

SECTION 2:

Conclusions of the Task Force

Following extensive research, the 4-12 Task Force arrived at 13 overarching conclusions around comprehensive literacy instruction in Grades 4-12 and across content areas. The conclusions are as follows:

CONCLUSION 1: The ultimate literacy goal for each student in Connecticut schools is to become an independent, skilled, lifelong reader and writer.

Independent, lifelong readers read often and use a full complement of reading strategies. Before reading, skilled readers assess the demands of a particular literacy task and decide on a reasonable approach. While reading, they self-monitor, activate background knowledge, visualize, infer, question, predict, clarify, connect, reflect, summarize, and organize ideas. After reading, skilled readers evaluate the ideas presented in the selection and share their thoughts through speaking, presenting and writing. Independent, lifelong writers possess a reasonable command of basic mechanics and conventions of writing and can focus on the meaning they wish to convey. They can generate many different types of writing, including narrative, expository, persuasive and creative pieces, and can use planning, drafting, editing and revising processes as necessary to produce polished pieces of writing. Connecticut educators are committed to assisting each student to become a skilled reader and writer.

CONCLUSION 2: Research has identified what good readers do when they read.

Duke and Pearson (2002) summarized these research-based good reader characteristics as follows. Good readers:

- Read text at their grade level accurately and easily and can attend to meaning rather than struggling with decoding individual words
- Are active readers who try to make sense of what they are reading
- Have clear goals in mind for their reading, constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals
- Typically look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals
- Frequently make predictions about what is to come;
- Read selectively – deciding what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, and what to reread
- Construct, revise and question the meanings they make as they read
- Try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text and then deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed
- Draw from, compare and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text
- Think about the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions and historical context
- Monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary

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- Evaluate the quality and value of the text, reacting to it in a range of ways, both intellectually and emotionally
 - Read different kinds of text differently
 - Find comprehension a consuming and complex activity, but one that is also satisfying and productive

Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement (2000, 12-13) parallels these characteristics in its description of the reading process: "Skilled reading involves a complex interplay of abilities and habits. Proficient readers actively construct meaning; for example, their comprehension extends far beyond an understanding of the literal information in a text to include drawing inferences, making evaluations, and using prior knowledge to interpret what they are reading. Proficient readers also identify printed words with ease; they recognize the pronunciation and meaning of most words automatically, without effort, and can use their knowledge of spelling-sound correspondences, when necessary, to figure out unfamiliar words. At the same time, proficient reading draws heavily on broad oral-language competencies, such as knowledge of word meanings (vocabulary), understanding of idiomatic expressions (e.g., "it's raining cats and dogs"), background knowledge, and comprehension of grammar and syntax. And proficient readers read strategically; for example, if they do not understand something they have read, they use strategies to repair their comprehension, such as rereading or using context clues to construct meaning. In skilled reading, these components — active construction of meaning, accurate and effortless reading of individual words, broad language knowledge, and comprehension strategies — all work in concert to enable good reading comprehension."

Skilled reading at all grade levels draws upon many different abilities, but the abilities most critical to further growth and achievement in literacy tend to shift somewhat across grades. By the end of third grade, students are generally expected to have developed a solid foundation of basic reading skills needed for meeting subsequent grade expectations. From fourth grade on, students must be prepared for a rapidly expanding volume of reading and writing, as well as increasingly advanced comprehension and expression demands. Furthermore, in a changing, technological world, literacy tasks are becoming more challenging and complex, requiring more high-level evaluative thinking and placing greater demands on students than ever before.

CONCLUSION 3: Research has identified core comprehension and writing strategies that can be taught.

