

SECTION 3:

Student Competencies:

What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do

K-3

In kindergarten through Grade 3, the acquisition of word identification skills is central to students' overall growth in reading. Accurate, automatic word identification provides an essential foundation for reading comprehension at all grade levels. Reading materials at the primary level are generally within the students' background and language experiences, and the ideas are relatively simple and straightforward. However, comprehension of text is always an important component of reading instruction and the ultimate goal of reading. In the early grades, both oral comprehension of text (i.e., when teachers read a story aloud to students) and students' reading comprehension (i.e., of text they have read themselves) are stressed. Basic comprehension strategies, such as summarization, prediction, inference and using context to infer word meanings, are introduced in the context of both oral and reading comprehension activities. At these early grade levels, even struggling readers may be able to function fairly well in content areas such as science or social studies, because much of the content is orally presented.

4-12

In Grades 4-12, the sheer volume of reading dramatically increases. The reading materials become much more complex and ideas and vocabulary are often beyond the students' daily background and language experiences. Although word study — discussions of how to approach unknown multisyllabic words and words with multiple meanings, use of prefix/suffix/root word information to determine pronunciation, and use of reference materials such as glossaries — is still part of the literacy program, comprehension and vocabulary become the major focal point for normally achieving readers.

Reading development has been less intensively studied in older students than in younger students, and there is a need for more research focused specifically on reading comprehension (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). However, some clear conclusions are warranted from existing studies and from a consideration of academic expectations across the grade continuum. Basic comprehension strategies are just as applicable in the middle and upper grades as in the primary grades. As students advance in school, they are expected to apply these comprehension strategies to increasingly varied and sophisticated texts. For example, summarization is an important strategy at all grade levels, but at the primary level students apply summarization to relatively short, simple texts, whereas at later grade levels they must be able to summarize longer, more complex materials, including those from many different content areas.

There may also be some qualitative shifts in the comprehension strategies used by students at middle and upper grade levels. For instance, at the primary level students may be introduced to the idea that they should modify their approaches to reading to suit the purpose for reading (e.g., texts being read in preparation for a test on specific information usually need to be read more closely than texts being

scanned for relevant information to be used in a research paper). However, the application of these kinds of strategies becomes much more frequent and vital to success beyond the primary grades, when students have to read and write about an increasing range and volume of materials.

Furthermore, as students advance in school, they are required to read more critically and reflectively; to have a deeper understanding of character development, literary themes and literary devices; and to evaluate and integrate information from different and sometimes conflicting sources. These evolving demands are reflected in the kinds of literacy tasks that students are expected to accomplish. For example, on the third through eighth grade CMT, students read individual passages and answer a variety of questions about each passage; whereas on the 10th-grade CAPT, students read several different sources, take a stand on an issue, and integrate those sources into an argument, which is a more challenging task that not only requires many basic comprehension strategies, but also draws on more sophisticated strategies.

In addition, students develop in their thinking processes across the grade continuum. George and Lawrence (1982) identified six dimensions of cognitive growth that begin in the primary grades and develop throughout adolescence. These include the move (1) from concrete to abstract thinking, (2) from an egocentric to a social perspective, (3) from narrowly defined ideas about time and space to broader ideas, (4) from simplistic views of human motivation to a more complex understanding of people, (5) from reliance on simple maxims or guidelines to an internalized philosophy of morality, and (6) from simple concepts to higher-order conceptualizing (summarized in Fountas and Pinnell 2001, 4). These dimensions of cognitive growth are reflected in students' use of literacy strategies and their comprehension of reading materials.

One important influence on adolescents' cognitive and oral language development is literacy itself, including reading and writing done in school as well as out of school. For example, Stanovich and his colleagues (e.g., Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Stanovich and Cunningham 1993) have found that wide reading promotes not only students' background knowledge, but also their vocabulary development (because students are exposed to more unusual words in the context of reading than in the context of everyday listening activities) and spelling development (because wide reading exposes students to many different printed words). The causal relationships between literacy and oral language are bidirectional; good oral language abilities facilitate literacy development, but literacy activities also help to develop oral language abilities. Reading and writing influence a student's cognitive and language development at every level.

