, including being integrated into opportunities for science and social studies learning, not exclusively in an isolated block identified as “English Language Arts” or “Literacy.” At the same time, literacy instruction should not take the place of science and social studies inquiry nor addressing the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations for Social Studies nor addressing the Michigan K-12 Science Standards. In the long term, that approach is counterproductive; later academic achievement is predicted not only by literacy knowledge and skills, but by mathematics learning, knowledge of the natural and social world, and certain aspects of physical, social, and emotional development. Finally, it is important to read this document in relation to the State of Michigan’s specific standards for literacy development in fourth and fifth grade, which should garner careful attention in all Michigan fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms and be one focus in observing classroom practice and children’s development. The endnotes indicate some connections between the ten instructional practices and the Michigan Standards, and they reference research studies that support the practices listed.

1. Deliberate, research-informed efforts to foster motivation and engagement within and across lessons⁴

The teacher:

- Creates opportunities for children to identify as successful readers and writers (e.g., “I am a reader.”)⁵
- Provides daily opportunities for children to make choices in their reading and writing across disciplines (choices may be a limited set of options or from extensive options but within a specific disciplinary topic or genre)
- Offers regular opportunities for children to collaborate with peers in reading and writing, such as through small-group discussion of texts of interest and opportunities to write within group projects⁶
- Helps establish meaningful purposes for children to read and write beyond being assigned or expected to do so, such as for their enjoyment/interest, to answer general or discipline-specific questions about the natural and social world, to address community needs, or to communicate with specific audiences⁷
- Builds positive learning environments that encourage students to set and achieve goals, as well as promote student independence
- Attends to and cultivates student interest by connecting literacy experiences to students’ family and community experiences

2. Intentional, research-informed instruction using increasingly complex texts and tasks that build comprehension, knowledge, and strategic reading activity⁸

An important aspect of literacy instruction is foregrounding the use of reading and writing for the purpose of building knowledge about the world and about oneself. Ideally, comprehension instruction, including strategy instruction, is always in the service of supporting knowledge building. At times, the teacher needs to be very explicit about how to construct meaning from text, but this activity is always embedded in sense making with text. One dimension of comprehension instruction is signaling that there are many possible causes for comprehension breakdowns (e.g., poorly constructed text, insufficient prior knowledge, challenging concepts and vocabulary). It is important that students be encouraged to monitor their understanding and, when there has been a breakdown, have a repertoire of fix-up strategies. While teachers can model these fix-up strategies, the goal is for students to practice the use of these fix-up strategies so that they become independent readers.

To build comprehension, knowledge, and strategic reading, the teacher:

- Facilitates discussion of text meaning to support students to interpret the ideas in a text⁷
- Provides experiences for students to build knowledge to support their interpretation of text prior to reading (e.g., to build prior knowledge), during reading (e.g., to support text interpretation), and after reading (e.g., to extend learning)⁹
- Models and guides students to be metacognitive while reading (i.e., monitor for comprehension and use fix-up strategies when there are breakdowns in comprehension)
- Provides explicit comprehension strategy instruction (e.g., finding main ideas, summarizing, making connections between new text information and prior knowledge, drawing inferences). High quality strategy instruction includes:
 - ▶ Thoughtful selection of the text to use when introducing and teaching a comprehension strategy
 - ▶ Attending to the demands the text places on the readers to inform appropriate selection of texts
 - ▶ Demonstrating and describing how to apply the strategies that students are learning to different texts
 - ▶ Providing guided practice that reflects the difficulty level of the strategies that students are learning, as well as the demands of the text, and purposes for reading

3. Small group instruction, using a variety of grouping strategies, most often with flexible groups formed and instruction targeted to children's observed and assessed needs in specific aspects of literacy development¹⁰

The teacher:

- Is deliberate in providing quality instruction to children in all groups, with meaning-making the ultimate goal of each group's work, and ensures that children use most of their time actually reading and writing
- Provides and supports opportunities for small group discussion of literature and disciplinary text (e.g., Instructional Conversations and Literature Circles) so that students can draw on their own knowledge and the knowledge of their peers to co-construct the meaning of text
- Provides opportunities for developing reading fluency during small group work, such as paired and partner reading
- Uses small group routines (e.g., cooperative and collaborative learning, such as Reciprocal Teaching and Collaborative Strategic Reading) for fostering strategic reading and knowledge-building using text
- Provides opportunities for students to plan, draft, revise, and/or edit writing together, framed by specific guidelines for working together

4. Activities that build reading fluency and stamina with increasingly complex text¹¹

Activities include:

- Listening to models of fluent reading (reading with appropriate accuracy, automaticity, and prosody) of age-appropriate books and other print or digital materials
- Engaging in repeated readings of familiar texts
- Engaging in wide reading of texts, including multiple modes (e.g., print, digital, visual, audio), genres, and topics
- Using reading materials of increasing text difficulty
- Opportunities to read independently for specific purposes, including for pleasure, for sustained periods of time
- Paired or partner reading

5. Discussion of the ideas in texts and how to construct text meaning across texts and disciplines¹²

The teacher:

- Reads aloud age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital¹³
- Carefully selects texts that provide the grist for rich discussion, and analyses texts to identify specific learning goals, challenges (e.g., the complexity of the ideas in the text, insufficient information) and affordances (e.g., text organization, such as problem-solution or compare-contrast; text features, such as graphics or headings)⁷
- Uses discussion moves (e.g., linking students' ideas, probing children's thinking, having students return to the text to support claims about the ideas in the text) that help provide continuity and extend the discussion of the ideas in the text
- Provides tasks or discussion routines students know how to follow (e.g., Instructional Conversations and Literature Circles) when students discuss texts in small groups
- Provides regular opportunities for peer-assisted learning, especially for emergent bilingual learners, by pairing students at different levels of English proficiency

6. Research-informed and standards-aligned writing instruction¹⁴

The teacher provides:

- Daily time for student writing across disciplines, including opportunities for students to write using digital tools (e.g., word processing)¹⁵
- Opportunities to study text models of (e.g., mentor and student-written texts) and write texts for a variety of purposes and audiences, particularly opinion, informative/explanatory, and narrative texts (real and imagined)
- Occasions for students to use writing as a tool for learning disciplinary content and engaging in disciplinary practices (e.g., writing scientific explanations), and that provide clear and specific goals for writing (e.g., address both sides of an argument)
- Explicit instruction in and guided practice using writing strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing writing
- Explicit instruction in spelling strategies, capitalization, punctuation, sentence and paragraph construction, purpose-driven text structure and organization, keyboarding, and word processing¹⁶

7. Intentional and ambitious efforts to build vocabulary, academic language, and content knowledge¹⁷

The teacher engages in:

- Teaching morphology (e.g., common word roots, inflections, prefixes, and affixes) and syntax¹⁸
- Attending to word relations (e.g., semantic maps, concept mapping, etc.)
- Providing explicit instruction in both general academic and content area vocabulary during reading and disciplinary instruction¹⁹
- Engaging students in wide reading that exposes them to rich and discipline-specific academic language, and provides the opportunity for vocabulary learning in the context of reading²⁰
- Encouraging the use of new vocabulary in a variety of contexts and modes, including reading, writing, and discussion of print or digital texts for discipline-specific purposes²¹

8. Abundant and diverse reading material, including digital texts, and opportunities to read in the classroom²²

The classroom includes:

- A wide range of books and other texts (e.g., print, audio, video, and digital), including information books, poetry, literature, and magazines²⁰
- Books and other materials connected to children’s interest and that reflect children’s backgrounds and cultural experiences, including class- and child-made books
- Books and other reading materials children can borrow and bring home and/or access digitally at home
- Reading materials that expose students to rich language and vocabulary learning²¹

10. Collaboration with families in promoting literacy²⁴

Teachers engage in:

