

Reading Philosophy Statement

One purpose of this document is to summarize the reading philosophy of the Shoreline School District; a secondary purpose is to outline in more detail the components of a balanced reading program; finally, this document is intended to be used as a standard for adopting reading materials.

Philosophy

The beliefs and practices underlying the teaching of reading in the Shoreline School District are guided by the accumulated findings of educational research. Reading is the active, cognitive process of making meaning from print. The goal of reading is to comprehend and apply what is read to real-world experiences. The acquisition of reading skills and strategies is developmental, influenced by an individual student's experiences of and facility with the alphabetic principle, comprehension strategies and motivation.

Reading instruction is multi-dimensional: first, it provides the foundation skills and strategies necessary to attain reading competence; secondly, it extends student learning in order to meet the Essential Academic Learning Requirements for Washington State; and finally, it ensures that students develop an appreciation and enjoyment of reading that will last throughout their lives. This is best achieved through a balanced literacy program that combines reading, writing, listening and oral language.

Components of a Balanced Literacy Program

A balanced literacy program incorporates a variety of reading instructional approaches: reading aloud, shared, guided and independent reading. Reading is taught as a process that includes relevant literacy experiences before, during, and after reading. Effective teaching of reading also incorporates a combination of whole class and small group instruction at the students' appropriate level. When possible, reading is connected to written and oral language and is integrated into other content areas.

Oral Language:

Oral language is at the heart of meaning making. Experiences with rich vocabulary and language promote reading comprehension. Children arrive at school with varying degrees of exposure to written and oral language. Therefore, opportunities for discussing, reflecting, listening and questioning in conjunction with reading and writing are fundamental.

Text Forms and Features:

In order to read effectively, children must develop the understanding that text takes varied forms for different purposes. Effective readers recognize these fundamental concepts of print and know how to use specific textual features to gain meaning. This is achieved through a combination of exposure to and instruction in a wide variety of text forms in a print rich environment. The materials provided must meet the range of reading levels and student diversity always present in any classroom. Whenever possible, nonfiction reading materials should be integrated into content areas.

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics:

Phonemic Awareness (the ability to hear and distinguish sounds and phonemes in spoken words) is an integral part of emergent reading instruction. The ability to hear sounds is a precursor for learning phonics.

Phonics is the ability to connect the sounds of letters with their written symbols (also known as sound/symbol correspondence). This is necessary for both reading and writing. Since the English language is represented alphabetically, an understanding of sound-symbol relationships, both regular and irregular, is necessary for accurate word identification.

Fluency:

Proficient readers are able to identify words accurately and rapidly so that attention is directed at the meaning of text. Repeated reading is critical for developing fluency, and time must be given for the rehearsal of reading and comprehension strategies.

Comprehension:

Comprehension, gaining meaning from text, is the purpose of reading. Effective readers gain comprehension by:

- interacting with text by using a variety of strategies which take place before, during, and after reading
- using three interactive cueing systems when reading: phonics, language structure and context
- demonstrating critical thinking skills by comprehending and synthesizing at the literal, inferential and evaluative levels
- connecting meaning to their prior knowledge and experiences
- applying strategies to read a variety of texts
- communicating responses to others

Vocabulary:

Vocabulary knowledge is a critical factor of reading comprehension. Most students acquire vocabulary knowledge indirectly through oral language, listening to texts read aloud, and extensive reading on their own. Effective vocabulary instruction should include direct instruction of individual words and word-learning strategies, such as using word parts, context clues, dictionaries, and other reference materials. Students learn new words best when they encounter them often, in many different contexts, and they are actively engaged in the learning.

Engagement and Interest:

Engagement in reading is motivated by personal interest in different forms of literature. Students need immersion in a variety of genres, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. In addition to instruction at their levels, children need opportunities to choose books of interest to read independently.

Assessment and Instruction:

Reading instruction should be informed by on-going assessment and serve several purposes. First of all, to continually monitor and diagnose progress and adjust instruction to meet student needs; secondly, to evaluate student achievement of the Shoreline Essential Learnings in reading; and finally, to evaluate student competency and program effectiveness in relation to the Washington State Reading Standards. As appropriate, students need to be actively involved in the evaluation process.

The Reading Environment:

Reading and literacy begin at home. A home environment that values literacy will help ensure reading success in school. Additionally, the school culture should value and promote literacy. The classroom environment, teacher expertise, instructional time and materials must reflect these values.

Struggling Readers:

Shoreline is committed to the success of all students. Current research and state assessments indicate that students not meeting standard in reading require appropriate, specialized instruction in order to be successful readers. Effective reading instruction for struggling readers must be differentiated and include intensive, systematic, explicit instruction and modeling in small groups, based on the needs and skill levels of students. Materials available to students should be motivating, at the appropriate readability level, and culturally relevant. Ongoing training in reading and differentiated instruction for reading teachers, content area teachers, and classroom teachers is an essential part of the district reading program.

Summary Statement

The process of learning to read should be motivating, captivating, enjoyable, and rewarding, so as to ensure that students will continue to read for the rest of their lives.