STUDENT LITERACY COMPETENCIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND ALL CONTENT AREAS

The literacy competencies that follow incorporate the conclusions of the Task Force about literacy development in older students. They reflect the strategies presented in *Connecticut's English Language Arts Curriculum Framework*, the research on core literacy strategies, and the expectations of the CMT and the CAPT. The competencies were also informed by the standards of other states, such as Indiana, Massachusetts and California, as well as by those of the American Diploma Project (see www.achieve.org).

These literacy competencies build upon the foundational competencies developed in the primary grades as outlined in *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement* for the following areas: (1) word identification, (2) fluent and accurate word identification in context, (3) comprehension, (4) spelling, and (5) writing (including mechanics and content aspects). They include *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement* competencies for Grade 3 to provide an equal interval size (Grades 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, 9/10 and 11/12) and a seamless transition from *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement*.

These literacy competencies are meant to guide school districts and individual teachers in determining the skills and abilities that are especially important to address at each grade level, as well as to guide schools of education in preparing both language-arts and content-area teachers. They are not intended to be checklists for evaluating individual students or a prescription for one particular instructional program or method.

The literacy competencies display a relatively greater emphasis on certain components of literacy, such as vocabulary, comprehension and writing, than on some of the basic components found in *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement*, such as word identification. The different emphases in the present document reflect the processes of reading development and increased grade expectations appropriate for readers, who meet grade-level expectations, from Grade 4 onward. (At any grade level, some students will be capable of far exceeding the specified competencies, and their instructional programs should enable them to do so.) However, struggling readers beyond Grade 3, including even some of those in high school, may require intensive interventions related to much more basic components of reading such as accuracy or fluency of word identification.

The percentage of adolescents who struggle with these more basic reading skills is not trivial. For example, Rasinski and his colleagues (Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, and Heim, 2005) found that more than 60 percent of ninth-graders in one large urban school could not meet *eighth grade* fluency norms, with fluency measured by the number of words students could read correctly per minute in text. (The researchers had to use eighth-grade norms because they could not find published norms for ninth grade.) Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between ninth-graders' rate of reading and their reading comprehension. Remediation of basic skills for students who require it is a key foundation for these students' continued literacy development.

GRADES 3-4

Word Identification Competencies:

- Knows sounds for a wide range of suffixes and prefixes, including those relevant to specific content areas
- Knows sounds for letter patterns common to multisyllable or low-frequency words (e.g., ch can say /sh/ as in *machinery* and /k/ as in *chemistry*, as well as /ch/ as in *chip*)
- Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode grade-appropriate unfamiliar words, including multisyllable words, and important content words
- Reads most common words automatically
- Uses context to accurately read words with more than one pronunciation (e.g., *an object* vs. *to object*)
- Has well-developed, accurate and generally automatic word identification skills

Competencies for Fluent and Accurate Word Identification in Context:

- Applies known decoding skills when reading in context
- Monitors comprehension and accuracy when reading in context and self-corrects errors
- Reads longer, more complex text and chapter books independently and silently
- Reads any grade-level text aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression

Comprehension Competencies:

- Answers literal and inferential comprehension questions about grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Applies a wide range of comprehension strategies (e.g., summarization, inferencing, prediction, activating prior knowledge, and generating questions) to grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that have been read and/or listened to
- Clearly identifies specific words or phrases causing comprehension difficulties
- Makes use of knowledge about text structure to aid comprehension
- Interprets fiction by discussing underlying theme or message and by making connections to background knowledge and other text
- Interprets nonfiction by distinguishing cause and effect, fact and opinion, main idea and supporting details
- Cites evidence from text to support conclusions
- Uses a glossary or index to locate information in a text
- Interprets graphic information in a text (e.g., charts, tables, diagrams)
- Identifies a variety of literary devices and conventions, including use of interesting word choice, humor, simile and personification
- Accesses, as needed, appropriate material on the Internet and other technologies to extend background knowledge or provide additional information

Vocabulary Competencies:

- Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary, including content area vocabulary
- Explains common homophones and homographs (e.g., *maid/made; to, two, too; pencil lead vs. to lead the way*)
- Identifies multiple meanings of common words, including meanings specific to various content areas (e.g., *product* in math)
- Infers word meanings from common roots, prefixes, suffixes and derivations
- Infers word meanings from context
- Recognizes pronoun referents in a text
- Uses resources to find word meanings in glossaries, dictionaries, etc.

