

November 21, 2023

Illinois State Board of Education
Board Members
100 N. 1st St.
Springfield, IL 62777



Re: DRAFT 2 of Literacy Plan

Dear Board Members:

The Illinois Early Literacy Coalition commends you on the leadership you have demonstrated in getting to this much-improved second draft of the statewide literacy plan. Your team has clearly invited, listened to, and incorporated much public feedback into this version.

Our coalition consists of hundreds of parents, educators, and literacy advocates who believe every student deserves access to high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction that prepares them for a successful future. We believe literacy is not just one of many things that a public education provides – but it is the single most important thing, a civil right to which every student is entitled.

This memo offers high level comments about four areas we hope you will strengthen: (1) vision and purpose, (2) educator preparation program accountability, (3) screening and assessment practices, and (4) support for students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities. Then, it highlights many positive changes that we appreciate in this draft, along with some constructive suggestions for improvement. Next, we include recommendations related to implementation of the plan. Finally, we conclude with a section offering specific line edits throughout the document.

FOUR BIG AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Make clear in your vision that this plan is a call to action you are leading.

As written, some stakeholders may not understand this plan is a call to action. As the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCCSO) has stated, “...state chiefs play an influential role in setting their state’s education policy agenda by defining the reading challenge their state faces.” **We urge you to more clearly articulate Illinois’ current challenge and the urgency to move forward a coherent statewide literacy vision that aligns every layer of Illinois’ education ecosystem.** We suggest adding this language to page 3 of the plan:

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) believes literacy reform is an urgent priority that will improve statewide literacy achievement. The Illinois State Legislature has passed a mandate that we create a plan to close the gap between current practice and the strong evidence base about what constitutes high-quality reading instruction. This Comprehensive Literacy Plan serves as a roadmap to guide and unify literacy reform efforts across the state.

The reflection questions for state leaders (page 75) suggest the role that ISBE must play: articulating a vision for high-quality instruction; advocating for and allocating funding; building state-wide capacity; tracking and assessing performance; ensuring high-quality teacher preparation and professional development; and addressing the issue of equity. Though other state officials have supporting roles in state literacy leadership, you play the critical state leadership role, so we suggest articulating that role in this plan to comprehensive literacy instruction statewide.

Hold educator preparation programs accountable.

ISBE has the power to set standards for, approve, and regularly re-authorize educator preparation programs. Yet, you write:

“[w]hile we may not directly oversee educator preparation programs in colleges and universities, we recognize the crucial role these institutions play in shaping the educators who will work in our elementary and secondary schools. Our commitment is to collaborate and provide guidance to ensure that the preparation of future educators aligns with our state’s literacy goals” (p. 56).

Over the summer, we did a petition drive asking you to strengthen your process for reauthorizing teacher prep programs. In the course of that campaign, we had students from Illinois programs – afraid to speak out publicly while depending on these institutions for their degree – share with us the materials they had received this year that explicitly instructed them how to use three-cueing to help students read. This is not evidence-based and it is not going away. **We ask that you hold these programs accountable and take ownership of your power to do so.**

Outline best practices for screening and assessment.

There is such prolific confusion about the purpose of screening, the difference among assessment types, and appropriate interpretation of data; the plan should further clarify what good screening practice entails. The plan defines multiple types of screeners (e.g., universal screener, benchmark assessments, progress monitoring), but the definitions overlap and there is no guidance on the interaction between assessment types. We provide more suggestions on how to do this in the line edit section below.

We believe, and your MTSS section seems to affirm, that universal screeners must be given already as a component of MTSS, although universal screening is not currently directly mandated. **This section is an ideal place for ISBE to provide guidance about what a thoughtful assessment system should include.** We understand that the literacy plan itself cannot compel districts to improve their screening practices, but it should set forth a strong model.

Directly address instruction, intervention, and assessment for students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities.

Every teacher will have a student with dyslexia in their classroom at some point, likely multiple students every year. Many students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, developmental language disorder, and other literacy disabilities will not qualify for an IEP. Most such students will undertake the vast majority of their learning in a general education classroom. General and special education teachers and interventionists will all work with students with reading disabilities. This is why it is so critical that the state literacy plan directly address this population of students.

Students with dyslexia deserve a specific section that contextualizes the dyslexia handbook instead of just including a passing reference to it. We know that many students who struggle to read do not have dyslexia and we have strongly supported a plan that is comprehensive and inclusive; at the same time, a plan that does not include any specific discussion about students with dyslexia is not inclusive.

MANY POSITIVE CHANGES TO RETAIN AND BUILD UPON

We sincerely appreciate your staff’s effort in collecting feedback and skill in incorporating it into a coherent state vision. There are many positive changes in this draft and we look forward to seeing them retained as you finalize the plan. Below are some highlights of changes we appreciate, along with related suggestions in some cases:

- **Definition of literacy.** This draft modifies the definition of literacy to include the words “read” and “write.”
 - Update the definition of “literacy” in the glossary, which still does not include reading and writing.
- **Focus.** Where the first draft read like a conglomeration of multiple writers and viewpoints, this is clearer and more focused. The belief statements are more succinct. While this is definitely on the right track, we offer some revisions and comments in our line edit section.

- **Acknowledgement of Terms and Glossary.** The call for definitions of terms was a recurring theme throughout listening sessions and we appreciate the addition.
 - **Move “balanced literacy” to the “acknowledgement of terms” section.** Like “science of reading,” “balanced literacy” means different things to different people and evokes a strong reaction (both among those whose children or students were failed by debunked instructional methodologies in a “balanced literacy” classroom, and by those who fear its alternative to be phonics-only instruction). The glossary defines “balanced literacy” and “science of reading” with two definitions. The only other use of “balanced literacy” is in the list of non-evidence-based practices.
- **List of Evidence-Based Practices.** This chart (p. 31) is a great start to a clear listening session mandate!
 - **Consider pairing the aligned and non-aligned practices*** so that readers can easily identify an alternative to the non-aligned practice. For example, decodables and leveled books can be coupled, but it is not as clear what an alternative to some of the other practices are, like guided reading and running records. The aligned list is also fairly short, while we know evidence supports instruction in far more components.
 - **Add sample literacy block schedules.*** We have heard a legend about classrooms that provide 90 minutes of phonics instruction (though we have never identified such a classroom). We also hear about classrooms that do five minutes of phonics and then use the rest of their literacy block on instruction that fails to integrate that phonics lesson. One powerful way to show what we mean by comprehensive literacy instruction would be to draft several sample lesson plans, all quite different and tailored to the students served in each classroom.

