

UPDATE REPORT:  
MIDDLE SCHOOL STANDARDS-BASED REFORM IN SAN DIEGO

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Education Matters' evaluation team visited San Diego during the first week of December, 1998, to learn how principals and teachers viewed both the process and content of the Literacy Framework brought to the district by the new administration.<sup>1</sup> We wanted to learn about the Framework itself as well as about how it fit in with on-going standards-based work. What we heard was quite positive. Overall, principals and teachers reported appreciating the clear focus on reading and said that it had already created positive outcomes in students. No one suggested that the Framework took them in inappropriate directions. Principals and teachers noted that implementing the components of the Framework took time and could be difficult. Some wanted additional professional development to assist them with implementation. Math and Science teachers, in particular, seemed confused about how they were to find the time to integrate literacy into their content areas.

Nonetheless, our data reveal considerable support for the district's strong emphasis on reading and other aspects of literacy. Almost everyone with whom we spoke said they were trying to use the components of the Literacy Framework. Classroom observations revealed that they were accurate. In fact, we saw many examples of teachers using new reading strategies with their students. We consider this a noteworthy achievement for the first few months of the district's new leadership team.

In this report, we want to briefly review the direction that the district has taken, the organization it has put in place to support that direction, and the components of the Framework that are being implemented at the schools. We base our findings on interviews with teachers and administrators at Pacific Beach Middle School, Wilson Academy and Roosevelt Junior High School, observations at all three schools, and interviews with seven members of the Institute for Learning.<sup>2</sup> We begin with a discussion of the Framework and the implementation plan designed to sustain it. Then we turn to a review of the Framework as it is being implemented at the schools.

## II. THE IDEA OF THE LITERACY FRAMEWORK

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<sup>1</sup>Teachers and administrators use the terms "framework" and "initiative" interchangeably. Sometimes this use of words suggests a confusion between the district's literacy standards and the Institute's overall program to enhance student's literacy achievement. In this report, we use the word "framework" to indicate the work that the Institute is encouraging.

<sup>2</sup>Our current evaluation design has us spend more time at three of our four sample schools. As a result, we did not interview at Muirlands Middle School during our fall visit. When we return to San Diego in May, we will interview teachers and administrators at Muirlands. In addition, we will attend a number of district sponsored professional development programs during the summer of 1999.

The Literacy Framework, as we understand it, is a component of the San Diego Institute for Learning. The Institute for Learning in San Diego is the west coast branch of the Pittsburgh-based Institute for Learning directed by Lauren Resnick. The purpose of the Institute in San Diego, described in materials distributed to the Board of Education on July 28, 1998, is “to create and sustain a culture of learning and a focus on instruction and achievement results throughout the San Diego school system.” At the time of our site visit, the organization of the Institute was not complete. However, its work, embodied in the Literacy Framework, was front and center in the district’s work.

The Literacy Framework, identified as a work in progress, has five strands.

1. Oral Language, Listening and Speaking
2. Awareness of Sound, Symbol, and Structure
3. Skills Integration
4. Reading and Comprehension Strategies
5. Writing, Vocabulary, and Spelling

The Institute began the implementation of its Literacy Framework with two components of Strand Four: Reading Aloud (in which students are read to) and Independent Reading (in which students are the readers). In documents presented to the School Board, these components were described as follows:

Reading Aloud introduces students to the joys of reading and the art of listening. Reading aloud provides opportunities to model reading strategies. Through reading aloud students understand that the language of books is different from spoken language, develop understanding of the patterns and structures of written language, learn new words and ideas, and learn about and locate models of particular genres or forms of writing.

Independent reading by students gives them other opportunities to gain confidence in their ability to read successfully and practice the strategies they have learned in shared reading, guided reading, read aloud and word study. Independent reading allows time for teachers to focus teaching on individual readers as she sits alongside and teaches directly to them. Books from a range of levels are available in the classroom. Students become proficient at selecting books that match their interests and reading level. Teachers provide guidance with book choices, tailor teaching to meet individual needs and meet with individuals to monitor progress.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>We include an elaboration of the strands in Appendix A.

Key to the eventual implementation strategy is the placement of at least one Staff Developer, full-time, in each school.

[The staff developer] would be someone that would work very closely with the teachers at a site, that would model lessons, that would go in and observe and give suggestions, that would even work with groups of kids, so that a teacher can see the kinds of things that we're talking about. (Institute Staff B)

Staff Developers will be selected, initially, from among the district's current teachers. Given disagreements between the district and the teachers' association about how to select the Staff Developers, however, these individuals were not in place at the time of our site visit. As a result, the Institute was relying on principals to provide teachers with initial professional development pertinent to implementing Read Alouds and Independent Reading.