Writing Competencies:

- Demonstrates the following spelling competencies:
 - Spells grade-appropriate words taught as part of the curriculum, including important content words

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- Spells words involving previously taught generalizations and spelling patterns
 - Spells common homophones correctly (e.g., *to, two, too*)
 - Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis in spelling grade-appropriate words, including important content words
 - Uses dictionaries and appropriate word lists as aids in spelling
 - Applies spelling knowledge in everyday writing tasks
 - Demonstrates the following basic mechanics/conventions of writing:
 - Use of apostrophe to show possession
 - Use of quotation marks
 - Correct capitalization of titles (of stories, books, etc.) and quotations
 - Indentation in paragraphing
 - Consistent use of lowercase for common nouns
 - Correct subject-verb agreement when the verb immediately follows the subject
 - Correct use of comparative and superlative
 - Use of complete and varied sentences in writing
 - Shows sensitivity to text structure in writing as well as reading (e.g., recognizes that a report is organized differently than a narrative)
 - Demonstrates a strong organizational strategy and/or sequencing in written work
 - Eliminates redundant words or phrases
 - Shows increasing use of formal language patterns in writing in place of informal or conversational language
 - Presents and discusses own work with other students and responds helpfully to other students' writing
 - With adult guidance, uses all aspects of a writing process in producing written compositions and reports, including planning, revision and editing of important pieces of work
 - Writes a fully developed narrative
 - Produces a variety of written work (e.g., literature response, reports, narratives)
 - Uses writing to explore ideas (e.g., quick writes, journal entries)

GRADES 5-6

Word Identification Competencies:

- Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode grade-appropriate unfamiliar words, including content words

Competencies for Fluent and Accurate Word Identification in Context:

- Reads grade-appropriate texts, including content textbooks, independently and silently
- Reads any grade-level text aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression

Comprehension Competencies:

- Answers literal and inferential comprehension questions about grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to

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- Applies a wide range of comprehension strategies (e.g., summarization, inferencing, prediction, activating prior knowledge and generating questions) to grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that he/she has read and/or listened to
 - Clarifies understanding of the text by identifying inconsistencies and ambiguities
 - Previews texts to determine text structure, vocabulary and concept difficulty
 - Uses appropriate rate of reading depending upon the purpose for reading, text difficulty and prior knowledge of the topic
 - Explains what makes a text engaging and appealing to a reader
 - Makes and supports judgments about the quality of a text
 - Identifies literary conventions and devices involving point of view, metaphor, imagery, onomatopoeia and style
 - Explains how and why literary conventions and devices contribute to the meaning of a text
 - Explains the effect of sound and structure in poetry
 - Reads and understands editorials
 - Reads and understands materials involving a range of everyday tasks, including bus or train schedules, step-by-step directions, recipes, catalogs, manuals and classified ads

Vocabulary Competencies:

- Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary, including content area vocabulary
- Explains less common homophones and homographs (e.g., *accept, except; affect, effect*)
- Identifies differences in connotations of grade-appropriate words (e.g., *miserly vs. thrifty*)
- Uses grade-appropriate words in correct contexts
- Infers word meanings from less common roots, prefixes, suffixes, and derivations (e.g., *auto = self, graph = writing*)
- Uses word origins to comprehend unfamiliar words, including words from content areas
- Recognizes and uses vocabulary highlighting strategies incorporated in informational texts
- Identifies and uses unique Internet features to locate meanings of unfamiliar words

Writing Competencies:

- Demonstrates the following spelling competencies:
 - Spells grade-appropriate words taught as part of the curriculum, including important content words
 - Spells many common homophones correctly (e.g., *its, it's; know, no; your, you're*)
 - Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis in spelling grade-appropriate words, including important content words
- Demonstrates the following basic mechanics/conventions of writing:
 - Capitalizes titles of people and names of organizations, nationalities, buildings, historical events
 - Uses a comma correctly before the conjunction in compound sentences
 - Maintains subject-verb agreement with intervening phrase (e.g., *The girls at the end of the hall were ...*)
 - Uses present, past, and future verb tenses correctly
 - Uses correct and unambiguous pronoun reference
 - Presents a clear main idea or topic in expository writing