* We plan to submit more details about what these could look like; however, we did not want to hold up the rest of our feedback while we work with experts in the coalition to come up with concrete suggestions.

- **Much-Improved Charts.** The stages of literacy chart (page 15-16) is significantly improved in this draft. We like the original Simple View of Reading chart better than this version, though.
 - There are still refinements to be made. Early “fluency” conflates oracy and reading fluency. Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness can be combined as just “phonological awareness” with acknowledgement that phonemic awareness is the appropriate level for early readers to focus on. Add building background and content knowledge to the comprehension strand, and morphology to the vocabulary strand. The format of the chart makes it difficult to categorize bridging processes. We offer more specific thoughts in the line edit suggestions at the bottom of this memo.
 - Add the original Simple View of Reading chart instead of the expanded version. SVR’s beauty is in its simplicity and even though there has been much research since its creation, it elegantly conveys a truth in an easy-to-understand way.
- **Workbook addition.** This is a nice addition to help facilitate school-level conversations to drive improvement in literacy instruction, and the format is much more user-friendly.
 - Perhaps it would be a better fit in an appendix so perusers of the plan do not feel overwhelmed at the 141-page document.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Over the last six months of discussing this plan, we heard feedback and suggested recommendations that we have come to acknowledge is outside the purview of what a non-binding literacy plan can accomplish. We know that you are already thinking about next steps for the implementation of this plan and that the statute includes multiple support tools to be developed over the next two years.

This plan is a first step in a long journey. As you are finalizing this draft, we want to keep sight of the big picture. Putting this plan into action will take intentionality. Illinois clearly values local control, but we cannot ensure equitable literacy opportunities for students if nothing changes. Consider the following as you roll out this plan:

- **Communications plan for the Literacy Plan.** How are district leaders and educators going to know this exists? Dr. Sanders has featured the literacy plan frequently and prominently in his weekly message, which is appreciated and surely will continue. What else will you do to support the awareness campaign? Some ideas we had are: webinars in partnership with professional organizations, creating a facilitator’s guide so regional and district leaders can educate their teams, school board trainings, and collaborating with IBHE on trainings for educator preparation program faculty and staff.
- **State funding for implementation.** A legislative appropriation for implementation of the plan would be a warranted request for ISBE’s FY25 budget. We support \$45 million in funding for:
 - ISBE staff to create and oversee creation of literacy support tools,
 - ISBE staff to provide more robust evaluation of educator preparation programs,
 - Development of several microcredentials,
 - Establishment of an open source literacy research repository,
 - Hiring, training, and managing a regional team of literacy coaches to provide on-the-ground, in-depth literacy support to schools with the highest numbers of non-proficient readers,
 - Early literacy grants to help the most under-resourced districts transition to evidence-based literacy, and
 - Continuing to invest as much as possible in the Evidence-Based Funding Formula will also help close equity gaps and enable school districts to move more quickly to implement literacy reforms.
- **IL-EMPOWER Vendors.** Most districts receiving comprehensive or targeted supports from an IL-EMPOWER Learning Partner have set improving literacy as a primary goal; yet, few seem to be moving the needle on literacy outcomes. As you approve Learning Partners, ISBE should ensure that their literacy practices align with the plan. No resources should be used to pay Learning Partners that rely on literacy methodologies that are unaligned.
- **Educator Prep Profiles.** Refine your policy and systems to include key metrics of literacy instruction on the Educator Preparation Profile dashboard.
- **Educator Prep Literacy Standards.** The standards for elementary literacy for prep programs are well done; however, there are no standards that correspond to the state law requiring coursework in reading methods and reading in the content area for all professional educator licenses. **ISBE should adopt literacy standards pertaining to all PELs so that programs have clarity on what they are expected to cover in their coursework.**
- **MTSS Legislation.** Of course, there are many literacy reforms we would like to see in law, but we have restrained ourselves here to issues that are directly relevant. The plan says that universal screening is the first step of a Multi-Tiered Support System, but there is confusion about whether MTSS is required. It appears there were Rules requiring it, but no guiding statute, and there is a law requiring MTSS for behavioral supports, but not for academic interventions. If we clarify this statutorily, we will clear up confusion for many stakeholders. **We support a bill to codify that MTSS is a state requirement and that universal screening is an MTSS requirement.**