During the past 25 years, there has been considerable research on literacy and on instructional activities that promote comprehension of text, as well as on activities for developing students' writing. Studies have identified important component abilities for reading and writing that need to be addressed, instructional strategies that improve comprehension and writing, and instructional models that teachers can adopt for daily classroom instruction. Pearson et al. (1992), *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000), Fountas and Pinnell (2001), and others have identified important research-based "core" comprehension strategies as including:

- Using prior knowledge to make connections to self, the world, other texts
- Self-questioning the text to clarify ideas

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- Making predictions based on clues from the text and prior knowledge
 - Determining importance of ideas and separating main ideas from details;
 - Using sensory images/visualization to enhance comprehension
 - Summarizing ideas
 - Synthesizing and evaluating ideas
 - Monitoring understanding and using fix-up strategies (e.g., rereading a difficult passage or looking up an unfamiliar word in a dictionary) when comprehension fails

Important writing strategies include:

- Planning processes that involve selecting and organizing ideas
- Revision processes that involve ongoing monitoring of writing and making effective changes both for content and for mechanics
- Applying an understanding of text structure to different types of writing, such as narrative, expository and persuasive writing

The literacy strategies outlined in each of the Connecticut curriculum frameworks, as well as the strategies assessed on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), reflect these core strategies.

Research has also shown that teachers and classroom instruction do make a difference in students' literacy development, not only in the primary grades, but also in middle and upper grades. Instructional activities such as think-alouds, use of task-appropriate graphic organizers, cognitive mapping, guided imagery, advanced organizers, and others promote comprehension and higher-level thinking. Additionally, research has demonstrated the value of explicit instruction in a variety of literacy-related skills and strategies, as well as the value of scaffolding and coaching from teachers in promoting students' literacy development. Descriptions of many of these types of activities are included in this document.

CONCLUSION 4: Comprehending, interpreting and evaluating texts are primary literacy learning goals for most students in Grades 4-12.

Students in Grade 4 and up build on the basic skills and strategies developed through the early grades. As materials in all content areas become more complex, comprehension becomes the focal point of reading instruction for most students. Understanding the literal meanings of texts, making reasonable interpretations, evaluating ideas, and vocabulary development are ongoing learning goals. Listening, as well as reading, continues to be important in comprehension development beyond Grade 3. Oral discussion of text, background knowledge, vocabulary and concepts help to engage and facilitate learning in students of all achievement levels. Many comprehension strategies, such as summarization, can be learned in the context of oral activities as well as during actual reading of text. Even for students who meet grade-level expectations, oral language comprehension may outstrip reading comprehension until seventh or eighth grade (Biemiller, 1999).

CONCLUSION 5: Continued instruction in literacy in Grades 4-12 is crucial for all students.

Literacy demands for all students increase in Grades 4-12, as reading and writing become primary learning tools in the content areas. The texts, particularly informational texts in the content areas, become significantly more challenging. Content-specific vocabulary becomes complex and beyond the prior knowledge of most students. As Hosking and Teberg (1998) state, “Students in the middle years face increasingly complex literacy challenges as they move from a curriculum where acquiring initial literacy knowledge and competencies permeates the school day, to a time when their literacy skills and interests are prerequisites for success across the school curriculum.” In Grades 4-12, students are expected to regularly and automatically engage in higher-level interpretive and evaluative thinking as they read. They need continued instruction and support to be successful, engaged, critical readers.

This need for ongoing literacy instruction beyond Grade 3 sometimes seems to be contradicted by Connecticut test scores reported by the press. On the NAEP, Connecticut students generally score very well in comparison to students in other states. The reading scores of Connecticut’s fourth-graders ranked No. 1 in the nation in 2003, and only five other states outperformed Connecticut’s eighth-graders on the 2003 reading tests. On the 2002 NAEP writing assessment, Connecticut students in Grade 4 and Grade 8 ranked first in the nation. In general, Connecticut’s minority students scored as well as or better than their counterparts in other states. These are excellent results; therefore, it may appear that students in Connecticut have mastered necessary reading and writing skills and that their literacy instruction is complete.

However, mean test scores do not tell the whole story. Even though, on average, Connecticut fourth- and eighth-grade students ranked very high in reading as compared to students in other states, more than 50 percent of Connecticut fourth- and eighth-graders performed below the proficiency level on the NAEP. Scores on the CMT and CAPT reflect a similar pattern. These scores indicate that many students have not acquired the advanced literacy skills necessary to address the complex texts required in school and in the work force.