- Supporting families to continue to provide reading and academic learning opportunities at home and during the summer months (e.g., book lending programs)
- Building on students’ family and cultural resources and knowledge in reading and writing instruction
- Promoting children’s independent reading outside of school
- Speaking with children in their home/most comfortable language, whether or not that language is English²⁵
- Providing literacy-supporting resources, such as the following:
 - ▶ Books from the classroom that children can borrow or keep
 - ▶ Children’s magazines
 - ▶ Information about judicious, adult-supported use of educational television and applications, or “apps,” that can, with guidance, support literacy development
 - ▶ Passes to local museums (for example, through www.michiganactivitypass.info)

- Daily opportunities for children to engage in independent reading of materials of their choice, with the teacher providing instruction and coaching in how to select texts and employ productive strategies during reading, feedback on children’s reading, and post-reading response activities including text discussion²⁰

9. Ongoing observation of children’s language and literacy development that informs small group and individual instruction²³

The teacher:

- Observes and assesses students during reading and writing activities using an array of indicators (e.g., ratings of fluency, retellings/summary and discussion to assess comprehension, productivity to assess writing fluency, and accuracy of mechanics in writing)
(Note: Use of formative assessments in these areas is particularly important for emergent bilingual speakers)
- Uses formative/benchmark assessments to monitor progress in literacy development and to guide instructional decision-making (e.g., differentiated instruction) for all students, including adding additional supports and providing opportunities for enrichment
- Uses diagnostic and ongoing assessment data to identify students who are struggling with reading and writing, and to design intensive, systematic instruction that focuses on identified learning needs
- Provides explicit feedback, related to reading and writing development, in which the teacher points out what the learner is doing correctly and incorrectly, and builds on earlier feedback

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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, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts

English Language Arts Leadership Network of Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts

General Education Leadership Network of Intermediate School Districts in Michigan

Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning

Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators

Michigan Association of Media Educators

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

Regional Educational Media Centers 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 Instructional Practices in Literacy Grades 4-5



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**General
Education
Leadership
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a MAISA Collaborative

Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades

A document of the Michigan General Education Leadership Network (GELN)

This document is intended to be read in concert with Essential Instructional Practices in Early Mathematics: Prekindergarten to Grade 3; Early Literacy: Prekindergarten, Early Literacy Grades K to 3, Literacy Grades 4 to 5, Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy, and other forthcoming documents from the Early Literacy and Early Mathematics Task Forces. The systems and practices outlined here provide school-level and program-level support for effective classroom instruction in prekindergarten and elementary literacy and mathematics.



ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

Purpose The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan’s capacity to improve children’s literacy and mathematics learning 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 and mathematics development in ways that systematically impact learning throughout elementary schools, early childhood learning centers, and other learning environments and programs.¹

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 and educators.

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-supported 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.

Our Values

Our values fundamentally shape our design of, and practice within, educational systems. Interpretation and implementation of the Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades should be shaped by the following research-supported values:

- We value a sustained, collaborative, and systemic approach to improving teaching and learning, with the acknowledgement that meaningful change takes time, requires ongoing inquiry and revision, and is never done.
- We value equity and inclusion for all children, families, and educators, with the recognition that schools and centers must resist and dismantle institutional practices that have historically marginalized some individuals and communities.
- We value children's and educators' social identities like age, race, ethnicity, gender, language, socio-economic status, and geographic context (e.g., urban, rural, suburban).
- We value caring learning environments where children, families, and educators have trusting relationships with one another and feel supported to learn and take risks.
- We value strategic, research-supported development of educators' practices, knowledge, and identities because powerful learning for children requires powerful learning for educators.