PAGE AND LINE EDITS

Page and/or Line	Edit	Rationale
p. 3	<u>The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) believes literacy reform is an urgent priority that will improve statewide literacy achievement. The Illinois State Legislature has passed a mandate that we create a plan to close the gap between current practice and the strong evidence base about what constitutes high-quality reading instruction. This Comprehensive Literacy Plan serves as a roadmap to guide and unify literacy reform efforts across the state.</u>	Adds a sense of urgency to the implementation of the plan.
P. 6	“Every learner has the right to develop <u>benefits from</u> literacy in two or more languages to prepare for success in our global world.”	Developing biliteracy is strongly beneficial for students and communities, but it is not literally a “right.”
P. 6/7	Add to value statements re assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies student strengths and areas of challenge. • Supports teachers by providing actionable/instructional information on their students 	Identifies two additional values of assessment.
P. 6	“Applies principles of Universal Design for Learning.”	We agree UDL is an equitable practice; however, this is not mentioned anywhere else in the document. Either delete it here or describe it in the body of the report and define it in the glossary.
P. 8	Add: <u>“Balanced Literacy includes both foundational and language comprehension instructional features, such as phonemic awareness and phonics (understanding the relationships between sounds and their written representations), fluency, guided oral reading, vocabulary development, and comprehension. However, some interpret the term as akin to whole language instruction with little focus on basic skills instruction.”</u>	Balanced literacy is a polarizing, politically-charged term that, like “science of reading,” is interpreted vastly differently by different people. It is already not used in the document (but for page 31), so acknowledging that will provide clarity for audiences.
P. 8	“To avoid misunderstandings pertaining to this new term, this plan refrains from referencing the science of reading <u>or balanced literacy in favor</u> ”	
P. 8	Explicit Instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based instruction • Emphasizes clear communication, minimizes cognitive overload, encourages active student participation, offers timely feedback • Enhances long-term retention through purposeful practice techniques Systematic Instruction	Provides more accurate definitions of the terms and parallel sentence construction.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ensures foundational skills are introduced</u> <u>Reflects a scaffolding of skills beginning with those foundational to reading success</u> • <u>Follows a planned scope and sequence of skills that progresses from easier to more difficult</u> • Intricate skills introduced later. <u>Introduces increasingly complex skills as reading competency grow</u> • <u>Fosters deeper understanding and proficiency</u> • <u>Is cumulative and diagnostic</u> 	
	<p>Teaching Based on the Components of Literacy:</p> <p>Phonemic Awareness - The ability to identify and play with individual sounds in spoken words. <u>detect and manipulate the smallest unit of sound within a language.</u></p> <p>Phonics - Explicit and systematic <u>An approach to teaching reading that emphasizes the systematic relationship between in instruction on understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds of language and the letters or letter combinations that represent those sounds.</u> to form lettersound relationships and spelling patterns.</p> <p>Reading Fluency - The ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly, with enough speed, and expression. <u>connected text accurately, with appropriate expression (prosody), and at a rate sufficient to sustain comprehension.</u></p> <p>Vocabulary - Knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly. <u>Knowledge of word meanings, idioms, and the pragmatics of language that enable contextual understanding of text.</u></p> <p>Reading Comprehension - The ability to understand what you are reading. <u>extract and construct literal and inferred meaning from linguistic discourse represented in printed text.</u></p> <p>[Or, <u>Reading Comprehension: The process of creating meaning from a text by connecting it to one’s existing knowledge.</u>]</p> <p>Writing - Writing is a <u>The method of communication and a form of expression in which language is inscribed on a surface using symbols, characters, or letters.</u> process of recording language graphically by hand or other means, as by letters, logograms, and other symbols.</p> <p>Oracy - The ability to extract and construct literal and inferred meaning from linguistic discourse represented in speech. <u>refers to the development and use of oral communication skills, which involve the ability to express oneself, listen actively, and engage in meaningful conversations and discussions.</u></p>	<p>Changes definitions of the pillars to align with better definitions, usually from elsewhere in the plan. (PA, phonics, writing changed to glossary definition; fluency changed to p 21; vocabulary, reading comprehension, and oracy we pieced together from a variety of experts)</p>
<p>p. 11</p>	<p><u>Teacher leaders are school-based individuals acknowledged by colleagues as possessing the expertise to guide others in more deeply understanding how to deliver instruction that better encourages student learning.</u></p> <p><u>Teacher leaders can be teachers, literacy specialists, instructional</u></p>	<p>Expands the definition of teacher leader to capture those who take on the role informally.</p>

