



# Develop and Nurture a Culture of Shared Responsibility for Reading Improvement



## Developing and Nurturing a Reading Culture

It is the responsibility of the instructional leader to promote and support the reading culture of a school.

Improving outcomes in reading for all students demands the energy and momentum of a cooperative, cohesive staff.

2

It comes as no surprise that the culture of a building is due in large part to the leadership in that building. The instructional leader is responsible for promoting that culture and providing support to ensure a cooperative and cohesive staff. It is then the responsibility of the staff to implement and support the culture.

## Background and Rationale

Creating a collaborative culture is the single most important factor for successful schools' improvement initiatives and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their schools.

Eastwood and Lewis

3

The work of Eastwood and Lewis emphasizes the importance of collaboration among staff as the critical first step toward improving school effectiveness. Establishing a common ground is essential to initial and continued success and improved student outcomes. As we proceed through this presentation, the necessity of this foundation becomes evident.

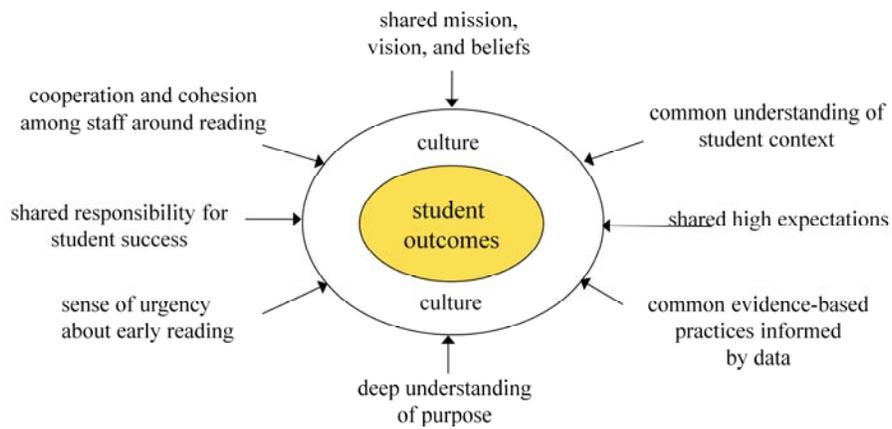
## Establish Common Ground

- Materials we use
- Training and support we provide
- Instruction we plan and deliver
- Assessments we conduct
- How we use time and other resources
- Leadership we provide for reading
- Our shared mission, vision, beliefs, expectations, norms, values and practices around reading outcomes

4

A school's reading culture is, essentially, "how we do things here" with respect to reading. That includes the materials used, the training and support provided, the instruction that is planned and delivered, and the assessments conducted. It also includes how time and resources are used and the leadership provided for reading. Through the development of a shared mission and vision, a school establishes their beliefs, expectations, norms, values and practices around reading outcomes.

## The components of reading culture



5

The components of a reading culture are many, but are all based on establishing a common ground. To begin with, a school must have a common mission and know its purpose; a common vision to view what is possible; and common beliefs about what is essential for learning to read.

## Developing and Nurturing a Reading Culture Key Concepts

1. Develop a shared vision of what the school could be by appealing to core values
2. Develop a deep understanding of purpose and a sense of urgency in moving continually toward that purpose
3. Promote cooperation and cohesion among staff around reading instruction
4. Promote a sense of well-being

adapted from Balanced Leadership, McREL 2003

6

These key concepts are adapted from the Balanced Leadership framework that lists 21 principal responsibilities associated with school success. Successful schools have a shared vision of what the school could be. Leadership works with staff to develop a deep understanding of their purpose and builds cooperation and cohesion among staff, while creating and promoting a sense of well-being.

## 1. Develop a shared vision of what the school could be by appealing to core values.

- All students achieving in reading
- Shared responsibility for student success
- Continuity across classrooms and services
- Scientifically-based instruction
- High-quality professional development
- Data-driven decisions
- Decreased behavior issues

7

The first key concept from *Balanced Leadership* gets to the heart of developing a shared vision by appealing to core values.