Additionally, statewide test scores identify a cluster of students who have not yet mastered basic skills in the areas of word identification, fluency or comprehension — skills typically mastered by the end of Grade 3. Although making progress, these students are not reading on grade level, are at high risk of failure as they enter the middle and upper grades, and are expected to learn from more complex, sophisticated reading materials. These students need intensive, immediate instruction in their areas of weakness to reach proficient and advanced literacy levels.

Furthermore, some students’ reading problems may not actually emerge until fourth grade or later (Badian, 1999; Leach, Scarborough, and Rescorla, 2003). These students may have acquired basic word-identification skills on schedule in the early grades, but they typically have comprehension-based weaknesses that may not reveal themselves until the middle or upper grades, when the texts used in school become much more demanding. Early intervention and effective K-3 reading instruction are vitally important and will help to prevent reading difficulties in many students; however, even high-quality primary literacy instruction will not prevent *all* reading problems. Schools can expect to encounter a subgroup of students who perform adequately in reading at the primary level but who struggle with the more complex literacy requirements of the later grades.

Finally, even very capable students with strong standardized test scores at the elementary or middle school level have not completed their literacy learning. Development of many literacy-related competencies — including acquisition and understanding, higher-level comprehension and writing strategies, and some conventions of writing — continues well beyond middle school. Therefore, all students need ongoing literacy instruction to help them attain the proficiencies demanded for success in later schooling and in adult life.

CONCLUSION 6: Effective literacy instruction in Grades 4-12 requires explicit instruction, scaffolding and coaching from teachers.

Research supports the value of explicit instruction in basic literacy skills such as decoding, spelling, vocabulary and the mechanics of writing, as well as in higher-level strategies for comprehension and writing. The National Reading Panel Report (2000), the RAND study group report (2002), the International Reading Association's (IRA) *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (2002), and *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004), all indicate that literacy instruction that is explicit and systematic, and that provides expert modeling and assistance, results in increased student achievement. All students benefit from explicit instruction, but this kind of instruction is likely to be especially crucial for struggling students.

In *Getting Kids into the Reading Game*, Wilhelm (2001) maintains that educators have not been as systematic as they need to be in providing literacy instruction for the upper grades. He says: “We often fall short of helping struggling adolescent readers for several reasons... (1) we underestimate the demands that particular texts place on readers; (2) we do not actively provide the expert strategies of dealing with more complex texts, and (3) we do not assist them in the use of these strategies.”

Equally important, teachers also must scaffold and guide students' reading and writing. For example, they can deliberately choose texts or assignments that lend themselves to the application of particular literacy strategies. They can show students how to help themselves learn through the skillful use of “before reading” activities to activate prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading (activities such as KWL charts, Go charts, anticipation guides, etc.) and through “during reading” activities that help students organize and synthesize ideas (activities such as graphic organizers, response journals, notation systems for marking questions, confusions, and others.) “After reading” activities provide opportunities for students to summarize, analyze, evaluate and make connections to their own lives, other texts and the world.

Balancing the requirements of content learning and literacy places many demands on teachers' skill, knowledge and experience. Content objectives are the crux of content area instruction; literacy objectives do not replace content standards. Rather, the literacy objectives are learning tools that are applied to each discipline. By incorporating literacy objectives in daily lessons, teachers can help their students more efficiently learn the content of the discipline. Content area teachers thus are not reading teachers, but rather teachers of how most effectively to use the content-area text and written materials in learning the content ideas. Since content area teachers are the expert learners in their domains, they are the most qualified people to demonstrate how to read the text, how to learn the new vocabulary, how to evaluate the ideas presented, how to study, and how to express key concepts in writing.