	<p><u>coaches, librarians, or others filling a formal or informal leadership role within a school building.</u></p> <p>Teacher leaders include school librarians, reading resource teachers, literacy coaches, and specialists who support classroom teachers. They use their expertise and data to guide educators in creating and maintaining literacy-rich environments. The knowledge they gain supporting different grade levels allows them to contribute to a sustainable and vertically aligned curriculum.</p>	
p. 11	Principals, assistant principals, <u>and school psychologists</u>	Adds school psychologists to the list of school leaders
P. 11	Add school boards as an audience (or within the community box)	School boards will have an important role to play in setting the direction for districts' literacy vision.
p. 13	<p><u>Language is a systematic method of communicating ideas and feelings through the use of agreed upon signs, sounds, gestures or marks having understood meanings. Reading and writing is language, as is speech. However, unlike speech which emerges naturally through immersion within a community of speakers during the earliest years of life, the sound-to-letter connections composing reading and writing (the code), must be explicitly taught.</u></p> <p>Unlike language development, which unfolds naturally and instinctively as individuals engage in their environment, literacy is a skill acquired through direct and purposeful instruction.³ It necessitates deliberate guidance and structured education to navigate the intricate world of written language effectively. written language effectively.</p>	It is important to characterize literacy as language-based.
P. 13	Add a section that clearly illustrates the brain changes as a brain transforms from a non-reading brain to a reading brain.	Understanding the neuroscience of how reading transforms the brain is the “why” behind many elements in the plan.
P. 15 - 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add an intro to the chart to explain its purpose and understand the columns. • Under <i>concepts of print</i>, introduce “concept of word in text (COWt)” in box 2. • Concepts of print, PA, and phonics go on for too long (for Tier 1 instruction. You could clarify in later box(es) for PA and phonics that this is no longer appropriate for Tier 1, but students who have not mastered decoding need heavy doses of intervention in these skill areas.) • Combine Phonological and Phonemic Awareness into one row, but make clear in box 2 that the phoneme is the most impactful level. (Phonemic Awareness starts too late in box 3.) • Phonemic Awareness (box 3): Add “Students develop the ability to aurally isolate and manipulate sounds within words at the initial, medial, and ending position and in consonant blends to form new words.” 	<p>The chart is much better, but still needs work and is not yet a practical tool. It appears that skills should be taught in siloes, and while many components <i>should</i> be introduced explicitly and systematically, they also need to be integrated and practiced alongside other skills in context.</p> <p>Development of PA skills to point of automaticity, what is called <i>phonemic proficiency</i>, is</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonics: Add: “Sound-to-letter knowledge occurs along a developmental continuum consisting of beginning and ending consonants, short vowels, digraphs, consonant blends, and affricates. These skills progress to long and r-controlled vowels and progressively complex letter combinations, syllable junctures, and derivations.” Change “fluency” to “reading fluency” and move the early boxes “oracy.” Define “sight word” (at least in the glossary if not here). Add morphology (probably under vocabulary), starting with -s, -ed, and -ing in K/1 and going through high school with content-area root words. Comprehension: Box 1: “Comprehension is highly dependent on background and general knowledge. Exposure to experiences throughout childhood aids comprehension.” Box 3 (2 as drafted now with merged cells): “Reading fluency is a prerequisite to reading comprehension. Comprehension strategies help fluent readers beyond third grade; they do not have to be taught year after year, but comprehension must be monitored year after year.” Box 3: Content area instruction (social studies, science, art, etc.) continues to be especially critical for building comprehension skills, with exposure to different kinds of writing and increasing text complexity. Writing box 2: Integrating word writing with letter-sound knowledge aids recognition of letter features within words and ability to spell words. 	<p>associated with instant word identification.</p> <p>Combining oral language fluency elements into reading fluency instead of oracy is confusing.</p> <p>Sight words should mean any word that has been orthographically mapped, not just words that have been memorized from a frequent work list or words that follow an irregular spelling pattern. Comprehension strategies will not solve reading problems, but comprehension is strengthened by background and content knowledge and preceded by reading fluency. This is a place to clearly bring in that idea that literacy is not just the job of English teachers.</p>
p. 17	<p>It’s crucial to acknowledge <u>diversity in learning</u>, that students <u>learn progress</u> at different rates <u>of acquisition</u>.</p>	<p>Introduces the concept of diversity in learning.</p>
P. 18	<p>The commonly taught concept <u>model</u> of the “simple view of reading”</p> <p>Use the original “Simple View of Reading” model instead of this graphic.</p> <p>(Or, Scarborough’s Rope (or both) would be good if you want to get at that idea that there are multiple variables within each big bucket of the SVR.)</p> <p>Could also include the “Simple View of Writing” (Ideation + Transcription) or writing rope graphics.</p>	<p>Fluency as extending across the constructs of language acquisition and word recognition is incorrect and confusing. (It is better represented as a bridge between the two.) It doesn’t make sense for “comprehension” to be an element of “language comprehension” that is a part of “reading comprehension.”</p>
p. 20	<p>Throughout <u>early elementary and middle school</u>, students refine their phonemic awareness skills by mastering phoneme segmentation, blending, and substitution. <u>For older students who struggle with decoding, assessing their phonemic awareness and providing intensive high-level phonemic awareness skills support (e.g., manipulation rather than just identification of sounds) can be a powerful intervention.</u> By high school, students should possess a well-developed phonological and phonemic awareness, empowering them to decode unfamiliar words, enhance spelling accuracy, and comprehend complex texts.</p>	<p>Fully developed PA aids acquisition of letter-sound features. In other words, phonemic awareness aids phonics acquisition. With proper instruction, students acquire full PA by the end of second-grade. PA should be well-developed in elementary school and explicit</p>

		<p>teaching of PA should no longer be necessary in Tier 1 classrooms after first or second grade; however, even through high school, some students will still struggle to manipulate sounds in words and benefit from PA intervention.</p>
<p>p. 21</p>	<p>Orthographic mapping (OM) is the cognitive process in which connections are established between letters, their associated sounds, and meanings. <u>that enables the anchoring of graphemes in lexical memory.</u> This process is fundamental for word recognition, spelling, and vocabulary acquisition, as it underpins how children learn to instantly recognize words and store them in their memory. OM unfolds through distinct developmental overlapping <u>overlapping</u> phases, commencing with basic visual connections and evolving toward more complex grapho-syllabic and grapho-morphemic associations. <u>While alphabet knowledge is learned through paired associative learning, its sound is anchored in the brain by its phonology.</u> For example, a learner recognizes the grapheme <t> and learns its common sound /t/. OM hypothesizes that after several repetitions, the orthographic representation for <t> becomes anchored by its sound. A solid foundation in phonemic awareness and grapheme-phoneme knowledge is essential to achieve successful OM. Recent studies have indicated that enhancing OM, especially for sight word recognition, can be facilitated by <u>Educating beginners on the articulatory aspects of phonemes and incorporating letter-embedded picture mnemonics into grapheme-phoneme instruction helps facilitate OM, especially for sight word recognition.</u>¹⁰</p> <p><u>The term “sight word” refers to any word that has been orthographically mapped. For example, a student can decode the word <cat> as /c/ /a/ /t/, but fluent readers will no longer need to decode <cat> each time they come across it. After several repetitions connecting the graphemes to their phonemes, the word is anchored in the brain and becomes a sight word.</u></p>	<p>The description states that OM unfolds through distinct, developmental phases. The literature does not represent OM as developing in phases. Rather, OM is the process that enables the anchoring of graphemes in lexical memory. For example, while alphabet knowledge (AK) is learned through paired associative learning, its sound (PAL) is anchored in the brain by its phonology. While the instructional method is PAL, OM is the anchoring mechanism. Therefore, the sentence stating that “A solid foundation in PA and grapheme-phoneme knowledge is essential to achieving successful OM” is only partially correct. Grapheme-phoneme (GP) knowledge is not a prerequisite for OM to occur, rather, OM is the process that facilitates GP learning.</p> <p>The phrase “sight word” is open to various interpretations</p>
<p>p. 23</p>	<p>Proficient spelling is a crucial part of literacy, as it has a significant impact on how written language functions. Spelling, <u>also called encoding,</u> involves <u>isolating the sounds within a word, identifying their corresponding graphemes, and transcribing them</u> understanding how letters correspond to the sounds in words. <u>When students spell, they connect the sounds they know (phonemes) to the letters in a word (spellings)</u> using the part of their brain that processes spoken language. This skill is essential for accurately representing words and reading them correctly, bridging the gap between spoken and written language. <u>Spelling instruction should be direct and systematic, coupled with opportunities for guided practice, all of which should be connected to the scope and sequence of the phonics instruction.</u>^t However, the importance of spelling goes beyond word formation. It’s a versatile skill closely tied to literacy, particularly with writing fluency,</p>	<p>Most importantly, adds that spelling should be taught parallel to the phonics sequence through direct instruction.</p> <p>Also edited for readability.</p>

