



Alignment for Early Literacy

Review of Delaware's Prekindergarten to Grade 3 Licensure and Certification Landscape

Summary 1 of 4¹: What is the evidence base for the current practices preparing teachers and support staff for teaching literacy?

Key Findings

- There is clear research consensus on best practices for teaching literacy based on the science of reading, and those components are appropriately reflected in the Delaware state standards for the grade bands analyzed.
- There is strong research support for job-embedded professional development (which includes a range of practice and learning opportunities) to positively impact teacher practice. There is not clear consensus on the impact of professional development types on practice such as the duration of professional development engagements and the types of coursework included.

Methodology

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach with a document and data review, a research literature review, and an abbreviated interview series with key system stakeholders. To understand the gap between this regulatory and comparable model review and the identified priority for literacy improvement, the research team turned to stakeholders to share their perspectives and experiences. The portion of the study highlighted in this document is a literature review.

¹ See the full report for detailed analysis as well as the associated summaries (1–4).

Relevant Report Highlights

The empirical research on elementary and adolescent reading instruction recommends explicit teaching of the literacy practices, including text and engagement structures that support intentional development of ways of thinking, speaking, reading, and writing (Catterson and Pearson, 2017; Cervetti et al., 2020; Foorman et al., 2016; Goldman et al., 2016; NBPTS, 1995; Pearson et al., 2020; Sabatini et al., 2018).

The high-level review of the standards for pre-K and early childhood settings (Early Learning Foundations, or ELFs) and the Delaware state standards for the elementary level. In this limited analysis based on key terms, both sets of standards broadly reflect the current evidence base for the components of strong literacy instruction and are aligned to standards in place across most of the country. Research suggests that supporting teachers to implement standards specific to early literacy and reading readiness requires early childhood educators “to be immersed in knowledge about language and literacy development” in their preparation and in the course of the career. Effective teachers balance what to teach (content) with how to teach developmentally effective (theory, practice, and method) and they need to know how to monitor children’s growth and progress.

Research focused on improving early literacy practices for early childhood educators in preschool and elementary settings found “there were statistically significant improvements in language and literacy practices for teachers who received coursework plus coaching” while “professional development alone had negligible effects on improvements in quality practices.” Further, research found that “brief well-executed professional development interventions have small but reasonably robust measurable effects on student literacy outcomes” with longer sessions not necessarily having a greater impact than short sessions. This indicates that focusing on the length of time served in a professional development session should not be a major measure of quality and should be viewed as part of a system for teacher growth, not the only path for teacher growth. Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) has the strongest evidence base for teacher improvement. This type of practice does not take place in a separate course off-site from schools or classrooms—instead, this is a school- or classroom-based model integrated into the workday. JEPD is a shared, ongoing process in a teaching community that focuses on direct applications of teachers in daily practice, while in dialogues with peers or coaches. (Hawley & Valli, 1999). JEPD models can include coaching, collaborative teaching, peer–peer learning, and time for teacher reflection and connection with their own classroom practice.

Selected Considerations and Recommendations

- Identify and review the impact of current incentives for professional development through compensation and flexible use of time for collaboration for literacy across grade bands. Consider expanding incentives according to insights on impact.
- Examine the overlap between early childhood certification and elementary certification and analyze the literacy approach within preparation for the two different pathways.