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- Presents written ideas in logical order
 - Writes a fully developed expository piece of writing
 - Writes well-developed literature responses that support judgments through reference to the text and to prior knowledge
 - Uses some literary conventions and devices, such as metaphor and imagery
 - Writes poems that incorporate basic poetic techniques, such as alliteration, metaphor and imagery
 - Revises written work to eliminate extraneous or redundant information
 - Makes use of transition words in writing (e.g., *however, therefore*)
 - Uses planning, revision and editing processes in writing with some degree of independence
 - Provides constructive ideas for revision and editing to peers
 - Takes helpful notes in content areas
 - Writes for a specific audience or person
 - Uses technology when appropriate to prepare final products
 - Uses a spell check, grammar check and thesaurus correctly when preparing final products
 - Conducts multiple-step information searches using computer networks
 - Uses a variety of formatting changes correctly in preparing electronic documents (e.g., margins, tabs, font changes)

GRADES 7-8

Word Identification Competencies:

- Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode grade-appropriate unfamiliar words, including content words

Competencies for Fluent and Accurate Word Identification in Context:

- Reads grade-appropriate texts, including content textbooks, independently and silently
- Reads any grade-level text aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression

Comprehension Competencies:

- Answers literal and inferential comprehension questions about grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Applies a wide range of comprehension strategies (e.g., summarization, inferencing, prediction, activating prior knowledge and generating questions) to grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Analyzes a pair of texts (e.g., two articles, letters to the editor, books, etc.) with related topics or themes
- Identifies literary conventions and devices involving use of flashbacks, irony and satire
- Identifies changes or differences in tone in narratives
- Analyzes an author's use of literary conventions and devices
- Analyzes poetry in terms of meaning, sound, structure, and the author's use of literary conventions and devices

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- Analyzes an author's bias and how it influences meaning
 - Evaluates the credibility, accuracy and bias of a range of informational resources, including Internet sites and other technology resources

Vocabulary Competencies:

- Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary, including content area vocabulary
- Identifies differences in connotations of grade-appropriate words
- Uses grade-appropriate words in correct contexts
- Identifies meanings and origins of commonly used foreign words (e.g., *tsunami*, *salsa*)

Writing Competencies:

- Demonstrates the following spelling competencies:
 - Spells grade-appropriate words taught as part of the curriculum, including important content words
 - Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis in spelling grade-appropriate words, including important content words
- Demonstrates the following basic mechanics/conventions of writing:
 - Uses a comma correctly with an appositive, parenthetical expression or participial phrase
 - Uses semicolons correctly
 - Uses colons correctly
 - Uses simple and perfect verb tenses correctly
 - Uses commonly confused words correctly (e.g., *who/whom*; *good/well*)
 - Places modifiers correctly to convey desired meaning (e.g., *He left his coat, which was torn and dirty, on the floor* vs. *He left his coat on the floor, which was torn and dirty*)
 - Identifies active vs. passive voice and revises for active voice when appropriate
 - Demonstrates a consistent awareness of audience when writing and adjusts style and tone accordingly
 - Writes a fully developed persuasive piece of writing
 - Writes biographies, autobiographies, and short stories
 - Writes poems that incorporate a range of poetic techniques
 - Expands use of literary conventions and devices (e.g., use of flashbacks and irony)
 - Documents sources for reports and other similar types of writing in a bibliography
 - Uses a consistent format for bibliographic citations
 - Uses planning, revision and editing processes in writing independently
 - Effectively uses constructive feedback from adults and peers when planning, revising and editing written work
 - Develops simple databases and spreadsheets to manage information and prepare reports
 - Plans and conducts multiple-step information searches using computer networks
 - Uses a variety of formatting changes correctly in preparing electronic documents (e.g., margins, tabs, font changes)

GRADES 9-10

Word Identification Competencies:

- Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode grade-appropriate unfamiliar words, including content words

Competencies for Fluent and Accurate Word Identification in Context:

- Reads grade-appropriate texts, including content textbooks, independently and silently
- Reads any grade-appropriate text aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression

Comprehension Competencies:

- Answers literal and inferential comprehension questions about grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Applies a wide range of comprehension strategies (e.g., summarization, inferencing, prediction, activating prior knowledge and generating questions) to grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Makes perceptive connections between a work of literature and other texts and/or outside experiences
- Makes perceptive judgments about the literary quality of works of literature
- Analyzes an author's use of literary conventions and devices
- Identifies and explains the function of various features of dramatic literature, such as soliloquies, dialogues, and stage designs
- Draws conclusions about an author's purpose in including or omitting specific details in a written work
- Evaluates explicit and implicit information within a written work, including both fiction and nonfiction
- Explains and evaluates themes within a written work, including both fiction and nonfiction
- Supports opinions and judgments about a text, both fiction and nonfiction, with extensive examples from the text and/or outside experiences
- Demonstrates use of technology by following directions in technical manuals