Although all teachers play a part in students' continued literacy development, teachers' roles in fostering literacy may vary somewhat depending on the content area (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) and on the component area of literacy (e.g., conventions of writing, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, writing strategies). For example, especially in junior high and high school, explicit instruction in many conventions of writing — such as the use of commas in setting off appositives or the use of parallel language — will likely be handled by English/language arts teachers. Other content area teachers should be monitoring and providing feedback regarding students' use of those conventions but probably will not be primarily responsible for teaching them. Nevertheless, the role of all content teachers is important, because students need to apply conventions of writing throughout the school day, not merely in English class.

On the other hand, most comprehension and writing strategies — such as summarization, evaluation, use of prior knowledge, and planning and revision of writing — are best *taught* in the context of specific content; for example, summarizing a chapter section about different types of angles in geometry, evaluating two different sources on the underlying causes of the Civil War in American history, applying prior knowledge in reading a newspaper article about AIDS for a health class, or planning and revising a paper on volcanoes in science. All content teachers will be involved in explicitly teaching and helping students to generalize these kinds of strategies.

CONCLUSION 7: Knowledgeable, responsive, effective teachers are critical.

Teachers shoulder a great responsibility. In each class, teachers face a range of student literacy levels, engagement intensity, language competencies and special necessities. Yet, despite these challenges, teachers are deeply committed to helping students meet the standards and goals of their content area. Teachers also are deeply committed to meeting the needs of all students by providing both a culturally and educationally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally responsive teachers understand the essentiality of using their students' cultures as important sources of their education, with the added recognition that not all students from the same cultural background learn the same way. Teachers expand the information to which students are exposed through culturally diverse texts, resources and materials routinely incorporated into all content areas. Teachers challenge and support students to embrace high expectations for themselves and reach those expectations despite what others outside the classroom may expect of them (Tatum, 2005).

Culturally and educationally responsive teachers understand that addressing students' cultural, academic, developmental, emotional and social needs each day serves a central role in students' learning the subject matter. They challenge every student, including those who are English language learners, who have special education needs, and who are enrolled in gifted and talented programs. They use a wide variety of instructional strategies.

All teachers are key to the day-to-day movement of each student toward the ultimate goal of becoming a skilled, independent, lifelong reader and writer. Teachers make critical decisions about what to teach and how to teach, and these decisions make a difference in student learning. Thus, literacy is the mission of every teacher — the science, mathematics, social studies, world language, art, music,

theater, physical education, health, business, technology and other content area teachers, as well as special education and gifted and talented program teachers.

To be successful in this mission, content area teachers and English language arts teachers need to be well versed in the reading requirements of their particular specialty areas. Teacher preparation programs must provide teachers with this kind of knowledge. Furthermore, given the depth and breadth of knowledge required of teachers, as well as the fact that the scientific knowledge base about literacy is continually expanding, opportunities for ongoing professional development are essential. Professional development workshops, study groups, conferences, classroom-based coaching and modeling, and resource materials must be available for teachers as they refine their knowledge of literacy in their content area and of appropriate instructional strategies. Professional development opportunities must be directly related and embedded into the teachers' content areas.

CONCLUSION 8: Teachers need to differentiate materials and instruction to meet individual student needs.

Students need reading materials that, with the support of the teacher, they can comprehend. Textbooks, as Daniels and Zemelman (2004, 37) note, “are a very big part of reality in middle and high school. They may not be perfect ... but they are here to stay ... They should be supplemented generously or replaced with other reading materials where possible.” Even though textbooks may remain the primary text in most classrooms, no textbook meets the content or literacy needs of all students in any class. Teachers must differentiate both reading materials and instruction to meet the needs of individual students. “Literacy instruction must have value in these young people’s current time and space if it is to attract and sustain their attention. It must address their issues and concerns in a way that will lead them to examine their own lives” (Tatum 2005, 15). Accomplishing this differentiation requires evaluating the readability and usability of any proposed reading text, as well as its academic content and its match to content standards and curricular expectations.