	<p>vocabulary development (??), and effective communication. It not only helps with constructing words but also greatly expands one's vocabulary. A rich vocabulary, in turn, is vital for comprehending text deeply and extracting precise meanings. Good spelling ensures that when you write, your expression is clear and accurate, making it a critical aspect of effective communication. In summary, spelling isn't just a part of literacy; it forms the foundation upon which language proficiency is built.</p>	
<p>p. 24</p>	<p>Reading and writing are <u>reciprocal</u> intricate processes that hinge on fluency, intertwining decoding and encoding skills. To engage in <u>While reading requires</u>, it is essential to perform word decoding, which involves sounding out words. <u>Conversely, when it comes to spelling requires word encoding, and the scope and sequence of these two areas should be aligned.</u> words is necessary. <u>To clarify, spelling entails breaking down the sounds within a word and aligning the corresponding letters with those sounds.</u> Both encoding and decoding processes encompass the integration of auditory and visual processing elements. While decoding may seem simpler, simultaneous practice in pronunciation and spelling enhances decoding proficiency. This connection of skills extends beyond decoding and encoding, encompassing phonological awareness, vocabulary, grammar, text comprehension, tonal nuances, and textual elements. The process of literacy development involves learners advancing from basic skills to more advanced ones as they progress over time. Each subskill, from decoding to grammar, follows a unique developmental trajectory, significantly influencing overall reading and writing competence. However, assessing literacy, especially in early stages of complex content development, poses a nuanced challenge. To gauge literacy effectively, one must consider all components, including phonemic awareness, reading prowess, spelling accuracy, legible handwriting, and precise spelling. A wellrounded teaching approach that covers language mechanics, contextual grammar teaching, improving handwriting or typing skills, and using real world assessments helps learners become confident in mastering literacy.</p>	<p>Most importantly, added that encoding and decoding instruction should be direct, systematic, and connected to each other. Also edited for readability, to cut down on what was in spelling section already, and to remove references that did not seem to belong in an encoding subsection.</p>
<p>P. 26</p>	<p>Add paragraphs under the section "Considerations for Learners with Specialized Needs" at least for dyslexia:</p> <p><u>Understanding Dyslexia</u> <u>Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin, characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA definition).</u> <u>The prevalence of dyslexia may be up to 20%, but the condition often goes undiagnosed due to the time, expense, and access to an evaluator who will make such a diagnosis. Because dyslexia occurs on a continuum from mild to severe, many students with dyslexia will not qualify for an IEP and, therefore, most of their instruction will come from general education teachers in general education classrooms. All students benefit from explicit and systematic foundational skills instruction in early</u></p>	<p>The plan needs to acknowledge that dyslexia exists and address literacy for dyslexic learners. This can be pulled from the dyslexia handbook, but it is important to contextualize it within the literacy plan.</p>

	<p><u>grades, but students with dyslexia require about twenty times more practice than other students to learn to read a word with automaticity. (VB Berninger, <i>Language-Based REading and Writing Intervention: Findings of the University of Washington Multi-Disciplinary Disability Center</i>, November 2000). Preventative, explicit, systematic Tier 1 instruction in foundational literacy skills is imperative to ensure all students, including students with dyslexia, receive the instruction needed to become a successful and skilled reader. Moreover, universal early literacy screening and intervention for phonological processing, decoding, and encoding difficulties are crucial. Dyslexia is not related to a visual impairment.</u></p> <p>[Perhaps also sections on multi-sensory instruction, dysgraphia, developmental language disorder...]</p>	
P. 27	<p>"Early screening for all students is important to identify students those at risk for reading difficulties. and who may need evidence-based supports for students with specialized education needs. Identification takes place through screening and assessment, and learning supports for individuals are determined through and individualized learning plans. Explicit and systematic approaches are especially important for specialized education needs. For students who continue to have difficulties, a diagnostic assessment will help identify the specific area(s) of weakness.</p>	Provides a fuller picture of the trajectory a student with reading difficulties will go through to get appropriate supports.
P. 27	<p>The Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan recognizes the importance of catering to <u>supporting</u> the unique needs of advanced learners</p>	More uplifting terminology.
P. 27	<p>For example, <u>with proper instruction</u>, most learners will have generalized phonemic awareness skills by the end of second grade.</p>	Many readers below grade level will continue to struggle with phonemic awareness after second grade.
P. 28	<p>Add morphology to 3 - 5 and 6 - 8.</p>	Strong research basis to support explicit teaching of morphology.
p. 28	<p>“Assessment plays a pivotal role in education, serving as the compass by which we navigate toward our educational goals. It shapes decisions about grades, student placement, progression, instructional needs, curriculum development, and, in some instances, funding allocation. <u>A thoughtful assessment system that employs technically sound, scientifically reliable and valid tools that are sensitive enough to detect changes, including clear, locally-determined cut-score guidance, will enable a school to most strategically focus its limited resources to support students.</u></p> <p><u>There are four major purposes of assessment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Screening (Who needs more support?)</u> • <u>Diagnostic (What are the student’s individual needs?)</u> • <u>Progress Monitoring (How are their skills growing over time with this support?)</u> • <u>Program Evaluation (How effective is the program to meet all students’ needs?)</u> 	Frames the assessment conversation.

