



Adolescent Literacy: School-Wide Literacy Planning **Joan Sedita**

There has been a growing interest in recent years in adolescent literacy, especially as Americans become more concerned about the economic and civic health of the nation. Literacy skills are necessary more than ever to succeed in college and work, as well as to manage the everyday life demands of an increasingly more complex society and world economy. The best example of this focus is the tag line “college and career ready” of the Common Core literacy standards

More middle and high schools are beginning to acknowledge that they must develop a school-wide approach to teaching literacy skills that includes two tiers of instruction. The first tier is content literacy instruction for all students that is delivered in regular classes including history, science, math and English language arts. The second is literacy instruction for struggling readers that is delivered partly in regular content classes, and partly in intervention settings (including extended English/language arts blocks and individual/small group settings).

A school-wide approach to literacy instruction must involve all teachers in the delivery of reading and writing instruction, including regular content teachers and staff who work with special populations. This is a major tenet of the Common Core literacy standards. A successful school-wide plan must also have strong, committed leadership that provides ongoing support for literacy instruction.

A Literacy Planning Model

I have worked with numerous schools and districts to help develop literacy plans using a planning model that addresses six components:

1. Establishment of a literacy planning team
2. Assessment planning for screening, guiding instruction and progress monitoring
3. Literacy instruction in the content classroom
4. Interventions for struggling readers that address phonics, word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills
5. Flexible scheduling to allow for grouping based on instructional needs
6. Professional development planning

A key first step is to assemble a literacy planning team that is representative of the major stakeholders who will have to implement the plan. Members of the team should include teachers of all subject areas, interventionists, parents, reading specialists, and administrators. It is important to recognize that literacy planning is a process, not an event. Like most school-wide initiatives, developing and executing a literacy plan will take time and sustained effort; literacy planning teams should be prepared for the process to take 1–3 years.

Once a planning team is assembled, the first step is to take stock of what is already in place in relation to the six components. This includes gathering information that answers questions such as:

- What assessments are currently used to identify good and struggling readers?
- What assessments are used to identify specific needs of individual struggling readers? What reading instruction is already taking place in content classrooms, and what professional development do content teachers and others need to effectively address all reading components?

- What reading interventions and supplemental reading programs are currently offered for struggling readers?
- What information and professional development do the teachers of struggling readers need?
- Is the scheduling process flexible enough to accommodate different grouping patterns for struggling readers?

After information has been collected to answer these questions, the planning team can set and prioritize goals and action steps for each of the six components. Some action steps are like low-hanging fruit – easy to accomplish quickly and with minimal expense. Some action steps will take longer to address. A concrete plan for addressing the action steps during the upcoming year or two is essential to keep the process going.

A literacy assessment plan is key to successfully implementing a school-wide literacy plan. Screening literacy assessments provide the data to determine which students are struggling, diagnostic assessments help determine why they struggle, and progress monitoring assessments determine if instruction is working in both content classrooms (Tier I) and with supplemental instruction (Tier II).

The six planning components are interrelated. Action steps for one component need to be related to action steps for the other components. For example, decisions about both tiers of instruction should be based on assessment data, along with how to group students and schedule supplemental instruction. Plans for professional development should be made based on the needs of teachers who will be embedding literacy into content teachers, and on the areas of intervention that will be addressed by specialists.

I have written about adolescent literacy and provided more details about literacy planning and literacy assessment models in chapter 17 of *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*, 3rd Edition (2011, Paul H. Brookes Publishing). This chapter can be accessed at my website www.keystoliteracy.com.

Middle and high school administrators must make the acquisition of literacy skills a priority and provide adequate time in the school schedule for reading and writing instruction. They must also be willing to use flexible grouping patterns when scheduling students in order to implement a two-tiered model for delivering reading instruction in both content classes and intervention settings. Professional development for content teachers and specialists is also essential.

The time, effort, and expertise necessary to develop a school-wide plan for providing effective literacy instruction to all students present a challenge for most middle and high schools. The challenge is worth taking – there is an urgent need to improve the reading, writing and comprehension skills of middle and high school students.

Joan Sedita is founding partner of Keys to Literacy, a literacy professional development organization that focuses on adolescent literacy. www.keystoliteracy.com

Reference

Sedita, J. (2011). Adolescent literacy: Addressing the needs of students in grades 4-12. In J.R. Birsh (Ed). *Multisensory teaching of basic language skills*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.