Everyone involved wants the students in your school to succeed. Every staff member, every parent wants what's best for each student. It's the job of school leadership to show how these core values are well-served by your school's reading plan. This plan needs to show a commitment to all students achieving in reading through a shared responsibility for student success and continuity across classrooms and services. Instruction must be scientifically-based and supported by an on-going high-quality professional development plan to ensure implementation with fidelity. Student data must drive instructional decisions for all students. Modules are included within these framework presentations on topics of instruction, professional development, data-based decision making and student engagement, which your team may find to be helpful resources.

## Work Together to Develop a Shared Vision

- When you think of developing a shared vision of what your school could be, what images/phrases come to mind?
- To what degree are those visions currently shared among staff? By parents?
- List ways for developing or strengthening a shared vision of what your school could be like.
- Identify key people to help carry the vision and key times and strategies for promoting the vision.

8

With your group or leadership team, take the time now to participate in this activity. What do you see as a vision for your school and how are those visions shared by other staff and parents? How could a shared vision be developed or strengthened and who are some key people to help carry the vision?

## 2. Develop a deep understanding of purpose

- Be in classrooms during reading instruction
- Hold reading-related conversations with staff and students
- Know the data and talk about it
- Make reading an on-going topic at staff meetings
- Ask how you can support reading achievement efforts
- Be an advocate for reading beyond the building

9

The second key concept reminds us to be very clear about why we're here. What is the purpose of this school community? What can we accomplish together that we can't individually?

For the principal, promoting and supporting the culture means not only sharing the vision but being the guide, building in accountability, and providing huge amounts of support as others acclimate to the culture. Toward that goal, a principal must be in classrooms to observe instruction; engage in reading-related conversations with staff and students at every opportunity; know the data and talk about it; make reading an on-going topic at staff meetings and ask how reading achievement efforts can be better supported; and be an advocate for reading beyond the building – bringing the conversation to parents, district administrators and school board members.

## More Walking the Talk . . .

- Seize every opportunity to promote reading
- Make the data public
- Host and attend celebrations of reading success
- Facilitate and support master teachers sharing with more novice reading teachers
- Use as many of your daily interactions as you can to promote the reading culture with staff, students, parents, central office, the community-at-large
- Stress the urgency of early reading

10

Committing to the reading culture becomes the responsibility of teachers and staff as well. Presented here are a few more ways to walk the talk and promote your school's vision and beliefs about reading instruction. One of the most powerful of these is to stress the urgency of early reading. It seems that once people understand the urgency and look to the data for guidance, a deeper understanding of purpose would be established.

## The Urgency of Early Reading

# 540 Days

Assuming that during reading instruction there are:

- 0 absences
- 0 field trips
- 0 interruptions
- 0 school assemblies
- Attendance every day from Grade 1 to end of Grade 3

11

More people need to recognize the fact that we have a limited amount of time to teach children to read.

540 days is “idealized” time assuming children are not absent, there is no wasted time, no assemblies, field trips, snow days, etc. With recent budget cuts and decreased school funding, many districts now have significantly fewer instructional days than this, making the urgency even more acute. Prevention of reading difficulties is key because of the challenges of catching kids up once they fall behind.

## The Urgency of Early Reading

- As early as kindergarten, “meaningful differences” exist between students’ literacy knowledge and experience (Hart & Risley, 1995).
- In a sample of 54 students, Juel found that there was an 88% probability of being a poor reader in fourth grade if you were a poor reader in first grade (Juel, 1988).
- Approximately 75% of students identified with reading problems in the third grade are still reading disabled in the 9th grade (Francis et al., 1996, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, cited in National Reading Panel Progress Report, February 22, 1999).

12

Here are a few citations from significant pieces of research supporting the urgency of teaching reading early. Communicating these findings to parents, other staff, district administration and the community will help to validate the importance of early reading and the need for their support.

