

Handbook of Effective Literacy Instruction

Research-Based Practice K-8



edited by

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CHAPTER 19

Improving the School Literacy Program

Developing Coherence in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments

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In an era of high-stakes testing, there is a strong push for data-based decision making; however, it can be difficult for teachers and schools to know which data to collect and how to use them to increase students' literacy achievement levels. To improve the school reading program, educators must work together as a professional learning community (PLC) to build coherence within and across grade levels to ensure success for all students. This chapter begins with an overview of research related to schoolwide curricular coherence and assessment data. It then unpacks ways that school teams can work together to improve literacy teaching and learning schoolwide.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

Despite decades of research on effective literacy instruction, an achievement gap remains, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds living in poverty (Kennedy, 2010; Timperley & Parr, 2007). Recently, literacy scholars have begun to examine factors beyond classroom instruction that can contribute to or impede improvement, including the whole-school context. Researchers have consistently found that curricular coherence within and across grades increases student achievement (Bryk, Rollow, & Pinnell, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; King & Newmann, 2001; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Strahan, 2003). The key to creating a trajectory of continuous

growth is to build a schoolwide system of accountability that addresses literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as ongoing professional learning.

Whole-School Collaborative Community

To build a coherent schoolwide literacy program, all members of the school community must be equal stakeholders in students' successes and function as a schoolwide PLC. Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) describe a PLC as "a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way; operating as a collective enterprise" (p. 223). (For more on collaboration, see Walpole & Najera, Chapter 20, this volume. For more on PLCs or study groups, see Peterson, Chapter 21.) Although each member of an effective school community has different roles and responsibilities, each contributes substantively to children's literacy learning. For instance, principals and administrators focus on policy decisions related to scheduling, external initiatives, staffing, and strategic use of resources (e.g., time, money, personnel). They support instruction as well, particularly by supporting those who work directly with students (Cobb, 2003). Teachers and curriculum leaders provide literacy instruction to students in the classroom and support individualized learning. They also work with administrators to make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Cooter, 2003). Parents are also important stakeholders who support student learning by bridging the gap between home and school (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). Stakeholders may also include external partners, community members, teaching assistants, students, and others who support literacy teaching and learning either directly or indirectly.

Common Vision of Students' Success

Each of these stakeholders must hold a belief that all students can learn (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001; Stoll et al., 2006), and must have rigorous expectations for what students should know and be able to do. Coherence built around a weak idea or low-level practices will impede a school's progress, resulting in static or even decreased student achievement. Scholars (Au, 2005; Bryk et al., 1996; Copland, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret, 2007; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rowan, 1990; Stoll et al., 2006) suggest that all stakeholders in a school collaboratively develop a common vision for success and clearly articulate goals for student learning. Having a common vision sets the foundation for curricular coherence within and across grade levels by making public what is expected of the school's graduates. From there, staff members at each grade level can articulate their contribution to the school vision. Au (2005) uses the metaphor of a staircase to describe curricular coherence, with each step representing the student learning goals established by teachers at each grade level. The staircase ensures curricular alignment, uniform rigor, and coherence within and across grade levels (Au & Raphael, 2011).

High-Functioning School Infrastructure to Support Students' Literacy Learning

To develop curricular coherence within and across grade levels, a school must create an infrastructure that supports collaboration among members of the school community. A

high-functioning infrastructure should address (1) school organization, (2) high-quality literacy leadership, and (3) coherent professional development (Raphael, Au, & Goldman, 2009). (For an overview of effective schoolwide reading improvement, see Taylor, Chapter 18, this volume. For coverage of effective professional learning within schools, see Peterson, Chapter 21, and Sailors, Russell, Augustine, & Alexander, Chapter 22.)

School Organization

Schools need to have high-functioning structures in place that allow for collaborative conversations at multiple levels (e.g., within grade levels, across grade levels vertically, and within the whole school). The teams must meet on a regular basis to discuss curriculum, assessment, and instruction; they also must have systems for tracking what has been done, current projects, and future goals. Moreover, they need clear feedback loops within and across the various groups to create schoolwide coherence. Grade-level teams, for example, may meet weekly to create assessments to monitor student progress, collaboratively score student work, and make instructional decisions together to improve student achievement across classrooms (Newmann et al., 2001; Vissher & Witziers, 2004). Vertical teams might meet monthly to share successes, challenges, and instructional needs across grade levels (Cobb, 2003; Lambert, 1998, 2002). The purpose of these meetings is to build curricular coherence by examining gaps, overlaps, and trends across grade levels. Whole-school meetings may occur quarterly and provide the entire faculty with time to publicize grade-level goals, present student achievement data, and make instructional decisions (Au et al., 2008; DuFour, 2004). In this context, the school community analyzes the developmental progression of curriculum across the grades and makes adjustments as necessary to ensure high levels of achievement at every grade. (For more information on whole-school meetings, see Peterson, Chapter 21.)

High-Quality Literacy Leadership

Creating structures that enable collaboration is necessary, but not sufficient. To build curricular coherence, collaborative school communities must focus on the functionality of a number of structures. That is, to what extent are these structures moving the school toward higher levels of coherence, rigor, and student achievement? School leaders play an important role in building and strengthening the school's infrastructure and increasing its productivity. Spillane (2003, 2006) and others (e.g., Timperley, 2009) suggest schools adopt a distributed leadership model, in which each individual in the school assumes a formal or informal leadership role (e.g., literacy coach, grade-level team member, vertical team representative). From this perspective, teachers, administrators, and other members of the school community are empowered to create and sustain schoolwide change (King & Newmann, 2001). (For more on school leadership and school change, see Taylor, Chapter 18.) Individuals with more formal leadership roles, such as principals or curriculum leaders, equip other leaders and teachers to build, strengthen, and maintain an effective schoolwide literacy program. For example, in addition to being a content expert, a literacy coach may support teachers as they become leaders by engaging them in curriculum development and shared decision making about resources, materials, and use of data (King & Newmann, 2001). He or she may

provide protocols for interacting and help teachers work together effectively to build coherence in curriculum, instruction, and assessment within a grade level. (More information about the role of the literacy coach is provided by Sailors et al. in Chapter 22.)

