GRADES K TO 3

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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 relevant[1], responsive[2], and sustaining[3] 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 frameworks[4] 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 instruction[10], 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/ /ĭ/ /sh/" [i.e., the sounds "fffff" "iiiii" "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 day [13]

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 3[13]), and word processing

7. Intentional and ambitious efforts to build vocabulary and knowledge, including content and other cultural knowledge, throughout the day [14]

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 classroom [15]

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) postreading response activities, including text discussion

9. Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children's language and literacy development that informs their education [16]

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 literacy [17]

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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10 Explicit instruction involves telling children what you want them to know rather than expecting that they will infer this information. For example, explicit explanation about phonological awareness might include (although not necessarily all at once) the following: "There are sounds inside words. Say, 'fun.' Now say it slowly: /ffuunn/. Inside the word *fun*, there are three sounds. The first sound is /f/, /ffffun/. The second sound is /uh/, /fuuuun/. The third sound is /n/, /funnn/. /f/ /uh/ /n/ [hold up a finger to count each sound, demonstrate an arm segmentation procedure, or the like]. Three sounds in the word *fun*."

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

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

Oakland University

Reading NOW Network

Regional Educational Media Centers Association of Michigan

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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