If principals were to take on the staff developer role, even temporarily, they needed to understand the key components of Read Alouds and Independent Reading well-enough to teach them to others. The challenging task of preparing principals for this work fell to the seven individuals chosen to spearhead the Institute's design and implementation, the Instructional Leaders.<sup>4</sup> Using written materials and videos that elaborated the strategies and their goals and demonstrated what they looked like in classrooms, Instructional Leaders, with support from other Institute personnel instructed principals.

Institute staff members recognized that this approach was a temporary strategy and that many principals would find the role of professional developer new and quite difficult. Not only would principals have to learn in-depth literacy strategies which they might never have seen or used, they would have to teach them to others based on limited knowledge and skill. And, they would have to figure out how to support teachers who were required to implement them with students. Interviews suggest that Institute staff knew that this was not the strongest way to introduce the Literacy Framework; it was a way to proceed, however, without in-school Staff Developers.

Interviews with principals and Instructional Leaders suggest that some principals were comfortable with the new role in professional development while others were not. Some principals who had backgrounds in literacy and were familiar with the

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<sup>4</sup>At the request of Superintendent Alan Bersin, the School Board voted to abolish the position of Assistant Superintendent at its June 30, 1998, meeting. Prior to that date, principals were supported and evaluated by Assistant Superintendents whose responsibilities did not emphasize instruction. Instructional Leaders, the role that replaces the Assistant Superintendent, support principals in implementing instructional reform and they evaluate them with respect to the quality of their work.

Framework strategies reported reasonably good understanding of the Read Alouds and Independent Reading. They were able to effectively introduce them to teachers. Some principals without such prior knowledge reported learning that they had not understood the strategies and, therefore, had not adequately conveyed them to teachers. Institute staff seemed aware of the variation, but agreed that it was important to require principals to provide professional development to their teachers whether or not they were comfortable with the role or sufficiently knowledgeable of the content they were teaching. Through this requirement, Institute staff could demonstrate to principals that responsibility for professional development was now school-based and that principals were to act as school-based instructional leaders.

Instructional Leaders then supervised and supported principals as they moved forward with helping their teachers implement Read Alouds and Independent Reading. Instructional Leaders described how their role worked, emphasizing its strong focus on instruction.

The Instructional Leaders focus 100 percent on instruction. When they go to a school to visit, and they go to school every day of the week, for the most part, they really talk to the Principal. But their talk is not about budgets, other than how budgets relate to student achievement. It's not about the Building Service Supervisor not doing their job. It's, "Are there teachers that need help and support? Are there programs that we need to bring in? Do you have enough books for the classroom?" And then, the bulk of their visit is walking into classrooms, initially. (Institute Staff A)

Another Instructional leader explained that, prior to each visit, they send the principal a letter detailing the times of the visit and what they would like to see by way of classrooms and instructional strategies.<sup>5</sup> School visits last about three to four hours, during which time the Instructional Leaders visit from four to six classrooms where they are,

... specifically looking for Read Aloud and Independent Reading, because those are the two approaches that we're emphasizing right now. ... When we go into the classroom, we sit down, we observe, say, for twenty minutes or longer, then we leave the classroom. Then I have a conversation with the principal about what did they see. Usually my first question is, "Well, what did you think of the lesson? What did you see?" And then, hopefully, they'll come up with positive indicators, for example, of a Read Aloud, what they liked, what they

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<sup>5</sup>This is information the Instructional Leaders feel that the principals should have readily available, in any case, so that they can productively observe in classrooms.

would suggest to the teacher, what are the next steps.... And so we have certain indicators that we've shared with the principals already, through our principal trainings, of the kinds of things that we want them to look for when they're in classrooms. (Institute Staff B)

This Instructional Leader described the detail with which she works with principals to help them understand what they can do to help improve instruction.

If we're observing independent reading, I've either sat down, right with the principal, beside the teacher to listen to the questions that they're asking during the conferencing time, because while, say, thirty kids are reading, the teacher's conferencing with the student. And I listen to the kinds of questions that they're giving, and then, later, I'll talk to the principal about the kinds of questions that were asked, and did they need to delve more, and maybe they didn't ask a question, but reading strategy, just on comprehension, and how, really, the reading strategy part should be there, too. So, you can do that. Or also, actually, I have participated in conferencing, too. The principal will do a student, I'll do a student, then the teacher will. And then, afterwards, I compare notes with the principal about what their experience was like and then what mine was like. And that's a good learning process for me, too. So that's been effective also. And then, as we walk from one classroom to the next, we continue our accountable talk.<sup>6</sup> And the whole purpose, really, it's for me to help the principal. I sort of see myself as a coach, pointing things out to the principal to strengthen their skills as an instructional leader, so they can then coach their teachers. (Institute Staff B)

These interactions are designed to strengthen principals' knowledge and skill with respect to the components of the Literacy Framework so that they can better support teachers in its implementation.

