

Literacy Learning: Supporting Our Students and Staff

An Update for the School Committee

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I. Overview

As a result of self study and with input from district stakeholders and literacy consultants, the district is implementing a new approach to literacy to better align with the science of reading research, to close gaps that persist from pandemic learning loss, and to ensure that all students have access to curriculum that prepares them to meet grade-level standards defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

A lot of the plans made on paper last April, when I shared [this update](#), are well underway. I'm gratified to have your support and excited to describe the progress made in the time since.

II. Personnel

Shrewsbury's pride lies with its people, and the district is fortunate to have so many hardworking and dedicated educators serving in our schools. With support from the School Committee and contained in the budget approved by Town Meeting last spring, we were able to add three highly qualified individuals to Reading Specialist positions to our ranks, joining our one existing position. The addition of two more positions at the elementary level and one at Sherwood Middle School means that we expanded our capacity for student and staff support.

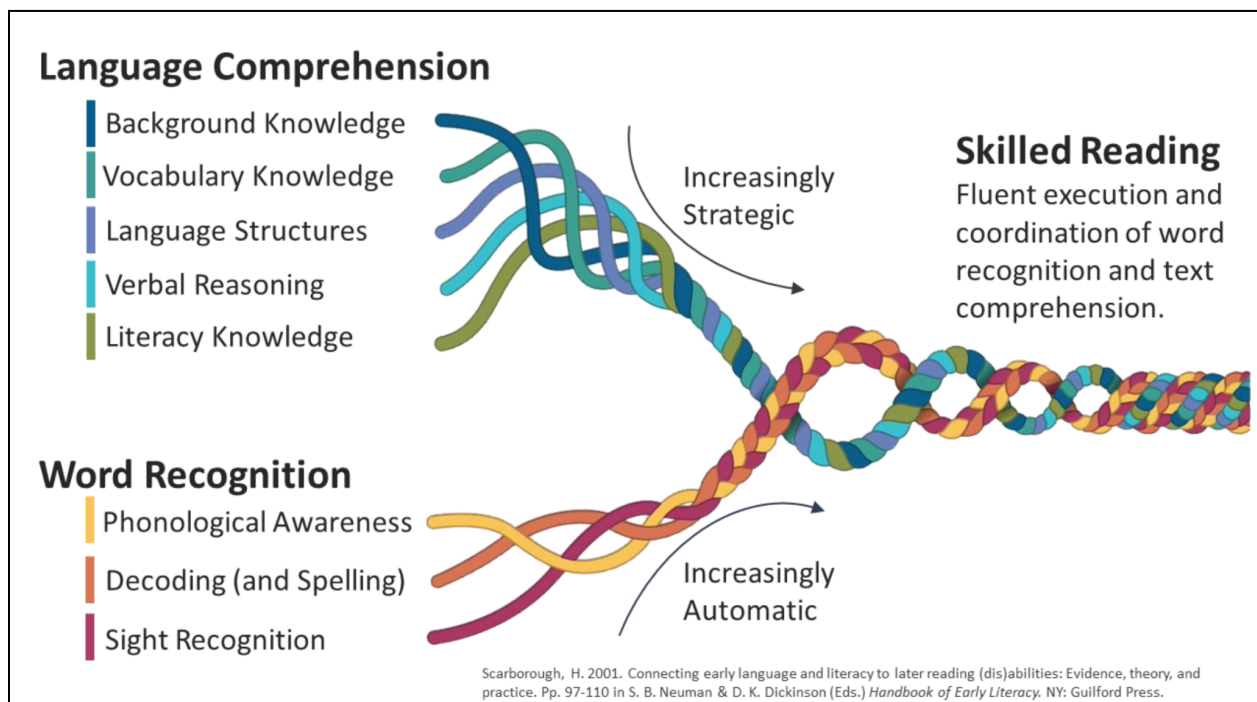
The table below depicts the current staffing dedicated to literacy by level:

Reading Specialist	Building(s)	Total Tutors & Hours
Maureen Henry	Coolidge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● CCS: 3 tutors (65.5 hours per week)
Vanessa Colleran	Floral & Paton	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● FSS: 4 tutors (74 hours per week)● WJP: 2 tutors (39 hours per week)
Heather Mistretta	Beal & Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● HWB: 4 tutors (117.5 hours per week)● SSS: 1 tutor (19.5 hours per week)
Susan Drenzo	Sherwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● SMS: 1 tutor (30 hours per week)

Importantly, our ongoing participation in the Mass Tiered Literacy network enabled us to benefit from the support of an additional literacy expert, and additional financial support you authorized through the district budget enabled us to significantly increase the time this consultant, Ms. Kristin Osborne, is able to devote to SPS. While our building-based specialists focus on training and supporting students and tutors, Ms. Osborne has lent her expertise to support our Instructional Coach / Curriculum Coordinator team and to provide ongoing professional development directly to our teachers. Between the state grant and the additional \$50,000 allocated from the district, we are able to garner a full three days per week of consultant support this year.

III. Literacy Programs

In order for students to become skillful readers, educators must ensure that they teach both word recognition and language comprehension skills. Scarborough's Rope is a helpful way of depicting both domains:



The specific skills teachers target vary by grade. All teachers in grades Kindergarten through Grade 5 have standards that center word recognition skills. For that reason, our first priority was purchasing materials to ensure consistency in teaching grade level standards within that strand of the rope for each of these grades.