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

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

- includes members with considerable, current, and collective expertise in literacy, mathematics, instructional improvement, systems change, and early childhood education;
- promotes the implementation of evidence-based, high-quality literacy and mathematics curriculum, instructional practices, resources, and assessments aligned across the learning environment;²
- develops a vision, mission, set of goals, and educational philosophy that guide school climate, children's learning, and educator 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;³
- engages in ongoing learning about high-quality instruction, educator learning, equity oriented continuous improvement, and systems leadership;⁴
- maintains a comprehensive system for assessing children's strengths and needs that focuses on multiple points of data (e.g., formative, summative, family input, student voice) and keeps the best interests of children paramount in assessment, knowing the primary purpose is to promote equity by improving teaching and learning;⁵
- makes decisions based on deep understanding of community, school and district goals, strengths, and needs using iterative strategies such as Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles;⁶
- ensures a collaborative problem-solving approach that may include administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, parents, aides, reading and mathematics specialists, library media specialists, special educators, and others as needed;⁷ and
- distributes leadership throughout the organization for the purposes of drawing on multiple perspectives, working collectively for improvement, and building leadership capacity among all staff.⁸

2. The *organizational climate* reflects a collective sense of responsibility for all children, a focus on developing child independence and competence, and support for the learning of all children and adults.

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

- share and act upon a sense of collective responsibility for the literacy and mathematics growth and overall well-being of every child that is grounded in the shared belief that every child can and will be successful and that draws upon assets from children’s families, communities, cultures, and identities;⁹
- ensure that the entire learning environment is physically safe and emotionally supportive, such that all children feel a sense of belonging, and there are positive educator-child-family, child-child, and educator-educator relationships throughout the building;¹⁰
- support the development of children’s independence, competence, self-efficacy, and identity in reading, writing, and mathematics through practices such 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, writers, and mathematicians;¹¹
- promote authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students by building culturally sustaining and responsive learning environments;¹² and
- share professional trust, collective efficacy, and a sense of agency and voice in shaping the organization.¹³

3. The *learning environment* reflects a strong commitment to literacy and mathematics.¹⁴

Throughout the learning environment, there is evidence that:

- literacy is a priority, such that:
 - print experiences are meaningful with consideration of the amount, type, and use;¹⁵
 - children and teachers are actively engaged with the school library, media center, and library media specialist;¹⁶
 - guest readers and volunteers (e.g., parents, college students, community members) are recruited and trained to support literacy in an ongoing manner;¹⁷
 - 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 or posting of book reviews throughout the school; and
- mathematics is a priority, such that:
 - children’s developing and varied mathematical ideas are central to instruction and fostered through collective learning;¹⁸
 - learning environments are designed to foster mathematical experimentation, practice, and play, including access to mathematical tools and manipulatives;¹⁹
 - educator professional learning emphasizes an ongoing focus on supporting rich mathematical discussion and problem-solving and fostering positive mathematical identities;²⁰
 - goals for and celebrations of learning emphasize reasoning and problem solving and are not limited to performance on standardized assessments;²¹
- literacy and mathematics are integrated and occur throughout the day including during science and social studies learning;²²
- children regularly use literacy and mathematics concepts by reading, writing, speaking, and listening for multiple purposes, and student products are made prominently visible;²³
- books, learning materials, student tasks, and classroom decor reflect diversity across cultures, ethnic and racial groups, geographic locations, genders, and social roles;²⁴
- school staff aim to foster intrinsic motivation to learn, such that:
 - in literacy, there is 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.”²⁵
 - in mathematics, there is emphasis on the relevant, real-world use of mathematical concepts and problem-solving and avoidance of mathematical activities that can lead to anxiety²⁶

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

School, center, and program leaders prioritize educator learning²⁷ and ensure that professional learning opportunities are:

- intentional in terms of content, such that learning opportunities are:
 - responsive and data informed so that they meet the needs and best interests of educators and their students²⁸;
 - focused on development of educators’ understanding of content, instructional practices, context, and student learning, motivation, and engagement²⁹;
 - integrating learning about content instruction with learning about culturally responsive, asset-based, and equity-oriented instructional practice³⁰;
 - aligned with the research-supported, developmentally appropriate practices outlined in the Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics;
 - focused on the “why” as well as the “how” of effective whole-class and small group instructional practices;
- intentional in terms of context, such that learning opportunities are:
 - collaborative in nature, involving colleagues working together in ways that foster trust, vulnerability, curiosity, experimentation, and critical reflection³¹;
 - inclusive of multiple roles, such as: school leaders, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, aides, and support staff;
 - part of coherent, ongoing, and sustained systems of educator learning supports that occur over extended periods of time³²
- intentional in terms of design, such that learning opportunities are:
 - structured in ways that foster job-embedded, collaborative learning (e.g., study groups, collaborative inquiry, and problem solving)³³
 - designed to include, and be followed by, opportunities for teachers to experiment with and observe effective practice and receive feedback from mentors, peers, coaches, and/or principal;³⁴
 - based in an understanding of the educator knowledge, skills, and identities reflected in the Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics;³⁵
 - 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 manner³⁶

5. There is a system for determining the allocation of *literacy and mathematics support* in addition to high-quality classroom instruction with multiple layers of support available to children, building on existing skills.

School, center, and program leaders ensure that:

- instruction and additional supports are implemented across learning environments in addition to, not instead of, core instruction, and are coherent and consistent with the Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics;³⁷
- supports are differentiated to the individual child’s specific profile of strengths and needs;³⁸
- highly trained educators are those teaching the children needing the most support;³⁹
- teachers are supported to design needs-based instruction by using and analyzing multiple, varied, systematic, formative assessments and observation as appropriate in an ongoing basis to:
 - identify individual child needs early and accurately;
 - tailor whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction;
 - measure progress regularly; and
 - move students fluidly among layered supports as their needs change in order to avoid ability grouping that is long-term and static in nature; and⁴⁰
- formal and informal assessment practices disrupt historical patterns of marginalization with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status, language, etc.⁴¹.

6. Organizational systems assess and respond to *individual needs* that may impact learning and development.

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

- any potential learning, physical, visual, regulatory, mental health, and social-emotional needs that require specific conditions and supports are identified;⁴²
- assessments, interventions, and initiatives align with family and community values, culture, and history and attend to student strengths, assets, and funds of knowledge;⁴³
- every adult has access to research-supported strategies and tools to support culturally responsive, whole-child development for each child, 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;⁴⁴
- children 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);⁴⁵ and

- all adults intentionally work to:
 - identify systems and conditions that may hinder or support learning for each child;
 - modify learning environments to recognize and respond to children’s individual, developmental, and cultural needs;
 - foster collaborative relationships with professional colleagues and children’s families; and
 - assess whether school-wide patterns in learning and/or behavior warrant adopting strategies or programs and, if so, implement ones that are caring, student-centered, and equity-oriented and that have been shown to positively impact both academic and socio-emotional learning.⁴⁶

7. Adequate, high-quality *instructional resources* are well maintained and utilized in ways that align with the Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics.

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

- teachers are provided with resources, including technological and curricular resources, that support research-supported instruction in all components of literacy and mathematics instruction and that provide continuity across ages and grade levels;
- teachers have professional learning opportunities and support for effective use of available technologies, materials, and resources;⁴⁷
- each child has access to cognitively demanding mathematical tasks and materials that include diverse problem contexts, engage children in learning mathematics through play and experimentation, provide space for a range of mathematical problem solving, and foster growth along coherent learning progressions;⁴⁸

- 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;⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

8. A consistent *family collaboration* strategy includes specific attention to literacy and mathematics development.

Members of the learning organization collaborate with families to:

- prioritize learning about families and the language, literacy, and mathematics 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 and mathematical problems they encounter as part of their lives at home or at work);⁵¹
- provide regular opportunities for families to be in schools and centers and for educators to be in community spaces;
- enable families and educators to build a network of social relationships to support children's language, literacy, and mathematics development (e.g., connect families with community organizations and with each other to celebrate and support learning);⁵²
- foster familial and community partnerships in the education of children and the work of the learning environment through equitable collaboration and reciprocal relationships;⁵³
- engage families to build leadership and gather feedback to guide future collaboration and promote positive experiences for each child; and⁵⁴
- examine how families can utilize research-supported strategies to foster literacy and mathematics development at home (see *Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics*).⁵⁵