	<p><u>(Some of the assessments described below fulfill more than one of these purposes.)</u></p> <p><u>While there are a multitude of useful tools that may be used to answer varying assessment questions, it cannot be understated that the most powerful evidence-based tool in addressing reading difficulties is the Curriculum-Based Measure (CBM). CBMs have been validated over 30 years of research as a direct measure of reading skill development and the recommended reading screening measure from the National Institute For Improving Literacy for reading difficulties. From the National Center On Progress Monitoring: 'Research has demonstrated that when teachers use curriculum-based measurement (CBM) to inform their instructional decision making, students learn more, teacher decision making improves, and students are more aware of their own performance (e.g., Fuchs, Deno, & Mirkin, 1984). CBM research, conducted over the past 30 years, has also shown CBM to be reliable and valid (e.g., Deno, 1985; Germann & Tindal, 1985; Marston, 1988; Shinn, 1989).'</u> Further, CBM can be uniquely used to answer all four purposes of assessment across educational planning.</p>	<p>Highlights value of curriculum-based measures in tracking literacy. Microsoft Word - BAT 8-1-cover.rtf (ed.gov)</p>
p. 28	<p><u>A “Universal screener” is a tool that is used to determine whether students are making adequate progress in reading achievement. It is standardized, scientifically reliable and valid, available in alternate equivalent forms so that it can be administered multiple times a year, and norm-referenced. At least one skill-based measure should be used. Universal screening for literacy skills is foundational. Screening all students is a prerequisite to MTSS. This process empowers school and district staff to identify students who are thriving, those at risk, or those in need of accelerated support. Every school needs a universal literacy screening tool and process for assessing students.</u></p>	<p>Defines universal screener and clarifies that universal screening is required; it is assumed that universal screening is mandated because it is implicit to MTSS, but this is not enough.</p>
p. 28	<p><u>Monitoring the impact of specific interventions using a scientific, research based progress monitoring instrument should occur continuously (at least every two weeks) to assess their efficacy. This process is distinct from benchmarking. Progress monitoring should use instruments that are scientifically reliable and valid and norm-referenced. These measures are standardized, sensitive to change, targeted, brief to administer (less than five minutes) incorporate standardized procedures to track student performance and progress toward predefined goals. We emphasize that the rate of improvement is a critical indicator of student progress. More intensive evidence-based interventions should be prescribed for students who do not adequately respond to targeted interventions. These interventions should increase in duration, intensity, and frequency and should be regularly monitored for progress.</u></p>	<p>Defines best practices for progress monitoring tools and procedures.</p>
p. 28/29	<p>It also serves as a vital signal for potential systematic instructional improvements. Universal screeners should be concise assessments that provide a holistic view of need. We emphasize that the screening processes of a student’s academic well-being, enabling educators to intervene at the earliest signs of integrity relies on the use of measures</p>	<p>Rolls benchmarking subsection into universal screening section. Having a separate definition/paragraph for Benchmarking and Universal</p>

	<p>with proven reliability and validity. Universal screening encompasses a systematically evaluating of all students within a class, grade, school building, or school district, focusing on critical academic and social-emotional indicators <u>multiple times each year.</u></p> <p><u>These universal screeners serve a dual role: while they guide decisions about which students may require additional assessment or intervention, they also serve a system-level benchmarking function, a vital signal for potential systematic instructional improvements.</u> This data helps school teams assess whether the core curriculum effectively meets the majority of students’ needs and if enhancements are warranted in curriculum, instruction, or educational environments. Universal screening also guides decisions about which students may require additional assessments or supplemental or intensive intervention beyond what the core program provides.</p> <p>Delete entire “benchmarking” subsection.</p>	<p>Screening is confusing and makes it seem like teachers would use a “benchmark assessment” often associated with a particular reading program. In practice, the universal screener and benchmark assessment are usually the same tool and process, just used analytically for different purposes (Benchmarking = determining and monitoring effectiveness of Core for all/most students and Screening = identifying students who are struggling (or far above grade level)).</p>
p. 30	<p>Tier 1 - Whole Class: All students in Tier 1 receive core instruction in the general education classroom. Teachers utilize evidence-based literacy instruction techniques, differentiating instruction to accommodate individual strengths and needs, <u>often through flexible group instruction.</u> Continuous monitoring allows for early identification of students who may need additional support.</p> <p>Tier 2 - Small Group Interventions: Students who require more focused assistance move to Tier 2 while still participating in Tier 1 lessons. Here, they receive targeted support through small group lessons and interventions. <u>Note that Tier 1 instruction often includes types of small group instruction, literacy stations, or other differentiation, which is not the same as Tier 2 small group instruction.</u></p>	<p>The explanation of Tier 2 intervention refers to small-group instruction. Some school-based personnel may get the idea that all small-group instruction <i>IS</i> Tier-2 instruction. The term “flexible-group instruction” defined as a component of Tier 1 instruction would differentiate the idea of small-group instruction that is Tier 2 from whole-class and flexible-groups that compose Tier 1.</p>
p. 30	<p>MTSS recognizes the importance of involving parents and caregivers in the intervention process. They are encouraged to understand Schools should proactively and regularly inform families about the interventions being employed and the students’ progress and provide information on how to support their students at home.”</p>	<p>Removes passive voice and sets expectation that schools communicate with parents.</p>
p. 31	<p>This approach is particularly relevant when addressing the over- <u>and under-identification</u> of certain groups of students for special education services.</p>	<p>Both over- and under-identification are problematic</p>
p. 31	<p>Data-Driven Decision Making: MTSS emphasizes data-driven decision making, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of students. It utilizes <u>diagnostic assessment data that can pinpoint the exact skill(s) needed to be mastered by the student.</u> screening assessments and information about instructional aterials to guide instructional decisions effectively.</p>	<p>The term “data-driven decision making” has been used generically for some time and has come to be interpreted as the use of any kind of data is data-driven decision making. The field has missed the idea that data are like tools and are task-specific. The right datum must be selected depending on</p>

