

# Literacy Program Evaluation Report to the Board of Education May 10, 2010

## I. Introduction

### A. Title/Topic – Literacy Program Evaluation

The purpose of this presentation is to review *best practices in literacy program evaluation in public schools* and use this knowledge to consider an appropriate approach that can be implemented by Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) to evaluate the district's literacy program. The recommended steps to evaluation are derived from scholarly journal articles, reports from reputed educational policy organizations, government-sponsored research, and interviews with public school districts.

At the December 14, 2009 Board of Education meeting the following motion was passed.

"Direct the administration to evaluate district reading programs, which could include development of additional interventions for students below proficiency in elementary schools."

### B. Presenters

Susan Ablanalp, Assistant Superintendent – Elementary  
Kurt Kiefer – Chief Information Officer  
Pam Nash, Assistant Superintendent – Secondary  
Lisa Wachtel, Teaching & Learning Executive Director

- C. Background - This report is in response to Board directive requesting that administration perform a reading program evaluation. The administration recommended an approach that began with a summary of how such evaluations have been conducted elsewhere across the country. The Hanover Research Council (HRC) was retained to conduct that survey of evaluation studies.

Based on HRC's analysis, there is no standard approach to evaluating literacy programs although there are general methodologies used. It is up to individual school districts to determine the best strategy and processes for evaluation. To arrive at appropriate conclusions, a district must look at its literacy programs through an outcomes-based lens as systems that have inputs, activities/processes, outputs, and outcomes. Research indicates the steps that a district should follow to carry out an effective, practical evaluation. The literature recommends an evaluation process comprising the setting of standards as a foundation, establishment of a formal committee to oversee the process, and methods of collecting and analyzing of data. Key to the process is having decision makers clearly define the essential questions which are to be answered in conjunction with the evaluation so they may take specific actions based on the results of the study.

- D. Action Requested - The BOE is requested to consider the literacy program evaluation process reviewed in this presentation as one that could help shape future policy of evaluating MMSD reading programs.

## II. Summary of Current Information

A. Synthesis of Topic - A district should first make decisions on some definitions to guide its approach to the evaluation, including what 'reading' means and the objectives of the schools concerning reading. Research suggests that a comprehensive reading program measures progress in five essential components:

- Phonemic awareness – The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words in order to relate speech sounds.
- Phonics – Understanding how letters and sounds relate to print.
- Reading fluency – Smooth, accurate and expressive reading.
- Vocabulary – The ability to grasp the meaning of words and concepts as well as strategies to learn new words.
- Comprehension – Understanding and communicating the meaning of all kinds of printed materials.

Further, effective program evaluating also requires an understanding of the elements of successful reading programs, including:

- Good leadership and organization;
- Parental and community involvement;
- Effective intervention strategies;
- Adequate time allotted to reading;
- Assessments based on multiple measures; and
- Thorough professional development.

The essential first step to a literacy program evaluation is to clearly define the research objectives and questions which decision makers consider most important for the study to address. Once these objectives and questions are defined then approaches and methodologies can be determined. Improperly defined research questions risk having the results of the study not useful for decision makers. Examples of such questions may include, but would not be limited to:

- How has the literacy program improved student learning in regard to reading achievement scores?
- How extensively and consistently do teachers use best instructional practices in literacy? How can the District best use professional development and other means to extend the use of best practices across all schools and classrooms?
- What do principals and teachers consider the highest priorities of the District in support of literacy practices within schools and classrooms?
- What specific interventions have improved significantly student reading achievement performance? How much have they improved achievement?
- Is reading achievement performance uniformly improved by certain literacy interventions or does it vary by specific subgroups of students? If not uniform, what factors, including specific instructional practices, affect this?
- Is student reading achievement performance improved consistently across all schools and classrooms or does improvement occur inconsistently across schools and classrooms? If not uniform, what factors, including specific instructional practices, affect this?
- How much do we spend on our literacy program efforts annually? In what areas are expenses incurred?

- How cost-effective are the current literacy interventions used in terms of student reading achievement scores?
- Are there differences in the effectiveness/cost-effectiveness of specific literacy interventions?
- What factors contribute to the some interventions being more or less effective/cost-effective?
- How effective is the District at bringing effective/cost-effective interventions to scale across all schools? What factors contribute to this? What factors create barriers to this?