Coherent Professional Development

To create and sustain coherence in the schoolwide literacy program, teachers and administrators must reconceptualize professional development. Research has shown that traditional, decontextualized, “one-shot” workshops are an ineffective way to change classroom practices or improve student achievement (Cooter, 2003; International Reading Association, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 1983). Schools need to shift from disjointed presentations to a model of professional development that consists of collaboration and ongoing learning situated in the context of practice (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Teachers need sustained opportunities to learn new material, implement ideas in their classrooms, and participate in mutual critique of their practice with colleagues in a PLC (King & Newmann, 2001; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). To build a coherent reading program, educators must work together to address challenges, define problems of practice, and collectively set and achieve goals related to curricular alignment over a long period of time (Au & Raphael, 2011; Bryk et al., 1996; Copland, 2003; Mason, Mason, Mendez, Nelsen, & Orwig, 2005; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000; Rowan, 1990).

King and Newmann (2001) believe that sustained professional development focusing on school goals is critical for improving student achievement. They argue that professional development influences a school’s capacity for providing effective instruction, including (1) program coherence; (2) professional community (e.g., purpose, collaboration, and inquiry); and (3) teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Increasing a school’s capacity for providing effective instruction improves its instructional quality (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment), which leads to improved student achievement. Scholars (see Cooter, 2003; King & Newmann, 2001; Newmann et al., 2000, 2001) agree that developing teachers’ capacity to make data-driven decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment will lead to systemic change and schoolwide coherence.

Multifaceted, Data-Driven Decision Making

Schools need to have clear purposes for collecting, analyzing, and using data. According to Earl and Katz (2006), “Synthesizing and organizing data in different ways stimulates reflection and conjecture about the nature of the problem under consideration and provides the vehicle for investigation and planning focused improvement strategies” (p. 3). If a school is to develop high-level curricular coherence, it must also create assessment systems that generate data about the program’s effectiveness. Assessment systems should address both student and teacher learning.

Student Learning

The goal of any literacy program is to improve student achievement and engagement on high-level literacy tasks. Assessment systems allow educators to monitor students’

progress toward desired goals. It is important that each of the school's stakeholders understand which data inform which decisions, so they can use data responsibly for the intended purpose. For example, standardized tests provide educators with different information than classroom-based assessments and serve different purposes for informing literacy instruction and school improvement. Stiggins and Duke (2008) propose three levels of assessments that provide teachers, administrators, policymakers, and parents with information about student achievement: classroom, program, and policy. They also suggest that schools ask three key questions about assessment prior to designing or implementing a data collection plan: (1) What instructional decisions are to be based on the assessment results? (2) Who will be making those decisions? (3) What information will help them make good decisions? Table 19.1 presents uses and examples of each assessment level. Classroom-level assessments are most closely aligned to instruction and are used to monitor student progress and teacher effectiveness on daily or weekly lessons. (For more on classroom-level assessments, see Valencia & Hebard, Chapter 5.) Program-level assessments provide information about the overall success of the school's reading program, alignment across grades, and schoolwide coherence of literacy teaching and learning. Policy-level assessments inform policymakers (e.g., district, state, federal) about resource allocation and overall school progress, usually on an annual basis. These assessments are not intended to inform ongoing instruction, nor are they sensitive enough to measure incremental student achievements.

TABLE 19.1. Levels and Uses of Assessments

Level of assessments	Use for assessments	Examples of assessments
Classroom level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and verify learning • Inform and guide instruction for teachers • Student goal setting and self-assessment • Monitor students' progress on an ongoing basis (e.g., daily, weekly) • Focus on each individual student's achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal reading inventories • High-level tasks • Writing portfolios • Conversations with students
Program level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate program effectiveness across classrooms • Develop plans for whole-school improvements • Create or change programs to better meet student and teacher needs • Focus on achievement standards (e.g., common challenge for many students that needs to be addressed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School benchmark assessments • Quarterly writing prompts (given schoolwide)
Policy level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide institutional accountability • Enable district leaders or policymakers to make decisions about resource allocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) • Districtwide assessments • State standardized tests

Instructional Effectiveness

As previously discussed, both teachers' knowledge and their capacity to deliver effective instruction affect student progress. Thus it is important to use student achievement data, as well as other sources of information, to make decisions about improving teachers' learning. For example, classroom-level assessments are reflective of an individual teacher's knowledge and skills. If data demonstrate that most students in the class are struggling in a particular area, it may indicate that the teacher needs support related to content or pedagogical practices. Program-level assessments provide a snapshot of the entire school. Looking across these data may reveal schoolwide trends of strengths and challenges that indicate a need for targeted professional development in specific areas. Many schools use data retreats (described in detail in the following section) as a systematic way of analyzing and using data. Strategically using data as a basis for identifying professional learning needs allows schools to be responsive in strengthening and developing teachers' expertise. Thus improving literacy teaching ultimately improves student learning.