The school visits and interactions, however, are also designed to help the Instructional Leaders gather information with which to evaluate principals. In addition, during this school year, principals wrote work plans as part of their two-

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<sup>6</sup>Accountable Talk is principle six of the Institute for Learning's Principles of Learning. It is described as follows: "Talking with others about ideas and work is fundamental to learning. For professional development dialogue to promote learning it must have certain characteristics that make it accountable. Accountable talk responds to and further develops what others have said. It puts forth and demands knowledge that is accurate and relevant. It uses evidence appropriately and follows established norms of good reasoning. Accountable talk sharpens educators' thinking – just as it does students' – by reinforcing their ability to use knowledge. Educators can create the norms and skills of accountable talk in their nested learning communities by modeling appropriate forms of discussion and by questioning, probing and directing conversations." Some teachers and principals in San Diego use the term "quality talk" in place of "accountable talk."

year evaluation process. Principals will be under greater scrutiny than in the past and the Instructional Leaders who evaluate them will have considerable first-hand information on which to base evaluations as a result of their school visits.

Instructional Leaders, along with other members of the Institute's staff, meet at least weekly as a team to discuss how what they are learning from the schools and from their work with principals can inform next steps in implementing the Literacy Framework. They acknowledge that, during this first year of the Institute, they are developing its work as well as implementing it. They describe being supported in their efforts by Chancellor Alvarado, by staff at the Institute for Learning in Pittsburgh, and by teachers and administrators who work in District 2 in New York City.

Eventually, with the Staff Developers in place and with principals better prepared to focus on instructional issues, the goal of the Institute is to have every teacher, whether in elementary or secondary school, involved in instruction that supports literacy.

[We want every teacher to believe] that they have a significant role in the area of building literacy and that is the message that we talked with the senior high and middle school principals about. We said to them that we know overnight you're not going to change people's ideas or beliefs about their content. But [we said] they're to constantly be looking at how it is that they're going to continue to build capacity at their site for [all teachers] to begin to see themselves in a supportive role for literacy. And we said that you don't just say, "Tomorrow all of you will do this or that." We gave them the idea that they were to develop - at the middle and senior high level - that they were to take a look at how literacy could be implemented at their site, and that they were to have discussions with their staff about how that could happen, and to think about what that timeline might look like for it to be where we want it to be. But we didn't say overnight, all of you will be doing 20 minutes of read aloud and all of you will be doing 20 minutes of independent reading. (Institute Staff C)

Instructional Leaders recognize, as this quote indicates, that it will take time to get all of the pieces in place and to have all of them done well.

### **III. THE LITERACY FRAMEWORK IN ACTION: THE VIEW FROM THE SCHOOLS**

Interviews at all three schools revealed that teachers and principals are pleased with the district's clear focus on literacy. Most appreciate that the approach to improve reading is the same across the district. They suggest that the focus pushes

them to do what they need to do and that the strategies are well-aligned with what they were already doing to enhance students' literacy. This is especially true with respect to the district's prior commitment to the Literacy Portfolio and its initial focus on reading.

Teachers and principals vary in their enthusiasm for one or another component of the Framework. Many of those who are using the Accelerated Reader program are particularly enthusiastic about the Independent Reading component of the Framework. Some teachers find great benefit in the use of Read Alouds. Often these are teachers who were already using some variant of this approach to literacy. A few wonder whether there really are links between reading aloud to students and their improved reading ability. Despite the doubts we sometimes heard, none of the teachers with whom we spoke thought the district's emphasis or strategy was completely misplaced. And the principals in our sample strongly supported the district's initial approach to improving reading.<sup>7</sup>

In this section of the report, we describe teachers and principals responses to the Read Alouds and Independent Reading Strategies. We note briefly areas in which they will need further professional development support.

#### **a. Read Alouds**

Teachers have been asked to read aloud to students and to demonstrate during that reading a) what good reading sounds like, and b) the strategies a good reader uses to figure out the meaning of text. Teachers can read from literature and/or from content-based text books. We understand that they are to spend between ten and twenty minutes each day on Read Aloud activities.

Teachers vary in their understanding of this reading strategy and in their beliefs about whether it will help students. Language arts teachers, not surprisingly, seem to be a bit more confident about the potential value of Read Alouds. Some of them have used the strategy before; others, as a result of professional development, see that it can fit into their overall curriculum and goals. For example, some teachers understand that the strategy is designed to give students access to how good readers read.