To build a sufficient knowledge base to guide the evaluation process, a district may establish an appropriate group of individuals to lead the literacy evaluation study initiative. This “literacy committee” should have members with clearly defined roles and be tasked with organizing and directing the monitoring efforts of the program evaluation.

The committee may wish to identify the external factors that affect the success of the literacy program such as students’ cultural backgrounds, second-language learning, socioeconomic status, and special needs. Focus questions should then be developed by a literacy committee in conjunction with district teachers before the formal monitoring process begins. These questions would be reviewed and approved by the Board of Education.

To evaluate the literacy program, the literacy committee would consider collecting data from teachers and students in the form of test results as well as alternative formative assessments that measure students’ reading progress. Data may also be collected from other stakeholders such as teachers, principals, program support staff, parents, and students in the form of focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires to determine strengths and weaknesses of the literacy program and instructional effectiveness.

After collecting the data, the literacy committee, in conjunction with District research staff, would then analyze the data to determine patterns, trends, and areas of strength and weakness of the literacy program. The literacy committee would also compare data from the other various sources included in the study and try to formulate conclusions, such as possible causes or reasons for students’ performance. The literacy committee would then organize it in a clear report format for the Board of Education to review.

**B. Recommendations – The administration recommends the following steps be taken to conduct a literacy program evaluation:**

- Define scope of the literacy program evaluation with the Board of Education (April/May 2010)
- Develop an advisory group for the evaluation study (May 2010)
- Review scope with advisory group and build knowledge base (May 2010)
- Recommend specific evaluation approaches and methods in alignment with the scope and validate with Board of Education (June 2010)
- Determine which tasks can be performed internally and which should be conducted by external parties (June 2010)
- Complete request for proposal (RFP) process, as needed, receive Board of Education Approval (June-August 2010)
- Conduct evaluation study (September-November 2010)
- On-going review by advisory group, reporting to the Board of Education on progress (May-November 2010)
- Develop final report for Board of Education, actions taken (January/February 2011)

The literacy advisory committee includes broad pre K-12 district-wide representation. The purpose of the literacy advisory committee is to research, develop and refine an articulated

continuum of curricula, assessment and literacy interventions. Membership includes: Assistant Superintendents; Executive Director of Curriculum & Assessment; Director of Title Programs; Research & Evaluation staff; ESL Program Support Teacher; Bilingual/Dual Immersion Coordinator; Special Education Program Support Teacher; Talented and Gifted Instructional Resource Teacher; Reading Recovery Teacher Leader; Literacy Instructional Resource Teachers; elementary, middle and high principals and school-based leaders; family; student; and higher education representation.

A particular focus of the literacy advisory committee in 2010-11 is to review literature and data on pre-K- 12 intervention strategies and make recommendations for implementation. In consultation with external experts, the committee will review interventions using higher education and government sources such as the National RtI Center (<http://www.rti4success.org/>); What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>); Cornerstone Literacy Project (<http://www.rti4success.org/>); and the Teacher's College Reading & Writing Project (<http://www.rti4success.org/>).

It is recommended that existing statistical analyses be leveraged for any literacy evaluation study. Specifically, it is recommended that the value added analysis used in conjunction with the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) be used as part of the study. This analysis would take the existing school level analysis and add to it classroom level as well. From those results we would determine if there were schools or classrooms beating the odds and conduct follow up using such things as interviews, focus groups and surveys to attempt to understand why differences across schools and classroom occur.

Another overriding portion of the evaluation is to conduct a program audit and curriculum review. This is a standard methodology and there are several organizations who routinely perform these services. The exact specifications of the review would be driven by the key questions identified by the literacy committee and approved by the Board of Education.

- C. Supporting Detail - See full HRC research report, *Best Practices in Literacy Program Evaluation*, prepared for MMSD for further details of the information summarized above. References cited in the HRC report are included in Section IV of this document for your convenience.

