

Neshaminy School District

K-12 English Language Arts Task Force

Action Proposal



June 10, 2014

English Language Arts Task Force

Gloria Hancock, Ed. D
Geeta Heble, Ed. D
Mary Beth Tecce
Jennifer Tesno

Assistant to the Superintendent for C, I & A
Director of Humanities
Staff Developer/Data Specialist – Elementary
Academic Coach Mathematics/ELA

Elementary

Kathy Brewster	Principal, Albert Schweitzer Elementary
Jamie Callahan	Teacher – Walter Miller Elementary
Judy Culang	Reading Specialist – Joseph Ferderbar Elementary
Stacy Flynn	Teacher – Albert Schweitzer Elementary
Amy Gordon	Teacher (Special Education) – Albert Schweitzer Elementary
Paul Mahoney	Principal, Walter Miller Elementary
Nicole Mascione	Reading Specialist – Albert Schweitzer Elementary
Stephanie Miguelez	Principal, Pearl Buck Elementary
Catherine Riley	Reading Specialist – Walter Miller Elementary
Colleen Stahl	Reading Specialist – Samuel Everitt Elementary

Secondary

Dan August	Teacher (English) – Neshaminy High School
Bob Boffa	English Department Chair/Lead Teacher
Mary Grace Buckwalter	Teacher (English) – Carl Sandburg Middle
Chris DiCicco	Teacher (English) – Neshaminy High School
Stacy Flaville-Boop	Teacher (English) – Maple Point Middle
Carol Foley	Teacher (English – Maple Pont Middle
Amanda Henry	Teacher (English) – Neshaminy High School
Christine Johnson	Teacher (Special Education) – Carl Sandburg Middle School
Kim Kowchik	Teacher (English) – Carl Sandburg Middle
Kate Livingstone	Teacher (English) – Neshaminy High School
Michelle Michaud	Teacher (Special Education) – Carl Sandburg Middle School
Gail Park	Literacy Coach
Marylou Sienko	Teacher (English) – Carl Sandburg Middle
Colin Trickle	Assistant Principal – Neshaminy High School

Parents

Denise Gormley	President, SPIN
Debra Huberfeld	Parent of Junior, Neshaminy High School

Plan of Action for Improvement of English Language Arts, K-12

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND:

We are pleased to submit the Neshaminy School District English Language Arts Task Force Plan of Action for Improvement of the English Language Arts Program, K-12. We hope it will meet with your approval to move forward beginning with the 2014-15 school year.

A district-wide task force was convened on March 18, 2014 to address the findings contained in the English Language Arts Program Quality Review Report through the development of a Plan of Action for Improvement. Members of the task force included administrators, elementary, secondary and special education teachers, reading specialists, staff developers/data specialists, academic coach and parents. It was co-chaired by Dr. Gloria Hancock, Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment and Kathleen Brewster, Principal, Albert Schweitzer Elementary School.

This brief provides a summary of how the plan of action was conceptualized. It includes a summarization of the main ideas put forth during deliberations, thematic activities that are all encompassing and designed to make the needed improvements more manageable for the purposes of full implementation and progress monitoring, and an implementation work plan, including timelines.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

In developing our plan of action for systemic improvement, we read the English Language Arts Program Quality Review Report that was prepared by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit based on findings generated from a three day on-site comprehensive review of the District's English Language Arts program from K-12 in the fall of 2013. This report identified the District's strengths and areas in need of improvement in English Language Arts from Kindergarten through grade 12.

Key strengths identified included:

- A highly knowledgeable, motivated and dedicated professional staff
- Marked progress in the design and development of a comprehensive approach to balanced literacy at the elementary level
- Considerable investment in supporting instructional materials by the District, e.g. *Superkids* reading program, *Pearson's Good Habits*, *Great Readers* program and *Writing Fundamentals*
- Addition of 30 minutes to the school day dedicated to job embedded professional development, student interventions, and improved communication resulting in program improvements
- An infrastructure of sophisticated data warehousing which provides easy access to data for all
- Staff reporting they are eager to begin Grade K-12 ELA program improvement

Key needs improvement areas identified included:

- Continue designing a well-articulated K-12 ELA Curriculum that is aligned to PA Core Standards
- Increase the use of instructional best practices K-12
- Align assessments with curriculum & instructional decision-making
- Create a culture of building leadership that provides informed oversight and support of the ELA K-12 program
- Design a comprehensive professional development plan that focuses on the effective delivery of the written, taught, and tested ELA Curriculum

Based on these findings, several spirited and lively discussions led to prioritization of the recommendations contained in the full report. In addition, five actionable themes emerged from this process. They are as follows:

- Establish a district-wide literacy philosophy to guide instructional practices and professional development. Currently only the elementary level has a literacy philosophy that guides instruction.
- Ensure the PA Core Standards are aligned both vertically and horizontally to the K-12 English Language Arts curriculum maps. Curriculum maps for English Language Arts are presently aligned to the Common Core Standards.
- Ensure expectations are clearly and consistently communicated across all grade levels. The framework and accompanying curriculum must be implemented with fidelity and have a focus on the needs of the students.
- Ensure special education teachers participate in all discussions about professional development activities, instructional materials, resources and supplies, and receive such as appropriate.
- Ensure formative assessment and effective feedback is an integral part of daily practices.

These five umbrella themes represent our conceptual framework for the plan of action. The Task Force discussed best practices for literacy instruction and recommended that all teachers of reading be provided on-going, embedded professional development to ensure that all students receive effective instruction in the essential areas of literacy instruction: teaching phonological awareness and phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, oral reading fluency, teaching writing, and best practices in literacy assessment.