Vocabulary Competencies:

- Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary, including content area vocabulary
- Identifies differences in connotations of grade-appropriate words
- Uses grade-appropriate words in correct contexts
- Identifies meanings and origins of commonly used foreign phrases (e.g., *per se*, *coup d'etat*)

Writing Competencies:

- Demonstrates the following spelling competencies:
 - Spells correctly grade-appropriate words taught as part of the curriculum, including important content words

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- Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis in spelling grade-appropriate words, including important content words
 - Demonstrates the following basic mechanics/conventions of writing:
 - Uses hyphens, dashes and ellipses correctly
 - Uses parallel language correctly
 - Uses correct subordination/coordination in word choice
 - Uses consistency of verb tense and number correctly
 - Integrates quotations and citations into a text while maintaining the flow of ideas
 - Evaluates and integrates multiple sources in planning a piece of writing
 - Writes a well-developed persuasive or expository piece of writing based on multiple sources
 - Writes perceptive critiques of literary works with extensive references to the text and/or outside experiences, including analyses of theme and the author's craft
 - Writes formal letters (e.g., business letters, letters to the editor or to a government official) using appropriate tone and style
 - Uses writing skills effectively across a wide range of tasks in all content areas
 - Uses presents written material using basic software programs (such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint) and graphics (such as charts, ratios and tables) to explain information and ideas best understood visually
 - Uses technology when appropriate for all aspects of creating, revising, editing and producing final versions of written work
 - Sends and receives electronic documents

GRADES 11 -12

Word Identification Competencies:

- Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode grade-appropriate unfamiliar words, including content words

Competencies for Fluent and Accurate Word Identification in Context:

- Reads grade-appropriate texts, including content textbooks, independently and silently
- Reads grade-appropriate texts aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression

Comprehension Competencies:

- Answers literal and inferential comprehension questions about grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Applies a wide range of comprehension strategies (e.g., summarization, inferencing, prediction, activating prior knowledge and generating questions) to grade-appropriate texts, including content texts, that she/he has read and/or listened to
- Analyzes the features and persuasive devices of different types of public documents, such as policy statements, speeches or debates
- Critiques the power and validity of arguments set forth in public documents
- Analyzes recognized works of literature from a variety of genres and traditions in terms of

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- theme, style and trends in different literary/historical periods
- Analyzes the ways that poets use literary devices such as imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sound to evoke emotion
 - Analyzes the way authors have used archetypes (models or patterns) drawn from myth and tradition
 - Analyzes the moral dilemmas in works of literature, as revealed by characters' motivation and behavior
 - Identifies and evaluates characteristics of subgenres, such as allegory, parody and pastoral pieces of work
 - Evaluates informational and technical texts for their clarity, coherence and visual appeal
 - Evaluates images and other special effects used by television, radio, film and the Internet for their ability to inform, persuade and entertain

Vocabulary Competencies:

- Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary, including content area vocabulary
- Identifies differences in connotations of grade-appropriate words
- Uses grade-appropriate words in correct contexts
- Applies knowledge of Greek, Latin and Anglo-Saxon roots and word parts to identify meaning
- Draw inferences about new words in the fields of science and math (*gene splicing, genetic engineering*)
- Identifies meanings of literary, classical and biblical allusions and of words derived from such allusions (e.g., *narcissistic*)

Writing Competencies:

- Consistently and independently demonstrates the following spelling competencies:
 - Spells correctly grade-appropriate words taught as part of the curriculum, including important content words
 - Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis in spelling grade-appropriate words, including important content words
- Consistently and independently produces writing that demonstrates correct use of mechanics and conventions of writing in capitalization, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure and paragraphing
- Consistently and independently applies appropriate manuscript conventions in producing written documents, including title page presentation, pagination, spacing, margins and integration of source and support material
- Consistently and independently revises and edits writing to highlight the individual voice, improve sentence variety and style, and enhance subtlety of meaning and tone in ways consistent with the purpose, audience and form of writing
- Writes job applications and resumes that follow appropriate tone and style