SECTION 4:
Teacher Competencies:
What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do

Effective teachers in Grades 4-12 in all content areas possess a body of knowledge about literacy in their domains. They are the "learning experts" in their fields and are the best teachers of how to read and write about content involving those fields. They have mastered literacy-related strategies and skills in their own schooling. They understand how texts are organized, which concepts and vocabulary are critical, and how to evaluate key ideas in their fields. They have knowledge about literacy development and why students may experience difficulties in reading or writing. They bring this expertise to their analysis of student strengths and needs, content objectives, and the design of lessons that promote literacy as well content learning.

Effective teachers in all content areas understand that three elements — the reader, the text and the learning situation — interact to build comprehension. Therefore, they understand, design, implement and assess instruction based on reader characteristics, text features, and the learning atmosphere and expectations they create. The following teacher competencies reflect these understandings and skills.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS UNDERSTAND READER AND WRITER CHARACTERISTICS.

They understand how students':
- Oral language abilities affect their reading and writing performance
- Overall levels of prior knowledge and experience influence their comprehension of a text
- Specific knowledge of a particular subject influences their comprehension of a text
- Vocabulary knowledge influences their comprehension of a text
- Word identification accuracy and fluency influence the comprehension of a text
- Knowledge of spelling and conventions of writing may influence their performance on writing tasks
- Use of writing strategies, such as planning, revising, and editing processes, may influence their performance on writing tasks
- Motivation influences their approach to various literacy tasks
- Unique strengths and needs — English language learners, learners with language and learning disabilities, learners with different dialects, high-achieving learners — may influence their performance on various literacy tasks
- Cultural heritage affects students' dispositions, attitudes and approaches to learning
- Instructional needs require adjustments to be made, including the use of multiple instructional texts to meet the literacy and content learning needs of a wide range of learners
- Instructional needs require adjustments to be made based on ongoing assessments that help teachers understand reader/writer characteristics and progress

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THE FEATURES OF THE TEXTS THEY SELECT TO SUPPORT CONTENT LEARNING, INCLUDING TECHNOLOGY, AS WELL AS CONVENTIONAL PRINT RESOURCES.

They understand how:
- To evaluate the reading difficulty level of a text and choose material that matches their students' reading levels
- To analyze and evaluate a text for fairness and possible bias
- To analyze a text's organization of ideas and clarity of concept presentation
- The conceptual and vocabulary load of a text may affect comprehension
- The linguistic complexity of a text (e.g., the use of many long, complex sentences) may affect comprehension
- Text features, such as headings, summaries, vocabulary highlights, etc., support student learning
- To plan and implement instruction that recognizes and adjusts for text difficulties similarities and differences between technological resources and conventional print materials

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THE LEARNING CONTEXT AND THEIR ROLE IN CREATING A SUPPORTIVE LITERACY-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

- They understand the importance of "active construction of meaning."
- They set academic expectations and purposes for literacy assignments.
- They establish an accepting, safe climate for inquiry.
- They use a variety of grouping patterns to assure student involvement in the learning process.
- They select materials that meet academic content criteria and match their students' literacy levels.
- They collaborate with parents, colleagues in school and in other community agencies, such as the public library, to expand the supportive literacy context to settings beyond the individual classroom.
- They understand the importance of planning, revision and editing processes, and of constructive feedback from the teacher and peers in developing students' writing.
- They recognize the importance of technological resources in developing students' literacy and content learning.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THE READING AND WRITING PROCESSES AND CAN TEACH IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF LITERACY TO A WIDE RANGE OF STUDENTS.

- They can effectively model, teach and scaffold comprehension strategies in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and presenting, including:
  – Teaching narrative, informational and persuasive text structures
  – Building students' background knowledge
  – Showing students how to make connections between texts and their background knowledge
  – Modeling and using comprehension strategies such as summarizing, inferring, self-questioning, imaging, evaluating ideas, etc.

- Teaching explicitly the vocabulary critical for the understanding of text
- Teaching how to interpret words with idioms and multiple meanings
- Demonstrating how to use text features (headings, summaries, bolded words, etc.) to construct meaning
- Scaffolding questions that foster discussion, elaboration and active construction of meaning
- Demonstrating how to monitor comprehension and apply "fix-up" strategies when comprehension fails
- They can effectively teach important vocabulary by:
  - Introducing new words and helping students relate new vocabulary to their background knowledge
  - Teaching how to use prefixes, suffixes and root words to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word
  - Demonstrating personal interest in new words and encourage students to be active "word collectors"
  - Teaching how to use graphic and visual aids to assist in determining the meaning of a particular word
- They can effectively build accurate, fluent word identification in context by:
  - Teaching and reinforcing the use of relevant word families
  - Encouraging students to apply known decoding skills when reading in context
  - Providing students with reading materials at an appropriate level of difficulty
  - Using specific activities to promote fluency development, such as repeated readings
- They can teach writing effectively by:
  - Demonstrating the connections between reading and writing
  - Guiding students through the stages of a writing process with planning, composing, revising and editing to improve written products
  - Providing appropriate scaffolding and constructive feedback to students
  - Showing students how to write for varied purposes and audiences
  - Teaching students how to write essays using informational, narrative, expository, persuasive and other organizational patterns
  - Requiring the use of standard, formal English language patterns in students' formal writing
  - Explicitly teaching and modeling spelling and conventions of writing (grammar, usage and mechanics)
  - Drawing students' attention to morphological and structural relationships among words as an aid to spelling
  - Encouraging application of spelling knowledge and basic writing conventions to everyday writing as well as to formal writing products
  - Incorporating various features of word processing and technology into written assignments

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS INTEGRATE A WIDE VARIETY OF MATERIALS IN THEIR INSTRUCTION.

- They provide a range of fictional texts (anthologies, novels, novellas, short stories, plays, poetry, movies), such as mystery, suspense/thrillers, horror, romance, historical fiction, science fiction/ fantasy, myths/legends/fairy tales, westerns and humor.
- They provide a range of primary and secondary nonfiction texts, such as newspaper, magazine and online articles; journals; speeches; lectures; reports; summaries; interviews; editorials; essays; memos; memoirs; letters; reviews; government documents; trade, workplace and consumer materials; maps; photographs; drawings; charts; and documentaries.
- They provide a range of texts that consider diversity, such as age, ethnicity, race, family background, gender, health, lifestyle, nationality, native language, physical appearance, profession, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disabilities, and parental status.
- They provide a range of texts for students of varying reading levels (special education, ELL, gifted and talented) and interests, skills and talents.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FOSTER MOTIVATION TO READ AND WRITE INDEPENDENTLY.

- They model enthusiasm for reading and writing.
- They give students choices of reading materials and writing assignments related to their content areas.
- They ensure reading materials are at the student's independent or instructional level.
- They provide clear, specific, constructive feedback to student work.
- They encourage students to set appropriate goals for their own learning and help students to achieve those goals.