Read Aloud means that you have -- first of all, your students are all focused usually on one piece of text. And it's pretty much like what I was doing today, as where you go through and you read parts of the text, and then you ask questions that are going to get them thinking at

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<sup>7</sup>Principals in our sample schools did not always like the top-down processes used by central office to implement the new Literacy Framework. They suggested that the new administration did not act as if it valued their knowledge and skill. However, they said that they very much liked the Framework's content and goals.



higher levels, making evaluations and applications and things like that. So you're breaking down the text. But the important part is that it's different from Round Robin in that Round Robin I would read and then I would have Johnnie read and then I would have Susie read, and I'm having to correct Johnnie on lots of pronunciations, and Susie's very fluent but she forgets to stop at periods and stuff like that. So kids are hearing bad reading when they hear it from each other, and they need to hear good reading. (Teacher A)

Introducing the book, giving some prior background on what the book is about, letting the kids know where they're going with the book, giving them some sort of anticipation of what they should be looking for and what they should be listening for. Stopping, once in a while, at key points and asking the kids to predict what will happen next, asking the kids to clarify what has already happened, asking the kids, "Do you have any prior experience or connection to what's been happening so far?" And not only asking the kids but teaching the kids how a good reader approaches a book. And the way that I've been taught to do that is to -- basically, it's a think aloud. If I come to a word that I think the kids don't know, I don't ask the kids what the word means; I tell them how I would figure it out. I'd say, "I don't understand this word but maybe I can figure it out by doing this." So, I teach them, or I show them the strategies that a good reader would do. (Teacher B)

Others see it as a method of engaging students and increasing their enthusiasm for reading. They do not yet understand the need for explicit discussion about the strategies a reader uses to make sense of the text.

Students are supposed to interact with us. They're supposed to see enthusiasm and passion, or something, on our side. It's just involvement, listening, appreciating different forms of literature, maybe sometimes talking about the style: this is a poem versus -- like I could have mentioned paraphrase, but I didn't want to get too touchy on the explanation. It's just a time for them to respond to somebody who reads aloud, and it offers them a variety of different styles that will just raise their level of awareness, if nothing else. It's supposed to be engaging, I think that's the key word, they're supposed to be engaged. (Teacher C)

A handful of teachers focus on the requirements of the components: how often to do them and what kinds of materials to use. Although they may become supportive of the strategy, at the time of our site visit, they sounded as though they were operating, primarily out of a desire to comply with the requirement.

[Question: How often are you to do this?] They haven't made that clear, that is not real clear to us. First, they said every day, and then they said, "Well, it'll be confusing to the kids if every teacher's reading the literature piece, a different literature piece." So then they said, "OK, only in English classes should you read a literature piece, and in the other classes you can read the textbook." Well, then, when they came around looking at what we were doing, they said, "No, that's not Read Aloud. Read Aloud is reading a book that's related to the curriculum." Oh, okay. So, you know, it's not real clear what it's supposed to be; and they come in and they observe us. (Teacher D)

A small number of teachers are fundamentally confused about the literacy strategies. At an extreme, one teacher in our sample thought that Read Alouds required all children to read aloud simultaneously from their different independent reading books. Another thought it was a form of choral reading of the same text. And one teacher in our sample thought her job was to call on children, in round-robin fashion, to read aloud. Although these teachers were exceptions to the general statement that most teachers had a good understanding of Read Alouds as a strategy, it is important to note that there is a need for additional and on-going professional development in this basic literacy strategy. At the time of our visit, such professional development was not yet available.

We also spoke with teachers who understood the Read Aloud strategy, but doubted its value because, they said, either students "tune out" when being read to or refuse to participate in discussions of the reading.

And these kids, they don't follow along, they just tune out when I'm reading aloud. It's like, Oh, good, she's reading to us now. It's kind of funny. It's like I don't know if this is a learned behavior because of elementary school: when the teacher read aloud it was time just to lay down on your desk and be quiet. So I don't know -- are they getting the information? Because, then, when I'll ask them questions about it, they don't know what I said, they don't remember what I read, because I don't think they listen. So, it's hard for me to understand how this is really going to improve student achievement. (Teacher D)

We do a read aloud which is usually fairly brief. The concept is what follows the read aloud is sort of a discussion period where you talk about what you've read and what my kids have usually found is why should they say anything? They don't want to respond. It's such a peer group that if I read them an emotional piece of writing and ask them to respond to that out loud, are you crazy? They're not going to say a thing. They don't want to respond to that at all, they don't want to respond on a personal level. (Teacher E)

As we noted earlier, we imagine that, with additional professional development, such teachers will learn to engage students in being active listeners during the Read Alouds. Some teachers, even without such additional training, report having seen a change in their students' responses. One such teacher, who had held this view at the outset, report having changed her mind. Although initially her students balked at being read to, or appeared to "tune out," more recently, she found them quite engaged.

I have eighth graders and they're like, "This sucks." They're belly aching "I don't want to be read to." And now they're really cute. They like to be read to as much as they complain about it. [They say,] "Okay, read some more!" "No, I've got to stop." "No, no, read some more, read some more." They're fun. (Teacher F)

Unlike language arts teachers, several math and science teachers were troubled by the emphasis on Read Alouds. They felt that the emphasis took them away from teaching their content even though they recognized that literacy had a place in their discipline.