		the task. Using the term “diagnostic assessments” captures that idea.
p. 31	<u>We are working on more specific language to share.</u> Recommendation: pair up the components so each non-aligned practice has aligned one to point people to. Be more comprehensive and specific in the aligned list (e.g., “vocabulary” is listed as aligned, but no mention of what vocabulary instructional practices are aligned).	This chart is a very welcome addition and exactly what we (and people at every listening session) asked for!
p. 41	Delete “decodable” or expand it to “decodable, as appropriate”	Decodable books are not appropriate for whole classrooms in older grades
P. 42	Add how and when to use whole group vs. small group instruction, and how to group students for small groups.	Add as a reflection question - but also probably need to add to this chapter.
p. 43 and/or p. 45	Add next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure instructional alignment through the tiers of instruction within MTSS. • Ensure high-quality, evidence-based materials, training, and coaching are aligned. 	Directs audiences to consider alignment among tiers of instruction and supports beyond curriculum
p. 51	Monitor <u>and report</u> state trends in student data... Require professional learning opportunities, <u>approved learning partners, and educator preparation programs</u> to be aligned... <u>Amend IEPP dashboard to include alignment to plan and literacy standards.</u>	Adds elements of public transparency
p. 56	Classroom and pre-service <u>educators</u> teachers are equipped Faculty at institutions of higher education align their instruction with the literacy framework <u>and to state literacy standards</u> and incorporate	Inclusive to K-12 teachers, gen ed and sped, leaders, SLPs, psychs, school librarians. EPPs should already be aligned to state standards, but there is a broad disconnect now between those standards and teacher candidates’ learning.
p. 57	Alignment with literacy framework: We encourage our higher education partners <u>must</u> to align their educator preparation programs with the literacy framework and the objectives outlined in this plan. By doing so, we aim to create a cohesive and unified approach to literacy instruction, from the classroom to teacher preparation institutions. Inclusion of evidence-based practices: We <u>expect</u> invite educator preparation programs to incorporate evidence-based practices into their...	Makes it clearer that ISBE expects EPPs to be in alignment with the plan.

<p>p. 60</p>	<p>Add Institute of Education Sciences guide as a potential tool for EPPs: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4660&display=1</p>	<p>The College Instructor’s Guide is designed to assist college instructors build pre-service teacher knowledge of evidence-based strategies to help kindergarten through grade 3 students acquire the language and literacy skills needed to succeed academically. This tool is intended to be used in conjunction with the Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade practice guide, produced by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an investment of the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.</p>
<p>p. 60</p>	<p>Professional Learning for In-Service Educators</p> <p>Professional learning emerges as a pivotal focus in the pursuit of advancing literacy outcomes for all Illinois learners. This section addresses the distinct realm of professional learning tailored for in-service educators, which includes teachers, school and district leaders, professional learning providers, and more. Our approach to professional learning is firmly anchored in the delivery of high-quality, job-embedded experiences meticulously aligned with the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan, <u>conducted by individuals who also have expert knowledge aligned to the plan, and presented within a larger framework of effective instruction that leverages processes critical to reading attainment</u>. The paramount objective is to bolster educators at every juncture of their professional journey in recognition of the dynamic nature of effective literacy instruction.</p>	<p>Professional learning has a long history of in-effectiveness due to poor (or even wrong) content about reading and option that teachers can use the knowledge or not. As we are on the precipice of greatly improving reading instruction, it is imperative that PD is conducted by individuals with <i>expert knowledge</i>. Any old presenter will not do. Also, PD must be presented within a larger framework of effective instruction that leverages the reading processes that research has identified as being critical to reading attainment (e.g., alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, immersion in reading, building knowledge, etc.).</p>
<p>p. 77</p>	<p>Add implementation consideration:</p> <p><u>A child’s access to high-quality literacy instruction and support should not depend on a parent’s ability to understand literacy pedagogy, navigate special education law, or implement interventions at home.</u></p>	<p>Within the family and community section(s), we want to make it clear that homes play an important role, but that family engagement cannot be a prerequisite to students getting high-quality literacy instruction</p>

	<u>Partnership between school and home is valuable; families are often the greatest contributors to children’s literacy readiness, particularly in language development and background knowledge, while knowledgeable educators are often the greatest contributors to most children’s ability to “crack the code” and intervene when a child struggles.</u>	and supports in school. Families should be engaged and informed, but they are no substitute for a knowledgeable teacher. To drive equity in outcomes, we cannot afford to blame families or rely on them to fill gaps in instruction.
p. 81	4. Continuous Improvement: The field of literacy is dynamic, with new research and practices emerging regularly. Leaders who possess an understanding of literacy instruction recognize the need for continuous learning and improvement. They set a precedent for <u>not just</u> a culture of ongoing professional development and growth within their institutions, <u>but also a commitment to improvement science, which recognizes that implementation of practices within different contexts have variables and that continual monitoring and adjustment can maximize outcomes within a local environment.</u> This commitment to continuous improvement ensures that their leadership remains relevant and effective in an ever-evolving educational landscape.	The term “continuous improvement” is often used narrowly as an abstract idea around “getting better” over time. There is an entire body of improvement science that would greatly benefit literacy improvement efforts that could be suggested to the reader (see Paige et al., 2022, Reading is More Than a Science: It’s Also an Art; <i>Reading Research Quarterly</i> , 56(S1), S339-S350). SIDENOTE: This will be an important concept we hope to see in the template of the local literacy plan that ISBE drafts soon.
p. 100	We prioritize equity by recognizing that literacy success cannot be achieved without addressing systemic disparities. <u>At the same time, improving literacy instruction is imperative to addressing systemic disparities.</u>	Makes the paragraph more explicit that implementation of high-quality literacy <i>is</i> attending to equity.
p. 122	Add: https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/ , https://www.colorincolorado.org/ , https://readinguniverse.org/ , https://intensiveintervention.org/ , https://www.thereadingleague.org/ , https://dyslexiaida.org/ , https://dldandme.org/	
p. 124	Delete reference to this Curriculum Evaluation Tool, modify it significantly, or use it in conjunction with The Reading League’s tool (at least in the meantime until ISBE’s is revised). Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (thereadingleague.org)	This curriculum evaluation tool is not aligned to the plan. At a minimum, such a tool needs to highlight the essential elements of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, oracy) and call out disproven instructional theories. The Reading League’s tool does that exceptionally well; however, it lacks the ISBE tool’s

