

English Language Arts and Literacy in Newton Middle Schools: Creating Engaged and Capable Literate Learners for Life

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Background and Influences

Advancing Adolescent Literacy Initiative (2003)

- Economic and social factors require a more literate society.
- Learning to read K-3 is no longer enough.
- Facility with oral language and more advanced reading skills require specific literacy instruction beyond elementary school.
- Secondary content teachers must teach the literacy skills of their content.

Common Core State Standards (2011)

- Standards for English
 - Reading (literary and informational texts)
 - Writing
 - Speaking
 - Listening
- Standards for History and Science
 - Writing
 - Reading



Components of the English Language Arts Program in Newton Middle Schools

Clearly-articulated Program of Studies

Collaborative Leadership Teams

Job-embedded Professional Development

Responsive Intervention Model



Clearly Articulated Program of Studies

- TWO common units of study per grade featuring common elements
- Integrating literacy instruction (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language interwoven)
- Engaging texts and rigorous tasks
- Teaching the habits and practices of life-long learners

Collaborative Leadership Teams

- Middle School Principals and Curriculum Coordinators: Collaborative professional development focused on instructional strategies
 - Making Thinking Visible
 - Student engagement strategies
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration – Science and Social Studies
 - Claims, Evidence, and Reasoning (CER)
 - Document-based Questions (DBQ)

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Literacy Coach

- School-based literacy leader
- Collaborate with teachers to improve teaching

Citywide department teacher meetings

- Realign benchmarks, content, and assessments
- Redesign units of study
- Common assessments
- Update curriculum

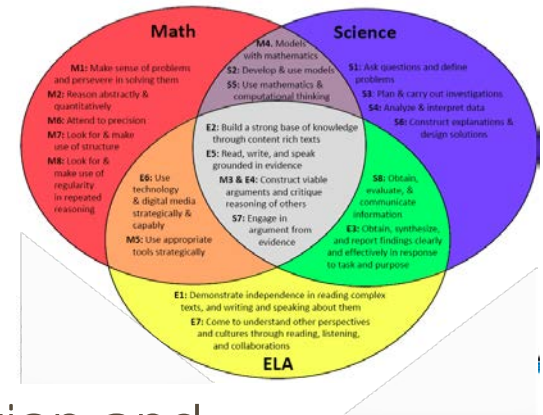


Responsive Intervention

- Some students need more time, instruction, and practice in reading to achieve at high levels in all disciplines
 - Assess all sixth graders
 - Determine specific needs
- Grade 6 Literacy Lab
 - Small group instruction
 - Build on strengths, address needs

What is going well?

- Emphasis on critical thinking– creating a consistent experience for students from class to class
- Quick response to staff requests for information and support
- Providing reading support in regular education
- Collaboration of Grade 5 teachers, elementary literacy specialists and middle school literacy coaches to identify students for immediate intervention in sixth grade





What is Challenging?

- Increased expectations for student proficiency in reading and writing, and more rigorous assessments on the way – increased text complexity – requiring closer reading and writing
- Middle School schedules are different leading to differing opportunities for additional support
- Expanding enrollment means more demand for regular education support
- Increased need for literacy professional development for all content teachers
- Data collection is ongoing; data management is difficult



Looking Ahead

- Invest in professional development – English teachers and teachers of other content areas
- Continue to develop units of study
- Provide opportunities for reading intervention in grades 7 and 8
- Improve data collection and management systems



Upcoming Professional Development

Spring 2014: ELA
Study Groups

Summer 2014:
Middle School
Literacy Institute on
Writing

2014-2015: Content
Literacy Instruction