

WA State Literacy Framework K-6

Families, Caregivers, and Communities

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.

Sponsors of Literacy

Literacy development begins long before kindergarten within homes, communities, and daily interactions amongst children and caregivers. From infancy, children develop foundational language, listening, and communication skills that set the stage for reading and writing success. Research shows that early family involvement in literacy significantly impacts academic achievement, test scores, graduation rates, and even college enrollment (Henderson & Berla, 1994). When families, schools, libraries, and community organizations work together, children are more likely to develop strong literacy skills, a love for reading, and confidence in learning.

Deborah Brandt (1998) defines "sponsors of literacy" as *agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, or model literacy*. Sponsors of literacy are present in every community in various and valuable forms. Beyond schools and teachers, early readers can benefit greatly from engaging with various sponsors of literacy in their communities. When literacy activities are community-based, families and caregivers are more likely to engage as they are often seen as more accessible and more inclusive than formal school-based settings, which reduces barriers to participation. Family involvement in community-based literacy activities can reinforce the importance of reading and language at home and at school. This provides additional support and encouragement for the development of young learners.

Below are examples of common sponsors of literacy and some of the ways young readers may engage:

- **Libraries:** Libraries offer story time sessions, reading clubs, and access to a wide range of age-appropriate books. Early readers can also participate in summer reading programs and literacy events that make reading fun and social.
- **Community Centers:** Local cultural or tribal centers, museums, zoos, and public park systems often host literacy programs and workshops specifically designed for young children. Activities such as singing, cooking, dancing board games, movement, author visits, puppet shows, craft sessions, interactive storytelling, and other events that connect literacy to the real world can make learning to read an enjoyable experience.
- **Religious Institutions:** Churches, mosques, temples, and other places of worship may offer literacy classes or other educational programs that include reading and discussing religious texts together in a supportive environment.
- **Non-Profit Organizations:** Organizations like the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, neighborhood centers, or local groups often run programs that provide books, tutoring, and



literacy activities for young children. These programs can offer personalized support and resources to help early readers thrive.

- **Games and Media:** Children's magazines, music, dance, educational TV shows, and online platforms can provide engaging reading materials and interactive content that capture the interest of early readers. Parents can guide their children to age-appropriate media that supports literacy development. Digital games and apps can provide interactive and adaptive learning experiences.

Community-based literacy activities often reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of a child's community. This helps children see their own experiences and backgrounds represented in what they read, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in their community. Engaging with local sponsors of literacy provides young readers and families with a strong support network. These spaces offer resources, programs, and encouragement that can significantly add to a child's literacy development.

These sponsors not only facilitate literacy but also benefit from the literate individuals they help create, whether through economic, social, or cultural gains. By engaging with these literacy sponsors, early readers can develop a love for reading, enhance their literacy skills, and gain confidence in their abilities. Encouraging a variety of literacy experiences within their own community makes reading more dynamic and shows children how literacy is a vibrant and valuable part of everyday life.

Families and Caregivers Encouraging Literacy Development

Families and caregivers are the first and most influential teachers. Learning between and amongst children, families, caregivers, and community members is reciprocal, intergenerational, and reflects a holistic understanding of literacy development. The literacy-rich, community-based experiences provide—such as talking, reading, singing, storytelling, and playing—to build oral language, vocabulary, and comprehension skills long before formal schooling begins. Children learn language through interaction, and caregivers play a vital role in ensuring these early experiences are positive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate. Family, caregivers, and community members can read to young children, encourage them to read aloud, and create a literacy-rich environment outside of school. Simple activities like oral storytelling, bedtime stories, word games, reading signs and menus, or visits to the library are foundational in building early literacy skills. The practices listed below lay the foundation for literacy success and could be encouraged both at home and in community settings:

- **Reading Aloud Daily:** Strengthens vocabulary, listening skills, and comprehension.
- **Encouraging Storytelling:** Helping children organize thoughts and express ideas.
- **Providing Access:** Books, magazines, and print materials at home.
- **Modeling Reading and Writing Behaviors:** Showing children that literacy is valuable and enjoyable.
- **Engaging in Everyday Literacy Activities:** Such as making grocery lists, reading signs, or telling family stories.

- **Intentional Social-Emotional Skill Development:** Engage children in activities that build self-regulation, communication, and relationship skills.
- **Brain Games:** Strengthen working memory, attention, planning, and flexible thinking through structured play (e.g., puzzles, scavenger hunts, word searches, matching).
- **Vocabulary Building Through Talk:** Engage children in rich conversations and introduce new words.
- **Letter and Sound Knowledge:** Show children each letter, say the sound it makes, and help them practice recognizing and using those sounds in words.
- **Shared Book Reading:** Read together daily, discussing characters, events, and new vocabulary.
- **Exploring Print Features:** Point out words in the environment (street signs, food labels, menus), helping children recognize that print carries meaning.
- **Learn about the children, their families, and their communities:** Use this knowledge to adapt teaching methods, materials, and classroom setup to better suit the students' backgrounds.
- **Seek out books that include characters with whom children and their families share identities:** Ensure that these characters are presented in authentic and positive ways.
- **Encourage children and families to bring their traditions and culturally important experiences to their learning:** Helps create a more inclusive and engaging environment, while also emphasizing that all members of a community can contribute as learners and teachers.
- **Display real pictures of the teachers, children, their families, and their communities:** Fosters a sense of belonging and representation.
- **Read books about different cultures, traditions, countries, and regions of the world:** Broadens students' understanding and appreciation of diversity.