

Reading Curriculum Provides the Structure for Education

by Howard Crouse, Superintendent

Reprinted with permission from the Daily Herald (October 8, 2004)

Curriculum review is an important process for any school district. Once every seven to ten years, we review the Illinois Learning Standards, what and how we teach, what the research tells us about instruction in a particular discipline, and then select textbooks and instructional materials that best support that curriculum.

In Indian Prairie and in most other districts, the reading curriculum is by far the largest component of our entire curriculum. It impacts not only the elementary and middle school reading program, but also how reading is taught and applied through other subjects and departments.

At our recent Curriculum Committee meeting, our staff provided the Board of Education with an overview of the work done by our Literacy Council and curriculum writers over the last 18 months. This group of talented teachers from every grade level created a great foundation for our reading curriculum. They spent this summer putting the final touches on the printed materials and on the staff development programs needed to introduce the reading curriculum to our faculty.

Our reading curriculum brings together the Illinois Learning Standards and our own Reading Instruction Framework. The Learning Standards are the Illinois State Board of Education's expectations of what a student at a particular grade level should be able to do. These standards are the basis of the ISAT and PSAE tests given to our students.

To date, the State has not promoted a statewide curriculum, but these standards clearly dictate a significant portion of one. The State's intrusion on a local school board's curricular control is our new reality in response to increased demands for accountability and No Child Left Behind legislation. The State has produced its own Assessment Framework that tells districts exactly how those standards will be measured beginning in 2006. We see this as a significant and welcome improvement of the State's assessment program.

Our reading curriculum stresses the content of reading instruction and five processes for teaching those content areas. These include systematic word study (including but not limited to phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary), comprehension strategy instruction, fluency, reading response, and literature studies.

The curriculum writers incorporated performance descriptors that connect the Learning Standards and the Assessment Framework to classroom outcomes. This critical step guides our staff toward predictable outcomes in a cohesive manner. Then, the performance descriptors were categorized within each of the content areas described above. This structure tells us what our students learn, when they learn it, and how it will be assessed.

Next, our curriculum writers connected everything to teaching strategies. The content areas are learned through read aloud activities, independent practice, and activities in a variety of formats, including shared, guided, and interactive reading. Although this explanation is thick with educational jargon, it truly reflects the best of research-based practices.

Our curriculum writers summarized their work with two statements. The curriculum is broader than just a textbook. This statement helps to keep us focused on the "what and how," of

instruction and not on the confines of a textbook. And secondly they stated, “Remember, the curriculum provides a plan or structure for education; a teacher is the significant key that unlocks learning for a child.”

Our Board of Education is extremely proud of the work our Literacy Council and curriculum writers have accomplished over the last eighteen months. Our students will benefit greatly from this outstanding effort.

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