

WA State Literacy Framework K-6

Literacy For All Learners

This document is a section from the [Washington State Literacy Framework K-6](#). Refer to the main source for more information. If you have policy questions related to the WA State Literacy Framework K-6, please contact ELA@k12.wa.us.

Ensuring Equitable Literacy Instruction for Every Student

Every student brings a unique set of strengths, experiences, and learning needs to the classroom. To ensure that all students have access to high-quality literacy instruction, schools must provide targeted support that recognizes and responds to diverse learners. Effective literacy instruction is grounded in MTSS, UDL, culturally responsive teaching, and coordination with Special Education and related services. These approaches proactively tend to barriers for learning while leveraging students' strengths:

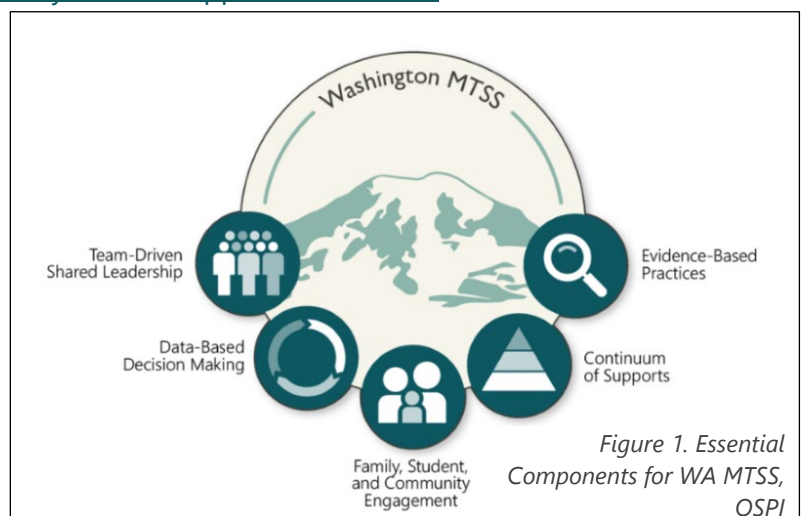
- Understand and implement the principles of instructional design that engage and support diverse learners.
- Establish and maintain an ongoing process for collecting a variety of student data.
- Provide evidence-based, differentiated instruction that meets students' individual needs.
- Use high-quality instructional materials that align with state learning standards.
- Form transdisciplinary teams that share in thinking, data analysis, and decision-making.

Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach in Literacy

For students developing literacy skills, targeted interventions must be evidence-based, such as those outlined in [Washington's Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework](#). This framework

ensures that regular screening, progress monitoring, and differentiated instruction are used to support all students equitably. The essential components of MTSS are interrelated, and as the intensity of student need increases, each of the components also increases in intensity. Teams share the responsibility of making decisions in an MTSS framework. These decisions are driven by high-quality data, collected over time, from multiple sources. Teams engage families, students, and invite

community partners to plan, implement, and improve student services. Staff and community partners provide a continuum of support to students through a tiered delivery system, starting



with strong core instruction, using evidence-based practices to accelerate student learning across all tiers.

By emphasizing student strengths and providing personalized instruction, this framework fosters a growth-oriented learning environment where all students can achieve success. A multi-tiered approach to reading instruction and intervention includes these essential components:

- **Team-Driven Shared Leadership:** Teams share the responsibility of making decisions within the MTSS framework. Decisions are made based on high-quality data.
- **Data-Based Decision Making:** The use of data to make informed decisions about instruction, movement within the multi-level prevention system, intensification, allocation of resources, and disability identification.
- **Family, Student, and Community Engagement:** Engaging families, students, and when applicable, inviting community partners to plan, implement, and improve services. This engagement ensures that there is ongoing two-way communication and collaboration between school personnel and families.
- **Continuum of Supports:** Providing a continuum of support to students through a tiered delivery system, starting with strong core instruction, and increasing in intensity based on student needs.
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** Using evidence-based practices; activities, strategies, or interventions that have been proven to improve student outcomes. These practices are systematically implemented to ensure they are effective in improving student outcomes. Districts can support by providing teachers with high-quality professional development on effective reading interventions and data-driven decision-making. Building and districts leadership can advocate for teachers to use evidence-based practices when providing literacy instruction to all students.