For some students the reading level of the text may be difficult. If the mismatch between the student and the reading level of the text is not too large, additional time for reading the text or additional scaffolding from the teacher (e.g., previewing of difficult words in the text) may be sufficient to meet the student’s needs. If the mismatch is large, students may need alternative materials. In today’s technological world, teachers’ choices have greatly expanded. The Internet provides many options on almost any topic, including articles at various reading levels, primary documents, materials that provide background information, simulations, research articles, and government documents. In Connecticut, all schools have access to www.iconn.org, which provides access to library collections across the state and to a collection of online subscription databases. As described on its homepage, it includes “thousands of popular and scholarly articles, from 1980 to the present including Spanish-language articles, newspapers, business information on over 450,000 companies, health and wellness information, and much more.” It is one of many sites teachers may use to select the best materials for their content area and their students’ reading abilities. Teachers can collaborate with school library media specialists to find the best matches for students and content.

Listening comprehension and oral discussion play key roles in differentiating instruction. Although oral language activities are important in engaging and developing the literacy and content knowledge of all students, these activities can be particularly critical for struggling students. For example, for students who are English learners, the vocabulary and sentence structure of the typical textbook can be very difficult. Oral discussion of vocabulary and concepts can facilitate content learning for these students and may also improve their text comprehension.

Other students may be able to read the text fluently but may lack the background knowledge necessary for good comprehension; oral discussion of the relevant background knowledge will aid comprehension for these students. Students with learning disabilities in reading often have oral language comprehension that is much stronger than their reading comprehension, due to problems that revolve around accuracy or fluency of word identification. For these students, oral language activities — such as listening to and participating in class discussions, giving oral presentations, or watching a film or documentary — can be a crucial vehicle for content learning and for demonstrating their knowledge. Oral activities should never substitute for teaching or remediation of reading and writing skills, but these activities can be very valuable in differentiating instruction, especially for struggling students.

Finally, as teachers use a variety of materials and activities to differentiate instruction, administrators need to support their efforts, for example, with financial resources for supplemental materials, professional development time to explore differentiation models, and the assistance of supervisors, colleagues and literacy specialists.

CONCLUSION 9: Teachers need to incorporate information technology in ongoing classroom instruction.

The Internet and other technologies are rapidly redefining literacy and learning. As the IRA (2002) states: “Defining reading solely around book technologies will shortchange our students. Proficiency at effectively using the new literacies of networked information technologies has become critical to our students’ success in the workplace and in their daily lives.” Technology in today’s classrooms needs to become an integral part of each student’s process of learning new information and of organizing and sharing ideas. Therefore, teachers need to model how to locate, evaluate and use information from technologies, such as the Internet, and provide students with opportunities to explore curricular topics and share their learning. Technology must be a part of an effective adolescent literacy program.

Although the core reading and writing processes involved in using technology are not necessarily different from those involved in more traditional literacy activities, there are some differences between conventional print and technology resources that teachers should highlight; for example, the latter types of resources may use sound or video in ways that influence, even bias, the interpretation of a message. Teachers need to help students apply their literacy skills to the use of information technology and should encourage students to critically evaluate both technology and print resources. For students to be fully literate in today’s world they must become proficient in the new literacies of information and communication technologies.

CONCLUSION 10: Ongoing assessment must inform teachers' decisions about daily instruction in literacy as well as content.

Effective classrooms involve teachers who investigate learning and gather information about each student's component literacy abilities (e.g., fluency, vocabulary knowledge, spelling, conventions of writing, and comprehension and writing strategies). Individual districts may use standardized measures, and these measures can be helpful in many ways; however, they rarely provide the kind of information classroom teachers require to understand and address their students' specific literacy needs. Teachers must continually observe what each student can do as a reader and writer and use formative assessments as evidence of student learning and student literacy skills. Teachers also should collect, summarize and analyze this information to adjust instruction and provide feedback to individual students. They should focus on informal formative literacy assessments that are part of everyday classroom activities at any given time.

For example, a health teacher may analyze a group of students' response journal entries and find that the students are accurately recording all the facts in a reading but making no distinction between important and irrelevant ideas. These data could lead to a whole class or a small group lesson in determining the importance of ideas in the text. Likewise, a math teacher may observe in class discussions that students are not able to explain how they solved a problem. The teacher may then decide to model the reasoning process and have students write their rationales as part of ongoing assignments.