		attention to representation. Incorporating both of these would be ideal.
p. 128	Embed the term “disciplinary literacy” in the body of the plan, not just the glossary.	The terms “disciplinary literacy” and “content-area literacy” are only found in the glossary; however, the plan references content knowledge multiple times. It should be made clear that “disciplinary literacy” is the more crucial of these and the one aligned to IL learning standards. “Disciplinary literacy” is about reading and writing differently according to norms of various disciplines, while “content-area literacy” is about generalizing strategies to be used across disciplines.
p. 129 - 135	<p><u>Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) reflects a systematic set of procedures through which data regarding student skill development in basic areas of achievement are obtained. Assessed by fluency metrics that assess students’ command and accuracy at math computation, reading of connected text, and writing serve as central domains in its application in the educational setting. CBM can serve both formative and summative purposes and are useful in monitoring student progress and making subsequent educational decisions about instructional content and strategies.</u></p> <p><u>Encoding (writing) involves translating speech into print using one’s alphabet, phonemic awareness, and letter-sound knowledge to spell words through writing. the knowledge of the logic of the written symbol system (especially letter-sound relationships and patterns in alphabetic orthographies).</u></p> <p><u>Engagement is the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional state directing one’s attentional resource to a specific activity. activities and processes of literacy that enable individuals to gain pleasure, knowledge, and self-realization from text interactions.</u></p> <p><u>Evidence-based practices refer to individual practices (e.g., single lessons or in-class activities) or programs (e.g.,, year-long curricula) that are considered effective based on supported by scientific evidence. This evidence exists within a continuum of rigor, in which some well-studied practices are highly supported while others may be promising or emerging. Researchers will typically study the impact of the resource(s) in a controlled setting e.g., for example, they may study differences in skill growth between students whose educators used the resources and students whose educators did not) before deeming a program or practice “evidence-based.</u></p>	<p>Improves and adds definitions...</p> <p>Engagement applies to all intentional activities and should not be limited to only literacy.</p> <p>Makes clear that evidence involves a continuum of rigor.</p>

~~Literacy screening is a type of assessment that helps teachers identify students who are not meeting grade-level learning goals used to identify those who may be at risk of — Screening assessments check for warning signs to see if students have reading difficulties and including dyslexia. Screening can provide valuable information to teachers to help struggling readers or those who are likely to struggle in the future.~~

~~Neuroscience is the scientific study of the nervous system, its functions, and its disorders. how the brain and nervous system are developed and how they work.~~

~~Norm-referenced describes an assessment that is designed to compare a student's score to a representative sample.~~

~~Oracy is the ability to express and understand communicate effectively through spoken language.~~

~~Reading Foundational Reading Skills are the building blocks of reading. The goal is to help students comprehend the texts they read. Students must develop proficiency with print concepts, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency skills that will help them better understand texts. core reading processes necessary for proficient word reading and comprehension including early literacy skills, alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and reading fluency.~~

~~Delete Research-Based definition.~~

~~Scaffolded reading entails student reading a text with the guidance or support of a teacher that is is called scaffolded reading. It is the provision and gradually withdrawn of teaching support through modeling, questioning, feedback, and so forth for a student's learning growth across successive attempts, thus to transferring more and more increasing responsibility to the student.~~

~~Skills-based universal screener or skills-based assessment is a brief (less than 5 minutes), informative tool used to measure academic skills in one of six general areas (basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, written expression). Skills-based assessments can be used for screening and weekly or bi-weekly progress monitoring.~~

~~Standardized assessment is an assessment that is developed using standard procedures and is administered and scored in a consistent manner for all test takers.~~

~~Standards are the learning goals promulgated by a state documenting what students should know or be able to do at each grade level. States have identified a set of competencies (known as the Common Core State Standards) expected of students across the grade levels for literacy in fiction and informational reading as well as in writing, speaking, and listening~~

This definition is reflected in the evidence-based practice definition and can be deleted.

	<p><u>Standards-based assessment is an assessment, often adaptive in nature, which provides information regarding students' mastery of grade-level standards. Standards-based assessments can be used for tri-annual screenings, but should not be used for weekly or biweekly progress monitoring.</u></p> <p>A summative assessment is <u>an assessment indicating student attainment of learning the final evaluation, usually quantitative, of the degree to which the goals and objectives compared to a standards or benchmark achieved by the end of an instructional unit or academic term. of a program have been attained. Different types of evidence, as the final test score of students and the statistical analysis of program results, may enter into summative evaluation. (See formative assessment.)*</u></p> <p>Universal screening is the systematic assessment of all students within a given class, grade, school building, or school district on critical academic and/or social-emotional indicators.</p>	
p. 137	<p>In the Instructional Practices box:</p> <p><i>Letter Recognition:</i> Teach the automatic recognition of letter names and common sounds.</p> <p><i>Phonemic Awareness:</i> Teach the ability to automatically isolate and manipulate phonemes at the beginning, medial, and ending positions of CVC words and within consonant blends to make new words.</p> <p>Assessment Practices:</p> <p><i>Phonemic awareness:</i> Assess the child's ability to automatically isolate and manipulate phonemes at the beginning, medial, and ending positions of CVC words and within consonant blends to make new words.</p> <p><i>Letter Recognition:</i> Evaluate the ability to identify the names and commons sounds of letters in lower and upper case, and identify the sounds associated with digraphs.</p>	
p. 138	<p>Middle Grades, Assessment Practices:</p> <p><i>Reading Fluency checks:</i> Assess students' fluency with appropriately leveled complex text.</p>	<p>Middle schoolers should be reading connected text to gauge their fluency,</p>

Thank you for considering our suggestions. If you would like to discuss any of these points further, Jessica Handy (jhandy@stand.org or 217-415-9175) can connect you to the most appropriate member of the Illinois Early Literacy Coalition or expert who can best address the specific issue area.

Sincerely,

The Illinois Early Literacy Coalition