

# Literacy Leadership: The Beginnings of a Comprehensive Literacy Program



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## Introduction

### High School Literacy Leadership Team (LLT)

The LLT was created as part of a larger district-wide initiative to address deficiencies in literacy skills. Findings from the LLT revealed significant gaps in assessment and instruction of literacy at Willamette High School. The research base on secondary literacy highlights the need for formative and summative data on individual literacy skills to design appropriate interventions. However, a review of the literature revealed scant data on the implementation of individual progress monitoring systems to assess secondary student literacy.

The LLT constructed a framework to develop an assessment system for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, utilizing the district database that currently provides literacy assessment data (ORF, Maze) through grade 8. The assessment system will be developed in coordination with targeted professional development to provide faculty with the skills to create and implement interventions that address specific deficiencies in secondary student literacy skills. Specific formative assessments will be selected that are valid secondary literacy measures.

### Secondary Literacy

Research on the assessment of secondary literacy is emergent, although data on literacy assessments highlight substantial skill deficits. On the 2005 administration of the NAEP, only 31% of eight graders performed at or above "proficient," while 70% of secondary students require differentiated literacy instruction (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

Middle and high school infrastructural barriers create challenges to the implementation of literacy assessments and interventions (Schoenbach et al., 1999). To overcome these barriers, three key components are identified: (a) ongoing summative assessment and program evaluation, (b) ongoing formative literacy assessment, and (c) a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Several different factors cause students to read below grade level, such as deficits in decoding skills, vocabulary, and background knowledge, which require instruments that can measure individual literacy needs and provide the appropriate interventions.

Identification should occur in two stages; a student undergoes an initial screening to qualify for services, followed by a diagnostic assessment to identify individual literacy strengths and weaknesses (IES, 2008). The design and intensity of interventions should match student need, and assumes a high level of instructional quality (IES, 2008).

### SIP Goal

The high school strongly believes that literacy is the foundation that enables each graduate to excel in college and the workplace. Therefore, our goal for the school improvement project is to design a comprehensive literacy assessment and system of interventions that address literacy deficits and provide adequate supports to ensure that each student is prepared for the demands of college and the workplace.

## Formative Literacy Assessments

### Oral Reading Fluency

The measurement of oral reading fluency has been widely used to assess decoding and comprehension of text in elementary and middle school applications. Research suggests that efficient word recognition builds the capacity for higher-level comprehension of text. Thus, oral reading fluency can be used as an indicator of overall reading competence, including (a) processing meaningful connections between sentences while utilizing background knowledge, (b) making inferences to fill in gaps in understanding, and (c) inferring the macrostructure of a passage (Fuchs et al., 2001). There are few high school applications of oral reading fluency.

### easyCBM

easyCBM is progress monitoring system for reading that is designed for use in elementary and middle school. It includes multiple measures (passage reading fluency, word reading fluency, and multiple choice reading comprehension) to assess individual student literacy progress. Oral reading fluency is one component of easyCBM. easyCBM is currently available up to grade 8, although grade 9 application may be possible.

### Maze

The Maze assessment is designed to measure reading comprehension through the use of a multiple-choice, silently read close task in a three-minute window. Assessment passages are 150-400 words in length, and every 7<sup>th</sup> word is replaced with three words inside parentheses. Students select the word inside the parenthesis that fits the context of the sentence. This assessment is designed for elementary and middle school applications, for both benchmarking and progress monitoring.

## Infrastructural Development

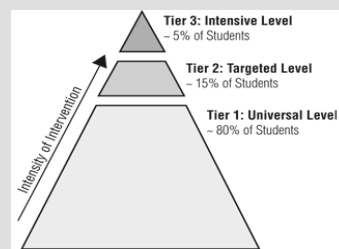
### School-wide survey

A ten-item Likert survey conducted at the high school indicated that faculty did not possess the background knowledge to utilize literacy assessment data. Furthermore, confounds with student engagement were cited as a major deterrent to assessing individual student performance.

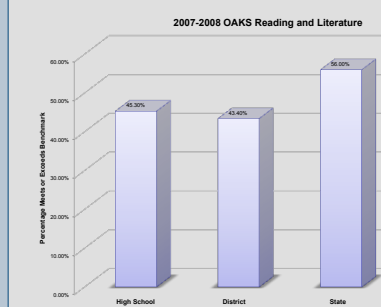
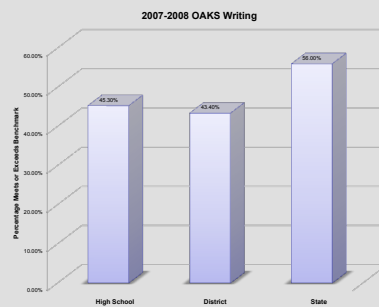
In a constructed response following the survey, 69% of faculty (n=51) stated that a systemic school-wide response to literacy deficits was essential, while 44% wrote that literacy issues were related to curricula that were too challenging for students.

### RtI Development

The school district utilizes RtI models in K-8 programs, although there are no applications at the high school. The LLT and district office determined that RtI models should be used to address individual literacy deficits. Progress-monitoring assessments will provide data to measure degree of need. Future research will need to investigate evidence-based secondary literacy interventions that provide feedback to adjust the intensity of interventions based on student responsiveness.



## OAKS Reading and Writing Data: The High School



## Contact Information and Acknowledgements

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## Projected Outcomes

### Achievement

New Oregon diploma requirements will mandate that students pass OAKS reading and writing tests to earn a diploma. The final RtI model will substantially increase the number of students meeting the new proficiency requirements.

### College Readiness

High school graduates require substantial remediation in reading and writing in college (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Students will be more adequately prepared to engage in critical thinking and the four components of college readiness (Conley, 2007) by addressing literacy deficits that prevent the movement from literal to critical comprehension (Brasell & Yopp, 2008).

## Timeline

Phase I: 9/08-present  
The high school LLT compiled all research relevant to secondary literacy assessment. This research guided discussions on potential directions for the implementation of progress monitoring assessments. After the team reaches consensus on the design of the assessment system, a cost-benefit analysis will be undertaken to determine high school capacity in regards to staffing and resources. The high school is making a three-year commitment to this project, so the costs of the assessment and professional development will be evaluated over two biennia. The LLT will investigate collaborative opportunities with other school districts to invest in the development of literacy assessment systems.

Phase II: 4/09-6/09  
Data from the school-wide literacy survey will be used to inform professional development opportunities. Differentiated interventions and tiered supports will be pursued. Teachers will undergo a series of intensive, ongoing trainings that will develop expertise in both the analysis of assessment data and the utilization of literacy strategies that will address deficits in student performance. The LLT will develop literacy teams within the school to create a community of interaction on literacy issues and approaches.

Phase III: 9/09-9/11  
A program evaluation process will be determined to assess the efficacy of the literacy program. Key data will drive decision making, with a focus on the assessment of teacher capacity to address literacy deficits in classrooms with varying degrees of need and low staff to pupil ratios. Further research will include the development of a literacy coordinator position to build upon classroom instruction and implement a comprehensive, systemic response to literacy deficits with additional supports.

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