

Scoop from the Supt

by Tracy Terris and Bryan Girbach



Milan Area Schools chooses to take part in a rigorous, continuous improvement process. All of the district's improvement work stems directly from the Board of Education's *District and Superintendent Priorities*:

- Create 21st Century Learners Through Authentic Experiences and Personalized Learning
- Improve Early Reading Proficiency
- Improve Vertical Alignment
- Improve the Understanding of the Diversity of the District



These priorities create the foundation for the improvement initiatives that are being implemented at the district, building, and classroom levels.

In this month's article, I want to focus on the *District Priority*: **Improve Early Reading Proficiency**. While we have always been focused on literacy, the district began a very intentional Early Literacy initiative approximately 10 years ago. This initiative has included the following components:

- Regular Curriculum Reviews and Updates
- Increased Reading Intervention Services
- Addition of Reading Coaches
- Additional Professional Development for Teachers

Below is a more detailed description of these components.

Milan Area Schools utilizes a Balanced Literacy Approach in teaching our Reading and the English Language Arts Curriculum. This instructional framework allows teachers to teach the critical skills and behaviors students need to achieve the Common Core Standards in Reading, Writing, and Speaking & Listening Skills. This approach also affords teachers the opportunity to respond to the needs of a diverse population of developing readers and writers.

The components of a Balanced Literacy Framework include:

- **Reading Workshop** - Units of study that are aligned to the state curriculum are taught throughout the year. The reading workshop provides the opportunity for students to practice reading and apply the skills being taught. Students have time to read alone and with a partner. Within the Reading Workshop the teacher is pulling students for small group work in three ways:
 - Guided Reading Groups - introduces books at each child's instructional level and supports the students as they read harder books
 - Strategy Groups - teaches strategies and provides practice of different reading strategies that students may be struggling with
 - Small Group Shared Reading – provides time to read instructional level texts alongside the teacher
- **Writing Workshop** - Units of study are taught throughout the year, aligned to the state standards in Writing Opinion, Informational writing, Narrative writing and the Conventions of writing. During this time the teacher does the following:
 - meets with small groups to provide instruction in areas needed
 - confers one-on-one with students to support their needs
- **Read Aloud** - Teachers read aloud quality texts each day, exposing students to a variety of genres and providing time for discussion around the texts. Teachers utilize the following types of Read Aloud:
 - Interactive Read Aloud - supports comprehension, higher level thinking, speaking, and listening skills
 - Read Aloud with Accountable Talk - supports comprehension, higher level thinking, speaking, and listening skills
 - Read Aloud with Argument - supports comprehension, higher level thinking skills, Opinion writing, and Speaking and Listening skills
 - Read Aloud with Vocabulary - supports developing vocabulary across the content areas
- **Word Study** - Students receive direct instruction in phonics and high frequency words.
- **Shared Reading** - Students read grade level text with teacher support. Word attack skills and comprehension strategies are reinforced during this time.
- **Interactive Writing** - Students write in a variety of genres or create pieces as a classroom community with the teacher. The teacher and students share the pen to create the piece. Interactive writing provides additional time for students to practice the conventions of writing in a meaningful way

Assessment:

All students are assessed three times a year using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This includes assessment in phonemic awareness, phonics, High Frequency Words, and Running Records. Students are given a pre and post-test for Opinion, Narrative, and Informational writing. In addition to these assessments, students take the NWEA nationally normed assessment. Students are assessed, by their classroom teacher, as needed throughout the year in order to adjust instruction and be responsive to the needs of students. These assessments are used to help teachers:

- determine appropriate books for students to read independently without teacher support
- determine appropriate books to use for instruction (helping students to read harder books)
- determine skills that need more instruction and practice by each student
- identify students that are in need of additional support in order to meet standards in reading
- monitor our curriculum and how it's working to help students move toward proficiency in reading and writing
- determine additional professional development that may be needed

Response to Intervention:

Students “at risk” for meeting standards in reading and writing are provided with additional Tier 2 supports in the classroom. These include:

- additional time with their classroom teacher in small groups or one-on-one instruction
- visual supports and tools to help students develop independence and skills
- utilizing a variety of instructional approaches that aren't a part of Tier 1 (Core Curriculum) instruction

Qualifying students are provided their core classroom reading instruction daily and additional reading instruction with a paraprofessional or reading specialist. This instruction takes place outside of classroom reading instruction in order for students to receive Tier 1 reading instruction and additional time to develop reading proficiency. Students are provided with 30 minutes of additional reading instruction 5 days a week.

- **Tier 2** (students approaching standards) - Students receive intervention delivered by a paraprofessional in groups no larger than three. The curriculum used includes: Leveled Literacy Intervention and Sound Partners.
- **Tier 3** (students “At risk” for meeting standards by the end of the school year) - Students receive intervention delivered by the reading specialist or a certified teacher with extensive experience in reading instruction. Students are instructed one-on-one or in groups no larger than two. The curriculum involves a tailored intervention designed by the Reading Specialist to meet the individual needs of each student.

Professional Development for Teachers of Early Literacy:

Milan Area Schools provides a Literacy Coach to support classroom teachers in helping students become proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade. The coach supports early literacy teachers by providing professional development in implementing the core curriculum, differentiating instruction for the diverse needs of students, providing and gathering resources needed, designing classroom interventions, and using data and assessments to guide instruction. The coach and teacher work together collaboratively to help students meet the state standards and develop proficiency in reading and writing. The coach is available to demonstrate instructional practices, co-plan with teachers, provide feedback to teachers, and analyze assessments alongside teachers.

The literacy coach provides before and after school workshops for teachers in response to their needs for professional development, facilitates Professional Learning Communities and Book Studies that are aligned to our School Improvement Goals, District Initiative, and the needs of our students. The Literacy Coach is responsible for providing ongoing and embedded professional development throughout the school year and inside classrooms with students. Two to three Literacy cycles of professional development are planned and facilitated by the coach each year. These cycles allow all teachers to: have access to continued professional growth, develop common language and practices, and get into other classrooms for observations.

In addition to the above supports, the Literacy Coach monitors school wide data and assists in the facilitation of three **Data Days** a year. These Data Days provides teachers the opportunity to look at school wide, grade level, and individual classroom data. Teachers, Principals, and the Coach make adjustments and instructional changes based on the information they see during data days. These days also guide our school improvement work.

The district utilizes a very comprehensive approach to Early Literacy. It is important for **everyone** to be involved in the development of our youngest readers. Reading, being read to, visiting the library, and many other activities help support our Early Literacy work, so.....

**READ TO YOUR CHILD
EVERY DAY!**