Data Retreats

Data retreats (Sargent, 2012) are an exemplary model for how to engage school teams in ongoing, systematic data analysis. They are collaborations among educators, including administrators, as well as representative teachers from various grade levels and subject areas. Teams range in size from 5–25 people, depending on the size and needs of individual schools. School teams focus on improving student learning by clearly articulating their visions for student success and using data as a means for understanding where they are and where they want to go on the path to improvement. Each retreat includes eight steps that guide school teams through data collection, analysis, and use (see Figure 19.1) over a 2- to 3-day period.

Step	Activity
1	Prepare the team
2	Collect data
3	Analyze data in four lenses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student data • Professional practices data • Program and structures data • Family and community data
4	Pose hypotheses
5	Develop goals
6	Design strategies
7	Design evaluation
8	Develop roll-out and sustainability

FIGURE 19.1. Data retreat process.

The first steps of the process, preparing the team and collecting data, are done prior to the actual data retreats. School teams work together to develop norms and engage in leadership development, as well as to collect various kinds of data (e.g., student, professional practice, program and structures, family and community) that form the bases for the data retreat. They organize data into summary tables to make the data easily useable during collaboration with colleagues.

During the data retreat, school teams analyze data by observing, discussing, and documenting themes and patterns they notice across the data. They then pose hypotheses about why these patterns are occurring in the data. For example, teachers may notice that they focus much of their instruction in one area and students are performing at high levels, while another area of reading may not receive as much attention and students are struggling. The hypotheses should focus on the factors that contribute to or impede student success, and on ways that teaching and learning can be altered to improve achievement. From these hypotheses, school teams develop goals for teaching and learning, and design strategies for meeting the goals. Goals and strategies should relate directly to the improvement needs identified through data analysis. After the retreat, school teams engage in ongoing evaluation of their plans and focus on sustainability. This may include keeping a chart that delineates goals, dates for completion of these goals, strategies to move forward on goals, indicators of progress toward goals, people responsible for meeting the goals, and resources needed to accomplish the goals.

SUMMARY OF BIG IDEAS FROM RESEARCH

This section summarizes key ideas from the research on assessment and curricular coherence, and Table 19.2 presents specific articles to support each idea.

- Effective schools collaboratively develop a vision and goals for student success that reflect rigorous expectations and emphasize high-level cognitive demands.
- For schools to create coherence in the school literacy program within and across grade levels, they must develop a strong infrastructure that enables teachers and administrators to meet on a regular basis to engage in ongoing inquiry about curriculum, assessment, and instruction.
- A successful school engages the entire school and surrounding community (including parents) as equal stakeholders with a long-term commitment to students' literacy achievement.
- An effective school adopts a distributed leadership model in which the principal, curriculum leaders, and teachers work collectively to make decisions about literacy teaching and learning. Each member of the school community has clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for helping each student achieve the school's vision of success.
- School communities should engage in ongoing inquiry about curriculum, assessment, and instruction to build coherence within and across grade levels.

(For a related summary, see Taylor, Chapter 18.)

TABLE 19.2. Summary of Big Ideas from Research on Schools with Coherent Literacy Programs

Citation	Collaborative school community	Common vision and high expectations for student learning	Purposeful school organization and use of resources	Distributive instructional leadership	Ongoing professional development	Collaborative decision making
Au (2005)	×	×	×	×	×	
Au, Raphael & Mooney (2008)	×	×	×			
Brookover et al. (1978)		×		×		
Bryk, Rollow, & Pinnell (1996)	×	×	×	×		×
Copland (2003)	×	×				×
Earl & Katz (2006)	×					×
Fullan (2000)	×		×	×	×	
Fullan (2003)	×	×		×		
Hallinger & Murphy (1986)	×	×		×		
Hargreaves & Fink (2006)	×					
King & Newmann (2001)	×	×	×		×	
Louis, Marks, & Kruse (1996)			×	×	×	×
Mason, Mason, Mendez, Nelsen, & Orwig (2005)	×		×			×
McLaughlin & Talbert (2001)	×					×
Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk (2001)	×	×	×	×	×	×
Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret (2007)	×	×				
Purkey & Smith (1983)	×	×	×	×	×	
Rowan (1990)		×	×	×		
Spillane (2006)	×			×		
Strahan (2003)	×				×	
Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez (2005)	×	×			×	
Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield (1989)				×		
Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, & Duck (1978)	×		×			

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Members of a collaborative school community must work together to improve literacy teaching and learning. In this section, strategies are presented for school teams to use as they work together to build coherence in literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels. Illustrative examples are shared from schools engaged in systematic literacy improvement, using a model for change that emphasizes multiple levels of development in an iterative process (see Au, 2005; Au & Raphael, 2011; Raphael et al., 2009). The process involves (1) creation of a school infrastructure to support improvement in teaching and learning; (2) articulation of a schoolwide philosophy and vision related to students' literacy learning; (3) teachers' creation and implementation of assessments and instruction that are aligned with curricular objectives within and across grades, as well as creation of a developmental progression of students' achievement benchmarks tied to data-driven instructional decision making; and (4) development of schoolwide capacity for sustained change within schools through professional learning, achieved via within-building and cross-site professional learning activities. This model for schoolwide literacy improvement supports a school by engaging the community in a series of whole-school processes (e.g., developing norms, creating vision) and grade-level or department tasks (e.g., developing pupil benchmarks, conducting classroom-based assessments), leading to curricular coherence in the target area (e.g., reading, writing).

Examples of Whole-School Collaboration

Research suggests (Au, 2005; Bryk et al., 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Purkey & Smith, 1983) that educators work collaboratively within an effective school community to create a common vision for student success. This requires the entire staff working together to determine what its members want their students to know and be able to do when they graduate from their school. Au (2002) suggests that schools first address philosophy (teachers' beliefs), which is foundational to the school's vision.