Table 1: Tiered Intensity of Supports

Tier	Description	Instructional Focus
Tier 1 (Core Instruction)	High-quality, evidence-based, differentiated instruction for all students. Tier 1 is the foundation for additional layers of support and should meet the needs of approximately 80% of student population.	Systematic phonics, oral language development, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies.
Tier 2 (Core + additional support)	Targeted interventions for students who need additional support.	Small-group instruction on targeted skills and concepts, providing additional practice with feedback.
Tier 3 (Core + additional support + intensive support)	Intensive, individualized intervention for students	Explicit, diagnostic-prescriptive instruction with

Tier	Description	Instructional Focus
	significantly below grade level.	increased frequency and intensity.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [MTSS Components and Resources](#)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. By utilizing a UDL framework, educators focus on learning experiences that provide the opportunity for all learners to have access to, participate in, and progress in the general education curriculum. There is mention of UDL throughout this framework, as it is connected to many aspects of effective literacy instruction. UDL is a framework for how to develop lesson plans and assessments that are based on three main principles:

- **Multimodal Materials:** Offering information in more than one format and seeking “flexible and varied” materials intended to increase access to instruction and engagement.
- **Actions and Expressions:** Providing more than one way to interact with the material and to show what they have learned. There are many options for students to show what they know, because students have different strengths in how they express themselves.
- **Engagement Motivations:** UDL encourages multiple ways to motivate students. Letting kids make choices and giving them assignments that feel relevant to their lives are some examples of how teachers can sustain students’ interest.

Structured Literacy

Structured Literacy is a highly effective, evidence-based approach that benefits all students, including those with dyslexia, varied reading abilities, and language-based learning differences. The importance of Structured Literacy lies in its systematic, cumulative, and explicit methodology. It ensures that students receive instruction that builds on prior knowledge and addresses their specific areas of need. This approach provides explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction in the key components of reading:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Understanding and manipulating sounds in spoken language.
- **Phonics:** Recognizing letter-sound relationships and decoding words.
- **Fluency:** Reading with accuracy, appropriate speed, and expression.
- **Vocabulary:** Understanding and using words effectively.
- **Comprehension:** Making meaning from text.

Supporting students with reading difficulties requires targeted, specialized support tailored to their unique needs. Structured Literacy is required in Washington state under [Dyslexia Interventions \(RCW 28A.320.260\)](#) and [ESSB 6162](#). This requires schools to use MTSS to provide evidence-based multisensory structured literacy interventions to students in grades K–2 who are

at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. By adhering to these requirements, Washington state ensures that all students receive the support they need to develop strong literacy skills.

Specific Learning Needs

Every student brings a rich tapestry of strengths, experiences, and unique gifts to the classroom. Recognizing and celebrating these assets is foundational. When educators acknowledge what students bring, add, and can do, they lay the groundwork for supporting students in areas where they may need additional assistance. With that strength-based perspective in mind, educators can address potential challenges or unique characteristics as part of a holistic view of the learner. Many students bring unique learning styles to the classroom. Some may require additional support in specific areas like reading and writing, while also possessing remarkable strengths in areas such as problem-solving or creative expression.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that is neurological in origin and is characterized by unexpected difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities that are not consistent with the person's intelligence, motivation, and sensory capabilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological components of language that are often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities. The difficulties are not typically the result of ineffective classroom practices. Secondary consequences may include challenges in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge ([RCW 28A.320.250](#)).

For some students, learning to read requires more than just high-quality core instruction. It also requires targeted, specialized support tailored to their unique needs. Students with dyslexia or other reading difficulties often face persistent challenges with decoding, fluency, and comprehension, despite receiving standard reading instruction. For these learners, structured literacy approaches offer the explicit, systematic instruction necessary to develop foundational reading skills. A structured literacy approach emphasizes:

- **Explicit Phonics Instruction:** Teaching letter-sound relationships in a clear, sequential manner.
- **Multisensory Learning Techniques:** Which engage multiple senses (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), to reinforce reading skills.
- **Decodable Texts:** Ensuring students have controlled reading materials that align with their phonics knowledge.
- **Ongoing Formative Assessments:** Allowing educators to monitor progress and adjust instruction accordingly.

