

# SPS Literacy: Personnel and Practices

An Update for the School Committee

December 6, 2023

Amy Clouter,

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment



## I. Overview

In my last curriculum communication I described the district's new approach to literacy. The related presentation was primarily focused on the new curriculum materials purchased for instruction in foundational reading, and the professional development provided to general education teachers in grades K-6. This report will describe the roles of the reading specialists in supporting students inside and outside the classroom, and the assessment information that is helping our educators to improve literacy practices in Shrewsbury.

## II. Reading Specialist Positions

To recap, 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 these positions means that we significantly expanded our capacity for student support.

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

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

The role of the reading specialist as listed in the original posting describes a role that is both student and staff-facing.

Key responsibilities include:

- Assessing students reading skills and using data to develop and implement individualized reading plans
- Working with students that require support 1:1, in small groups, or in the classroom setting and maintaining records of services provided
- Supervising literacy tutors
- Collaborating with classroom teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals to support students' reading success and educator effectiveness.
- Monitoring student progress and communicating with parents and other caregivers about students' literacy strengths and needs
- Facilitating data-informed, building based discussions focused on reading interventions

Currently the bulk of a reading specialist's schedule is currently allocated to providing direct support to students in need and supervising the tutors that work in their respective building(s).

However, the addition of the reading specialist positions also increased capacity for staff support by creating districtwide systems for collecting and analyzing student assessments. Moreover, our ongoing participation in the Massachusetts Tiered Literacy network enables 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 work with district leaders to develop systems for structuring, monitoring and strengthening reading instruction at both the Elementary and Middle level. Together our general educators and specialists continuously collaborate to identify and support children in need by assessing skills, implementing intervention plans and monitoring student progress. We call this process the data cycle.

### **III. The Data Cycle: Promising Practices**

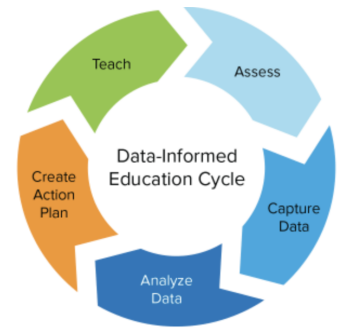
The data cycle begins at the start of each year with the use of a universal screener. All students in Grades K-8 take either the Star Early Literacy or the Star Reading test three times a year, with the first administration scheduled for oldest students first.

The table below shows the number of Elementary students that took these assessments in September by grade and school:

Total Star Assessments: Grades 1-4

	<i>Beal</i>	<i>Coolidge</i>	<i>Floral</i>	<i>Paton</i>	<i>Spring</i>	<i>Total</i>
Grade 4	125	63	123	68	65	444
Grade 3	122	50	110	49	56	387
Grade 2	112	60	109	59	56	396
Grade 1	128	55	102	50	51	386
<b>Total</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>1,613</b>

**Note:** Kindergarten students took the Star Early Literacy assessment between November 6-17. However, since Kindergarten students are expected to be learning foundational skills as part of literacy instruction, most additional support is provided within the context of the classroom.



Total Star Assessments: Grades 5-8

	Grade 8	Grade 7	Grade 6	Grade 5
Number	463	484	412	444
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,803</b>			

Following assessment administration, teacher teams gather to consider the results and to use common criteria to identify which students qualify for reading support and to align the intensity of that support to individual student needs. Each student identified for additional support has an individualized plan, including how their progress will be tracked over time.

Teachers in grades Kindergarten through Grade 5 have standards that center word recognition skills, and tools to measure each skill. The specific skills teachers target vary by grade, and so do the assessments that gauge their mastery of those skills over time. We call the assessments used to monitor progress “curriculum-based measures”, and we use the results of these quick checks to determine how best to support students that have not yet achieved grade-level benchmarks and to design appropriate student supports.

It's important to note that some students simply need additional time with their teacher in the classroom. On the other hand, some students will require support from a tutor or specialist in order to make effective progress. The table below depicts the number of students that met the criteria for each type of reading support at the beginning of the year by grade and school.

