

## **Guiding Principles for Reading, Writing and Vocabulary**

The following seven principles serve as the guiding factors used when formulating this document. These principles are grounded in research on best-practices in literacy instruction, and are meant to serve as the underlying foundation for making all curricular and instructional decisions with regards to literacy in the district.

### **1. Reading and writing are about developing meaning.**

In elementary schools, students learn to interact with and produce text. They not only learn how to read, but also learn that reading and writing are about developing meaning and engaging with and producing a variety of texts. Students must be taught comprehension strategies they can apply to help them understand a variety of texts. They must learn about text structures and how to apply their strategies and understandings to new contexts as they begin to synthesize information into new, meaningful constructions.

In secondary schools, students interact with and produce more complex texts. They must move from a dependence on surface structure systems for understanding to deep structure systems. Students must develop the ability to analyze and evaluate text. They must be able to apply their understanding to new contexts and they must be able to synthesize information from a variety of texts into new, meaningful constructions.

### **2. Reading and writing involve complex thinking and metacognition.**

Elementary students are learning to be metacognitive. They are taught to think about the strategies and skills they are applying while reading and interacting with text and how these strategies and skills develop their understanding. Writing becomes a critical factor in communicating their thought processes, as students provide evidence of their thinking and learn to explore and connect ideas.

Older students are expanding their cognitive abilities into more symbolic and complex thinking patterns. They are better able to understand and apply the concepts of analogy and metaphor and to generalize concepts learned in context to other content areas. At this stage, writing becomes critical in supporting these expanded abilities. Writing provides a structure for students to explore and connect ideas.

### **3. Reading and writing require active “conversations” with the text.**

All students are learning to continuously interact with the texts they are reading and writing. They learn that what they bring to the text (background knowledge) has as much of an impact on their development of meaning as the actual words that they read. Students are taught through explicit modeling to listen to their “inner voice” as they read, paying attention to their questions, connections, and predictions. They are explicitly taught to have internal conversations with the author in order to deepen their understandings while reading. Students are also taught that writers hold these internal conversations with the text they are producing, and learn to use these conversations to reflect upon their written messages.

### **4. Vocabulary and grammar must be developed within context.**

Research has shown that lists of words or practice worksheets of grammatical rules that are disconnected from meaningful context are not retained and applied by students; therefore, having little to no lasting benefit. At both elementary and secondary, instruction should focus on strategies which **embed** vocabulary and grammar within the context of meaningful and authentic reading and writing that provide a more lasting effect on students.

**5. Reading and writing are critical components across all content areas.**

Teachers of all grade levels need to address reading and writing across content areas. The language of reading and writing should be related and connected across content areas, highlighting the similarities and differences between the relationships of the various content areas (i.e. predicting in language arts, hypothesizing in science, and estimating in math = connecting and applying across contents). It is the teacher's responsibility to demonstrate these relationships and make the structure of the text transparent, explicitly teaching so that students can apply literacy skills and strategies while making meaning across all content areas.

**6. Reading and writing are social experiences.**

People write text materials and people read them. Students bring their backgrounds and social context to the table when interacting with text. Through literacy discussion, and explorations of a variety of texts, students are able to develop richer and more nuanced understandings of materials.

**7. Reading and writing competence is necessary for academic success and beyond.**

Reading and writing skills are not only needed to succeed in post-secondary education, but are also “threshold skills” for the work place. Literacy skills are the leading predictor of completion of high school and college. In addition, businesses report that reading and writing abilities are critical for promotion and retention.