9. A *summer learning* initiative fosters continued engagement with literacy and mathematics.⁵⁶

To support summer reading and mathematics learning, the school, center, or program:

- facilitates opportunities for every child to read books and access texts during the summer through strategies, including:
 - providing books that are of high interest to children and within the likely range of reading levels within each class;⁵⁷
 - connecting children to summer reading programs offered through school and public libraries;
 - 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;⁵⁸ and
 - collaborating with families to support reading at home, such as by encouraging family members to listen to their child read aloud, discuss books with their child, and provide feedback on their child's reading.⁵⁹
- facilitates opportunities for children to engage with mathematics during the summer through strategies including:
 - providing access to games and other activities that families can do together;⁶⁰ and
 - collaborating with families to learn about strategies for supporting relevant and joyful mathematical talk, play, and problem solving within home and community contexts.⁶¹
- facilitates access to a free, voluntary, high-quality instructional summer program for children that includes five to six weeks of programming, research-supported and small-group learning, highly qualified teachers, a positive learning environment, and meaningful partnerships with families.⁶²

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 networking with local businesses, cultural centers, and community organizations to:
 - tap into available funds of knowledge⁶³,
 - support development of children's content knowledge and identities, and
 - facilitate opportunities for children to read, write, and do mathematics for purposes and audiences beyond school assignments;⁶⁴

- access to opportunities for individualized support that aligns with *Essential Instructional Practices for Literacy and Mathematics*, for example through one-on-one tutoring;⁶⁵ and
- opportunities for children to develop literacy and mathematics outside of the school hours, including through engaging out-of-school time library, community, and school programs in the summer and after school.⁶⁶

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Process for Development and Review

This document was developed by the Early Mathematics 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:

Early Childhood Administrators' Network, MAISA	Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
English Language Arts Leadership Network, MAISA	Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative
General Education Leadership Network, MAISA	Michigan Mathematics and Science Leaders Network Michigan State
Grand Valley State University	Michigan Reading Association
Kalamazoo Public Schools	Michigan State University
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning	Michigan Virtual University
Mathematics Leadership Team	MiSTEM Network
Michigan Assessment Consortium	Reading NOW Network
Michigan Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators	REMC Association of Michigan
Michigan Association of Superintendents & Administrators	Southwest Michigan Reading Council
Michigan Association of Supervisors of Special Education	Technology Readiness Infrastructure Grant
Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics	University of Michigan
Michigan Department of Education	University of Washington

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 and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades

[Literacyessentials.org](https://literacyessentials.org) #MichiganLiteracy

[MathEssentials.org](https://mathessentials.org) #MiMathEssentials





**General
Education
Leadership
Network**
a MAISA Collaborative

Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy

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.



COACHING PRACTICES

This document is intended to be partnered with *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* and *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: K to 3* as well as *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy*.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported literacy coaching practices that should be a focus of professional development throughout the state. Literacy coaching can provide powerful job-embedded, ongoing professional development with a primary goal of enhancing classroom literacy instruction through improving teacher expertise.¹ Effective literacy coaching supports teachers to successfully navigate the daily challenges they face in their classrooms. As a result, instructional capacity and sustainability within the schools increases.² In addition, through improving teacher expertise and the quality of core instruction, student achievement increases.³

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The focus of this document is to identify the critical qualifications, dispositions, activities, and roles of effective elementary literacy coaches. Research suggests that each of the seven essentials is an important contributor to literacy coaching that results in increased student literacy learning. They should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting minimum expectations for Michigan's literacy coaches.