School Philosophy Related to Literacy Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

In any given building, members of the school community hold various philosophies about instructional approaches, assessment, and perhaps even what constitutes literacy (see Kamil & Pearson, 1979; Weber, 2010). Schools can bring these personal philosophies to the surface by engaging in a whole-group conversation that asks each individual to share his or her beliefs about (1) teaching, (2) learning, and (3) literacy (Au, 2002). After each member has an opportunity to jot down two or three ideas for each of the prompts, they can share these in cross-grade-level groups. This allows various perspectives to be represented. For example, kindergarten and fifth-grade teachers may hold different beliefs about teaching, learning, and literacy. Heterogeneous grouping creates natural opportunities to discuss these various perspectives and begin shaping a schoolwide philosophy related to an effective literacy program. Each small group can share its ideas with the whole group, and the entire school community can look for themes across groups to start developing a shared philosophy. This process requires trust,

communication, and willingness to compromise, so that each person's ideas are valued and represented in the philosophy. Newmann and his colleagues (2001) stress the importance of such activities for building coherence across the school literacy program, arguing that schools must have "unity of purpose, a clear focus, and shared values for student learning" (p. 10). See Table 19.3 for an example list of ideas that Chambers Elementary School generated as the basis of the school's philosophy statement related to an effective literacy program. The ideas generated by the faculty are truncated into a concise statement that captures the overall philosophy of the school.

School Vision of Students' Literacy Abilities

Building from the school philosophy, schools should develop a clear vision for the readers and writers graduating from their school (Au, 2005; Au et al., 2008). The *philosophy*

TABLE 19.3. Chambers Elementary School Philosophy: Actions Leading to Effective Literacy Instruction

Beliefs about teaching

- Cultivate predisposition to learn
- Encourage appreciation and respect for diversity of others
- Create inquiring minds
- What we give students should be relevant and authentic
- Have fun and enjoy
- Positive
- Hands-on learning and cooperation
- Continuing process—doesn't stop after graduation
- Provide students with a base for their own learning
- Interactive
- Holistic—not focused only on cognitive development

Beliefs about learning

- Helping students gain tools to help inside and outside of classroom
- Independent and self [-guided] learners
- Learning should be shared between student and teacher
- Problem-solving skills
- Project-based learning
- Students should know their own goals for learning
- Applicable to real-life situations

Beliefs about literacy

- Literacy is a survival tool—[as] critical as food, clothing, and shelter
- Opens doorways to learn about anything
- Should be fun and encourage lifelong readers with the abilities to make connections
- Relevant to students' lives
- Reflection, not just recognition
- Enhances self-esteem; promotes awareness of self and others
- Allows for active participation in the world around them (students)
- Making meaning from text
- Communicating through reading, writing, and speaking
- Interactive experiences with text

is what educators believe about literacy teaching and learning, whereas the *vision* is what students will know and be able to do as a result of being educated at the school. The school vision should be broad and represent the culmination of a student's learning experiences from each grade level. This shifts the focus from isolated teaching to schoolwide coherence, in which each faculty member is contributing substantively to every student's success. Newmann and his colleagues (2001) suggest that "students are more likely to engage in the difficult work of learning when curricular experiences within classes, among classes, and over time are connected to one another" (p. 15). Similar to the process of creating the school's philosophy, educators can meet in heterogeneous groups that represent multiple grade levels and perspectives (e.g., special education, bilingual education, administration, etc.). Members of the PLC share individual ideas about the graduating student and collectively determine which ideas should be included in the school's vision statement. See the accompanying box for an example of ideas that Chambers Elementary School generated related to vision.

A vision statement is the overall goal that educators and students strive for as they engage in literacy teaching and learning; it represents the desired outcome of the coherent staircase curriculum (Au & Raphael, 2011). The vision must be broad, but also specific. For example, the faculty at Avery Elementary School created the following statement: "The literacy vision for an Avery graduate is the acquisition of necessary skills and strategies to communicate effectively in all realms of literacy for the purpose of being a critical thinker, problem solver, and advocate in a continuously changing world." Figure 19.2 shows a working vision statement developed by the school community at Danbury Elementary.

Chambers Elementary School Ideas about Vision

What students should know and be able to do upon graduation from Chambers:

- Write for a variety of purposes and a multitude of audiences.
- Demonstrate confidence in literal skills to express ideas through writing, reading, and speaking.
- Read with understanding, [and then] be able to write about it, talk about it, and represent [it] in some medium.
- Be self-motivated and fluent readers.
- Think critically about what they read.
- Fill out high school applications of their choice.
- Continue to question and explore ideas and find solutions.
- Connect what they know to what they are reading and move beyond.
- Discuss intelligently events in the world around them.

Examples of Grade-Level Collaboration

For schools to realize their vision of student success, educators must engage in ongoing collaboration in large-group and small-group settings. Large-group activities enable educators to build schoolwide curricular coherence; however, much of the work related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data-driven decision making is done within grade-level teams. Teachers at each grade level work together to develop coherence in curriculum, instruction, and assessments across classrooms, and also work with other grade levels to create schoolwide coherence. Within grade-level teams, teachers (1) set

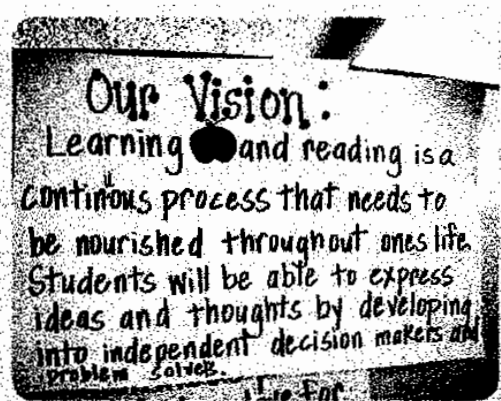


FIGURE 19.2. Danbury Elementary School's vision.

high-level year-end goals for literacy learning; (2) develop data systems to monitor student progress toward goals and reflect on the effectiveness of instruction; and (3) analyze and use data to inform instructional decisions.