These measures ensure that students with reading disabilities receive the support they need to become confident, capable readers. By equipping educators with the right tools and strategies, schools can create inclusive learning environments where all students can succeed.

Follow link for more OSPI information on [Dyslexia Guidance: Implementing MTSS for Literacy \(2024\)](#).

Learning Assistance Program (LAP): Closing Literacy Gaps

For students who are not yet meeting grade-level literacy standards, the [Learning Assistance Program \(LAP\)](#) provides essential, state-funded support. Aligned with MTSS, LAP ensures that students receive targeted (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) interventions that accelerate literacy growth. LAP plays a vital role in removing barriers to literacy success by providing supplemental time, instruction, and resources to help students reach their full potential. LAP services are most effective when they are:

- Aligned with general education classroom instruction, ensuring consistency across core and supplemental literacy practices.
- Implemented with fidelity, using evidence-based strategies tailored to student needs.
- Responsive to progress monitoring, allowing educators to adjust support as students develop their skills.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [LAP Program Overview](#).

Special Education Services

Special education services provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) offer an essential layer of support that complements, rather than replaces, solid Tier 1 instruction. These services are designed to address the unique needs of students, ensuring that they receive personalized assistance tailored to their specific learning requirements. By integrating IEP support with Tier 1 instruction, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that promotes academic success and fosters a sense of belonging among all students. This approach underscores the commitment to providing equitable education opportunities, recognizing that every student deserves access to high-quality instruction and the necessary resources to thrive.

Multisensory Learning

Multisensory learning occurs within core instruction. This technique offers an engaging approach by activating multiple senses—visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic—during literacy lessons. Picture a student tracing letters in sand while saying their sounds aloud or using colored tiles to build words. These strategies make abstract concepts tangible and reinforce learning in ways that are both memorable and effective for a broad range of students.

Individualized Instruction

At the heart of effective special education services is Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), which adapts the content, methodology, and delivery of instruction to meet the unique needs of each learner. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) related to literacy skills require specially designed instruction that is both individualized and evidence based. For students with disabilities, this approach ensures equitable access to literacy development and grade level standards, while addressing specific learning needs. Imagine a classroom where every child's learning journey is tailored to their strengths and needs. This is the essence of individualized instruction in special education. For students with IEPs, explicit and systematic teaching methods, such as structured literacy approaches, are essential for building foundational skills like decoding, fluency, and comprehension. These methods are not one-size-fits-all; they are carefully designed to address the specific barriers each student faces while helping them achieve their academic goals.

Effective individualized instruction in literacy must include the following:

- **Progress Monitoring:** Progress monitoring acts as a compass, guiding educators toward effective interventions and adjustments when needed. It involves systematically tracking a student's advancement toward their IEP goals through tools like Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBMs) or observational data. For example, a teacher might administer timed reading fluency tests weekly to measure growth or use graphs to visualize trends over time. When progress stalls or accelerates unexpectedly, these insights allow educators to recalibrate instruction, ensuring every student stays on track toward meaningful growth.
- **Collaboration:** The success of special education services often hinges on collaboration. Transdisciplinary teams, including special educators, general educators, related service providers, and families, work together to create cohesive plans that align with IEP goals. In practice, this might look like flexible teaching arrangements where a general educator focuses on grade-level content while a specialist provides targeted support using SDI strategies.
- **Family and Community Engagement:** The role of families and communities in supporting students with disabilities cannot be overstated. When families are empowered to reinforce learning at home using multisensory games or assistive technologies, the impact extends beyond the classroom. Similarly, partnerships with community organizations can provide additional resources, such as tutoring or literacy workshops, tailored to students' needs.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [Special Education Resource Library](#).

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and Strengths

Multilingual learners (MLs) bring linguistic diversity and cultural knowledge that enriches the classroom. Recognizing and honoring their home languages as assets fosters engagement and accelerates language and literacy development. MLs enrich our classroom with diverse linguistic

and cultural perspectives. There is much diversity within the multilingual population with varying literacy needs. Multilingual students require varied instructional approaches. State and federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, require districts to allow MLs the opportunity to participate in all programs, services, and activities offered by the district. They possess the incredible ability to navigate multiple languages, and as they develop proficiency in English, we can provide targeted vocabulary support that builds on their existing knowledge. By affirming students' identities and creating meaningful connections to their literacy experiences, educators empower MLs to succeed in speaking and listening, reading, and writing. To make literacy instruction accessible, educators may:

- Use culturally responsive teaching, valuing, and integrating students' linguistic backgrounds.
- Incorporate scaffolding strategies, such as sentence frames, graphic organizers, and guided practice.
- Provide visual supports and language modeling, ensuring comprehension through explicit instruction.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [ML Policies and Practices Guide 2024](#).

