

SUBJECT: 6-8 READING AND LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM UPDATE**Overview**

The Reading Learning Team comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, and Board of Education Members, formed in the fall of the 2003-2004 school year and developed a set of recommendations which have guided all components of professional development in reading for grades K-8. In 2007, after a successful pilot by the Reading Implementation Team (RIT) members, all K-5 classroom, special education, and gifted teachers completed training with our consultants.

In the summer of 2006 and throughout the last school year, language arts, special education, and ELL teachers at OOJH received professional development with consultant Cathie Elsbree, focusing on the six strategies research has revealed are essential to proficient reading. Teachers learned how to select appropriate reading materials for novel study and independent reading in grades 6-8 using lexile scores from the MAP assessment. “Reading Actively” assessments were developed and utilized to evaluate the understanding of each student in relation to the six comprehension strategies. At OOJH, pre- and post tests on each strategy were administered to assess growth and inform instruction. The remedial Reading and Math Intervention (RMI) program assisted students needing additional support. With this foundation, the 2007-2008 staff development program has focused on integrating these strategies and assessments throughout the curriculum to form a complete language arts program.

2007-2008 Curriculum Development

This school year, teaching to higher levels on the strategy continuum, using multiple data points to inform instruction, and incorporating reading skills into a comprehensive language arts program has been at the center of our work with consultant Cathie Elsbree. Staff development in writing has focused on the development of “proof cycles” and adding “voice” to student essays. The “proof cycle” requires students to justify their answers with text examples and explain why their ideas are important, while adding “voice” to an essay improves the style and distinctiveness of written work.

Cathie Elsbree has provided demonstration lessons as well as direct, individualized support and guidance to classroom teachers. “Reading Actively” assessments, which measure the ability of the student to use more advanced comprehension strategies, have been coupled with MAP and ISAT data to inform instruction. Latin and Greek roots have been highlighted to improve word analysis skills. Literary terms have received additional attention. Specific novels have been selected by teachers to match the lexile levels revealed by MAP scores throughout the year, and instructional planning using these differentiated lexile levels is scheduled for later this spring. Special education teachers have incorporated a “guided reading” component, targeting small group instruction at the student’s reading level.

Curriculum mapping is also being targeted in this second semester. Each unit in the curriculum is being reviewed and organized to ensure alignment with the Illinois Standards including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In sixth grade, integration of language arts and social studies has become seamless, and elements of reading and writing are extending to science as well. In grades seven and eight, Cathie Elsbree has met with science and social studies teachers to discuss use of the “proof cycle” in students’ written responses.

Summary

During the past two years, the revision and implementation of the reading and language arts curriculum has been a primary focus of professional development efforts throughout the district. Accompanying the revisions has been a significant shift in theoretical foundation, teaching strategies, and student assessment. Some faculty have described the events of our professional development as follows, “We have shifted our craft from assigning projects to truly modeling and teaching the skills the students are expected to develop and are carefully monitoring their progress to this end.” These significant changes are still in their initial stages and will require additional years of reinforcement and reflection which will be provided by the department chair and periodic use of outside consultants, but most importantly, the teachers are now working as a professional learning community to analyze lessons and student work.