This kind of assessment data is more than information for assigning a grade; evaluating performance to assign a grade is summative and final. Ongoing formative assessment should be used to inform daily instruction. It should focus on important component areas of literacy, including fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, spelling, conventions of writing, writing strategies, and application of writing to different kinds of writing tasks. Assessment of *oral* vocabulary and comprehension abilities (not just reading vocabulary and reading comprehension) is critical, because reading tasks may tap multiple component areas. For example, students may perform poorly on a written vocabulary test that requires reading because they lack oral vocabulary knowledge, or because they simply cannot read the words. Assessment of students' oral vocabulary knowledge and oral comprehension can help teachers to more accurately identify the specific weaknesses of individual students.

A focus on component areas is essential to effective remediation. For instance, three students may function at the same overall grade level in terms of reading comprehension but may have very different underlying component profiles. If one student's primary reading comprehension weakness involves vocabulary knowledge, the second has difficulty mainly with speed or fluency of reading, and the third has difficulty only with applying certain comprehension strategies, then clearly these students will require some different emphases in instruction.

Similarly, if two students have serious writing weaknesses, but one student's problems revolve around a lack of knowledge of spelling and conventions, whereas the other student has this knowledge but fails adequately to plan and revise, then again, these students will require different emphases in instruction to address their needs. Some patterns of literacy-related difficulties that may be observed in Grade 4 and up students are discussed in Section 6.

Formative assessments can include many types of measures that teachers already use in their classrooms such as classroom observations, student work, response journal entries, student conferences, written summaries of readings or retellings, teacher-created tests, portfolio choices, student interest inventories, running records, informal reading inventories, weekly tests of spelling or vocabulary, and proofreading and editing checklists.

Additionally, some tests may not be routinely given by teachers but may still be feasible to administer occasionally when warranted for an individual student. For example, timed fluency measures typically only take a minute or two to administer and can allow a teacher to determine if a student's rate of reading is generally sufficient to meet grade expectations. Individually administered tests of students' phonics skills or oral vocabulary knowledge may take 10 to 20 minutes to administer but may provide information that is very useful for planning instruction for a particular student. In some cases, literacy specialists, such as a reading teacher or special education teacher, may provide assistance with administration and interpretation of these kinds of measures.

Student self-evaluation also is an important part of any instructional model. Assessments should occur periodically during the learning process, with the results communicated to students so that adjustments or corrections can be made in learning and teaching. Evaluations should emphasize areas in which students have made progress, clear goals for future learning, and specific steps students can take to achieve these goals. When students are part of the evaluation process and are involved in setting goals, they are more likely to be invested in success.

CONCLUSION 11: Students should regularly use writing as a strategy for exploring and expanding text meaning.

Writing is a powerful thinking tool. Writing expert Donald Graves states: "Writing is the most disciplined form of thinking. It allows us to be precise, to stand back and examine what we have thought, to see what our words really mean, to see if they stand up to our own critical eye, make sense, [and] will be understood by someone else ..." (Murray 1993, 3). Writing about what one has read helps the writer clarify thinking, evaluate the importance of ideas, and make connections to prior knowledge. Studies such as that conducted by Martin and Konopak (1987) with high school juniors in social studies classes have found that writing activities help students synthesize new information and integrate it with prior experiences and knowledge. Writing activities also help to develop many important component literacy skills, such as spelling and vocabulary. For instance, using recently learned vocabulary words in their writing can help students to remember those words and refine their understanding of the connotations of the words.

To use writing as a tool for thinking, students need to have some command of the basic mechanics and conventions of writing, including handwriting and keyboarding, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure. Students who struggle excessively with the basic mechanics of writing tend to find it difficult to focus on the content and meaning of their writing. They may experience writing tasks as extremely laborious and may develop a considerable aversion to writing (Berninger and

Amtmann, 2003). Students, who meet grade-level expectations, have developed many basic mechanics of writing by the end of Grade 3, as described in *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement* (2000). However, even students who meet grade-level expectations continue to require instruction in spelling of complex, unusual and technical words, and in many higher-level conventions of writing, well beyond Grade 3. Students who are functioning below grade level in literacy may need intensive remediation of basic mechanics of writing in order to use writing as a tool for thinking and to write effectively in content areas.