1. Effective literacy coaches have specialized literacy knowledge and skills beyond that of initial teacher preparation.⁴

Literacy coaches, due to the complexity of literacy instruction, must:

- have an in-depth knowledge of reading and writing processes and acquisition⁵
- recognize the varied purposes for assessment (e.g., screening, diagnostic, monitoring progress, achievement), select specific assessments that meet those purposes, administer and score assessments, and use assessment results to inform instruction⁶
- know and appropriately use research-informed instructional practices to help all students develop literacy knowledge, skills, and abilities including concepts of print, phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, word reading, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, writing, critical thinking, and motivation⁷
- be able to create a literate learning environment that considers how the physical arrangement, materials, group work, routines, and motivational factors such as choice and purpose contribute to learning in today's diverse classrooms⁸

Literacy coaches develop in-depth literacy knowledge and skills⁹ by:

- completing advanced course work in literacy that results in a reading teacher or reading or literacy specialist endorsement
- having successful classroom teaching experience as evidenced by positive student learning
- continually updating their knowledge through professional reading, active participation in professional development workshops, and attendance at local, state, and national professional conferences

Teachers report that literacy coaches need advanced

literacy knowledge and skills in order to carry out their responsibilities such as modeling research-informed literacy practices, helping teachers analyze assessment data and solve instructional problems, and recommending appropriate materials and resources.¹⁰

When literacy coaches have completed advanced course work in literacy and been successful classroom teachers, students of teachers they coached exhibited more literacy growth than students of teachers coached by literacy coaches who had not completed advanced course work in literacy.¹¹

2. Effective literacy coaches apply adult learning principles in their work.^{1, 2, 13, 14}

Effective literacy coaches also have specialized knowledge about adult learning principles, and they apply those principles when working with teachers.

- Adults are most interested in learning when it has immediate relevance to their job. Thus, the focus of literacy coaching should be on classroom instructional practices that foster literacy development.
- Adults want to be actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning. Thus, effective literacy coaches work with teachers to develop goals and methods for addressing and assessing those goals.
- Adults learn from reflecting on the problems that arise during the implementation of new knowledge/skills. Thus, effective literacy coaches guide teachers to reflect deeply on their practice and on the results of implementing new strategies with their learners.
- Adults learn best when they can integrate new knowledge and skills with previous experiences. Thus, effective literacy coaches help teachers understand how new concepts and strategies are similar and different from concepts they know and strategies they are currently learning.

3. Whether working with large groups, small groups, or individual teachers, effective literacy coaches demonstrate specific skills and dispositions in order to engage teachers and build collaborative relationships.¹⁵

Effective literacy coaches:

- use a variety of strategies to establish rapport and trust as the initial steps in building collaborative relationships (e.g., one-on-one conversations about teaching or student learning in general, attending grade level/team meetings as an interested listener/learner, finding specific resources/materials for a teacher)¹⁶
- strive to determine the underlying beliefs about literacy of the teachers with whom they are working in order to develop collaborative relationships¹⁷
- use language when engaging in conversations with teachers that is encouraging and supportive, not evaluative¹⁸
- position themselves as co-learners¹⁹ and/or facilitators of teacher learning²⁰
- are intentional, collaborating with teachers to set specific goals for their work with a respect for teachers' time and expertise. However, literacy coaches also demonstrate flexibility by being open to conversations and questions as they arise—conversations and questions that may lead to more intentional coaching.²¹
- are reflective—regarding their demonstration teaching, their observations of teacher's instruction, and the conversations they have with teachers²²

4. Literacy coaching is most effective when it is done within a multi-year school-wide or district-wide initiative focused on student learning and is supported by building and district administrators.

Research results indicate that initiatives, including those that involve a literacy coaching component²³, may require three to five years to show impact on student learning.²⁴

Support from building and district administrators is evidenced in various ways.

- Teacher participation in activities with the coach is higher when principals:²⁵
 - present the coaches as sources of literacy expertise
 - actively participate in the professional development sessions designed for coaches and administrators as well as in activities facilitated by

the coaches (e.g., modeling instruction, conferring with teachers)²⁶

- exhibit respect for the coaches as valued professionals
- give coaches autonomy over their schedules

- Principals support coaches by:²⁷
 - presenting them as sources of literacy expertise to the teachers
 - clearly describing and endorsing the coaching foci to the teachers
 - explicitly encouraging teachers to work with their coach
 - observing their work with teachers
 - explicitly communicating to them personally how much their work is valued²⁸

5. Effective literacy coaches spend most of their time working with teachers to enhance teacher practice and improve student learning. They make effective use of their time by using a multi-faceted approach to coaching.