In the past teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 2 used Wilson Language Training's [Foundations](#) curriculum to teach decoding, spelling and handwriting. This year, for Kindergarten we supplemented Foundations with [Heggerty](#), a program designed to support phonological awareness. Teachers of students in Grades 3 and up received new resources too, with Grade 3 teachers receiving Foundations training for the first time. The district also purchased a set of [95% Phonics](#) curriculum materials for teachers in Grades 4 through 6. All of these programs are rated highly.

With new materials comes new learning, so we provided specific training to teachers by grade band so that they could orient to the new curriculum, explore the new resources, better understand their use, and share any questions or concerns.

IV. Professional Development

Having high-quality instructional materials at hand is a great beginning, but in order for teachers to effectively use materials they require ongoing support. We had sufficient substitutes available in the district to pull grade bands together to provide curriculum-specific training in September. However, it will take time to apply this learning and gain familiarity with new routines. Our curriculum team and district administrators partnered last year to ensure that teachers can access professional development and additional coaching as needed.

As you know, members of the curriculum teams at the Elementary and Middle level and educator members of the Literacy Council received robust training on the science of reading. This year all teachers and literacy tutors will receive this training. [This schedule](#) details the professional development planned this year for all professional educators in Grades K-8. Reading specialists will support and supervise the literacy tutors in their respective buildings.

Teachers serving on the Expeditionary Learning (EL) Literacy Implementation Team completed an in-district graduate course this summer taught by Ms. Osborne to prepare for the launch of the new program. This team will receive eight days of EL-specific training in addition to district-led professional development in order to implement a new curriculum that integrates word recognition, language comprehension and writing instruction.



Launch: Fall, 2023

Implementation Team will:

- *Provide professional development and training to all general educators preK-6
- * Implement "nuts and bolts" of revised / new Tier 1 program with fidelity
- *Establish goals, pacing guides for subsequent year
- *Prepare for and support full implementation in 2024-2025

V. Shifts in Practices

The adoption of new curriculum materials means that we have new resources to address student needs. The implementation of a literacy plan across grade spans also enables us to align instruction and intervention in new ways.

We have used the Star universal screening tool since 2021 to identify and address student needs in Reading and Math. This year, however, we are also consistently using the additional curriculum-based assessments that are built into the platform to determine how best to support students that have not yet achieved grade-level benchmarks and to design intervention using new curriculum materials under the supervision of subject matter experts.

The table below the data cycle schedule for the beginning of the year:

Cycle 1: Beginning of Year		
Date	Tests/Responsibilities	Who/What/Where
9/6-9/20	Grades 1-8: Star Reading screener Star Curriculum Based Measures (CBMs)	Teachers administer assessments in classrooms
9/25-10/20 (varies by level)	Beginning of Year (BOY) Data Meeting <i>Goals:</i> Identify At-Risk Students & Appropriate Tier of Instruction Determine Instructional Grouping, Focus Area & Progress Monitoring Plan	Coaches, Reading Specialists, Special Educators, English Language Education Teachers, Classroom Teachers
11/20-12/1	Intervention Check In Meetings <i>Goals:</i> 1. Progress Monitoring update on current interventions. 2. Review data to determine needs.	Reading Specialists & Teachers
11/6-11/17	Kindergarten Only: Star Reading screener Star Curriculum Based Measures (CBMs)	Teachers administer assessments in classrooms
Week of 11/20	BOY Kindergarten Data Meeting <i>Goals:</i> 1. Identify At-Risk Students & Appropriate Tier of Instruction 2. Determine Instructional Grouping, Focus Area & Progress Monitoring Plan	Coaches, Reading Specialists, Special Educators, English Education Teachers, Classroom Teachers

The Star screener is administered three times per year for all students. As you can see from the chart above detailing the first cycle of using this data, our educators will monitor the progress of students receiving interventions as well. In this way we can adjust student support and evaluate the effectiveness of an individual student's plan.

In the next few weeks parents and caregivers will receive a copy of the Star Reading report for their child(ren) along with resources that families can use to support reading at home. A more detailed presentation of the Star assessment results will be shared at a future School Committee meeting.

VI. Next Steps

The vision statement created by the Literacy Council last year depicts our collective hopes for our students well. It reads:

We aspire to empower students by providing structured, standards-based literacy experiences that are engaging, relevant and responsive to their identities. Our shared commitment is to ensure equitable access to the curriculum and to foster curiosity, lifelong enjoyment of reading and writing and a growth mindset so that students experience academic success and apply their skills to understand and impact the world around them.

We will do this by providing evidence-based literacy instruction that is explicit, systematic and aligned across grades PreK-6. We will use a comprehensive assessment system to analyze and respond to students' literacy needs, ensuring that all students enjoy the supports and opportunities our district has to offer.

We will provide teachers with the tools, professional development and materials to implement all components of literacy instruction so that they can confidently and effectively support the diverse range of students in our community.

In this way we will ensure that everyone has the resources and knowledge to effectively contribute to their community.

Moving from actuality to aspiration will take multiple years. It's inspiring to observe our educators investing so much common planning time this year to improve our collective practice, and I'm excited to share the results of their hard work. It's just as important to note that ensuring equitable outcomes for students will take continued investment in curriculum materials and professional learning. I'm eager to continue advancing this strategic commitment, and gratified to have community support to maintain our forward momentum.

I look forward to answering your questions about this initial phase of our literacy work at your meeting on October 25.