

In lieu of a recent local publication on the topic of literacy and reading instruction in Madison, we felt it was important for the community to have a clearer and more nuanced understanding about current practice in MMSD.

What is MMSD's approach to literacy?

Reading instruction in MMSD aims to provide students with a rich experience in literacy that is aligned to the standards and builds a love for reading. Students in grades K-5 receive instruction in foundational skills, comprehension and fluency within both fiction and non-fiction texts, writing, oral language development, speaking, and listening. Students in grades K-2 receive thirty minutes a day of explicit instruction which includes: grade-level phonics, word analysis skills for decoding, and fluency to support overall comprehension. The materials used for our foundational skills instruction are research-based and provide a sequenced approach to phonics instruction.

Why does MMSD take this approach?

In order to accelerate student progress, students need access to both structured phonics and engaging grade-level materials and content. The standards recognize that it is important to provide a progression of learning opportunities for students in addition to structured phonics. This teaching progression is focused on the acquisition of academic vocabulary and exposure to a wide range of both fiction and informational texts that are of high interest to students.

What do we do when students need more support?

Within strong core instruction, MMSD utilizes a progress monitoring tool that provides information to teachers about what specific skill deficits a child may be experiencing. If accommodations cannot be made within the core literacy block, a child may receive individualized or small group instruction from a reading interventionist who possesses a reading teacher or reading specialist license. Based on data, students receive time-limited instruction and targeted, brief pre/post assessments to determine success on identified skill areas.

In addition, every MMSD school has a full time Instructional Coach to support the implementation of high quality instruction and assessment. The Instructional Coaches receive focused professional development throughout the school year so that they can engage teachers in coaching cycles focused on implementation of high quality reading instruction.

We also rely on several important partnerships to provide additional supports for students. MMSD has worked with the Madison Children's Dyslexia Center and has also hired a coordinator to train staff members on the multi-sensory approach to reading instruction based on the work of Orton Gillingham. MMSD has trained over 132 teachers across the district, which is double

the amount of teachers from a year ago, who are able to implement this specific intervention. Through our ongoing partnerships with United Way, Schools of Hope, Centro Hispano, and the Partners for After School Success, we are grateful to have volunteer tutors in many schools and community centers that have provided meaningful support to our MMSD students.

What results are we seeing in MMSD?

We see signs of positive gains over time, as measured from our current district's Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS), which is administered individually to students by the teacher. The percent of students at or above benchmark on PALS, Grade 2 has increased over time:

- This benchmark has increased 10 points for African American students, 11 points for Latinx students, 11 points for low income students, and 14 points for students with disabilities.

The benchmark, Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), which mainly measures comprehension and language acquisition, indicates that the percent of students at or above benchmark is on an upward trend in grades 3-8.

- Third grade reading has increased 8 points and fifth grade reading is up 10.
- Seventeen schools met or exceeded our goals for reading in grades three through five. Five schools also made gains of 20 points or more in reading.
- For African American students, there has been a seven point increase in our grade 1 and 2 literacy benchmarks, grades 3-5 reading, and grades 6-8 reading, among other measures. Additionally, the percentage of students scoring "minimal" has gone down by 15 points.

What's next?

This year, we successfully launched the first steps of our new Comprehensive Assessment System, which has already eliminated some assessments that were repetitive and/or not providing us with the detailed information we need. This will give more instructional minutes back to teachers in MMSD, as they work to utilize more formative and day-to-day instructional strategies that give them ongoing information about how a child learns. As part of our plan, we will continue to embed staff development on assessment practices and data literacy in order to best address our students' assets and challenges.

In an effort to provide our students with the highest quality instruction, we recently applied for the "Equity District Quality Matters Grant" from DPI to support the process of selecting new K-5 literacy core materials. This adoption process will begin during the 2019-20 school year. This process will include input from stakeholders both within the district as well as across the larger Madison community to best include a diversity of perspectives and approaches. Our goal is to select materials that are historically accurate, inclusive and culturally representative.