### III. Implications

- A. Budget – The HRC study was not successful in determining specific costs for conducting a literacy program evaluation student as respondents did not offer that information. However, one estimate has been previously provided by a consulting firm which conducts curriculum program reviews that incorporates many of the elements described in this recommendation. The estimate for that work was roughly \$100,000.
- B. Strategic Plan – The strategic plan calls for rigorous evaluation of programs, services and personnel through a collaborative, data-driven process. It also calls for conducting value added analysis in appropriate content areas including reading and to correlate these results with best instructional practices and professional development strategies.
- C. Equity Policy – This evaluation addresses the explicit assumption defined in BOE Policy 9001 - Schools will be excellent only when students of all economic and demographic groups are achieving at high levels. Further, the evaluation aligns with this goal within BOE Policy 9001 - The district will eliminate gaps in access, opportunities, and achievement by recognizing and addressing historic and contemporary inequalities
- D. Implications for other aspects of the organization - If implemented, the methodology for evaluating a literacy program as recommended by current research would involve stakeholders at every level. A literacy committee (as defined in Section III) typically is composed of teachers,

principals, central office staff, parents, and a variety of experts. Aside from the committee:

- Parents play a supportive reading role in the home;
- Teachers collect data on student performance and provide feedback on the reading program and satisfaction with professional development;
- Principals observe teachers' methods in the classroom, lead the decision-making process, and communicate the findings of the evaluation; and
- Literacy and special education experts such as reading coaches guide teachers in proper data collecting and analyzing.

It is likely that staff from both Teaching & Learning (C&A) and Research & Evaluation would focus significant amounts of time on this effort over the period of the study. How much time would vary based on the actual study methods selected. For planning purposes this could result in between 10 to 50 percent of the time available for select staff members. Using the literacy committee approach would include time for both teachers and principals as participants as well. While some tasks might be conducted during after school hours it is likely that some amount of school day release time would be needed. In addition, if cost-effective is an objective of the study time would be required of the Finance and Accounting division staff as well.

#### IV. Supporting Documentation

- The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), one of the ten regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education (the work of which is conducted by Learning Point Associates), has produced frequently cited materials on the issue of monitoring a school literacy program, including:
  - Carnahan, Danielle, and Jeri Levesque. "Stepping stones to evaluating your own school literacy program." Learning Point Associates, 2005  
<http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/literacy/steppingstones.pdf>
  - Foertsch, Mary. "A Study of reading practices, instruction, and achievement in District 31 schools." NCREL, 2001 <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/liread.pdf>
  - Foertsch, Mary, and Debra Johnson. "Critical Issue: Monitoring the School Literacy Program." NCREL, 2000  
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li700.htm>
- Other helpful resources for literacy program evaluating:
  - Alliance for Excellent Education. "How to know a good adolescent literacy program when you see one: Quality criteria to consider." Issue Brief, May 2004  
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/Criteria%20for%20Adolescent%20Literacy%20Programs.pdf>
  - Biancarosa, Gina, and Catherine Snow. "Reading next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE), 2006  
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf>
  - Florida Center for Reading Research. "Guidelines to Review Comprehensive Core Reading Programs." n.d. <http://www.fcrr.org/fccrreports/guides/CCRP.pdf>
  - Frey, Bruce B., et. al. "Balanced literacy in an urban school district." The Journal of Educational Research (Vol. 98, No. 5), p272-280, May/June 2005. MasterFILE Premier  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,cpid&custid=s4132146&db=f5h&AN=22826736&loginpage=cpidlogin.asp?custid=s4132146&site=ehost-live>
  - Hawaii State Department of Education. "Literacy for Learning." Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Student Support, April 2009  
[http://hawaiiidoeliteracy.pbworks.com/f/Literacy\\_for\\_Learning\\_2.pdf](http://hawaiiidoeliteracy.pbworks.com/f/Literacy_for_Learning_2.pdf)

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<http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/Magda/My%20Research%20Library/Evaluation/A%20Basic%20Guide%20to%20Program%20Evaluation.pdf>
- Mitchell, Stephanie, and Nancy Wile. "2001 Literacy Program Evaluation: A Report of the Evaluation of Literacy Programs in Elementary and Middle Schools." Research and Evaluation Dept., Portland Public Schools [Oregon], March 2002. ERIC  
[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1a/36/cb.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/36/cb.pdf)
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction." Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000  
[http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/upload/smallbook\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/upload/smallbook_pdf.pdf)
- Pearson, P. David, et. al. "The CIERA school change project: Supporting schools as they implement home-grown reading reform." Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, June 13, 2002  
<http://www.ciera.org/library/reports/inquiry-2/2-016/2-016a.pdf>
- Taylor-Powell, E., S. Steele, and M. Douglass. "Planning a program evaluation." The Learning Store, University of Wisconsin-Extension, January 2006  
<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/G3658-1W.PDF>