American Indian/Alaska Native Learners: Honoring Tribal Languages and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

For American Indian/Alaska Native learners, it essential that literacy instruction be culturally affirming and relevant to their lived experiences. There is diversity in and amongst populations of Native students. Each tribal community is unique in terms of languages, governments, histories, and current experiences. Native learners “walk in two worlds” and are not only defined by traditional ways of knowing; they are leaders, creators, and knowledge holders of today.

One critical initiative is to incorporate the [John McCoy \(luliláš\) Since Time Immemorial Curriculum](#). A vital effort in Washington state is the integration of the Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington state curriculum (John McCoy, luliláš), developed to ensure that all students, Native and non-Native, learn accurate and tribally endorsed histories and the present-day realities of Tribal Nations. This curriculum is endorsed by all twenty-nine federally recognized Tribes in Washington and is designed to help Native students see themselves in the curriculum while promoting government-to-government partnerships. Literacy instruction should incorporate teachings, languages, oral traditions, and contemporary voices across subjects. Doing so affirms identity, fosters belonging, and supports literacy growth in ways that reflect and honor the cultural values and strengths of Native communities. Educators can support native students by:

- Using culturally relevant texts that reflect Indigenous perspectives, languages, and oral traditions.
- Learning from and partnering with tribal educators and leaders, ensuring that literacy

instruction aligns with Native knowledge systems.

- Creating space for Indigenous storytelling and community engagement, reinforcing the importance of identity and community in literacy development.

The following principles of successful Native literacy instruction and indicators support many of the core beliefs in both the state literacy framework and the WA ELA Standards (2026). They are intended to serve as guidance on how educators can integrate the knowledge of teaching literacy with the best practices of Native instruction. When these principles are implemented, the result is a strong school community that effectively connects and serves the teachers, students, families, and broader community. The following excerpt is from the [OSPI Native Literacy Guidance \(2026\)](#), authored by OSPI's Office of Native Education and the Native Literacy Work Group (2026).

Principals for Successful Native Literacy Instruction (2026)

1. Foster trust and belonging through relationships and community.
2. Use a strength-based approach to assessing and instructing AI/AN learners.
3. Center identity development as a pillar of literacy development.
4. Develop oral language and storytelling as foundations for literacy.
5. Ground curricular and instructional choices in the concept of Indigenous Excellence.
6. Engage with students in deliberate, multifaceted, and culturally respectful ways.
7. Integrate criticality into reading, writing, and community engagement.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [John McCoy \(luliláš\) Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State](#) or information on [Native Education](#).

Contextual Factors for Learning

Students in Rural and Small Schools: Expanding Access to Literacy

Students in rural and small schools often face unique challenges, including limited access to literacy specialists, intervention programs, and professional development opportunities. Technology and statewide partnerships can bridge gaps and ensure that students in rural communities receive the same level of literacy instruction as their urban peers. To ensure equitable literacy instruction, schools and districts can:

- Expand virtual professional development, providing teachers with high-quality training regardless of location.
- Utilize digital literacy tools, ensuring students have access to engaging, research-based learning materials.
- Strengthen inter-district collaboration, enabling small schools to share resources and best practices.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on the [Rural Education Initiative \(Title V, Part B\)](#).

Migrant Students

Migratory families have unique circumstances which impact how students receive continuous, high-quality educational services. This is related to a necessary high rate of mobility, as well as cultural and language barriers, social isolation, health-related problems, and the lack of resources in the areas in which they live and work. The Washington State Migrant Education Program (MEP) is federally funded to ensure high-quality education programs and supplemental support services for migratory children. Literacy is a powerful mitigator and form of advocacy for migrant students and families. It provides an opportunity for voice, choice, and connection through language, stories, and the sharing of migrant cultural experiences.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on the [Migrant Education Program](#).