## How Do You “Walk the Talk”?

- Make a list of ways that you (as a building leader or staff member) currently “walk the talk” in your building and beyond.
- Identify one or two more opportunities for you and add them to your list.
- If you are a building leader, how can you create opportunities for other staff to promote the reading culture?

13

Spend a few minutes thinking about the ideas presented on developing a deep understanding of purpose (slides 9 and 10). Based on your role at your school, reflect on current practices and target one or two additional opportunities for you personally to help develop that deep understanding of purpose.

### 3. Promote Cooperation and Cohesion Among Staff

- Establish shared responsibility
  - Shared responsibility for student success
  - Shared data analysis and problem solving
  - Shared celebration of student successes

14

This big idea addresses the notion that as a staff, we can accomplish goals that couldn't be accomplished individually.

The idea of sharing or “giving up” students seems to be a hard concept for teachers to accept, let alone embrace. At first teachers may not want to regroup students for small group differentiated instruction, for example. But it must be reinforced, through data analysis and sharing and problem solving that everyone is responsible for every student's success. Better solutions are often the result and few things are more rewarding to staff than sharing student successes.

## Promote Cooperation and Cohesion Among Staff

- Build time into the master schedule
- Build collaborative processes
- Provide collaboration training
- Get protected collaboration times and common planning times on the calendar at the beginning of the year
- Support staff in observing one grade level above and one grade level below their own to facilitate cross-grade collaboration
- Promote collaborative processes at staff meetings

15

A collaborative culture must be cultivated, requiring the principal to allocate resources necessary to realize such goals as collaboration times and common instructional and planning times. This process includes opportunities to develop collaborative processes and an understanding both within and across grade levels.

**Facilitating collaboration  
within and beyond scheduled meetings: or  
Talk, talk, talk--and a whole lot of action**

- Make sure meetings are scheduled, structured, focused, facilitated, & outcome oriented (tasks w/follow-up).
- Make sure you are there! (It speaks volumes about the importance of the meeting.)
- Get staff talking about reading within and across grade level lines.
- Ensure that non-classroom staff are involved.
- Be on the look-out for ways to nurture the reading culture.

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16

Here are more ways to facilitate a culture of collaboration. The active involvement of your building leader reinforces and validates the objectives of staff working together to improve student learning.

#### 4. A sense of well-being happens when . . .

- the work being done is critical
- efforts are informed by data and instruction is grounded in research
- staff are supported in their efforts and those efforts result in increased student achievement
- “this is the way we do things here”
- successes are acknowledged and celebrated

. . . then a sense of well-being is enjoyed by all.

17

Developing and nurturing a strong reading culture goes beyond getting everyone moving in the same direction. It becomes a dynamic system for promoting a sense of well-being – a sense that we’re doing the right work in the right way to maximum reading success for all of our students.

Practice Activity #1  
**“Describe Your Reading Culture”**

- Think about the current reading culture of your building: (Figure 55-A1)
- Identify 2 strengths
  - How are you supporting these?
  - What more could you be doing to strengthen these areas or people?
- Identify 2 areas for improvement
  - How can you positively and effectively impact these?
- What additional resources will you need?

18

Take 5 minutes to jot down your ideas, from the perspective of your role at your school. Work with your leadership team to problem-solve areas in need of improvement and where additional resources could potentially be found.

## Sustaining a Reading Culture Takes Commitment

Commitment is demonstrated by:

- Sharing the vision
- Communicating the vision every way and everywhere you can / Walking the talk
- Linking the vision back to the data and the urgency of early reading
- Maintaining collaborative processes and shared responsibility for student success
- Exploring ways of sustaining and strengthening the reading culture
- Celebrating successes and acknowledging the work

19

Once a strong reading culture has been developed at your school, commitment by all is crucial in being able to sustain it. You must not lose the focus of your work, but instead continue to build and strengthen it at every opportunity, while celebrating steps moving forward.