Effective literacy coaches:

- Spend time working directly with teachers, helping teachers to align their beliefs with research-informed instructional practices and enhance their:
 - classroom literacy environments²⁹
 - use of research-informed literacy strategies³⁰
 - implementation of new literacy programs and strategies³¹
 - use of practices aligned with state standards or curricular initiatives³²
- Schedule their time so that they are spending as much time as possible working directly with teachers because more coaching with teachers has been associated with higher student achievement at both the school³³ and coach³⁴ level.
- Spend more time interacting with teachers by using a multi-faceted approach to coaching, carefully determining what types of coaching can be done effectively with large groups, small groups, and individual teachers.³⁵
- Consistently monitor the amount of time they spend working with teachers. Time spent on managerial tasks (e.g., maintaining an assessment database, ordering materials) or attending meetings not directly related to their coaching work reduces the time spent addressing literacy initiatives and lowers teachers' perceptions about how helpful coaches are.³⁶

6. When coaching individual teachers, effective literacy coaches employ a core set of coaching activities that are predictors of student literacy growth at one or more grade levels.³⁷

Conferencing. Coaches and teachers hold one-on-one conferences for numerous purposes³⁸, including the following:

- to determine specific purposes for collaborations between the literacy coach and the teacher
- to analyze the critical instructional elements and benefits of a lesson taught by the coach to demonstrate a specific strategy or scaffolding technique
- to analyze the critical instructional elements and benefits of a lesson taught by the teacher
- to examine and select appropriate texts and materials for specific lessons and/or students
- to evaluate and make changes to the literacy environment of the classroom
- to discuss assessment results to determine instructional needs and plan instruction for the whole class, small groups of students, and individual students, particularly when the teacher is concerned about the progress of one or more students³⁹

Modeling. Coaches engage in modeling for numerous purposes, including the following⁴⁰:

- to enable teachers to learn how instructional practices work with their own students, giving them confidence to implement these practices
- to demonstrate how appropriate pacing, scaffolding, and materials contribute to students' engagement and learning
- to provide teachers with opportunities to observe and document students' literacy behaviors and response to instruction
- to demonstrate how to administer assessments and use data to inform instruction

Observing. Coaches engage in observation for numerous purposes, determined in collaboration with teachers⁴¹, including the following:

- to observe and document specific literacy behaviors of students whose progress is of concern to the teacher
- to observe how literacy instructional practices are

being implemented across the school to inform future professional development efforts at the school, grade, or individual teacher level

- to observe a teacher's instruction in order to provide support related to various aspects of instruction (e.g., planning, scaffolding, pacing, selecting materials, grouping, assessing progress toward instructional objectives)

Co-planning. Coaches and teachers co-plan⁴² instruction in order to:

- help build collaborative relationships as both coach and teacher are seen as important contributors to the process
- ensure that instructional planning includes delineating learner outcomes, selecting appropriate practices, determining grouping options, and developing outcome-based assessment
- inform additional support from the coach which may include modeling, co-teaching, and/or observation of the co-planned instruction
- use assessment data to meet the instructional needs of students

7. Effective literacy coaches are integral members of literacy leadership teams at the school and/or district level.⁴³

Literacy coaches serve as literacy leaders within their schools⁴⁴ by:

- providing grade/team-level professional development
- collaborating with special educators about literacy instruction for students who have special needs⁴⁵
- serving on school committees that focus on literacy-related and student achievement issues, including being a member of the intervention and student support teams⁴⁶
- working with administrators and other teachers to establish a school-wide literacy vision and to develop/refine and manage the school's literacy program
- analyzing data and helping teachers use the data to make decisions⁴⁷
- serving as a liaison between the district and their schools by attending district-level meetings/workshops and sharing the information with the appropriate stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, support personnel)

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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.

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