To execute this plan the ELA Task Force adopted a district-wide literacy philosophy to guide instructional practices and professional development. This philosophy of literacy will also serve to guide our direction for future professional development in best practices in literacy instruction and assessment.

Philosophy of Literacy

Neshaminy Schools are dedicated to developing a culture of literacy that transcends classroom walls. Literacy instruction should stimulate, teach, and extend the communication and thinking skills that will allow students to develop positive attitudes about reading and writing. Our ultimate goal is to have students become effective readers, writers, thinkers, communicators and life-long learners.

Guiding Principles

- A comprehensive literacy program includes acquisition and application of thinking, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.
- Effective early literacy instruction is crucial in developing proficient readers and writers.
- The integration of literacy skills across curricular areas is essential to academic achievement.

Reading

- Reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text.
- Reading is a complex process that involves the integration of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension skills.
- Reading comprehension is necessary to analyze and interpret text.

Writing

- Writing has a two-fold purpose: to communicate and to learn.
- Writing is a complex process that requires the writer to attend to key components of writing such as focus, content, organization, style, and conventions. Writing involves the integration of mechanical skills (handwriting or typing), procedural knowledge, background knowledge, creativity, vocabulary, and fluency.

Reading and Writing

- Reading and writing require similar cognitive processes.
- Reading and writing are not naturally acquired and, therefore, must be taught.
- Reading and writing are developmental processes that require differentiated instruction based on an assessment of student needs.
- Reading and writing are recursive processes.
- Reading and writing are interrelated and reciprocal.
- Reading and writing is enjoyable if students have the necessary skills.
- Proficient readers and writers become self-directed learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following action steps are recommended for adoption by the District:

- Conduct refresher training on the Balanced Literacy Framework for administrators and teachers prior to the start of the 2014-15 school year
- Ensure curriculum alignment to PA Core Standards, Common Units and Common Assessments, K-12
- Adopt the proposed philosophy of literacy K-12 and prominently display it in all classrooms
- Develop K-12 Learning Progression Charts and disseminate and post on the District website
- Identify and implement Best Practices in Literacy, K-12 beginning with a common vocabulary
- Develop and implement protocols for communication and collaborative decision-making between special and regular education teachers
- Develop building level Professional Development Plans, K-12 that include a literacy focus for the 2014-15 school year
- Create a culture of building distributed leadership for English Language Arts support
- Develop grade appropriate walk-through checklists for administrators
- Develop K-12 Learning Progression charts
- Design and implement a balanced comprehensive assessment plan focused on formative assessments

A Work Plan for Improvement chart delineating the recommendations, responsible parties and associated timelines was developed by the task force. A copy of the Work Plan for Improvement is attached to this proposal.

NEXT STEPS:

The Neshaminy School District Task Force for English Language Arts Literacy will continue to meet on a quarterly basis throughout the 2014-15 school year to monitor and report on progress in implementing approved recommendations. A copy of the monitoring form is attached to this proposal.

ELA Task Force Work Plan for Improvement

Key Task	Timeline	Responsible Party	Comments
Ensure curriculum alignment	June 30, 2014	Lead teacher; English 6-12 teachers; C & I; Jennifer Tesno	Align to PA Core in grades 6-12 by 5/2/14; K-5 by 6/30/14
Adopt a philosophy of literacy, K-12	June 3, 2014	ELA Task Force	Philosophy at elementary level should be extended to K-12
Develop K-12 Learning Progression Chart and disseminate	May 2014	C & I	Common Core vertical review
Convene a committee to identify best practices in literacy, K-12, for implementation	June 30, 2015	C & I Director of Arts and Humanities, English Department Chairs; Reading Specialists; teachers; principals	
Develop protocols for communication and collaborative decision-making between Special Ed and Regular Ed	June 30, 2014	Kathy Brewster	
Develop building level Professional Development plans (PD), K-12	May 30, 2014	Building administration; C & I	Aug. 23 & 26 – Balanced Literacy In-service PD Needs Assessment developed District PD by June 30, 2014 District Priorities-Balanced Literacy, Lesson design, differentiation, data analysis, & formative assessment/instruction/student work
Create culture of building leadership for ELA support	August 26, 2014 – June 30, 2015	Superintendent; Assistant Superintendent; Administration	Develop administrative goals and incorporate into Superintendent's Report, Educator and Teacher Effectiveness System
Develop grade appropriate walkthroughs checklist	August 15, 2014	C & I	Building level implementation
Design and implement a balanced comprehensive assessment plan focused on formative assessments	May – June 2014	Student Assessment System work group/Principals; Data Specialists (Task Force); Reading Specialists	New benchmark/common assessments, as well as formative assessments are an integral component of building /district professional development plan Specific number of assessments per course that are common Utilize Performance Plus/Assessment Builder

Neshaminy School District English Language Arts Literacy Task Force Monitoring Form

Responsible Party: _____

Quarter of 2014-15 1 2 3 4

(Circle one)

Tasks	On Schedule (Y/N)	Quantify current status as of this quarter	Identify obstacles/barriers	Identify recommendations for corrective action, if needed
Conduct refresher training on the Balanced Literacy Framework for administrators and teachers				
Align English Language Arts Curriculum, K-12				
Adopt Philosophy of Literacy, K-12				
Convene a committee to identify and implement Best Practices in Literacy, K-12				
Develop protocols for communication and collaborative decision-making between special and regular education				
Develop building level Professional Development Plans, K-12				
Create a culture of building distributed leadership for English Language Arts support				
Develop grade appropriate walk-through checklists for administrators				
Develop K-12 Learning Programing charts				
Design and implement a balanced comprehensive assessment plan focused in formative assessments				