Students should have experience applying writing to many different types of tasks and text structures, including (but not limited to) narrative, informational or expository, and persuasive writing. Some types of writing – such as quick writes, journal responses and exit slips – are very informal writing tasks and do not necessarily require a final product that is taken through the revision and editing process. These responses become sharing points for partner, small group or whole class discussions. Other types of writing — such as research papers, summaries, persuasive essays, and PowerPoint and multimedia presentations — are longer, more complex and more formal. These kinds of writing generally should undergo a writing process of brainstorming, organizing and drafting, and revising and editing before being shared as the final copies. Students need to be comfortable with both informal and formal levels of writing, as well as competent in applying planning and revision processes to their writing as needed.

Students are introduced to the idea and use of a writing process in the primary grades. However, from Grade 4 onward, they must apply planning and revision processes to increasingly lengthy, complex and varied writing tasks. In addition, older students are expected to become more independent in their use of a writing process and less reliant on the adult guidance usually provided to primary-level students. Nevertheless, constructive feedback from teachers and peers remains critical to older students' growth in writing.

CONCLUSION 12: Literacy skills develop at different rates.

Some students need additional support or specialized instruction in order to reach the goal of becoming skilled, independent, lifelong readers and writers. Individual and small group research-based interventions must be provided for those students who have not mastered the skills delineated in *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement*. Some students may still require targeted instruction in phonics and word attack skills, while others may struggle primarily with fluency, while still others may need additional support in specific components of comprehension, such as vocabulary or the use of comprehension strategies. Struggling students may include those with disabilities, those who are English language learners, or those who did not master essential skills in their early school years.

Teachers and staff with appropriate expertise should be involved in the identification and instructional planning for these students. Intensive literacy intervention should occur on a regularly scheduled basis (minimum three times per week) and should be delivered by a highly qualified professional knowledgeable about instruction in the student's area(s) of weakness. The intervention should be continued as long as the identified student struggles. The intervention must be based on reliable, valid and ongoing individual assessments that inform the instruction. The instruction should be explicit, systematic and motivational; should address the individual student's specific weaknesses (e.g., word

attack, fluency or vocabulary); and materials should be at a student's instructional level and of high interest. Any intervention should be part of a broader educational program that addresses content learning as well as all component areas involved in literacy development.

Meeting the needs of high-achieving readers in all districts is also important. To further their literacy development, these students require appropriately challenging materials and activities. For example, Snow and her colleagues (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, 1991) studied a group of low-income students who did well in reading initially, but who tended to fall behind at upper grade levels, despite the fact that many were avid readers outside of school. The researchers concluded that a lack of sufficiently demanding course work and challenging reading in school was part of the problem for these students; although reading for enjoyment outside of school is certainly desirable, it does not substitute for appropriately challenging reading experiences in school.

CONCLUSION 13: School leaders play a very important role in advancing, monitoring and supporting literacy learning.

School leaders must understand the importance of literacy in all content areas and be knowledgeable about the instructional approaches and strategies necessary to advance student learning and literacy. Effective leaders establish school literacy goals and work to build a school culture that supports the development of literacy in students of all achievement levels. These leaders understand the literacy process; expect every teacher to incorporate literacy instruction in daily lessons; facilitate teachers' use of literacy instruction, modeling, and coaching; and celebrate teachers' and students' successes.

Ongoing support for teachers is critical. School leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to meet on a regular basis to examine student work, explore effective literacy instructional strategies, and study student assessment information in data teams. Additionally, in every content area class, school leaders should expect to observe evidence of the inclusion of appropriate content literacy strategies and differentiated materials. In the promotion of literacy, school leaders should allocate funds for instructional materials including technology as well as print resources, and they should support continuing, comprehensive staff development on literacy and literacy instruction.