Having students read aloud in class is not done so much now, at least in my class....the literacy framework, it hurts [time on math.] I mean, it's the whole district focus, so it affects everything. Anywhere you can fit in literacy, in math, science, you know, you do it, you get it in there, so it's had a big effect. (Teacher G)

Here, too, however, with appropriate support, it sounds as though math and science teachers can be helped to fit some Read Aloud activities into their classes.

[Administrator B] is going to be here, in my second period, to model for us, for the math department. Because the math department, [we ask], "How can we do this in our class? It's not related to our class." She came to one of the meetings and she modeled it for us, and she had good examples, good books that we could read [aloud]. (Teacher K)

Without doubt, teachers and principals will face challenges and will benefit from help as they determine how to organize time effectively to implement the new reading strategies without shortchanging important instructional goals.

At one of our sample schools, Wilson Academy, the advisory period was re-oriented to focus on literacy skills. First, teachers and administrators agreed that students would benefit from a coherent, consistent curriculum of word study skills. Such an emphasis, they felt, would support the school's extant use of First Steps; it would also mesh with the district's new Literacy Framework. To address word study skills, the school now implements a curriculum based that has a ten-minute "word

warm-up” component in which students learn, for example, prefixes, synonyms, homonyms. All students at all three grade levels have the same word study lessons during the advisory period. As a result, teachers across all content areas are familiar with what the students are learning and can refer to specific word attack skills in their classes.

Teachers in our sample at Wilson sounded pleased with this emphasis on word study.

The word warm-ups have been great, sort of a word study thing which is one of the things that the district wants - one of the next things coming down the line. And we've already got that going with the word warmups, that's been a good thing. We've been doing basic parts of speech, synonyms, homonyms, noun, verb, adjective and things like that - homophones - I mix them up, I don't know how they're going to keep them straight, but we've been working on those.  
(Teacher E)

Following the word warm-ups, teachers then implement Read Alouds for about half an hour.

In this section of the update report, we have presented the range of responses teachers have to the Read Aloud strategy. We want to emphasize that, although some teachers are not quite sure about what the strategy is or will do for students, a large majority of those in our sample support the strategy and are trying to find ways to incorporate it into their daily practice. We provided an example of how one school has found time for this work by using its advisory period. We understand from members of the Institute’s staff that other schools are also using their advisory periods for literacy activities. In the next section of this update, we briefly review the Independent Reading component of the Literacy Framework and describe how another of our sample schools, Pacific Beach is using its advisory period to implement independent reading.

## **b. Independent Reading**

Teachers recognize that students have to read in order to become better readers. However, we often hear them worry about the fact that their students do not like to read. They report that sustained silent reading periods, a popular strategy for increasing the time spent reading, are not appropriate for many of their students who stare at their books for the required time. In addition, sustained silent reading does not provide students with the reading instruction they need in order to improve their skills. The Independent Reading component of the Literacy Framework is designed to enable students to read books that are at their reading level for at least one hour each day, receive direct reading instruction from their teachers, and, as a result, become more competent and, therefore, more willing

readers.

Our sample schools were at different places with respect to implementing this component of the literacy framework when we visited in December 1998. Not all of the schools had a sufficient supply of "leveled" books with which to develop the Independent Reading component. Some had chosen to implement Independent Reading only in formal reading classes, classes which were not available to all students. Others were concentrating on Read Alouds. A number of teachers reported that they had not been provided with sufficient professional development to help them implement this component of the Literacy Framework. All of the schools, however, expected to be implementing Independent Reading later in the school year. One of the schools, Pacific Beach (PB), was implementing Independent Reading through the use of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. We turn next to a brief description of this approach to Independent Reading.

At the end of the 1997-1998 school year, teachers and the principal at PB had agreed to implement the AR program and eight teachers participated in AR summer professional development. When the district described its requirements for Independent Reading, PB was ready to use AR to implement this component of the Literacy Framework. The school now devotes its last period, formerly the advisory period, to Independent Reading using AR. During this time, all teachers, the principal and other administrators, teach a reading class. This organization has the double benefit of reducing class size for reading and engaging administrators with the core instructional work of the school. Students have forty-five minutes of independent reading during this period; they read for the additional required fifteen minutes in their humanities classes. Humanities teachers in our sample, in particular, report that students are becoming more enthusiastic readers and are making great strides in their reading achievement.