Goal Setting for Literacy Learning within Grade Levels

The school's vision serves as the overall goal for student learning upon graduation; however, each grade level should articulate their contribution to students' learning. Grade-level teams can begin to articulate year-end goals by discussing the following questions:

1. What do we want our students to know and be able to do by the end of the year?
2. What literacy skills will our students need to have as they enter this grade in order to accomplish the year-end goal?
3. What skills and/or strategies will we need to teach to help our students reach these goals?

The year-end goals should be broad enough to cover the entire year, but specific enough to be measureable. O'Neill (2000) provides guidelines for developing such goals, which he refers to as SMART: Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound. Each grade-level goal forms a step in the staircase curriculum described above (Au & Raphael, 2011).

The teachers at Avery Elementary School created year-end goals for comprehension instruction at each grade level (K–8) that lead to the realization of their vision. The goals build upon one another and become increasingly complex as they continue through the grades. For example, in kindergarten, the goal is "Students will be able to sequence a story that has been read to them, including characters and settings." By fifth grade, "Students will be able to interpret author's purpose, summarize big ideas, analyze details in all texts (including graphic sources), and make informed decisions." When students are in eighth grade, preparing to graduate, they "will be able to apply research heuristics (e.g., sourcing, contextualization, subtext, and corroboration), using multiple sources to analyze and critically interact with text across the curriculum."

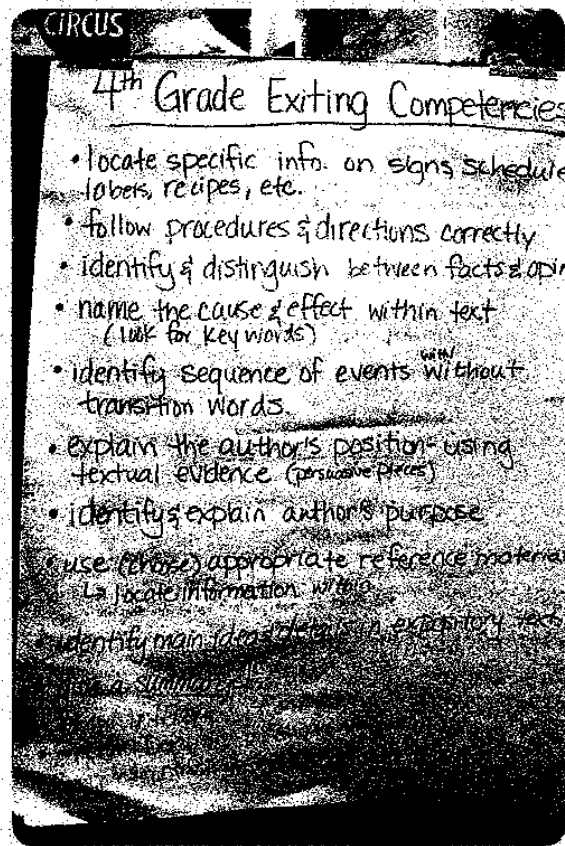


FIGURE 19.3. Caddock Elementary School's brainstorming chart for end-of-year goals.

Teachers developed these goals by brainstorming to create lists of what they believed their students should know and be able to do by the end of the year. The lists serve two purposes: the creation of SMART goals, and the beginning of an instructional roadmap. The items on each list are strategies and skills at each grade level that the teachers will teach throughout the year to help students reach the goal. Figure 19.3 shows the year-end goals of the fourth-grade teachers at Caddock Elementary School.

In addition, each grade level should create a list of expectations related to literacy knowledge and abilities that students should know and be able to engage in at the beginning of the year in order for teachers to be able to accomplish all that they need to teach during the year. This activity is critical for building coherence across grades and is discussed in detail in the section about cross-grade collaboration. Figure 19.4 shows an example of beginning-of-year (entering) and end-of-year (exiting) expectations for student learning from the fourth-grade team at Somerset Elementary School.

Developing Data Systems

Setting high-level goals for student learning is necessary, but not sufficient for schools to develop coherent curriculum within and across grades. Data systems must be created to monitor students' progress toward year-end goals, as well as teachers' effectiveness in teaching students to reach these goals. Progress-monitoring data provide teachers with information about students' performance on tasks related specifically to what is taught in the classroom.

Entering 4 th grade	Exiting 4 th grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and using subject Experience of the writing process Understand writing strategies Use basic transitions such as first, next, etc. Write a 5 paragraph essay Clearly state idea and topic sentences with the story and each paragraph Organize supporting details with topic and subtopic Understand how text is organized and how it is used Understand of descriptive and narrative Understand of descriptive and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use writing rubric to help organize writing & meet expectations Organize writing process when generating writing or to solve research Use variety of descriptive and persuasive language Experience variety of brainstorming strategies Use variety of transitions between subjects (with beginning & end) Write clear and use evidence organization Use evidence and use explaining intro, have strong thinking Use appropriate voice depending on context Use strategies to include details Use appropriate transitions across paragraphs

FIGURE 19.4. Somerset Elementary School's entering and exiting expectations for fourth-grade student learning.