<b>Grade</b>		<b>Beal</b>	<b>Coolidge</b>	<b>Floral</b>	<b>Paton</b>	<b>Spring</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
4	Classroom-Based Support	23	10	21	11	7	72	16%
	Tutor Support	18	7	15	5	4	49	11%
	Specialist Support	8	10	11	2	3	34	8%
	Total Gr 4 Support	49	27	47	18	14	155	<b>35%</b>
3	Classroom-Based Support	21	6	20	10	12	69	18%
	Tutor Support	15	3	15	7	5	45	12%
	Specialist Support	11	14	7	1	0	33	9%
	Total Gr 3 Support	47	23	42	18	17	147	<b>38%</b>
2	Classroom-Based Support	13	7	15	14	10	59	15%
	Tutor Support	11	9	7	6	3	36	9%
	Specialist Support	12	18	12	6	3	51	13%
	Total Gr 2 Support	36	34	34	26	16	146	<b>37%</b>
1	Classroom-Based Support	27	10	28	9	18	92	24%
	Tutor Support	19	10	14	8	9	60	15%
	Specialist Support	26	12	15	5	4	62	16%
	Total Gr 1 Support	72	32	57	22	31	214	<b>55%</b>

Educators providing support monitor students' progress towards their goals in six week cycles. Grade level teams, reading specialists and tutors completed an analysis of our first cycle in mid- October. At our upcoming presentation we will share updated information about how the students selected for additional reading support in the first district cycle reading are faring.

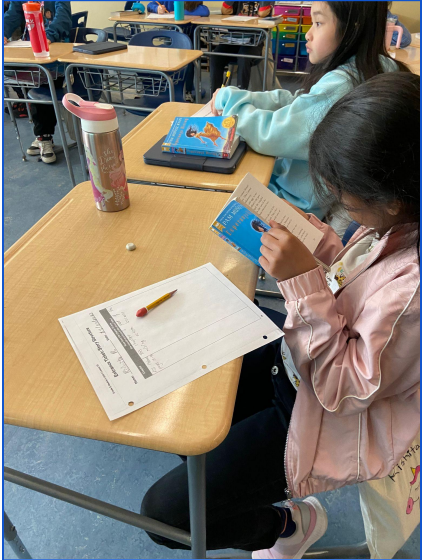
Looking at these numbers raises the question of capacity- and for good reason. It's helpful to look at the supports provided in classrooms as compared to outside supports. The table below simplifies the information in the table above. For example, we can see that 55% of first graders in Shrewsbury were identified for reading support in the first data cycle, with 24% of the cohort receiving support within their classrooms and 31% qualifying for support from a tutor or reading specialist.

**Percentage of Students Eligible for Classroom vs Specialized Support By Grade**

Grade	Classroom Support	Tutor Support	Reading Specialist Support	Total Percentage of Students Receiving Support
4	16%	11%	8%	35%
3	18%	12%	9%	38%
2	15%	9%	13%	37%
1	24%	15%	16%	55%

The next administration of the Star screener begins in January. Our educators will continue to monitor the progress of students receiving interventions throughout the year. In this way we can adjust student support and evaluate the effectiveness of an individual student's plan. A more detailed presentation of the Star Reading and Math assessments will be shared at a future School Committee meeting.

The structure for support at the middle level is different. We only have one Reading Specialist position and no tutors. However, we do have scheduled time for academic support that team teachers provide, and similar structures for collecting and using data.



Grade			%
5	Classroom Support	95	21%
	Team-Based Support	18	18%
	Specialist Support	23	5%
	Total Gr 5 Support	196	<b>44%</b>
6	Classroom Support	122	30%
	Team-Based Support	55	13%
	Specialist Support	14	3%
	Total Gr 6 Support	191	<b>46%</b>

#### IV. Conclusion

The vision statement created by the Literacy Council last year depicts our collective hopes for our students well. In part 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.*

Our reading specialists play a crucial role in providing standards-based, individualized support to students. As part of this effort they have modeled effective practice for general educators and contributed to team conversations informed by data. Again, moving from actuality to aspiration will require us to strengthen our practice and our systems. It's inspiring to see the ways our teams of educators have embraced their roles and responsibilities in this initial phase.

Ensuring equitable outcomes for students will take continued investment in support for students, staff and continued attention to the systems that enable us to monitor the effectiveness of our implementation plan. I remain deeply grateful for your support of the district's literacy initiative and eager to describe the ways in which we are working to ensure equal access to grade level standards for all students. I look forward to sharing updated student information and answering your questions about literacy instruction at your meeting on December 6.