I have always done silent sustained reading in my class, but oftentimes the kids would just have any book because they didn't want to get in trouble, and it would be too easy, it would be too hard, they didn't know what was going on, they didn't care, they may be reading the same book all year, they're still on page two. And with the Accelerated Reader program... I'm looking on as I go by, and I say, "Oh, gosh, you've been reading *Johnny Tremain* for three weeks now. Do you like this book?" [And the student says,] "Well, no, it's really boring." [And I say,] "Well, trade it in and get one you'll like. Don't read it if you don't like it." And I think it teaches a lot of good reading habits. I have a lot of kids that, it really excites them. (Teacher H)

I think it's been great. I mean, you wouldn't believe this. The first couple of weeks there were lots of kids complaining, I want to do homework [in advisory], I want to do homework. Now, they also have to do 15 minutes of reading in their humanities class, and that fifteen

minutes go by, and they're yelling, "No, just five more minutes, ten more minutes. Let me get to the end of the chapter." It's phenomenal. I've had kids that I don't even know come up to me and say: "I just got 100 percent on my test, I'm doing so good, and just, I used to hate to read and I really like reading now." And that's the whole point of this. ...And [especially for the low level readers] we try to get good titles for them. They haven't been exposed to pleasure reading [before.] It's not something that kids do at home. (Teacher A)

The kids like the program. When [the administration] first told us we were reading for 45, 50 minutes in class, I was like, "No way." These kids never even complained about it. They come in, they sit down, and they read. I do occasionally have a kid that will be pretending to read. I'll be like, "You're only doing this for you. I already know how to read so you're not tricking me!" And we keep them accountable. You've only read one book in three weeks? You should have read two. And we have goals that they set for themselves and we talk about that. (Teacher O)

The independent reading, I think, is a grand idea, and I am so happy we have a program here at our school to put it in place. It's something that I think is going to make a huge difference, and I'm really glad we're doing it. It requires of me some little extra record keeping, which I don't mind at all. (Teacher L)

These humanities teachers are enthusiastic about using AR for Independent Reading. They were planning to use it to address students' reading needs prior to the Institute adopting the Literacy Framework. For them, it is the implementation of a strategy that they had already chosen

Their colleagues in other departments had not chosen to implement AR. They did not have the benefit of AR training during the summer nor did they have prior experience as language arts teachers. Some reported experiencing the decision to use AR in the advisory period as a surprise. Although they can see the value in focusing on reading, they sound unsure of their knowledge and skill as reading teachers and suggest they would like additional professional development in order to implement effectively Independent Reading (as well as Read Alouds).

It was brand new and it was "pushed on" or "dumped on us" the very first day of school without any training whatsoever. We're supposedly supposed to get this as time goes on. And there is good to it. Yes, I believe students should be quietly reading or have time to read and I believe it does help. The more you read the better you're going to get at it. And as far as my [content area], reading can tie in because once they learn how to read and analyze what they're reading, sure, that's

not going to hurt. But [I did not like] just the way it was implemented.  
(Teacher N)

A few teachers in our sample who were not quite comfortable using AR also reported that their students were not engaged with reading. They describe the students as bored, as staring at the books, and as unmotivated by the small rewards that come from successful completion of work. We imagine that as such teachers become more skillful and comfortable with AR, they may be better able to engage students in Independent Reading.

Finally, we want to note that there are non-humanities teachers who are learning a great deal from helping students with their reading skills, as one other teacher suggests.

We help them set goals for the year, for what they hope to accomplish and how many books they're going to read and how many points they're going to try to get. They read to us individually and we work with them when we can individually just to help them along. Of course some kids are zooming along and don't need you as much, but it's nice to hear every kid read and listen to how they pronounce and understand what they're reading. So then you listen to them and do some feedback questions on what they just read and how they understand it. (Teacher M)

Overall, the comments we heard about implementing AR during advisory period were positive. Teachers reported that they liked the program, that students were carrying around books and using the library in record numbers, and that, overall, they were optimistic about the impact of this approach. Teachers also reported that they appreciated very much the fact that the principal was also teaching a regular class of students. She and they reported that such close work with students gave her first-hand insights into the students' learning needs and into the work that teachers were doing every day.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS**

If someone had asked us how teachers and principals would respond if the leadership in San Diego required Read Alouds and Independent Reading, we would have said that most of them would be furious at their loss of autonomy. We might have quoted central office administrators who we have interviewed during the last five years who always stressed the importance of site-based management and the power of the school site councils. We might have said that many people would not implement the strategies because they would not believe that they had to. We would have noted that some teachers still have not accepted responsibility for the district's Reading Portfolio.

Our data from this December site visit reveal that we would have been wrong in predicting the response. Teachers and principals have responded to the Literacy Framework by attempting to implement its components. Of course, they vary in the extent and quality with which they are responding. They vary in the extent to which they have bought-in to the strategies. But, nonetheless, our data reveal that there are genuine changes in literacy instruction at the middle schools in our sample. When teachers and principals talk about the district's initiative, they reflect their opinion that the district is serious and the work is worthwhile.

We think that teachers' conclusion that the district is serious about the Framework is associated with their understanding that their principal will be held accountable for school-site implementation. Teachers know that the Instructional Leader assigned to their school will visit classrooms looking for evidence that the principal is helping teachers implement Read Alouds and Independent Reading. They know that their principal's job will be on the line if the Instructional Leader sees little implementation.