ASSESSMENT TASKS AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

At Avery Elementary School, teachers at each grade-level work collaboratively to create assessments that are linked directly to their end-of-year goals. All of the teachers in a grade level administer parallel assessments three times per year. The cognitive demands and rubrics remain the same throughout the year (based on year-end outcomes), but the topic and text change (e.g., sports, music, etc.). At the beginning of the year, baseline data provide teachers with information about what students know and are able to do as a result of previous learning experiences. Midyear data provide a “temperature check” of students’ progress toward year-end goals and enable teachers to adjust instruction accordingly. End-of-year data provide information about how many students have met the goal; they also allow teachers to reflect on their instruction and set future goals.

For example, in second grade at Avery Elementary School, the year-end comprehension goal is “Students will be able to read and summarize a text, including the big idea with support from the text, as well as [to] make meaningful connections and inferences.” Teachers developed an assessment that addressed each part of the goal and created a criteria chart that articulated the cognitive demand expected at each data collection point (in this case, fall, winter, and spring). See Figure 19.5 for an example of the criteria chart. On the left side of the chart are the general criteria that will be assessed throughout the year. The other three columns display the expected student responses for each administration of the assessment, based on the different texts students read. The second-grade team is still working on creating its spring assessment.

Assessments may simply be high-level tasks that encompass multiple learning goals. For example, third-grade teachers may ask students to “Read two advertisements about breakfast cereals (Lucky Charms and Cheerios). Evaluate which you think is a better choice to buy and why. Use the categories (taste, price, nutritional value, toys/games, and look of the box) to help guide your analysis. Write an explanation of your choice with reasons.” The criteria used to evaluate responses include students’ abilities to do the following:

- Compare and contrast ideas/claims from both advertisements and how they are supported in the text.
- Identify relevant information.
- Read a table (nutritional information).
- Look at pictures and text about the cereal to gather information.

General Criteria for Meeting the End-of-Year Benchmark	Fall	Winter	Spring
<p>Summary in logical order</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Who (name characters) ➤ Problem ➤ Plan for resolution ➤ Resolution 	<p>CHARACTERS: Oscar is an owl.</p> <p>PROBLEM: He is lonely because he doesn't sleep like other owls.</p> <p>PLAN FOR RESOLUTION: His friends wanted to help him, so they decide to have a dance party to keep him awake so he gets real tired.</p> <p>RESOLUTION: Oscar stayed up and danced all night. The party worked and now he is happy because he sleeps like the other owls.</p>	<p>CHARACTERS: Beth and Kim</p> <p>PROBLEM: The garden is a mess and Mrs. Miller is not feeling well.</p> <p>PLAN FOR RESOLUTION: Clean up the garden and go to the park to ask people to help.</p> <p>RESOLUTION: Clean up the garden with the help of others and it looks beautiful.</p>	<p>CHARACTERS:</p> <p>PROBLEM:</p> <p>PLAN FOR RESOLUTION:</p> <p>RESOLUTION:</p>
<p>Inferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Analyze the character's reaction based on events 	<p>Oscar is happy at the end. He hangs out with friends and isn't lonely any more.</p>	<p>Mrs. Miller is happy because she waves to the kids and smiles from her front porch.</p>	<p>INFERENCE:</p>
<p>Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make a connection of putting yourself in the character's shoes to analyze how you would solve the problem, how you would feel, etc. 	<p>(I have felt like Oscar because . . . I would have _____ to solve Oscar's problem, etc.)</p>	<p>I am helpful like Kim and Beth. This is why . . .</p> <p>Will accept: They are nice, helpful, caring.</p> <p>Not acceptable: Garden</p>	<p>INFERENCE:</p>

- Evaluate information about each product.
- Agree or disagree with the authors.
- Write an argument that supports their opinion with evidence.

This type of task is easy to administer and provides a lot of information to teachers about students' abilities related to year-end goals. It is also relevant to students' lives and has value beyond school. As reported in the online magazine *Parentdish*, "A study by Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity found that cereals marketed to children have 85 percent more sugar, 65 percent less fiber, and 60 percent more sodium than cereals advertised to adults" (Martin, 2010). This task requires students to engage in high-level reasoning about real-world issues that directly affect them—childhood obesity and advertising of products specifically marketed to children.

GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTERING ASSESSMENTS

To ensure uniformity across classrooms, teachers at each grade level should develop guidelines for administering the formative assessment tasks they co-create (see Airasian, 2000). Guidelines for the data system may include (1) a timeline for administering assessments (e.g., window of dates in the year); (2) time allotted for each task in class (e.g., timed, untimed, length of time); (3) support (or lack thereof) from a teacher during each task; (4) directions to students (e.g., oral instructions, written prompts); and (5) materials needed (e.g., prompts, texts, videos). Having clear guidelines reduces subjectivity and allows for equal comparisons across classrooms at each data point, as well as valid comparisons across data points.

RUBRICS FOR SCORING ASSESSMENTS

In addition to clear guidelines for administering, grade-level teams must develop clear expectations for scoring student assessment tasks. All teachers in a grade level can work collaboratively to determine the criteria that will be used to assess student work and create anchor pieces that are representative of the criteria. At Chambers Elementary School, teachers at each grade level began developing rubrics by defining what it meant for a student to meet the expectation of a task related to an end-of-year goal. They created a list similar to the one described above about breakfast cereals, and unpacked the skills and strategies embedded within each of the criteria. For example, to meet the criteria "Compare and contrast ideas/claims from both advertisements and how they are supported in the text," students would need to (1) use information from both advertisements, (2) analyze claims, (3) determine relevant information, and (4) make comparisons. Once the criteria for meeting the standards of the task are clear, teachers can collect and analyze student work according to the rubric. Using student work samples as a basis for discussion, teachers can articulate criteria for "still working" on the goal and "exceeding" the goal.