## Commitment across levels

- Classrooms are embedded in a broader school and education system. Student achievement is directly affected by instructional quality; instructional quality is directly affected by school capacity; and school capacity is directly affected by district support.
- All levels of the organization must be aligned

King and Newman, 2000

20

As we know, no single level of the educational system is as effective on its own as when the whole organization is aligned and working toward common goals. As concluded in the research by King and Newman, when the district allocates resources and develops a professional development plan to support student achievement targets, each school is better able to align their reading plan to improve instruction in the classroom.

## Commitment at the District Level

- Hire and assign district leaders and principals committed to goals and practices which strengthen reading improvement efforts
- Guide collaboration among regular education, Title, Special Education and ELL staff in the reading improvement process
- Build capacity by investing in training for all staff
- Align on-going professional development with reading priorities
- Support the formative assessment process and communicate data to school board and schools

21

Ideally, commitment begins at the district level, with hiring practices, collaboration among services, and coordinated training and on-going professional development for all staff. The district can cultivate support through communications with the school board and the larger community.

## Commitment at the School Level

- Build capacity through hiring staff committed to school goals
- Develop teacher capacity to understand data and deliver instruction aligned with each student's needs
- Involve all school staff in reading improvement and provide support for implementation
- Continue PD, follow-up and support process
- Examine student data regularly to assure progress; adjust instruction

22

At individual schools, capacity must continue to be built through hiring staff committed to the goals and reading culture that has been developed. By providing on-going professional development and support from principals, coaches and instructional leaders, and by ensuring regular use of data to plan instruction, instructional delivery systems will be strengthened to ensure student achievement gains. In the Resources section of this presentation is an example of a school district procedure for using data to monitor student reading performance, which you may find helpful in your discussions.

## Commitment at the Classroom Level

- Collaborate across classrooms, grades, content areas and services
- Regularly monitor student progress
- Regularly meet with grade level or content area teams to adjust grouping and instruction as needed
- Share accountability for student outcomes
- Implement with high fidelity and effective use of time

23

With the support of the district and building leadership, teachers in all classrooms, grades, content areas and across program services can work together as a team, with a focused purpose to improve student reading outcomes in their school. It is ultimately the teachers' responsibility to implement curriculum and strategies with a high degree of fidelity and to use instructional time effectively. Additionally, teaching staff must ask for support and assistance if students are not progressing.

# Sustainability

The greatest barrier to sustainability is not loss of funding. It is:

- Loss of focus
- Erosion of the culture
- Loss of commitment upon which the initial success was built

24

In order to sustain a school's success toward improving student reading outcomes, the focus must be diligently maintained. While funding losses present significant challenges, a school and staff can adjust and overcome many of those challenges by keeping the reading culture strong and holding true to their commitments.

## Practice Activity #2

### Promoting Sustainability

- Figure 55-A2 :
  - Individually or in small groups
  - Look at the slides from the level at which you work (district administrator, superintendent, principal, coach/specialist, classroom teacher)
  - Look at the slides from the level “above and below” yours
  - How might you influence efforts and promote sustaining the commitment at those levels?

25

This is a good time to apply these ideas to your own role in the school system. Figure 55-A2 includes information for staff at each level of a school system. Determine which strategies seem like they might work for you to promote sustainability at your level. How might you influence efforts at the level “above and below” yours? Keep this thinking in the forefront as you continue to nurture and

## References and Resources

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- Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- *Teaching All Students to Read: Practices from Reading First Schools With Strong Intervention Outcomes – Florida Center for Reading Research, 2006.*
- *Lessons shared: What we have learned from high performing schools Principals' Insights from the Oregon Reading First Case Studies. PowerPoint March, 2006*

## Activities

- Discussion: “Developing a Shared Vision”
- Discussion: “Walking the Talk”
- Practice Activity #1 Handout: “Describe Your Reading Culture” (figure 55 A-1)
- Practice Activity #2 Handout: “Promoting Sustainability” (figure 55-A2)