No one explicitly made these links between teacher practice and principal accountability, but many teachers reported understanding that their principals were under scrutiny with respect to implementation of the Literacy Framework. Principals have shared this fact with their teachers. In one school, for example, teachers know that their principal got "failing grades" for giving them incorrect information during professional development about Read Alouds and Independent Reading. With principals clearly accountable for professional development and implementation, teachers may realize that the reform agenda is serious.

We also think that language arts/humanities teachers view the Framework as a serious enterprise because they are reasonably convinced that the strategies a) address a critical need and b) are likely to improve students' reading capacity. Math and science teachers view the Framework as serious but wonder how they will address the required standards and focus on literacy. They also wonder why their content is not yet the focus of the Institute's work.

Given all of the pressures connected with the Literacy Framework, one might not expect to find teachers and principals generally pleased with the new emphases. However, despite complaints about a) the quality of some of the professional development and the absence of much-needed additional professional development, b) the speed of changes, c) doubts that the strategies will be effective, and d) the centralized approaches to instructional design, teachers and principals say that they have found considerable value in the direction taken by the Institute. Voices from all three schools support for the changes in which they are engaged.

There is not a lot of resentment at this school about the district requirements because the district emphases and the school emphasis are more aligned this year - the focus on literacy. The perception is



that there is a lot of public support for the focus on literacy. This seems to be a much more positive approach. (Teacher I)

I think it's made me better. It's got me very focused on what I'm doing. I really like the idea of having the kids know exactly what they have to know, rather than it's just some nebulous thing, what do you have to know to get out of 6th grade? I'll ask them that at the beginning of the year. They don't know. Well, we're going to find out. You will be able to mm-mm-mm by the end of the year. I like it. It helps me keep more focused with my teaching, and I think they learn better if they know exactly what it is that they have to learn. (Teacher J)

I feel like my whole spirit's been renewed. First of all, I have a new boss, who is much more in tuned to secondary school and the reality of instruction, and that's not to say that it's any less stressful, because it is, ...Plus, Mr. Bersin has a really good philosophy about cleaning our plates off so that we can get into the classrooms and do what we need to do in the classrooms,... You can go into classrooms, now, and you can see these kids, they've learned to listen, they've learned a skill of listening here. You can see, as we're going along, how teachers have -- as they felt comfortable with Read Aloud and quality talk -- they're now moving it into their curriculum area. (Principal A)

It's been a 30 year revolution, and finally we're back to some kind of conformity that will put us all moving in a similar direction. We've had 30 years of diversity of styles, etc., that after a point in time that balance is lost, and craziness results. ...So, I like the fact that we're all going in a direction, I don't care what direction it is, as long as it's moral, it's good, it's educationally sound. But I think that reading is the direction we should be going in. ...The fact that the students are all aware that reading is the key thing makes it much easier for me to follow through, doing Independent Reading and Read Alouds, getting books, because this is what we do here, everybody does this, it's important. So that's how the literacy program, so far, has affected the teaching. (Teacher C)

With this Accelerated Reader program that we're doing, the kids are -- it just amazes me, how much more reading they're doing, and they're all reading chapter books, in essence. (Teacher H)

Implementing the Read Aloud and Independent Reading components of the Literacy Framework has not been simple for teachers or administrators. Many have had to learn what these strategies are and how to use them. Principals have had to learn

the strategies and how to teach them to teachers. This has been a daunting task for some, somewhat easier for others. Everyone has had to find time in their already full days to focus on new literacy strategies. And they have had to do this in a context where the strategies are mandated by the Institute and where implementation is scrutinized by the Instructional Leaders. What was traditionally private teacher and principal practice has been made far more public in a very short time. The Instructional Leaders' work is also public; they work in a common space and they must share their with one another in an on-going way. Instructional Leaders work very long days (and even weekends) developing and implementing the reform simultaneously.

Teachers and principals are also working hard and, too often, they are attempting to implement the new strategies without sufficient in-school professional development support. They may know how to implement, for example, the initial Read Aloud strategies; they do not yet know how to improve that strategy so that the kind of talking about books is what the Institute would call Accountable Talk. Teachers need help to get better at what they are learning to do. We imagine that as the Institute moves ahead to implement additional components of the Literacy Framework, this need for on-site support will increase.

Nonetheless, and with all of this in mind, we suggest that our data reveal genuine progress in moving the Literacy Framework forward at the middle level schools in San Diego.

## Appendix A

### Components of the Literacy Framework

San Diego City Schools

# Institute For Learning

## WORK IN PROGRESS

### *San Diego's K-12 Literacy Framework*

Students learn to read, write, and speak effectively when a variety of instructional approaches to literacy learning are provided. The Language Arts Standards define reading for us-good readers read a variety of text; read broadly and deeply; comprehend, analyze, evaluate, interpret, and use literature and informational text; and use a variety of vocabulary and word study skills to read aloud with accuracy, comprehension, and fluency. The following approaches provide the framework for the implementation of San Diego City School's literacy program. The approaches align with the California Reading Task Force Report, "Every Child a Reader," the California Reading Program Advisory, "Teaching Reading" and the San Diego City School's Language Arts Standards.