Collaborative scoring of student work can serve as a professional development experience in and of itself, as teachers learn from one another through discussion about expectations for rigor in students' work and related instructional strategies to improve student learning. It also provides an opportunity to build coherence across classrooms when teachers look at each other's student work.

Analyzing and Using Data

DuFour (2004) suggests that use of data will improve practice when teachers have an opportunity to develop formative assessments together, analyze students' work on these assessments, and compare student performance across classrooms. This process provides teachers with (1) snapshots of student performance within a grade level; (2) opportunities to share ideas, resources, and strategies with colleagues; and (3) data to inform instructional decisions. (For more on classroom-based formative assessment, see Valencia & Hebard, Chapter 5.)

Examples of Cross-Grade Collaboration

As previously discussed, each grade level works collaboratively to develop expectations for end-of-year goals, as well as expectations upon entrance to the grade level. This creates coherence within the grade level; however, each grade level must communicate with its adjacent grade levels (above and below) to build coherence across grades. Vertical meetings provide opportunities for teachers to make their practice public and negotiate expectations for literacy teaching and learning across grade levels. To build a staircase curriculum, each grade's exiting expectations should align with the next grade's entering expectations. In cases where there is a disconnect, teachers can discuss and determine in which grade level specific skills and strategies should be taught. There are often misconceptions about what is expected of students. The expectation may be low at one grade level because teachers do not realize how much students know from previous grades. In other instances, the expectation at a grade level is appropriately high; however, the teachers are unable to teach what they need to because the previous grades had low expectations. Clarifying such occurrences makes everyone's ideas transparent and allows for negotiation of expectations during adjacent-grade-level conversations. The process of sharing and negotiating expectations ensures high-level learning at every grade level.

For example, at Somerset Elementary School, teachers created charts with entering and exiting pupil performance expectations for each grade. They aligned the charts developed for grades PreK–8, so that they could see the progression of expectations across grades. Teachers in adjacent grade levels used sticky notes to make comments, ask questions, or probe for clarification. The adjacent-grade teachers then discussed whether or not they saw gaps (e.g., missing concepts or skills, discrepancies in rigor) or overlaps (e.g., the same concepts being taught in multiple grades). These teachers collaboratively made adjustments to the expectations to ensure strong coherence from grade to grade. The process of whole-school alignment is discussed further in the section about ongoing inquiry and collaboration.

Meeting All Students' Needs

Teachers use data to improve instruction, group students, and address the needs of diverse learners in their classrooms (Brunner et al., 2005; Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter, 2006; Wayman & Cho, 2008; Young, 2006). Engaging in student achievement goal setting and strategic data collection, as described above, ensures uniform rigor both within and across grade levels. The process makes expectations for learning transparent to all members of the school community and provides a roadmap for instruction.

Assessment data gathered at the beginning of the year provide teachers with information about students' abilities coming into the grade level. Midyear assessments provide information about progress toward end-of-year goals, and end-of-year data let teachers know whether students have met the goals or not. Each data collection point creates a broad-strokes picture about whole-class progress, but also brings individual students' strengths and instructional needs to the surface.

Individual student data enable teachers to tailor instruction to meet the needs of all learners through whole-class, small-group, and individualized instruction (Newmann, 1996). (For more on grouping practices to meet students' needs, see Taylor, Chapter 3.) Having clear learning goals makes explicit what students should know and be able to do by the end of the school year. The standard of rigor does not change for students who are struggling (e.g., fifth graders reading at a third-grade level), but the instruction and scaffolds to help struggling students achieve the goals may be different. The same is true for students excelling beyond grade-level expectations: Teachers should push those students further so that, regardless of their competencies in the fall, they make at least a year's growth in a year's time. This model of competency-based instruction uses data to inform next steps for literacy teaching and learning, rather than an "X marks the spot" notion of grade-level expectations.

In addition, students should engage in self-assessment and personalized goal setting (Au et al., 2008; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). Effective teachers create learning environments in which students have opportunities to develop as independent learners. Such a teacher assumes the role of an instructional coach, facilitator, and participant in the classroom, rather than a pedantic teacher (Newmann, 1996; Taylor et al., 2005). (For more on developing independent learners, see Roehrig, Brinkerhoff, Rawls, & Pressley, Chapter 1. For more on teacher coaching and student-centered learning, see Peterson, Chapter 4.)

LOOKING FORWARD

Curricular coherence is not a new idea. As Ananda (2003) asserts, "[The notion that] standards and assessments must be properly aligned is neither new nor controversial. But the need for alignment has acquired new urgency with the escalating use of student assessment results to determine sanctions and rewards for schools, teachers, and students" (p. 1). Race to the Top funding and value-added assessment systems are examples of this urgency related to alignment and coherence. As educators, we need to investigate further ways to (1) analyze and use data responsibly and effectively to inform decision making; (2) build collaborative school teams capable of engaging in ongoing inquiry that leads to sustainable school improvement; and (3) create school contexts to facilitate high-level learning for all students that is coherent across grade levels. In particular, further research should focus on multifaceted data collection, analysis, and use across each of those areas. For example, we need to develop models for evaluating schools, teachers, and students that consider many factors that impede or improve student achievement (e.g., context, resources, student assessments, school artifacts, classroom observations). Research suggests that the following practices will support schools in their efforts to create curricular coherence in their school literacy program and a trajectory of sustainable growth in student literacy achievement:

- Distribute leadership across grade-level/department teams and leadership teams to support curriculum development and coherence (Cobb, 2005; Johnston & Caldwell, 2001; Taylor et al., 2005).
- Use multiple data sources as a basis for instructional planning (Cobb, 2003; Mokhtari, Rosemary, & Edwards, 2007; Stiggins & Duke, 2008).
- Plan coherent professional development that addresses specific needs of teachers and leaders, as evidenced by data (e.g., student achievement data, conversations within a PLC) (Cooter, 2003; Johnston & Caldwell, 2001; King & Newmann, 2001; Taylor et al., 2005).
- Make a long-term commitment to creating and sustaining schoolwide curricular coherence (Au, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Newmann et al., 2001).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION • • • • •

Whole-School PLC and/or Literacy Leadership Team

1. Does our school have a clear vision of what students should know and be able to do when they graduate? To what extent does it drive our school's literacy program?
2. In what ways does each grade-level and/or department team's collaborative goals contribute substantively to the school's vision for student literacy learning?
3. To what extent are literacy achievement expectations for student success rigorous and focused on high-level cognitive demands across grade levels?
4. In what ways does our school infrastructure allow for consistent meetings of various groups within our PLC (e.g., the whole school, grade levels, departments) to discuss curriculum, assessment, and instruction? Are those meetings productive? In what ways can we maximize their effectiveness to create a coherent schoolwide reading program?
5. In what ways can we improve the use of data at multiple levels to improve schoolwide coherence of literacy curriculum, assessment, and instruction?

Grade-Level Teams or Departments

1. To what extent have we made clear goals for what we want our students to know and be able to do by the end of the year? How do these goals build from year to year across grades?
2. To what extent have we addressed the multiple layers of assessment (e.g., summative assessments, ongoing formative assessments, daily high-level tasks, quarterly benchmarks, etc.) to monitor students' progress toward year-end goals?
3. To what extent are the data we have being used to guide instruction? What other data do we need to collect to be able to meet the needs of all learners more strategically?
4. To what extent are the relationships among our pupil performance goals, assessments, data analyses, and instructional plans coherent and clear?
5. In what ways can we improve our grade-level collaboration related to curriculum development, data collection and analysis, and data-driven instruction decision making?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Wayman and Cho (2008), as well as other scholars (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2006; Massell, 2001), suggest that collaborating in regard to data increases the conversations that teachers and administrators have with one another, students, and other community members about education. In addition to grade-level and vertical team meetings, whole-school PLCs need regular times to meet throughout the year to discuss curricular coherence (see Figure 19.6 for a sample ongoing collaboration schedule).

McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) suggest that schools set specific times for meeting and collaboration in which educators engage in inquiry cycles about data collection, analysis, and use for improving instruction. For example, in the Oakley School District, all schools have 3 days per year (at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year) dedicated as “staircase check-in days,” which are focused on creating and maintaining coherence across grades to ensure student achievement of the school vision for student achievement in literacy. During those whole school meetings, grade-level teams share (1) end-of-year goals; (2) assessment tasks and rubrics; (3) student data and analyses of trends; (4) plans for targeted instruction based on data; and (5) strengths and challenges related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Figure 19.7 shows an example of guiding questions that a school might use as staff members assess rigor and coherence across grade levels. These discussions enable the school community to develop a diagnostic view of what constitute data, what the data indicate, and what data need to be collected. These data inform school teams about instructional needs, as well as professional development needs.

Professional learning and collaboration activities related to curriculum coherence	
Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade-level or subject-area department meetings
Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vertical team or cross-grade meetings Literacy grade-level team meetings Professional development options (e.g., PLCs focused on content—see Chapters 8–17; PLCs focused on teaching processes—see Chapters 1–7; professional book club discussions)
Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-school professional collaboration on curriculum coherence

FIGURE 19.6. Sample schedule for ongoing collaboration.

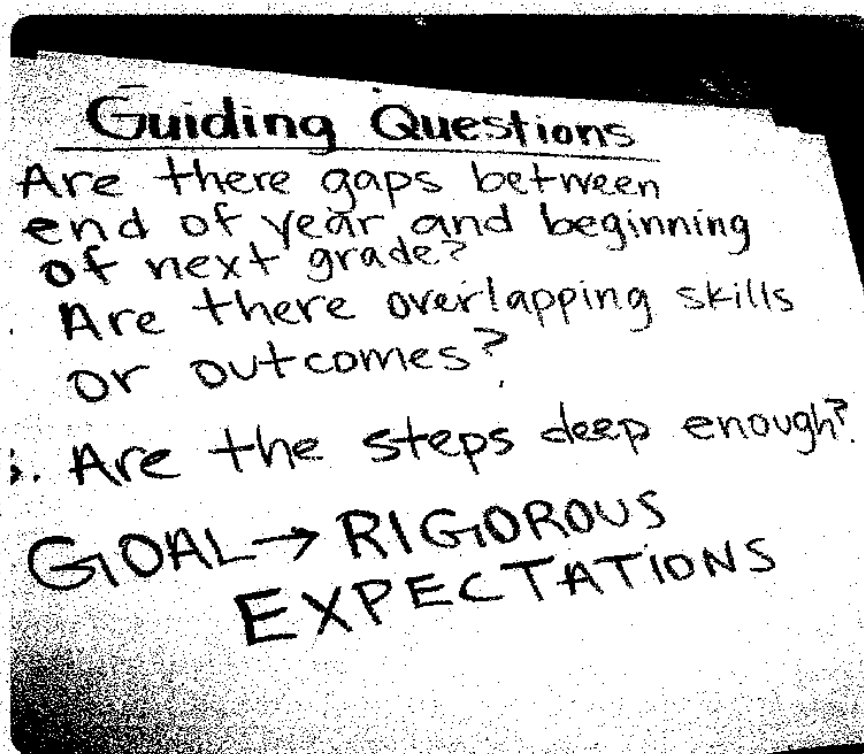


FIGURE 19.6. Guiding questions for whole-school alignment.

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