Highly Capable Students

Students identified as highly capable or gifted require advanced, inquiry-based literacy opportunities that push their thinking and encourage intellectual growth. However, underrepresentation in gifted programs remains a challenge, particularly for students from diverse and historically marginalized backgrounds. Highly capable students thrive when given rigorous, engaging literacy instruction that challenges them to question, synthesize, and innovate. Schools can address this by:

- Expanding access to gifted identification, using culturally responsive assessment tools.
- Providing literacy tasks that encourage deep analysis, problem-solving, and creativity.
- Integrating complex, interdisciplinary texts that promote critical thinking and independent exploration.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [Addressing Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs](#).

Trauma-Sensitive Literacy Practices

Trauma is a strong emotional response to a scary, upsetting, or overwhelming experience that makes a child feel unsafe, helpless, or out of control. It can affect how they think, feel, and behave—even long after the event is over. The potential effects of trauma on young learners must be considered when working towards an equitable and inclusive approach to learning. Exposure to trauma can have neurological effects that impact the learning process as well as young learners' ability to cope with stressors, both social and academic (Cantor et al., 2018). Under-resourced communities are at compounded risk for trauma exposure and its effects (Blair & Raver, 2016). Trauma-sensitive literacy practices are designed to support students who have experienced trauma by creating a safe, supportive, and responsive learning environment (Savitz & Kane, 2023). These practices recognize the impact of trauma on a child's learning and aim to address their emotional and psychological needs in support of their academic development.

Literacy can be healing and empowering to children who have experienced trauma as it provides a means to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Writing and storytelling can be healing in a safe and structured environment. Including diverse and relevant texts and stories can also help children feel seen and understood, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. Educators of young learners can play an important role in the lives of students, impacted by trauma by providing supportive relationships, a consistent classroom environment, and integrating trauma-sensitive literacy practices. Engaging with texts helps young learners develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to analyze and question experiences and the world around them. Trauma-sensitive literacy practices include:

- **Interactive Read-Aloud:** Using books and stories that address themes of empathy, resilience, and overcoming challenges. Young learners can connect with characters and express their feelings.
- **Choice and Voice:** Provide young learners with choices in their reading and writing activities to foster a sense of greater control and engagement.
- **Consistent Routines:** Maintaining consistent daily routines helps create a sense of stability and predictability, allowing learners to focus on the demands of learning.

Follow the link for more OSPI information on [OSPI SEL Implementation Guide](#).

Evidence-Based Practices that Support Literacy for All Learners

Ensuring literacy for all students requires a comprehensive, responsive approach that removes barriers and amplifies student strengths. By integrating targeted supports, culturally responsive practices, and equitable access to high-quality instruction, educators can create inclusive literacy environments where all students—regardless of background, ability, or location—can thrive as readers and writers. Effective literacy instruction is explicit, systematic, and responsive.

The following research-based strategies have been identified as high-impact practices by the IES What Works Clearinghouse (WWC):

1. Explicit and Systematic Instruction

- Scaffold literacy skills into clear, sequential lessons that build on prior knowledge.
- Provide direct modeling and guided practice before independent work.
- Teach decoding strategies explicitly to support word recognition.

2. High-Rate Interaction and Opportunities to Respond

- Increase student engagement by integrating active participation techniques, such as choral reading, partner discussions, and peer-assisted learning.
- Use frequent checks for understanding and prompt feedback to correct misconceptions.

3. Timely and Specific Feedback

- Provide immediate, constructive feedback to reinforce correct responses and redirect errors.
- Use error analysis to adjust instruction and prevent recurring challenges.

4. Scaffolding for Success

- Build supports into instruction to gradually increase student independence.
- Use visual supports, anchor charts, and guided practice before transitioning to

independent tasks.

5. Data-Driven Decision Making

- Form building-level teams to implement universal screening and progress monitoring.
- Use benchmarks and formative assessments to adjust instruction based on student needs.
- Train teachers to efficiently collect and analyze reading data to identify learning gaps.

6. Differentiated Instruction

- Adjust time, content, and support levels to meet students at their current level of development.
- Provide targeted instruction that aligns with each student's unique literacy profile.

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