#### **Strand One: Oral Language, Listening, and Speaking**

##### *Oral Language, Listening, and Speaking*

Students participate in rich experiences in listening and speaking. Hearing, seeing, and experiencing language is critical for language growth. Quality daily conversations are evident and have a particular teaching/learning intention. This may be whole class, small group or individual. The activities, structured for authentic audiences and purposes, are connected to reading and writing. Students listen and discuss a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction. Students develop oral language through storytelling, retelling, rhymes, and songs. Through read alouds students explain, discuss and recite poetry, participate in literacy groups, participate in reader's theater and choral reading. Students present reports and participate in public speaking and debate.

#### **Strand Two: Awareness of Sound, Symbol, and Structure**

#### **Strand Three: Skills Integration**

##### *Word Study*

Students become aware of sounds in words and how they relate to symbols in written language. Word study prepares students to become familiar with both the visual aspects of letters and words and the phonological pattern of words. Word study is done both in the context of reading and writing and through a systematic, explicit process. All decisions about what to teach students is driven by assessment in reading and writing. Word study can be done during shared reading, guided reading, writing, reading centers, and during a designated word study block.

#### **Strand Four: Reading and Comprehension Strategies**

##### *Reading Aloud (Reading To)*

Reading aloud introduces students to the joys of reading and the art of listening. Reading aloud provides opportunities to model reading strategies. Through reading aloud students understand that the language of books is different from spoken language, develop understanding of the patterns and structures of written language, learn new words and ideas, and learn about and locate models of particular genres or forms of writing.

##### *Shared Reading (Reading With)*

Shared reading with an enlarged text or a text everyone can see provides a non-threatening experience which demonstrates the reading process in action. Each student, regardless of reading level, can be engaged in the reading process. Teachers demonstrate the reading process and strategies that successful readers use. Students and teacher share the task of reading, supported by a safe environment in which the entire class reads text (with the assistance of the teacher) which might otherwise prove to be too difficult. Students learn to interpret illustrations, diagrams, and charts. Teachers identify and discuss with students the conventions, structures, and language

features of written texts.

*Guided Reading (Reading By)*

Guided reading provides an opportunity for readers to utilize, develop and further reading strategies by working at the edge of their development. Students practice for themselves the strategies that have been introduced in shared reading. It is crucial that a text closely matches the needs of the group of readers. This is not a choral reading experience, neither is it round-robin reading. Students read for themselves within the group setting. Teachers listen in and make decisions on the instructional needs of each student.

*Independent Reading (Reading By)*

Independent reading by students gives them other opportunities to gain confidence in their ability to read successfully and practice the strategies they have learned in shared reading, guided reading, read aloud and word study. Independent reading allows time for teachers to focus teaching on individual readers as she sits alongside and teaches directly to them. Books from a range of levels are available in the classroom. Students become proficient at selecting books that match their interests and reading level. Teachers provide guidance with book choices, tailor teaching to meet individual needs and meet with individuals to monitor progress.

**Strand Five: Writing, Vocabulary, and Spelling**

*Modeled Writing (Writing To)*

With this approach, the teacher demonstrates his/her own strategies as a proficient adult writer. Modeled writing involves the teacher writing in front of the students for his/her own purposes. This experience provides students with the teacher's expertise and understanding of the writing process.

*Shared Writing (Writing With)*

Shared Writing provides an opportunity to demonstrate and model what experienced writers do. This writing comes from the student's ideas and experiences and as the teacher writes and students participate orally, many teaching points can be brought out.

*Guided Writing (Writing By)*

Guided writing provides an opportunity to work with groups of students or an individual student on effective writing strategies as determined through teacher observation of student behaviors and work. The needed strategies and skills are demonstrated within the context of authentic writing tasks. This is an opportunity to develop a student's independence and ability to self-monitor the learning of writing strategies and skills.

*Independent Writing (Writing By)*

Students use their background knowledge and personal experiences to write for authentic audiences and meaningful purposes. They will develop their own writing process within a community of authors. The student's writing pieces are published and shared with the class.

*Observation and Assessment*

Systematic assessment, which is recorded, builds a profile of the progress a child is making in literacy. Ongoing assessment informs teaching, tells teachers what students can do and what they need to do next. Teachers assess students in a variety of ways and focus on individual students. Running records, informal comprehension assessments, observations and writing samples are all critical components of purposeful assessing. In addition to ongoing assessment, students participate in assessment such as standardized testing and district assessment portfolios.

Students benefit from particular experiences in different ways and to different degrees. With a literacy program we move away from single approach teaching and provide a broader program which integrates the processes of language. Assessment and evaluation are deeply intertwined

with the instruction in this type of classroom. Assessment and evaluation are a daily, necessary component in guiding instruction.

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